

CPYU charts telling stats

The following items are typical examples of the information that can be found in the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding's e-updates:

- According to Nielsen SoundScan, as reported by Reuters, Eminem's "The Eminem Show" was the top selling album in 2002.

- The Associated Press reported data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showing that binge drinking — five-plus drinks per drinking session — among underage 18- to 20-year-olds increased 56 percent between 1993 and 2001.

- The October 7, 2002 issue of Time magazine, pp. 64-65, includes an article about the growing abstinence movement. The results of an online survey of 1,061 13- to 18-year-old teens conducted by TIME/MTV on September 10-12, 2002, reveal that 56 percent of teens want to abstain from sex until they marry. Thirty-seven percent think virginity pledges are effective to prevent teens from having sex until marriage.

- According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, the teen abortion rate for 15- to 19-year-old girls dropped 27 percent to 25 abortions per 1,000 women from 34 in 1994 (41 percent drop from the abortion rate of 42 per 1,000 women in 1987). Other key findings: 19 percent of women who had an abortion in 2000-01 were adolescents; 34 percent of teen pregnancies end in abortion.

- According to the Yankee Group, as reported by NPD Techworld, wireless phones are increasingly becoming a back-to-school necessity, with 34 percent of teens currently owning one. The percentage of wireless phone teens is expected to rise to 75 percent by 2006.

- United Press International reported that a study by researchers at the University of Indiana's Medical School showed exposure to violent video games causes disruptions in brain activity and a desensitization to an understanding of the real impact of violence. The study involved brain scans of 38 teens (19 normal teens and 19 teens diagnosed with Disruptive Behavior Disorder).



Reuters/CNS

Britney Spears (from left), Madonna and Christina Aguilera open the 2003 MTV Video Music Awards with a controversial performance at New York City's Radio City Music Hall Aug. 28.

Expert tracks teen trends

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

In the late 1950s, television censors deemed that cameras should cut off Elvis Presley at the waist, leaving viewers to wonder just how wildly those hips were gyrating.

These days, considerably less imagination is needed. Consider the images of Madonna kissing Britney Spears then Christina Aguilera, during the MTV Awards broadcast Aug. 28. The singers' provocative actions are part of an ongoing pattern of testing censors' limits — one that has seen such entertainers as Eminem, 50 Cent and Ozzy Osbourne become big hits among teenagers.

According to teen expert Walt Mueller, the onslaught of sex, violence and foul language may be why the recent display by Madonna, Britney and Christina — though widely reported — fell short of creating a major furor.

"I don't think today the outcry was as great as it would have been for Elvis. You look back and say, what were people so concerned about back then? You can see how far we've come," remarked Mueller, founder and president of the nonprofit Center for Parent/Youth Understanding in Elizabethtown, Pa. "The envelope keeps getting stretched further and further."

Mueller's nonprofit organization



tracks societal trends and their long-term effects on teen behavior in such areas as video-game violence, smoking, sexual activity, substance abuse, music, advertising and religion. CPYU's findings are published in newsletters as well as an e-update on its Web site, www.cpyu.org. The e-update, begun in November 2001 and published every two weeks, is a free service reaching approximately 7,000 subscribers. It's full of verifiable statistics and news items, with numerous links to additional articles and resources.

Mueller said CPYU seeks to get to the root of what appeals to teens. For instance, with hip-hop music, "what you have to do is ask the question, 'Why?' Why are (teens) listening to it, why are they connecting with it?"

Although Mueller is concerned about the course entertainment is taking, he said his top goal is to promote awareness, not to condemn. "You're not going to hear a pronouncement from us. We want you to take the information and make your own pronouncement," he said.

He emphasized that parents need to study negative influences rather than ignore them. "Even if our kids are not watching or listening to that

stuff, they are immersed in this culture out there," said Mueller, who has four children ages 11 to 19. "I've wanted my kids to be street-wise. As Christians are we called to be separate from the world? Yes. But what does that mean? Does that mean we live in a tent out in the woods somewhere? No."

Michael Theisen, diocesan director of youth ministry, frequently quotes CPYU in his own e-updates to diocesan youth ministers. Theisen said the CPYU information "connects the idea of faith and morality without negating the culture. It didn't come out right and say, 'This is evil and this is bad.' It said be aware of how it's forming young people's minds and values. It's really an approach I appreciate."

Mueller, who is Presbyterian, began CPYU in 1990 after conducting a series of well-received seminars for parents on teen behavior. He is also a lecturer and author of the 1994 book *Understanding Today's Youth Culture*.

Today's teens have many societal obstacles to overcome, Mueller said, but he remains hopeful.

"We're in difficult times. Attitudes certainly have changed, but this is not the first time, nor will be the last, that society has gotten to this point," he said. "What a wonderful opportunity to practice our faith."

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