



What's So Funny About That?

Comedy can **reinforce** a culture's values. Political jokes remind us that we have freedom of speech. Priest, minister and rabbi jokes can do the same regarding freedom of religion. The Irish enjoy telling Irish jokes and laughing at themselves. Comedy can also **change** a culture's values. It plays both roles in youth culture.

Today, teen comedy is a powerful agent of change but it hasn't always been so. Early teen comedy films like *Gidget* (1959) and *Beach Party* (1963) primarily made fun of the fact that teenage romance is awkward, but the moral behavior was mainstream for the day.



As teen comedies developed they injected more humor that dismissed adult culture and values. *Saturday Night Live* (first aired in 1975) and *Animal House* (1978) epitomize teen comedy. Their formula **reinforced** youth culture's values: fun is the

purpose of life, passions are more important than principles, risky behavior is normal, **I** am what is important, I'm old enough to decide everything myself and youth define fashion (cool).

The humor of these shows, by its nature, said "don't take me seriously" and "I'm only trying to be funny." Humor somehow exempted them from moral responsibility. This dynamic makes it harder to criticize the underlying values of teen comedy.

The strategy of **change** is to mix innocuous humor with humor that pushed the moral boundaries. Teens laughed at it all as harmless even if they thought some of it was over the edge. Soon edgy becomes normal. Who was it that said, "A little leaven can spoil a whole loaf?"

Humor is potent stuff, to be handled with care. ✚

Comedy Central

A good example of the power of comedy is a pilot program on *Comedy Central* this autumn. The *Midwest Teen Sex Show* was originally made for internet viewing but due to its popularity (and its politically correct liberal morals) it will likely now be available on cable TV in the USA. It will push the moral and attitudinal boundaries further than ever.

Each episode looks at a particular topic. Episode three, **Abstinence**, humorously notes the main advantage of abstinence is: "No children, no boring cub scout meetings." The disadvantages it cites are that abstinence is unrealistic. "Who is not going to have sex! Besides, if you succeed in not having sex, I

pity your future partner! You won't know anything."

The **Birth Control** episode promotes "safe sex" asking, "Have you ever seen a baby? They are ****ing stupid and you have to feed them at least once per day. So lets prevent them."

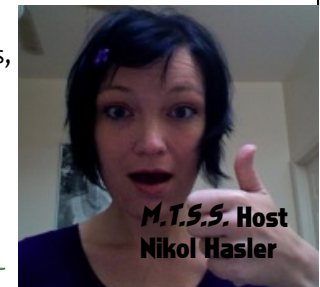


The episode on **Hooking Up** pushes casual sex a step further. It features a boy and a girl arguing about whether or not they actually hooked up. "Mom," the girl says, "Billy doesn't want to admit that he and I had sex." "Now Billy," the mom says, "Don't lie to your sister! Did you two have sex?" Billy answers, "Yes, but only twice."

Imagine their advice on pornography, STDs, drugs, fetishes and promiscuity. Actually, don't bother.

Youth deserve better humor than this.

Youth deserve a better culture than this. ✚



M.T.S.S. Host
Nikol Hasler

The History of Youth Culture

(part 1 1890-1910)

The beginning of youth culture can be dated to the 1890s—1910s in the USA. It was during these years that changes in social networks, the economy and technology converged to make youth culture possible.

The USA had 10.5 million immigrants in 80 years from 1800-1880. In just 30 years, from 1881-1910, it had 18.3 million.

In 1830, 67% of immigrants were from the English speaking world. By 1900, 90% were non-English speaking. It was among immigrant youth that a new sub-culture developed – youth culture.

Ghetto-dwelling, immigrant youth rejected their parents culture and developed their own environments,

morality, fashions, music, dance and customs.

The major newspapers saw what was happening among immigrant youth and condemned it. Many cities passed [municipal morality codes](#) to curb it. Youth culture was not happily embraced by the establishment because it was promoting immorality, self-centeredness and irresponsibility. It seemed only oriented toward fun and fads.

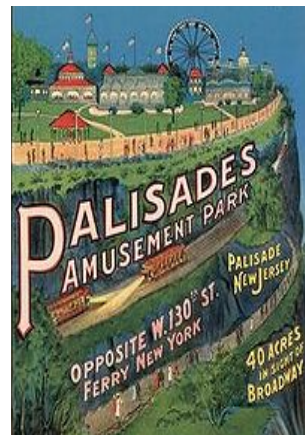
Social Network Changes

Immigrant youth quickly learned English and dismissed their parents' language and culture as out-dated. Their new authority was the “melting pot” of older immigrant youth they met in schools, factories, boarding houses and amusement parks. Youth now had their own environments that were unsupervised. Factories led to the transformation of courtship. In 1890 young men did not speak to young women without a formal introduction, but by 1910, because they had work breaks together, they related to the opposite sex freely. Courtship moved from being

initiated and supervised by parents to youth initiated dates that were set up at work.

Economics

The American economy boomed in the 1890s. Youth got jobs in factories, had money and spent it on fashion. This was the Gay Nineties. Immigrant youth wanted anything new, especially fancy clothes. Their elders said spending money on cheaply made, frilly clothes was a waste. (The new French, a.k.a. high, heels were an example. They weren't functional and they communicated a new sexual liberty.)



The American Federation of Labor shortened the work day to eight hours in 1890. Youth suddenly had more leisure time. They spent the time (and their money) unsupervised in amusement parks. Money was spent on penny arcades, nickelodeons, peep shows and amusement rides, much to the dismay of parents.

Technology

In 1889 the first coin-operated jukebox was installed in San Francisco. It made \$1000 the first month. By 1895 the gramophone, victrola, and phonograph (hand cranked music boxes) were being produced in bulk. In 1903 the first 12 inch records were produced.

All of these enabled the playing of music without having to hire a band. This led to the dance craze. By 1910 Cleveland had one dance hall for every 1,000 youth. The dance halls were notorious as *unsupervised* places where youth did whatever they wanted. Kissing games grew popular in their dimly lit areas. Alcohol was easily obtained and abused by

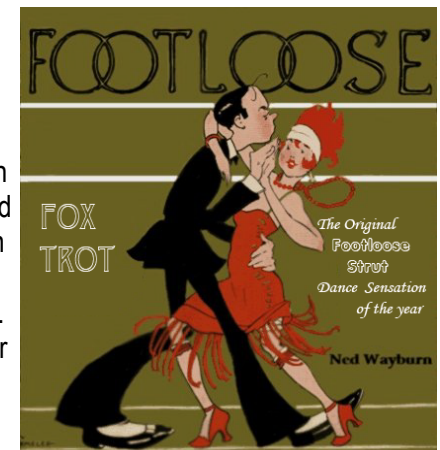
AN EARLY GRAMOPHONE



minors. That men paid to dance with young women was scandalous. Prostitution increased in and around dance halls, which was not surprising since the new dances were more and more erotic.

By the 1920's youth culture was firmly established in mainstream America. The leisure time activities of youth were no longer under the supervision of adults.

Recreational dating largely had replaced courtship. Youth had money to burn on fashion and amusement in their own environments. They had their own dances and their own music. It was the Roaring Twenties. (to be continued...)



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