

Law Admission Essay

It was orientation day for college. After sharing my given name, mainland Chinese origin, and intended major to another new student, I could immediately detect the next question. "So, are you the only child in your family?" I had only been in the U.S. for several weeks, but had already learned that people were very curious to learn from a personal perspective of the one-child policy in China, even if they were somewhat hesitant to ask.

Growing up in China, I had heard about conflicts caused by the controversial one-child policy and 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, gained access to better education and living conditions as the only daughter. However, in China or anywhere else in the world, I never thought being the only child would be the topic of a daily conversation. Clearly, I was missing something significant.

Like everyone else, I was shaped and defined by my upbringing. The only child discussion was another manifestation of how my past experience influenced my opinion. Accustomed to the one child norm, I had been considering the issue from one fixed perspective for long enough. I unconsciously ignored the influence of other perspectives. Coming into a new environment enabled me to scrutinize many viewpoints and assumptions that I had taken for granted. Other people's opinions, based on their own cultural backgrounds, provided me with valuable opportunities to evaluate and adjust those of my own.

As the combination of tradition, experience, religion and many other factors cultivate distinct ideas, it is impossible to have an inclusive perspective that encompasses all viewpoints. When we encounter people with divergent opinions, it is important to be open-minded and encourage communication. If we adhere stubbornly to our own beliefs or simply avoid discussion, there will be no collaboration or progress.

"I think you should wear some makeup because every other girl is wearing it." The fact that this advice came from a college classmate—someone who believed that women should marry before thirty and look after kids at home if possible—did not surprise me. My friends found his opinions sexist and suggested me simply ignoring him, but I believed I should let him know our different views toward women.

The finance class I took with my classmate required students to team up and work on a semester-long project. I took the opportunity and asked him to join my group. We chose a renowned fashion company for women's apparels and accessories to evaluate its investment prospects. Although my classmate claimed that males have better math ability, he found himself constantly asking for help to work on financial calculations.

As the group spent much time working on the project and we knew each other better, I started to focus on my classmates' preconceptions of women. The company we studied had many high-profile campaigns that promoted the image of independent women. And I used them as a starting point for our conversation. As we talked more about the issue, I could feel how my classmate's religion and family tradition deeply affected his perspective. Both from Asian countries, I was aware how centuries-long customs that objectify and restrict women distorted many people's views and it would take time to change my classmate's mind.

Outside class, I began sending him more pamphlets about the feminism movement and suggested to him that we go to lectures about prevailing gender discrimination in the world. I felt that his rigid views toward women had gradually softened in the process. At the end of the semester, our group produced a comprehensive report that earned us a college award for our work. The more rewarding result, however, was that my classmate had given up some his prejudice regarding women and we became close friends.

If I ignored my classmate due to his stereotyped view and refused to communicate, he would remain his old self and I would not know a teammate who was skilled and knowledgeable. In the past, I felt many ideas were deeply embedded and difficult to change. To avoid potential conflicts raised by sensitive topics, I refrained from discussions. Looking back, my inaction only meant that people with stereotypes would not hear my thoughts and I would never fully understand what factors contributed to their beliefs.

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

During my four-year study in college, ideas expressed by people from different background made me see many things from new angles. I learn to pay close attention to new information and opinions no matter where I go. As everyone has their own unique perspective, I am constantly searching for more effective ways of communication to let each side better understand each other. I believe my open-minded attitude toward different perspectives and willingness to communicate can benefit me greatly in future law school study and legal career.

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