

Understanding



Toronto YFC



TODAY'S YOUTH

Spring 2005

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Youth Culture Facts:

- 99% of Canadian students have used the Internet
- 48% of Canadian students use it for a least an hour a day
- Canadians have the highest Internet usage in the world
- Only 28% of parents are aware that their children use instant messaging

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The Age of Innocence Lost

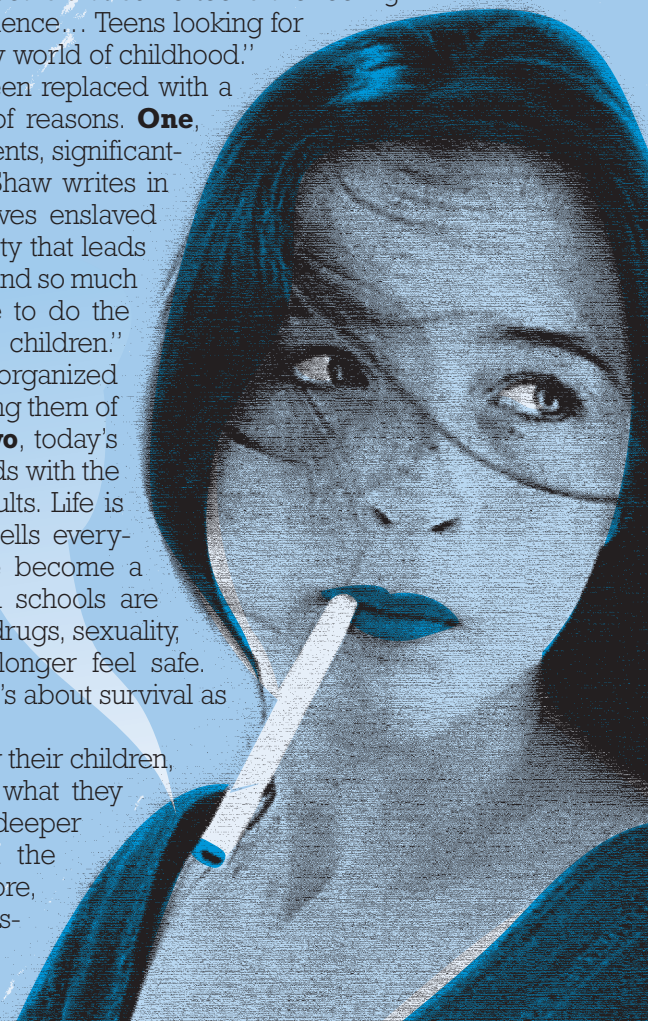
In 1950, Canadian author Robertson Davies opined, "One of the really notable achievements of the 20th century has been to make the young old before their time." If kids were "old" before their time six decades ago, they are absolutely "ancient" in our day. Today the lines between childhood, adolescence, and adulthood have been sufficiently blurred.

A 16-year-old girl stands in front of her high school enjoying her morning smoke with a pink Barbie doll backpack slung over her shoulder. Another 15 year-old girl takes pride in the fact that the Fisher Price musical ornament on the side of her bed once hung in her crib. A growing number of teens are retreating to the safety of an earlier media era as their fascination with Disney characters, sixties television and music, Care Bears, and Winnie the Pooh rekindles.

Margo Varadi, teen writer for the Toronto Star, writes "For some, feeling younger is about re-experiencing a purer existence... Why do 13 year-old girls think they're old and want to regain their innocence? It appears that some teens are feeling overexposed to too much sex and violence... Teens looking for a way out find a safe haven: the fantasy world of childhood."

The innocence of childhood has been replaced with a premature adulthood for a number of reasons. **One**, they have fewer adults, especially parents, significantly involved in their lives. Dr. Robert Shaw writes in *The Epidemic*, "Parents find themselves enslaved by a materialistic, overachieving society that leads them to spend so many hours at work and so much money that they can't make the time to do the things necessary to bond with their children." The number of youth involved in organized sports continues to decline thus robbing them of another source of adult influence. **Two**, today's marketers and advertisers treat our kids with the same lack of respect that they do adults. Life is reduced to what you own and sex sells everything. **Three**, our high schools have become a microcosm of the world at large. All schools are marked with issues of theft, violence, drugs, sexuality, racism and discrimination. Kids no longer feel safe. School is no longer about education; it's about survival as life is lived out at light speed.

Parents need to slow down and enjoy their children, realize that buying them things isn't what they want, and that eating together fosters deeper relationships that pay dividends in the future. Our kids, more than ever before, need the care and safety of a compassionate home.



The Casual Sex Revolution

A 38-year-old graphic artist in Toronto sits in his office and ponders how his culture has drifted so far from its moral moorings. "I have a 14-year-old daughter and the world she is growing up in scares me. I hear all this stuff about the number of kids having sex and the growing number of teens involved in oral sex and I can't believe what's going on. Things have changed so quickly and I can't figure out why." Like many other parents, today's youth culture leaves one confused and concerned about the new casual sex revolution.

To begin with, we have a generation of youth who have even changed how we talk about sex. Their new lexicon of sexual terms reflects their laid-back view of sex. "Friends with benefits" is a new type of relationship among younger teens. It is when friends get together for sex with no commitment. It is practiced by both church and nonchurch youth. Some refer to it as "easy access" sex. A "hook up" is more casual than friends with benefits and occurs when teens are sexually active, usually engaging in oral sex, with complete strangers.

"Giving a dome" refers to the act of performing oral sex on a boy. Oral sex is common and considered acceptable among younger teens. A recent Health Canada survey shows that 30 per cent of teens have had oral sex by Grade 9 and more than half by Grade 11.

The Canadian Youth, Sexual Health, and HIV/AIDS Study shares even more disconcerting data. Although the number of students having intercourse has dropped, the figures are still alarming – 21 per cent have had intercourse by Grade 9 and 43 per cent have had intercourse by Grade 11. When asked how many used a condom last time they had sex, 32 per cent said they did NOT. An amazing 60 per cent of the boys and 31 per cent of the females think that casual sex is OK. How much sex education do teens get? Sixty-four per cent of teens had between 0-4 hours and 36 per cent of teen had 5 hours or more.

So how did we get to the point we are at today with so many kids engaging in casual sex? There are a number of factors to be considered.

Factor One – Of all the information that our teens are exposed to, whether it is sex education in school, friends at the lunch table, media mentors, or even some parents, moral considerations are almost none existent. When it comes to intercourse, the emphasis is on social, emotional, and physical readiness. Media rarely deals with any of the negatives; everything is about pleasure. In a world without boundaries, sexuality for our kids is only limited by their own imaginations and enjoyment. There is no celebrity, either in film or music, who tells our kids it is wrong. Kids have been left wandering in a moral minefield as they find themselves with sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, and infertility brought on by Chlamydia.



“Friends with benefits” is a new type of relationship among younger teens. It is when friends get together for sex with no commitment.

Factor Two – Their world is filled with hundreds of thousands of sexual messages every year. CBC recently ran a tween special entitled *Buying into Sexy* which looked at the world of 10-

12 year olds in Toronto. One Grade 8 girl was bombarded by 262 messages of sexuality in one day. Young teens are encouraged to be sexy, act sexy, and dress sexy all in the name of popularity and profitability. Our kids also live in a world where pornography has gone mainstream fuelling the raging hormones of children who are already confused and frightened.

Factor Three – The changing structure of Canadian families has left many kids looking for love in all the questionable places. Thirty years ago Johnny Lee penned his country pop classic *Lookin' For Love*—"I was lookin' for love in all the wrong places. Lookin' for love in too many places." Today, we have a cohort of lonely kids following his advice. Two million kids in Canada will go to bed tonight without saying goodnight to their fathers because their dads don't live at home anymore. Studies show that girls who don't have loving relationships with their fathers tend to have sex at an earlier age and will have more sexual partners. Other kids growing up in broken homes tend to find the misplaced love of their family in the arms of other kids. When the sexual revolution started in the 1960s, a teen's first sexual experience was normally in a car because that was one of the few places you get away from your parents. Today, many parents have run away from home through separation and divorce and left the kids home alone. Child Trends USA report a majority (56%) of teens said they had their first sexual experience, not in some distant "love shack," but under the roof of their family's (22%) or their partner's (34%) home because it was empty – just like their lives.

Factor Four – Our young people are also looking for dependable, life-preserving information in all the wrong places. Health Canada reports that teens most cherished source of information for all things sexual is from other teens – not exactly a reliable source. One third of Grade 11 girls said they would first go to their friends if they thought they had a sexually transmitted disease with only 17 per cent opting for a doctor. When it

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comes to information on HIV/AIDS over the last two years, 27 per cent of Grade 7 students and 14 per cent of Grade 9 students had not received ANY information. No wonder cases of Chlamydia and gonorrhoea among 15-24 year olds has doubled since 1997. Thirty years ago girls lost their virginity at age 20 and boys at age 18. Today, one in four has had sexual intercourse by age 14.

Factor Five – There is a growing shift in the values and perceptions of young people when it comes to sex. In today's postmodern youth culture, young people are taught, and most believe, including kids in the church, that there is no such thing as absolute moral truth. If there is no such thing as truth then all lifestyles become equally valid including one of promiscuity and early sexual activity. No one has the right to tell anyone else that what they are doing is wrong. Growing up in a world without boundaries leaves kids open to do whatever they please. This partially explains why so many kids don't even consider oral sex to be sex.

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 is more casual than friends with benefits and occurs when teens are sexually active, usually engaging in oral sex, with complete strangers.

Factor Six – We have raised a generation of teens who simply see sex in general and oral sex specifically to be less risky both physically and psychologically. Via media, we have educated them to the point of experimentation. Sex is everywhere and it perks their curiosity which runs high during the adolescent years. In addition, teens naturally go through a stage of mental development which makes them believe that nothing bad will ever happen to them – never get pregnant, never get a STD, and never fall out of love. Because they lack the faculties to really think through these serious life issues, we leave them vulnerable when exposing them to activities which can have deadly consequences. Most young people do not even know that sexually transmitted infections can be transferred through oral contact.

The various factors covered leave us wondering how to respond. What is our responsibility as adults in society? What should our response be as parents, educators and youth workers?

First, we need to remember that things are not likely to get better in the near future. Media will continue its barrage of immorality upon our young people because no one defends our children's right to age appropriate purity. They will continue to push the sexual envelope as long as there is no opposition.

Second, adults need to be aware of the changing value systems in today's youth culture. The majority of kids live by the “if it feels good do it” philosophy of the day because no one tells them anything different. It is a system that will change as culture continues to develop based on a “no truth required” approach to life.

Third, parents in particular need to be talking about sexual issues with their children because everyone else is. For the vast majority of teens, their parents do not speak to them about sexuality and the silence is killing some of them. For kids ages 8-12, mom is the most trusted source of information. Most kids under 14 want their parent's advice.

Fourth, parents need to be aware of what their kids are watching and listening to. Recent research from the Rand Corporation (USA) shows that young people who watch sexually explicit media on more likely to be sexually active. A television in any child's bedroom is just an invitation to disaster given what can be seen at any time of the day. Even kids who “hear” such material are more likely to act on it.

Fifth, if you approach life with a faith based worldview, you need to make your children the object of your prayers. Even the act of prayer keeps your children as the focus of your life and deepens your love and commitment to them. Children are God's way of reminding us that He has not yet given up on us or the world around us.



Cyber Bullies in Your House

In 2003, 15-year-old Ghyslain Raza of Montreal came home after school and made a home video of him wielding a golf ball retriever as a light saber and doing his best impersonation of a Star Wars battle scene complete with his own sound effects. Somehow the video ended up on a file-sharing network and was eventually downloaded by millions of viewers around the world. He instantly became known as "Star Wars Kid" but celebrity wasn't what he was looking for.

Overweight and already suffering from poor self-esteem, he was humiliated around the globe as others digitally inserted his clip into other movies. Ghyslain was so hurt and disgraced by the event that he was placed under psychiatric care and finished his final school session at a child psychiatric ward.

A 16-year-old Japanese student has an unpleasant break-up with her boyfriend. The boy knew all of her contact numbers, including e-mail, cell phone and street address. Within minutes he had posted them on porn websites all over Japan. People soon began driving by her home and instant messaging her for favours.

Another girl is bombarded with instant messages on her computer, text messages on her cell phone, and hundreds of emails telling her she is a worthless little slut who has no friends; all of this because she dared to challenge the authority of another girl in her group of "friends."

Welcome to the new world of cyber bullying - a world where it is impossible to escape the bully even in the confines of your own home. A mean world where what is said hurts worse than sticks and stones. Cyber bullying takes place via e-mails, instant messaging, chat rooms on the Internet, on-line voting booths, small text messaging, personal on-line journals (Weblogs), and even on websites (bash boards) set up especially to ridicule and disgrace.

Maclean's magazine (May 2004) reports that IM (instant messaging) is the number one on-line activity among kids with over 60 per cent of them using it. It has also become a natural, very impersonal medium for maltreatment. Media Awareness Network in Ottawa found that 25 per cent of Canadian Internet users report having received material that said horrible things about others.

CBC-TV's The National reported in March 2005 that 14 per cent of teen



respondents said they have been threatened while using instant messaging and that 16 per cent admitted to having sent hateful messages themselves.

Cyber bullying is a very disturbing phenomenon. It can be instant and invasive. For a spiteful teen, the damage can be done instantly and without thought, often leading to deep regrets. The message can be sent right into the victim's house through a variety of sources without parents knowing.

Dr. Rex Kay, a psychiatrist affiliated with the University of Toronto, says there is no longer any wall or boundaries for protection. The victim is almost powerless to counter the onslaught of messages from the perpetrator. It becomes a convenient and

speedy way for a group of kids to gang up on another without even leaving their bedrooms.

The impersonal character of instant messages allows a bully to say things that would probably never be spoken in person which means it is even scarier to be the recipient. Often the victim never knows who has seen the messages or even who has sent them. Their cyber world, once a place of discovery and excitement, has turned against them. It robs them of much needed privacy and personal space so necessary for healthy growth and development.

Adults need to understand that this is the "new" world of our kids. A world where youth feel at home and parents feel like aliens. In many ways this innovative world of technology is shaping who our children will become.

Parents need to stay up-to-date with the almost daily changes in our kid's ability to communicate and the potential abuse they hold. We need to speak openly with our young people about what we are hearing and seeing in their culture. If you are want to learn more about cyber bullying, check out www.cyberbullying.ca. If you want to monitor your kids conversations on-line you need to consider Spectorsoft - the latest software that takes a picture of your computer screen every 5 seconds thus allowing you to read later everything you kids have been talking about on-line www.spectorsoft.com. For the sake of our children, let's do all we can to protect them from techno terrorism.



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