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ENGL 1121

2 February 2025

Teenage Stereotypes

Imagine you're a 16-year-old teenager and an older man says to you, "Back in my day it was way harder, you guys have it easy now." How would you respond? I know the first thing I would respond with to the older man is, "In what way?" Every generation has its own challenges; just because things are different nowadays than they used to be doesn't mean they're easier. Many older adults assume plenty of stereotypes about teenagers my age. They say things like, "They all have it easy," or "They're lazy." Some believe we all make bad decisions and can't think critically. Others think we don't read, don't care about learning, or are always disrespectful and glued to our phones. Almost every single one of these statements is stereotypes that older adults have directed at or said to me before. When assuming these different stereotypes, I think some older people might imagine the typical teenage cartoon character who is exaggerated, messy, casual, emotional, rebellious, and self-conscious. However, as a teenager, I can confirm that these stereotypes are not always true. I get why some adults feel this way, but this is not the full picture. Plenty of teenagers work hard, think critically, can be capable and engaged on their phones, and care about school and learning.

Despite the belief that teenagers have it easy and are lazy, this oversimplifies the truth-- teens are busier than ever. I wake up at 6:00am every day for my pre-calc class at the high school which starts at 7:40. After pre-calc, I drive straight to the Anoka Ramsey Community

College (ARCC) where I am taking four college classes equaling fifteen college credits through PSEO. After my classes at ARCC, I head straight back to the high school where I play basketball for the high school team for three hours a day and for six days a week. I work twelve hours a week at my part-time job at Fleet Farm as a cashier and also have to drive my little sister around to ski team and swim practice every other day. Between all of this, I have to manage time for studying for exams, doing homework, and helping out around the house as much as I can. This schedule leaves little to no down time to do the things I enjoy most. Teenagers nowadays are way busier than they used to be. Teens today face higher academic expectations and increasing pressure to perform well in school. Many also deal with extracurricular overload, juggling sports, clubs, and part-time jobs. On top of that, work and financial pressures weigh heavily, as some teens help support their families or save for college. All of this contributes to mental health challenges, with many teens struggling with anxiety, depression, and feeling overwhelmed by their workloads. Sure, teenagers don't have to worry about paying a mortgage or working a full-time job. But this doesn't mean that life is easy, and we are lazy, as there are tons of pressures and expectations that come with being a teenager.

In addition, many older people assume teenagers make poor decisions and lack critical thinking skills. This is frustrating, since teens are still developing, and many are fully capable of making good choices. I'm constantly challenged to think critically. My friends at school are an incredibly good example of this. I was heading to my pre-calc class when one of my friends stopped me in the middle of the hall and told me to skip class, leave school, and go to McDonald's with him and some other buddies. At that exact moment, it sounded like a great idea because who wants to go learn about the unit circle in a math class. So, I didn't give it much thought and left. Later that day when I got home, my parents got a call from the office saying I

had an unexcused absence in 1st hour. I got grounded by my parents and to make matters worse we had a pop quiz that couldn't be retaken that day. A few weeks later, the same scenario happened again, but this time I considered the consequences of falling behind in class and getting in trouble by my parents and the school. I politely declined even through their persisting efforts and continued walking to class. Both of these situations challenged my thinking. In the first situation, I made a bad decision, not considering what could happen if I skipped, and I realized that after facing the consequences for my actions. But when the second situation came around, I didn't make the same mistake twice. Just like me, not every teenager is going to be perfect and make the best decision, but many are capable of making good ones and fixing their mistakes. While some teenagers might take more risks than adults and don't always get everything right (just like adults), that doesn't mean they can't think critically or make good choices ever.

All the time I hear older adults say, "Teenagers don't care about learning or school anymore." This is a common misconception from older adults as many teenagers aspire to go to college and pursue a degree. My aunt especially buys into this misconception as she has a son the exact same age as me who is home schooled, hates school, doesn't participate in any sports or clubs, and spends all of his time on social media and video games. I, on the other hand, go to public school, enjoy reading and put in a lot of work and effort in school for every one of my classes. I also don't spend that much time on video games and social media as I play basketball for the high school team and work a part-time job. My cousin is where my aunt gets all her information about teenagers. Every time I see and talk to my aunt, she always assumes that I hate school and my classes and have been spending an excessive amount of time playing video games since that is her only source of information. While in reality, I really enjoy all of my classes and yes, every once in a while, hop on and play some video games, but mostly try to focus on more

important things like basketball and studying. This simple stereotype that teenagers do not care about learning or school anymore can simplify many teenagers who love school and learning into a “single story” which doesn’t fully show them as a person. Which from firsthand experience can be quite irritating.

Furthermore, older generations tend to think that teenagers are always on their phones looking at a screen. This generalization is another common misconception and isn’t always fair and accurate as not all teenagers are glued to their phones. I could see why older people might think this as the average teenager spends around 8 hours and 40 minutes a day on their phone. Me personally, when using my phone, I try and use it productively like for studying, staying informed, and talking to friends and family. My average screentime is about four hours per day, which is less than half of the teenage average. I also tend to use my phone in the sense of “escaping reality” and relax to music or a movie as there is a lot of stress in my life between work, sports, and school. I remember I was at a funeral reception one time about 2 months ago at this big church. Everyone including me was eating and visiting. I took out my phone when I saw I got a group text from my coach about practice the next day. As I was responding to the text message, my dad came up behind me and said in a stern tone, “Put away your phone, you’re going to be on it the rest of the day after this. Visit with people.” As teenagers, we might use our phones more than usual, but that doesn’t mean we’re being unproductive or not engaged. I realize it could have been just bad timing as that was the first time I had been on my phone and definitely could have responded at a better time like after the reception was over. But the assumption that I was going to be on my phone during the rest of the day felt excessive and made me feel like he saw my phone as only a distraction. What’s interesting is that I’ve also seen plenty of older adults on their phones at social events, checking Facebook, texting, or even

scrolling through news articles, yet that behavior doesn't always get called out in the same way. Older generations have their own versions of "too much screen time" too, like watching TV for hours or talking on the phone all night. My grandpa is a prime example of this, at as he can be on his phone The phone is a tool for productivity, not just for scrolling through social media and playing games. Teenagers being on their phone is also a way to disconnect from the pressures of our daily lives and can act as a big stress reliever.

Being a teenager comes with dozens of stereotypes you can't control. People from older generations assume and have many misconceptions about you and your life. If I put myself in the shoes of these older generations, I can see why some of these stereotypes exist, even if they're unfair. Many adults grew up in a whole different time period with different expectations, responsibilities, and technology. So, when teenagers act differently, they often assume the worst. Now, imagine your 16-year-old teenager and an older adult came up to you and said, "back then it was way harder, you guys have it easy now." I get that things were tough back then, but today's challenges are just different. We're under constant academic pressure, juggling extracurriculars, part-time jobs, and dealing with social media and mental health struggles. It's not easier, it's just a different kind of hard.