

The Effects of Stereotyping Teenagers

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Teen stereotypes are difficult to overcome.

For decades teenagers have been labeled jocks, nerds, preps and punks, but stereotyping isn't usually productive or beneficial to a teen's mental and emotional development. A stereotype is a judgment about an individual based on real or imagined characteristics of a particular group, according to the website Facing History and Ourselves. Stereotyping can be done by parents, teachers, coaches and peers. When a teenager is stereotyped, she might assume she has to measure up to certain standards. Stereotyping puts a teen in a box, making little room for growth beyond society's limited labels and often unjustified expectations.

Poor Self-Image

Some stereotypes result in a poor self-image. Teens who are labeled weird, asocial, awkward, hyperactive or unpopular might suffer from isolation and rejection, feeling like misfits in their high schools or neighborhoods. Some might struggle with depression, have trouble fitting in with peer groups. Even attractive, popular students can suffer from stereotyping when they feel that they can't live up to their parents' or peers' athletic, academic or social expectations. For example, teenagers are often stereotyped and labeled according to their physical appearance, so many struggle with a low self-esteem when they can't meet society's body-image and beauty expectations, according to Cornell University's Cooperative Extension.

Discrimination

Teen stereotyping often pits one group against another, resulting in discriminatory behavior. Those of a particular race might get teased or called rude and disrespectful nicknames by those of another race. For example, a Native American teenager might get called, "Chief," "Tonto" or "Indian," rather than by his real name, according to Facing History and Ourselves. Discriminatory

behavior can lead to bullying, such as cyber bullying, physical abuse and violence. Discrimination is one of the most harmful effects of stereotyping because it's usually based on race or gender -- factors that have nothing to do with a person's values or character traits.

Generalizations

Stereotyping also hurts those who make judgments about teens because it causes them to ignore differences. People who stereotype classify teens according to generalizations. They often infer characteristics and abilities on all members of the group that might not be true, according to Saul McLeod, a college psychology lecturer in the United Kingdom. For example, stereotyping all teens in the school band as nerds is an unfair characterization. Some band members might struggle with their school work and get bad grades or have athletic abilities and play competitive team sports -- opposites of the nerdy stereotype.

Missed Opportunities

Missed opportunities and unmet goals are often the effects of teen stereotyping. A teen might have the skills and talents to pursue a college degree in art or play collegiate sports but never follow her dreams because she is stereotyped a loser or a reject. Some teens might forgo certain career paths because they are labeled "dumb jocks" and never apply to college or pursue educational opportunities. Stereotyping makes teens resistant to change and unwilling to pursue new opportunities because they feel they will always be the nerd, slut, dork, loser, punk, prep or jock they have always been.