

Understanding

TODAY'S YOUTH



Toronto YFC

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Inside this Issue:

Peer Orientation Spells Problems 1

Mens' Magazines Have New Audience 2

Report on Fathers Only Half the Story 3

Media IN the Minds of Christian Youth 4

Youth Culture Facts:

- over 73,000 Ontario students have been threatened or injured with a weapon at school
- nearly 91,000 grade 7-10 students in Ontario has carried a gun or knife to school in last year
- males are more likely than females to carry a weapon - 15% and 5% respectively

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Peer Orientation Spells Problems

A considerable number of parents feel that parenting is no longer a natural activity. It has become arduous and without reward for many. Kids seem to be spinning out of control with little or no explanation. For years we have talked about them being less influenced by parents, less respectful of adults and property, less afraid of breaking the rules, and less inclined to want to please those in authority over them. Though this has been our thinking for years, could it be such an era has now arrived?

Vancouver clinicians Gordon Neufeld and Gabor Mate certainly do in their latest book, **"Hold On To Your Kids: Why Parents Matter."** Based on their years of work and research with young people, they suggest that a new problem has arrived in the land of peaceful parenting. It is *peer orientation* - the phenomenon whereby more and more kids are taking their sense of direction for life from their peers rather than parents. Citing social, economic and cultural trends over the past 50 years, parents have been displaced from their position as the orienting influence and the peer group has moved in to fill the void, often with unfortunate results.

The authors assert that a child cannot be oriented to their parents and other children at the same time. "Just as one cannot follow two sets of conflicting directions at the same time, so the child's brain must automatically choose between parental values and peer values, parental guidance and peer guidance, parental culture and peer culture whenever the two would appear to be in conflict... In cultures that are adult oriented, in which the guiding princi-

ples and values are those of the more mature generations, children attach to other children without losing their bearings or without having to reject parental influences. In our society that is no longer the case. Peer bonds have come to replace relationships with adults as children's *primary* source of orientation."

This should come as no surprise. Young people have less time with adults as their families fall apart, they drop out of organized sports because they are embarrassed by their folks, and they long for parents who spend too much time at the office. Combined with our children's new ability to deepen connections with their peers through pagers, instant messaging, email, voice mail, call waiting, text messaging, and cell phones, our kids are now primed to take their cues from each other.

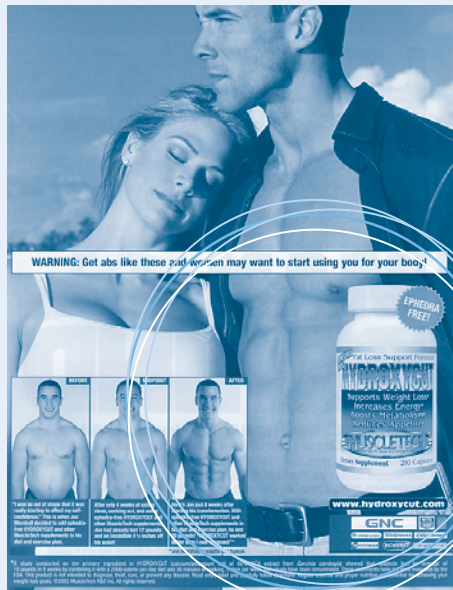
However, we shouldn't abandon hope quite yet. As Neufeld and Mate point out, the secret of parenting is not in what a parent *does* but rather who the parent *is* to a child. The key is taking advantage of those times when our kids are seeking contact and closeness, especially during the early years. In these "attachment moments," we become enabled as nurturer, coach, and parent. It is at this time, that we help to establish ourselves as the compass for their lives. As they grow, so must we in our ability to stay attached, often in creative ways.

Hold On To Your Kids is a fascinating read and filled with wonderful insights for any parents struggling to understand their children and peer influence. It also provides a number of very practical parenting tips as well. Highly recommended.



Mens' Magazines Have New Audience

The boys each snapped up their favourite magazine from the rack and were quickly seated on the window ledge of Chapters. Setting the backpacks aside, they quickly flipped, eyes bulging, through endless pages of semi-nude women. Within a few seconds the debate began. Whose maga-



body if you want to be accepted by the opposite sex. Body image used to be the sole domain of young girls, but no longer. A doctor in Kitchener recently had a visit from a 15 year old boy who came in for a physical examination before joining the gym and hiring a personal trainer. The boy also wanted a prescription for diuretics so he could lose weight quickly. The only problem was this boy was not overweight. This was a young man whose view of him-

**“WARNING:
Get abs like
these and
women will
want to use you
for your body!”**

zine contained the best looking babes? It would be tough to decide. Mens' magazines Maxim, Stuff, and FHM are filled with the kind of eye candy a young man finds irresistible.

What used to be referred to as “mens' magazines” are now common fodder for adolescent boys. Some teen boys even have subscriptions to such publications. Is it just part of the playful passage into adulthood or is it filling a young mind with questionable messages not really needed for healthy development?

American based Teen Research Unlimited reports that 65 percent of boys ages 12 to 19 read a magazine for pleasure every week. For many of them, mens' magazines have become the print media of choice. Just as younger girls are reading and viewing materials designed for older females, boys are following the same approach.

What are some of the messages mens' magazines are sending to teenage boys? How do they shape their values and ultimate behaviour?

First, you better have the perfect

self had been distorted by the media around him. The perfect body has little to do with athletic prowess and everything to do with being more attractive to the opposite sex.

Second, you have to drink to be prove your social status. Alcohol manufacturers are always pushing as close as they can to the edge of the teen market. Many ads portray young adults, hardly distinguishable from teenagers, in a party setting that would make an Epicurean smile - eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we have even more things to try. Hedonism is a central theme in all of these magazines.

Third, you need to have the latest material goods in order to be happy. Acquiring current fashions, colognes, electronic devices, stereo equipment, sporting goods, and cars are what life has been reduced to. There is no such thing as “enough” in the pop culture marketplace where happiness is just another purchase away.

Fourth, you need to sprinkle your speech with profanity. The “f” word runs rampant in all of these magazines. No interviewer or contributor

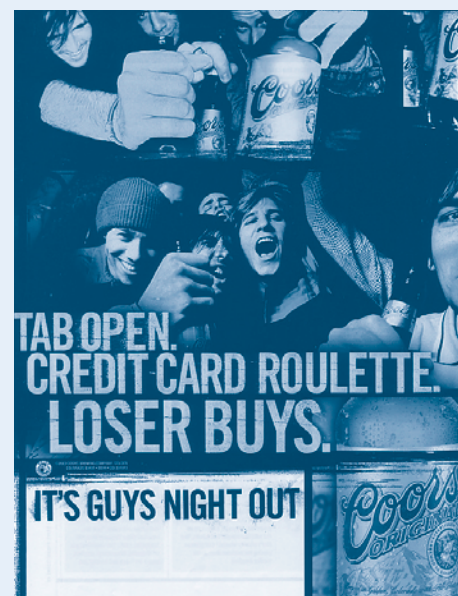
would think of restricting any expletives. A mark of manhood has become the use of toilet language. Somehow this impresses the opposite sex.

Chris Wagner from the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding (cpyu.org) has some great suggestions for parents if their sons are having their values and beliefs shaped by the magazine industry.

Find out what your son is reading, pick up a copy for yourself and determine the effect it might be having on him. Great place to start some rich discussions on lifestyle choices.

Help your son develop a proper self-image. Self-confidence comes from being a person of trust and integrity and not from the acquisition of products.

Help your son develop a healthy view of the opposite sex. Most magazines geared for males present women as eye-candy or sexual objects. Be a model in your own home of what it means to treat a woman with respect and dignity.



Don't be discouraged. It can be easy to think there is no way to counter the garbage that the world has to offer our kids. **Remember: your example speaks more loudly than culture.** Let your son see in you a quiet sense of peace and contentment with who you are and what you have.

Report on Fathers Only Half the Story

In a time when the family is under attack, a recent Globe and Mail/CTV poll of Canadian parents brought some much needed good news. The survey showed that almost 70 per cent of mothers and fathers are spending more time with their children than their parents did with them.

Dads are spending about one hour and twenty minutes per day focused on their children. It also went on to say that Canadian fathers are very involved in storybook readings, bedtime duties, and general playtime. Plus, dads are doing more dishes as well. Moms have to be happy with that.

Canadian women still spend more time on child care, but dads have been doing better. In the 70's, a father's time with children averaged about 40 per cent of the time a mother spent; by the late 90's it had increased to 67 per cent.

The study was based on the analysis of 24-hour journals kept by parents. This simple fact tells us much about what the results would be. Only a caring parent who had nothing to hide would go to all the work of detailing their lives for such a public report.

One author of the study stated that fathers have made the largest shift in the last 30 years although he could not explain why men are making more time for their offspring. Perhaps the researcher has forgotten that in the last 30 years our divorce rate has climbed steadily. Could it be that Canadian dads are finally realizing what a significant role they play in the lives of their children?

If you are a child who happens to live with your biological father in one of these homes, it is very good news indeed. But what if you are one of the nearly two million kids who will go to bed this evening without saying good-night to their dad for the simple reason that your father doesn't live with you anymore? This report is only telling a partial tale.

Lynn, a 17 year old high school student reports that the only time she ever saw her father cry was the time he came home and announced to the family that the marriage was over. And then she added these words, "Divorce

is never easy on the kids you know." Being a teenage girl watching your father walk out of your life is simply devastating. Most dads never realize the cost.

and dad will once again be together.

As the number of fatherless kids has risen since 1970, so has teen suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, pregnancies and promiscuity, depression and anxi-



David Popenoe, in his book **Life Without Father**, suggests it is better for a child to lose a father to death than to divorce or separation. At least in death, the child will mourn and move on with their lives. In divorce, kids can be left with an endless hope that mom

ety while scholastic scores have plummeted. Studies show that girls who do not have a solid relationship with their fathers are more likely to engage in sexual activity at an earlier age and have more sexual partners. It is simply a case of looking for love in all the wrong places.

Popenoe goes on to remind us that fathers are the ones who, by loving their kids, teach them they are love-worthy which in turns builds strong self-esteem. The way a father simply *plays* with his children has effects on everything from the management of emotions to intelligence and academic performance. A father's involvement has been linked to improved verbal and problem-solving skills.

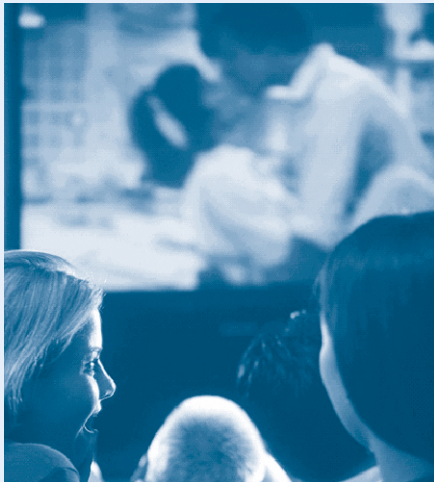
Most fathers underestimate the impact they can have on their children. The culture tends to whisper that you are not needed and that independence comes early. The whisper is a lie. The time a father spends with his children today will pay rich rewards tomorrow.

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Media IN the Minds of Christian Youth

As the Christian high school students broke into small groups, the noise level increased but so did their enthusiasm. Their assignment was to look at the various way media messages shape their beliefs and behaviour. The students all agreed that they were influenced by their music and media, but to what degree are their daily decisions and worldview shaped by information technology?

The answer soon became apparent. Many of these teens had never realized how much their biblical convictions are being challenged by misinformation from their media. Through media, they are encouraged to enjoy a sexuality of “no rules” where oral sex isn’t really an intimate activity. When it comes to materialism, the more you have, the happier you will be. After all, it is the new salvation. Happiness and peace in life are achieved through stimulating music and illegal stimulants. Values and meaning for life are determined by what you own and who you know.



It’s the cumulative effect of all these messages that that should disturb us. Most Christians, including our young people, are destroyed not by explosion but by erosion. Little by little, the biblical truth they seek to live out is continuously countered by question-

able propositions from the media. Given the fact that most kids spend nearly 50 hours a week with the media, the foundation of their faith will be vulnerable.

“Through television, we permit people into our homes who would otherwise never get past our front door.”

According to social development theorist, Lev Vygotsky, the “zone of proximal learning” is that period of time when children are ready to learn from others more capable than themselves. Today, often in the absence of adult input, kids are getting endless hours of assistance from the media. Television has become their new “media mentor.” For young undiscerning minds, they easily believe whatever they see and hear. The peril of such a scenario is best captured in a quip from comedian Steve Allen, “Through television, we permit people into our homes who would otherwise never get past our front door.”

How media works in the minds of young people certainly helps explain not only the behaviour of youth culture at large but many of the issues that Christian youth struggle with as well. We know that a person’s values determine their behaviour. As a child grows into adolescence, decision making can still be a complicated issue. A developing brain, especially in the early teen years, can make even small decisions challenging. A partial explanation for what our parents called “stupid decisions” is the fact that the brain has trouble processing information that enables it to make critical decisions. Making the right choice in a world of “anything

goes” complicates the process even further. It is here that media greatly influences their preferences for how to live in the postmodern world. Left to the whims of culture, they will be in trouble.

Sarah, now a teacher and Christian mom, talks about the dangers of being raised by the culture. Growing up with alcoholic parents who cared little, her life was molded by the media. “Whatever I read in teen magazines or saw on television or in the movies, I did it. If they talked about a drug I’d never tried, I did it. If it was something sexual, I experimented. I never had a parent or adult in my life to tell me right from wrong so I simply followed the only thing I knew - the pop culture.”

After spending an hour looking at the impact of media on their lives, these students were left to silently answer one more challenge. The real question isn’t how much media are they consuming and how they being changed by it. The real question is what kind of a Christian are they *becoming*? The bible only gives three options – baby, carnal, and maturing. All of them wanted to be in the maturing category and it is these little daily decisions in all areas of life that will determine how well they live.

As one 15-year-old girl later wrote, “After what you said today about the types of Christians that you can be, it just makes so much sense, and I really want to take that step to become a ‘maturing Christian.’” Yes Erin, it really does just make sense.



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To book a speaking engagement call: 905-453-7991