

## Chapter 4

# The Fear Factor



***I fear that I'm just wasting my life.  
And I fear that in a hundred years,  
no one will even  
remember me or my name.***

Survey Respondent #89

**THE** future holds a lot to be uncertain about; individually, we teens have our own things—things like fears, hopes, dreams ... just everyday issues ... at least, they seem like they are everyday to us.

### **Daily Dread**

We wonder whether we will ever find someone to love us and respect us; whether we'll be able to support ourselves and others dear to us when we have to—be it financially or emotionally; whether we will be happy. Abraham Lincoln once said, "The best thing about the future is that it comes one day at a time."

For high-schoolers today, sometimes it can feel like our future is being forced upon us. In just four short years, we will be deemed "adults"—ideally, we will be launched into "the real world," out of the parental domain where expectations are infinitely higher and we are no longer seen as pre-adults but full on, independent individuals. Responsible. Trustworthy. Mature. Logical. Financially independent. In other words, clones of our parents. That's the myth ... what's the reality?

To many, it may seem like teenagers are more than eager to leave their parents in exchange for

*freedom*, yet our survey proved the contrary. Believe it or not, we know we don't know everything. Surprised? We recognize that without parents, or adults in general, telling us what to do or helping us out, we're going to hit a few walls—in fact, most of us realized we may hit many walls along the way. Maybe it is that we are too proud to admit it ... out loud. The survey, nevertheless, was able to finally bring these fears to the surface.

When asked what top three things teens were afraid of as they transition from high school to college, most of them answered with money, love, and being in control of future decisions. Their fears included:

*Will future tuition costs drown me in debt?*

*Will tuition debt ruin my future?*

*Will I be able to fend for myself and pay the costs of adult world bills—food, utilities, car expenses and housing?*

*Will I land in a “dead end” job, lose myself, and be stuck just to pay bills?*

*Will I have to take any job just to pay off loans?*

*Will I find a job to pay off loans?*

*Will I find a job?*

*Will I run out of money?*

What teens are saying, literally, is *can I pay for all this shit?*

Contrary to popular adult belief, teens *do* care what adults (and society) think about them. Yes, sometimes our attitudes don't back it up, but ... and it's a big but ... we are forming, we are learning, we are challenged with hormones shrieking at times, and we are, we are ... Just take the time to listen to our voices.

*I don't really hold many fears about the future though, I let things go as they will; God has a plan for us.*

*I wonder if everything will always work out, like my dad says it will.*

*I fear things moving too quickly and losing the real world experience of it all.*

*I fear no face to face interaction in the future.*



*I fear that I will not find someone who loves me for me and that I will fail at life. However, I am determined not to fail at life and plan on being a great influence on the world.*

*The teachers don't understand me or what I really want to do.*

*I want to be accepted as me, not someone else's idea of what me is.*

*I'm not perfect.*

*My parents don't understand me or what I really want to do.*

*I'm afraid of not accomplishing what my parents set up for me.*

Kyle is a quiet and passionate 10<sup>th</sup> grader. He's lived in England and the United States. He adds:

*It's not that I have pressure to figure out my future—it's just about college. I think I might want to go to a music school—like Juilliard or Berkeley College of Music. My parents, however, are hesitant. They want me get a "real" education, in case I don't make in the music industry. They are supportive of me following my passion for music—but they are fearful for*

*me becoming a starving artist, which is understandable. What do they really want me to do? Be a doctor. I know that medical school is a definite no.*

*I am who I am, I dress the way I dress, I talk the way I talk, I'm friends with those who are kind and accepting, and I don't give a limey f\*\*k about what anyone thinks of me.*

Grace, a senior, also has a love of music ... and yet her parents also want her to go to medical school. In her words:

*There's a lot more competition now, even to get into school. When my parents immigrated to the United States, they gave me this huge opportunity to live here. I know that I have an advantage because I can speak multiple languages—the pressure on me comes from the constant reminder that they sacrificed so much to get here ... for me.*

*What do I want? I think I've found a middle ground. I want to be a music therapist. Not only does it involve medical school like my mom wants, a master's degree, but on top of that I can include music—which is something I love. So not only is it what you want for me, Mom ... it's something that I want for myself.*

Peer-pressure always surfaces, as it did in the top three things that teens fear most. Be it drugs, drinking, looks, sex, how to act, grades and society in general, all repeatedly surfaced in both the survey and interviews.

*I worry about being pressured into drugs and drinking.*

*I get pressured all the time about my weight, that I need to lose it—I'm not*

*a plus size ... I'm a size 8!*

*Getting involved and hanging with the crowd. I worry about flunking classes.*

Another female senior wrote:

*The hardest thing about being a teenager is not being taken seriously. Not all teenagers are going out, getting drunk and having sex every weekend. Most of us are—surprise, surprise—normal.*

The Gener@tion respondents did worry about leaving home, managing their time, losing freedom and getting out of touch with friends ... friends that they have been close to for years. What was interesting, food and laundry surfaced on several surveys—not being able to get the right foods and

having the money to pay for them. The “laundry” remark is intriguing—getting it done or having someone do it for them?—that is a real question!



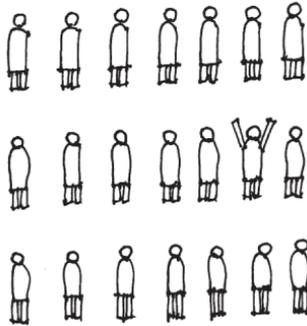
### **Living in a Fast-Paced World**

Over all, what the teens from the Gener@tion survey and interviews reflect is that it's not easy going; that the world is getting smaller and changing. The cliché that “the world is getting smaller,” in fact, really means that it's getting closer. We are able to connect with people living in countries hundreds and thousands of miles away. We hold knowledge of the world at our fingertips; only a few clicks away. Uprisings can be initiated and commandeered via Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. As I did my research, the Internet became a close ally. Some of the tidbits that caught my attention include:

- China will soon become the number one English speaking country in the world.
- The top 10 in-demand jobs in 2010 did not exist in 2004—a six year span.
- We are currently preparing students for jobs that don't yet exist... using technologies

that haven't been invented... in order to solve problems we don't even know are problems yet.

- The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that today's learner will have 10-14 jobs by the age of 38.
- One in four workers has been with their current employer for less than a year. One in two has been there less than five years.
- Years it took to reach a market audience of 50 million: Radio, 38 years; TV, 13 years; Internet, 4 years; iPod, 3 years; Facebook, 2 years.<sup>1</sup>



Nothing is constant for today's teens. Many of the things that schools are prepping us for are irrelevant. Our parent's operated under different

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<sup>1</sup>Various facts drawn from soliberty's 'Did You Know? "We are living in exponential times"'

rules. No wonder there's confusion on what to do; where to go; how to behave.

What does this all mean? It means that we're more global. The younger generation of today is growing up in a world that is changing faster than they can adapt to. Soon enough, society is going to have to shift in how they raise their youth if they want them to be prepared for the future, once relatively predictable, but of which we know so little now.

## **Education Angst**

Let's take it down a notch. In terms of college, just under 37 percent of us say that yes, we are totally prepared and 78 percent of the respondents said that the current education they are receiving now is good enough for the future. But what about the 22 percent that says it's mediocre to awful?

Well, we have a few ideas as to why that might be:

*It's all memorization—I end up forgetting everything at the end of the year, so what's the point?*

*It is hard to tell, in some public schools, if you are getting enough education just to pass high school or if you are getting enough information that will actually help you in the future.*

*They're trying to focus on so many different things, instead of just working on the basics.*

*America needs to improve education and eliminate bullying.*

*If your job lies in math, social studies, English, or science, it's sufficient, but if you're not sure what you want to do or your future doesn't revolve around these four subjects, then it isn't.*

*I don't know what's out there for me.*

*Kids aren't taught to do any thinking on their own. Their work in school is just to regurgitate what they have learned, which only requires rote memorization and no actual thought.*

*We are still in this rote system of learning ... we need to specialize earlier, like China or other world powers do.*

*It is designed to make us look good for colleges, and not convey actual life skills.*

The economy is not promising to college graduates like it used to be. Our education system is the same one set up almost 100 years ago for a whole different society. American society has changed.

Now one more time, take a look at this:

- If you're one in a million in China, there are 1,300 people just like you.
- China will soon become the number one English speaking country in the world.
- The 25 percent of India's population with the highest IQ's is greater than the total population of the United States. *Translation:* India has more honors' kids than America has kids.

When teenagers complain and openly express our fears about the future, is there some truth to what we say?

