TEEN CULTURE

Across the Generations

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CHAPTER TWO

Socializing and Hanging Out

One of the main purposes of teen culture is to allow young people to develop identities independent from their parents. Teens do this in part by socializing with their peers. Although teens today socialize in different ways than their parents and grandparents did, there are also similarities. Teens seek out social spaces that are separate from the world of their parents—and that sometimes meet with parents' disapproval.

Perhaps most importantly, teens look for ways to have fun. Young people face all kinds of challenges—schoolwork, mental health, bullying, and so much more. But being a teenager can also be incredibly fun, and for many teens, socializing with peers is the most fun part.

Grandparents as Teens: Unscheduled Fun

Many of today's teens are accustomed to busy lives that are heavily scheduled with extracurricular activities, part-time jobs, and challenging classes. This is different from the way most teens' grandparents lived when they were young. Schoolwork tended to be less demanding. Although teens were involved in extracurricular activities, these typically did not dominate their time. Although some teens worked—especially if they came from poorer families or lived on farms—teens in this economically prosperous era were less likely to work than teens today. This meant that many teens had plenty of time on their hands

to simply have fun. Their parents, who grew up in the challenging years of the Great Depression and World War II, did not always approve.

For children and younger teens, free time was spent socializing in their neighborhoods in unscheduled and largely unsupervised ways. During the post–World War II baby boom, neighborhoods were full of kids who hung out together. Outside, kids played games like marbles, tag, and hopscotch. Inside, they played board games like Monopoly and Yahtzee and with toys like Play-Doh, Lincoln Logs, and doll houses. Kids had freedom to explore on their bikes, and city kids rode buses or walked to places like movie theaters and candy stores. For older teens, the fun continued away from their neighborhoods once they had access to cars. "In the last half of the 1950s, nearly every teenager either had or could get the use of a car," recalls writer Tom Rodriguez. "As a result, no generation of teenagers ever had more opportunities to be alone with each other."[16]

When the grandparents of today's teens were young, they enjoyed a lot of unscheduled and unsupervised time in their neighborhoods. Many young children explored on their bikes, as shown in this photo from the 1970s.

Hangouts

With so many teens spending time away from their parents, the teen hangout became a phenomenon. "Teens have to have a place that's theirs. A place where there are no adult restrictions and everything is done their way," explains psychology professor Chator Mason. "In a way, the hangout is like a religious sanctuary. And in this sanctuary, ideas are swapped and social interaction takes place."[17]

Teen hangouts in the 1950s included restaurants—typically locally owned diners and soda shops, which sold inexpensive food like burgers and milkshakes. Many of these restaurants featured jukeboxes, which played records when teens put coins in them. Other hangouts included bowling alleys, roller-skating rinks, and miniature golf courses. Some of the most popular hangouts involved cars, including drive-in movie theaters and drive-in restaurants. Many parents bemoaned that the streets themselves were hangouts, with carloads of teens cruising down their local Main Street and downtown. In some cases, much to their parents' horror, they drag raced.

> **"Teens have to have a place that's theirs. A place where there are no adult restrictions and everything is done their way."[17]**
>
> **—Chator Mason, psychology professor**

Teens and Dancing

When rock and roll became extremely popular in the 1950s, so did dancing. For some teens, it was a joyful activity that allowed teens to express themselves during a conformist era. "What I remember most about the 50s were rules. Rules, rules, rules . . . for everything," writes John McKeon. "The *dance* rules were different. Dance with girls and hold this hand, but then . . . you could do whatever you wanted to do! Dance looked like freedom. The only freedom this kid knew."[18]

Since rock and roll was different from other forms of music, it required new dances like the twist, the hand jive, and the mashed potato. The dance crazes of the 1950s and 1960s spread after the television show *American Bandstand* started airing in 1957, which featured teens dancing to the latest hits. Although all the

The Roller Rink as Teen Hangout

Indoor roller-skating rinks started to become popular teen hangouts in the 1950s, and they reached peak popularity in the 1970s and 1980s. Roller rinks combined popular elements of other teen hangouts and gatherings. Like many teen hangouts, music was an essential part of the experience, with teens skating to a soundtrack of popular songs. Roller rinks also resembled sock hops and other dances because they centered on a fun physical activity. They also often featured a version of slow dancing called "slow skating," where couples skated hand-in-hand to romantic songs. In addition, like other teen hangouts, roller rinks gave teens the opportunity to socialize over food at the concession stand. In the 1980s, many roller rinks became part arcade as well, with video games and activities such as Skee-Ball. Roller rinks are still around, but these days many of the customers are baby boomers and Gen Xers skating together on nostalgia nights.

teens on the show were White, the show popularized the music of Black performers, along with dance steps that originated in the Black community.

Nervous about rock and roll and these new dances, adults exercised control by organizing school dances. Often these dances were held in gymnasiums and called "sock hops" because teens had to remove their shoes to avoid scuffing the floor.

Socializing in the 1980s and 1990s

In the 1980s and 1990s, the lives of some teens became more scheduled. Traveling sports leagues for both boys and girls became popular, especially in the 1990s, which is where the term *soccer mom* came from, describing parents driving their kids to soccer in their minivans. More children and young teens went to summer day camps. As the booming postwar economy became a distant memory, more teens were busy with part-time jobs.

At the same time, many teens during the 1980s and 1990s were even less supervised than their parents had been. Many kids and younger teens still socialized and rode bikes in their neighborhoods. The difference was that in the 1950s and 1960s, many women were not in the workplace, so there was at least some supervision from nearby mothers. In the 1980s and 1990s, many

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FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

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ORGANIZATIONS AND WEBSITES

David Hoffman
www.youtube.com/channel/UC6wBro4B4pf9xnBh9Xi2zcQ
This is the YouTube channel of historical documentarian David Hoffman. Viewers can find hundreds of short videos—including in-depth personal interviews—about what it was like to grow up in the 1950s and 1960s.

Do You Remember?
https://doyouremember.com
This frequently updated website includes videos and stories about popular music, celebrities, and popular culture from the past and present. The site also includes pop culture polls such as "Who Is Your Favorite '70s TV Dad?" as well as nostalgia-based games and quizzes.

Fashion History Timeline
https://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu
Hosted by the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City, this website features detailed information and images of clothing trends from throughout history, including clothing trends from the years today's teens' parents and grandparents were growing up.

Nostalgia Machine
http://thenostalgiamachine.com
This website is a database of popular music videos and music clips since 1951. After users select a year, they are directed to a list of clickable music resources from that year.

Recollection Road
www.youtube.com/@RecollectionRoad
This YouTube video series includes detailed, colorful videos about American life since the 1950s, with an emphasis on teen culture, trends, gadgets, and popular culture.

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