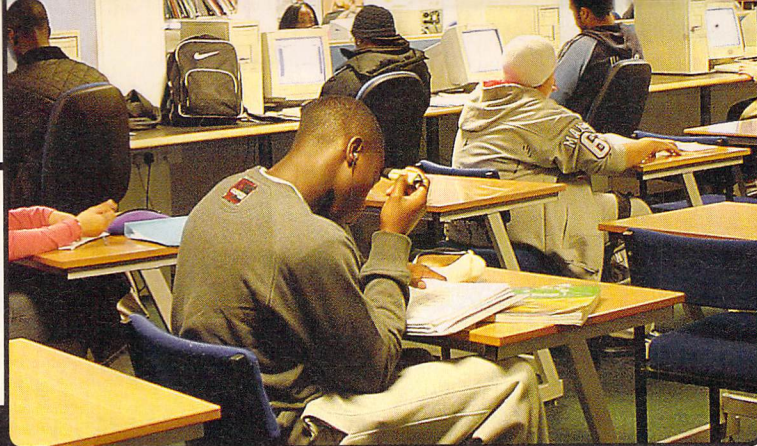


culture

it's about time... and how teens spend it

TRENDS



Compared to Gen Xers, today's Millennial kids spend a lot more time in school and a lot less time goofing around outside. According to the University of Michigan study *Changing Times of American Youth: 1981–2003*, the typical teenager spends 36.5 hours in school or doing homework—compared to 29 hours per week for teenagers in the early '80s.

The study found other major shifts in the way kids dice up their day, including:

Less Time Spent...

● **Watching TV**—Two decades ago kids spent an hour longer in front of the TV every week than kids do today—but given all the other ways they're filling their time, you'd expect the drop to be greater.

● **Eating**—With home life looking more and more like the Indy 500, it's no surprise that teenagers are spending close to 17% less time eating than they did in 1981.

● **Playing Sports and Outdoor Activities**—Combined, kids spend a little less than four hours a week (3:49) being physically active—that's almost two hours less per week than their Gen X predecessors.

● **Church Activities**—Two decades ago teenagers spent about two hours a week at church—that's dropped by a half-hour (or 25%). Dwindling time at church ups the ante for what we do with kids while we have them.

● **At Work**—In 1981 teenagers worked a little more than two hours a week, on average. Today the figure is just 53 minutes.

● **Enjoying a Hobby**—The average teenager spends just 12 minutes a week mastering a hobby—that's a big drop from 1981, when it was 27 minutes.

More Time Spent...

● **At School and Studying**—The backpacks are bigger, and so is the load of homework teenagers are expected to complete every week—that partially accounts for more than a seven-hour spike in school/study time.

● **Doing "Personal Care"**—We have no idea what "personal care" really means, but kids are spending an average of two hours more per week doing it. Maybe it's a hair-gel thing.

● **Playing Games**—Kids spend about 45 minutes more per week playing games—mostly video games—than teenagers in 1981. On weekends they spend anywhere between one and two-and-a-half hours playing games every day, and that drops to 30 to 60 minutes on weekdays.

● **Doing Household Work**—With two-income and single-parent households on the rise, teenagers have more household

chores—and they spend a remarkable two hours more per week on them.

● Visiting With Friends—

Today's teenagers spend more than twice the time their early-'80s counterparts spent socializing with friends—4:47 compared to 2:12.

● Computer Activities—

Computer time wasn't even a category in the 1981 study—now it accounts for almost three hours (2:45) of kids' time every week.

● **Other Passive Leisure Activities**—It'd be interesting to ask your kids to define this category, because they spend a lot more time at it than teenagers did two decades ago (2:46 compared to just 39 minutes).

true believers treat fiction as fact

The more an American believes in something, the less the truth matters—that's according to an international study on why people continue to believe something is true even when they learn new facts that prove it's not.

Psychologists in the U.S., Australia, and Germany gave more than 860 people a list of events—some of them true, some of them widely reported myths—and asked whether they still believed the "myth" events happened even though they recalled hearing evidence to the contrary. The Aussies and the Germans responded as you'd expect—those who heard a "retraction" about something originally reported as fact said they no longer believed the original report. Not so for Americans—a retraction was not enough to overcome their existing "mental model."

That means if a "fact" is disproven but

underscores an already-held belief, an American tends to accept the "fact" anyway. This strange dynamic explains why so few kids (and adults, for that matter) have a full and accurate picture of Jesus. For example, ask a typical teenager to describe Jesus, and you'll likely hear words such as "kind," "nice," and "forgiving." Then ask them whether Jesus was being kind, nice, and forgiving when he drove the moneychangers out of the Temple with a whip. They'll say something like, "Jesus is basically nice, so even though I don't understand why he did that, it must have been nice."

Focused youth ministries will try to surmount these "false but still true" beliefs and erode the ground they stand on. C.S. Lewis did this when he wrote that Jesus could only be a "liar, lunatic, or Lord"—not the "nice guy" many make him out to be.