

Gore Takes Tough Stand on Violent Entertainment

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By KEVIN SACK

WASHINGTON, Sept. 10 — Vice President Al Gore and his running mate, Senator Joseph I. Lieberman, said today that if the entertainment industry did not stop marketing violent films, recordings and video games to children they would propose legislation or new regulatory authority allowing the federal government to sanction the industry.

In an extended interview on the veranda of the vice president's residence, Mr. Gore said he would give industry officials six months to "clean up their act." If they do not, and if he and Mr. Lieberman win the November election, the vice president said he would encourage the Federal Trade Commission to move against the industry by using its power to prohibit false and deceptive advertising.

The position taken today by the Democratic candidates is not particularly new for Mr. Lieberman, who warned last year that entertainment industry leaders would "invite legal restrictions on their freedom" if they did not address public concerns about children's access to media violence. But it is quite new for Mr. Gore, who has always stopped short of suggesting government-imposed restrictions on media marketing, even during his wife's crusade against explicit rock lyrics.

Mr. Gore said he understood that care would have to be taken to ensure that any enforcement did not violate First Amendment protections of speech. And he acknowledged that there had been no constitutional tests of the use of deceptive advertising laws to challenge marketing strategies, as opposed to advertising content.

But in a clear appeal to voters concerned about moral issues, and particularly to women with children, Mr. Gore said he was determined to use the presidency to give parents more control over the cultural influences that bombard their children.

"If I'm entrusted with the presidency," he said, his voice rising, "I am going to do something about this."

As in past elections, the Democrats have collected millions of dollars in campaign contributions this year from the entertainment industry. But Mr. Gore, who has chastised the industry even as he solicited its wealthy leaders, suggested that he was not concerned about alienating his backers in Hollywood and New York City.

"Those who don't like it, well, they don't like it," he said.

Today's interview, which was requested by The New York Times, came on the eve of the release of an trade commission report that is expected to harshly criticize the entertainment industry for marketing violent, adult-rated entertainment to young people.

Several people familiar with the report said it concludes that, despite

voluntary rating and labeling systems adopted over the years, the makers of films, recordings and video games routinely use marketing strategies to entice young consumers into buying products that the manufacturers themselves deem inappropriate. The commission study, which relies on internal marketing documents provided by the industry, found that the companies did this largely by placing advertising in publications and television broadcasts that appeal to young people.

The report will be released by the

commission's chairman, Robert Pitofsky, on Monday, and will be discussed at a Senate hearing on Wednesday at which Mr. Lieberman plans to testify.

Because Mr. Lieberman has been known in the Senate as a crusader against media violence, the Gore

campaign has been eager to demonstrate that there is little distance between the two running mates on the issue.

Mr. Gore, whose wife, Tipper, was among the first to call for warning labels on recordings with explicit lyrics, has also taken active stands on the topic. But several published reports over the years have suggested that Mr. Gore has taken strong anti-industry positions in public while backing away from them in private meetings with entertainment executives and contributors.

While the F.T.C. report recommends that the entertainment industry better regulate the behavior of its companies, it pointedly does not propose the kind of legislation or new regulatory authority threatened by Mr. Gore and Mr. Lieberman.

"The commission's position is that self-regulation should be the primary approach in this area," said Eric London, a commission spokesman. "However, if it doesn't work, there would be a need to take further action, possibly in the form of legislation." Mr. London said the commission had no legal opinion on whether deceptive advertising laws could be used to sanction the industry.

Jack Valenti, the president of the Motion Picture Association of America, said today that Mr. Gore and Mr. Lieberman were "very wise people" who understood that "the reason the F.T.C. did not recommend government intervention — in a nonexistent problem, I might add — is that they know such legislation would be dead on arrival in the first federal court that reviews it."

Mr. Valenti dismissed the Democrats' proposal as carefully calibrated political posturing. "Frankly," he said, "if I were running for office I'd be trashing the movie industry myself."

Hilary Rosen, the president of the Recording Industry Association of America, said that Mr. Gore's threat of government action could be counterproductive. Several weeks ago, Ms. Rosen said, her industry voluntarily adopted guidelines against marketing recordings with explicit lyrics in publications that were read primarily by children under 16.

"This just proves that no good deed goes unpunished," she said, "because these voluntary guidelines, if suddenly subjected to criminal sanctions, would be withdrawn immediately and you would create a disincentive in the marketplace for people to try and do the right thing."

First Amendment experts said that regulating the marketing of violence through deceptive advertising laws was a plausible legal theory, but would not necessarily pass constitutional scrutiny.

"Congress could readily enlarge its jurisdiction to embrace this territory of what might constitute false and misleading advertising," said William Van Alstyne, a law professor at Duke University. "But that would just set up the constitutional question."

Mr. Gore said he was convinced it could be done in cases where companies seem to be undermining their own rating and labeling standards by marketing inappropriate material to children. "If the industry violates its own rules and actively misleads parents with advertising, then the industry should be held accountable," he

said. "If the industry promises parents that it will not market violent material to children and then proceeds to do so, then the industry's practices could constitute false and deceptive advertising."

Mr. Lieberman joined Mr. Gore in calling the F.T.C.'s findings troubling. "It obviously makes a mockery of their own rating system," he said of the entertainment industry. "They've rated their own content and then not lived by their own rating."

Both Mr. Gore and Mr. Lieberman have made a campaign tactic of attacking cultural influences. Mr. Gore, in his nomination speech, spoke of challenging "a culture with too much meanness, and not enough meaning." Mr. Lieberman speaks of helping families "win the competition against the popular culture."

Those are lines that play particularly well with female voters, who are shown by polls to be more concerned than men about moral issues. And they are designed to help change the impression found in some polling that Republicans in general and the party's presidential nominee, Gov. George W. Bush, in particular, would

be better at upholding moral values than the Democrats and Mr. Gore.

Ray Sullivan, a spokesman for Mr. Bush, said the Republican nominee "believes there clearly needs to be greater responsibility" shown by the entertainment industry. He said that Mr. Bush prefers that the industry impose its own restrictions rather than be regulated by the federal government.

But the notion of regulating the entertainment industry is politically perilous for the Democratic ticket because of the party's longtime reliance on the industry as a source of campaign funds. As it is, some Hollywood figures have said they are uneasy with Mr. Gore's choice of Mr. Lieberman and have encouraged Democratic contributors to pocket their wallets.

During the 2000 election cycle, Democratic committees have received \$13.6 million from individuals, companies and political action committees associated with the television, film and music industries, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, a Washington group that monitors campaign financing. Republican committees have received \$8.6 million, the center found.

In addition, the Gore-Lieberman campaign has received \$928,000 from the industry, compared to \$725,000 for the Bush campaign. On Thursday, Mr. Gore is to appear at a \$5 million fund-raiser for the Democratic National Committee at Radio City Music Hall in New York City featuring a long list of entertainers, ranging from Bette Midler to Paul Simon to Ben Affleck. The following week, he is scheduled to attend another party fund-raiser, in Los Angeles, that is expected to generate contributions from Hollywood.

Republicans have long maintained that the industry's financial clout with Democrats has compromised the Clinton administration's ability to use its bully pulpit to persuade entertainment executives to change their practices. A Gore administration, they say, would be no different.

"What I fear with the Gore-Lieberman ticket," said Senator Sam Brownback, a Kansas Republican, "is that you'll hear words but see no action or real push to deal with the products produced by these billion-dollar companies because of the money they put into their campaigns."

Rebels Without a Childhood in Sri Lanka War

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By CELIA W. DUGGER

PALALI, Sri Lanka, Sept. 9 — Renuka, a 13-year-old wisp of a girl, said she is afraid she will be scolded because she chose not to swallow her cyanide capsule.

Recruited at age 11 by ethnic Tamil rebels to fight for a separate state, she lay wounded on the front lines of Sri Lanka's civil war six days ago, surrounded by the blasted bodies of three other insurgents who were on duty with her when mortar fire hit their sentry post.

But rather than kill herself to avoid capture as her superiors in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam had ordered, Renuka said she wrapped her bloody chest in a sarong and waited for the soldiers from the

Sri Lankan Army. "I didn't want to die," she said in a thin, quavering voice during an interview at an army detention camp here. "And I'm not going back to the L.T.T.E. They will threaten me and scold me and ask why I didn't take the cyanide."

Two years ago the Tigers met in northern Sri Lanka with Olara A. Ottunu, the United Nations official charged with trying to halt the use of an estimated 300,000 child soldiers worldwide. They promised him that they would stop recruiting children under 17 and sending anyone under age 18 into battle. But evidence emerging from the recent carnage in Sri Lanka's 17-year war with the separatist rebels strongly suggests that they have continued using children in their battle to win a homeland for the country's mostly Hindu Tamil minority in the north and east of the country.

Renuka and Malar Arumugam, another 13-year-old girl soldier captured by the army, gave accounts of their years with the Tigers in interviews through an independent Tamil translator. Malar, an orphan who said she was recruited at age 8, remains fiercely loyal to the Tigers, whom she regards as her family. She wept angrily when she spoke of what

she called atrocities against Tamils by the Sri Lankan and Indian armies.

In contrast, Renuka, who said she left her impoverished family to join the Tigers largely because she was hungry and knew they would feed her, wants nothing more to do with the rebels. The Tigers refused to let her see her parents, and she believes that the rebel fighters abandoned her when she was wounded in battle.

The girls' stories could not be independently verified, though their wounds and scars were consistent with their accounts, as were the circumstances of their confinement. Army officials, happy to score propaganda points against the Tigers, readily agreed to allow Renuka, still in their custody, to be interviewed. Her last name was withheld by The New York Times out of concern that the rebels would punish her for turning against them.

A district magistrate in Jaffna permitted an interview with Malar, who unlike Renuka is still a true Tiger believer. Captured in July, she is now in judicial custody and is incarcerated in the rundown jail in Jaffna. Officials stood listening to

both interviews.

One other thing also suggests that the Tigers are using child soldiers: the youthfulness of the rebel dead found after a Sept. 3 battle here on the Jaffna peninsula. Six of the 36 dead rebels whose bodies were picked up by the Sri Lankan Army and returned to the Tigers appeared to have been girls between ages 12 and 16, said an international official who inspected them, but asked that the organization not be identified to preserve its ability to function in Jaffna.

Officials at the Jaffna Teaching Hospital, where the bodies were taken, declined to comment, but a hospital worker who saw the dead said, "Most of them were young, but you can't say whether they were 12, 14, 16, 18 or 20. They were small-made."

For the past year, human rights groups have alleged that the Tigers are still using child soldiers. In July, the United Teachers for Human Rights in Jaffna charged that the rebel group was rounding up an increasing number of boys and girls in its push to retake the Jaffna peninsula, a northern spit of land that had long been its stronghold.

The United States has classified the Tigers as a terrorist organization, but Canada and Great Britain, with substantial Tamil communities, have not banned the group, which raises money from the nearly one million Sri Lankan Tamils living abroad.

A man who identified himself as A. Shanthan, in the group's London branch, said he was not a spokesman for the organization and could not comment on the girls' stories. He said he would try to get an answer to faxed questions in coming days, though it was difficult for him to reach Tiger leaders in Sri Lanka.

The girls' stories had much in common, though Renuka was timid and softspoken, while Malar was defiant and angry. Both said they came from poor backgrounds, joined the Tigers without telling their families and received heavy indoctrination and arms training in Tiger camps.

Renuka hobbled out of the detention center, dressed in a polka-dotted hospital gown. She whimpered as she lowered herself into a chair shaded by a tree in the parking lot. Doctors had operated the day before to remove shrapnel from her chest.

She said she grew up in the desolate northern reaches of the country known as the Wanni. Her father was unemployed and she, her sister and her parents survived on the bit of money a relative in Colombo sent them every now and then. Often they went hungry.

Tiger soldiers came to her school every month on recruiting drives from the time she was in the 6th grade, she said. The children were gathered in the school's main hall as men and women in battle fatigues told them it was their duty to join the Tigers and help save the Tamil people from the approaching Sri Lankan army.

One day when she was in the 7th grade, Renuka told her parents she was going shopping, but instead went to a Tiger camp. She was hungry, she said, "and we all knew that they give meals."

As it turned out, she was well fed, but said she quickly regretted her choice. She pleaded to see her parents, but was told she could only have a visit after she had fought on the front lines. During the next two years, she said she and many other children were drilled in the Tiger view of history, the Tiger vision of a Tamil homeland and the Tiger cult of martyrdom. They learned to lob a grenade and dive for cover and to fire a machine gun on the run.

She was assigned to an all-female fighting group and dispatched a month ago to a battlefield east of the city of Jaffna. Early in the morning of Sept. 3, the Sri Lankan army began a deafening assault. Thousands of rounds of mortar fire rained down. Within hours, everyone in her sentry post was dead except her.

"The L.T.T.E. took me," she said of the Tamil rebel group. "They didn't let me see my parents. When I was injured, they didn't come to help me. I ask myself, 'Who are they?'"

Unlike Renuka, Malar, her short, curly hair pulled back by a headband, said she is still a true believer. According to her account, she was born in the Mannar district in northwestern Sri Lanka. Her father died of a heart attack when she was 3 and her mother went into the hospital when she was 6 and never returned. She moved in with her uncle, an unmarried farm laborer. Often, they had little to eat, she said.

When she was 8, she said, a woman from the Tigers came and told her the rebels would educate and care for her. "I thought it was better to go with the L.T.T.E. sister because of our poverty," she said. "I also wanted to contribute to freedom."

She was trained with 50 other girls, most of them orphans like her. They underwent years of ideological indoctrination in Tiger schools. She once caught a glimpse of the secretive, reclusive rebel leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, and said, "We treat him as our god."

Last year, at age 12, she volunteered to go to war. "I wanted to save the country," she said. She was eventually sent to the eastern coast of the Jaffna peninsula, carrying a Chinese-made submachine gun.

In July, during a routine sweep, army soldiers tossed a grenade into her bunker. "Eleven of us girls were in the bunker," she said as hot angry tears streaked down her cheeks. "Ten died in front of me. The military removed the girls' clothes and fired rounds into the bodies."

She lives now in a jail cell with Dayalani Balasubramaniam, 22, who joined the jailhouse conversation to say she had become a Tiger cadre when she was 16. The young woman held out her warped hands, the fingers curving at odd angles. She said soldiers had broken the bones with batons and left the fingers to heal without setting them. Human rights groups say the torture of rebel suspects is not uncommon.

The girl and the young woman, sharing a dark, dank cell, seemed to bolster each other's resolve to stay true to the cause. With their jailers listening, Miss Balasubramaniam declared she was still worked up to fight because of the army's bombing and shelling.

Malar fiercely echoed her words. "I feel the same," she said.

Unworthy Pandering by Mr. Gore

In threatening to aim punitive legislation at the entertainment industry, Vice President Al Gore has crossed a line that no Democratic presidential candidate should ever cross. His party has a tradition of protecting free expression. Mr. Gore and his running mate, Senator Joseph Lieberman, betray that tradition by advocating what would amount to government censorship.

Mr. Gore's statements came as the Federal Trade Commission produced a report requested by President Clinton after the ghastly shooting at Columbine High School. In it, the commission charges that the producers of movies, music and computer and video games have marketed inappropriate material to young people, violating the spirit of their own ratings system. The F.T.C. recommended tightening enforcement of ratings curbs, a step that the industry should consider as a matter of civic responsibility and political prudence.

But in delivering the report, the Trade Commission chairman, Robert Pitofsky, cautioned against setting up a federal "thought police." Mr. Gore tried to skirt that problem by saying he would back legislation to give the F.T.C. broader power to punish the entertainment industry for "deceptive advertising," but that he would do so in a way "consistent with the First Amendment." That is sophistry that seems to reinforce the charge by the Republican nominee, Gov. George W. Bush of Tex-

as, that Mr. Gore will say anything to get elected.

A presidential candidate can properly promise to jawbone Hollywood into responsible behavior on this serious national problem. But to seek the votes of cultural conservatives by advocating new legal restrictions on commercial speech is a dangerous assault on civil liberties and the Constitution.

Moreover, as the F.T.C. noted in its report, there is no concrete evidence linking violent or sexual content in popular culture with the violent actions of teenagers with guns. That does not mean that the industry can refuse to help parents exercise control over what their children watch. But that must be done through voluntary labeling and a rigorously enforced rating system. The Gore-Lieberman approach glosses over the fact that R-rated movies are not barred to teenagers. The rating requires that those under 17 be accompanied by an adult. Barring the marketing of R movies on television shows that have a large teenage audience would violate the rights of other viewers of these shows who are 18 and older.

These difficulties make it all the more dangerous to wield a legislative or regulatory cudgel. The proper place for enforcing the rating ban against unaccompanied teenagers going to R-rated movies is at the movie theater. An unwarranted expansion of federal regulatory power over advertising content is not the solution.

A Vanishing Security Case

The criminal investigation and prosecution of Wen Ho Lee, which largely collapsed last weekend with his agreement to plead guilty to a single felony count, must be reviewed by an independent examiner to determine if racial profiling or other unfair tactics were used by the government.

Dr. Lee had planned to plead guilty to improperly downloading classified defense documents at the Los Alamos laboratory. But the plea hearing has been postponed until tomorrow. Federal prosecutors are expected to drop the 58 other counts against him, allowing him to go free. The remaining count does not indicate any intent to harm the United States or assist a foreign nation, the central claim the government initially sought to prove.

This would be a stunning turnabout for government officials who previously insisted that the downloaded data contained the "crown jewels" of America's nuclear arsenal that could change the global balance of power if transferred to a hostile nation. In recent weeks these assertions were undermined by new information. The lead agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation admitted in court to having testified falsely. Several top nuclear scientists testified that the vast majority of the information was already in the public domain. The data was not classified as secret or even confidential until after Mr. Lee was fired from Los Alamos last year.

As the case came unglued under the prodding of

Judge James A. Parker, evidence has mounted that Mr. Lee was singled out because of his Chinese ancestry. Robert Vrooman, former head of counterintelligence at Los Alamos, and Charles Washington, former acting head of counterintelligence at the Energy Department, submitted affidavits saying that Mr. Lee had been targeted as a suspect because of his background. Mr. Washington said that others suspected of serious security violations had escaped prosecution, and that many had merely been "verbally counseled" for mishandling classified data.

Judge Parker ordered the government to turn over for his review thousands of pages of documents this week, including classified material compiled by the Energy Department on racial profiling tactics and State Department records on individuals who breached national security but were not prosecuted. In ending the case, the government would conveniently avoid those disclosures.

But Congress and the public should not be satisfied with this resolution. President Clinton should appoint a politically independent person of national standing to review the entire case. The nation deserves to know if national security secrets were ever compromised at Los Alamos, and whether the government unfairly singled out Dr. Lee and other Chinese-Americans for investigation. If racial profiling is found, investigators and prosecutors should be called to account for their conduct.

There They Go, Bad-Mouthing Divorce Again

By Jane Smiley

S CARMEL VALLEY, Calif. Several years ago at a party, I asked a woman I had just met how her Christmas had been. She said, "First good Christmas in 25 years."

"Why was that?"

"Oh, my father died."

"And that made it good?"

"Well, every year for 25 years, he would gather us all around the Christmas tree and tell us how terrible his life was and how disappointed he was in everyone."

"How did your mother feel, though?"

"Oh, she was relieved. He'd been telling her for 60 years that she wasn't pretty or smart enough for him. Now she's planning to do some of the things she's wanted to do all along."

I thought this was an excellent example of a thank-God-for-divorce tale. Here's another one: When the grand-

father of a friend of mine died many years ago, his last words to his wife of 50 years were, "I'm sorry I married you."

I admit that I am susceptible to such tales. I am the poster child for the recent study by Judith Wallerstein et al. of the long-term effects of divorce on children — the child of parents who parted before I was a year old and divorced by the time I was 4. I have been divorced uncountable times (well, three).

Bad habits? Bad choices? Perhaps it is time to subject myself to Wallersteinian analysis. But when I do my own little survey, and come up with the marital histories of my 32 closest friends and relatives, the picture grows more complex. All of the 32 are baby boomers or a bit older — oldest, 58, youngest, 40. Twenty-six are the offspring of long-term first marriages that ended in the death of one spouse or the other; six of them come from divorced families.

Of the 26 whose parents had long-term marriages, 17 have been divorced at least once.

What does my mini-survey tell me? It tells me the same thing that any cursory review of the last 50 years of

married life in America tells us — most baby boomers were born into intact families. On the surface nearly all adhered to the ideal: Dad earned enough money so that Mom could stay home and take care of the 3.2 children and the house. Marital roles were divided by gender, and Mom was regularly advised by Ann Landers and Abigail Van Buren, not to mention everyone else, to cater to Dad's sense of privileged masculinity: Should she iron his shorts? If he didn't give her any money of your own, was it permissible to take it out of his pockets while he was sleeping? If, when she was doing the laundry, she found lipstick on his collar, should she mention it?

And most baby boomers, learning how to be married, as Ms. Wallerstein suggests, by witnessing the examples of marriage that they grew up with, voted with their feet when the time came to endure or not in their own.

Twenty-six boomers from 26 intact marriages. Seventeen divorced. That's about 65 percent.

The fact is, the goals of marriage have changed. In the first half of the century people married to survive, reproduce, join properties, become a part of the mainstream community of

adults. Individual happiness might have been foreseen and desired, but if as the marriage wore on happiness came to seem elusive, other goals dominated. Some marriages did work on both levels: several of my divorced peers had parents whose marriages I know to have been happy, compatible and peaceful.

Whatever the reasons for their parents' marital longevity, though, the children in my group did not learn from their example how to choose their own partners wisely or how to stick with it, as Ms. Wallerstein would have expected. Some who were divorced chose to try again, and have found happiness. Others in second or third marriages have not. The person I know whose parents had the longest, happiest marriage recently wrote me: "We plug along." A thank-God-for-divorce tale, midlife version.

Americans born since mid-century marry for the same reason they do anything else — to be happy. Yet literature of all periods tells us that marrying to be happy is at best an iffy proposition. Historians of domestic life have suggested that marriages in the premodern period were usually short — death did the work of divorce.

Marrying with the overriding goal of being happy for all your adult life with a single other (since survival, reproduction, property joining and being part of a community of adults can be achieved now without marriage) is a new experiment. Divorce is its corollary. This is an experiment that our children will engage in, whatever models we give them.

Divorce is a right that took many generations to gain. It is no more a guarantor of happiness than marriage, but also no less. The rate of divorce in our country tells us very little other than that our culture is in transition to new ways of organizing itself. Given the social and technological changes of the past century, this can hardly be surprising.

Personally, in spite of the testimonials of the Wallersteinians, I'm glad my parents divorced, and I have been since I first began to actually think about it. I can't speak for my children, but I do hope they try more than one way of being happy, rather than turning around at 84 and saying, "Free at last." [1]

Jane Smiley is the author, most recently, of "Horse Heaven."

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AND MRS. CLINTON
ON CHILDREN, VIOLENCE AND MARKETING

The Rose Garden

11:46 A.M. EDT

MRS. CLINTON: Good morning, and please be seated, and thank you for joining us today in the Rose Garden as we continue a national conversation about how to address the problems of youth violence in our communities and schools.

I want to thank everyone for coming this morning, and I'd like to acknowledge Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, Mayor Deedee Corradini, Mayor Timothy Kaine, and County Executives Wayne Curry and Charles Ruppertsburger. In addition to the Chairman of the FTC, whom you will hear from in a minute, Robert Pitofsky, we also have Commissioner Sheila Anthony and Commissioner Mozelle Thompson. I'm also pleased that Pamela Eakes, who led the very innovative group, Mothers Against Violence in America, has worked with us on this event as she has on past events that are also part of our efforts to try to create ways in which every American can take his or her part in doing whatever we can against youth violence.

As a nation, we've reacted to the shootings at Columbine High School like almost no other event I can remember in recent memory. It has literally pierced the heart of America. Yet, in my conversations with young people and parents over the past few weeks, I've heard less talk about people feeling helpless or hopeless and more about a growing consensus that finger-pointing doesn't lead to solutions and that we have to move forward together to take steps to end the violence, not only in our schools, but in our broader community. And that it is time -- some might say past time -- that we all play a role in making a positive difference in the lives of our children.

I want to thank the Attorney General and the Chair of the FTC for joining us today, as well as the many parents, educators, religious leaders, members of the media and students who are here as well. I'm pleased that we will be hearing from a 4th grader this morning who will tell us how he became part of the solution in his home state of Washington.

I think all of us recognize that there is no single answer or solution to the problem of violence in our society, but that we must move on many fronts -- from passing common-sense gun control efforts to helping parents understand better how to exercise authority over the media that their children are exposed to, and enabling more parents to spend more time with their own children.

We've come together to talk about some of the ways we can begin to reverse the culture of violence that is engulfing American children every day, particularly the role that the media plays in shaping the lives and values of our children and young people.

In 1972, a Surgeon General report said, and I quote: "We know that

children imitate and learn from everything they see -- parents, fellow children, school, the media. It would be extraordinary, indeed, if they did not imitate and learn from what they see on television."

The report went on to say that violence on television causes children either to mimic directly the actions they see or to act generally in a more aggressive way. Yet, today, more than 25 years after this report was written, our culture is even more saturated with TV programs, movies and songs that romanticize and glorify violence. What kind of values are we promoting when a child can walk into a store and find video games where you win based on how many people you can kill or how many places you can blow up.

We can no longer ignore the well-documented connection between violence in the media and the effects that it has on children's behavior. One study has found, for example, that if an actor is rewarded for violent behavior, children are more likely to imitate it. Another tells us that media violence has a particularly negative effect on children who already have a tendency toward aggressive or antisocial behavior.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, viewers of violence not only become desensitized and fearful, they begin to identify with an aggressive solution to their own personal problems. America's culture of violence is having a profound effect on our children, and we have to resolve to do all we can to change that culture.

One of the ways we can do that is to give parents the tools they need to control what their own children are exposed to. And we've already moved forward in that direction. Today's announcement is another important step in the fight against violence. We know there is a lot of work to be done. But I'm encouraged that so many leaders and citizens are coming together and talking honestly not only about the challenges we face, but what we have to do, together, to meet those challenges.

I'm particularly heartened that as a result of the meeting the President convened at the White House a few weeks ago, there was general agreement from a broad cross-section of Americans that we would launch a national grass roots campaign to prevent youth violence. We would model the campaign on successful national efforts like Mothers Against Drunk Driving, which showed us that we can change the culture when enough people from all walks of life say enough is enough. So I look forward to seeing everyone working together on this new nationwide effort to prevent youth violence.

Now, I'd like to introduce someone who cares deeply about the future of our children and who has fought tirelessly to create safe schools and communities. Our Attorney General, Janet Reno. (Applause.)

* * * * *

THE PRESIDENT: Give him another hand. He was great. Bravo. (Applause.) Thank you.

When I was listening to Arthur speak, I didn't know whether to offer him a job as a White House speechwriter -- (laughter) -- or just wait for the opportunity to vote for him someday. Let me say -- (applause) -- thank you very much. Thank you.

And we thank your mother for bringing you here, and congratulations. (Applause.) And Representative Mary Lou Dickerson, thank you; and Pam Eakes, founder of Mothers Against Violence in America, thank you.

I thank the Attorney General, and Chairman Pitofsky, for their remarks and their commitment. I thank Mayor Corradini, Mayor Kaine, County Executive Curry and County Executive Dutch Ruppersburger for the interest that our local government leaders have. I thank Representative Sheila Jackson Lee for her passionate commitment to this issue. And, all of you, welcome to the White House.

And most of all, I want to say again how much I appreciate Arthur Sawe for coming here, and for sharing a child's perspective. We have other children in this audience today, and we are really here about them, and their future.

As Hillary said, the tragedy at Littleton had a profound effect on America. It certainly had a profound effect on us, and on our family -- particularly after we had the chance to go to Colorado and visit with the families of the children who were killed, and many of the young children who are still grievously wounded -- and the kids at the school with them, who are hurting still, and the teachers.

I do think that what Hillary said is right: we sense a determination, not only in that community but throughout our country, not just to grieve about this, but to do something about it. The national grassroots campaign against violence against children is rooted in our faith that we can do better.

We know we can prevent more youth violence if we work together, across all the lines that divide us. We know we can do it if we're all willing to assume responsibility, and stop trying to assign blame. Of course, the responsibility begins at home. It must be reinforced and supported at schools and houses of worship in the community as a whole. Those of us in public service must also do our part. There is broad and growing consensus for us to do more.

Let me say I am also very grateful that the gun manufacturers came here last month and voiced their support for common-sense restrictions to make it more difficult for guns to get into the hands of children and criminals. I'm encouraged that the Senate acted to close the deadly gun show loophole, to require safety locks to be sold with every handgun, to ban the importation of large-capacity ammunition clips, and ban violent juveniles from owning guns as adults. I hope the House of Representatives will pass these common-sense measures as soon as they return from the Memorial Day recess. (Applause.) We have a lot to do this year, but this should be put at the top of the agenda, and not put on hold.

As you have already heard, members of the entertainment industry must also do their part. They, and the rest of us, cannot kid ourselves. Our children are being fed a dependable daily dose of violence -- and it sells. Now, 30 years of studies have shown that this desensitizes our children to violence, and to the consequences of it.

We now know that by the time the typical American child reaches the age of 18, he or she has seen 200,000 dramatized acts of violence, and 40,000 dramatized murders. Kids become attracted to it, and more numb to its consequences. As their exposure to violence grows, so, in some deeply troubling cases of particularly vulnerable children, does the taste for it. We should not be surprised that half the video games a typical seventh-grader plays are violent.

Anyone who doubts the impact of the cultural assault can look at what now, over 30 years, amounts to somewhere over 300 studies, all of whom show that there is a link between sustained exposure, hour after hour, day after day, week after week, year after year, to violent entertainment and violent behavior.

What the studies say, quite simply, is that the boundary between fantasy and reality violence, which is a clear line for most adults, can become very blurred for vulnerable children. Kids steeped in the culture of violence do become desensitized to it and more capable of committing it themselves.

That is why I have strongly urged people in the entertainment industry to consider the consequences of what they create and how they advertise it. One can value the First Amendment right to free speech and at the same time care for and act with restraint. Our administration has worked to give parents more tools to protect their kids, to block violent programming from entering their living room with the V-chip and the rating system. We've made progress on parental screening for Internet and ratings for Internet game sites.

Still, when violent entertainment made for adults is marketed to children, it undermines the rating system designed to protect them. And if you look at some of these ads, it's hard to argue with a straight face that the games were made for adults in the first place. Like the one Arthur mentioned.

Advertisements have a particular role here. They have the power to egg children on and lure them in. Every parent knows what response a commercial for sugar cereal or the latest Star Wars toy will get from their children. People advertise because it works. They want that product and, one way or the other, they're determined to get it. So we ought to think twice about the impact of ads for so-called "first person shooter video games," like the recent ad for a game that invites players to -- and I quote -- "get in touch with your gun-toting, cold-blooded murdering side."

I was given -- today, Arthur brought me the magazine with the ad that he mentioned, and he was kind enough to mark it for me. There really is a gun here. It says: More fun than shooting your neighbor's cat. I was given another ad that says: What kind of psycho drives a school bus into a war zone? And here's a school bus, heavily armed. This came out right after the incident in Springfield, Oregon.

Here's an ad that turns the argument I just made on its head: Psychiatrists say it's important to feel something when you kill. And then it goes on to say, you ought to get this technology because it bumps and you feel it. It says: Every sensation, every vibration, every mutilation, nine programmable weapons buttons. Customizable feedback software. Push the stick that pushes back and feel your pain. And here's one that's the most unbelievable of all. It says: Kill your friends guilt-free.

Now, obviously, Arthur has the inner strength and the good upbringing to reject that kind of violent appeal. Most of our children do. But not all of our children do. We cannot be surprised when this kind of thing has an impact on our most vulnerable children. Is it 100 percent to blame? No. It's easier to get guns in this society. Parents on average spend 22 hours a week less with their children than they did 30 years ago because of the demands of work and commuting, the busyness of daily life.

But when you put it all together, there are bound to be explosive negative consequences. That's why today I am asking the Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission to study the extent to which the video game, music and movie markets do actually market violence to children, and whether those industries are abiding by their own voluntary systems of regulations.

To any company that sells violent products, I say, children are

more than consumers. I understand nobody made anybody buy any of this stuff. But every day, a responsible society declines to do some things for short-term gain that it can do. And that is what we have to think about. These children are our future, our most precious resource. Raising them is any society's most important job.

Don't make young people want what your own rating systems say they shouldn't have. I might say again, as has already been acknowledged, they shouldn't have. I might say again, as has already been acknowledged, many, many people in the entertainment industry have worked with us on this -- on the ratings system, on the V-chip, on the screening technology for the Internet.

I noticed one network executive, a few days ago, actually cancelled a program because its violent content was inappropriate, and I applaud that. But I also read with concern the news that some of the new programming coming up for this fall on some networks will be even more violent than last year's. The time has come to show some restraint, even if it has a short-term impact on the bottom line.

I also want to challenge the owners of movie theaters and video stores, distributors -- anyone at any point of sale -- enforce the rating systems on the products that you sell. Check the IDs, draw the line. If underage children are buying violent video games or getting into R-rated movies, the rating system should be enforced to put a stop to it. (Applause.)

And if, as many of us suspect, there is still too much gratuitous violence in PG-13-rated movies, the rating systems themselves should be re-evaluated.

I want to thank Senators Brownback, Lieberman, Hatch and Kohl, for the bipartisan work they have done on this issue. Again, I want to commend State Representative Mary Lou Dickerson from Washington, who read about young Arthur, helped to create a task force on video game violence, and thanks to her work with Pam and the Mothers Against Violence in America and the Washington Retailers' Association -- who are all represented here today -- video game retailers in Washington state now voluntarily sign a pledge to parents, committing themselves to check IDs and block sales of violent games to minors. That's something that ought to happen in every state in the United States of America. (Applause.)

Again I say, we can do something about this. It will take a grass roots campaign. It will take everybody doing his or her part. This is a problem we face together, a problem America can solve together. There is no more urgent task for our future.

You were all looking at this young man speaking today, thinking, what a wonderful thing that a person that young could speak so clearly, so confidently, about things that are so right. You look around at the other young people here today who are involved in this effort in some way or another, and you thank God that we have this legacy of children.

A lot of those kids that haven't made it through all these school violence incidents were just as good, just as fine, had just as much to give the world. We've got to quit fooling around with this. We've got a chance. Our hearts are open, our ears are open, are heads are thinking.

I know this stuff sells. But that doesn't make it right.

Thank you, and God bless you. (Applause.)

12:16 P.M. EDT

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 1, 1999

TEXT OF A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT TO
THE ATTORNEY GENERAL AND CHAIR OF
THE FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION

June 1, 1999

Dear Madam Attorney General: (Dear Mr. Chairman:)

New technologies have enabled us to learn, work, and grow in ways that were unimaginable just a few years ago, and modern media has brought culture, entertainment, and education to a wider audience than ever before. With this great power, there also comes an enormous responsibility to ensure that parents have the tools they need so that the movies children watch, the music they listen to, and the video games they play reflect the values that parents want to pass on to their children.

Too often today children are exposed to images that glamorize violence and desensitize children to it. Numerous studies have shown that this kind of violent programming can promote violent tendencies in children. Media violence increases children's aggression towards others and promotes the development of a sense of callousness towards violence. And such programming can have a particularly negative effect on children who are already vulnerable.

My Administration has worked hard to give parents the information they need to make the right choices for their children. My Administration has brought about a breakthrough agreement by the television industry to create a content-based voluntary ratings system that informs viewers of the appropriateness of the programs they watch. Along with the V-Chip, this rating system will enable parents to choose the programs their children watch, and allow them to better control the images to which their children are exposed.

Today, the motion picture, recording, and video game industries also use content-based ratings to improve the choices parents have. If, however, these industries market violent or other inappropriate materials, rated for adults, to children, then they undermine the effective functioning of the ratings systems. And the industries make it harder for parents to control the movies, music, and games to which their children are exposed.

Therefore, I am requesting that the Federal Trade Commission and the Department of Justice to conduct a study on the marketing practices of the motion picture, recording, and video game industries with regard to material rated for adults to determine whether and to what extent these industries market such material to children. Among other matters, the study should examine whether such violent material rated for adults is advertised or promoted in media outlets in which minors comprise a substantial percentage of the audience. The study also should examine whether these advertisements are intended to and in fact attract underage audiences.

As a result of this study, we will learn more about how violence is marketed to our children. I thank you for your efforts in this area and your attention to this project.

Sincerely,

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

June 1, 1999

PRESIDENT CLINTON ANNOUNCES NEW STUDY TO EXAMINE
THE MARKETING OF VIOLENT MEDIA TO CHILDREN

June 1, 1999

Today the President, as part of his continuing efforts to reduce youth violence, will announce that the Federal Trade Commission and the Department of Justice will conduct a joint study of the marketing practices of entertainment industries to determine whether these industries are marketing to children violent and other material that is rated for adults. Also today, the President, joined by the First Lady, will challenge retailers to enforce age restrictions on adult-oriented media, so that inappropriate material is kept out of the hands of children.

Helping Parents to Make the Right Choices for Their Children. Numerous studies have shown that violent programming increases children's aggression toward others and desensitizes them to violence. If, and to the extent that, the video game, movie, and recording industries market to children violent and other materials that are rated for adults, they undermine current content-based ratings systems. This would also make it harder for parents to control the movies, music and games their children see, and would increase the likelihood of children being exposed to inappropriate materials. The study will examine: whether and how the video game, motion picture, and recording industries market to children violent and other material rated for adults; whether sectors of these industries advertise violent material rated for adults in media outlets in which children comprise a substantial percentage of the audience; whether they otherwise use marketing practices designed to attract children to violent material; whether these industries have adopted procedures restricting the sale of products rated for adults to children; and the extent to which these procedures are effective in ensuring that children do not have access to adult-oriented material.

Challenging Entertainment Industry Distributors to Enforce Ratings. A key to shielding children from exposure to excessively violent media is to halt their access to these products at the point of sale. Too many children can purchase or rent violent video games and films intended for adults from retailers who do not check identifications. In fact, according to a study conducted last year, only nine percent of retail stores that rent video games refused to rent to minors games that are rated as suitable only for adults. As part of an effort to address this issue, the Washington State Retail Association and the Interactive Digital Software Association are working together to create a point-of-sale system that will notify and remind clerks to ask for identification from buyers. Today, the President will challenge the nation's retailers today to follow the lead of those in Washington State and enforce the ratings systems when they sell or rent any adult-rated material to children.

Advancing an Agenda to Address Youth Violence. The President is launching a national campaign on youth violence to comprehensively address the causes. This effort will involve community and religious leaders, the gun and entertainment industries, educators, parents, and young people. As the President announced at last month's White House Strategy Session on Children, Violence, and Responsibility, this campaign will be modeled on the highly successful Welfare to Work

Partnership and the National Campaign to Reduce Teen Pregnancy. The campaign will call on all sectors of society to take responsibility for reducing youth violence and will disseminate efforts that are working throughout the nation.

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**IMAGES OF YOUTH:
A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF ADOLESCENTS
IN PRIME-TIME ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAMMING**

**Prepared for the W.T. Grant Foundation
And the Frameworks Institute**

By

**Katharine E. Heintz-Knowles, Ph.D.
Children's Media Research and Consulting**

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April 9, 2000

INTRODUCTION

Television is a cultural storyteller. It's programming both reflects the values and ideals of American society as well as shapes the attitudes and beliefs of those who watch it. Heavy TV viewers tend to believe that the representations on TV programming reflect the state of the world outside TV, and thus develop perceptions about our world based on TV information. Through patterns of inclusion and exclusion, television content sends implicit messages about the relative cultural importance of different groups, behaviors, and ideologies (Clark, 1972; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli, 1994).

Underrepresentation and negative portrayals of different groups on TV can influence the self-concepts and images of viewers from these groups. Further, such portrayals can influence the attitudes and belief about such groups among members of the general public. Even when viewers recognize that the content they are viewing is fictional, its messages and images gradually shape expectations and beliefs about the real world (Huston et. al., 1992).

Cultivation hypothesis, developed by Gerbner and his colleagues to explain the effect of violent content on audiences, provides a conceptual framework for the study of television content, and in this case, specifically content related to adolescent issues. The hypothesis posits that heavy viewers of television cultivate perceptions about the "real world" that are based on the television "world" they see. In other words, heavy viewers are more likely to believe that television content imitates and represents the world at large (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli, 1981).

The crux of the cultivation hypothesis is that television is ubiquitous, and the types of messages are relatively similar and frequently repeated, regardless of program type. Similar stories and situations get played out over and over, and the repetition of these messages leads to accumulative effects in audiences. Cultivation effects do not occur immediately or with one television program; they are the result of long-term and heavy viewing. Jefferes (1997) explains: "Like the steady drip of a faucet, measurable effects at any one moment may be small, but they accumulate over time." (p. 87)

Since the introduction of the cultivation hypothesis to the field of mass media effects, modifications have been introduced to address the potential effects of long-term, heavy viewing of specific program types. For example, the cultivation hypothesis informed studies on the impact of adolescent viewing of talk shows (Davis and Mares, 1998) and soap operas (Buerkel-Rothfuss and Mayes, 1981). Cumulative effects of viewing were manifested in stereotypical views of gender roles, fear of violence, and overestimating adulterous affairs.

TV has also been shown to be a powerful source of behavioral models. *Cognitive social learning theory*, developed by psychologist Albert Bandura (1986), proposes that social behavior is determined by a combination of mental and physical abilities and desires. We learn new behaviors through observing others perform them. The consequences we observe others receiving influence our willingness to perform the behavior ourselves. Television characters - and the actors who play them - are often taken as role models by viewers, young and old alike. Numerous studies document the influence of television viewing on the aggressive behavior of children and adolescents (see Josephson, 1996 for a review). Conversely, there is substantial evidence that television characters are effective models of prosocial behavior (see Johnston & Ettema, 1986 for a review). Television characters who are attractive, successful, and of high status are more likely to be imitated than those who are unattractive, unsuccessful, or ridiculed (Bandura, 1994).

Because of the dual role of TV as a reflection and an influence, it is critical to assess the messages sent incessantly into American homes. Prime-time broadcast entertainment programming reaches approximately 100 million Americans each night (Nielsen Media Research, 1998).

Television's Depiction of Adolescents

Little research has been conducted looking specifically at the representation of adolescents in television entertainment programming. However, prior research on the depiction of children (usually defined as up to age 18) on television offers some important insights. A study analyzing the representation of children and adolescents in television programming from 1969-1985 discovered that these characters were presented in limiting roles that often served to enhance adult roles rather than present children in a favorable way (Signorielli, 1987). The author reported that adolescents were frequently shown as victims of violence and that adolescent males were often shown as perpetrators of violence. Younger adolescents were most often shown in the context of family life, while this was less common for older adolescents. Finally, the author noted that the rare instances of drug use in prime time programming was most likely to be committed by older adolescents than characters of any other age.

A 1995 study of children and teenagers in prime time and Saturday morning programming discovered that these characters were motivated most often by peer relationships and romance, and least often by school-related or religious issues (Heintz-Knowles, 1995). The study further reported that entertainment television almost never showed children grappling with important issues. On commercial broadcast networks, a majority of the child characters engaged in anti-social behaviors, and those behaviors often yielded positive results for the characters.

In a 1999 article for *TV Guide*, psychologist William Pollack wrote of the lack of positive male role models on TV. Two studies commissioned by Children Now (1997 and 1999) examined characters in media content popular with adolescents and found that males consistently outnumber females, that non-whites are underrepresented, and that both sexes are often shown in stereotypical roles (Signorielli, 1997; Heintz-Knowles, 1999).

This study attempts to further the analysis of the representation of the world of prime-time entertainment by focusing specifically on the youth characters who inhabit that world. This report presents new information about the ways that adolescent characters are shown in prime-time entertainment programs viewed by both children and adults in the U.S. and around the globe.

METHODOLOGY

One episode of each prime-time ¹entertainment series² aired during Fall 1999 on the six broadcast networks³ was examined for its representation of youth characters⁴. Three first-run episodes of each series were recorded between September 20 – November 21, 1999. One episode of each series was randomly selected for inclusion in the sample. All selected episodes were screened for inclusion of youth characters in primary, secondary, or background roles. Episodes containing youth characters were retained for further analysis. See Appendix A for a complete list of series containing adolescent characters.

Each episode containing youth characters was subject to two levels of analysis:

- *Macro-level analysis*: Coders examined program-level characteristics such as genre, network, racial diversity among the cast, and youth-oriented themes.
- *Micro-level analysis*: Coders identified all youth characters who played primary or secondary roles.⁵ These characters were coded for such features as gender, race, role status, primary problem, activities, and opinions expressed about youth-oriented issues.

All content was coded by the author and two trained coders.⁶ To ensure reliability among coders, a portion of the sample was coded by each of the coders independently. The percent of agreement between coders was calculated. All variables included in this analysis received a level of agreement of at least 90%.

¹ Prime time is defined as: Monday – Saturday, 8p.m. – 11 p.m. P.S.T. and Sunday, 7 p.m. – 11 p.m. P.S.T.

² This study included only scripted, fictional entertainment programs in series format. The sample did not include any news or news magazine programs, reality programs, game shows, specials, made-for-TV movies, or sports.

³ Broadcast networks: ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, WB, UPN.

⁴ For the purposes of this study, youth was defined as approximately between the ages of 13 and 21.

⁵ Both recurring (regular) and non-recurring (guest) characters were included for analysis.

⁶ Thanks to Jennifer Henderson, M.A. and Meredith Li-Vollmer, M.A. for their assistance in coding and data entry for this project.

DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE

This sampling method yielded 92 total program episodes across the six networks. Just under half of those episodes contained youth characters (n=45, 49%). Table 1 shows the overall distribution of programs by network, and the distribution of episodes containing youth characters by network.

TABLE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE PROGRAMS BY NETWORK

Network	All programs sampled		Programs Containing Youth Characters	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
ABC	16	17	9	20
CBS	17	19	6	13
NBC	21	23	8	18
FOX	14	15	10	22
WB	14	15	9	20
UPN	10	11	3	7
Total	92	100	45	100

Overall, 163 youth characters were identified as playing either primary or secondary roles in the episodes examined.

KEY FINDINGS

- Youth characters appear in about ½ of all prime-time entertainment programs, and are featured characters in nearly 6 out of 10 of those.
- TV youth do not reflect the demographics of U.S. youth. TV youth are slightly more likely to be female, and are overwhelmingly white.
- TV youth are most often shown dealing with problems relating to romantic relationships, friendships/popularity, and family issues.
- In programs with a primarily youth cast, adolescents are often shown as capable of solving their own problems without adult help.
- In programs with a primarily adult cast, youth characters often act as catalysts creating problems adults must fix.
- TV parents are most often shown as absent or ineffective, although some programs feature supportive and effective parent characters.
- The most common activity identified for youth characters is socializing – at school and elsewhere.
- Drugs and alcohol were not shown as part of the everyday world of most of the youth characters.
- Youth-oriented issues discussed most frequently by youth and adult characters were: parent-teen relationships, romantic relationships, doing well in school, and social pressure/popularity.
- When discussing youth, adult characters most often use terminology that sets adolescents apart as young and childlike.

RESULTS

Youth characters are included in about one-half of all prime time network programs. Of the ninety-two programs sampled, just under ½ (n=45, 49%) contained any depictions of youth. However, in programs with youth representation, nearly six in ten featured youth characters in primary recurring roles (n=26).

Over ½ of the programs with youth characters featured high school aged youth (n=24, 53%). Ten programs (22%) featured college aged youth characters. Less than one-fifth featured middle school aged youth (n=7, 16%).

TABLE 2
ROLE STATUS OF YOUTH CHARACTERS⁷
IN PRIME-TIME ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAMS

Character Role Status	Frequency	Percent of Youth Characters
Primary Recurring	92	56
Primary Non-Recurring	2	1
Secondary Recurring	34	21
Secondary Non-Recurring	35	22

One hundred sixty three youth characters were featured across the broadcast dial, with the highest concentration of primary youth characters on the WB and Fox networks. The WB aired eight programs featuring a total of 39 youth characters in primary recurring roles. Fox aired eight programs featuring 22 primary recurring youth characters.

TABLE 3
NETWORK REPRESENTATION OF YOUTH CHARACTERS
IN PRIME-TIME ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAMS

Network	Total Youth Characters		Primary Recurring Youth Characters	
	Number	Percent of All Youth Characters	Number	Percent of Primary Recurring Youth
ABC	27	17	17	19
CBS	4	2	1	1
NBC	23	14	7	8
FOX	41	25	22	24
WB	57	35	39	42
UPN	11	7	6	7
Total	163	100	92	100

Sixty percent of youth characters appeared in dramatic programming (n=98); forty percent appeared in situation comedies (n=65).

⁷ Role Status Definitions:

Primary Recurring: Characters who are central to the story line, appear weekly, and are included in the opening cast credits

Primary Non-Recurring: Characters who are central to the story line but who do not appear weekly

Secondary Recurring: Characters who are peripheral to the main story line, appear weekly, and do not appear in the opening cast credits

Secondary Non-recurring: Characters who are peripheral to the main story line, do not appear weekly

TV Youth Don't Reflect the Demographics of the U.S. Youth Population.

While the teen population of the U.S. is slightly more male and much more ethnically diverse than the general population (Adgate, 1999), TV youth are evenly split on gender lines and overwhelmingly white. African Americans make up the second largest racial group on TV; other non-white groups make up just 5% of the sample. Despite their low frequency of representation, African American youths are as likely as white youths to play primary roles.

TABLE 4
RACE OF YOUTH CHARACTERS BY ROLE STATUS
IN PRIME-TIME ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAMS

Race	Primary Recurring		Primary Non-Recurring		Secondary Recurring		Secondary Non-Recurring		Total	
	N	%*	N	%*	N	%*	N	%*	N	%**
White	78	57	1	1	28	21	29	21	136	83
African American	10	53	1	5	3	16	5	26	19	12
Asian American					2	100			2	1
Hispanic/Latino	3	60			1	20	1	20	5	3
Other	1	100							1	1

*In these columns, figures indicate percent of each racial group

**In this column, figures indicate percent of total sample

Not surprisingly, more than half of the programs in the sample (n=23, 51%) contain all white youth casts. Just three programs (7%) were identified as having an even distribution of white and non-white youth characters (*Law and Order*, *Sabrina The Teenaged Witch*, *Steve Harvey*).

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

TV youth are most often shown dealing with problems relating to romantic relationships, friendships/popularity, and family issues.

Coders identified the major problem or conflict for each youth character in the sample. None of the characters were shown to be primarily concerned with issues outside of their immediate experience. In the sample, there was not a single instance of a youth character involved in a conflict or problem that was societal in nature (i.e. homelessness, poverty, environmental concerns).

Interpersonal relationships accounted for the primary problem areas for ½ of all youth characters, and for 55% of all primary recurring youth characters: romances, friendships, family relationships. There were no significant differences by gender in the experience of these types of problems.

For example:

Romance/Dating as Problem: *Dawson's Creek (WB)*

Pacey and Andie, both high school juniors, break off their romance after Andie reveals she lost her virginity while away during the summer.

Friendship/Popularity as Problem: *Freaks and Geeks (NBC)*

When her parents go out of town for the weekend, Lindsay, a high school junior, throws a keg party. She believes that the party will gain her acceptance into a group she wishes to join, but finds that she has to compromise many of her values to fit in with this group.

Family Relationships as Problem: *Mission Hill (WB)*

Kevin, a high school senior, moves in with his single older brother after their parents move out of state. The brothers' different life styles cause conflict, but they learn to find common ground.

TABLE 5
PRIMARY PROBLEM AREAS
FOR YOUTH CHARACTERS
IN PRIME-TIME ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAMS

Problem Area	Total Youth Characters		Primary Youth Characters	
	Number	Percent of All Youth Characters	Number	Percent of Primary Youth
Friendships/Popularity	36	22	23	25
Romance/Dating	27	17	15	16
Family	20	12	14	15
Violence	7	4	-	-
Sex	9	6	4	4
Education	5	3	3	3
Personal Safety	4	2	3	3
Work	3	2	3	3
Substance Use/Abuse	2	1	-	-
Personal Health	2	1	1	1
Other	18	11	1	16
No problem	30	18	13	14
Total	163	100	94	100

The other half of the youth characters dealt with a variety of problem areas, or had no problem at all. Interestingly, violence and drugs – two headline-making youth oriented issues – accounted for a very small percentage of the problems concerning the youth in this sample. Just four percent of youth characters (n=7) were involved in story lines where violence was their central conflict (two characters were featured as victims of violence, and five were shown as perpetrators) and only one percent (n=2) of the characters had primary problems involving drug or alcohol use or abuse. For example:

Violence as Victim Primary Problem: *E.R. (NBC)*

Reggie, a high school “punk,” is treated at the E.R. for facial cuts received when he was beaten up at school. He tells the attending physicians about numerous beatings he has received because of how he looks.

Violence as Perpetrator Primary Problem: *The Practice (ABC)*

Teen-aged Steven murdered a woman with whom his father was having an affair. His father is convicted of the crime. Steven becomes distraught when he is confronted by lawyers who suspect he was the murderer, and he hangs himself in the family garage.

Substance Abuse as Primary Problem: *Third Watch (CBS)*

Sunny, a teen-aged addict, is the victim of a drug overdose. The paramedics respond to her friends’ call to 911 and take her to the hospital for treatment.

Nearly one in five youth characters (n=30, 18%) had no functional importance to the episodes’ story lines, and were coded as having “no problem.” These characters were most often in supporting roles, although nearly ½ of the characters identified as having no problem were primary recurring youth characters (n=13). The following examples illustrate how characters could be identified as having “no problem.”

Secondary Character with No Identifiable Problem:

Beverly Hills, 90210 (Fox)

Teen pop star Christina Aguilera, makes a cameo appearance, singing at the local hang-out. Her appearance is not integral to the plot.

Primary Character with No Identifiable Problem:

The Practice (ABC)

Lucy, a teen-aged receptionist at a Boston law firm, is shown answering phones and filing papers but does not impact on the story line of the episode.

Problem Solving

Youth characters' primary problems were solved to their satisfaction about half of the time (n=85, 52%). The other half of the time, the problems were either solved in a manner counter to the character's desire (i.e. a relationship ends after the youth character worked to save it) or were unresolved at the end of the episode (i.e. episode ends with parent and child stuck in a stalemate over an issue).

In programs with a primarily youth cast, adolescents are often shown as capable of solving their own problems without adult help.

In nearly 80% of the cases when a youth character achieved a successful resolution to his/her problem, it was a result of a collective effort (n=66, 78%). In just 21% of cases, youth characters worked alone on problem solving (n=17). Who got enlisted for help in problem solving depended on the type of problem.

When youth characters work on a primary problem relating to friendships/popularity, they successfully solve the problem on their own nearly half the time (n=11, 46% of successful resolutions). When they enlist the help of others, it is ten times more likely to be a peer (n=10) than a parent (n=1), and five times more likely to be a peer than a teacher (n=2). For example:

Friendship problem solved with help from peers: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer (WB)*

Xander's primary problem in this episode is helping his friend Buffy feel confident about her vampire slaying abilities. When Buffy is abducted by a pack of vampires, Xander enlists the help of friends Willow and Oz to find Buffy and help her slay the vampires.

When youth characters work on a primary problem relating to romance, however, they enlist help from a wider range of problem solvers. Youth characters solve their problems on their own in nearly 40% of the cases (n=5, 39%). When they do engage in collective problem solving, they are almost equally likely to enlist the help of their parents (n=2), peers (n=3), other adults (n=2), or teachers (n=1). For example:

Romance problem solved with help from adults:

Ally McBeal (Fox)

Kirby, a high school freshman, has a crush on Kimberly, a popular senior. He kisses Kimberly in the crowded cafeteria. Kimberly becomes so embarrassed by being kissed by "a geek" that she sues Kirby for sexual harassment. Kirby's lawyers convince Kimberly and her parents that Kirby meant no harm. The lawsuit against Kirby is dropped.

Not surprisingly, when youth characters experience conflict with family members (n=20), their successful resolutions often result when the youth and parents work together. Approximately 2/3 of family problems are solved to the youth's satisfaction, and more than half of those (n=7, 54%) are resolved with the parent and adolescent working together. Youth characters also enlist the help of peers (n=2) and other adults (n=2) when tackling family problems.

For example:

Family problem solved with help from parents:

Ladies' Man (CBS)

Teen-aged Tara lives with her father and his new wife, who is pregnant. She feels unwanted, and shoplifts to get attention. Her mother, father, and stepmother all work together to assure her that she is loved and wanted.

Youth Concern with the Problems of Others

Although most of the youth characters in the sample were concerned solely with problems impacting on themselves, one in five (n=34, 21%) of the youth characters showed concern about the problems of others. These youth were shown as compassionate and willing to help out friends and family members.

For example:

Youth characters showing concern about others:

Oh, Grow Up (ABC): Teen-aged Chloe visits her father at the house he shares with two other men. XXX, a roommate, tells Chloe about a lost love and she helps him locate a current phone number for the woman so he can make contact again.

Felicity (WB): College sophomore Ben is hurt by the break-up of his romance with Felicity. His former girlfriend, Julie, comforts him.

YOUTH AND THEIR PARENTS

TV parents are most often shown as absent or ineffective, although some programs feature supportive and effective parent characters.

Many TV youth characters exist in a world void of parental involvement. In some cases, the parental absence is a plot device. In other cases, parents are simply not shown. This occurs most often when the focus of action is outside the family arena (i.e. at school or work) or when youth are not the central characters.

In several programs, the parents take a trip, leaving the children behind. In some cases the youth are left with another relative or friend. In other cases, the youth are left unsupervised. For example:

Youth left unsupervised in parents' absence:

Freaks and Geeks (NBC)

High schoolers Lindsay and Sam are left alone when their parents go out of town for the weekend.

Beverly Hills, 90210 (Fox)

Lucy, a high school graduate, is left alone in a luxury hotel in Beverly Hills while her parents vacation in Europe.

Popular (WB)

Samantha and Brooke, both high school sophomores, are left alone in their respective homes while their parents go on a cruise.

Youth left in the care of a relative or friend in parents' absence:

Charmed (WB)

Teen-aged Jenny is left with her uncle in San Francisco for several months while her parents work out of the country.

Mission Hill (WB)

After their parents move to another state, Kevin moves in to his older brother's apartment to finish out his senior year of high school.

In some cases, the parents' absence is due to death or incarceration:

Party of Five (Fox)

The Salingers' parents died in a car accident, leaving the five children to take care of themselves.

Dawson's Creek (WB)

Joey, a high school senior, lives with her older sister. Joey's mother died long ago, and her father is serving a jail sentence for drug dealing.

In programs where youth are not the central characters, we often don't know about the family relationships of the youth characters. For example:

Veronica's Closet (NBC)

Olive volunteers to read to a Jason, a blind youth. The only times we see Jason are during the reading sessions at the Braille Institute office.

Steve Harvey (WB)

Steve is a high school teacher who interacts with a number of students during the school day. The students' home lives are neither shown nor discussed.

When parents are involved in their children's lives, they are about as likely to be shown as effective as ineffective. In some instances, parents are identified as the root of youth characters' problems. In other cases, while they may not be the cause of their children's problems, they are shown as ineffective or uninvolved in their children's lives.

Parents Shown as Cause of Youth Problems:

Family Guy (Fox)

When their family inherits a mansion from a wealthy relative, Megan and Chris' father sells their belongings to afford a staff of servants. Megan, Chris, and their father become upper class snobs until their mother sells the mansion and buys back their old house.

Safe Harbor (WB)

Teen-aged Jamie runs away from her wealthy family because she fears sexual abuse from her father.

Family Law (CBS)

Recovering drug addict, Holly Reynolds, attempts to regain custody of her children. Her adolescent son doesn't believe his mother is better or that she loves him, and convinces his mom to give up her parental rights so he can stay with his foster parents.

Parents Shown as Uninvolved or Ineffective***Roswell (WB)***

Liz, a high schooler, is shot when a fight breaks out in the diner where she works. Although the incident is the subject of a major investigation, her single father is shown only once checking on her health, and is not present while she is interviewed by the sheriff.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer (WB)

Buffy starts college and feels overwhelmed by the new pressures facing her. She goes to see her mother for support, but her mother is busy making a storage area out of Buffy's old room and isn't responsive to Buffy's needs.

Parents are also shown as effective and compassionate, although with much less frequency than they are shown as absent, unavailable, or ineffective. For example:

Odd Man Out (ABC)

When teen-aged Andrew creates a romantic problem for himself, his mother offers support and encouragement but refuses to step in and fix the problem for him.

Seventh Heaven (WB)

While Rev. Camden recovers from a heart attack, his wife is shown doing a variety of parenting duties: helping with homework, discussing future career goals, and providing moral support.

Once and Again (ABC)

When teen-aged Eli has concerns about sex, he asks his father for advice. Eli's father listens and offers serious advice.

YOUTH ACTIVITIES

Coders identified the frequency with which youth characters engaged in a predetermined set of activities. For each character, coders determined whether the activity was a primary activity (performed in more than ½ of the character's screen time), a secondary activity (performed in less than ½ of the character's screen time), or not performed. Table 6 shows the activity participation for youth characters by gender of character.

TABLE 6
ACTIVITY PARTICIPATION
BY GENDER OF YOUTH CHARACTER
IN PRIME-TIME ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAMMING

Activity	Performed by Male Characters (n=82)		Performed by Female Characters (n=81)		Total
	Primary Activity	Secondary Activity	Primary Activity	Secondary Activity	
At School – Socializing	13	25	18	19	75
Doing School work	0	14	7	17	38
“Hanging Out”	22	12	14	16	64
Making Out	2	8	2	9	21
Involved in Extracurricular Activities	5	3	5	6	19
Fighting	2	10	2	2	16
Drinking Alcohol, Using Drugs	3	6	3	3	15
Doing Chores	0	7	0	8	15
Working at Low Wage Employment	2	3	3	7	15
Taking Care of Family Members	1	1	0	3	5
Working as Entrepreneur	0	1	2	1	4
Spending Time With Children (non-relatives)	1	0	0	0	1
Involved in Gang Activity	1	0	0	0	1

Given the emphasis on personal relationships of youth characters, it is not surprising that the most common activity identified for these characters is socializing – both at school and elsewhere.

Eighty-seven youth characters (53%) were shown at school, but they were twice as likely to be shown socializing than engaging in academic work there. Although more than half of the characters in the sample were shown at school, they appeared in just 40% (n=18) of the programs, and clustered in just a handful. More than ½ of all youth characters shown at school appear on just six programs (*Dawson's Creek*, *Freaks and Geeks*, *Get Real*, *Popular*, *Roswell*, *Seventh Heaven*), and depictions of youth doing schoolwork (either at home or school) are concentrated in just three programs (*Felicity*, *Freaks and Geeks*, *Popular*).

The second most common activity – “hanging out” – identifies socializing behavior off school grounds. It is a more widely depicted activity, being shown in more than half of the programs in the sample (n=23, 51%). “Hanging out” most frequently took place at the homes of youth characters, although youth were also seen “hanging out” in a nightclub (*That 70s Show*), the local diner (*Roswell*), a fraternity house (*Ryan Caulfield: Year One*), and a dormitory room (*Moesha*).

Twelve percent of youth characters (10% of males, 14 % of females) participated in some form of school-oriented extracurricular activities. These activities included: practicing for a high school football game (*Popular*, *Dawson's Creek*), cheerleading (*Popular*, *Dawson's Creek*), working on the school newspaper (*Popular*) or yearbook (*Sabrina*, *The Teenaged Witch*), and performing with the school drama club (*Freaks and Geeks*).

Just under ten percent of youth characters (n=15, 9%) were shown doing chores at home or working at low wage employment. Four characters were shown working in entrepreneurial positions. Three of those were musicians and one was XXX. Female youths were shown twice as often as male youths in low wage employment. Youth characters worked at a range of jobs, including waiter/waitress (*Two Guys and a Girl*, *Roswell*), receptionist (*Time of Your Life*, *The Practice*), go-fer (*Moesha*), and police officer (*Ryan Caulfield: Year One*).

Drugs and alcohol were not shown as part of the everyday world of most of the characters.

Although 15 of the characters (9%) were shown drinking alcohol or using illegal drugs, these depictions were concentrated in just five programs. In four of those programs (*Freaks and Geeks*, *Mission Hill*, *Ryan Caulfield: Year One*, *Time of Your Life*), youth characters attended parties and consumed alcohol. Three of the parties took place at the homes of one of the characters and one was held at a fraternity house. One character was shown alone in her hotel room abusing both drugs and alcohol (*Beverly Hills, 90210*).

Fifteen percent of male youth characters (n=12) and five percent of female youth characters (n=4) engaged in some form of fighting. These fights ranged from serious to science fiction to silly. On *Boy Meets World* (ABC), two female youths fight two male youth characters in WWF fashion for the right to rent an apartment they all want. Buffy and her friends in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (WB) fight a pack of vampires who terrorize their college campus. In two instances, alcohol-induced fighting erupts between male youths at parties (*Freaks and Geeks*, *Ryan Caulfield: Year One*). A bully punches a high school freshman in *Get Real* (WB), and two sibling arguments become physical in *Safe Harbor* (WB) and *Mission Hill* (WB).

YOUTH ORIENTED ISSUES

For each program, coders identified if any characters engaged in discussion of youth-oriented issues. For each of the issues discussed, coders identified if youth characters expressed an opinion on the importance of the issue. Coders determined from the discussion if the participating characters perceived the issue as important (eg. "I'm concerned about...") or unimportant (eg. "It's no big deal..."). When no opinion was expressed, characters were coded for their participation in the discussion only. The following examples should help illustrate how issue importance was coded:

Discussion of Social Pressure/Popularity as Important Issue:

Popular (WB)

High school sophomores Nicole and Brooke discuss throwing a party at Brooke's house while her father is away. Brooke expresses reservations until Nicole reminds her of the importance of popularity by saying: "The first party of the year creates the social Siberia and I, for one, do not intend to be left out in the cold." Brooke responds: "You're so right."

Discussion of Sex as Unimportant Issue:

Get Real (WB)

Sixteen-year old Camron has a young woman spend the night with him in his family's home. When his mother objects the next morning, Camron demonstrates his perception of the lack of importance of this issue when he explains: "Mom, I know how hyper you get about kids and sex and stuff like that, so I had Gabby stay over... for you."

Table 7 presents the frequency of issue discussions among adult and youth characters in the sample.

TABLE 7
YOUTH ORIENTED ISSUE DISCUSSION
IN PRIME-TIME ENTERTAINMENT SERIES

Issue	Number of Programs Containing Discussion of the Issue*				
	Discussed by Parents	Discussed by Youth	Discussed by Teachers	Discussed by Other Adults	Total Programs
Family	13	15	1	10	24
Romance	4	17	2	3	18
School	5	7	1	1	11
Social Pressures	1	9	1	3	10
Sex	4	8	1	2	9
College	3	5	-	1	7
Lack of Money	2	4	-	3	6
Declining Morals	4	1	1	3	6
Jobs/Economic opportunity	1	5	1	3	6
Drugs	-	3	2	3	5
Crime	-	5	-	4	5
Personal Health	2	3	-	1	5
School Crime	1	-	1	-	2

* Some programs contained discussion by more than one character type

Youth-oriented issues discussed most frequently by youth and adult characters were: parent-teen relationships, romantic relationships, doing well in school, and social pressure/popularity.

Discussion of issues facing youth in modern society is heavily dependent upon the story lines of program episodes. With substantial emphasis on the immediate social environment of youth characters, it is not surprising that the issues that receive the most frequent and in-depth discussion by characters are those relating to youth romance, social pressures, school, and family.

Family issues were discussed in more than ½ of all programs (n=24, 53%), and were a focal discussion in ten of those episodes. Twenty youths participated in discussions of family issues. They most commonly talked about these issues with their peers (n=11), parents (n=10), siblings (n=7). When youth characters expressed an opinion on the issue, they were overwhelmingly likely to comment on its importance. Ten characters commented that family issues were important to them; just one mentioned the issue's lack of importance. Nine characters engaged in discussion about family issues without expressing an opinion.

Youth romance issues were discussed in 18 programs (40%) and were the topic of a focal discussion 11 times. Thirty-four percent of youth characters (n=56) engaged in discussions of youth romance issues, and were overwhelmingly likely to express the opinion that this was an important issue. Thirty-eight youth characters (68% of those who engaged in discussion of romance issues) opined that this issue was important. Just three characters commented on the issue's lack of importance to them.

Coders identified the characters with whom TV youth discussed personal issues, including romance. When youth characters were involved in discussions of personal issues, their discussion partners were far more likely to be other youth characters than any other type of confidant. Eighty-two percent of youth characters involved in discussions of personal issues spoke with peers (n=65). Just nine percent (n=7) spoke with their parents about these issues.

Youth characters are far more likely than any adult characters to discuss issues relating to youth romance, social pressures, and sex. Conversely, adult characters express more concern than youth characters over issues of declining youth morals and school crime. When youth characters discuss social pressures and sex, they are likely to express the belief that these issues are important to them. TV adolescents are eight times more likely to comment on the importance of the issue of social pressure/popularity (n=16) than to comment on the issue's lack of importance (n=2). Similarly, sexual issues are three times as likely to be described as important than unimportant by TV youth (14 say "important" vs. 5 say "unimportant").

DISCUSSION OF YOUTH

Discussion of adolescence and adolescents in general is relatively rare on entertainment television. Most programs featuring youth characters did not include discussion of a broader social context. Characters discussed particular youth, but rarely did the discussion get raised to a societal or developmental level. However, when youth in general were discussed, a variety of terms were used to refer to this population. Coders identified all instances of reference to youth, including words used to describe youth characters and phrases to describe the plight of youth.

When discussing youth, adult characters most often use terminology that sets adolescents apart as young and childlike.

The most common references used by adult characters identified youth as "kids" (n=12 references) or "girls/boys" (n=11 references), unless these adults were operating within the sphere of law enforcement. Police officers and attorneys referred to youth as "minors" (n=2) and "juveniles" (n=1).

When youth characters talk about youth in general, they use a variety of terms, seemingly recognizing the blurry status that youth assume in U.S. culture. Youth characters refer to other youth as “girls/boys,” “kids,” “teens,” or “young people.” The terms used to describe youth and the frequency of use by both adult and youth characters are shown in Table 8.

TABLE 8
TERMS USED BY PRIME-TIME ENTERTAINMENT TV CHARACTERS
TO DESCRIBE YOUTH

Term Used	Frequency of Use by Adult Characters	Frequent of Use by Youth Characters
Kid(s)	12	2
Girl/Boy(s)	11	3
Young People	5	1
Child(ren)	4	-
Teen(s)	3	1
Minor(s)	2	-
Juvenile(s)	1	-

CONCLUSIONS

Television images have been shown in prior research to play a role in the development of viewers’ worldviews. The information gleaned from television – both news and entertainment content – is used to form attitudes and opinions about our world and the people in it. So what do the images of youth in entertainment television tell viewers?

First, the overwhelming whiteness of the youth population on television does not reflect the actual teen population, but can send a powerful message about the importance of different teens in society. While youth of color are often featured on news stories about crime (Woodruff, 1998), they are noticeably absent from the non-violent world of entertainment programming.

Youth in this sample of programming were overwhelmingly ordinary adolescents with concerns related to their immediate experiences – school, peers, romance, family. Romance, peer friendships, and family issues dominated the dialogue and actions of youth characters. Societal level problems were neither discussed nor acted upon by youth characters. Such an emphasis in television programming reinforces a common stereotype of teens as self-absorbed.

TV youth did, however, show concern for the problems of others, and often helped others resolve their own problems. TV youth are loyal to their friends and show compassion when friends face problems.

Youth characters frequently existed in a world devoid of parental or family involvement. For many of the characters, family situations were unknown. For those whose family situations were known, parent characters were often absent, uninvolved, or ineffective. This portrayal of youth as self-reliant sends an empowering message to youth viewers, but it can also convey the sense that youth do not need connections to their families or the larger community. This type of message can impact the way both adolescents and adults think about the needs of youth. The self-contained world of TV youth functions without intervention from social agencies, businesses, or government. With this type of image consistently repeated throughout different programs, it is not inconceivable that viewers will use such information when forming opinions about the needs of adolescents outside the TV world.

TV youth are talked about most often with terms that set them apart from adults. Youth and adult characters alike use words like “kids” and “girls” to describe adolescents. The use of terminology that implies immaturity seems in stark contrast to the images of youth as self-reliant problem solvers. This duality does seem consistent, however, with public opinion data showing that adults are not often sure how to define adolescents (Aubrun & Grady, 2000).

Popular television entertainment is a relatively conservative medium – it does not lead social change, but rather reflects it. The images of youth shown in prime-time entertainment TV reflect widely held assumptions about adolescents in U.S. culture. But just as these images are a *reflection* of currently held belief systems, these images are also *influences* on newly forming belief systems. Adolescent viewers use television entertainment for information about their current and future social roles. Adult viewers, too, learn from television, especially in areas with which they are unfamiliar. The images presented to viewers in the current season reinforce the idea that youth are independent, isolated, and concerned with a narrow range of issues.

For those concerned with youth in U.S. society, it is imperative to understand the nature of the information that contributes to the worldviews of decision-makers. Television is still the most ubiquitous medium in America, and entertainment programming reaches nearly every U.S. household. Analyzing the consistent imagery about youth contained in entertainment programming provides insight into the current state of cultural attitudes, and can point to areas where strategic communication can effectively work to change attitudes.

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APPENDIX A

Prime-time entertainment programs including youth characters:

1. **Ally McBeal (Fox)**
2. **Beverly Hills, 90210 (Fox)**
3. **Boy Meets World (ABC)**
4. **Buffy the Vampire Slayer (WB)**
5. **Charmed (WB)**
6. **Dawson's Creek (WB)**
7. **Diagnosis Murder (CBS)**
8. **The Drew Carey Show (ABC)**
9. **E.R. (NBC)**
10. **Family Guy (Fox)**
11. **Family Law (CBS)**
12. **Felicity (WB)**
13. **For Your Love (WB)**
14. **Freaks and Geeks (NBC)**
15. **Futurama (Fox)**
16. **Get Real (WB)**
17. **The Hughley's (ABC)**
18. **Judging Amy (CBS)**
19. **King of the Hill (Fox)**
20. **Ladies' Man (CBS)**
21. **Law and Order (NBC)**
22. **Mission Hill (WB)**
23. **Moesha (UPN)**
24. **Now and Again (CBS)**
25. **Odd Man Out (ABC)**
26. **Oh, Grow Up (ABC)**
27. **Once and Again (ABC)**
28. **Party of Five (Fox)**
29. **Popular (WB)**
30. **Profiler (NBC)**
31. **Roswell (WB)**
32. **Ryan Caulfield: Year One (Fox)**
33. **Sabrina, the Teenaged Witch (ABC)**
34. **Safe Harbor (WB)**
35. **Seventh Heaven (WB)**
36. **Steve Harvey (WB)**
37. **That 70's Show (Fox)**
38. **The Parkers (UPN)**
39. **The Practice (ABC)**
40. **The Pretender (NBC)**
41. **Third Rock from the Sun (NBC)**
42. **Third Watch (CBS)**

- 43. Time of Your Life (Fox)
- 44. Two Guys and a Girl (ABC)
- 45. Veronica's Closet (NBC)
- 46. Walker, Texas Ranger (CBS)

POSSIBLE YOUTH ATTENDEES

Youth (with parent) tbd from Our Last Best Shot (African American male)[keynote]

YMCA Youth (with parent) tbd (girl) [panel I speaker]

Youth (with adult? with Janet Reno?) tbd from Justice Department's National Youth Network [panel II speaker on youth as resources]

Immigrant youth (with program director) tbd from AmeriCorps? (possibility is Sandra Gutierrez, rec. by HHS, serving at Latin American Youth Center) [breakout]

Brandi Chapple (with Sarah Brown and/or parent)(African American female)[breakout]

Youth social entrepreneur (with program director) tbd from Community Impact? [breakout]

Service-Learning student (with teacher) from Turner Middle School [breakout]

Latoya Gardner (or other youth involved in arts program)(African American female) [breakout]

Sarah Austin (with parent)(white female)

Disabled youth tbd (with parent or program director)

REFRAMING YOUTH: MODELS, METAPHORS, MESSAGES

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April 4, 2000

I. INTRODUCTION

This report begins with the assumption that public attitudes towards teenagers have an impact on teenagers' well-being. Adults' prevailing ways of thinking about teenagers shape their actions, both public and private, in ways that affect the lives of young people. Public consciousness is in turn shaped by a number of factors, including images presented in the media, everyday experience, and even innate aspects of universal human nature; some of these factors are difficult to manipulate, but one of the most important, public discourse, can be shifted, if new ways of framing teenagers are effectively promoted.

With an eye towards the W.T. Grant Foundation's mission of promoting the well-being of American youth, the report presents a number of ways of talking and thinking about teenagers that have the potential to shift public attitudes in a positive direction.

Based on cognitive/cultural analysis

The work presented in the report is based on the authors' previous analysis of American understandings of teenagers (Aubrun & Grady, "How Americans Understand Teens: Findings From Cognitive Interviews" 2000), which identified framings (including metaphors) used to talk and reason about adolescents. The framings recommended here are rooted in ways people already think — and in particular, those elements of public understandings that most closely match the views of experts such as developmental psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists. The framings we recommend constitute "bridges" between public and expert views, and highlight those perspectives which are most productive from the point of view of teenagers and their advocates.

Frames vs. language

The list of models and metaphors we present here should not be confused with final copy. While some of the language that follows might be used as-is by W.T. Grant and other advocates, the main purpose of the paper is to point to conceptual frames — i.e. ways of thinking about the world. Many different words (and images) could be found to effectively express the same frames. This work should therefore be seen as input both to creative efforts (such as the work of copywriters and designers) and to research, such as testing with focus groups.

It should also be noted that part of the process of bridging involves taking account of people's various, and often contradictory cognitive models. The toolkit of suggested frames that we provide reflects this variety, and as a result not every suggested frame is compatible with every other.

II. SUGGESTED FRAMES

1) TEENS WANT TO BE RECRUITED - TEENS NEED CONNECTION

An important finding from our previous report is that while most other cultures recognize teenagers' need for mentoring from an adult outside the nuclear family, this principle has lost force in the American consciousness. The cross-cultural evidence suggests that in virtually all human societies adolescents (especially boys) are recruited and mentored at some stage by authority figures other than their parents.

A dominant contemporary American model, by contrast, seems to be that the nurturing role of parents should be stretched to include the job of mentoring. Even informed researchers tend to put almost exclusive emphasis on the need for more *parental* involvement with teens, a sign that the cultural understandings have shifted on this point (see e.g., Zill 1998).

The emphasis on parental responsibility is counterproductive in two ways: First, it obscures the role of a social context beyond the nuclear family in adolescent development. Despite this unusual aspect of American culture, outside mentoring should probably still be seen as an invaluable ingredient in adolescent development. Maintaining an emphasis on parents' exclusive responsibility for their teens' development means that less attention is paid to providing real mentors. In their absence, and because adolescents lack the experience and judgment of adults, teens' eagerness to be recruited can lead them in unfortunate directions. Thus, a teenager who sees no better options may allow himself to be "recruited" by a gang.

Second, there is reason to doubt that parents *can* be as much of an influence as many contemporary Americans would like them to be. Teenagers are probably predisposed (in a biological sense) to look beyond the nuclear family for mentoring, i.e., to look for the opportunity to be "recruited" into a group that gives them a satisfying sense of identity. Furthermore, parents are probably predisposed to expect (on some level) that people or groups outside the immediate family will take on a mentoring role for their child.

Productive framings will imply that the adult population as a whole bears a responsibility for giving teenagers a degree of attention, input and guidance. Thus, while communications efforts that promote the Nurturant Parent model (see Lakoff 1996) are likely to help teens, we strongly recommend that this model be supplemented with the Mentor model. Framings should suggest, among other things, that the job of adults is to provide context, either by "adopting" individual teens, or by supporting institutions that offer guidance to teens. This perspective emphasizes the importance of a connection that extends beyond the family, and therefore addresses the "family-is-responsible" canard.

One natural advantage of this approach will be that it cuts across the American political divide. Conservatives as well as liberals feel that context is important — what they disagree on is the *nature* of the mentorship (e.g., boot camps vs. Big Brothers).

Teens want to be discovered.

Teenagers often dream of being noticed by a sports scout, talent scout, or modeling agency. Less dramatically, and more practically, they want to be discovered by a capable adult or institution capable of taking on a mentoring role. In typical media representations, teens are loud and conspicuous: They dye their hair and "act out." In fact, though, many teens do everything they can to avoid standing out, to become invisible; they nonetheless crave validation from a worthy authority.

Teens are waiting to be invited.

Many teens come across as passive and stand-offish. But this is due to a natural shyness more than to true negativity. Teens' natural inclination is to wait to be recruited, rather than actively to seek out a "team." They have to be brought aboard.

Isolation is a natural hazard for teens.

Despite the public image of teens as traveling in packs, cliques, or gangs, social isolation is a real danger for many teens, perhaps especially in this age of "electronic connectivity." Finding a group to identify with can be a slow and bumpy process. Adult mentors can ease this problem.

Gangs are sometimes the best recruiters in a teen's field of vision.

When positive mentoring from outside the family is not available, teens will look elsewhere for recruitment. Gangs make real efforts to recruit. There is a natural rivalry or competition between negative and positive mentors (consider the immense popularity of the *Star Wars* series, in which powerful mentors, one evil one good, compete in recruiting a teenaged boy).

It takes a mentor (from outside the family).

This language plays off of the slogan "It takes a village." It implies parental responsibility for selecting a suitable mentor for their child. Given the importance of the authority relationship entailed in the mentoring process, it is much less likely than the previous slogan to alienate conservatives.

Teens are pulled in different directions.

Social pressures are like physical forces pulling teens towards different sorts of lives. Communities have some structures that pull teens — e.g. night basketball and other mentoring programs. A variant of this framing is the idea that a mentoring vacuum is dangerous for teens.

Teens are natural apprentices.

Despite their apparent standoffishness, teens are generally eager to learn from more experienced adults. Mentoring is more a question of breaking the ice than of going against nature.

Teens are ready to earn their status.

This model is related to "Teens want to be discovered." While young children expect to be loved by their parents for who they are, teens expect to be recognized for their achievements or for their potential. They are often looking for someone to prove themselves to.

2) MOST TEENS ARE REGULAR PEOPLE

Unfortunately the media, by its nature, tends to depict teenagers who are extreme in some sense – e.g. "monsters" who have committed outrageous crimes, or "heroes" who have achieved extraordinary feats; what counts as newsworthy usually means that which is unusual. Public consciousness often reflects these extreme images, with important negative consequences. In particular, the media distortion of what most teenagers are actually like reinforces the idea that teens are fundamentally disconnected from ordinary life and people. It is, for example, hard to imagine oneself mentoring either a monster or a hero.

Reframes are needed which can strengthen people's awareness of the fact that most teenagers do not fall into either extreme category. The purpose of these reframes is to "reawaken" the model – held by most Americans, if often overshadowed by media portrayals – that teens are regular people. Fortunately, the task of reframing teens is made easier by the fact that a positive interpretation already exists in the public's mind. In many cases, simply reminding the public of salient truths about teenagers will go a long way to undermining the negative effects of the media's portrayals.

Teens are just as responsible as ever, only sometimes in different ways.

One-on-one elicitations revealed a model in which teens are fundamentally different today than in generations past. One component of this model posits that today's teens work less hard, and are slower to take on adult responsibilities than yesterday's teens. In fact, teenagers hold jobs in high numbers, often do volunteer work, and so forth. It is important to remind people that teens have not changed fundamentally, though the social and cultural context has.

Most teens are good, and not newsworthy.

The media's preoccupation with extreme teens is influential when it substitutes for people's actual experience with teens (Aubrun & Grady 2000). People with teens of their own, for example, are less likely to buy into the media model of teens.

Unfortunately, due to increasing age-based social segregation – e.g. teens spend much of their day in large, public schools, surrounded only by other teens – more and more adults have less and less experience with teens and are therefore more susceptible to the media portrayal.

At the same time, the dominance of the current media picture provides an opportunity to reintroduce the typical (good) teen into the public discourse: There is “news” in the fact that most teens are regular people.

Most teens do their homework and help in the kitchen.

Recent surveys have established that most teens are much more committed to doing chores (personal and household) than the public portrayal gives them credit for. This fact effectively reawakens the non-media model of teenagers held by many Americans.

A silent majority of teens.

This model alludes indirectly to a classic conservative model (the “silent majority”). As in the case of the slight reframe “It takes a mentor,” this formulation potentially borrows some of the force of the original without taking on the political baggage.

Most teens are middle of the road.

Fads like tattooing and body-piercing are only followed by a high-profile minority of teenagers. The same is true for excessive drug and alcohol use.

Teens cause small problems.

While in the public portrayal, teens are the most unstable and even antisocial element in society, the fact remains that with the vast majority of serious social problems (e.g. unemployment, urban decay), teenagers are victims rather than “perpetrators.”

3) TEENS AS LEARNERS

Categorizing is a natural feature of human thought, and it is a natural tendency for adults to think of teenagers as a specific kind of person that fits a particular stereotype. Just as mothers are stereotyped as unconditionally loving and overly protective, teens are often stereotyped as lazy, irresponsible, standoffish, rebellious, lacking a moral compass, etc. In short, there is a natural tendency for the public to view teens as morally defective adults. Teens are often physically developed, and equipped with various accoutrements of power (cars, cell phones, etc.), but are not yet completely socialized. This combination makes them seem like vaguely threatening figures, free from the various obligations (career, debts, marriage) that make most adults seem like known quantities.

One aspect of teens that bears constant reinforcing is that they are involved in a learning process. Frames that emphasize this aspect of adolescence strike a positive chord of self-improvement, and suggest that the job of people around teens is to be good "teachers."

Teens are immigrants/strangers/out of towners/newcomers.

This model points to the fact that teens have plenty to learn about being adults, no matter how much they seem to feel they know. They are leaving the old world of childhood and entering a new world of adulthood. They cannot be expected to know all of the rules and dangers of that new world, and we must be patient with them, giving them "directions" when they need them.

Teens are rookies, apprentices.

They are new to the job, green, raw. This model implies that, on the plus side, teens are eager to prove themselves. Teens are highly motivated, even if not always in the directions adults want.

Teens have limited vision (as opposed to corrupt vision),

In most cases, it's not that teenagers are perverse in their view of the world, but rather that they are able to see only a very small piece of the picture. In particular teens have trouble understanding all the causes and effect, for example of an activity such as driving a car or dating.

Teen idealism and cynicism are both forms of oversimplification.

Teens live in a simple world.

This is a variant of the idea that teens have limited vision. It suggests that teens are still forming their picture of the world. By adult standards, they are still largely uninformed (e.g., they are not very good at mapping causal connections).

Teens are stepping onto the world stage for the first time.

This model echoes the idea of the debutante, a new social actor presented to the world. While the status of debutante is limited to one sex and to a certain American subculture, the notion of the neophyte can be applied to teenagers in general. Teenagers are leaving the protection of the domestic sphere and entering a world of adult consequences.

Teens don't get to rehearse.

They've never been adults before, and their initial efforts mostly happen in public. Your role is to coach them rather than to judge them.

Teens are learning to play their instruments.

Teens have been issued their tools, but don't yet know how to use them.

Teens see the world as unknown territory.

For teens, the world beyond the family sphere is a strange new place. In most cases they are ready to explore it.

Teens are unafraid of limits.

Because they lack the experience of adults, experience which can often be discouraging in its cumulative effect, teenagers tend not to understand limits in the ways that adults do. Teens' unrealistic expectations about how fast they drive a car, and also the unwillingness of teen volunteers to be deterred by the magnitude of a social problem, both come from the same tendency to be unafraid of limits. This approach throws a positive light on a characteristic of teens that is often used to reduce teens to the heroic or the monstrous.

4) TEENS ARE IN PROCESS

As we saw in the last section, frames are needed that can remind people that teenagers are still in a developmental stage, rather than being some special, bad category of person. The expert model of adolescence emphasizes the rapid and dramatic physical, psychological, and social changes that take place during the teenage years. This model provides a key to understanding many of the particularities of teen behavior and appearance, and therefore to humanizing teens in the public mind. It provides another way of fighting the view that teenagers are a particular, unsatisfactory breed of person by emphasizing that they are undergoing a process of change and development — what they are today is not what they will be tomorrow.

From parents' point of view, one of the difficult challenges of raising a teenager is that they are "autonomous dependents." That is, they still require nurturing while they are asserting their independence. This frame suggests that this is a normal stage of development, rather than evidence of moral or personal inconsistency on the part of adolescents.

Most importantly, this general model elicits an empathetic stance toward teens (see Aubrun & Grady 2000).

Teens are kids in adult bodies.

or,

Teens look like they're fully developed, but they're not.

Adolescence is a process of uneven development, in which bodies typically develop before minds and social skills. An inner child in an outer adult is easily illustrated.

Teens are undergoing a process of metamorphosis.

The image chrysalis provides a simple visual of the difficult and not always pretty process of becoming an adult. It also suggests the naturalness of the "in-between" stage.

This model is linked to culturally salient ideas about ugly ducklings who turn into beautiful swans.

Teens are changing fast.

This frame closely echoes the expert model, and connects with the idea that adults have a role to play in forming teens.

Teens are like sponges.

This frame works like the previous three, but focuses in particular on the idea that teens are all ears (even if they pretend not to be).

The hormonal rocket sled is normal

There is a powerful hormonal force propelling teenagers towards adulthood, which they can't completely control. Interest in sex, for example, is part of the ride. We want them to be on the sled, and need to recognize that much of teen behavior that we disapprove of is the result of natural development.

Teens' development is uneven.

Mental maturation is like physical maturation — there are spurts and unevenness. With the body, this can mean one person's voice changes earlier while another grows big feet. Internally, it can mean that one teen's sense of responsibility has not kicked in yet, even though that teen is feeling adult urges for freedom, products etc.

Believe it or not you're looking at a future breadwinner.

The purpose of this frame is simply to remind adults that today's (irresponsible) teenagers are tomorrow's (responsible) adults.

Teens are pseudo-adults.

Although they seem hostile, standoffish, surly, large, and scary, teens are often childlike (e.g., scared, unqualified, unknowledgeable) inside.

One effect of this model is to counteract the negative of teens as powerful yet irresponsible actors on the social stage (the image of the Child-King).

"Child or adult?" (ad slogan).

This reframe points to the fact that the developmental line between children and adults is not always clear. Teenagers are usually a mix of features, some adult and some child-like.

A simple way of expressing how difficult it is to draw the line between child and adult is to start with a young teen and imagine adding a week to their age, and then another and another. At what point can we say that the child has become an adult?

Not kids, not adults, but still people.

This reframe alludes to the liberal idea that we should recognize and accept previously marginalized groups of people, particularly people who do not neatly fall into traditional social categories (e.g., gays and lesbians, mixed-race children).

Between high school senior and college freshman.

This model emphasizes the idea that teenagers typically spend a good deal of time oscillating between two social statuses (and two frames of mind). They are cocky kids some of the time and insecure adults some of the time, and it is easy to mistake them for the other at any time.

5) TEENS ARE SEARCHERS

Teens are often seen as negative and contrary; they seem to reject adult behavior and society's values for no good reason. They are rule-breakers, disrespectful, antisocial. The counter to this view is that teens are actively trying to figure out what *their* world will look like, as opposed to ours. This process inevitably involves exploring a lot of dead-ends and false starts.

Teens are idealistic.

Teens are dreamers. They spend a fair amount of time in private thoughts. They are often deeply idealistic, and their apparent cynicism comes from their disappointment with the world as it is.

Teens look more different than they really are.

There is an important difference between how teens look and their character. Part of the process of searching involves trying on various "looks" as one would try on hats. Where with an adult you often *can* judge a book by its cover, in the case of teens the old saying is much more true.

Teens have to spread their wings.

When teens seem to be rejecting their parents' values, or even their parents themselves, it's not really personal. Teens have to clear the slate, so to speak, as part of the searching process. (Parents can take comfort in the fact that once teens become adults, more likely than not they will return to values learned as a child.)

Teens are at the start of a new chapter.

One metaphor that usefully describes the developmental process is that life is a book with many chapters. In this case, the metaphor has the advantage of suggesting that teens have a clean slate, and should be treated as such.

6) TEENS ADAPT TO THEIR ENVIRONMENT

Experts on adolescent behavior and development emphasize that teenagers' behavior depends largely on the contexts they find themselves in – i.e. their environments are as important as their inner leanings.

Despite much political rhetoric, most Americans do believe that context makes a huge difference in what kind of adults teenagers become.

Teens are unfinished sculptures.

or,

Teens are saplings/are straightened at the stake.

These frames counteract the essentializing view that teenagers are either good or bad, and that the main job of the public is to figure out which category any given teenager (or group of teenagers) falls into. It shifts the focus to the role that their context plays in their development, and indirectly supports the idea of mentorship.

Teens are subject to many pulls.

The empathetic stance easily leads people to recognize that teens do not determine their own agenda. They listen to many voices, including those of the street, the family, and increasingly, of consumer marketers.

Teens gravitate.

A variant of the previous reframe that places the emphasis on teens as actively orienting towards certain voices and messages.

7) TEENS ARE WORKING HARD

Adults often think of teenagers as living easy, hedonistic lives. To counter this view, which makes teens seem immoral according to a core American value, it should be pointed out how hard teenagers are working in a variety of senses, working at real jobs, dealing with pressures people in other age groups don't have to deal with, and facing the hardships that come with the steep learning curves of adolescence.

Teens are working hard on the inside.

This model echoes the idea that teens are in process. Even if it's not obvious on the outside, teens are in a constant process of reshaping their bodies and minds. It's tiring. It's homework. It's nothing you can see.

Many teens hold down jobs.

This reframe falls in the category of simple truths that the public should be reminded of with an eye to counteracting the idea that teens are lazy and spoiled.

Teens are under lots of pressure, even if they look laid back.

or,

Teens have a lot on their plate.

This frame reminds adults that although the teenage years seem from the outside to be remarkably free of adult pressures and responsibilities, teens in fact face a wide variety of pressures, which range from doing well in school to avoiding drugs to making decisions about the future, all in the context of undergoing tremendous physical, emotional, and social transformation. When you combine the inner work with the outer work, teens are busy folks.

Teens are willing to pay the price.

One aspect of adolescence that does not appear much in the public discourse is its willingness to self-sacrifice. Teens are willing to work hard, and endure significant hardships to reach the adult state.

8) TEENS NEED TO BREAK AWAY

A corollary of the idea that teens need an adult mentor outside the family is that teenagers must break away from the family, as a natural step forward in maturing. Given the universal tendency for teens to be recruited by individuals and institutions outside of the family, there is reason to believe that adolescents are predisposed to keeping their family at arm's length.

From the perspective of the Nuclear Family-centered model, this predisposition is seen as a sign of (a) the selfish or bad character of some teens, and/or (b) the defective character of a particular nuclear family. Of course if a teen with the desire to break away is bad, then an uncomfortably large proportion of all teens are defined as bad. And it is interesting to note that in popular culture, the prototypical examples of mentoring are associated with defective nuclear families — consider the Boy's Town priest, the classic film "Angels with Dirty Faces," or the Big Brother program. In each case, the mentor more or less replaces an absent parent.

An important part of the reframe that we propose is undermining the zero-sum relationship between Good Parent and Mentor — it is possible and desirable to have both.

Teens are fledglings/need to spread their wings.

These well-worn frames emphasize the naturalness of the adolescent urge to develop one's own identity; teens' interest in things and voices from outside the nuclear family is normal. They also emphasize the difficulty and challenges of the natural and inevitable process of leaving the parental nest.

III. PROBLEMATIC FRAMINGS

There are some ways of framing teens that are positive on some level but problematic in other ways. We mention several here.

1) Teens are an asset not a liability.

A core theme of the W.T. Grant Foundation is that youth should be considered an asset rather than a liability. While this metaphor has the advantage of implying that teens — like other assets — should be valued, it is worth examining its entailments in more detail.

The term "asset" is a financial metaphor, which in this frame suggests a model common in American business culture: "human capital." The problem with this metaphor is that its natural implication is that teens are something to be exploited. This conflicts with the idea that teens are developing and in need of further positive investment from adults, such as mentoring.

2) Teens are at a fork in the road

This frame is constructive in that it suggests the importance of adolescence as a stage of life, and implies a possible role for adults in helping teens make significant decisions.

On the negative side, this frame reinforces the idea of moral irreversibility, which is closely linked to ideas about the essential goodness or badness of individuals. In other words, it reinforces the idea that some teens have already made their choice and thus that we should "give up" on some teens.

3) Adopt a teen.

This frame is constructive to the degree that it promotes the idea of mentoring.

The danger is that it subtly reinforces the notion that when adolescents need to be mentored by someone outside the family, it is because the parents are failing to their job.

4) Teens need boot camp.

The currently popular idea that boot camps are useful in bringing teens into line merits a substantial analysis of its own, which would be beyond the scope of this report. Put briefly, the problem with this frame is that boot camps — which are modeled on the military version of a rite of passage from adolescence into

adulthood — are taken out of context. That is to say, they emphasize the hazing, but fail to follow up with the next step: conferral of an enhanced social status, accompanied by enrollment in a social organization. Boot camps provide the unpleasant part of the rite, but very little in the way of real *passage* into adulthood.

The Authors

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Joseph Grady is a professor of linguistics at the University of Maryland, Department of English, currently working with the FrameWorks Institute. His academic research and publications focus on the relationship between metaphor and other aspects of thought and communication. He has conducted a number of studies related to public policy, including "Why Early Ed Benefits All of Us: Communications Strategies For Advocates of Early Childhood Education" (co-authored with George Lakoff, for the Benton Foundation). In addition, Grady spent a number of years as a consultant, applying the principles of linguistics to developing brand names.

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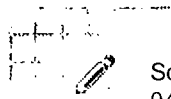
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Sonia G. Chessen
04/05/2000 09:26:06 AM

Record Type: Record

To: Ann O'Leary/OPD/EOP@EOP, Shirley S. Sagawa/WHO/EOP@EOP, MaryEllen C. McGuire/WHO/EOP@EOP

cc:

Subject: first of several research reports on how people view teens

Hi,

This is the first of Susan Bales' stuff. It looks good. It is still a draft and could be released at the conference.

She and I misunderstood each other. She can't come in this week, but can next Thursday at 11:00. Let me know if you think that is too late.

In the interim, she will continue to send me stuff.

Is the deliverables meeting with Jim Kohlenberger on for 2:00 today? I would like to be there, but I may be a bit late.

----- Forwarded by Sonia G. Chessen/OPD/EOP on 04/05/2000 09:19 AM -----



Susan Bales <susanb@frameworksinstitute.org>
04/04/2000 07:11:11 PM

Record Type: Record

To: Sonia G. Chessen/OPD/EOP

cc:

Subject: first of several research reports on how people view teens

Sonia, this is the report done by our cognitive team --- it's a really unique piece of work, I think, with some important (and positive) conclusions about how we get people to rethink adolescence. More to come....

Susan



- WTGTeenIntwvsFinal.doc

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**HOW AMERICANS UNDERSTAND TEENS:
FINDINGS FROM COGNITIVE INTERVIEWS**

Axel Aubrun, Ph.D.

Joe Grady, Ph.D.

February 28, 2000

I. INTRODUCTION

Background

This report has been undertaken as part of the W.T. Grant Foundation's ongoing enterprise to promote the welfare of American young people. In particular, we have set out here to determine Americans' basic understandings of youth — not focussing on their opinions about particular issues relating to adolescents (these have been extensively documented in previous polls and surveys), but on the more fundamental cultural models that define the American concept of Teenager, and on which the various opinions are based.

Method: The basis of the report is a series of ten in-depth, one-on-one interviews which we conducted with Americans representing diverse backgrounds and demographic classes. This is an approach which yields qualitative rather than quantitative data. In this sense, the method is comparable to focus groups and other techniques widely used to study public opinion. However, unlike these methods, which elicit particular opinions, cognitive analysis focuses on the more basic cultural models (i.e., understandings and beliefs) that motivate the opinions. The interview method thus provides a view of strong, recurrent patterns in thinking — a set of values and beliefs that underlie a distinctive American understanding of adolescence. Additional discussion of our methodology is provided in the Appendix.

Note: While various terms are used to refer to the age group between thirteen and nineteen, we found that the term *teenager* is by far the most common and neutral, as opposed to terms like *youth* or *adolescent*. The research applies to American understandings of this population, regardless of terminology, but we usually refer to them as *teenagers*, in keeping with the language of our interview subjects.

Key findings: How teenagers are understood

Most of the adults interviewed:

- Use the term "teen(ager)," or occasionally "kid," rather than "youth" or "adolescent."
This is significant because the terms "youth" and "adolescent" are widely used by experts, policy advocates and psychologists respectively.
- Are aware of the negative model of teenagers that prevails in the media.
People understand and are able to articulate the media's theory about teens, which includes propositions about selfish, disrespectful, outrageous, and even dangerous behavior.
- Are aware (at times) that this negative model is a negative stereotype rather than an accurate representation of the teens that they know.
That is to say, people understand on some level that the media picture does not fit their experience, and is more negative in its portrayal of teens.

- Tend nonetheless to resolve this contradiction by judging their own experience to be exceptional, rather than by challenging the media frames.

This reflects a broader pattern of Americans' response to the contradiction between what they know at first hand and what media and public discourse tells them.

- Toggle back and forth between empathetic and objectifying mindsets; i.e., between taking account of what it's like to be a teenager, and considering teens from the outside.

The empathetic mindset leads to understandings of teenagers that are closer to developmental psychologists' "expert" model of adolescence than does the objectifying model.

The toggling depends on the amount of personal experience that people are able to draw upon to counterbalance the media depiction, and on how eager they are to use the category "teen" to express anxieties about a variety of social issues.

- Make little use of a model in which adolescents are mentored by adults outside of the family.

An important finding of our research is the near-absence of a cultural model that emphasizes teens' need for mentoring from adults outside the nuclear family. The cross-cultural evidence (and arguments from evolutionary psychology) suggest that around the age of puberty, individuals (especially boys) are normally recruited by extra-familial institutions or individuals (e.g., mother's brothers, secret societies, etc.), and may in fact be predisposed to distancing themselves from the nuclear family at this stage. American models, including expert models, often fail to acknowledge this nearly-universal aspect of human development, in effect reinforcing the widespread idea that the nuclear family bears sole responsibility for guiding the development of youths (see e.g., Zill 1998).

II. THE PUBLIC'S VIEW OF TEENS: TOGGLING BETWEEN TWO MINDSETS

The Good News: Contra the public discourse, moderate and sympathetic views are common

The prevailing image of teens in the media is negative — there is a stereotype of an adolescent who is selfish, disrespectful, outrageous, and even dangerous (Kunkel 1994; Berkeley Media Studies Group 1994, 1997; Woodruff 1998). When you ask Americans about prevailing public attitudes towards teenagers, they typically invoke this picture. And yet, the same people who are able to articulate this stereotype, and who attribute it to their neighbors, often hold a much more benign view themselves. In fact, they very often feel more sympathy than resentment towards teenagers. In short, the negative stereotype is an important element of American culture — recognized by everyone — but it is not a reliable reflection of how individuals actually think or feel.

People are aware that the stereotype is promoted (for whatever reason) in the media, and they resist it (to an extent), but they often do believe that this public stereotype reflects the thinking of those around them. Further, although they are skeptical of media portrayals, the position of the media has the effect of making their own experience and attitudes seem unusual or even aberrant. They tend to discount what does not fit the media frame as exceptional, rather than questioning or challenging the media frame. This stark contrast between personal vs. public discourse shows up on other issues as well,

including foreign aid and the environment (Aubrun and Grady 1999; Kull and Destler 1999).

[T]he press ... tends to focus on the dramatically negative stories, and not much on the day to day ordinary lives.

I don't really like the news. I read the paper and watch the news every day but I don't really like it.

[T]hey [i.e. other Americans] think of teenagers as "the evil bunch" ...

I think more or less they are scared of them ...

My perception is that every generation of teenagers has that same experience with the general population. They get tagged with some label.

[Y]ou have the vocal group, the negative stories, the shocking stories, taking the headlines, and you assume that a lot more teenagers are like that than really are.

[Y]ou know that there've got to be hundreds of thousands of them that are going to college and that have made national honor society or ... who are trying to do the right things. But you hardly ever hear about them.

One interesting observation from the interviews reflects the fact that people's impressions are not (entirely) formed by what they see in the media: when adults are asked to "picture a teenager" they typically think of a teen they know, or sometimes imagine themselves as teenagers. They are less likely to picture a stereotype learned from the media.

The interviews also made clear that people do not simply accept media representation of teens as strange characters.

But I think the majority of teenagers are just normal looking kids.

The Mixed News: Empathy and objectification

On the other hand, attitudes towards teenagers are by no means universally positive. A major finding of the cognitive interviews is that people tend to toggle back and forth between what we term the *empathetic* and *objectifying* mindsets. The difference is between taking into account what it's like to be a teenager, and considering teenagers from the outside. The empathetic mindset corresponds more closely to the developmental perspective taken by experts on adolescence. It also corresponds more closely to what George Lakoff (1996) has called the Nurturant Parent model of child rearing. This model places a high value on appreciating the uniqueness and the subjective experience of an individual child, as opposed to the Strict Father model, which emphasizes judgements and punishments based on actions (and is aligned more with the objectifying mindset). The objectifying mindset is more vulnerable to media stereotypes about teenagers.

The two major mindsets available to Americans cannot be summed up simply as the views that teens are "good" or "bad," although as a rule people are more likely to be sympathetic toward teens when they are thinking about what it is like to be a teenager. We use the labels "empathetic mindset" and "objectifying mindset" to refer to basic cognitive perspectives rather than to opinions or beliefs. These cognitive perspectives determine, in a literal sense, what is seen and not seen, thought and not thought; and thus provide the basis for what is believed.

The two mindsets lead to different views

In various ways, discussed in the next section, the two different mindsets lead to different understandings of teenagers, and different opinions about them. Here are two examples:

"Not ready" vs. "Essentially different": From the empathetic stance, teens are like anyone else, but have not yet developed important skills of adulthood — they are just people who are not yet fully prepared for adult life. From the objectifying stance, on the other hand, teens are an essentially different category of person — with different values, different behavioral and emotional patterns — and should be treated according to a whole separate set of rules.

There is an important parallel with the analysis of the public's attitudes towards early childhood. A number of studies have shown that the public has an insufficient appreciation of the various ways (moral and intellectual as well as social) in which young children are developing. This attitude derives from an essentialist perspective and leads to an underestimation of environmental factors in early childhood (see Bales 1999).

"Teens are teens" vs. "teens are getting worse": People operating in the empathetic stance are more likely to feel that teens are the same as they have always been, despite changes in style. People operating in the objectifying stance (and again, the same people may alternate between the two stances) are more likely to feel that teens have changed in fundamental ways over the generations, usually for the worse. Because they look different and engage in some different activities — i.e. because they seem different to someone observing them from the outside — this stance leads to the conclusion that they have changed fundamentally as a group.

Toggling between the two mindsets

Based on various factors, including political orientation and personal experience with teens, individuals tend towards one or the other of these two mindsets; but nearly everyone is capable of seeing teens from either perspective. The success of any attempt to frame teens in a positive way depends on understanding this deep ambivalence. Our report describes a number of cultural models that bear on how teens are perceived, and explores some of the factors that cause the toggling between empathetic and objectifying attitudes. This is a first step towards designing a communications campaign that will frame adolescents in the most productive way possible.

When asked about their views of teenagers, respondents often had to make an (unconscious) choice about which perspective to take — considering either what it is like to deal with teenagers, or what it is like to be a teenager. For instance, here are two partial responses to a question about whether teenagers are different today from how they were a generation ago:

[M]y first vehicle, I bought it, arranged for it, bought the insurance. I don't see that happening today. I don't know of a 16 year old today that does that.

My perception [about the difference between today's teens and those of a generation ago] would be the pressure that that age group is under these days. It seems to be much more severe now ... I grew up in a pretty laid back time, the 60's. Things seemed to be pretty carefree.

The first response focuses on teens' behavior (and defines them negatively as a group), while the second refers to the conditions affecting teenagers today.

What causes the toggling?

Even though these two mindsets seem so far removed from one another — and even though they are based on two fundamentally different cognitive perspectives — people tend to toggle back and forth between them quite a bit. It is clear that understanding the dynamics of the toggling — what causes people to shift between the two perspectives, and what might help them favor the empathetic perspective — is critical to the purposes of the W.T. Grant mission.

In particular, there are two factors that stand out as keys to creating conflicting perspectives towards teens in people's minds, which we discuss in the next two subsections: the clash between media depictions and personal experience with teens, and the tendency for thinking about teens to become associated with broader topics.

Public information vs. Personal experience

Given the negative portrayals of teens in the media, it is not surprising that people's perspectives on teens depends in part on their experience or lack of experience with actual teenagers. Parents of teenagers or those who interact regularly with teenagers are much less susceptible to the media portrayals of teens. These people either reject media accounts outright or concede that they must be true in some abstract sense (or TV wouldn't be saying so), but not in any practical sense.

Well, the media distorts everything.

In America's age-segregated society, unfortunately, many adults have few opportunities to interact with teenagers. It is especially challenging for these adults to disregard the prevailing public portrayal of teens; they have to work very consciously to do this — e.g., by reasoning from general facts about the world, or by reference to distant or limited personal experience. Often though they simply fall into the default mode of accepting the media picture.

[M]y exposure is limited. So it's just the news and television programs about teenagers ...

It is revealing that adults are more likely to refer to positive aspects of teenagers when discussing individuals (especially, individuals they know), and more likely to refer to problems when referring to teens as a whole. In the latter context, teens are more of a distant and undifferentiated group — just the sort of category we learn about second-hand through the media, for instance.

The problem is exaggerated when teens of another ethnic group are considered. People tend in this case to have even less personal experience and to rely more heavily on media stereotypes.

Projection of other issues onto the category "teens"

The cultural category "teenager" is especially susceptible to being used to express attitudes towards a variety of social issues. Many tendencies associated with adolescence — the desire for self-expression most clearly — transform individual adolescents into symbols of larger themes. Thus, people's negative attitudes toward teens often seem to reflect anxieties about the direction that American society is taking.

There are periods of time when people are very civilized and periods of time when they are uncivilized. We seem to be in an uncivilized period right now.

The media is particularly adept at using the category "teens" to illustrate the worst, and occasionally, the best American tendencies.

Similarly, political rhetoric often touches deep-seated fears concerning, for example, the breakdown of traditional authority in society, by focusing on teens' autonomy and appearance differences. A number of features of the Conservative and Liberal worldviews correlate closely with features of the objectifying and empathetic perspectives. For example, the tendency to label individuals as good or bad on the basis of physical appearance (dress, speech, etc.) makes it harder for Conservatives to see things from a teenager's point of view. And the typical Conservative emphasis on self-reliance (see Lakoff 1996) comes out strongly in discussions of teenagers.

When I wanted something when I was [young] I figured out a way to get it. I did not expect it to come to me by asking for it.

As might be expected, projection of larger issues onto teens is mostly (but not exclusively) negative, as when it comes out in relation to sensitive issues such as concern about societal racism.

I don't know what they would do to me to harm me as an African-American woman ...

Teenagers, like any other stereotyped group, may also be sensitive to the way in which they are "constructed" in public discourse, and may tend in various ways to live up, or down, to the expectations. Since teens are often less constrained than adults in their thoughts and actions, such influences could have strong and noticeable effects.

III. THE MAJOR CULTURAL MODELS: ADOLESCENCE AS "LIMBO"

Although teenagers are easily identified by their numerical age, there are various ways in which they belong to a category which is difficult to grasp. The basic cultural assumption is that teens are "neither here nor there," liminal beings in transition between the better-understood and more stable categories of childhood and adulthood. By being adultlike in some ways and childlike in others, teens share features of two prototypes that are normally exclusive. There are several points to underscore here:

- The assumption that teens are in a state of limbo underlies most American models relating to adolescence

Americans regularly refer explicitly to the idea that teenagers are in a kind of limbo. American cultural models relating to adolescence often unconsciously reflect this basic cultural assumption.

The model offered by the media attempts to counter this assumption — it tends to objectify teens as a category; to present them as something like a fixed and alien kind of person.

- The limbo view is in agreement with expert views

A salient feature of expert models is that the psychological and social transition from childhood to adulthood involves a period of liminality, when adolescents are children in some ways and adults in others. Thus, many cultural models relating to adolescence, particularly those based on the "empathetic perspective," agree with expert (i.e. scientific)

understandings. This fact is noteworthy because on so many other topics (e.g., international relations), the public's understanding is sharply at odds with expert views.

For the purposes of this report, the significance of the agreement between public and expert models is that the expert models are the ones that tend to be more sympathetic and more likely to promote productive policies towards adolescence. Playing on these models is easier given that they closely parallel certain understandings that already have wide currency in the country as a whole.

- This in-between status is part of why it is sometimes unsettling for people to think about adolescents

As cultural and cognitive anthropologists have shown, there is a general tendency for objects that blur conceptual boundaries to be seen as troubling or even dangerous. For example, negative attitudes toward "gender-bending," or paranoia about the "divided loyalties" of minority groups are in part rooted in a psychological desire for clear conceptual categories.

For similar reasons, when we think of teens as either children or adults, we experience a lack of conceptual fit: they can seem like inadequate adults or out-of-control children. The interviews reveal that people continually remind themselves that teens are in limbo. And when they call this assumption to mind, they tend to feel sympathy for teens.

And so they're in this limbo that can be very unfair at times.

In the following subsections we present a list of common American cultural models of adolescence, all springing from the understanding that teens are in between two stages of development. In some cases we discuss two competing models that people may toggle between, one based on the empathetic stance and one based on the objectifying stance.

Difficulty drawing the line between teens and kids/adults

Aside from the superficial definition of the teenage years, many people feel that there are no sharp lines representing the transitions to or from adolescence.

I'm having trouble finding something for him because he's too big for toys really but he's not really a teenager yet so I don't know what to do.

I think an adult is probably between 25 and 30. ... I was probably 30 years old before I matured enough to be considering myself an adult.

I don't believe there's any difference [between a teenager and a nine year-old], just in age... But again I have to go back to the media — just seems like they have a ready access to sexual knowledge, they are into sex, smoking, drinking and doing all these other things.

When I was growing up, you could usually tell a teenager by their size, but nowadays a lot of them are much bigger, so the kids that you think are teenagers are only 9 or 10 year olds, 11 or 12 year olds

Physical vs. mental development

Teens may be large and physically (and sexually) developed, but they are often thought of as more like kids when it comes to certain aspects of thought and behavior.

... that limbo, that non-adult period that they're in, ... they're physically mature but not adults yet ...

Inexperienced adults

Sometimes they are thought of as adults who simply lack any experience which could help guide their decision-making.

I think that driving accidents ... [have] to do with inexperience rather than lack of maturity, to a large degree.

They probably take more risks because they don't know the consequences ...

This, by the way, is and has been the traditional view in many cultures outside the modern West.

Inadequate vs. Undeveloped

Closely related to the idea of an Inexperienced Adult is the idea of an Undeveloped (or "Partial ") Adult. Everyone agrees that teenagers have relatively little sense of responsibility regarding the consequences of their actions. Experts, people who deal professionally with adolescents, discuss this ambivalence in developmental terms — teens have developed in some ways but not others. This model is also common among the public.

[I]t's a sense of this irresponsibility, that "I can do all these things and not be held accountable" ... Maybe they [need] a little bit more developing, developmental growth ...

A negative variant of this model, held by some members of the public (and available to all of them) is that teenagers are Inadequate Adults — people who should but do not have a sense of morality, or responsibility for the consequences of their actions.

... there's a sense of no consequences, or irresponsibility.

Irresponsible, more so than teenagers in years past, generations past.

"Not Ready" vs. "Essentially Different"

Everyone agrees that teenagers are not just like adults, but there are two different ways people view the differences, based on the different mindsets described above. The empathetic mindset is correlated with the idea that teens are essentially the same as adults, but haven't yet developed into maturity. They are "not ready" for adult life.

[Y]ou shouldn't drink any younger than twenty-one. Mentally you're not ready for that responsibility or the circumstances that could happen.

[This, by the way, is a view that distinguishes contemporary American society from other times and cultures, where teenagers have often been considered competent to marry and have children, provide for themselves and their families, wage war, and so forth.]

The objectifying view, by contrast, is usually based on an assumption that teens are a special category of person, essentially different from adults. This tendency lends itself to

a judgemental perspective, in which teens are quickly assigned to the status of "good" or "bad," more often the latter.

A lot of teenagers nowadays, their morals are different. They don't think like we think.

[T]hey will shoot you faster than an older person would, some teenagers would, and they don't seem to care.

Are teens growing up faster or more slowly?

One of the more interesting questions relating to the ambivalent status of teenagers is whether they are growing up faster now than ever before or more slowly. People appear to have conflicting views on this point.

[T]hey're definitely growing up faster. They learn stuff quicker than I did in the past

Even my granddaughter is growing up faster than my son did when he was a kid. I just think things are going so fast.

Years ago ... there was a sense of responsibility that started at 3, 4 and 5 and 6 years old. I don't think that that's started any more in that level ... So the teenagers today that are 13 or 14 or 15 or 16 are older ten year olds.

Even though he or she may be worldly ... I still think of [a teenager] as a child.

The resolution of this conflict parallels the understanding that teens are mature on the outside but immature on the inside. Teens grow up faster now than in the past in the sense that they acquire knowledge, freedom, and power much earlier than in past generations (at least according to popular models) — they live more grown up lives. On the other hand, they mature more slowly in the sense that it takes longer for them to develop adult competence and self-sufficiency now than it took their parents and grandparents. This understanding is reflected in the fact that drinking and driving ages have risen over the past generation.

Technology increases teens' power, freedom

Technology is seen as an important factor contributing to contemporary teenagers' accelerated (and unhealthy) development.

Now they have their own phones, their own TVs, their own cell phones, their own pagers and all that. And I think to a certain degree I think it might be kind of bad.

The child-king

A variant on the fast-development vs. slow development question is the idea that teens look like adults (and have the destructive capacities of adults), but are children inside.

They just don't grasp they have that much power. A wheel does not weigh much. It doesn't look like much either, but it is a deadly device ...

I said [to my son] "because you're big" — he's like a 250- pound African American male — "people are going to look at you a certain way," and I said "if I walked down the street, perhaps I might be frightened of you, too."

Individualism

Teens are seen as being very self-centered (while at the same time very interested in their peers). This is related to the ideas that they have few obligations, have no place in a hierarchy, and are somewhat unpredictable and inscrutable.

[Y]ou don't know what you're going to encounter when you come upon a teenager.

Lack of work experience

Although a high percentage of teenagers hold paying jobs, most adults still perceive teens as a whole as lacking work experience. Given that the importance of work is a defining American cultural value, teens' perceived distance from the work world also contributes to the view that they are irresponsible.

[T]hey haven't had the experience necessarily of having to pay taxes or to ... go out and work.

All that laying back because you've got three classes and "I'm going to come home and do nothing all day" – can't work like that for me, not in my family.

I think [teenagers become adults] when they get their first real life experience ... maybe when they get their first job... Because then you realize you have responsibilities ...

I feel that the teenagers haven't gotten to that step yet; they haven't been out in the working world where they can experience and reason.

Independence from family authority

Most informants recognize that teens need to establish a certain sense of autonomy, even if they are not capable of true (eg., financial or emotional) independence.

an impulse to break away

I think you have to spread your wings.

Weakening of family structure

Some informants connect this tendency to their sense that the family structure is weaker today than it was in the past — this interpretation leads to a more negative view of teens' desire for independence, as well as a harsh judgement of today's parents.

we don't teach the responsibility of drinking.

[B]ucking authority [is] one way to get attention.

I don't think they get any guidance from home. I think everything starts at home.

Independence from social authority

The public recognizes that teens have a tendency to express their separation from the societal authority, for example by dressing very differently from how their parents dress. This tendency is associated with "bad" teens more than "good" teens. It is also associated with today's teens, and with the current lessening of social order.

[T]heir lifestyle is so different from what I think of the rest of the population.

Weakening of social structure

Many informants referred to the fact that society has become less ordered in the last few decades, often mentioning the sixties as a turning point.

[W]e were more friendlier. We could get along more even if we did do some fighting and cursing. You were still friends the next day or even an hour or two; but now it's rough for them. Step on a \$150 tennis shoe and someone is going to get the gun.

[I]f a neighbor told you to do something or hit you that was all right because they were concerned about you.

We were just students, you know.

Influences on teenagers are like forces pulling them in particular directions

Teens are seen as eager to be recruited by influences outside of the family. When people are operating from the empathetic perspective, this is seen as an understandable desire, even when it takes antisocial form. This metaphorical framing highlights teens' impressionability. The fact that they lack experience and maturity means that they are susceptible to influences and temptations that an older person would resist.

[T]hey gravitate more to what the street is offering, more so than what could possibly come out of, say, the home or the church or some other social areas.

And overall if they don't have a steady influence that can pull them greatly in a positive area, then it's so easy for them to fall prey to what's out there for them ...

[Gangs] seem to be everywhere, a false church.

Once you get into a gang, it is not easy to get out of a gang.

[A gang] almost seems like a clique on steroids or something!

[T]he pull of the street had more influence on him than me as a single parent.

[T]hey gravitate more to what the street is offering.

This model is also sometimes connected to the model that the family structure is weaker now than it should be, so that teens' desire to join a gang is seen as a failure of the family rather than of the "village." Importantly, informants made little mention of positive influences outside of the family, eg., teachers, ministers, coaches, bosses, mentors, etc.

Teens are like malleable material

This metaphorical framing highlights the fact that teenagers are still developing, and that their development can be influenced from the outside – either for the better or for the worse.

[A teenager] is like a piece of clay. It is someone you can mold and make into a fairly responsible person given the right exposure, the right education and the right things culturally in a friendly family environment. It is a potential piece of material to work with.

Advertising as a powerful and destructive force

One of the strongest voices in the lives of teens is seen to be the advertising media. Many informants' negative attitudes toward the media are extended to this point. Advertisers exploit limbo state/insecurities about identity.

And it sends out the wrong message, that you have to look like this to be accepted and to be pretty, and if you had all these things this is how you would feel

I think it is a shame that the whole American culture, especially for the American girl is to grow up to be this perfect super model type woman.

Teens make bad parents

This model reflects the view that teens are physically adults, but psychologically not ready to take on the responsibility of parenting.

*I think [teenagers' lack of direction] would stem more from a parental factor. You're looking at teens now who are probably born to teens, who were probably **born** to teens.*

At a fork in the road

Most informants agreed that being a teenager means embarking on a rapid, high-stakes journey.

[T]hey have a sense that what they do will have long-term effect with their future, but not enough experience to understand / to truly understand that and make choices with that in mind.

[T]his is like the first level of where they're gonna step off the cliff, do or die.

Two types of teens

Informants regularly spoke in terms of a dichotomy between "normal" or "good" teens and "strange" or "bad" teens.

I see the teenagers that hang out on the street and the teenagers in my church and they are totally different.

Two extremes: one is criminal activity, and the other is where you see or read or hear about groups of teenagers going on trips to South America to build churches.

You see both types.

People feel sorry for teens

A common correlate of the empathetic stance is the expression of sympathy for the teenage condition.

a general overall teenage panic kind of thing

I see ... teenagers who are very motivated to prepare themselves for the future. And hard working and competitive in a way that makes it more difficult to be a teenager sometimes

It's a difficult time for teenagers.

Peer pressure, they have to achieve, parents forcing them to be much more productive, much more/achieving a lot more goals.

IV. ADDITIONAL MODELS

In this section we present a variety of other important models that do not relate directly to the idea that teenagers are in a limbo state between two more clear-cut stages of life.

"Teens are Teens" vs. "Teens are getting worse"

The empathetic mindset is correlated with the belief that while teens wear different clothes and listen to different music today, they are still essentially the same as they have ever been.

The specific interests might have changed a little but nothing substantial.

The objectifying mindset, on the other hand, is correlated with the belief that today's teenagers are fundamentally different from (and typically "worse" than) teens of past generations. That is to say, today's teens are inherently more difficult to identify with than yesterday's teens.

When I was a teenager it was much more smoother. You know, we smoked cigarettes and smoked marijuana and whatever. But we were more friendlier. We could get along more even if we did do some fighting and cursing.

Optimism, idealism and energy

Teens are sometimes seen as having a more positive, less cynical outlook on the world than adults. Even if this is understood as a sort of naïveté, it allows teenagers to take risks, imagine change, and invest energy where adults might not.

They're very naive towards the world so they see everything, like, "no trouble, no problems, we can do everything. What's the problem?" Everything seems to be very easy. Where as an adult would be, "well, you got to do this first. No, you can't do that. ..." They don't have any barriers ...

Delusions of power, immortality

The negative perspective on teens' optimism is that they feel they can accomplish things that are actually unrealistic. Notoriously, this includes surviving risky situations, like fast driving, excessive drinking, and so forth.

They take more chances when they are younger.

[T]hey haven't been taught any boundaries. You know they now feel and know that they can do all these things.

Problems with age segregation

Some people feel that teenage problems stem from spending too much time only with people of their own age — e.g. all day in a large high school. According to this model, current American teens (as opposed to teenagers in other times and places) do not learn important lessons about integrating with the community around them, and don't get sufficient exposure to other perspectives on the world.

There are certainly teenagers who are ... alienated from their families and from other age groups, and certainly I felt that going to a large suburban high school when I did, that my days were spent with other people my own age, in huge numbers. ... I think that's a terrible mistake for society to make. ... [M]y sense was at the time that I wasn't integrated into the world generally, I just saw lots of other people my same age.

Teens look like aliens

Adults are preoccupied with the "looks" adopted by teenagers, especially what is perceived as the widespread fad for tattoos and piercings. An unconventional appearance is seen, as it has been in earlier generations, as a reflection of very different attitudes, and even as a defiance of all of society's values. This is a negative, "objectifying" view that some people are prone to toggle into.

I think teenagers nowadays tend to be a bit more on the edge than we were when we were teenagers. Nobody when I was growing up had anything pierced other than an ear.

Teens are preoccupied with sex

Contrary to some expert studies (see Hines 1999) the popular American view is that teens are far more focussed on sex than adults are.

[In response to a question about what most interests teenagers:] Money and sex (laughs). I would put those two before I'd even say drugs.

Teens as a financial burden

Teenagers are sometimes framed in terms of the financial burden they place on a family. They have expensive needs (which they only partially pay for with their own income) and don't help support the family.

In their material acquisitions they want to start with something usually much better or much more than they should or could afford ...

Teens are self-centered

Teenagers are often perceived as indifferent to the people around them, only concerned with their own needs and agendas.

[I]t was like give me, give me, give me and that was it.

Some of them have an attitude of "I don't care."

[In response to a question about what teenagers are interested in:] Themselves.

This is a corollary to teens' increasing distance from the "family matrix" and broader "social matrix." And in fact this framing ignores and contradicts the other common view that teenagers are extremely interested in each other — i.e. in fitting in well with particular groups of peers.

Teens are spoiled

The idea that today's adolescents have too many privileges shows up occasionally. It provides a counterpoint to the model that it is difficult and stressful to be a teenager, and is connected to the model that today's teenagers are slower than previous generations to accept responsibility.

[M]y first vehicle, I bought it, arranged for it, bought the insurance. I don't see that happening today. I don't know of a 16 year old today that does that.

"Growing up" means becoming cynical

A recurring model, even among informants who feel that today's teens are not essentially different from yesterday's teens, is that children in general are exposed to far more adult-oriented media and events than they were in the past, and that this has a strong and negative effect on their view of the world.

[T]hey are a little more disillusioned, disaffected with their situation.

Teens represent future financial security

According to this model, parents invest in their children as a hedge against future financial need. This model showed up rarely, which points up a striking difference between current American models of parenting and more traditional views. [Note: This is not identical with the view that Americans should invest with teens in general, since today's teens will constitute tomorrow's (shrinking) class of social security contributors. We found no evidence of that particular model, and no evidence that would suggest its efficacy in helping the public reframe teens in a more positive light.]

... I might need to borrow a dollar or two from her one day.

Constant decline in teens' lives over the generations

Some informants expressed the view that there has been a gradual or sudden shift in the experience of teens in recent years.

Your teenagers from the 60's on I think have been totally different than any other teens.

Teens have little power/cause small problems

This model states that despite the bad press teenagers get, adults tend to cause the real problems in society. This model contradicts the anxiety that people feel about teens' destructive potential, evident in drunk driving and more recently in mass killings.

Teenagers tend to cause fairly temporary problems.

Actions determine maturity

A surprising finding from the interviews is that in the case of serious crime adulthood is defined by actions, rather than by physical appearance or emotional maturity. One interpretation of this finding is that childhood is defined by actions that have no lasting consequences. A crime such as murder cannot be undone, and is therefore not the work of a child.

I think shooting someone is a very adult crime; so the judication of the crime should be at an adult level.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The research presented in this report leads to a number of conclusions about productive and unproductive ways of framing youth – i.e. ways which will or will not help Americans value youth as a resource. Many of these research findings can be carried forward by other methodologies that are part of the strategic frame analysis approach. Where we have used a qualitative approach to identify and describe important American models of adolescence, other methodologies (including, for example, a fixed-form survey based on the findings of this report) lend themselves to determining how widely these models are distributed; how strongly they are held; or which messages are most effective moving opinion in the right direction.

- Not surprisingly, actual experience with teenagers is a key factor in determining people's attitudes. The more people's views are informed by "face time" and the less by the media, the more likely they are to share perspectives supported by WTG – i.e. the empathetic view of teenagers. This finding could be tested and refined quantitatively, through investigation of the correlation between the number of hours an adult spends with teenagers (whether in the home, in work settings, in the neighborhood, or wherever else) and the likelihood that the adult empathizes with teenagers. We expect the correlation would be strong.

While the Foundation cannot hope (in the near term) to increase overall interaction between adults and youth, there may be other ways of combating the destructive power of media stereotypes. Our research shows that people are hyperaware of unusual teenagers – ones who commit atrocious crimes or heroic feats – and often forget the majority who do

their homework, help with the dishes and never make the news. In short, thanks to the media, they often see the normal as abnormal, and spend more time thinking about teenagers who are the exceptions to the rules, and to whom they probably have a much harder time trying to relate. Using Gilliam and Iyengar's media effects testing methodology it should be possible to determine whether exposure to news stories depicting teens in more typical scenarios could have a positive effect on attitudes. (We recognize of course that this would represent a challenge to advocates and the media, since it amounts to a hope that we can see more "unnewsworthy" teens in the news.)

- People are sometimes very aware of the discrepancy between media models of teens (i.e. as monsters or heroes) and their own experience of "normal" teens. Quantitative measures of the impact of media models (e.g. how often people think in terms of them, how strongly they influence opinions on particular issues) would be valuable, since this information would help the foundation decide on communications priorities. Must the negative media model be combatted directly, or will it be more efficient to reinforce the empathetic model that is already widespread? Media effects testing could be used to explore the degree to which the public sees a lack of "fit" between their lived experience and the media model, and the degree to which they reconcile the conflict by seeing their own case as special.
- An important finding of our research is the near-absence of a cultural model that emphasizes teens' need for mentoring from adults outside the nuclear family. The cross-cultural evidence (and arguments from evolutionary psychology) suggest that around the age of puberty, individuals (especially boys) are normally recruited by social institutions (e.g., mother's-brothers; religious cults), and may be predisposed to distancing themselves from the nuclear family at this stage. American models, including expert models, often fail to acknowledge this nearly-universal aspect of human development, in effect reinforcing the idea that the nuclear family bears sole responsibility for guiding the development of youths (see e.g., Zill).
- A question that arises from the interview data is whether the choice of terminology – i.e. *teenager* vs. *youth* vs. *adolescent* vs. *person* vs. *kid/child* – make a difference in how people respond to media representations. Do people automatically superimpose their own frames no matter what language they are exposed to? Media effects testing is ideally suited to answer this question.
- Framings of teenagers should obviously stress what it's like to be a teenager – the empathetic viewpoint. In addition, they should stress the developmental nature of adolescence: teenagers are in the process of learning and transforming themselves. Many imperfections in their behavior can be traced to this.

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Appendix: The Cognitive Analysis Approach

The methodological basis of this report is a series of semi-structured one-hour interviews with 10 respondents, followed by close analysis of the transcriptions of these interviews. Language used by the subjects provides a window onto the *cognitive models* that structure their thinking about adolescence and adolescents. In particular, the method identifies widely shared and deeply held beliefs, the *cultural models* that form the foundation of American understandings of the topic. In what follows, we provide a brief summary of the main assumptions of this approach, which integrates aspects of cognitive anthropology and cognitive linguistics.

Frames

Researchers who study cognition and culture have established that people understand all concepts in terms of related networks of ideas, also known as *frames*. For example, the concept of a 'father' is not understood in isolation, but in connection with understandings of mothers, children, families, biology, responsibility, and so forth. People are usually unaware of the frames they are using, and the frames themselves are usually expressed indirectly. Instead, frames are revealed based on the language and reasoning the person uses in connection with a concept. Seeming contradictions in the way a person discusses a topic can be particularly enlightening, because they may reveal conflicting frames at work. It should be noted as well that frame is a general term — used somewhat differently in different disciplines — to refer to more specific concepts such as cognitive model, cultural model, and *cultural theory*, discussed below.

Cultural models vs. cultural theories

A cultural theory is a set of explicit propositions that describe the nature of some general phenomenon (D'Andrade 1995). Cultural theories are typically the most apparent and immediately coherent structures of knowledge — the ones that are volunteered by focus group participants for example, and the ones that lend themselves to direct description and summary by the analyst.

A cultural model, by contrast, consists of a set of largely implicit assumptions that allows a person to reason about and solve a problem (D'Andrade 1995). A cultural model specifies relationships between a given concept and others — specific domains (e.g., Teenagers) are typically connected to broader cultural assumptions (e.g., understandings about independence or safety).

A classic example of the difference between cultural models and cultural theories is provided by Strauss's study of blue collar workers in Rhode Island (1992). Her informants clearly understood, and explicitly articulated to the interviewer, the American model of self-made Success. In some cases, they even claimed that this style of success was important to them. Close analysis of discourse, however, revealed that these men were actually basing their behavior on an implicit model of a Breadwinner, which is more strongly related to ideals of husband and father than to wealth and status.

Cultural models, while less explicit and more challenging to identify than cultural theories, typically have more directive force — i.e., they are more relevant to understanding what people actually do.

Cognitive Analysis

An important assumption of this view of human motivation is that a variety of cultural models typically compete for expression in a given defined situation. Putting it simply, people often have conflicts about basic issues. For example, many Americans believe that a woman should work outside the home; a contradictory assumption, held by many of these same people, is that women should stay in the home and nurture children. Though contradictions such as this one often find partial resolution (e.g., through the contemporary American notion of the "Supermom"), typically such deeply held beliefs are compartmentalized; i.e., only one will be invoked in a given context.

Cognitive analysis first identifies the relevant deeply held models to which a given subject such as "Teens" are connected (literally or through metaphor). Second, it attempts to map the fault lines that predict which of the models will be expressed as action in a given situation, often triggered by particular cues. Third, it suggests a picture of the dynamic relationship between public messages, cultural models, and individual action around a given topic.

Metaphors

It is a universal finding of cognitive linguistics that people use metaphors to think, speak and reason about the world, even on topics as familiar as adolescence and teenagers — i.e., some of the cultural models used to reason about teenagers are metaphoric models. For example, teenagers are sometimes metaphorically understood as unfinished objects, materials that haven't been formed into their final shape. The metaphors people use to think and talk about teenagers contribute to guiding adults' behavior towards adolescents, including whether and how they choose to nurture, ignore, discipline, or otherwise engage with adolescents. Reasoning by way of metaphoric models also affects adults' evaluation of the appropriateness and efficacy of political policies and programs directed at adolescents (cf. Schön 1979).

Cognitive interviews

Because cultural models tend to be organized into distinct and recognizable patterns, they lend themselves to qualitative investigation. The cognitive interview format is designed to approximate a "natural conversation" (Quinn 1982). In an interview situation people are often most comfortable providing cultural theories (explicit and familiar explanations which are known to have general currency); the semi-structured interview puts them in a situation which encourages them instead to do their own reasoning about the issues we are interested in, i.e., to use the relevant cultural models.

Skilled interviewing shifts the informant away from a "performing" mode and toward a "training" mode. The natural give and take of a conversation puts informants in a position of teaching the interviewer how to think about a given issue. The analyst's job is to identify cultural assumptions, first in the interview setting by responding to and subtly challenging or asking for clarification of intuited premises, and second in the analysis of transcriptions by making these assumptions explicit.

Subjects and sample size

Because a culture is defined by a set of broadly shared understandings and assumptions, studying cultural models is analogous to studying the structure of a natural language. One does not need a large group of speakers to determine the basics of a language's grammar and syntax — a few speakers will typically suffice. Similarly, working with only a few subjects, one can identify the commonly held belief system typical of those subjects' culture. In-depth work with a relatively small group of informants has been the norm in cognitive

anthropology, allowing researchers to work more closely with subjects than is possible using large-scale methodologies. Findings from cognitive interviews may subsequently be expanded upon and refined through quantitative methods, which may establish, for example, how strongly particular models are held in different segments of the population. Where the cognitive approach identifies the nature of the models, carefully devised quantitative research, using fixed-form surveys for example, can establish the distribution of the models (see Kempton et al 1995).

For this study, the subjects were 10 American adults from different social and ethnic backgrounds, distributed approximately evenly across the following demographic divisions: male/female, over/under 35 years of age, with/without children, European-American/African-American (and 1 Hispanic-American), conservative/liberal.