Essay on defining stereotype

Health & Medicine, Alcoholism

A stereotype is a preconceived notion, opinion or image that is often based on hearsay instead of facts. Stereotypes may pertain to anything from people, cultures, race, age or gender. Most of the time, people do not realize that their perception is influenced by such conventional concepts and that it is leading them to being judgmental and prejudiced. Stereotypical ideas are generally passed on from generation to generation which is why they are so difficult to change. It can be particularly challenging for a person who is facing discrimination based on stereotypes.

As a teenager, I experienced stereotyping first hand. Teens are often targeted for bad behavior that they may not really be exhibiting. Rebellious, irresponsible, binge drinkers and the leaders of unhealthy lifestyles, these are just a few of the stereotypes haunting the modern day teenager. My parents were always ' keeping an eye' on my activities as they perceived teenagers to be vulnerable to bad influences. It was expected that, without any cause or notice, I would delve into the world of drugs, alcohol and tattoos if my behavior was not strictly monitored and checked. As a teenager who was not inclined towards any of these habits, I felt as though I was being punished for a crime I had not committed and had no intentions of doing so. Classmates and peers of teenagers have their own stereotypes too and this can have a major negative impact on their perception of what is an acceptable and normal behavior. As teenagers are expected to behave rebelliously, they start believing that such behavior is a norm for their age. Those who do not indulge in such excesses are hence considered to be ' geeks' and are often treated as outcasts by their peers. As a teen who took studies and grades seriously, abstained from alcohol and drugs, did not get

involved in gangs or fights, I often found myself struggling to blend in with people of my own age group. I had several friends who drank alcohol just because ' everyone else was doing it'. Peer pressure only makes it all the more difficult for teenagers to break the stereotype.

It is a vicious circle of sorts. People stereotype teens based on ideas and thoughts that are not their own and opinions that are not formed based on their own experience. Prejudiced and judgmental behavior on the part of adults ends up encouraging teens to live up to these ' expectations', hence, rendering a false stereotype true. The key to breaking stereotypes lies in the old and eternal law ' Innocent until proven guilty'. Having faith in teens to behave well and supporting them to cope with peer pressure will slowly but steadily lead to a decline in the poor perception people have about them and will eliminate several causes of the bad behavior that has made teens notorious.