
Welcomed by those interested in youth religiosity research, *Lost in Transition* is another publication stemming from the third wave the National Study of Youth and Religion.

As many readers will recall, the NSYR was a massive study and analysis of adolescence (age 13-17). The first NSYR book, *Soul Searching* (Smith and Denton, Oxford, 2005) focused on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescence. Their religious and spiritual lives was similarly the focus of the second wave study *A Faith of Their Own: Stability and Change in the Religiosity and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Pierce and Denton, Oxford, 2010) as well as the third wave study *Souls in Transition* (Smith and Snell, Oxford, 2009). The NSYR is very much in a global stream of youth religiosity research, all of which in one way or another affirms a causal link between youth religiosity and prosocial behavior.

It breaks away from the religion and spirituality focus previous NSYR works, and considers five important (and to the authors very concerning) trends emerging in the dispositions and life experiences of these now emerging adults.

The authors are to be commended, I believe, for putting their philosophical cards on the table up front. This is not, in the Weberian sense, value-free sociology. Yes, they are reporting on their data, but organizing, analyzing, and presenting it in such a way that it is Durkheimian. It is sociology with an *ought*, very much in the spirit of Robert Bellah’s (1985) *Habits of the Heart*. The background tone through out the book is often one of sadness and concern.

Here is the bottom line of *Lost in Transition*: (my words) “We have found five trends among emerging adults that are both hurtful for themselves and ultimately hurtful to a civil society.” A complete chapter is devoted to each of the five trends.

“*Morality Adrift*” documents the inability of many emerging adults to *articulate or think morally*. They have no anchors upon which to base decisions other than “Will this make me happy?” Confusion in the face of interview questions about morality was the norm, even if the subject was broached from several angles. One strength of the book is that portions of representative transcripts are included. While reading, I often found myself exclaiming (in a non Weberian way to be sure) “Yikes, this is appalling!”
“Captive to Consumerism” examines the wholesale adoption of materialistic mass consumption as a positive value. The authors point out this value persists without regard to race, social class, and gender. One interviewee, when pushed to theorize if one could ever have too many possessions, admitted that perhaps her owning more than 100 pairs of shoes (p.83) was excessive. Others felt one should “go for it” if you had the money to spend. Most emerging adults were not able to see a link between mass consumerism and anything negative. Purchasing and owning made them happy, end of story. Only about ten percent expressed a desire to a simple (yet comfortable) lifestyle that was friendly, by its moderation, to the environment.

“Intoxication’s Fake Feeling of Happiness” considers the use and overuse of alcohol and drugs among emerging adults. Nearly half of their sample reported at least one incidence of binge drinking in the previous two weeks, while nearly 10 percent had engaged in binge drinking five or more times in the same period. The percentage of persons who drinks or uses drugs increases from the teen years to the early twenties. The chief reason, it appears, for getting drunk or buzzed is to enhance social interaction. About 20 percent of emerging adults are non-users of alcohol, tobacco, or drugs.

“The Shadow Side of Sexual Liberation” While the stats are clear, for example, that of the 73 percent of the never married persons in this age group who have had sexual intercourse, more than two thirds of these have done so many times. The focus of this chapter, however, is not statistics. It is rather the self reported hurt, grief, anger, and regret that stems from the sexual freedom this generation “enjoys.” These negative reflections were expressed by half the sample.

The other half reported no regrets or problems. The authors point out that it is usually (though not exclusively) these young women who are the ones who are hurt emotionally in their sexual experiences. The authors note the desire in most emerging adults to have no regrets, or to learn from their mistakes.

“Civic and Political Disengagement” While during the 2008 presidential election the popular press often lauded the increasing political and civic activism of emerging adults, the actual statistics reveal only 4 percent of this age group have any strong interest in politics or anything to do with civic responsibility or engagement. One’s immediate group of friends is the primary “civic” concern here. The wider world, including volunteerism or charitable giving, is not seen important or interesting.
Depressed yet? *Lost in Transition* gets high marks for readability. One is not presented with a thick forest of statistics at every page-turn. The actual interview quotes bring a sense of weight to the narrative. We are reminded often in the text that the statistics and quotations are from a statistically representative sample. All the more reason for concern and sadness.

In the Conclusion, the authors, being true to a sociology as “ought” perspective, express the hope that subsequent writers will provide a clearer way forward. What is the tipping point at which the number of amoral, greedy, hung over, emotionally wounded and uncaring citizens causes civil society to come unstuck? They do make some suggestions, including that “moral thought” can be taught at the high school and college level. They point out that American culture, a culture that we created, is producing emerging adults who seemed lost. *Lost in Transition* is in one sense, then, a plea for cultural reflection and “soul searching” while there is still time.

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religiously engage less beholden to these…

perhaps we all don’t need to get phd’ in neuroscience…