

Re: Youth vs. Teenager

Guest post by Carl Uhl.

Skyler, in Butler Shaffer's book "Boundaries of Order", he made similar comparisons regarding teenagers and how they act when they are finally permitted to exercise some semblance of control over their lives.

Following is an excerpt from "Boundaries or Order" available in .pdf format from Mises.org

It has become commonplace for politicians and members of the media to publicly decry the lack of "responsibility" exhibited by modern teenagers. Children are criticized for using drugs and alcohol, for their lack of initiative in school or work, for their preoccupation with the pursuit of sensual pleasures, or for their poor judgments in making decisions. But responsibility is a function of control. How can we expect children to become responsible when they have been denied control over their own lives? They are compelled, by law, to attend schools that look and function like penitentiaries where they are subjected to often mindless curricula that have no apparent meaning to their lives. Those who exhibit any independence in the classroom are labeled "hyperactive" or victims of "attention deficit disorder"—meaning they have their own agendas that differ from the teachers—and are legally drugged into more compliant behavior.

Minimum wage and child labor laws greatly restrict teenagers' opportunities for employment, and we then wonder why so many of them turn to the sale of drugs or to prostitution as ways of earning the money they hope will give them more decision-making power in their lives. Emulating the methods of the state, which has taken away so much control over their lives, many have set up their own military structures, in the form of street-corner gangs, in an attempt to exert their authority through violence. We also cannot

understand why teenagers are so preoccupied with their cars. If we thought about it, we might realize that the automobile represents, to the teenager, the one part of life that is under their direct control, which responds to their commands, and takes them where they want to go. One of the advocates of the previously mentioned practice of abandoning traffic signs in various European cities has observed: “[t]he greater the number of prescriptions, the more people’s sense of personal responsibility dwindles.”