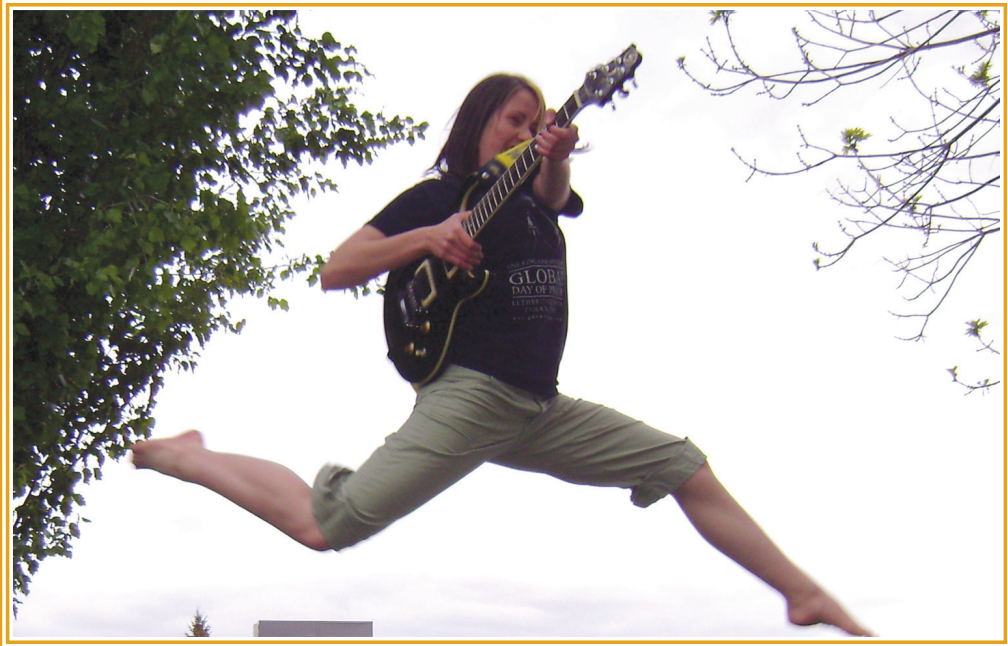


# 10 Things We All Need to Know About Today's Teens

*That Is, IF We Care About Them*



Reginald W. Bibby  
&  
James Penner



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### **Also by Reginald W. Bibby**

*The Emerging Generation* (with Donald Posterski), 1985  
*Fragmented Gods*, 1987  
*Mosaic Madness*, 1990  
*Teen Trends* (with Donald Posterski), 1992  
*Unknown Gods*, 1993  
*The Bibby Report*, 1995  
*There's Got to Be More!*, 1995  
*Canada's Teens*, 2001  
*Restless Gods*, 2002  
*Restless Churches*, 2004  
*The Boomer Factor*, 2006  
*The Emerging Millennials*, 2009

### **Also by James Penner**

*Soul Searching the Millennial Generation*  
(with L. David Overholt), 2002  
Revised edition, 2005

*To Dylan, Elya, and Erick*

*&*

*The Rest of  
The Emerging Millennials*



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James Penner

 *Project Canada Books*

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## Preface

One of the many paradoxes about contemporary life is that we never seem to have had more information and never had less time to take it all in. Most of us are lucky if we can learn a little about a lot, and probably more likely learn a lot about very little.

Both of us spend much of our lives working with information. We can appreciate the importance of being able to get on top of information quickly. Neither one of us have a lot of patience with books that go on and on and on. We want the headlines, and then the freedom to peruse the details as necessary.

We both have just given about two years of our lives to completing a major new national youth survey, Project Teen Canada 2008. In light of what we have invested and what we have found, we want to ensure that the results become known.

In May of 2009, the initial findings were released in *The Emerging Millennials: How Canada's Newest Generation is Responding to Change & Choice*. It was written by Bibby with commentaries from Sarah Russell and Ron Rolheiser. The book provides a thorough overview of the survey findings, examined in the context of major social trends since the 1960s. Bibby, especially, thinks it is a pretty good book.

However, that said, he – along with James – appreciates the importance of people being able to get a fairly quick snapshot of the major findings without having to wade through his 233-page book, or perhaps after having waded through the book.

In addition, we are well aware that, beyond familiarizing themselves with the “bottom-line findings,” most readers want to know what it all means for real life. In this case, that means trying to get some sense of some of the major implications for those of us who relate to young people in some capacity. Most of us could also benefit from some hints about how we might respond to the things we are learning.

That's where this booklet comes in. In about 60 pages or so, we want to highlight ten major findings that have emerged from the latest survey. These are findings that stand out, particularly when the data are seen in the context of findings concerning young people and adults that date back to about the end of the 1960s – almost 50 years.

Over against the widespread stereotypes many adults have about teenagers, we believe these are ten findings that everyone in the country needs to be aware of. We take just two pages to highlight each of the findings. What we then proceed to do is offer, in one short page, some preliminary thoughts on what the findings mean, and how we might respond to what we are learning.

The book provides bottom line findings and starting line responses. For detailed findings, see *The Emerging Millennials*. As for the Observations and Responses, treat them as our effort to start a conversation. Use these sections in reflecting on the findings with other people – friends and colleagues, family members, students, other teachers, and so on.

And, feel free to bring us in on your reflections by e-mailing us (bibby@ueth.ca; pennja@uleth.ca) or writing us (Dept. of Sociology, University of Lethbridge, Lethbridge AB T1K 3M4).

We thank our wives, Lita and Claire, for their patient support of our work. Our students have also brought much to these pages. We particularly want to thank Brianna Thomas for a number of photos in this booklet, including the intriguing and creative cover shot. We also are greatly appreciative to the two key funding sources that made the latest national survey possible – the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research and the Louisville Institute.

And we would be amiss if we didn't acknowledge the impact of Peter Hanhart, who left us in October. He was a gift who already is greatly missed.

Both of us want our research to have an impact on life. Our hope is that this body of research and our interpretations of the findings will have such an impact on the lives of both teenagers and adults.

Reginald Bibby & James Penner  
Lethbridge – December 2009

## Background

*Don't believe everything you hear about teenagers!*

About a decade ago, Canadian adults were asked for their perception of how important traits like honesty, family life, and concern for others are to teenagers. Some 20% said they felt that honesty was “very important” to teens, while just over 10% said the same thing about both family life and social compassion. However, when young people were given the chance to speak for themselves, more than 70% reported that honesty was “very important” to them, while around 60% said the same thing about family life and concern for others.<sup>1</sup>

### The Perils of Stereotyping

Those kinds of findings reminded us that **the majority of Canadians rely heavily on stereotypes when it comes to understanding teenagers.** In coining the term to describe “pictures in our heads,” American journalist Walter Lippman insightfully noted way back in 1922 that, once they are in place, stereotypes are extremely “hard to shake.”<sup>2</sup>

**Both of us have pointed out to our students over the years that stereotyping is both common and unavoidable.** When we meet someone, we all start out with “pictures in our minds” based on the individual’s age, gender, and occupation, for example. **The problem doesn’t lie with holding an initial stereotype; it lies with not being willing to modify that mental image in the face of additional information about the person.** Without question, however, many initial stereotypes are “hard to shake.”

This brings us back to stereotypes about teenagers. A major problem is that the images typically are not flattering. They often are negative, contributing to the age-old idea that every new generation of teenagers is somehow inferior to previous ones.

**One of the reasons for the prevalence of inaccurate stereotypes about teenagers in Canada is that we have not been having very many national conversations with them.** It’s rather astonishing to learn that, in our country’s near-150-year history, very few nation-wide surveys have been carried out to see what young people are actually thinking and doing.



## Age-old Anxiety/Angst About Young People

- **2005:** 54% wanted curfew in their communities for children <16
- **1995:** 62%
- **1965:** 76%
- **Late 2000:** a prominent pollster...



*"I tremble to see what kind of society today's young people are going to produce in 20-25 years"*

**We all know that, if we want to know what's going on in people's heads, we have to ask them.** The poetic cliché is true: anything less is only a guess. If we want to know what you value and enjoy, your attitudes and your beliefs, your hopes and expectations, it would be presumptuous, pompous, and precarious to tell you, rather than ask you. That's where surveys come in. At their best, they are simply good structured conversations. As such, they are indispensable to the correction of stereotypes.



A quick footnote. **When it comes to behaviour, that's another story.** Common sense tells us that, ideally, the best way for us to check out what people do versus what they think is to observe them versus rely on what they say. After all, we all know that there's often a fair amount of slippage between people's behaviour and their attitudes and values.

However, since we can't observe everything they do, we often have to settle for letting them tell us what they do. There simply is no alternative when it comes to many activities, ranging from sexual behaviour through drug use to private prayer. Of course we need to take what they tell us they do with the proverbial grain of salt. But often we have no choice but to ask them.

## Beyond Stereotyping

In short, if we are going to understand teenagers, we have to have such conversations. Reg has been attempting to do just that for a number of years. Since 1984, he has been conducting national surveys of 15-to-19-year-olds who are still in secondary schools and their equivalents. These "Project Teen Canada" surveys have been carried out in 1984, 1992, 2000, and 2008, and in each case have involved highly representative random samples of at least 3,500 students.

The youth surveys have been complemented by his "Project Canada" surveys of adults, carried out every five years from 1975 to 2005 with highly representative samples averaging about 1,500 people. Together, the youth and adult surveys provide us with a lot of trend and intergenerational data concerning how things have changed and not changed in Canada since the 1960s.<sup>3</sup>

- **The Project Canada Survey Series**



- \* 7 Adult...1975 → 2005: >10,000

- \* 4 Teen...1984 – 1992 – 2000 – 2008: > 15,000

- **Readings of**

- \* Boomers

- \* Pre-Boomers

- \* Post-Boomers

- \* Teens

- 80s

- 90s

- 00s

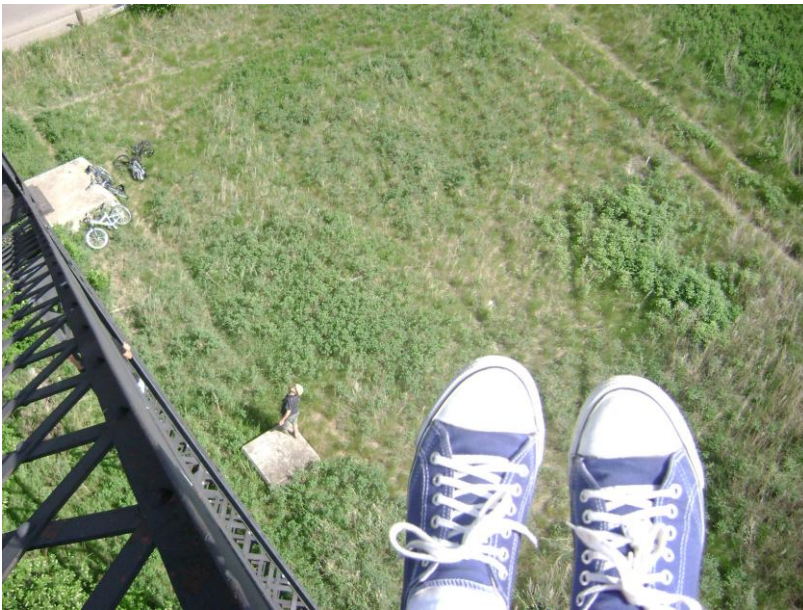
- Now

- **Together:** surveys lots of information on how we have changed & not changed since 1960s

To date the major findings have been summed up in a number of books, the latest of which is *The Emerging Millennials: How Canada's Newest Generation is Responding to Change and Choice*.<sup>4</sup>

**We briefly want to draw your attention to *ten things* that people who care about teens need to know about them.** The findings may require the revision of more than a few stereotypes.

What's at stake here is far more than academic accuracy. Improved clarity about young people has the potential to take us past unhelpful and relationally destructive stereotypes. Such enhanced clarity can elevate life for everyone.





# 1. They're decent people.



From the time the first teenagers arrived on the scene, someone has complained that they are rude, self-absorbed, and not particularly dependable. Those much-quoted lines of Socrates come to mind: “Children today are tyrants. They contradict their parents, gobble their food, and terrorize their teachers.” Bring up the topic in a group of adults and invariably people decry the lack of civility among today’s teens.

Our latest, **Project Teen Canada 2008** survey results call such stereotypes into question. The survey shows that more than 8 in 10 young people say they place supreme importance on traits such as trust and honesty, while more than 6 in 10 say that concern for others and politeness are “very important” to them. Females tend to more inclined than males to place importance on many interpersonal traits.

Valued Interpersonal Characteristics of Teenagers			
% Viewing as “Very Important”			
	Nationally	Males	Females
Trust	84%	76	92
Honesty	81	74	88
Humour	75	76	73
Concern for others	64	51	73
Politeness	64	57	71
Forgiveness	60	52	65
Working hard	54	53	55
Intelligence	52	54	49
Creativity	50	49	49
Patience	44	40	47

Do you yourself tend to get a shade ticked off at people who park in a handicapped stall when they are not handicapped, or are annoyed at people who don’t apologize when they accidentally bump into you? If so, you need to know that the majority of teens feel like you do. The same goes for having to wait for people who walk on a red light, or driving behind someone who is having a less than urgent conversation on a cell phone.

## Courtesy-Related Attitudes: 2008

"Do you APPROVE or DISAPPROVE of people..."

% Indicating "Disapprove"

	ALL	Females	Males
parking in a handicapped stall when are not handicapped	82	86	79
not saying "sorry" when accidentally bump into someone	77	82	71
posting personal information about you on the Web	75	80	70
walking on a red light and making traffic wait	63	63	62
talking on a cell phone when they are driving a vehicle	56	58	55
in some situations giving someone "the finger"	45	51	37

We suspect teenagers are less troubled than many readers about occasionally giving someone "the finger." But they are not at all happy about having personal information about them posted on the Web – then again, who is?

Teens born outside Canada, followed by those with parents who have come from other countries, are slightly more likely than others to endorse a number of interpersonal features. Yet, what is striking are the similarities overall in the values of teens, regardless of their geographical backgrounds.

PROJECT TEEN CANADA MOSAIC MIRROR					
	Trust	Honesty	Concern for others	Working Hard	No to the Finger
<b>Nationally</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>45</b>
Teens foreign-born	88	83	66	59	54
Parents foreign-born	84	82	68	57	46
Parents born Canada	82	80	63	53	42

These findings point to most teenagers being the kind of people we all would enjoy knowing and having in the neighbourhood.

## Implications

1. **We need to ask ourselves why negative views of teenagers are prevalent when most of them look so good.** Maybe we are not hearing – and spreading – enough stories about good teens who do good things.
2. **A corrective to stereotypes is getting to know people personally.** Who are the teenagers we actually know? What are those young females and males really like?
3. **Perceptions have the power to close or open possibilities.** Labels are self-fulfilling. We need to get beyond them.

## Responses

- ✓ **We don't have to be apprehensive about teens and around teens.** Contrary to rumour, they are not a different species, warranting terms like “they” and “them.” We need to recognize our value commonalities.
- ✓ **Let's try some positive “labeling” – expecting the best from youth.** We all become more trustworthy and compassionate when we are trusted and treated as caring people. Teenagers are no different.
- ✓ **We need to help teens put their values into action.** Values are a good start. But behaviour is better. Let's do everything we can to live out values like honesty, trust, hard work, and concern for others, and expect the same from them. Tangible ways of caring for other people, for example, need to be identified, and acted upon.

## 2. They love their friends & music.



**Sometimes we get so obsessed with the idea that everything is changing that we lose sight of some things that really haven't changed much at all.**

Take sources of enjoyment, for example. When we think back to when we ourselves were teenagers, there undoubtedly were two things that we enjoyed more than just about anything else: friends and music.

Well, guess what? **Teens today tell us that there is nothing that they enjoy more than...friends and music!**

Sources of Enjoyment			
% Receiving "A Great Deal" or "Quite a Bit"			
	Nationally	Males	Females
<b>Friends</b>	<b>96%</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Music</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>93</b>
The Internet	81	82	81
Your iPod/MP3	80	76	83
Your mother	78	73	83
Your boyfriend or girlfriend	75	73	77
Your father	73	72	74
Your own room	72	63	81
Sports	71	81	61
Brother(s) or sister(s)	68	62	74
Your grandparent(s)	66	63	70
Your pet(s)	66	61	71
Your cell phone	65	57	73
Television	63	66	61
Being by yourself	61	62	60
Shopping	58	38	76
Your car	58	64	52
School	51	50	53
E-mail	50	44	56
Video/computer games	47	67	28
Your job	47	48	45
Reading	45	34	55
Youth groups generally	41	41	42
Your religious group specifically	28	27	28

Now let's not be fooled for a moment: their friends may look a bit different from our friends – which, on balance, may not be a particularly bad thing. Depending on our ages, the appearances of those friends of ours in the photos from the 80s or 70s or 60s or 50s (let alone before then) have not exactly stood the test of time. I guess that includes us....

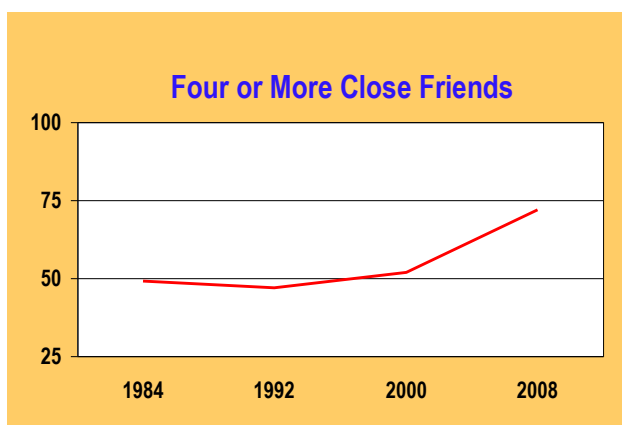


And, of course, the music was different. For some readers, favourites included Guns N' Roses and Metallica, Kiss, AC/DC, and Rod Stewart, for others Elton John, Bread, and Simon and Garfunkel, the Beatles, Elvis, the Everly Brothers, and the Platters.

Regardless, our music “back then” was such an important part of our lives, with songs and friends almost synonymous with each other. To hear one of the songs is to remember our friends.

<b>Top 10 Valued Goals of Teenagers</b> <i>% Viewing as “Very Important”</i>			
	Nationally	Males	Females
Friendship	86	83	89
Freedom	85	83	84
Being loved	79	65	87
A comfortable life	74	74	75
Having choices	73	73	79
Getting a good education	71	66	76
Success in what you do	71	69	73
Family life	67	58	73
Excitement	64	63	63
What your parents think of you	48	44	54

**Friends and music continue to be extremely significant for teens.** Both are life-giving. However, a couple of things have changed over the past decade. First, **there has been a big jump in the proportion who say they have “four or more” close friends.** The key sources? Web and cell phone connections. Second, **interracial friendships** are more prevalent than ever before. Multiculturalism has been a key player in the slaying of the monoculture.



## Implications

1. **Teens are exactly like us. They are highly relational.** Maybe we need to give a lot more time to exploring with them what makes for good relationships.
2. **Music genres and the means of transporting them have changed.** We need to work harder to understand and appreciate those changes so that intergenerational connections happen.
3. **Technology is offering teens who were previously separated by geography to be connected with others.** This is something to applaud.

## Responses

- ✓ **Both friends and music can be life giving.** However, they can also be life draining. We need to encourage teens to choose friends and music that pull them up and keep them healthy.
- ✓ **Freedom is also one of the top goals of teenagers.** We need to explore with them questions such as, what do they mean by freedom, what do they want to be free from and why, who or what takes their freedom away or makes them feel free?
- ✓ **Teens today are reporting that they have more close friends than previous generations of teens. This seems to reflect the increased accessibility of friends.** We would do well to explore the difference between simple connection and actual community. What is the role of technology? What are its strength and limits when it comes to experiencing friendship?



### 3. Their tech toys are new means to old ends.



Many Canadians adults, particularly older Boomers and pre-Boomers, have responded to the computer revolution and the explosion of technological gadgets with a sense of mystique. While some enthusiastically co-opt what has become available, others “give up” with phrases along the lines of, “I’m technologically challenged” and “I can’t keep up with my kids.”

Accompanying such responses is a sense of bewilderment about what is going on as they see teens text-messaging, taking videos with their cell phones, connecting with friends via Facebook, watching videos on YouTube – and largely ignoring Twitter. It’s like the teen world is a very different world from what adults knew when they were the same age.

There’s no question that young people today are enjoying the available technology.

- Some 83% tell us that they are receiving a high level of enjoyment from the Internet and 80% say the same thing about their I-Pods and MP3 players.
- On a typical day, more than 50% are using a cell phone, and just under 50% are text-messaging, using e-mail, and accessing sites such as Facebook and YouTube.

Use of Select Means of Communication			
	% Using or Accessing Daily		
	ALL	Males	Females
Cell phone	54%	48	60
Text messaging	44	37	51
Facebook	43	37	49
E-mail	42	38	46

What is centrally important to keep in mind is that teenagers are using all these new technological tools for two primary purposes: friendships and music. They tell us that there is nothing that they enjoy more than their friends and music. Technology has provided them with vastly improved means for pursuing two very old ends.

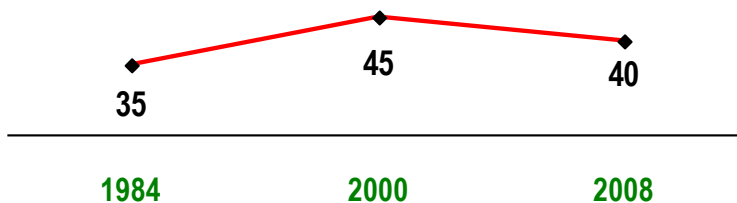
For example, their favourite websites are social sites (46%), with YouTube and other music sites second in popularity (13%). Internet social networking now is the no. 1 group activity for females and the no. 2 group activity for males, trailing only sports.

## Favourite Website Topics

	Nationally	Males	Females
<b>Relational</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>58</b>
<i>Facebook</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>50</i>
<i>Nexopia</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>&lt;1</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Other social nets, chat</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>6</i>
<b>Sports</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>YouTube</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Computer games</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Music</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>E-mail</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Entertainment generally</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Education</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Blogs</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>&lt;1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Google</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pornography</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>&lt;1</b>
<b>News</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>&lt;1</b>
<b>Cars</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>&lt;1</b>
<b>Movies</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Fashion</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>&lt;1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Animation</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

But in focusing on relationships and music, and fewer keeping up with the news than a decade ago, are today's youth squandering their rich technological resources? Hardly. What will be fascinating to see is what they do with their expanding resources and expertise, talent and imagination, as they move into their twenties and beyond. They still are only in training camp; just wait until the regular season begins!

## Keep Up With the News (%)



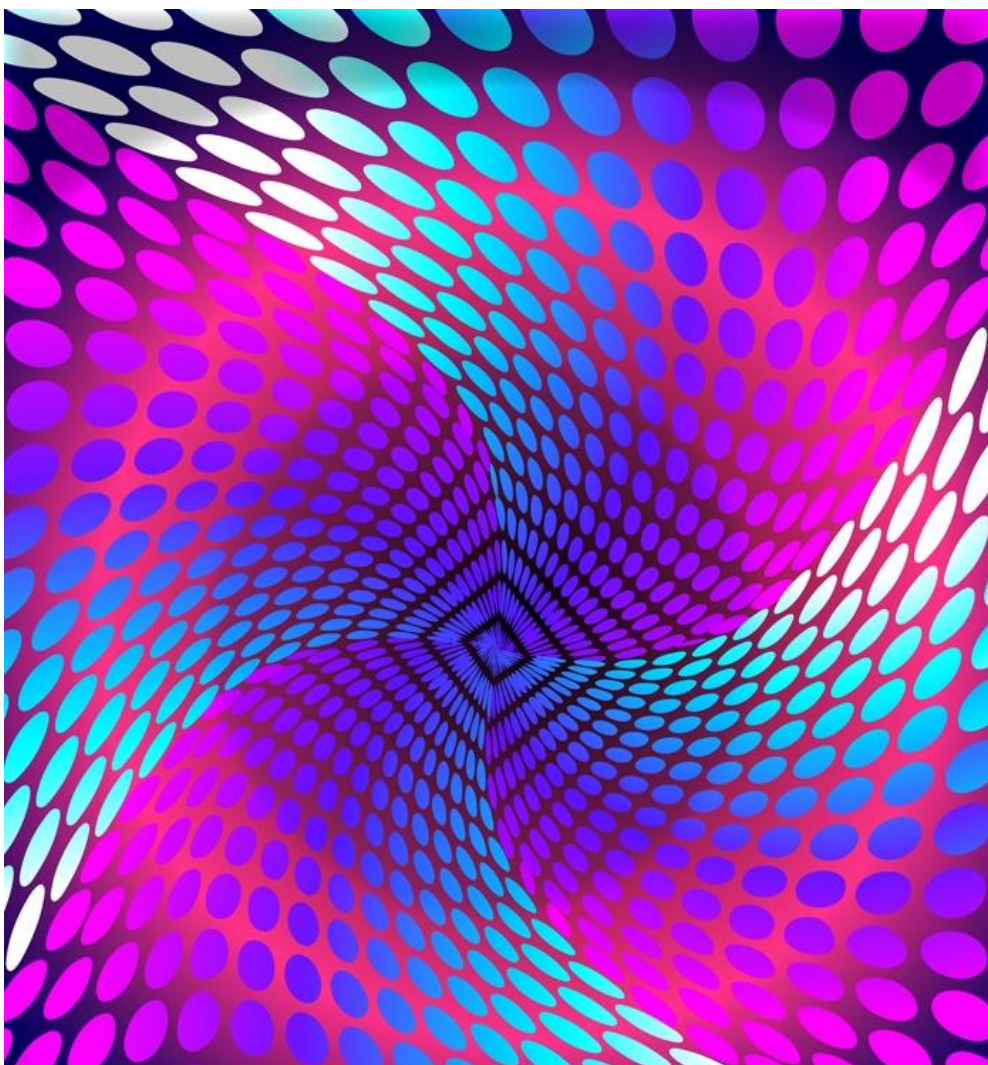
## Implications

1. **This may be the first time in history that the younger generation has mastered new technology before their elders.** To the extent this is the case, adults need to co-opt their expertise in the course of being lifelong learners.
2. **Technological consumption of the “newer” and “better” can cause a measure of stress and discontentment.** Is technology a stratifying factor in some of our communities – where some teens are being sidelined because, financially, they cannot keep up?
3. **In a socially networked world, teen “friends” are more accessible, more numerous, and more likely to be aware of what is happening in each other’s lives.** Is there such a thing as sharing too much with too many people?

## Responses

- ✓ **We need to have a passion for excellence around technology and respect its potential use by social movements.** Young people should be encouraged to experiment with these new tools to change the world in positive ways.
- ✓ **The technology revolution provides a unique opportunity for adult generations to connect with skilled young mentors.** Perhaps we can provide venues where young people have opportunities to assist adults of all ages in digital matters. Everyone could benefit.
- ✓ **Technology can have distracting qualities where the churn of images, voices and activity never stops.** We would all do well to find quiet spaces to sit and think, become “unplugged,” thereby develop “interior lives” that help us all to focus better on key tasks and relationships.

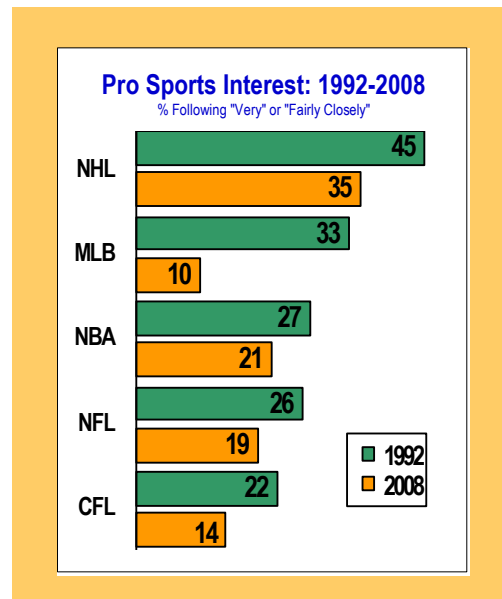
#### 4. They've said goodbye to the monoculture.



It sounded like cultural heresy. **In June of 2009, we informed the nation that there has been a significant decline in teenage interest in the National Hockey League over the past two decades.**

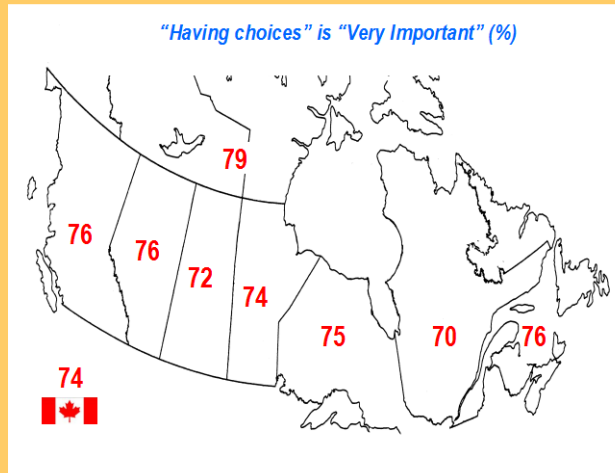
The news received more media play than virtually any Project Canada press release ever – national and regional newspaper, television, and radio coverage that extended as far as the Hockey News and ESPN. And, of course, it was all over the Internet. What the Project Teen Canada surveys have shown is that, since about 1990, teenage interest in the NHL has dropped from 45% to 35%. Among adults, the percentage of fans has slipped from about 35% to 30%. Significantly, the teenage decline in interest extends to all other major sports as well.

- During the glory days of the Blue Jays in the early 1990s, 33% of teenagers said they were following **Major League Baseball**. Today that figure stands at only 10%.
- Despite the presence of the Raptors, interest in the **NBA** among teens is actually lower today (21%) than it was in the early 90s before the league expanded to Canada (27%).
- For all the exposure the **NFL** has been receiving, teenage interest has fallen from 26% to 19% over the past two decades.
- In the case of the **CFL**, just 14% of teens say they are currently following the league, down from 22% in the early 1990s.



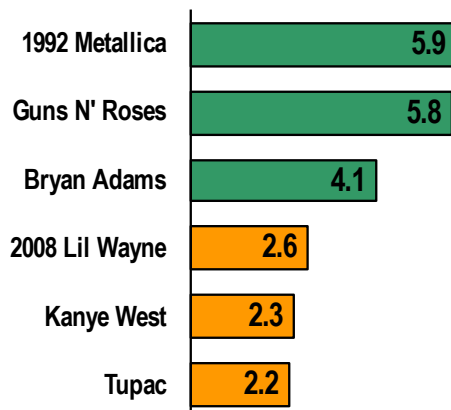
**What these findings point to is far more than a sports story.** Entertainment choices of young people and the rest of us have exploded. **We are witnessing what some observers of social trends refer to as the “death of the monoculture.”**<sup>5</sup> People of all ages have accelerated choices in every area of life.

## The National Picture



The result is the fragmentation of every kind of market. Choices are leading to diminishing market shares, whether we are talking about fashion and electronics or TV viewing, music, reading, or pro sports. The options extend to lifestyle, resulting in diverse choices when it comes to family life, education, religion, and morality – to offer just a shortlist. “The monocultural casualties” among young people include drinking, smoking, and sex. Even “vices” have to compete for the attention of teenagers.<sup>6</sup>

### Favourite Singer/Group: 1992-2008 (%)



**The monoculture is dead. Fragmentation is everywhere.**

## Implications

1. **There is so much choice that the pressure for teens to conform has diminished.** This is good news. Traditional teen vices (smoking, alcohol, sex and drugs) are taking a hit.
2. **Choice can be dizzying – even paralyzing.** Having too many choices can cause unnecessary stress, confusion and distraction. Is it possible that teens are becoming addicted to the “new”?
3. **Organizations that work with youth have to be in touch with their mindset of choice.** These are times that call for postures of exploration, creativity, and options. And the competition is intense.

## Responses

- ✓ **Young people could use some help in making good decisions in the face of the myriad of choices they have.** Individuals and groups hopefully can help them discover tools and criteria for decision-making.
- ✓ **Teen audiences are anything but captive audiences.** The choices and market competition are such that individuals, organizations and institutions will all have to “elevate their games.” Only the best will survive.
- ✓ **The move from monoculture to many cultures gives everyone the opportunity to initiate contact, be hospitable, care, listen, learn and understand.** It also provides us with the opportunity to embrace our own cultures and lifestyles, and share our insights. We need to assist young people in appreciating and contributing to diversity of all kinds.



**5. Their ties with parents  
are the best in decades.**

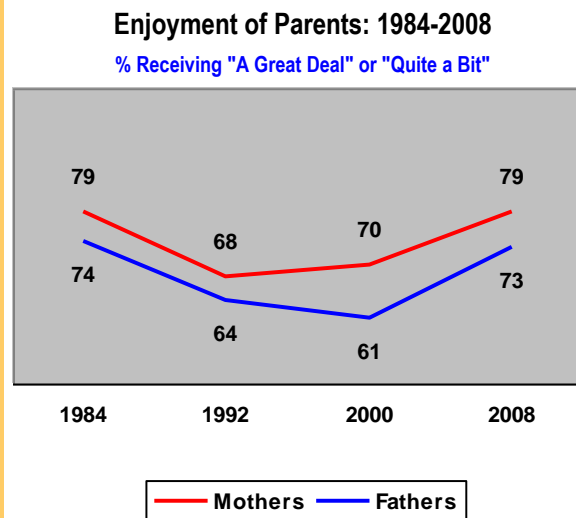


“Wait a moment,” say the critics. “Everyone knows that during the teen years, parents and their kids don’t get along very well.” Actually, all our surveys over the years have found that the majority of young people enjoy their moms and dads.

**What’s striking is that, in the last decade or so, there has been a noticeable increase in those enjoyment levels.** Enjoyment would seem to signal more rapport, more parental influence, and less conflict.

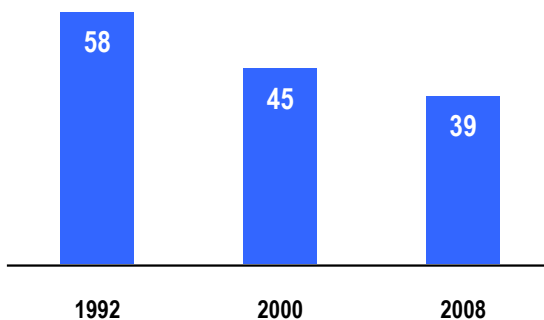
The findings back up that pattern.

- The proportion of teenagers who express **concern about not being understood by their parents** decreased from 58% in 1992 to 39% in 2008.
- Over the past decade there has been **an increase in the influence that young people maintain their mothers (81% to 89%) and fathers (70% to 82%) have in their lives.**
- Even **weekly arguments with parents are down**, from 52% in 2000 to 42% as of 2008.



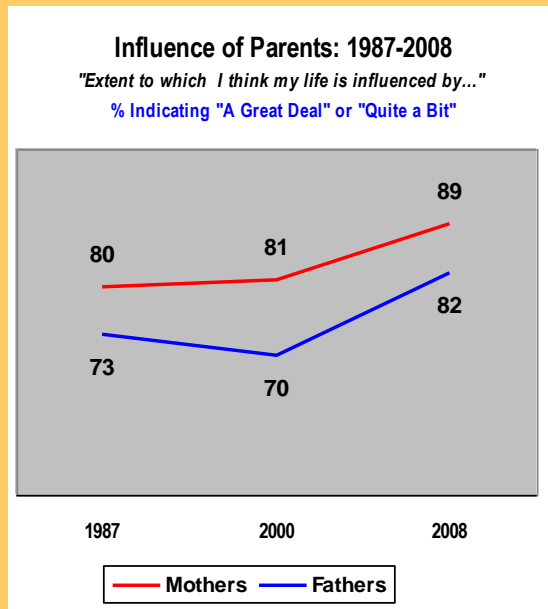
**Concern About Not Being Understood  
by My Parents: 1992-2008**

% Troubled "A Great Deal" or "Quite a Bit"



**Why are parents and teenagers getting along better?** One key reason seems to stand out: moms and dads are doing a much better job of finding a balance between careers and family life.

- Between 1960 and 2000, the percentage of mothers employed outside the home jumped from about 30% to 60%. It was a major social change that put new and unanticipated pressures on Boomer parents and teens alike.
- The good news is that, as they shared in this transformation, those same teenagers learned a lot about what they wanted – and didn't want – from their own careers and family lives.



So it is that, today, as younger Boomer and post-Boomer moms and dads, they seem determined to ensure that they balance the attention they are giving to their careers and the attention they are giving to their kids. The improved balancing act is having positive results.

Ties between Canadian teens and their parents today are far from perfect. But it's clear that, for all the hand-wringing and publicity given to problems, everyone is benefiting from these intergenerational, career-family adjustments.

**There's good reason to believe that better life at home is also having a positive impact on how they are experiencing life in one of their most important spheres – school.**



## Implications

1. **Much of our culture – teens and adults alike – assume that teens are not supposed to get along with parents. The fact is that they do.** This is good news.
2. **Better ties with parents are associated with increased influence – that presumably goes both ways.** If teens are reporting higher levels of parental influence, that may reflect the fact adults are also willing to learn from their offspring. Mutual enjoyment leads to mutual life changing.
3. **The idea that “teens want to distance themselves from their parents as they grow up” needs to be revisited.** Some Boomer and Post-Boomer parents were raised by “high control-low warmth” parents and relations were not always good. Some such parents blamed the distancing on teens when, in reality, they themselves were major contributors. If ties with teens are positive, mutual distancing is not inevitable.

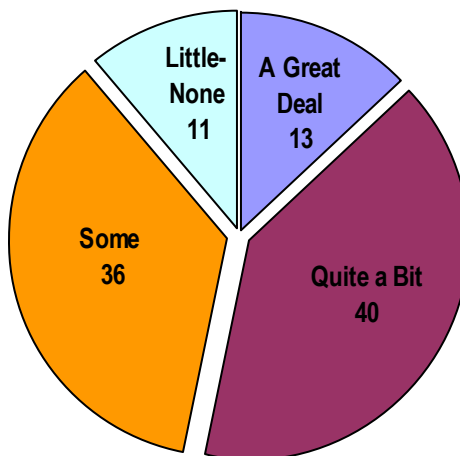
## Responses

- ✓ **Teens value parents who focus on their lives.** The trick is to know when to give them distance and when to give them room. There are times to say goodbye as they head off with friends, complete with the car keys. But the findings remind us there also are times when the presence of parents enriches their lives, and when their absence diminishes what’s taking place.
- ✓ **If you relate to teens, also keep their moms, dads, grandparents and siblings in mind.** Family members are typically more influential than their peers when it comes to financial, educational, marital and career choices.
- ✓ **There is much value in learning from our own parents and grandparents as to what made life better, along with things that weren’t quite so positive.** If we can take the good things and delete some of the unproductive things, the net result should be an upgrade for our own teenage kids and grandkids.

## 6. They enjoy school – strain and all.



Enjoyment Received from  
School (%)



A few years back, Reg had a member of a travelling Senate committee challenge his assertion that, ideally, teens should enjoy school: “I didn’t enjoy school when I was a kid,” the person protested. “Why should they?”

**Well, the news from our latest national survey is that some 53% of teenagers are saying that they are receiving a lot of enjoyment from school.** That figure is up from 44% in the early 90s. Another 36% indicate they are getting some enjoyment. Only about 1 in 10 say that school adds little or no joy to their lives. **One obvious factor is the presence of friends:** 94% say that at least one of their closest friends goes to their school. **But most teens are also positive about school personnel.**

- Close to 70% told us that they have high levels of confidence in the people in charge of schools; that compares, for example, to 52% for the music industry and 47% for the federal government.
- Six in 10 say that most of their courses are “fairly interesting”; the same proportion acknowledge that, “All in all, my teachers are genuinely interested in me.” Both levels are up slightly from 2000.
- Some 45% feel teachers influence their lives; the level in 2000 was 36%.
- Despite widespread adult anxiety about violence in schools, 84% of teens say they feel safe at school, an increase from 78% in 2000.
- Things aren't perfect: 1 in 3 admit they are troubled by conflict with other students, 1 in 4 by conflict with teachers; 15% are troubled about being bullied at school.

Some School Characteristics by School System					
	Enjoyment of School	Confidence Leadership	Pressure to Do Well	Feel Safe At School	Expect Grad from University
NATIONALLY	53%	69	75	84	68
Public system	53	63	76	83	69
Catholic system	54	72	80	85	68
Quebec public	56	79	72	81	65
Private non-religious	49	64	76	92	77
Private Christian	44	71	64	91	60
Private Other Faith	59	75	86	93	94
Aboriginal	74	74	76	77	39
On reserve	74	75	76	77	39
Off reserve	57	70	76	80	51

**No one has to be worried that teenagers as a whole are not taking school seriously.** Their no. 1 personal concern is not money or sex or looks or conflict, but *pressure to do well at school*. The pressure is heightened by the twin facts that 95% place importance on getting a good education and no less than 7 in 10 have their sights set on a university diploma.

Primary Personal Concerns			
% Indicating Concerned "A Great Deal" or "Quite A Bit"			
	Nationally	Males	Females
Pressure to do well at school	75%	68	79
What going to do when finish school	68	64	71
Lack of money	57	55	56
Never seem to have enough time	56	49	60
Losing friends	55	48	60
Boredom	53	54	51
So many things changing	50	45	52
My looks	49	44	55
Wondering about the purpose of life	45	43	46
Not as intelligent as would like to be	43	39	49
Not being understood by my parents	37	32	42
Having broken up with someone	37	34	41
Conflict with students at school	36	31	41
My weight	36	25	45
Depression	35	31	39
Feeling I am not as good as others	35	32	38
Loneliness	33	30	34
Parents' marriage	31	29	30
Not fitting in	30	29	32
Not having a girlfriend/boyfriend	30	33	27
Sex	28	30	26
Your family's lack of money	28	27	28
Parent(s) being so busy	24	21	28
Conflict with teachers at school	22	22	22
My height	21	23	20
Being bullied at school	15	16	14

**The positive news shouldn't come as a surprise.**

- Boomers have insisted we have better schools, complete with better-trained administrators and teachers and specialists who, together, can enhance the educational experience of teenagers.
- Our schools have never been better, our teachers never better prepared. Teens who enjoy mom or dad say the same about school.

**It's time to scrap the stereotype that teens hate school.**

## Implications

1. **There is a correlation between teenagers who enjoy school and those who enjoy parents.** The family continues to be the primary source of socialization – whereby young people learn how to participate in society. What happens at home matters at school – and pretty much everywhere else.
2. **Teens take school seriously.** This is obviously good. At the same time, there is little doubt that that some teens are taking school too seriously and becoming excessively stressed. As with so many other areas of life, the proverbial “healthy balance” is needed here.
3. **The high level of confidence that students have in school personnel is encouraging.** Provinces, school districts and educators at all levels take education seriously, and have instilled a culture of high standards and ongoing improvement in school communities and school personnel. The positive results are evident.

## Responses

- ✓ **Educators have been making good progress.** School is not what is used to be. Keep up the good work!
- ✓ **Contrary to widespread thinking, school can be an enjoyable experience for students, and is for most.** However, for some, school is a source of considerable strain. Attention obviously needs to continue to be directed toward those who are not enjoying school and why, with ongoing efforts made to turn their experiences around.
- ✓ **Teachers, like the rest of us, need to continue to get better at what they do – those professional days are worthwhile!** One research project found that the top five characteristics of teachers rated highly by students were helpfulness, making class fun, compassion, being knowledgeable, and being fair. The top reasons for being rated low? Disrespect, not knowing the subject matter; providing slow or poor feedback, not setting clear expectations, and wasting students’ time.<sup>7</sup> Some interesting goals to keep in mind.



## **7. Their quality of life is a solid upgrade.**



**The well-worn stereotype about the newest generation being inferior to previous generations is simply nonsense at this point in Canadian history.**

Taking into consideration **the emphases of the Boomers and post-Boomers** who variously have been their grandparents and parents, why would we not expect the quality of life for the emerging millennials to be a notch or two above that of previous teenage generations? After all, the Boomers worked hard to increase the levels of freedom, equality, and pluralism in Canada and contributed to enormous advances in education, information, technology, economic development, and health care. Boomer women broke down innumerable educational and occupational barriers. The impact of all this should be showing up in young lives.

**We also have been giving high priority to young people** – precisely because there is nothing much more important to Canadians than their children.

**The quality of life upgrade is readily apparent.**

- Smoking, drinking, and other forms of drug use has decreased in the past decade – despite the ready access most have to drugs.

<b>Smoking, Drinking, and Other Drug Use: 2000-2008</b>		
	<b>2000</b>	<b>2008</b>
<b>Smoking</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Drinking...beer, wine, other</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Marijuana or hashish</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Other illegal drugs</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>12</b>

- Most teens continue to feel safe at home, and greater numbers now feel safe at school.
- Some 90% maintain their health is either “excellent” or “good.”
- Three in 4 express very positive self-images – believing they are good people who have a number of positive qualities, and are well-liked. No less than 90% of young males and females describe themselves as either “very happy” or “pretty happy”; only 2% say that they are “not happy at all.”
- There have been steady declines since the early 1990s in the percentage who say they have close friends who have (a) had alcohol or drug problems, (b) been attacked at school, (c) attempted suicide, (d) been physically abused at home, (e) been sexually abused, and (f) been victims of gang violence.

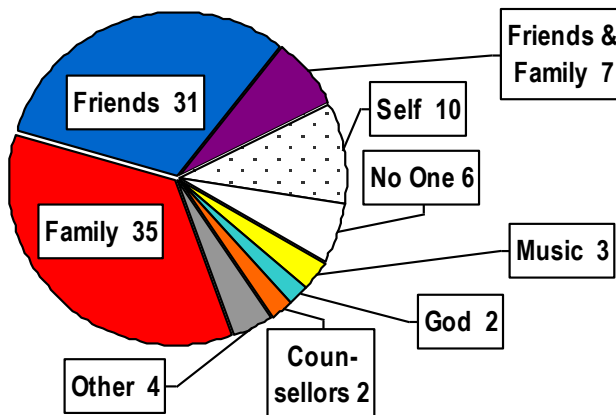
### Extent to Which Problems Have Been Experienced by a Close Friend: 1992-2008

	1992	2000	2008
Has an alcohol or drug problem	60%	46	52
Has been bullied at school	***	***	49
Has been severely depressed	***	48	47
Physically attacked at school	45	32	33
Has attempted suicide	58	41	32
Physically abused at home	42	37	28
Has been sexually abused	38	32	25
A victim of gang violence	35	21	18

**Some asterisks need to be added.** Positive results on these quality of life measures are slightly lower for *Aboriginal students*. More generally, *income differences* continue to matter: although only 3% of young people describe their family incomes as “far below average,” they consistently score lower on a variety of these indicators.

As noted earlier in our look at school pressures, teens continue to have a wide range of concerns. Most also tell us they have resources for dealing with serious personal problems, led by family and friends.

### “When I face a serious problem, I turn to...”



These findings suggest that the quality of life experienced by the majority of Canada’s teenagers today has been improving. Collectively, it is a solid upgrade from the past.

## Implications

1. **The data over time point to very positive patterns that often are not recognized “on the ground.”** Everyone should be encouraged.
2. **In the midst of the good news, it also is clear that a significant minority of young people need serious attention.** Quality of life disparities persist. The magnitude of those differences may even be increasing at a time when the actual numbers involved are decreasing. Kids at risk need to be remembered, led, perhaps, by low-income youth and many Aboriginals.
3. **Teens, for the most part, say they are turning to family and friends when they face serious problems.** Some, however, are not receiving very much support from any source.

## Responses

- ✓ **If youth are looking better, parents, teachers, and other adults need to give some credit and take some credit** – and continue to move life forward.
- ✓ **Being a resource to a young person in need carries a responsibility.** It's important that those who function as resources be able to provide the emotional and practical support needed when teens require help. It is equally important that such people become informed as to the wide range of quality community resources available to teens and others who are dealing with personal problems.
- ✓ **We need to find ways to provide education, employment and necessary support for the disadvantaged segments of our population.** If we are committed as a society to equality and social justice, we have to do more to ensure that all young people participate fully in Canadian life – by giving them an equal chance as they come out of the “starting blocks.”

**8. They are into relationships  
more than sex.**



**When it comes to teenagers and sex, speculation probably has always been rampant.** But with sex having gone public since the 1960s and young people allegedly now able to communicate anything, anytime and anywhere – compliments of the Internet and multi-functional phones - imaginations have been running wild. Rumours and wild-eyed claims about teenage sexual behaviour have been contributing to more than a little consternation and perspiration about what young people these days are doing sexually.

**For all the hype and anxiety and mystique about sexual possibilities, the national survey reveals that the majority of females and males tie sexual involvement to significant relationships.**

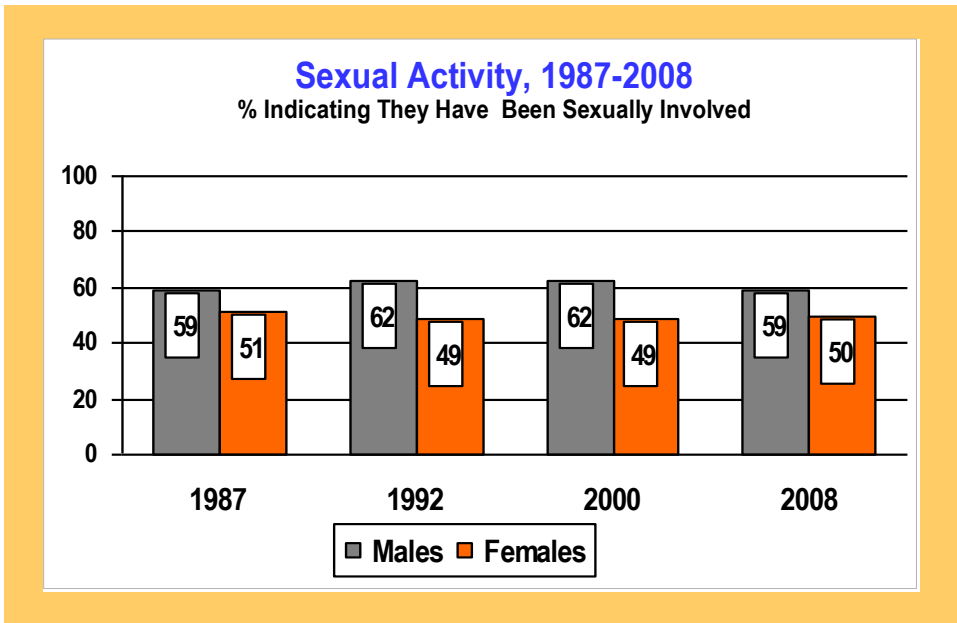
There's little doubt that **there has been a significant shift in the general outlook that today's young people have toward sex.** Put bluntly, sex was a big issue for pre-Boomers and, to a lesser extent, Boomers. Today's emerging millennials grew up three decades after the Sexual Revolution. For them, sex has been out in the open, as part of life to be discussed, as behaviour that has been openly practiced. Rather than being controversial, sexual behaviour for most seems to be greeted with a fairly pervasive sense of "whatever." If people want to have sex, have sex; if they don't want to have sex, don't have sex. But be responsible. In sharp contrast to how some of their parents and many of their grandparents viewed sex, it's just not that big a deal.

That said, there is an important qualifier. **Some 72% say they approve of premarital sex when people "love each other," but the figure drops to 38% for sex when people "like each other."** A majority of teens are saying that sex should be tied to significant relationships. What adults frequently miss is that significant ties for young people may be short-lived; but they still are significant.

#### Premarital Sexual Attitudes: 2008

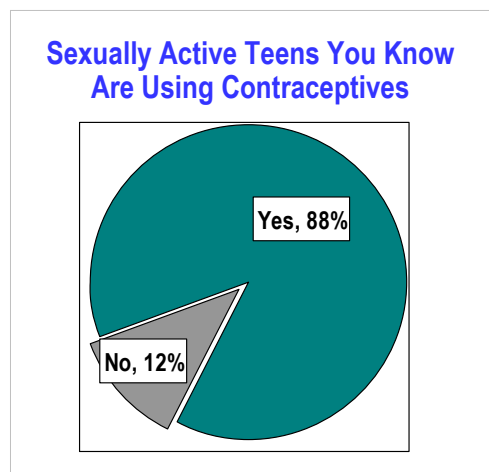
	Approve & Accept	Disapprove But Accept	Disapprove & Do Not Accept	Totals
when people <b>LOVE</b> each other	72%	19	9	100
when people <b>LIKE</b> each other	38	37	25	100

The net result is that **levels of sexual involvement are virtually unchanged from the 1980s**: 59% of males and 50% of females acknowledge that they have been sexually involved. The figures two decades ago were 59% and 51% respectively.



There are indications that teens are increasingly endorsing the idea of “**responsible sex.**” Some 9 in 10 claim that the young people they know who are sexually active are **using contraceptives.** That could well be an overestimate. But it does, at minimum, show that young people think that sexually active peers *should* be practicing so-called “safe sex.”

**These findings challenge many of the current stereotypes about teenage sex.**





## Implications

1. **We need to dispel the myth that teens are sex-crazed.** Relationships fuel their lives, not sex.
2. **It's not surprising that teens who value relationships highly want to express their feelings physically.** Such an obvious reality should hardly come as a surprise to adults. The issue is when sexual expressions of affection and attraction are appropriate.
3. **Sex is out in the open.** That fact represents an important intergenerational change. Large numbers of today's teens can discuss openly. The same cannot necessarily be said for all of their parents and perhaps many of their grandparents. The implications for family discussions of sex are obvious.

## Responses

- ✓ **Adults need to recognize that large numbers of teens who feel they are in love are engaging in sex or consider engaging in sex. It's important to help teens to understand the nature of healthy sexual involvement.** Obviously views will differ considerably among adults. But discussions need to take place and, given today's norms, should be easier than in the past.
- ✓ **Adults should avoid dismissing teenage relationships as insignificant just because they are experienced when teens are young, or because the relationships will often be relatively brief.** What is always important for behaviour is how people of all ages define situations. Lest we have forgotten, the fact someone is young in no ways diminishes the emotional and psychological impact of a relationship one views as significant.
- ✓ **If sex is associated with relationships for so many teens, so-called sex education needs to include a strong emphasis on the nature of a good and healthy relationship.** The emotional, intellectual and spiritual dimensions of healthy relationships, for example, need to be explored. Such an emphasis may help many young females and males to avoid relationships that include physical relations that are coercive, exploitive, and even abusive.



**9. They're morally flexible, but  
some things are no-no's.**



**Officially, teenagers today are highly relativistic.** Our surveys since 1992 have found that some 65% agree with the statement, “What’s right or wrong is a matter of personal opinion.” Asked what their basis is for making moral decisions, no less than 50% cite either “how I feel at the time” (43%) or “a personal decision” (7%). Religion, for example, is cited by only 10%.<sup>8</sup>

What's more, for at least the last two decades or so, 65% have maintained that "what is right or wrong is a matter of personal opinion."

On the surface, one could assume that with teenagers, pretty much anything goes. It would be a precarious assumption.

It is interesting to note that the survey provides many findings that point to young people being extremely flexible in their outlooks.

- We have just seen that most approve of *sex outside of marriage* when people love each other.
- A solid majority of almost 80% say they approve of *unmarried couples living together*, while close to the same proportion say that they either approve (53%) or are accepting of (32%) *unmarried couples having children*.
- *Homosexuality* is accepted by about 75%, as is *same sex marriage* and *same sex parenting*.

	Approve & Accept	Disapprove But Accept	Disapprove & Do Not Accept	Totals
<b>Unmarried couples... living together</b>	77%	16	7	100
<b>having children</b>	53	32	15	100
<b>Sexual relations between two people of the same sex</b>	44	28	28	100
<b>Same sex couples... marrying</b>	47	26	27	100
<b>raising children</b>	43	27	30	100

But there are some places where teenagers draw some fairly pronounced moral lines.

- For example, they are deeply troubled about behaviour such as *child abuse* or *racial discrimination*. Approximately 1 in 2 teens see both as constituting “very serious” problems in Canada today.
- Similarly, many young people view *violence against women* and *bullying* as inappropriate to the point where 1 in 3 maintain the two issues are currently “very serious” problems.

Issues Viewed as “Very Serious” in Canada Today	
Child abuse	51%
Racial discrimination	45
Violence against women	39
Bullying	34
Inequality of women	34
Terrorism	30
Unity	19



Something that teenagers greet with a high level of disapproval and non-acceptance is **extramarital sex**. Only 5% say they approve of and accept such behaviour; almost 80% say they find sex with someone other than one’s marriage partner to be unacceptable.

Given the prevalence of *divorce*, it’s not surprising to find that it is a reality that most teens are willing to accept (87%). That said, it is perhaps somewhat surprising to learn that just 40% say they actually approve of couples getting a divorce. Such a finding suggests that **while divorce is widespread, it remains something far less than ideal for a majority of young people**.

Teenage Attitudes: Extramarital Sex and Divorce				
	Approve & Accept	Disapprove But Accept	Disapprove & Do Not Accept	Totals
Extramarital sex	5%	17	78	100
Couples getting a divorce	40	47	13	100

## Implications

1. **Teens seem to be relativistic in terms of morality and make moral decisions on their own terms – but is that really the case?** The high level of consensus on many interpersonal values points to sources beyond merely how they “feel at the time.”
2. **Most young people have disdain for both child abuse and extramarital sex, and are not excited about divorce.** Such values seem to be grounded in a strong sense of wanting healthy home environments.
3. **Teens draw some moral lines in the sand.** For most, relativity has definite limits.

## Responses

- ✓ **We need to explore with teens how to make relationships work over the long haul.** When is it necessary to abandon “how we feel at the time” in favour of holding back on anger, dealing with disappointment, showing some patience and trying to put the other person first? Good relationships require some personal “no-no’s.”
- ✓ **They are both saying “no” to some things and “yes” to others.** Those positions mean that many have strong feelings about certain individual and social justice issues. Teens need to be given opportunities to act on those feelings.
- ✓ **We need to encourage young people to think about why they opt for some things and reject others.** It is important that they recognize that they do have moral outlooks and worldviews, and that there is much value in their understanding some of the key sources that have shaped their thinking.

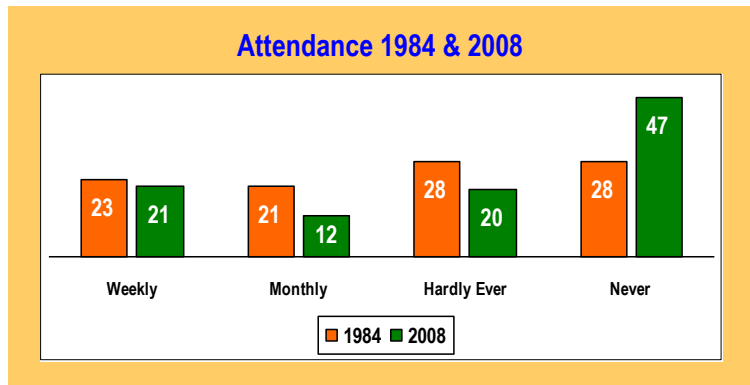
## 10. They're post-religious and pre-spiritual.



**When it comes to religion and spirituality, today's teens are mirroring their Boomer & post-Boomer parents.** The drop-off in participation in organized religion was largely a Boomer phenomenon. The post-60s through 2000 saw spiritual needs and fragmented beliefs and practices persist, along with the desire for rites of passage, especially those associated with marriages and death. But for a majority of Boomers, that has been about it.

Emerging millennials have followed in those footsteps, except **they are characterized by greater polarization.**

- A core of about 1 in 4 remain actively involved in religious groups, including many young adherents of major world faiths such as Islam and Hinduism. But “the moderate middle” is dissolving as more and more teenagers simply no longer participate.
- A belief shift is also taking place, whereby moderate believers are moving toward agnosticism, and agnostics are moving toward atheism – often reflecting parental inclinations.



**Yet, the evidence suggests that such patterns are hardly final.** A majority



of about 70% of teens continue to identify with religious traditions, many hold fairly conventional beliefs, and around 40% of the uninvolved maintain they are open to the possibility of greater participation if they can

find it to be worthwhile. Complicating the case for the abandonment of religion is the finding that some 85% of young people say they expect to turn to religious groups in the future for weddings and funerals.





In the midst of these perplexing patterns that characterize organized religion, close to 55% of teenagers continue to explicitly acknowledge that they themselves have spiritual needs.

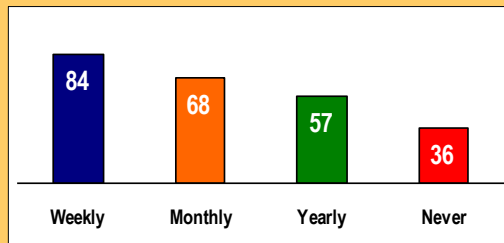
The difficulty here is trying to grasp what they have in mind when they think of “spiritual” and “spirituality.” While more research is needed, so far the findings suggest that their expressions tend to be highly subjective and very individualistic, even in the case of Aboriginal spirituality.

**The situation adds up to a cloudy picture** with some faint images of organized religion, spirituality, atheism, and apathy toward it all.

What we don't know at this point is what will remain and what will emerge, if and when the clouds are lifted.

**Still, beliefs and the widespread openness to “something” defy the stereotype of teenagers living their lives oblivious to the gods and feelings of inner restlessness.**

**Expression of Spiritual Needs by Service Attendance: 2008 (%)**



**Spiritual Needs, Rites of Passage, and Receptivity to Greater Involvement by Group**

	Attend Monthly Plus	Have Spiritual Needs	Want Religious Wedding	Open to Greater Involvement
<b>NATIONALLY</b>	33%	54	84	38
<b>ROMAN CATHOLIC</b>	37	62	93	44
Outside Quebec	47	67	95	55
Quebec	16	50	88	30
<b>PROTESTANT</b>	68	77	97	46
Conservative	91	89	99	35
Baptist	88	74	93	**
Pentecostal	84	91	96	**
Mainline	44	66	96	47
Anglican	33	59	97	39
United	37	69	93	52
Lutheran, Pres	64	74	96	57
<b>ORTHODOX</b>	43	69	95	56
<b>CHRISTIAN unspecified</b>	69	83	96	39
<b>OTHER FAITHS</b>	46	65	85	51
Buddhism	19	67	74	56
Judaism	41	48	95	47
Islam	56	67	88	54
Aboriginal Spirituality	25	78	74	49
On reserve*	25	72	78	56
Off reserve*	19	58	80	36
Hinduism	61	70	96	30
Sikhism	82	61	88	**
<b>NONE</b>	7	57	34	24
Outside Quebec	9	57	37	26
Quebec	3	58	25	18

\* Includes all Aboriginals. \*\*N's insufficient to permit accurate and stable percentaging.

## Implications

1. **Youth are mirroring the religious inclinations of their parents' generation.** Both faith and lack of faith are largely learned.
2. **Most youth are not oblivious to “the gods.”** They ask ultimate questions, have feelings of inner restlessness, indicate that they have spiritual needs, and express openness to “worthwhile” faith communities. Such a spiritual dimension of their lives needs to be recognized.
3. **Young people appear to be increasingly polarized religiously.** An understanding of youth needs to include the recognition of the existence of teens who are at both ends of the continuum – along with a noteworthy number who are “in between” the extremities of the two poles.

## Responses

- ✓ **In a pluralistic Canada, it is important that individuals and institutions respect the range of belief and disbelief, religious involvement and lack of involvement characterizing people.** This respect applies to younger people and adults alike.
- ✓ **Faith groups typically emphasize community.** An understanding of teens who participate in religious groups includes an understanding of the links they have with like-minded young people and adults. Those links brought them into groups and sustain their involvement.
- ✓ **Young people need to have an opportunity to reflect on religion and spirituality, given their importance in many of their lives, and in life more generally.** As possible and feasible, venues need to extend beyond conventional religious settings to formal and informal places where teenagers gather – ranging from schools to pizza places.



# Conclusion



**There we have it – ten snapshots of teenagers based on letting them have their say** that, at minimum, may lead us to rethink some of those “pictures in our heads.” These snippets also might make it possible to relate a bit better to young people. The findings remind us that teens are not a different species; they really are like the rest of us.

**Except for one thing: they are incredibly more hopeful.**

- Almost all of them expect to pursue careers and not merely get jobs but get the jobs they want when they graduate – from university.

Educational Aspirations 1987-2000								
<i>“How much education do you expect you will eventually get?”</i>								
	1987		1992		2000		2008	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Graduate from university	48%	55	56	65	58	65	61	70
Some university	5	5	11	9	8	7	9	7
Complete vocational	26	23	19	17	18	17	15	15
Some vocational	7	8	6	5	6	5	5	4
High school	12	8	7	4	10	5	9	4
Less than high school	2	1	1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1

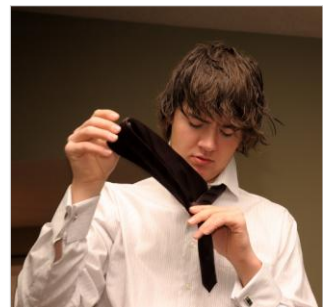
- Real estate prices might be intimidating, but 97% expect to own their own homes and 8 in 10 maintain they will be more financially comfortable than their parents.



- About 90% plan to marry; the same proportion expect to have children; and, regardless of their experiences at home, 88% say they expect to stay with the same partner for life.
- The Canadian Dream is alive: 74% maintain that “anyone who works hard

can rise to the top,” and they are prepared to work hard.

- If anything, today’s teens are even more positive about their futures than their counterparts of the early 90s.



Expectations of Teenagers: 1992-2008			
“Do you expect to...”			
% Indicating “Yes”			
	1992	2008	
<b>Career</b>			
Pursue a career	96%	95	
Get the job you want when you graduate	84	86	
<b>Family</b>			
Get married	85	91	
Stay with the same partner for life	86	88	
Have children	84	95	
<b>Success</b>			
Own your own home	96	96	
Be more financially comfortable than your parents	77	80	

Expectations of Canadian teenagers vary little regardless of their social class, birthplace, or race. One exception that underlines some ongoing differences in hope and dreams: the expectation of one day receiving a university degree. But that’s about it.

PROJECT TEEN CANADA MOSAIC MIRROR					
	Anyone Works Hard Can Rise to Top	Expect Get Job I Want	More \$ Comf Than Parents	Will Grad from University	Will Marry
<b>Nationally</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>91</b>
Upper class	76	88	76	77	90
Upper middle class	75	87	77	75	93
Middle class	73	87	84	63	89
Lower class	63	78	87	59	75
Born outside Canada	78	93	88	80	91
Parents Born Elsewhere	73	84	82	72	91
Born in Canada	73	86	77	62	90
Aboriginal: Off Reserve	76	81	79	51	82
On Reserve	89	84	80	39	81

Teens are dreaming – and dreaming big.

## Implications

1. **Great, great news! Teenagers are already dreaming big – and we wouldn't want it any other way.** Adults do not have to work hard to instill hope and expectations in young people as they reach their twenties. The job has already been done.
2. **On paper at least, teens are quite traditional – perhaps even more traditional in some ways than their elders.** They already possess an understanding that learning, financial stability, and long-term fidelity are good things.
3. **Teens are undoubtedly excessively optimistic.** Not everyone's dreams and expectations will be realized.

## Responses

- ✓ **We need to respect teens' optimism, knowing their dreams are alive and well.** It is easy to respond to their hopes with condescending adult cynicism. Rather than being "realistic cynics," we need to do everything we can to help them realize their dreams.
- ✓ **At the same time, we need to help young people to be prepared for unrealized dreams – and failure.** Along the way, many will have to deal with any number of life's inevitable disappointments relating to education, career, finances, and relationships. There is obviously value in candidly sharing some of the insights we all have gained from our own checkered experiences in the course of pursuing such goals.
- ✓ **As two sociologists we would remind readers that the realization of the dreams and expectations that teens have in mind hardly depend only on their own efforts.** We, as a society, need to work hard to ensure that our social structure, led by institutions such as education, government, the media, corporations, and faith communities collectively functions to enable young people to know the best in Canadian life that is possible.

## The Last Words

**Well, this brings us back to where we began. Teen stereotypes are everywhere.** That's fair enough. As we said at the outset, all of us base our initial perceptions of people on limited amounts of information; we don't have any choice. Same goes for our stereotypes about teenagers.

**But, now,** to borrow broadcaster Paul Harvey's words from yesteryear, **"You know the rest of the story."** You've just heard from more than 5,500 teens across the country – and lots more from earlier surveys as well.

**"The rest of the story" is a very positive story.** Canadian young people are looking good. No, they're not perfect and hardly "angels" as the *National Post* playfully described them in reporting some of our initial survey findings.<sup>9</sup> Apart from their attitudes and behaviour, there are some teens who are finding life difficult. Our detailed report on the survey results for Aboriginals, for example, has uncovered some good news about values and aspirations. But it also documents the fact that there is still a significant distance to go.<sup>10</sup> In the case of young people more generally, too many still know realities such as economic and domestic strain, drug problems, abuse, depression and despair.

**But the ongoing story of teenagers in Canada can be increasingly positive and uplifting** if we will continue to care about young people and do what we can to add to their lives. In the process, the rest of us will find that our lives are enriched as well.

Just as this booklet was about to go to press, a student at the University of Lethbridge, Kristina Larkin, who coincidentally was taking youth and trends classes with each of us, offered some words in a presentation that are worth repeating as we "sign off" for now:

*Reading The Emerging Millennials left me with a sense of optimism for teens today. Teens are good people, despite being stereotyped as irresponsible. Who knows how much better they could become if we as a society were able to erase our uninformed views of teens? If we encouraged youth to live up to high standards, and really allowed them the chance to do so, free of prejudice and negative assumptions, I really do think we could see even greater things from this generation of emerging millennials.*

Well said...and enough said. **Let's do it!**



# Appendix

## The Project Teen Canada Methodology

**Project Teen Canada 2008** was the latest in a series of national youth surveys carried out under the direction of Reginald Bibby from the University of Lethbridge. James Penner served as the Associate Director. The surveys have attempted to generate fairly comprehensive data on Canadian teenagers, 15-to-19, who are still in secondary schools and CEGEPs in Quebec. The survey, like earlier versions in 1984, 1992, and 2000, examined the attitudes, values, beliefs, behaviour, and expectations of teenagers. Themes included sources of enjoyment, social views, personal and social concerns, perceived sources of influence, sexuality, relationships, spirituality, hopes, and the impact of technology.

Data collection took place primarily between March 15 and June 15 of 2008, with some sample holes filled in the fall. The methodology used in the three previous Project Teen Canada surveys was replicated. The survey was funded by the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research and the Lilly Endowment through the Louisville Institute. In the case of Alberta, the Alberta Centre requested an oversample.

A special oversample of students in Aboriginal-run schools was carried out from approximately mid-November of 2008 through the end of February 2009, funded by Bibby and Penner. The goal was to generate a representative national sample of young people in Aboriginal schools to supplement and complement the main survey.

Since our interest again was with youth on the edge of adulthood, the sample once more was restricted to 15-to-19 years-old in grades 10 to 12 across Canada, including CEGEP1's Quebec. The design involved choosing one classroom in each school. Based on an average class size of perhaps 20 students, this meant that the participation of close to 200 schools was required. Anticipating a response rate of about 75-80% based on our earlier experiences, we selected some 250 schools, including replacements.

The schools were chosen using multi-stage stratified and cluster sampling procedures to pursue a highly random sample. The Aboriginal school oversample involved the random selection of some 35 schools from a list provided by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. Alberta was again oversampled. Following the receiving of board approval where required, questionnaire packets, including parental permission forms, were sent to principals of the sample schools.

Questionnaires were returned from 245 of the 308 schools that were contacted – a level of participation of 80%, similar to previous years. The remaining 63 schools either declined to participate (19) or did not respond to requests to do so (44). A total of 5,564 questionnaires were received, including 818 from Aboriginal schools.

As with previous surveys, the overall national sample has been weighted to ensure representativeness, with adjustments made for region, community size, and school system. In its final, weighted form, the sample is highly representative of high school students, 15-to-19. A sample of this size and quality makes it possible to generalize to young people in this category with a very high level of accuracy – on most items, within about plus or minus 3 percentage points of the true population values, 19 times in 20.

The Aboriginal school sample has been weighted down by region to 500 cases (given that Alberta had been oversampled) and appears to be representative. A sample of 500 permits accurate generalizations within about plus or minus 5 points, 19 times in 20.

Full methodological details can found in Reginald W. Bibby, *The Emerging Millennials*, Lethbridge: Project Canada Books, 2009:214-217.



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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Bibby, Reginald W. (2001), *Canada's Teens: Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow*. Toronto: Stoddart, 2001:228.

<sup>2</sup> Ewen, Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen. (2006). *Typecasting: On the Arts and Sciences of Human Inequality*. New York: Seven Stories Press, pp. 3ff.

<sup>3</sup> Methodological details are available in a number of my books, including Bibby, Reginald W. (2009). *The Emerging Millennials*. Lethbridge: Project Canada Books, pp. 214-217.

<sup>4</sup> Some of the others include *The Emerging Generation* (1985), *Teen Trends* (1992), and *Canada's Teens* (2001). Full information on these and other books dealing with the Project Teen Canada and Project Canada surveys can be found at "reginaldbibby.com" and "projectcanadabooks.com".

<sup>5</sup> Bigge, Ronald. (2008). "The Death of the Monoculture." *Toronto Star*, July 20.

<sup>6</sup> Bibby, *The Emerging Millennials*. (2009). Lethbridge: Project Canada Books, p. 212.

<sup>7</sup> This was carried out by James Penner (2009). For details, contact James via pennja@uleth.ca.

<sup>8</sup> Bibby, Reginald W. (2009). *The Emerging Millennials*. Lethbridge: Project Canada Books, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> Headline in a front page story on the research, *National Post*, April 7, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Reginald W. Bibby and James Penner. 2010. *Aboriginal Millennials in National Perspective*. Lethbridge: Project Canada Books.



# 10 Things We *ALL* Need to Know About Today's Teens!

This booklet provides people who care about youth with a highlight summary of the key findings from the latest Project Teen Canada national survey.

- what teenagers are really like • what they love and enjoy • the role and impact of new technology • their unprecedented choices • their ties with parents
- school • their greatest concerns • what they are thinking and doing sexually
  - moral yes's and no's • religion and spirituality
- their hopes, dreams & expectations as they look to the future

Beyond information, the authors offer point-blank, point-form reflections on what it all means and could mean.

- ◆ Information that takes us beyond stereotypes
- ◆ Data, ideas, and photos that open up our minds

**Reginald Bibby**, Ph.D., O.C., holds the Board of Governors Research Chair in Sociology at the University of Lethbridge. One of Canada's foremost trend trackers, he has been monitoring social trends through his well-known national adult and youth surveys dating back to the 1970s. The surveys have formed the basis for eleven best-selling books. The latest is *The Emerging Millennials*, released in May of this year. The 1984 and 1992 "Project Teen Canada" surveys were carried out with Don Posterski, the 2000 and 2008 versions with James Penner.



**James Penner**, M.A., is an Adjunct Professor in Sociology at the University of Lethbridge and co-author of *Soul Searching the Millennial Generation* with David Overholt. A veteran youth specialist, he served as a public school educator and IVCF national youth consultant before turning his attention to consultation and research and founding James Penner and Associates. He was the Associate Director of Project Teen Canada 2008.

*Project Canada Books*

