Are you really seeing within? Or just glancing over your shoulder?

By Paul Sourlos

You see them in every schoolyard, your classic 'Jocks'. They even get their own spot to sit at, in seclusion, usually the best spot in the school, a testament, to their status, their influence. This is what we call an example of social stereotyping. It's around us everywhere, beyond high school, haunting our workplaces, our restaurants, our clubs, even sometimes, and our homes. There will always exist in every situation at least one of these dominant creatures we call 'Jocks', people either admire them, or they are feared.

When you think about it, though, stereotypes such as these are easily deconstructed.

I realised this, when one of these unapproach-able people (one of the 'Jocks'), approached me one day in high school, starting a conversation, as if there was no barrier there. I realised then, that the 'Jock' stereotype is just a perception that we continually reconstruct within our minds, because it is what we are used to seeing in every community. Especially in high school we all act as if we are different people that belong only in one group, our circle, our place, where we are comfortable only with the people around us. Yet really, we are more similar to each other than we are willing to believe. Through this realisation, comes harmony, and through this realisation, that unapproachable person, is now one of my great friends.

At this point, you may be confused. What is this realisation exactly, you may ask?

In simple words, it basically means that one should never judge a person by their physical appearance, or who they sit with at lunchtime. Superficial features such as these can never tell us who a person really is. They simply form a stereotypical perception of a person that we are left to mould with our judgemental minds, having not cared to realise who they are on the inside. In many cases, we haven't even taken the initiative to talk to them, because we believe we know who they are already.

Through my own personal experience, I'm proud to say that by having taken the initiative to form relationships with people of this 'Jock' stereotype, in my mind it has truly been broken. The old adage is true after all, you should definitely: "Never judge a book by its cover".

FORGET the kiddies - why not take the kitties for a stroll?

As backyards shrink, more inner-city residents are hitting the streets with pet buggies. Rose Bay apartment dwellers Eliana Marino and Daniel Santos frequent Centennial Park with their two-year-old ragdoll cats Pepe and Maya."I don't care what people think.

The cats enjoy it and they have an instinct to run so it keeps them protected," Ms Marino said, adding: "I originally bought them a leash and trained them at home with it but they kept lying down. I thought, 'There has to be a way they can enjoy the outdoors.'"

Fotini Pratis owns and runs Classy Tails online pet boutique. She sells pet prams and strollers for between $150 and $450. Her main market is elderly people with ageing pets.

"They buy them because they love their pets and don't care what people think," she said. "There are also people in apartments who don't have cars or have to go to the vet.

"In the UK and America it's everywhere. It's only now starting to pick up in Australia."

Australian Veterinary Association president Dr Mark Lawrie said: "We're supportive of taking cats out in strollers if they're not stressed, but they don't really need to be walked like a dog."

Asked if she was planning to have a child, Ms Marino said: "As you can see, we need one."

Article from the Sun Herald

"I don't care what people think" ... Eliana Marino takes Pepe and Maya for a stroll in Centennial Park.
Photo: Helen Nezdropa

SYDNEY'S NEW YEAR'S EVE UP THERE WITH THE BEST EVER

Premier Kristina Keneally declared Sydney's 2009 New Year's Eve celebrations as being amongst the best ever.

"Sydney and NSW saw the new decade in, and we did it in style," Ms Keneally said. "Just like when Sydney celebrated the new Millennium, images of the last night's fireworks will stay with people for years. "Crowds of nearly.1.5 million people lined Sydney's foreshore to see the fireworks, joined by an international television audience of up to one billion viewers from 160 countries.

"This global reach is phenomenal and showcases Sydney as the place to be for New Years Eve. "It was great news that the weather held out and Sydneysiders were able to enjoy the spectacular fireworks display that we've come to expect."

Last night, the State Government ran an extra 1500 train trips and 3300 bus services – moving more than 600,000 passengers on trains and around 400,000 people on buses. More than 2,500 Police were deployed across metropolitan Sydney, with 1,500 in Sydney's CBD alone.

While Police were overall pleased with the crowd's behaviour, around 130 people were arrested and charged with 117 offences. Final figures for last night's police operation are still being compiled. Ms Keneally thanked the volunteers and State Government employees who helped make last night such a success.

"A total of 7000 police, bus drivers and rail staff were working last night, helping people keep safe and getting people to and from the festivities," Ms Keneally said. "On behalf of the people of NSW, I would like to thank our police and transport workers, and the council workers and waste collectors who are on the job this morning." Tourism NSW projections say Sydney's 2009 New Year's Eve celebrations are expected to pump $150 million into the NSW economy.

NEW CHILD PROTECTION GUIDE GOES ONLINE

A new guide to assist teachers, doctors, police officers and other mandatory reporters to report cases of child abuse and neglect is now online, Minister for Community Services Linda Burney today announced.

"Almost 200 mandatory reporters met in Sydney in December to learn about the new Mandatory Reporter Guide and the web-based application," Ms Burney said.

"We have now put the guide online to allow mandatory reporters to practise using it before the new child protection system goes live on 24 January."

The guide can be accessed via the Community Services website, www.community.nsw.gov.au or the Keep Them Safe website, www.keepthemsafe.nsw.gov.au/reporting_children_at_risk

Ms Burney said the new guide helps mandatory reporters understand the new reporting threshold and helps them decide when to report suspected cases of abuse and neglect to the Child Protection Helpline, to Child Wellbeing Units or to other services.

"The guide is not intended to replace critical thinking or to stop a mandatory reporter acting in a way they believe is appropriate," she said.

"Until now, mandatory reporters tended to refer all children at risk to the Child Protection Helpline. Under the new system, they will be guided through a series of questions and prompts to assist them in identifying children or young people at risk of significant harm.

"For matters that are not significant harm, reporters will need to work out what assistance can be provided by his or her own agency or through other government and non-government organisations. It is simply beyond the ability of one government agency to deal with problems of this scale and magnitude. We need shared responsibility and we need collaboration."

World-renowned child protection expert and Director of the US-based Children's Research Center (CRC) Raelene Freitag MSW, Ph.D was commissioned by the NSW Government to develop the decision-making tool drawing on international evidence and expert knowledge in the assessment of children at risk.

"Other jurisdictions have guidelines for professionals in child protection but as far as I'm aware the development of a tool for use by all those legally obliged to report children at risk is a world first," Dr Freitag said.

"What is so good about the guide is that all mandatory reporters will have the same tool to help them answer the difficult question: is this situation so serious that it requires intervention by the Government or is there some other person or organisation that can help the family and prevent further problems?"