

Stereotypes, generalizations can be hateful

BY VINCE SIMON

CHARACTER traits are all the aspects of behaviour and attitudes that make up a person's personality.

I am human. I have the characteristics, attitude and personality. I have faults, strengths and weaknesses. Such is the makeup of all humans.

During last year's Boston Marathon bombing I found that I was quick to hate. I hated the two bombing suspects and I found that, for the moment, I hated everyone who looked like them. I quickly realized that this was not fair, to hate someone who you don't know and to hate a whole group just for the actions of two! I should hate the behaviour, not the people.

"Hate" is a bad word unless it is used in the right context. Mahatma Gandhi's "Hate the sin, not the sinner" may have come from a translation from early Scriptures which said, "With love for mankind and hatred of sins."

"No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion," said Nelson Mandela. "People must learn to hate, and if they can



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Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism Advisory Committee produces this monthly column to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario.

learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."

Some have seen reports of the shale gas exploration protests in New Brunswick that made international news in the fall of 2013. Because I am from New Brunswick, some of these protesters are my family and friends. Some of the RCMP in New Brunswick are also

my family and friends.

An RCMP officer was overheard making a negative comment against First Nations at the protest site, even though the protesters were both Caucasian and First Nation. An individual officer's comment should not be a reflection of the whole force but rather one of the human weaknesses that tend to push that wedge of division and hate into society.

In that same incident RCMP vehicles were set on fire. It is not clear who set them on fire but we know that it was not the whole group of protesters. This spilled into the local First Nation community where a youth set fire to the police station. Actions of one person, not the whole community.

I recently experienced an incident here in our city that drove this point home for me. My wife and I were checking out in our neighbourhood pharmacy when the young cashier threw my status card on the counter. I quickly stated to her, "Did you just throw my card on there?" She responded that she didn't mean to and apologized. This was her personal attitude and action, not the business, nor anyone else who looked like her.

"Stereotype" is defined as "to believe unfairly that all people or things with a particular characteristic are the same." Generalization is described as "the act or process of forming opinions that are based on a small amount of information."

According to Sally Raskoff, a professor of sociology and ethnic studies in California, we make generalizations about objects in order to make sense of the world. When we see something, we want to know what it is and how to react and interact with it. Raskoff states that "stereotypes" are "over-generalizations." They often involve assuming a person has certain characteristics based on unfounded assumptions.

Because we are human, we sometimes tend to generalize and to assume. If only these generalizations and assumptions didn't lead to stereotypes, there would be less hatred.

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