

Who we are and what we believe is directly influenced by the beliefs of those who teach us and the beliefs of those who we hold dear to us. This idea is clear, and in fact the main theme of the short story "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson. In this story, the townsfolk of an unnamed town participate in a barbaric lottery where the "winner" is stoned to death. There is no semblance of logical thought processing as they did it, the only reason given is an Aztec sacrifice to increase crop yields, and a duty to adhere to customs. Their blind following of tradition is meant to be social commentary, and represents a hyperbolic view of human tradition. Presented in a subtler way is "First Confession" by Frank O'Connor. Would Jackie have believed himself sinful and flawed; requiring a cleansing of the soul, had he not been born to a devout Catholic family? I would say no, as this self-devaluing is not inherent to young children, but *can* be implanted in them by the ones responsible for their mental growth. He did not question the practice of confession, but believed it was the way things were supposed to be, because it was seen as normal in the society in which he had always lived.

In my own life, I have learned through years of deceit and ignorance that the common view of how things "should be" is more often than not mislead. I try my best not to take all things I am told at face value, instead viewing all evidence and making the decision on my own terms. I know I am not perfect however, and it would be blatant narcissism if I were to say all my views are right; I am still a product of my surroundings, and all I hope to accomplish is to uncover as much as I can of that which I believe to be truth, and disprove to myself all that is certainly lies.

Humans are social creatures; they strive for acceptance and peace of mind. The longer I have to observe humans however, the more I see that their acceptance is often found in herd mentality. So many people view the mathematical mode of thinking to be the correct one, without trying to prove to themselves why this is. This leads to sociocultural stagnation, where true progress is stifled by those whose views would be challenged, because most people are frightened at the thought of the views that were instilled in them growing up being false all along. Attempting to progress is not in vain though, as now in our technological age, all knowledge is eternal and instantly accessible. Human society may be comparable to sheep's, but one black sheep can inspire the herd, they just have to be heard.