



UNDERSTANDING TODAY'S YOUTH

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CULTURE QUOTES

“We live in a world where kids are encouraged to develop, figure out, and act on the truth that works for them based on how they feel at any given moment in time.”

Walt Mueller
President, Center for Parent/Youth Understanding

Student Life Shaped by Technology

Youth Unlimited recently spent a morning talking with a group of college students about the effects of technology on how they live and what they believe. They are quite aware of how they are being shaped by digital technology. Their straightforward answers provide valuable insights into their evolving world.

How They Live

First, technology shapes how they spend their time. Students devote hours each day to watching TV, checking Facebook, sending tweets, and watching the latest posts on YouTube. Life is very much arranged around access to technology.

Second, it determines how they connect with friends. Face-to-face encounters are no longer required. They have been replaced with electronic snippets devoid of emotional attachment.

Third, technology defines relationships. Texting relationships are simple, short, and superficial. There is even a new movement to boyfriend/girlfriend relationships based only on texting. Face-to-face relationships require instant responses which they find stressful. Texting permits you time to think about your answers. The students admitted it is harder now to find the right mate in life because you have to get beyond the “fun” of techno relationships and into the real world. (This begins to explain this current generation’s growing struggles in creating and maintaining human relationships.)

Finally, modern technology allows them to live in a world of instant self-gratification—whatever you need is a mere click away or in your favourite apps on your smartphone.

What They Believe

First, they all agree that digital media promotes a slanted view of life since technology is shaping everything about them including attitudes, beliefs, and worldviews. The Internet presents everything you could possibly want to believe about life, death, and everything in between. How is one to know what to believe with so many options?

Second, determining who you are and your personal identity has become a complicated process. Media has an endless list of who you should be and what you should look like. “Who am I?” has been replaced with “Who does the culture say I should be?”



Finally, media teaches a spiritual smorgasbord approach to faith systems. There is no such thing as truth so you are free to pick and choose from the table of spiritual delights. Many young people mix and match beliefs to create their own personal menu. Even Christian kids are not exempt from mixing their biblical worldview with such things as reincarnation, other world religions or a number of tenets from Wicca.

The invasion of technology in the lives and psyches of our young people should raise an alarm for parents. The vast majority of teen life involves being tethered to technology. They even fall asleep with it on their pillow. Who our children grow up to be is not the prerogative of Google, YouTube, or Facebook. Technology only underscores the importance of personal relationships within the family and beyond.

Youth Culture Soup, Maps, and Mirrors

The 30th annual MTV Video Music Awards 2013 took place at the Barclays Center in Brooklyn on August 25. Over 13 million viewers, most of them under 25, were treated to the now notorious performance by Miley Cyrus and Robin Thicke. One month later, a Google search of Miley provides 827 million pages in 0.26 seconds. Pop culture is currently consumed with everything VMA.

Welcome to the world of today's teens. This is their culture. Culture is what we believe, what we do, and how we live our lives. It binds us to those who think and live in a similar manner. It's the values, attitudes and behaviors that drive how we live our lives.

It is very much the soup our kids have been swimming in. We might not like what we see when we stir the soup but it allows us to engage our young people in meaningful ways. Our job as parents is to know what's going on out there and how it is impacting our young people.

Culture also serves our youth as a "map." The reality is that in today's world, where traditional life-shaping maps of family, church, and school are breaking down, kids still need a map to guide them through the question-filled years of adolescence. Music and media are maps for kids as other traditional institutions have failed to lead and guide them ethically. Kids are exposed 24/7 thanks to technology



You might find it easier to think of it as the "soup" in which our kids are swimming. It is like lifting the lid on a pot of soup only to discover what you see on the surface isn't really what the soup is all about. You need to stir it up to be sure of its contents. The same can be said of youth culture. There is much below the surface to be considered.

No one really saw what was coming at the VMAs but it is all young people (and adults) talked about for days after. Everyone had an opinion about Miley's performance with Robin Thicke. She took twerking to a new level. (The Oxford Dictionary defines twerking as dancing to music in a provocative manner involving thrusting hip movements and a low, squatting stance.)

and it is happy to show them where to go and how to live.

What we saw at the VMAs was this generation's philosophers, trend-setters, cultural gurus, preachers, and educators. They are all young people who have followed the map culture provided for them. What they sing and how they live is evidence of how they have been shaped by those in the industry who exercised a nurturing presence in their lives when they were coming of age. In the case of Miley Cyrus, family and faith have been replaced by the cultural directive to do whatever it takes to become a celebrity.

Maps provided by the media include defining what is real, who your heroes should be,

what you should look like, how to solve conflict, what your sexual standards can be, the value of people, the importance of materialism, what makes up a family, and where to find spirituality and peace.

Culture in other ways serves as a "mirror" into which we must gaze. Adults need to picture themselves standing behind a young person as they look into the mirror of their culture. There were virtually no young bloggers who were upset or angry with the Miley Cyrus performance; this is their world and the things to which they have grown accustomed. As we gaze over their shoulders at the reflection, we must look at their music, magazines, movies, websites, and Facebook pages. What we see reflected back helps us to understand at a deeper level the things which might be confusing and a worldview we might not share.

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Parents fill three important roles in guiding their children through pop culture. First, a prophetic role by letting kids know the truth about all the important issues they will face including sexuality. Parents are a trusted source of information and need to talk openly about the values and standards they deem important. Second, a preventative role by taking what they know and preparing their children to make right choices in all areas of life. Third, a redemptive role by initiating forgiveness and reconciliation when things don't go well. Our kids need us to be there to pick them up and set them on the right track after mistakes have been made.

Youth culture soup, maps, and mirrors may look challenging, but diligent adults will find ways to better understand their young people through a deeper understanding of their world.

The Plague of Porn

A generation ago most parents feared having the big sex talk with their kids. Today, parents need to be having the big porn talk given that the vast majority of kids, both girls and boys, have seen or read it. It is a sad commentary on our culture but all too real for our young people. The days of innocence don't last long.

Pornography has become mainstream and acceptable in ways we never thought would happen. Part of the reason is the power of pictures in today's culture. Young people have the capability of viewing anything and everything on the Internet. The pictures burn visual images deep into their psyche. Images always leave us wanting more and when young people look at graphic sexual depictions devoid of a conscience or moral absolutes, they create a reality that fits their own desires. There are no boundaries to be violated if there are no visual restrictions. There appears to be no sense of guilt or shame as well.

There are a number of trends that parents need to be aware of in the world of pornography. First, we will continue to see more and more kids exposed to porn at younger and younger ages. Any child who has a computer on the Net is a potential victim. "Pornpreneurs" websites utilize common words used by children to increase the possibility they will stumble on their site.

Second, the envelope of indecency expands every day. Pornographers know that they have to keep increasing the thrill and uniqueness of each encounter in order to keep kids returning. There appears to be no end to what they can come up with.

Third, pornography is moving from something sinful to simply a personal preference. Moral relativism says you are entitled to decide what is right for you regardless of what others may think. There is less shame involved around the topic and it becomes more and more mainstream. Being touched by the porn culture is now the new norm.

However, pornography still has powerful effects on children and teens who are ill equipped mentally to make sense of what they see and hear. The Center for Parent/Youth Understanding (cpyu.org) has a great downloadable booklet called "A Parent's Primer on Internet Pornography" which provides this extensive list:

An exaggerated perception of sexual activity in society... the belief that "everyone's doing it"

The abandonment of the hope of remaining sexually monogamous

Belief that sexual promiscuity is natural and normal

Belief that sexual abstinence and sexual inactivity are abnormal and unhealthy

Belief that marriage is sexually confining

A lack of attraction to family and child-rearing

Negative and/or traumatic emotional responses

Earlier onset of first sexual experience

The commodification of sex and the sexual objectification of persons

Increased acceptance of sexual perversions as normal

So what happens when you know your son or daughter has been viewing porn? Nicholas Black of Harvest USA (harvestusa.org) offers some solid action steps for parents:



1 Create a nurturing environment to talk about sex with your children. Sex is an emotionally charged topic so start when they are young and then you will be in better shape to tackle the tough issues like porn if they come up.

2 Address the deeper longings of their heart. We were born with the longing for relationships in our hearts. The danger comes when we see

porn as the way of filling that void for meaning and happiness in life.

3 Keep the discussion going. Ask questions that invite your child's heart to show itself. Pose questions that help him talk about his feelings (positive and negative) and not just get him to explain his behavior.

4 Listen with the right way of hearing—genuinely without over-reacting. Staying calm and connected with your child tells them that your love for them is real, especially when they are being vulnerable.

5 Understand their world with the right kind of knowledge. Take time to learn about the world your child is facing. This may mean researching media and learning more about what their peers believe is acceptable. ("Closing the Window—Steps to Living Porn Free" by Tim Chester is a highly recommended read.)

6 Lead by example. If you say nothing about pornography, your silence is a permission slip to engage in it. You cannot shield your kids from every problem and sin in the world but you can be an example of how to confront the important issues of life head-on.

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In addition, Youth Unlimited encourages you to take steps to restrict access and choices, while engaging them in ongoing accountability. Check out software solutions such as OpenDNS (opendns.com) which prevents questionable content from entering any computer, smart phone, and gaming device in your house. OpenDNS installs on the router so every device in your home will be protected, including the ones your child's friends bring with them.

New Understanding Today's Youth Seminar from Paul Robertson: 7 Youth Culture Trends Every Parent Should Know



If you are over 25, you can't understand what it means to be a teenager today. You can't understand it because they can't either. No boundaries. No truth. No families. No innocence. No time to just be a kid.

When adults venture into the world of adolescence, they feel very much like strangers in a strange land. Kids are so at home while adults feel so out of touch. The amount of change in the adolescent world is unprecedented thanks to the immediacy of media and technology.

This seminar is designed to help parents, youth workers, and educators better under-

stand the current trends and culture shapers affecting today's young people. Shapers such as... celebrity narcissism, moral relativism, tolerance, materialism, bullying, youth violence, cheating, cruelty, cohabitation, fatherlessness, overt sexuality, pornography, body image pressures, lack of human relationships, power of pictures, anxiety and depression,

lack of shame, and impact of media on brain development.

Focus will also be given on how adults can respond in positive ways to the various trends.

To book a seminar for your group please contact Paul directly at paul@paulrobertson.ca.



Pop culture got your kids? Youth Unlimited wants to help you get them back.

Youth Culture Specialist Paul Robertson has 16 seminars to help you deepen your relationship with the young people in your life by better understanding their culture. All articles were written by Paul.

To book Paul for your group call 416-520-6831 or check www.paulrobertson.ca for details.