

## UNDERSTANDING YOUTH CULTURE

Defining the Terms:

- Generation X 1965-1979
- Millennials 1980-1994
- IGen 1995-2012 (commercialization of the Internet)

10 Trends (surveyed of 11 million since 1960s)

1. In no hurry (the extension of childhood into adolescence)
2. Internet (how much time they are really spending on their phones and what that has replaced)
3. In person no more (the decline in interpersonal social interaction)
4. Insecure (the sharp rise in mental health issues)
5. Irreligious (the decline in religion)
6. Insulated but not intrinsic (the interest in safety and the decline in civic involvement)
7. Income insecurity (new attitudes toward work)
8. Indefinite (new attitudes toward sex, relationships, and children)
9. Inclusive (acceptance, equality, and free speech debates)
10. Independent (their political views)

## UNDERSTANDING ADOLESCENTS

How do we determine adolescents?

- (from Latin *adolescere*, meaning 'to grow up') is a transitional stage of physical and psychological development that generally occurs during the period from puberty to legal adulthood (age of majority).
- Historically it was based off of physical appearance and physical signs
  - Development of breasts
  - Facial, chest, pubic hair, etc.
  - Menarche
- Historically it was 14-16 years old
- Today, average girl gets their first period at 11 years old.

Adolescence was originally thought of as an 18-month window of time from age 14½; to 16- a bit of a culturally endorsed holding pattern in which “youth” were allowed an opportunity to wrestle with “adolescent issues.”

Rites of passage by Arnold van Gennep in 1908, had three elements

1. Separation from the old status
2. Transition, usually with a specified ritual
3. Incorporation into the adult community

What are the Rites of Passages today?

- From culture
- From parents
- From society

The three main tasks of adolescents came down to:

1. Identity “Who am I?”
2. Autonomy “How am I unique, and what power do I have?”
3. Affinity “Where and to whom do I belong?”

WHAT HAPPENS DURING ADOLESCENCE?

1. Understanding their brains
  - a. One of the biggest discoveries is the underdevelopment of the prefrontal cortex in teenagers. The frontal lobe is often called the brain’s CEO, or the decision-making center. Here’s a partial list of the functions it’s responsible for:
    - i. Decision-making, Wisdom, Prioritization, Impulse control, Planning, Organization, Focus
  - b. Myelination: increase speed between communication between neurons  
Increase in brain volume in early adolescence and decrease in late adolescence  
Synaptic pruning: good and important and allows body to focus on connections that are used most. What we do during the teenage years shapes us for the rest of our lives. Ex: tv, cell phones, etc
2. Playing with speculation: moving towards independence
  - Teens start questioning your values and choices (starting to see other alternatives)
    - Don’t take this personally
  - Asking tough questions about faith
    - Simplicity -> Complexity -> Perplexity -> Humility
  - Swap hobbies or style for a new bit of exploration
  - In order for the teen to move towards independence, teens need to exercise their “speculation muscle” \*they often won’t go on their own.
    - Don’t just give the right answer
3. Learning about the 3rd-person

In other words, to perceive yourself, or others, or a situation, from some other (or someone else’s) point of view.

Ex: Stand a 9-year-old girl in front of a mirror and ask her to describe herself. Most likely consist of what she literally sees in front of her - physical characteristic. Stand a 16 year old girl and ask her to describe what she sees and you'll get a very different kind of answer. While it might be a few concrete details, most of her description will be based on perception - who she sees herself to be, what she assumes others think of her, and how she perceives she doesn't meet some cultural expectation.

But this 3-person perspective isn't only about self-perception. Thinking from other points of views helps us with a bunch of other complex adult functions. It can help us make better decisions, since we can remove ourselves and our own biases from the speculation process. It can help us engage and be present to people, when we have a sense of what they're feeling or experiencing. And it can cause us to reflect on big, complex questions about life and evil and goodness and culture and all of humanity.

Ex: Narcissism - see others with real needs; priorities and values.

### **Role of Parents and Society during adolescence**

What is the primary goal of parenting? The goal of parenting a teenager should not be creating miniature versions of ourselves. It shouldn't be making nice, compliant citizens. And it sure shouldn't be raising "successful" wage earners. **The primary goal of parenting a teenager is to raise an adult.** They should finish their adolescence by saying "I'm ready to take responsibility for myself, for my decisions - good and bad - and for my influence for myself."

#### Gospel Implications

- Goal isn't to just "get them to college" or even "to live a nice and comfortable life", but what they are designed for - to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.
- Keep pushing them to the Gospel and call out the false narratives that are trying to disciple them towards death.

Teenagers spend almost every waking minute in a homogeneous grouping of peers (or alone). Today's teenagers have almost no opportunity to spend time with adults in the world of adults (the only time they spend with adults is when the adults come into the world of teenagers). As a result, teenagers and young adults have little opportunity to practice being what I like to call apprentice adults.

#### Gospel Implications

- What are we reinforcing to our students in terms of eternity?
- Not just in terms of education but even in how to live out a Christian lifestyle that highlights the gospel? How do we teach them to forgive? How do we model what we believe about biblical community? Is missions important for us?
- We have all failed in this and will continue to fail. But Jesus has lived out the perfect life on your behalf and has lived it out perfectly for tomorrow. And because of that God IS

pleased with you and there is nothing you can do or not do that will make him love you more. And this should drive us towards the Gospel and no away nor abuse it.