

# The Kids are Alright

A REVIEW OF *THE EMERGING MILLENNIALS: HOW CANADA'S NEWEST GENERATION IS RESPONDING*

*TO CHANGE & CHOICE* BY REGINALD BIBBY

PROJECT CANADA BOOKS, 2009. ISBN-13:9780981061405

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For most of human history, each generation has worried about the one to follow – animated in part by self-interest and in part by compassion. Pensions, welfare, and publicly-funded health care arrangements may have diminished the dependence of the older generation on the next one, but they have not entirely eliminated their symbiotic relationship. Social change, dependence, and poor memory also contribute to this inclination. Social change creates an inevitable gulf between generations, and the role of poor memory is illustrated by the familiar quip: things aren't what they used to be and never were.

It is thus comforting to learn from sociologist Reginald Bibby that Canada's newest generation – one he calls the emerging millennials – is responding well to change and choice. Bibby's data come from Project Teen Canada 2008, funded by the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research and the Louisville Institute, an Eli Lilly Endowment-funded program based at Louisville Seminary, to support the study of American religious institutions.

Project Teen Canada 2008 used a multi-stage stratified and cluster sampling procedure in six regions – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic, and the North. Communities within each region were stratified by population. Schools were sampled within regions and classrooms within schools. Aboriginal band schools and students in Alberta were over-sampled by design. Student participation was voluntary and anonymous. Of the 308 schools contacted, 248 returned 4,746 questionnaires. Aboriginal schools returned an additional 818.

The sampling design is common for such investigations. As a researcher, I would have liked to see reference to the total number of questionnaires distributed; some analysis of the schools that chose not to respond; and more statistical information about the results. However, researchers were not Bibby's primary audience. The book is clearly aimed at a more general audience, and that is both a strength and a weakness.

Organized into ten chapters with titles designed to engage the reader ("The Gods and the Groups are Optional – So who is opting for what?"), the book addresses a broad range of topics, including values, friendship patterns, information and communications technologies, and personal goals. It includes responses at the conclusion of each chapter by Sarah Russell, an RCMP community relations officer, and Ron Rolheiser, a priest. The approach is an interesting one that I expected to produce perspectives more divergent than the ones found in the volume.

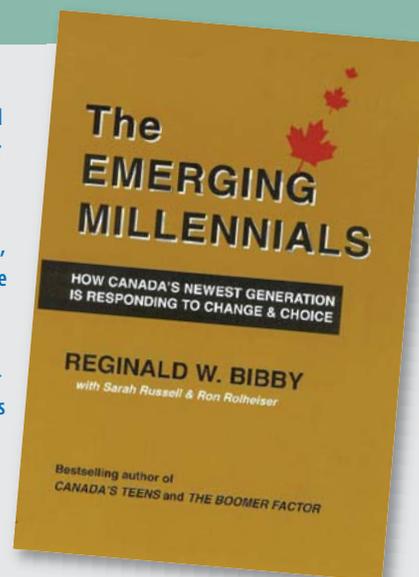
Bibby makes use of his prior studies of youth and adults, as well as material from other sources such as Statistics Canada, to augment his commentary. Notwithstanding my previous remarks about statistical information, he makes comparisons with reasonable caution, confining most to differences of more than ten percent.

A professor at the University of Lethbridge who holds an appointment as Board of Governors Research Chair, Bibby is a prolific author, with nearly a dozen books to his name. A number have been published by Project Canada Books, which describes itself as "Disseminating the Work of Reginald W. Bibby and His Associates." Therein lies one of the problems with *The Emerging Millennials*; Bibby appears to have followed his own advice:

*Today, one can still work through conventional publishers and bookstores, [but] one might be wiser to make the material available to the world through posting it on a website and supplementing hard copy with e-copy (p. 85).*

I have no difficulty with either self-publication or the desire to communicate with an intelligent lay audience, but the volume desperately needed more editorial supervision (and revision). For instance, it is sprinkled liberally with unnecessary quotation marks. In a chapter on what teens think about Canada, Bibby writes:

*Everyone wants to live "a good life" in a "good country." But the survey findings show that not everyone is getting an equal opportunity to do so. Young people could use some help in taking interpersonal life to the elusive "next level" (p. 120).*



I do not think this distractingly informal style – more consistent with a blog than a text – makes the book more accessible to a general audience. That's too bad because there is much to be learned from *The Emerging Millennials*, especially for readers looking to counter those who would demonize the young. For example:

- ... young people continue to emphasize that sex, for the most part, should be tied to meaningful relationships (p. 59).
- The voices heard in our survey indicate that, for all their concerns, the majority of Canada's emerging millennials are feeling very positive about themselves (p. 71).
- Today's emerging generation is a generation that is following in the footsteps of its predecessors in valuing Canada and valuing being Canadian ... (p. 119).
- ... all but a small minority of female and male teenagers inform us that they plan to pursue careers (p. 199).

It is unfortunate interested readers will have to overlook the chatty informality of the prose, the intrusive use of quotation marks, and the crude format of tables and charts in order to get to Bibby's positive and hopeful message about the young. |

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