“Tolerating Society”

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In eighth grade I was enrolled in my hometown’s Catholic Confirmation class, through the local church. The class was a culmination of the previous “religion school” classes. At this time, I found myself questioning my beliefs more and more, and began thinking outside what the classes taught and demanded. At this point, the involvement of religion in my life had made a unique influence on me. In the religion classes, we were taught a number of qualities and ideals by which to live our lives. However, I always critically listened to what the teachers had to say, and learned a few things about qualities they did not teach. From the perspective I had, I could see that many involved in my religion class showed an unbelievably small amount of tolerance towards other people different than themselves. All of the people had preconceived notions of how things were supposed to be; anything different was something to be gawked and pointed at, not worthy of understanding.

In one of the final classes, we watched a video with the teacher and our parents that helped cement my perception about religion and tolerance. In the video, we watched a camera crew navigate through the audience of a Marilyn Manson concert. The camera began to interview and catch glimpses of people attending who had dressed up in all black clothes, makeup, and some unconventional, Marilyn Manson-esque styles of dress. Our confirmation teacher began mocking the audience for being “so weird.” He focused on specific people and began making fun of them and declaring how this was “unhealthy.” At this point my own mother turned to me, and commented on how bizarre these people were. Most of the class and the teacher then began laughing at the audience’s comments that they were just normal people dressing up and having fun. Following this, the class then began laughing at
the people on the screen in a more demeaning way, as if to state they were inferior for dressing up and attending this concert. The video was shown to us in order to “help” us understand how different people are wrong, and that only through faith in God can prove us worthy. However, this lesson taught me of the prejudices against people that were different, and the importance of tolerance.

Celebrities and media figures have always been in the public eye, and their influence on the public has always been criticized. Because of this, society and the media tend to put more responsibility and, consequently, blame on them when things go wrong. Somehow, it is the people in the spotlight to blame, when in fact their messages and voices are not directed at any one single person. Credit is due to Marilyn Manson for being the target of ridicule and persecution that he is. Not many people deal with the amount of labeling and disrespect that he does. I have had teachers use him as a means of accusation towards the stupidity of being “weird,” and I have had lecturers and people of great recognition use him as a negative example of how society is spiraling downwards. It seems many people are quick to judge Manson’s based on appearance, and give no effort to change their negative perceptions of him.

These same people, who claim to know so much about him, probably haven’t even listened to one of his songs, or read any of his responses to interviews. In many of his songs, he speaks of people not being able to cope with their world, the fight against drug addiction, love, and rebelling against the norms of society. However, people fail to give his lyrics and poetry a chance. This gives the impression that society doesn’t care what you have to say or how beautiful it is if you can’t abide by the accepted standards of appearance. Society and the media have no tolerance for difference. It is unacceptable for society to so quickly condemn someone for not conforming to what it has established as the norm. People like Marilyn Manson help offset this false ideal by pushing the limit on what people are exposed to, and defying the command to conform to society’s standards.

Manson has been under the accusational spotlight for years now by the
media as being a negative influence on young listeners. He has received much criticism for the things he does and the way he dresses, but one of the more serious events to which the media linked was the 1999 Columbine high school shooting in Columbine, Colorado. The media and many people in the United States were quick to blame and point the finger at many sources of influence on the two school shooters, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris. Even after allegations that the two kids had been huge fans and avid listeners of Manson’s music had been discredited, many still blamed him for the tragedy at the school. Manson, in a statement made after the shooting and aimed at reporters and critics nationwide, said “The media has unfairly scapegoated the music industry and so-called Goth kids and has speculated - with no basis in truth - that artists like myself are in some way to blame. This tragedy was a product of ignorance, hatred and an access to guns. I hope the media’s irresponsible finger-pointing doesn’t create more discrimination against kids who look different.” Manson canceled many of his music tours shortly after the shooting because of media and public pressure. In one of many interviews after Columbine, Manson told reporter Alice Hammond of the magazine NY Rock, some of the reasons why he presents his act the way he does, and his take on the “hysteria” surrounding the tragedy. “I do [things] in an extreme way, which provokes extreme reactions.” Manson stated that what he does, in large part, is to provoke people into thought. He concluded his statement with, “thinking is something that most Americans have forgotten how to do.”

Whether it’s how society treats a celebrity or how we are all taught to judge people that are different, tolerance is a decreasingly present characteristic in society. We are all taught from a young age to dress, talk and act a certain way so that we can be accepted by those we seek acceptance from. Marilyn Manson is an example of how certain people can become a focus of blame in society and the media. However, he continues to defy the norms and engage people to think beyond accepted values. Watching that video in Confirmation class, and seeing how my peers and teachers treated people who looked different taught me more about tolerance and the importance it has in
society. Only by challenging people to deny what they accept as normal can tolerance be established. Without tolerance, there will be no room for variation or difference, and everyone will become shades of gray.

Works Cited

