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Writing Lab

“Improving Self-Image by Not Trashing It”

Ageism is discrimination, but on a different level. No one seems to notice or care when it happens; no one believes it belongs in the same category as racism, sexism, and anti-Semitism. But just like the other “isms”, there are real-world economics and consequences at work.

The youth have a lingering social stigma – the assumption that teenagers are immature, insubordinate, and irresponsible. From a social rights standpoint, these assumptions are unfair, unjust, and uncalled for; but from an objective standpoint, can we not help but draw such a conclusion? Youth are prone to thrill seeking and negligence. The result of their actions tally high numbers in alcohol and drug use; sexual activity and STD statistics; and delinquency and crime rates. Being a highly analytical generation, society interprets these numbers and forms a stereotype. In other words, society perceives people by their actions. The youth act like idiots, and then wonder why they face such disdain.

The teenage search for an identity, adulthood, and a place in society does not mean reckless experimentation. They’ll grow out of it, is the common excuse, but like Martin Luther King said concerning the false perception of healing in the concept of time, immaturity is not something you grow out of. Stepping out of immaturity requires the decision of being mature.

But with the youth socially stereotyped, is there any hope of moving forward?

Certainly.

Like people, society judges based on action. By changing our actions little by little, the youth can change how they are perceived. How? By not littering.

In various studies of environmental psychology performed by Francis T. McAndrew the groups most likely to litter were identified: “young people litter more than older people, men litter more than women, people living in rural areas litter more than urban residents, and people who are alone litter more than people in groups.”¹

Litter is the result of a lack of education or ignorance of the law; a poor outlook towards the environment and the surroundings; a laziness to properly dispose of it in the trashcan; or a careless attitude. There are other reasons, but regardless of what they are, by not littering, you overcome every single negative aspect associated them.²

The ability to clean up after yourself displays the trait of responsibility and self-discipline. It saves money through the avoidance of littering fines, bills for large scale

cleanup, and reduced property value. You also show those around you that you harbor a concern for the environment, surrounding, and community.

Such awareness, responsibility, and self-discipline are characteristics of mature adults. By simply not littering, you boost your overall self-image. For the youth, this improved self-image is a step towards resolving the portion of ageism the youth have brought upon themselves.

Citations:

¹ Bisbort, Alan. "America Loves Its Litter." Hartford Advocate. 27 Sept. 2001. 5 Feb. 2007 <<http://old.hartfordadvocate.com/articles/litter.html>>.

² "Litter." Wikipedia. 9 Feb. 2007. 5 Feb. 2007 <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Litter>>.