

TEENAGERS RESEARCH REVIEW

The Horatio Alger Report on the State Of The (U.S.) Nation's Youth, 2008-209 , Individually Optimistic, Collectively Not So Much
(www.horatioalger.com/pdfs/state05.pdf)

OVERVIEW

The State of our Nations Youth report "was created by the Horatio Alger Association to give voice and attention to the opinions, concerns, thoughts and aspirations of the young people of the United States." This is the fifth of these reports, begun in 2005-2006.

According to its Overview this study from a sample of over a thousand 13-19-year-olds found U.S. high school students wanting "more from their high schools" and wanting "their high schools to do more for them—including higher expectations of them. At the same time they report high pressures about their grades from themselves and parental expectations.

"In their own words, the State Of Our Nation's Youth is confident, ambitious, and optimistic" although they are aware of many serious challenges. "These teenagers are worried about the country's future and apprehensive about the economy and the war in Iraq. They face every increasing pressure about their grades and getting into college. (In fact, hope and optimism about their country's future has declined from 75% in 2003 to 53% in 2008. They seem to understand the importance of a presidential election in shaping their own and their country's future—75% say they care about who wins the 2008 presidential election. There is growing evidence that adult problems, such as financial worries and health care concerns, are creeping into their lives.

"Yet despite these anxieties, what emerges here is a portrait of a generation who believe in themselves and their abilities. Their pessimism about the country's future is matched by optimism for their own futures."

This generation recognizes the importance of technology. They would improve their schools with more up-to-date technology and believe science and technology classes are most important. They also see the importance of technology in their own personal lives—with both positive (doing homework) and negative (wasting time) consequences.

In general this report presents a rather optimistic portrait of teens despite the world's turmoil. They are generally optimist about their own abilities and futures,

much less about their country's future. In fact, hope and optimism about their country's future has declined from 75% in 2003 to 53% in 2008. They seem to understand the importance of a presidential election in shaping theirs and their country's future—75% say they care about who wins the 2008 presidential election. African-American students are more likely to say they care about who wins an election, and more likely (83%) than Hispanic (69%) or Caucasian (73%) to say the election will make a very or fairly large difference in the direction of the country. Television, then the Internet, are their main sources for news.

DESIGN

Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., a leading survey research firm, surveyed by telephone 1,006 students across the country from April 21-26, 2008. The sample "was based from a list of K-12 students compiled by the American Student List. Selected telephone numbers were called randomly with the sample structured to ensure proper geographic representation. Within households students were selected by a procedure designed to provide an approximate balance of respondents by gender and age." Only freshmen through seniors in high school were accepted as respondents.

"The data's statistical margin of sampling error is + or - 3.1 percentage points among all students at the 95% confidence level, although sample tolerances for subgroups are larger and sampling error is just one form of error or bias that can affect survey results."

As to how these respondents described the areas they lived in: 29% City, 25% suburb, 29% small town, 15% rural, 2% not sure. As to their perceived income group: 5% far below average, 20% slightly below average, 40% just above average, 27% slightly above average, 3% far above average, 5% not sure. And as to their race or ethnicity: 19% Hispanic, 54% White, 17% Black, 3% Asian, 6% Other, 1% not sure.

FINDINGS

THE INTERNET

Average number of hours spent online

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------|
| > for help in homework | 4.5 hours |
| > browsing social networking sites | 6.2 hours |
| > for entertainment | 7.1 hours |

A bare half (46%) report their parents have rules for their use of Internet
Three of four (72%) say their parents know what they're doing online

Three in ten (30%) say online bullying is now a bigger problem than bullying in the hallways and bathrooms.

16% of students say they have been a victim of online bullying

TIME ON CELL PHONES, INTERNET, TV

Today's teenagers spend

12.9 hours per week talking on a cell phone

11.6 hours per week on the Internet

9.8 hours per week watching television

8.9 hours per week doing homework

"There is a correlation between amount of time students spend online and the grades they report getting. A and B students spend an average of 10.2 hours a week online, students who receive C's and lower spend an average of 12.6 hours."

PRESSURE

59% of teens say they are free to act their age as teenagers

37% of teens say they feel a lot of the same pressures as adults and not able to just be teenagers

63% of teenagers see their lives under control

37% of teenagers say they have one or more pressures creating real problems in their lives

Describing themselves, 88% would use the word "confident" to describe themselves, 81% would use the word "ambitious," 66% of students consider themselves "optimists."

Major problems: 56% family problems getting along with parents, 56% financial pressure, 53% concerns about personal safety, 50% pressure to look a certain way, 49% health concerns, cost and availability, 43% loneliness or feeling left out, 39% pressure to do drugs or to drink, 38% pressure to engage in sexual activity.

Main stresses: 38% getting good grades, 33% getting into college, 14% family problems, 23% having enough money, 11% fights with peers, 4% fitting in at school, not sure 3%.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES FOR STUDENTS

1. The economy/jobs (34 percent)
2. War in Iraq (31 percent)
3. Environment/global warming (28 percent)
4. Education (25 percent)
5. Health care (16 percent)
6. Terrorism & national security (13 percent)
7. Civil liberties & civil rights (11 percent)
8. Moral values (10 percent)

STEROIDS

"Nearly half of students say steroids are a big problem.... Hispanic (52%) and African-American (54%) are much more likely than Caucasian (39%) to feel steroids are a big problem among high school students."

COLLEGE AND CAREERS

Asked what would make their parents proud of them, 75% of students said getting all A's; 18% said doing community service, and 5% said receiving a sports award.

What they've thought about doing as an adult? 49% being a teacher; 42% serving in the military; 33% serving in government; 20% running for public office.

FAMILY MEMBERS IN HOME (What family members live with you?)

88% mother
 70% father
 51% brother
 46% sister
 8% grandparent(s)
 4% stepfather
 3% stepmother
 1% stepbrother
 1% stepsister

ROLE MODELS

Family member	57% (up from 47% in 2005)
Friend/family friend	11% (down from 15% in 2005)
Teacher/Educator	9%
Entertainer/artist/writer	9% (down from 11% in 2005)

Sports figure	4% (down from 5% in 2005)
Religious figure	4% (down from 5% in 2005)
National political leader	2% (up from 1% in 2005)
Business leader	2% (down from 3% in 2005)
Internat. political leader	1%

QUESTIONS FROM REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What surprised or impressed you most in this report?
2. To what degree do you trust these findings?
3. What critique or suggestions do you have about the Survey and Report, or this summary?
4. What do you see as worthy of discussion here: among youth leaders, with young people themselves, with parents?

IMPLICATIONS

1. For some of us changes in the generations are apparent. These young people can be distinguished from those ten and twenty years ago.
2. Obviously, there are many aspects of Internet use that need to be discussed with students: what they get out of it, how they could profit more, how they discipline their use of it, how bullying can be curtailed, how they handle the temptations of internet use (e.g. pornography).
3. This study tells us today's high school students are interested in justice issues and global crises. Such matters are too little discussed around a family meal or in youth groups—the directions of which can go deeper and be more personal than school discussions.
4. Pressures and stress remain large issues for young people. Their feelings about this need to be expressed and opinions shared.

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