Influential Stereotypes

Not all Asians are super intelligent, not every black person enjoys eating fried chicken, and not every blonde-haired girl is feeble minded. Over time, society has created this concept of viewing one another according to stereotypes. In the historical fiction novel, of To Kill a Mockingbird, written by Harper Lee, the protagonist, Scout Finch, and her brother, Jem Finch, are both exposed to their town’s commonly viewed stereotypes. They are also exposed to the negative impact of racial discrimination when their father agrees to defend a black man accused of raping a white woman. Through the circumstances of Boo Radley, Tom Robinson’s trial, and Scout, Lee reveals the naked truth about stereotypes. Harper Lee wishes to suggest the fact that stereotypical beliefs can affect one’s perception of others.

In the beginning of the story, a wide variety of stereotyped rumors are mentioned about Boo Radley, and Scout chooses to believe that they are all true. Scout expresses the town’s mass rumors about Boo in the line, “People said he went out at night when the moon was down, and peeped in people’s windows [...] Any stealthy small crimes committed in Maycomb were his work” (Lee 10). Although Scout had never even crossed paths with her neighbor, she still perceived Boo Radley as a disturbing individual because of the stereotypes spread throughout Maycomb County about him. After all, stereotypes can alter one’s outlook on another.

When overlooking general society, people are first to accuse a person of unethical actions on the behalf of their skin color. This idealism foreshadows in the trial case for Tom Robinson when Atticus, the father of Scout and also Tom’s defendant, speaks out towards the jury, “..—the evil assumption—that all Negroes lie, that all Negroes are basically immoral beings, that all Negro men are not to be trusted around our women, an assumption one associates with minds of their caliber” (Lee 273). Within this statement mentioned during Tom’s trial, it is obvious that negroes are perceived as dirty and dangerous to the public eye because of common stereotypes.Thusly, one’s point of view can be easily persuaded by such beliefs.

Although most women are expected to be perfectly proper and feminine, Scout does not fall into that specific category. For instance, while attending a Thanksgiving family dinner party, Scout mentions to the readers, "Aunt Alexandra was fanatical on the subject of my attire. I could not possibly hope to be a lady if I wore breeches; when I said I could do nothing in a dress, she said I wasn’t supposed to be doing things that required pants” (Lee 108). Furthermore, this quote indicates how Scout’s Aunt views her as a despicable young woman due to the fact she wears trousers and engages in unlady-like activities rather than being the average stereotyped girl her aunt expects her to be. Accordingly to Lee, pre-assumed notions are able to modify one’s attitude towards another.

One’s perception of others is indeed influenced by stereotypes. A few key arguments that clarified this illustration were through the use of Boo Radley, Tom Robinson’s trial, and Scout Finch. Harper Lee does a tremendous job with showing the different perspectives given by people when inspired by stereotyped beliefs in the 1930’s and 60’s. Her message leaves a huge impact on her audience and it forces her readers to be more open-minded. Think twice next time before abiding by the common stereotypes.