

The Line Between Bigotry and Racism

The Line Between Bigotry and Racism

By Gil Laroya, Contributor

Award Winning Silicon Valley Entrepreneur, Writer

Aug 20, 2010, 01:09 AM EDT | **Updated** Nov 17, 2011

This post was published on the now-closed HuffPost Contributor platform. Contributors control their own work and posted freely to our site. If you need to flag this entry as abusive, [send us an email](#).



Growing up non-caucasian in America, I experienced prejudicial attitudes at a very early age. As I grew up, I wondered how racial judgement got instilled into humanity, and why it would never go away for the foreseeable future, thanks to opinion and tradition. I became convinced that racism was either learned at a young age, or else it was decided upon later in life only after a negative experience. But what defines a racist? How does it differ from a bigot? And how do they remain so institutionalized in America? Now I'm typically known as a Technology writer here on The Post, but this got me thinking.

Kids have the ability to see things and people as they really are, in a way that ignores the details of opinion and tradition. Opinion, after all, is a self-learned trait; a facet of personal insight that grows and evolves internally within a person as they live and learn. Opinion is very singular, very owner-dependent, very personalized. Tradition, on the other hand, comes to us externally from friends, from family, and anyone else that we're exposed to. Where opinion is something that we teach ourselves through our own experience, tradition is something that is taught to us by others via their experiences.

As a kid, I would notice how people treated me and how they reacted to me. I was a typical brown-skinned Asian kid with black hair. In grade school, I would notice when white kids stared at me, to see if I ate lunch they same way they did. As a teenager, I observed adults staring at me in a store, to see if I would try and shoplift something. Later in life, people who

being sure if I spoke English or not. I remember these experiences making me feel "not human" - like I was an animal or an alien. For awhile I even learned to hate those who treated me that way, until I began to distinguish between racists and bigots. Neither one was right or moral, but there was a difference.

ADVERTISEMENT

Some of this, I thought, felt outright hateful and racist, while some of it felt a little more muted and polite, which I went on to consider bigotry. I defined racism as the act of actively hating someone based on race. I defined a bigot as someone who just didn't "prefer" someone based on race. They weren't people who hated, just people who "politely disliked". In today's lingo, we'd call this "*institutional racism*"... racism that's polite, unspoken, and generally accepted. Institutional racism has become the default method of being actively racist, which blending in with society. A racist hostess can prevent a black man from being seated at a restaurant, but as long as she is polite and doesn't outwardly call him the "N" word, she can't be accused of racism. It's essentially the convenient use of circumstance to perform acts of racism without getting caught.

As a kid, I wondered why some people hated me, while some just avoided me, because of my race. As an adult, I began to understand the distinction between racism and bigotry, and the opinions and traditions that continued to nurture new generations of both. Unless the cycle is somehow broken, racism and bigotry will continue to affect the lives of children growing up in America, the same way they did mine.

The fact that both are so institutional in American society is a sad legacy that differentiates America from the rest of the world - not in a good way.

ADVERTISEMENT

Some people say that "it's easier to ignore morality than to do what is right" - this is a tradition or opinion that needs changing in America.

RELATED

[HEALTHY LIVING](#)

[RACISM](#)

[TECHNOLOGY](#)

[BIGOTRY](#)