

Prejudice

3 | News

SCRAP THE TEEN STEREOTYPES

When Kurt Cobain unleashed 'Smells like Teen Spirit' in 1991, the Nirvana song became a gritty anthem for a generation of disaffected youth. But the late grunge demigod might have been less inspired by a whiff of today's teens. In the Facebook age, where's the alienation? Teenagers are now a surprisingly virtuous lot, according to sociologist Reginald Bibby, author of 'The Emerging Millennials: How Canada's Newest Generation Is Responding to Change and Choice'. In his 2008 survey of 5,500 youth, Dr. Bibby found that Canadian teens place supreme importance on values such as honesty and caring for others. They actually like hanging out with their parents. And they're less likely to smoke, drink, do drugs and have sex than any group since he began tracking adolescent behaviour in 1984. Dr. Bibby spoke to *The Globe and Mail* about how today's parents are raising great kids – and why people get upset by his good news.

[1]

There are significant decreases in the percentage of kids who say they have a close friend who has experienced severe depression, bullying at school, drug and alcohol problems, gang violence, sexual abuse, or a suicide attempt. That's the biggest thing that surprised me overall.

[2]

Invariably, if I say things are looking pretty good for teens relative to the past, people get mad. We just have this assumption that this generation

can't possibly turn out as well as previous generations.

[3]

I don't want to sound naive here but my sense is that post-boomers have recognized the importance of balancing career and family. They're focusing on building good relationships with their kids. And they're no longer using the old cliché about quality versus quantity time.

[4]

No, I think it is overplayed. What teens are saying in the survey is that friends are very important in terms of giving them sheer joy but when it comes to areas of influence, Mom and Dad are right up there. Parents are being shown more respect than they realize.

[5]

We have such tremendous resources, from governments as well as the corporate community, designed to elevate the lives of young people. If there's a violent incident at virtually any school in the country, for example, the next thing we hear is that grief counselors are being brought in. So it's no wonder we're seeing improvements in all these areas.

[6]

I try to tell social workers, give yourselves a cheer. Some people think they're going to get the pink slip here, but obviously there are other areas where kids need help. Maybe it's time to focus on teen gambling, for example.

[7]

One of the reasons kids aren't drinking as much on a Friday night is, frankly, they have other things they can do – they've got Facebook, YouTube, video games. Vice has to compete with all these entertainment options.

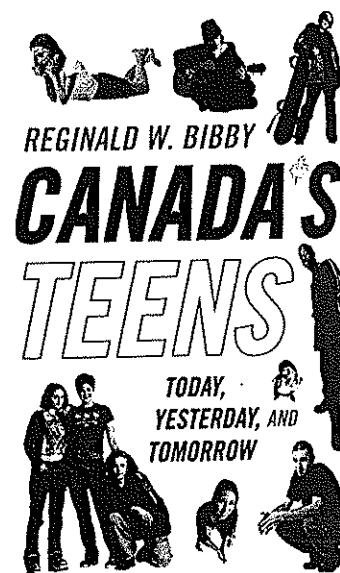
[8]

I don't think we can when they're teenagers. They're using technology for social and entertainment functions. They've got all this artillery to understand what's going on in the world but the percentage that say they follow the news has actually dropped off in the last decade. What's intriguing will be to see how they'll make use of technology when they get into their 20s and beyond.

[9]

No. In the course of doing this research, I can't say I've been reading much in terms of parenting guides.

Adriana Barto



- I The interview questions have been removed from the text. Match the questions below with the gaps numbered [1]–[9] in the text. There are more than you need.
- A About 99 per cent of teens watch TV and use computers daily, yet only 17 per cent keep up with the news. How can we get teens to become global thinkers?
 - B According to your research, today's adolescents have stronger ties to their parents than any teen cohort in the past 30 years. Are today's parents trying to be their kids' best friends?
 - C After analysing teenagers' replies to your 200-question survey, what surprised you most?
 - D As the father of three sons in their early 40s and a six-year-old girl, can you recommend any parenting books?
 - E Experts such as Gordon Neufeld, author of *Hold On to Your Kids*, claim that today's children are increasingly peer-oriented. Is this something we should worry about?
 - F How has the Internet influenced teen habits?
 - G In your experience, what do you think are the greatest pressures on teenagers today?
 - H Should we expect big cuts to social programs if politicians read your survey results?
 - I What are some of the most common stereotypical views of teenagers?
 - J What advice can you offer concerned parents of teenagers?
 - K Your book paints a rosy picture of today's youth but it's been met with considerable scepticism. Why?
 - L Your study found that teens are less likely to smoke, drink, or take drugs than they were eight years ago. Why?

Give a meaning for each of the following words or phrases as they appear in the text.

- | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| a unleashed (line 1) | d grunge demigod (line 5) |
| b gritty anthem (line 3) | e whiff (line 6) |
| c disaffected (line 4) | f virtuous lot (line 9) |

Answer the following questions.

- a List five improvements to teenage behaviour over the last decade.
- b To what does 'That's' relate in line 34?
- c Why do certain people criticize Dr. Bibby for his optimism about teenagers?
- d According to the text which three factors have contributed to a change in teenage behaviour in Canada?
- e In what ways does he feel parents have contributed to the change?
- f How does Dr. Bibby evaluate the role of friendship?
- g In what ways has the partnership between government and business contributed to teenagers' welfare?
- h According to Dr. Bibby, what new threats face teenagers?
- i How has new technology changed teenage behaviour patterns?
- j According to Dr Bibby, how have young people's attitudes changed to current affairs?
- k Explain the meaning of the phrase 'they've got all this artillery' (line 89).
- l What can we not predict about the present generation of teenagers?

Identify and explain the following cultural references mentioned in the text:

- a post-boomers (line 44)
- b quality versus quantity time (lines 50–51)
- c get the pink slip (lines 73–74)