“This Week in Teen Culture”

June 15, 2022

Three Things:

1

Time to Wake Up

What it is: The state of California will require all public high schools to start classes no earlier than 8:30am.

Why it could catch on: If you feel like you need a fog horn and a water gun to wake your teen up in the morning, you’re not alone—and the solution could be as simple as moving back the academic clock. The Atlantic has published a book excerpt adapted from Lisa L. Lewis’s *The Sleep Deprived Teen* that makes the case for this policy. Lewis points out that waking teens up early for school puts them at a higher risk of driving accidents, poor performance in school, and even mental health conditions. She quotes a host of academic studies as well as a 2014 recommendation from the American Academy of Pediatrics that advocates for later start times in middle and high school. Teens are biologically programmed to prefer later evenings from the onset of puberty, but their need to get hours of quality sleep doesn’t decrease just because they’re not little kids anymore. With bills similar to California’s in development in New Jersey and New York, start times for students 11 and up might start to reflect these scientific findings.

2

I Still Do

What it is: In her latest column for the *New York Times*, Anglican priest Tish Harrison Warren argues that we should normalize some level of dissatisfaction and disappointment in marriage relationships.

Why it’s relevant to teens: The contemporary understanding of a healthy, fulfilled marriage can be a complicated one. Christians and nonbelievers alike would agree that choosing a person to partner with is a critical decision, and that the person

we select will inevitably let us down in some way or another in the course of a lifetime. The Christian idea of marriage diverges quite a lot from the secular idea of a soulmate who single-handedly will bring us to our highest level of happiness. Warren points out that “if we as a culture view seeking personal fulfillment as a sacred duty, staying in an unhappy marriage is then seen as an act of self-betrayal.” To put that another way, relationships that require a lot of work are often seen as handcuffs on our happiness potential. Staying in difficult relationships when we feel convicted and called to do so has become controversial. As followers of Christ, we know that our hope is found in Him, and while a person may assist us in the painful, humbling, virtuous pursuit of sanctification, it’s not our spouse’s job to make us happy.

3

La Croke

What it is: A viral hack for “healthy” Coke on TikTok requires two ingredients: balsamic vinegar and any flavor of sparkling beverage.

Why it’s dividing the internet: The original post about the trend, which apparently was invented by @mandyjones’ Pilates instructor, has over 5 million views. Several famous influencers plopping a splash of balsamic in their La Croix and hoping for the best. People who have tried the fad seem to be divided firmly into two camps: “This tastes better than I thought” vs. “This is absolute internet madness.” If your family is curious, it could be fun to give this one a try together — although with the caveat that there is no clear health benefit to drinking fizzified acid, Coke or no coke. One could argue about whether this “recipe” is representative of some deeper neurosis about diet culture and FitTok’s obsession with health hacks, but we’re just happy that this week’s trending TikTok doesn’t breed disease-causing pathogens the way last week’s avocado storage hack does.

Slang of the Week

Mid: used on TikTok to describe something that's simply poor, average, or mediocre; based on a TikTok that went viral in December 2021 in which wrestler

Maxwell Friedman was seen declaring, "It's called the Midwest because every single person who lives here is... mid!"

Translation: I Still Do

In a culture that promises infinite pleasure (or at least, infinite options for pleasure), sometimes fears can develop that we aren't experiencing as much life-satisfaction as we otherwise could be. This fear of missing out now pervades almost every aspect of modern life—including the way many people think about love and relationships.

In his book *The Paradox of Choice*, Barry Schwartz points out that "the very option of being allowed to change our minds seems to increase the chances that we *will* change our minds. When we can change our minds about decisions, we are less satisfied with them." But mind-changing is part of this restless desire for maximal satisfaction, which can frame even divorce as something like a "radical act of self-love." When we prioritize personal fulfillment above all else, the natural outcome is this lopsided view.

In Romans 8:12, the Apostle Paul writes: "Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it." In other words, as Christians, our obligation is not to our own maximal experience of satisfaction, fulfillment, and pleasure. Our obligation is to the Lord, and to the way he has designed us. And although Warren is careful to say that subjection to abuse is not part of "our design," she also writes that, "There are times in marriage when the Bible's call to love your enemies and the call to love your spouse are the same call."

Let's be clear: there are some in dangerous homes who need to find safety; they have God's (and our) compassion. There are others who, for one reason or another, are parenting alone; they, too, have God's (and our) compassion. The body of Christ's call is to care for all such people. And as part of that care, we hold

out hope that the next generation can find something better. Toward that end, here are three questions to hopefully get some conversation going with the teens in your world:

Here are some questions to hopefully spark discussion about all this with your teens:

- How do you think FOMO impacts relationships?
- Do you think life is fundamentally about being happy? Why or why not?
- Do you think relationships are fundamentally about being happy? Why or why not?

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8 PREMIUM INSIGHTS

A broader look at the world that teens inhabit. Skim our summary or click the links to read more. Engage your teens in conversation about their world.

They said it best:

“When you offer peace instead of division, when you offer faith instead of fear, when you offer someone a place at your table instead of keeping them out because they’re different or messy or wrong somehow, you represent the heart of Christ.” — Shauna Niequist

Pop Culture

Film/TV/Streaming

1. Netflix released the trailer for their latest YA book adaptation, “The School for Good and Evil,” which is due to stream this fall. The original series of books told the story of a fantasy academy where boys and girls are trained to be fairytale heroes and villains. The star-studded cast includes Kerry Washington and Charlize Theron. As of right now, the film is categorized as a “Children and Family” film, but

we'll be interested in seeing what sorts of messages about beauty, loyalty, and true love the movie in its final form will portray.

2. *Jurassic Park: Dominion* makes its long-awaited theatrical debut this weekend. Starring fan favorite Chris Pratt and clocking in at 2 hours and 26 minutes, it's a blockbuster in the truest sense of the word. However, critics really don't like it (*spoilers)*, but fans are likely to want to see it anyway. If the predecessors in the trilogy are any indication, this movie will likely feature lots of dino-gore and jump scares, so it might not be appropriate for all audiences.

Sports

3. The Tampa Bay Devil Rays held their 16th annual Pride night in their Florida Stadium this past Saturday. Several on the team opted out of a rainbow-themed patch that was meant to be displayed on the players' caps and sleeves, which ignited several days of controversy. Pitcher Jason Adam, acting as a spokesman for the other players, said that the decision was based on faith, reiterating that the Rays who didn't wear the pride-themed uniform didn't desire to look down on anyone and that it was a "hard choice," saying, "It's not judgmental. It's not looking down. It's just what we believe the lifestyle [Jesus] encouraged us to live, for our good, not to withhold. But again, we love these men and women, we care about them, and we want them to feel safe and welcome here."

4. In other MLB controversies, a Cardinals rookie was called out over homophobic tweets he made as a teenager. Twenty-five-year-old Brendan Donovan drove in 4 runs during his team's extra-inning defeat of the Cubs in which the final score was 7-4, but the story of the night ended up being an apology he issued from the dugout after the game. Even though Donovan was 14 when he engaged in what he called "playful banter" with a friend on Twitter, he still says he "takes full responsibility" for the tweets. For viewers, it was an important reminder that when it comes to social media, nothing stays in the past.

Social media

5. Many longtime users are turning on Instagram. The platform has become particularly addled with ads and sponsored posts, making it nearly impossible for users to find the content that they actually want to see. One reporter writing for Mashable counted 14 ads, suggested posts, and sponsored posts within the first 16 posts seen on their feed. Content creators have also expressed frustration, citing Instagram's preference for highlighting video content/reels, even though creators don't particularly enjoy making them nor do users seem to prefer that type of content. It seems likely that younger users, especially, will just quit using the app altogether if the content being served strays from what they're looking for.

6. TikTok is rolling out a new dashboard to summarize screen time spent on the app. In an effort to help users curb addictive behaviors, it will provide statistics on how many times the app was opened, summaries of daytime and nighttime use, and an overall estimate of how much time was spent on the app each day. If teens use the app for more than 100 minutes per day, they will receive a prompt that advises them to use the screen time limitation tool. Whether teens will just ignore this prompt and keep scrolling is the question.

7. Johnny Depp, who has been one of the most popular subjects on TikTok over the past few weeks, has now joined TikTok. The actor, who is presumably mounting a comeback, made a post to thank his fans for their support. Depp has accumulated 4 million followers after the highly publicized trial in which he sued his ex-wife, Amber Heard. It's possible that the long-term outcome of that trial could be a brand new following of younger fans for Depp, who is approaching 60.

Conversation Starter:

8. Vox has some ideas for how to help teens have a healthy relationship with food and their bodies. This includes letting teens off the hook from deriving a sense of accomplishment from what they eat, according to reporting by Alex Hazlett. "You can just eat and exist," says one expert quoted in the piece. Though we can't

cosign everything the article says, it's an interesting entry point for a family conversation about fatphobia, body positivity, and everything in between.

Conversation starters:

- What does a "healthy" relationship with food look like? Is there a biblical precedent for how we should eat?
- Are there foods or eating behaviors that make you feel anxious or stressed? How do you cope with that?
- Does your family model healthy eating practices on a regular basis? In what ways would you like to work together to improve?