

GenTrends

Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!

March 2004

What's Happened to Play?

A friend and I were reminiscing the other day about how we used to play in the backyard, building forts, hanging from rope swings and taking sides for war games.

But for most of "civilized" America these days, those activities have become taboo. What with lawsuits, legislation, safety regulations, child protection advocates, and the scrutiny of the media, one would think that the average eight-year-old should wear body armor just to leave the house.

Children instead seem to focus on the "programmed play" of television, computers, and video games. While one can understand the role this plays in child development, it has also had a tremendous impact on imagination, not to mention physical activity. Is it any wonder, for instance, that childhood obesity is taking on epic proportions? Given an opportunity, the average eight-year-old from an underdeveloped country can probably beat the pants off the average eight-year-old from the US any day of the week and twice on Sunday.

Old-fashioned play revolved around running, jumping, and creating the requisite "equipment" on the spot – boxes became forts, sticks became swords, and wagons became dump trucks. (This is from my male perspective, of course.) But the outcome was exercise, social development, and a sense of freedom to imagine whatever your little heart desired. Other than the occasional motherly admonition, survival was to the fittest and you settled your scores on the playground.

We didn't bully-proof anyone. There were no classes in getting along. We simply figured it out.

Playgrounds were also meritocracies. The best ball player was picked first. The kid with the coolest toy got the most attention, and everyone played for keeps. These days, we don't keep score in ball games for fear of hurting someone's self-esteem. (This is in part to dissuade the more assertive of parents from accosting volunteer umpires over close calls in the sixth inning.)

Through all of this, children developed a network within the neighborhood. You learned who to trust and who to avoid. Your friends' parents disciplined you and your parents' corrected your friends. There were no neighborhood agreements or local ordinances around play. But we all spent so much time together, we developed our own unwritten codes.

Ask yourself if today's kids are living better lives protected by programmed play and being scheduled to the hilt. Are we losing the opportunity for the development of imagination by limiting their ability to explore? Will we, as a society, lose our edge, over time by producing young adults with fast fingers yet overly dependent on external forces to guide their imaginations?

**Call 1-800-227-5510 to
book us for your next
meeting.**

Upcoming Center audiences include

US Department of Veterans Affairs
Century College
Self-Storage Association
ND Rural Electric Cooperatives
Washington State Medical Association
Utility Supply Management Association
Western Independent Bankers
Joint Warfare Analysis Command
Government Finance Officers Association
National Association of College Stores

"GenTistics"

Travelers over the age of 55 now make up about 15% of Thailand's backpacker population.

Peter de Jong, President
Pacific-Asia Travel Association



Robert W. Wendover
Editorial Director



15200 E. Girard Ave.
Suite 4000
Aurora, CO 80014
Phone: 303-617-7207
Fax: 303-617-7209
Toll Free: 800-227-5510
www.gentrends.com

To ponder . . .

Many Americans believed that rock 'n' roll was an irritant that provoked conflict between parents and teenagers and increased antisocial behavior. Acknowledging that there was no simple, causal equation between enjoying Elvis and arranging a rumble, they remained convinced that rock 'n' roll reinforced the most worrisome aspects of youth culture: antagonism to adult authority and expectations; conformity to peer-group norms; and an ephemeral, erratic emotional intensity. With journalist John Sharnik, many adults in the 1950's found Presley's "air of inarticulate suspicion" just as subversive as his onstage gymnastics: "It's like that hostile look you get when you've told your 13-year old daughter that she can't wear lipstick, or stay up to watch the late movie."

According to cultural critic Dwight MacDonald, with rock 'n' roll "teenism reached its climax, or its nadir" as a form of defiance of adult control. Popular music, however, was by no means alone as a symbol and a sign of generational conflict. Throughout mass media and the marketplace, it seemed, teenagers separated themselves from the rest of the population. Their behavior was as "baffling to the lay adult," wrote Macdonald, "as if they were in the grip of a severe neurosis." How should parents respond? Were teenagers really all that rebellious? If so, what made them so? Were the standards of taste and conduct of young people actually natural and functional aspects of the transition to adulthood? Or might the tribal subculture of the '50s adolescents become a permanent way of life?

Glenn C. Altschuler

To Read: *All Shook Up: How Rock 'N' Roll Changed America.*

Glenn C. Altschuler. Oxford University Press, New York, 2003. ISBN 0-19-513943-7.

Case Study Corner

I manage a retirement community with 300 residents whose average age is 82. Lately, a number have been expressing concerns about employees who do not treat them with the respect they feel they deserve. A few are uncomfortable having teenage workers call them by their first name. A couple of others have complained about workers who do not arrive to clean apartments when promised. One resident expressed frustration with a young aide who chats on a cell phone while cleaning the common areas. What's the best way to handle this?

Three different situations, three different answers. You might begin by gathering the staff and asking them to address all residents by their surnames unless the resident asks to be called by his/her first name. It will help to explain to them that most of the residents came of age in an era when surnames were used to address elders. Most of your younger workers have not received that training.

The apartment cleaning schedule is a little trickier. Many of your elderly residents live for these kinds of appointments during the day and are disappointed when they do not happen as expected. Do two things: 1) Gently remind the complaining residents that some apartments take longer to clean than expected and ask them to be patient. 2) Suggest to the staff that they be careful about making specific time commitments with regard to cleaning and other services where the timing can be unpredictable.

Finally, the cell-phone issue. In my mind, one complaint is not a reason to alter policy if you permit cell-phones on the job. If the complaints increase in number, then it may be time to revisit the issue and limit usage to emergencies.

Send your questions to wendover@gentrends.com. If we address your issue in the Case Study Corner, we'll send a free CD or tape to you from the Center's library of resources.

Don't Retire. Work for Yourself.

A Rand Corporation study conducted for AARP has found that about 16% of U.S. workers over age 50 were self-employed as of 2002. This is comparatively higher than the 10% self-employment percentage of the overall workforce. Consequently, U.S. workers over age 50 accounted for 40% of all people in business for themselves.

A three-hour tour . . .

According to Video Store Magazine, Warner Home Video has announced that it is releasing the first full season of *Gilligan's Island* on DVD later this month. Future releases this year include

- Little House on the Prairie*
- The Dick VanDyke Show*
- Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In*
- I Married Joan*
- The Milton Berle Buick Hour*
- Kung Fu*
- The Flintstones*
- The Richard Pryor Show*
- The Waltons*

Age Bias? Get Over It.

"Half of the workers in the US, or about 70 million, are over 40 and can sue for age discrimination. The other half simply need to grow up to get this kind of legal protection . . .

"Many younger workers feel kicked around at the office. Only 44% of employees age 18-24 believe they are fairly treated at work, says a survey by Mercer Human Resource Consulting. That compares with 64% of employees 45-55 . . .

"Call it an injustice. But it is not one that lasts a career. In time, the young become the old and the old become the dead. That's the cycle of life."

Al Lewis, Business Editor
The Denver Post