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# Law Admission Essay

It was first-year orientation day at college. After sharing with another new student my given name, mainland Chinese origin, and intended major, I immediately knew what the next question would be: “So, are you the only child in your family?” I had been in the U.S. for only a few weeks, but had already learned that people were curious to learn from a personal perspective about China’s one-child policy, even if they were hesitant to ask. How I decided to answer that question, and the varied perspectives that people have on culturally significant issues, are what this essay is about.

Growing up in China, I had heard about conflicts caused by the controversial one-child policy and had learned about its pros and cons. Surrounded by friends with no siblings, I focused less on the discussion about reproductive rights or state intervention, and more on how tens of thousands of urban girls, including myself, had gained access to better education and living conditions as the only daughters. However, I never thought that in China or anywhere else in the world, being the only child would be a topic of daily conversation; clearly, I was missing something that was culturally significant.

Like everyone else, I have been shaped and defined by my upbringing. The only child discussion was another manifestation of how my past experience influenced my opinions. Accustomed to the one child norm, I had considered the issue from a fixed perspective and had ignored the influence of other perspectives. Coming into a new environment – that of the United States -- enabled me to scrutinize viewpoints and assumptions that I had taken for granted. Other people’s opinions, which were based on their own cultural backgrounds, provided me with opportunities to evaluate and adjust my own ideas.

Our particular ideas are affected by tradition, religion, experience, and other factors, and so it is impossible to form an inclusive perspective that encompasses all viewpoints. When we encounter people with opinions that differ from our own, it is important to be open-minded and to encourage communication. If we avoid discussion and adhere stubbornly to our own beliefs, there will be no collaboration or progress.

Here is an example drawn from my own experience. “I think you should wear some makeup because every other girl is wearing it.” I was not surprised that this advice came from a male college classmate who believed that women should marry before they reached the age of thirty and then look after the kids at home, if possible. My friends found his opinions sexist and suggested that I simply ignore what he said, but I felt differently: I believed I should let him know that we held differing views toward women.

The finance class that I took with this classmate required students to team up and collaborate on a semester-long project. I viewed this requirement as an opportunity to ask him to join my group. He did join, and we chose as our project the evaluation of the investment prospects of a renowned fashion company that marketed women’s apparel and accessories. I soon discovered that although this classmate claimed that males have better math ability than females, he very quickly found himself constantly asking for help to work on financial calculations. In other words, his views on women were open to question.

As the group spent time working on the project and we came to know one another better, I began to focus on my classmate’s preconceptions of women. The apparel company that we studied had many high-profile campaigns that promoted the image of independent women, and I used this as a starting point for our conversation. As we talked about the issue, I could feel how my classmate’s religion and family tradition affected his perspective. We were both from Asian countries, but I was aware how centuries-long customs that objectify and restrict women had distorted people’s views, and that it would take time to change my classmate’s mind. Outside class, I began sending him pamphlets about the feminist movement; I also suggested to him that we attend lectures about gender discrimination throughout the world. Eventually, I sensed that in the process of doing this, his rigid views toward women gradually softened. At the end of the semester, our group produced a comprehensive report that earned us a college award for our work. For me, however, the more rewarding result was that my classmate had relinquished some his prejudice regarding women, and we became close friends.

What is the ‘moral’ of this story? If I had ignored my classmate because of his stereotypical views and had refused to communicate with him, he would have remained his old self and I would not have become friends with a teammate who was in other ways skilled and knowledgeable. In the past, I used to feel that many ideas which people expressed were deeply ingrained in their personalities and were therefore difficult to change. To avoid potential conflicts raised by sensitive topics, I would refrain from discussion. In retrospect, I feel that my inaction meant that people with stereotypical views wouldn’t hear my thoughts and I would never understand what factors contributed to their beliefs.

We live in an increasingly globalized world in which the conflict between ideas fostered by different cultures is inevitable. Fixating on our old beliefs or labeling other ideas inferior or wrong hinders communication and leads to misunderstanding. We need instead to set aside our preconceptions and let all sides freely express their thoughts. No matter how radical, offensive or even unreasonable other people’s opinions may be, it is important that we ensure all ideas are considered and respected; only then will it be possible to form a mutual understanding that leads to true collaboration.

So – to return to the beginning of this essay – my answer to the one-child policy question is this: there are many ways to look at it, and what is important is not one particular view or way, but rather the openness to communication that allows many viewpoints to be considered and evaluated. During my four-years of study in college, the ideas expressed by people from different backgrounds led me to see things from new and different angles. I have learned to pay close attention to new information and opinions. Everyone has their own unique perspective, and I am constantly searching for more effective ways of communication that will enable each of us to better understand one another. I believe that my open-minded attitude toward different perspectives and my willingness to communicate with others will benefit me greatly as a law student and future attorney.

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