

Hope *or* Despair

Suburbia's
Children
Look
Into
the Future



★ This project was supported by a grant from the Rauch Foundation.

A copy of this report will be available on the
North Shore Child & Family Guidance Center
website at: www.northshorechildguidance.org

March 31, 2006

Dear Friend,

Today marks North Shore Child and Family Guidance Center's sixth Action-Oriented Research Conference in twenty-years. The present project was the result of a joint effort amongst several child and youth serving agencies across Long Island. The Project has been supported by a grant from the Rauch Foundation and the good work of our organizing committee members:


- Nancy Amer-Lake, board member, Long Beach Reach
- Jan Barbieri, Executive Director, Child Care Council of Nassau
- Maureen Ferrari, board member, NSC&FGC
- Dana Friedman, Project Director, Early Care and Education—Long Island
- Marion Levine, Executive Director/CEO, NSC&FGC
- Andrew Malekoff, Associate Director, NSC&FGC
- Robert McMahon, Executive Director, St. Christopher Otilie Family of Services
- Joseph Smith, Executive Director, Long Beach Reach
- Reinhardt Van Dyke, Executive Director, Family Service League—Long Island

We invite you to read the following report entitled: "Hope or Despair: Suburbia's Children Look into the Future." Action research is an approach in which a social survey is developed by concerned citizens and then used as a means to raise community consciousness, stimulate interaction among diverse groups, and motivate people to work toward change both individually and collectively. The central theme of investigation in this project is local youths' perceptions about the future. Over 1000 students from seven high schools across Long Island completed the survey.

Action research is designed to raise more questions than to provide conclusive answers. It is designed as a dynamic and not a static process. Therefore, as you read the report's survey results, and narrative responses regarding youth's deep concerns contained in the appendix to the report, consider what questions all of this raises about what suburban young people face in today's world. Think about whether views are different than how adults view things. Do kids and adults see eye-to-eye on the important critical issues in the survey, or do they part company on any or all of the issues? What are implications?

And, after all of the considering and thinking, think about one more thing please. Think about what actions you might take individually or in concert with others to make a difference, to become an active participant in community affairs. It is only through action, born out of critical thinking and interaction among concerned individuals, that might change the world—the world with a small "w" or the world with a big "W."

Sincerely,



Andrew Malekoff

Associate Director and Project Coordinator

“Never doubt for a moment that a small group of committed, thoughtful people can make a difference. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

**THE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE MEMBER
AGENCIES FOR THIS PROJECT ARE:**

Child Care Council of Nassau

Early Care and Education—Long Island

Family Service League—Long Island

Long Beach Reach

North Shore Child & Family Guidance Center

St. Christopher Ottilie Family of Services

Action Research

Hope or Despair? Suburbia's Children Look Into the Future

Background

In 1984 almost 300 teenagers, ages 11 to 19, from Port Washington and Westbury were invited to fill out a questionnaire to see how our children viewed the future. They expressed their deep concerns and talked about their role models. In the Spring of 2005, over 20 years later, we asked almost four times as many teenagers from seven Nassau and Suffolk School Districts to tell us through a questionnaire about their concerns now and in the future. The questionnaire was completed in their Health and Physical Education classes in order to get a representative sample. In a world with terrorism, war, and environmental concerns, how are our children faring?

Today we not only briefly share what they said, but we have invited students to discuss with us their thoughts, feelings, and hopes in an Action Research experience. Action Research doesn't provide definitive answers but rather creates a space for members of the community to come together to express their viewpoints, and create change, both individually and collectively.

What follows is a summary of some of the statistical highlights, with brief commentary on the concerns of youth in 1984, followed by a narrative in the words of the youth. Their voices provide their unique viewpoints on these issues.

Results

Demographics

A total of 1,045 students in 7 different schools across Nassau and Suffolk counties participated covering 9th through 12th grades. The students were evenly split between males (49%) and females (51%). They were mostly 9th (30%) and 11th (48%) graders as anticipated, however 10th graders (8%) and 12th graders (14%) were also included in the group.

Sixty-five percent (65%) of the students report living with two parents, 25% with their mother only and 7% with their father only. Three percent report other living arrangements or did not answer the question.

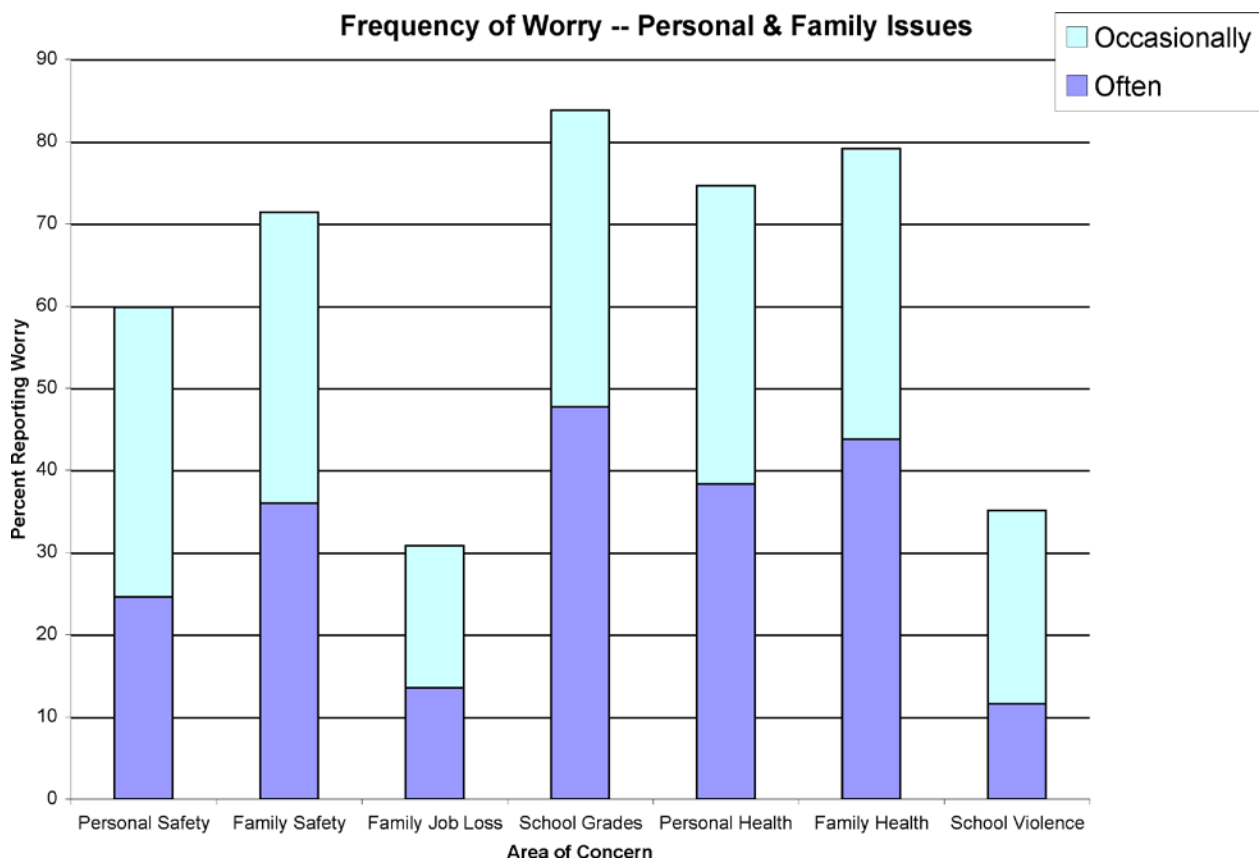
Worries and Concerns

We asked the youth in the survey to tell us of their concerns in two different ways. In one question we asked them to indicate how often they worry about different possible concerns, and later we asked them to write three things with which they are most concerned. When we asked how often they worried about personal and family issues they report that the areas of their greatest concern are school grades (84% worry at least occasionally), health of family members (79%), and safety of family (71%). These even surpass their concern with their own safety (60%).

However, when we asked them to tell us anything that concerned them, they told us that it was their family and friends, mentioned as their #1 concern.

Many of the young people were more revealing than anticipated in their response to an open-ended question in which they were asked to write about any area of deep concern. One young person wrote the following:

“People today are so concerned about themselves and what they have, they don’t look around them to see other people’s needs. People think they are important. They are. But they think they are above everyone, when in reality we all are like grains of sand in the beach.”

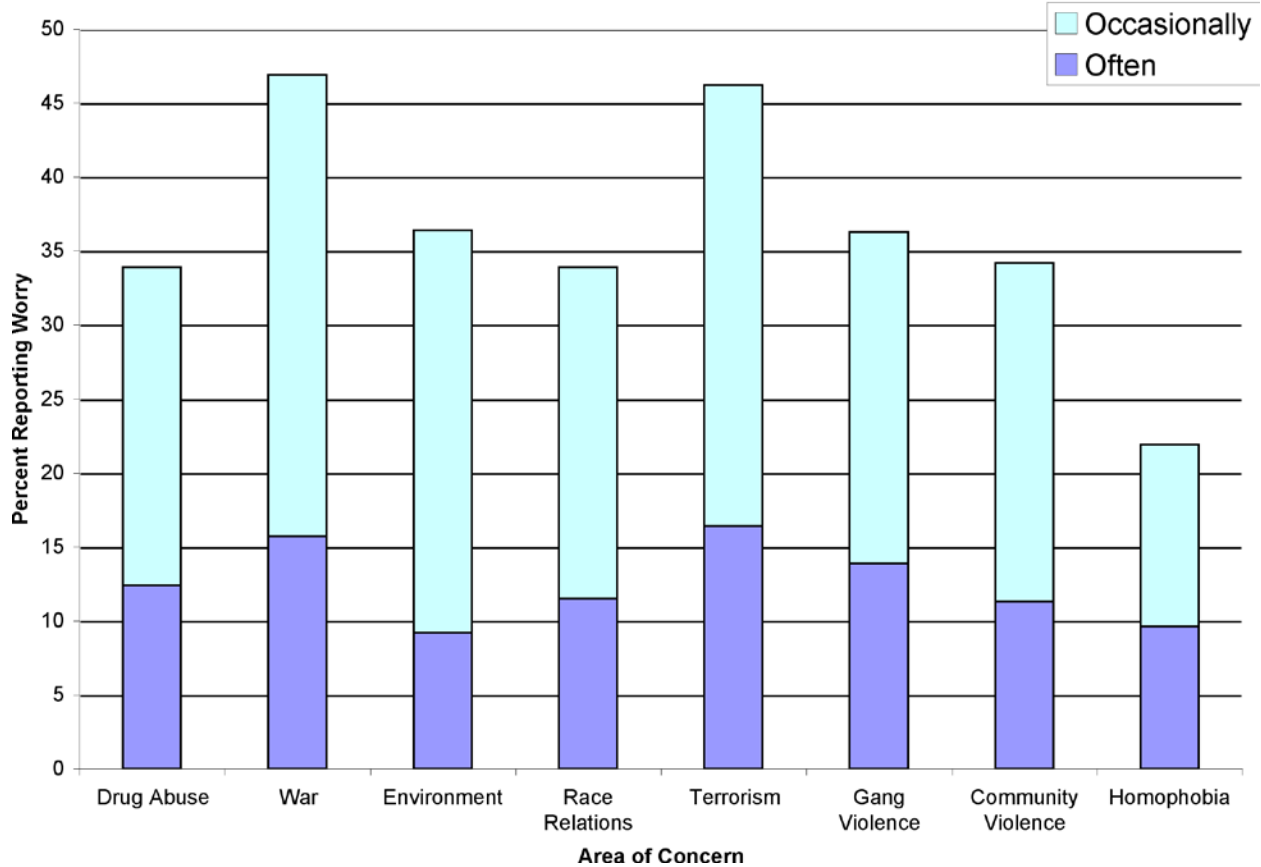


They report less concern with social issues. Less than half report worrying at least occasionally about war (47%) and about terrorism (46%). The other areas generate even less concern, but about 1/3 think about these issues, at least occasionally.

One young person commented on concerns about the world situation and alienation at home in a most interesting manner:

“War concerns me. Because our world is under attack and we have no way of stopping it. Our loved ones are out there fighting for our freedom...people wait just to hear from their loved ones. I recently read an article about how one man’s wife sits by the computer all day waiting for her husband to talk to her. I could not imagine living that way.”

Frequency of Worry -- Social Issues



And what of the terrorist attack of September 11th, 2001? When asked about the frequency with which they think about 9/11, it is clear that it is not part of their daily worry. In fact, 74% report thinking of September 11th at most a few times a year. They are, however, still concerned about future war and terrorism. And, when we asked them how likely they believed an act of terrorism in the next five years, almost 75% said it was very or somewhat likely to happen.

One of the teens put it this way: *“This is what concerns me. The world being destroyed in a matter of seconds—How it can just be gone in the blink of an eye. It’s scary.”*

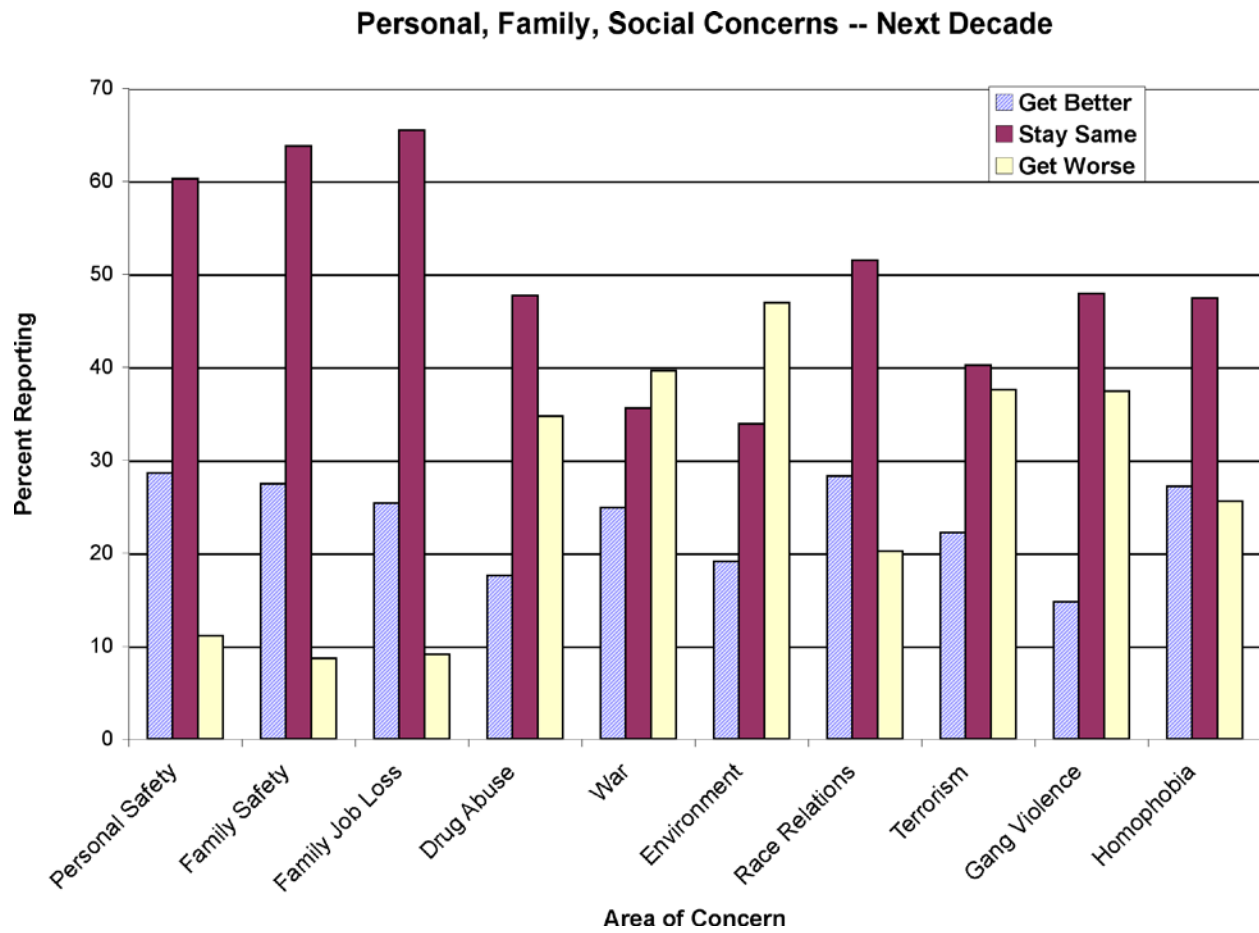
Better or Worse in the Future?

Next we looked at their predictions for the future. Generally, our respondents expect things to stay the same over the next decade. For areas affecting them, or their family among those indicating a change in direction, more expect things to get better than worse. Between 25 to 28% expect personal safety, family safety, and family job loss to improve, while between 9 and 11% expect these areas to worsen.

However, a different pattern emerges when we look at social concerns. While most still believe things will stay the same, in two areas respondents are more likely to think things will worsen. Almost 40% expect war to worsen, 47% expect the environment to worsen.

There is more pessimism than optimism expressed for drug use, terrorism, and gang violence.

The better news is race relations is expected to stay the same or improve.



Social Institutions

And what about social institutions? How much faith do our youth have? Who do they look up to?

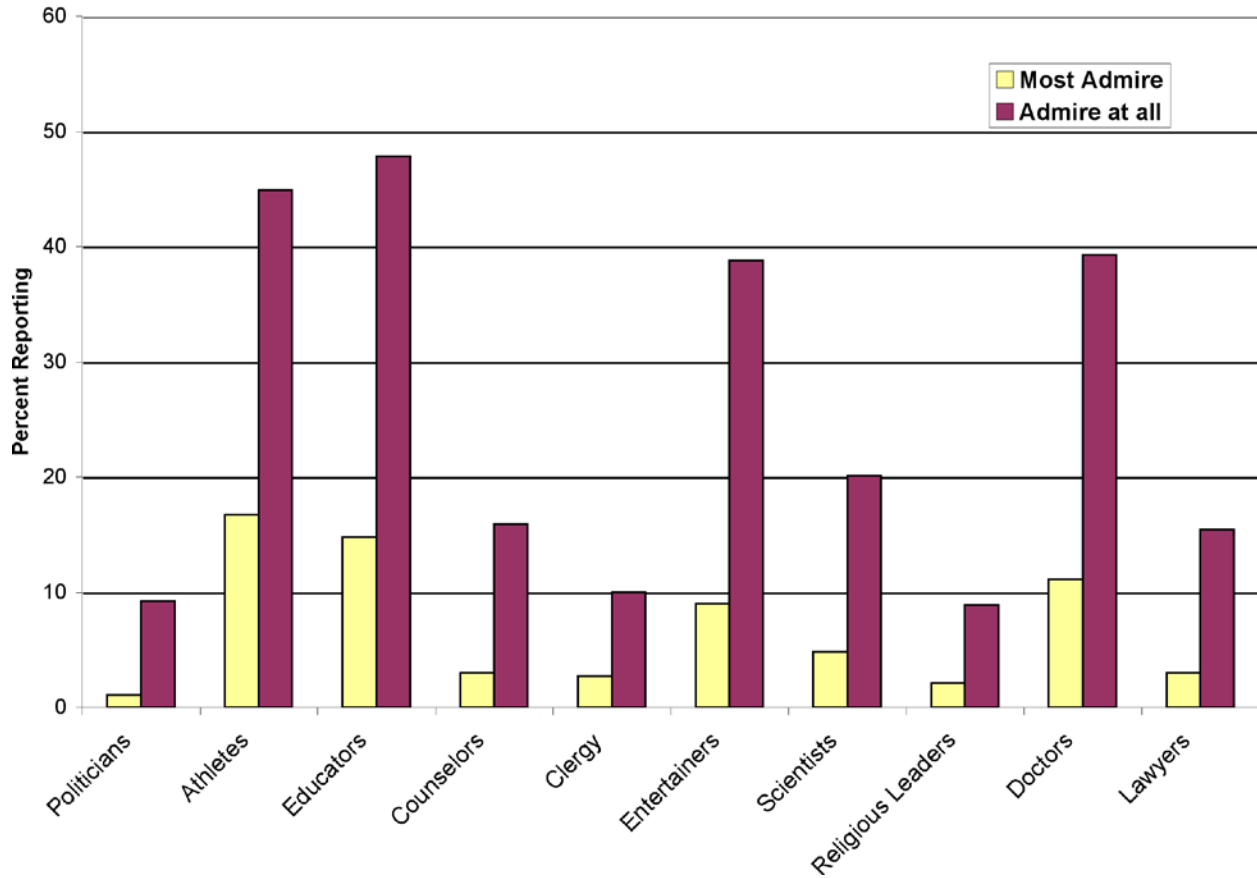
It isn't the government. Only 47% say they trust the government to do the right thing and 53% disagreed.

When we ask about groups worthy of admiration, their lack of trust in the government is clearly related to their lack of admiration for politicians. We asked students to tell us the most, next most, and third most admired groups ¹. Politicians, joined by religious leaders and clergy, are among the least admired groups. Only 9% reporting any level of admiration at all for politicians, 10% for clergy, and 9% for religious leaders.

On the positive side, teachers/educators are one of the most admired groups (48%), joined by athletes (45%). Doctors (39%) and entertainers (39%) also achieved notice as groups worth admiring. Nonetheless, it's clear that no group today captures the admiration of our youth.

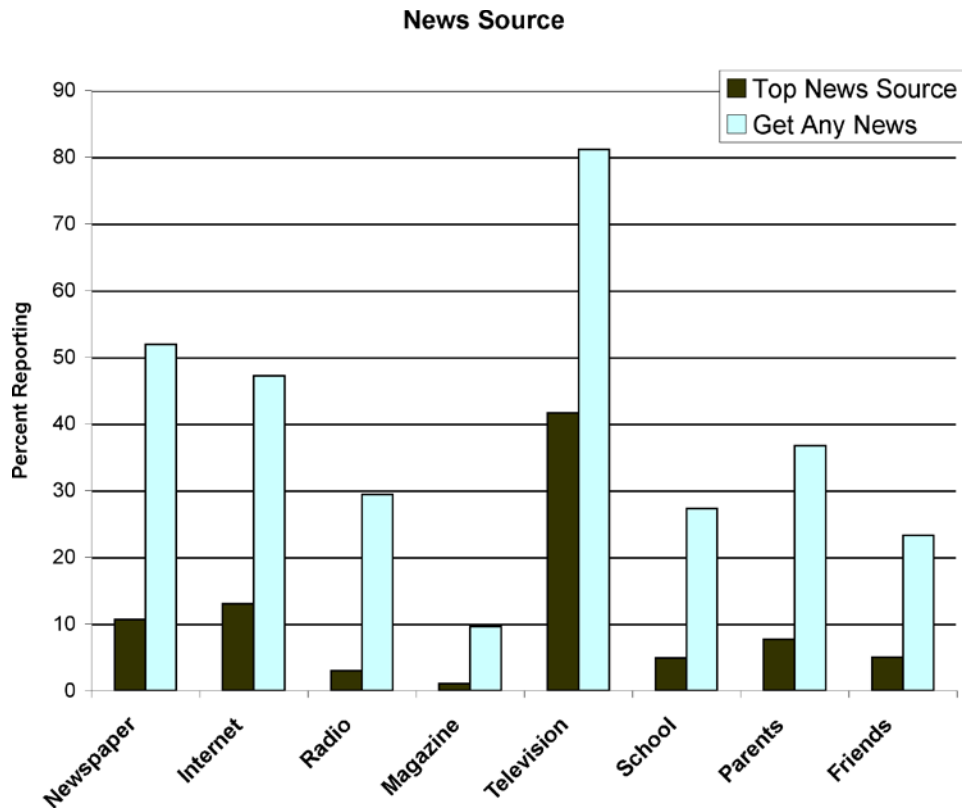
¹ Some respondents used check marks to indicate whether they admired these groups. These data were also included.

Who Do You Look Up To and Admire Today?

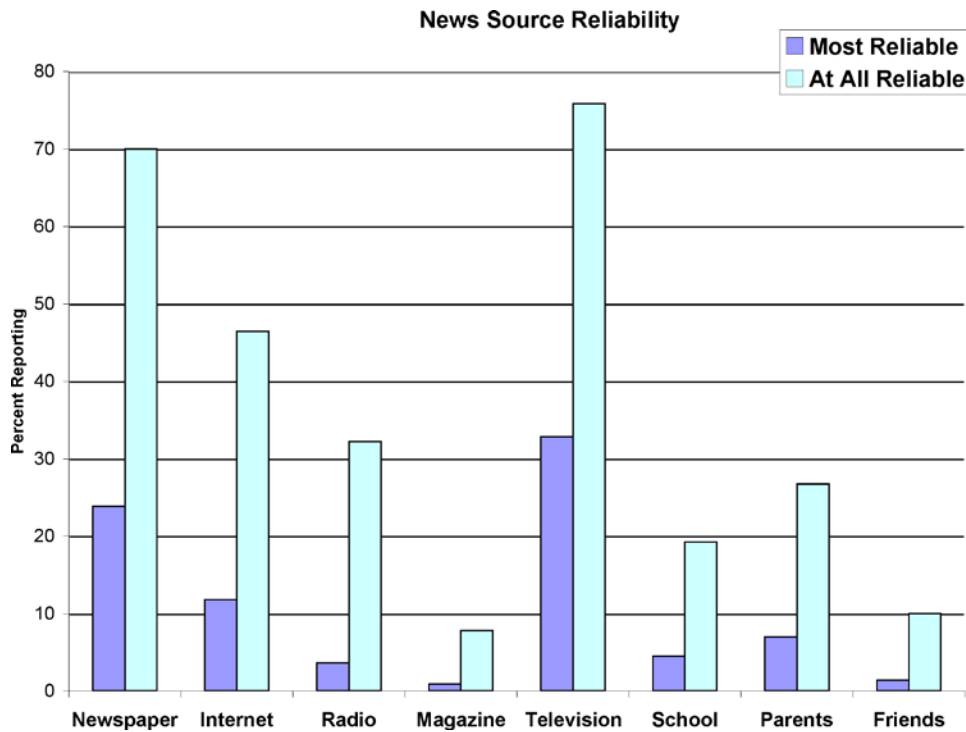


The Media

The media play a crucial role in the shaping of people's world views and opinions. Where are the youth getting their news? Television is clearly the top source with 81% listing it as one of their most frequently used sources. Over half get at least some news from the newspapers.

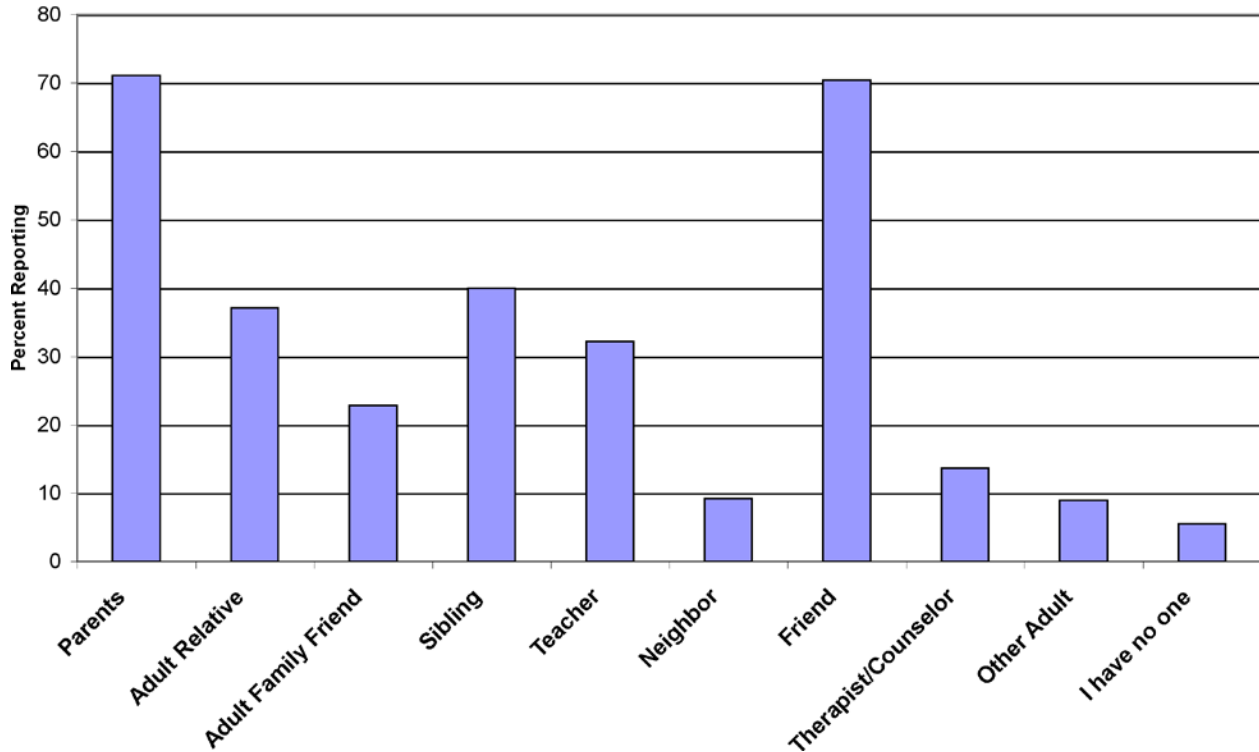


The respondents see both of these sources as reliable, 70% rating newspapers as one of the reliable sources, and 76% included television in that category.



Over 78% said that the information is generally clear. Finally, when asked who helps you sort through things, over 70% said their parents, and their friends fill that role.

When You're Confused About Life, Who Helps You Sort Things Out?



A Livable Long Island?

We asked questions about the quality of life on Long Island. When asked about whether there are enough parks, and whether the government pays enough attention to citizens 22% and 31% (respectively) said that they didn't know, suggesting that these are questions that have not received much thought, at least until now. Among those who reported an opinion, about half said we needed more parks and that the community government doesn't pay enough attention.

It also appears that there is not a strong identification with being a Long Islander. Only 49% reported that they label themselves that way.

When asked about leaving Long Island because of the high cost of housing, 54% identified a lack of affordable housing as very or extremely serious and a total of 78% reported it as at least a somewhat serious problem. The generally high cost of living was at least somewhat serious (71%) with almost half (46%) labeling it very or extremely serious. As a result, 57% of these youth said that they did not see themselves living on Long Island in the future. One of the teens said, "I find Long Island becoming more and more dangerous and expensive. I fear for the future and the future generations. How will we be living in the future?"

And, on the same subject another said, "I'm becoming really nervous, about finding an affordable place to live, getting a good paying job. All the prices are increasing making it much harder to buy

houses or anything for that matter...Housing on Long Island is too expensive. Most young people who are just starting out have to move away off of the island, even though they have lived here their whole life.“

Then and Now

Then

The results from 1984 and today are not directly comparable. But in some ways it is instructive. Then, the deep concern they wrote about in the greatest frequency was nuclear war, clearly eclipsing academic achievement, the environment, or family relations. Their role models were educators and doctors. And a sense of helplessness pervaded their responses. Even those who expressed concern for the environment said that they would not become active in solving the problem.

Where Are We Now?

What can we say about our youth? They are clearly experiencing both Hope and Despair. They worry about school grades and family health. There are also serious concerns about war and terrorism, both now and in the future.

What level of anxiety and worry do we expect or think appropriate? Perhaps odd to ask, but do we want our youth concerned about grades? How much so? What about family health? Terrorism? War? What is an appropriate level, and when does it become worrisome to us as parents, teachers, and other concerned adults.

The social issues that concern them the most are ones squarely in the hands of adults including politicians and the government officials, those folks who our youth don't trust or admire.

What is perhaps worse, our children don't expect these things to improve in the next 10 years. In fact, they expect war and the environment to get worse. In the open ended responses the youth were particularly raw and expansive in their remarks about whether or not things can change for the better and whether or not the adults can do anything about it.

Following is an example of one young man who directly challenges those of us responsible for launching this project, and by association indicts all adults:

“Murder, drugs, rape—yeah, it concerns us, but what can we expect you to do about it? Are you some amazing secret society hell-bent on faxing (sic) the world each of its faults? News flash: you can't. You can “understand” the world, and you can try to understand and fix the concerns of U.S. teenagers. But can't you please try to understand more quietly and without wasting our time?...I doubt anyone will read this anyway.”

It is perhaps interesting that the groups our youth admire more are those who work directly to improve their lives—teachers and doctors.

What do we make of the admiration for athletes? These may be the people whose achievements are out there to be seen, often the result of skill and effort.

And we need to ask “why?” Why are politicians, lawyers, clergy and religious leaders so much less likely to be seen as worthy of being admired and looked up to.

What does it take to earn the respect of our youth?

Finally, we turn to the source of news. The agenda-setting effect of the media is clear. They tell people what to talk about. What’s news. To what extent has it created the attitudes and beliefs of our youth?

Happily, there is something we can do about it. Our youth turn to parents and friends to help them sort through issues and concerns. They turn to us. While we are also affected by the media, we do have the potential to become a moderator and mediator.

As with much research, we are left with more questions than answers. The questions provide us with challenges for us as parents, teachers, and other concerned adults. We see our children greatly worried about their family and we have to wonder what has caused our youth to become so concerned? What has happened to our families? And what can we do about it?

Our youth look to the future and they see problems with war, and with the environment. They see problems staying on Long Island. And, there is little trust in some of our major social institutions. Society doesn’t seem to be ruled by laws or by moral values. Religious leaders and clergy, politicians and lawyers are not seen as worthy of respect. Nor the government seen as trustworthy. What does this say about our society? Why has this happened and what can be done to reclaim the admiration and trust of our youth.

The words of Andrew Malekoff writing about the 1984 Action Research program still hold true today: *“Intergenerational joining hands will empower us to ensure a place for the generations yet to come.” We can start again, today.*

Neala Schwartzberg, Ph.D.
Research Coordinator

Appendix—Narrative In the Kids' Voices

HOPE OR DESPAIR: SUBURBIA'S CHILDREN LOOK INTO THE FUTURE

On the following pages is a narrative constructed of comments written by teenagers, ages 14-18 from seven school districts across Long Island in the spring months of 2005. Their comments were written in response to a survey question, the final question in a long survey, in which they were invited to write about “something that concerns you deeply.” This narrative, organized thematically, represents the reflections of a sample of approximately 100 of the almost 1100 students that completed the survey. Although not all students who completed the survey responded to the open-ended question.

With the exception of a few minor edits such as bracketed [segments] in which words are added to link thoughts more gracefully, for example, the text is taken verbatim from the young people's responses.

Passages were selected that represent as wide a range of views and as representative a sample as possible. They reflect several areas including: (1) what they said that concerns them deeply, (2) what they thought about completing the survey, (3) what they said that seemed aimed at raising adults' consciousness about their hopes, dreams and struggles, (4) *how* what they said allowed their sense of humor, vulnerability, and humanity to emerge, and (5) what they said that reflected their ambivalent relationships with adults—parents and others—including the disappointment they feel about the shape of the world we have left for them coupled with their deep desire to be understood and feel connected.

In constructing this “narrative voice” what came through was less a sense of adolescent bravado and more a sense of fragility.

Andrew Malekoff
ACTION RESEARCH Project Coordinator
Associate Director
North Shore Child and Family Guidance Center

INTRODUCTION: A MATTER OF TRUST

I don't think this world is ever going to get better. To live in this world you have to be very very very!! strong because if you're not, the system will walk all over you. The price of living is going high up and people are dying for stupid reasons like gang violence. You can't trust...politicians because they are all snakes in the grass...you really can't trust [anybody] but your family, and not even them half the time.

WHAT CONCERNS ME AND WHAT I THINK OF THIS SURVEY

I'm not concerned about anything... too young to care...At this time I have no issues that concern me deeply!!!

To be honest, there are many things that "concern" me. To me, I interpret the word "concern" as somewhat a light word to use...my future is something I worry about...I'm concerned about my family, their health and safety but I'm not afraid of the future. Whatever happens, happens for a reason, so although I may be concerned about our nation, my friends, my family, myself, my school and other things, I know that it all happens for a reason and it is all just a part of the conundrum of life. Life is a big puzzle...

I am not concerned about anything deeply due to my lack of concern in deep matters...To tell you the truth, nothing at this point concerns me at all...this has to be the happiest point in time for me...I am unaffected by petty problems. Also, I hate surveys, but love making the results vague, and inaccurate.

I have no soul, and thus transcend your inane mortal concerns. The one concern I do have, is being administered stupid surveys by silly people...My concern is that the mental clarity of those who actually come up with these time consuming vortexes of doom. They are a complete waste of our valuable time that could be used to do things that actually matter—which means in essence we don't want to appease your raging mental issues. My condolences.

To be brutally honest, surveys like this concern me. I mean, what the hell are you trying to understand? We're teenagers—we're angst ridden, confused, worried and most importantly: curious. It's the way the world works. It's been this way in the past, and it will be this way in the future...Murder, drugs, rape—yeah, it concerns us, but what can we expect you to do about it? Are you some amazing secret society hell-bent on fixing the world each of its faults? News flash: you can't. You can "understand" the world, and you can try to understand and fix the concerns of U.S. teenagers. But can't you please try to understand more quietly and without wasting our time?...I doubt anyone will read this anyway.

MONEY AND LIVING ON LONG ISLAND

I'm becoming really nervous, about finding an affordable place to live, getting a good paying job. All the prices are increasing making it much harder to buy houses or anything for that matter...Housing on Long Island is too expensive. Most young people who are just starting out have to move away off of the island, even though they have lived here their whole life.

This has affected my family because my cousin has recently married and bought a house on Long Island. Him and his wife cannot afford it anymore and have put their house up for sale and are planning to move to Texas, where housing is cheaper...

Not everybody has money to send their kids to college. Even if the kid is extremely smart and has excellent grades they won't be able to go to a college they really want to go to. Money is an issue. Besides that, there aren't enough after-school programs for young kids.

Many parents work in the city and can't get home in time to either pick up their kids or take care

of them.

I find Long Island becoming more and more dangerous and expensive. I fear for the future and the future generations. How will we be living in the future?

SEX AND PREGNANCY

So many girls are getting pregnant. And it is really serious...they don't think about the consequences ... they go and have sex and next thing you know they [are] pregnant...condoms [are] not going to do nothing for them and they [are] supposed to go to school and get their diploma but no, they go and get their selves pregnant and after that they have a baby and they can't get a job without their diploma.

I don't think it is going to change in the future...I think they need help...the number of girls getting pregnant from ages 13 between 18 is consistently rising. I think that a major factor is...the little attention the parents pay to what their daughters do. I think the situation in the future is going to get worse. [We need] more education about sexual relationships among youth.

RELATIONSHIPS, SEPARATION AND LOSS

My parents are getting a divorce. I barely know my father and the courts force me to go to a supervised therapy with him and now there is talk about my mother being forced to move out of the house and my father move in. Me and my brother have no say, they give us a court appointed lawyer but he seems to be on my father's side. Since this has happened I have lost faith in the court system I thought we had the right to freedom of speech but I guess actually listening is another story.

Cancer. It can ruin so many people's lives. I know that my family and myself have been greatly affected by my mother's passing away due to Leukemia. I really wish cancer could be cured so more people do not have to live through the loss I had.

Something that concerns me deeply is my relationship with my boyfriend. I want to be with him forever. We are madly in love, and my only concern is that we're together until we die.

You see I had a girl last year [and] her name was [Regina]...I never felt this way before for a girl but I can say I loved her more than she did me...she was my first and now...she goes with someone else...[it]bothers me but I started another relationship...but I don't know what to do.

What concerns me is...dying...[when] my uncle died I was torn apart...I wasn't the same... what really concerns me the most is just having my uncle back...sometimes I wish that I could just be with him. I really did and still and will always love my uncle.

Last year my grandpa died...he was like a best friend to everyone in my family including my mom. So after his surprising death, everyone had an extremely hard time with it. Everyday since that I think about it, and how my family is dealing with it, and how my grandmother is living alone.

[An]other thing that concerns me [are] my cousin and friend. My cousin has been very depressed and suicidal. Everyday I think about her and hope she's doing ok.

One of my friends who is like a sister lost a brother in 2001. She is still having a hard time and I try to do anything I can to help her.

My parents...always argue and fight. Not only that, but they also lie to me. It's always, "Your father is the reason this happened." or "Your mother is the bad person." I don't want other kids to go through that pain as I have before.

I am afraid of a lot of things; mainly dying too young [and] not getting live to my greatest expectations.

DISCRIMINATION AND EQUAL RIGHTS

I feel that discrimination/homophobia/sexism is a huge problem. People are people. We are all equal. You shouldn't be judged on your gender, race or sexual orientation...You should accept everyone for what they are...Love is love. My lord. People need to see that!

Bosses shouldn't pay a man more than a woman. A woman can just as well do a "man's job." Did you know in the animal kingdom, the female lion does the hunting? I'm sick of these gender-based roles.

People should see people and not color. We are all equal and no one race is better than another. These are some issues that I feel need to be dealt with because it's ridiculous.

One of my teachers is a lesbian. One day we started to talk about the rights in this country. Gays and lesbians are deprived of over 1,000 rights. I don't think it is right to take away their rights. If her and her partner want to get married, why should it matter? It doesn't affect anyone else. In the future, I see this problem only getting worse...we discriminate against people of color, and now we're discriminating against gays and lesbians. It seems like history is repeating itself.

I am concerned about the bigotry I notice everyday. I see a lot of blind people who hate because they are not taught acceptance and tolerance. Obviously I hope this situation will improve, but I realize that it will require action.

Being a bi/gay male in a straight world scares me. Even writing this anonymous statement is making me nervous. I have to cover my paper as I write it so no one will see it. I just wish I could be myself without having to worry about what others will say and I wish I didn't have to be afraid that people will make fun of me.

I am concerned with the path my generation is taking. I think that not enough attention is given to teens who are depressed, or teens that are being harassed. Especially in my school there are so many issues that are obvious, and yet are being ignored.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

Something that deeply concerns me...is that fact that our government seems to do nothing about the environment. New refineries are being built all over the world. Oil prices are rising not only in the Northeast but throughout the country. We as a world [are] abusing fossil fuels...everyone need to take concern. The freakin' End!

Save the trees. Everywhere you look you see buildings. I also dislike how the stream of my town is tremendously polluted and yet...local legislators continue to ignore the growing problem. There are not enough recreational areas. Okay that's all you're getting out of me!!

VIOLENCE, GANGS, WAR AND TERROR

What I worry about are...gangs in our community. We don't have many leaders these days. Many kids are followers and that's why they join gangs.

I don't agree with today's society, with the degradation of women in rap and the use of violent language, encouraging violence and sex.

I am concerned about school violence...I don't want my son to have problems within the [school] environment.

Nothing really concerns me that much. I live life on the wild side. But I am kinda concerned about terrorism. As years pass we get more weapons, nuclear is known more so there is more of an opportunity for it because there will be more things they can get a hold of.

War concerns me. Because our world is under attack and we have no way of stopping it. Our loved ones are out there fighting for our freedom...people wait just to hear from their loved ones. I

recently read an article about how one man's wife sits by the computer all day waiting for her husband to talk to her. I could not imagine living that way.

This is what concerns me. The world being destroyed in a matter of seconds—How it can just be gone in the blink of an eye. It's scary.

I'm a sci-fi writer, and I have been attempting to write a plausible future history for mankind as a whole. As a result, much of my time is spent researching modern trends and trying to project them into the future. I've seen disturbing trends, concerning the state of the planet Earth in general. Globally stretching conglomerates control more money, influence and territory than before, while conventional nations are suffering from terrorism, civil disruptions and monetary issues. Terrorism and war seem projected to go up in frequency and severity. However, this seems to me a long term problem, one most likely coming to a head a century or two from now. As a result, my writing postulates a scenario where by 2167 (made up), the UN has no political power, the nations (as they are now) have fragmented into their cultural/ideological components through civil war or through natural disintegration.

[I am] scared about things happening to friends, family...the end of world.

PHYSICAL HEALTH, EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

Something that concerns me is teen obesity. I feel this issue is important because the number of premature deaths due to heart failure...I think that depression and stress [are]...major factors of teen obesity. When many teens feel depressed or stressed due to a problem, they find eating a way to feel better. I see the issue changing in the future if parents find specialized help for their children.

We as a society are being taught how to eat and what is good for us, and are taught to take medicine. We are not educated on other ways to eat/live, and I don't like that medication is the quickest answer to everything.

I am concerned about my parents smoking a lot—5-8 times every day. I talk to them but they say it is hard for them. I hope they don't pass away...

The things that concern me most are how my mother is sick with multiple sclerosis and I come from a kind of poor family, hoping I can make it in my future to be a dental hygienist. Another thing that concerns me is terrorism, ever since 9/11 I can't stop thinking about it and I'm scared of what else can happen and I'm worried for the soldiers.

My parents are older than all of my friends' parents. They both have high cholesterol and my dad has diabetes. I know they don't have too much time but I feel like I'm not going to be able to handle it when they pass; and everyday I am reminded of this.

What I am concerned about deeply is the well-being of my brother and sister. My sister uses drugs (I will never say she is a drug addict) and my brother is a recovering alcoholic...my brother... he fell into depression and even though he only drank about once a week, that one time he binged. I am worried that he will get into his car one day and not make it home. I have spoken to a very close friend of mine about this, but I don't think that feeling will ever go away.

I am concerned with my own well-being because after 14 yrs I figured out I was depressed and I have thoughts of suicide and cutting. I go to a therapist and have gotten better, but I'm afraid that I will fall back into a deep depression and not be strong enough to take myself out, hurting me and everyone around me.

One thing I am most concerned about is...whether I will have enough strength to stay alive and make the right choices. This is because I have thought about committing suicide and the only reason I have done so is that my parents and my sisters and my family and friends have gone through enough because my sister recently passed (2 years ago) and I don't want to hurt them anymore than they already have been.

CONCLUSION

I'm bored and tired. I hate school. I hate surveys. I hate gym class. If I don't get into a good college, I'll be pissed. Why is college so expensive? It bothers me that my school does not want to address school problems that truly affect the students...

What concerns me is the lack of nationalism and patriotism, how no one is interested in what is going on with our countries...I think the world has become so corrupt and full of immorality that God might decide to end the world.

[Other] things that concern me...Social Security—for the fact that it might not even exist by the time we reach retirement, Job Security—for the fact that once secured professions such as medicine and law are not secured anymore, and SATs—unfair test for the fact it does not test you on your knowledge.

Something that concerns me is the focus of attention [by] the media....The media sometimes loses focus of the real issues and forget about what is important...they showed too much 9/11 and terrorism things. I have completely stopped watching the TV news because I was sick of seeing war on TV. This will probably continue in the future because [I don't] see the war in Iraq or wherever ending anytime soon...The nation has other problems to be concerned with. Basically, America has misplaced goals and puts other things before important matters.

[I worry about] not knowing what to do with my life. I want to go to college but I don't know what for. Life would be so much easier if a machine could read your mind and tell you what you should be. At the same time I want to do so many things but life is too short and I want to travel, so I'm stuck...how do I pay for college? I'm not the richest person in the world and neither are my parents, so I worry about a lot of things concerning what I should do and I need to make up my mind soon.

People today are so concerned about themselves and what they have, they don't look around them to see other people's needs. People think they are important. They are. But they think they are above everyone, when in reality we all are like grains of sand in the beach.

ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

HOPE OR DESPAIR: SUBURBIA'S CHILDREN LOOK INTO THE FUTURE

March 31, 2006

Highlights

What is action research?

Action research is an approach combining various methods including the use of a social survey to raise community consciousness, stimulate intergroup and intergenerational interaction, and motivate people to work toward change both individually and collectively. The central theme of investigation in this project is local youths' perceptions about the future.

Who completed the survey?

Over 1000 students from seven high schools across Long Island, roughly half girls and half boys.

What did they say about what worries them?

Most are worried about school grades (84%) and the health (79%) and safety (71%) of family members. They also worry about their own safety (60%) or about war (47%) and terrorism (46%).

What did they say about the future?

Most (over 60%) do not expect personal and family safety concerns to get worse over the next decade; however, almost half of the respondents expect war and the environment to worsen.

What about their faith in government?

Over half said that they do not trust the government to do the right thing most of the time and rated politicians among the least admired group.

Who do they admire?

Educators, athletes, entertainers, and doctors top the list of most admired.

Where do they get their news?

Television tops the list at over 80%, with almost as many young people stating that TV is a reliable source of news. Newspapers followed close behind.

Who do they confide in to deal with life's confusions?

Although friends and family were lower on the list of most used news sources, these two groups—parents and peers—topped the list of: "Who helps you sort things out when you are confused about life?"

What do they think about life on Long Island?

A little less than half of the surveyed youth say they strongly identify themselves as Long Islanders, over three-quarters see affordable housing on Long Island as a significant problem, and almost 60% state that they cannot see themselves living on Long Island in the future.

What questions do these findings raise?

- What does the overwhelming concern over school grades suggest?
- What about the high percentage of youths' concerns about family safety and health? What accounts for that?
- What does a lack of trust in government and politicians coupled with concern over affordable housing on Long Island, worries about family health, and belief in continuing war suggest?
- How do we make sense of this interesting mix of variables?
- Can parents and peers, the groups they rank highest in helping them to sort out life's confusions, help youth to sort it out?
- Or is television, ranked as the number one and most reliable news source, the answer?
- If television is viewed as the most reliable source of news and if there is little trust in the government, how do youth reconcile the fact that television is controlled by just a few major corporations, many of whom have close relationships with the government?
- Or are there other forums and people that can help in the sorting out process such as educators who were ranked as most admired along with doctors, athletes and entertainers?
- And, if schools and educators can help, can they really help when kids are more worried about grades (and many schools about standardized testing) than anything?
- Where is the time in school or home or elsewhere to discuss real issues—i.e., safety, health, terrorism, war, affordable housing on Long Island—in real depth when grades matter most?
- What can one do to make a difference, individually or collectively?

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