

The artefact that is adolescence

Bishop: In your new book *The Case Against Adolescence: Rediscovering the Adult in Every Teen*, you take a highly controversial stand. Boiling it down to its very basics, you say that the whole of adolescence is an artificial state. It is a new invention. Throughout most of human history, young people were integrated into adult society early on but, from the late 1800s, new laws and cultural practices began to isolate teens from adults, imposing increasing restrictions on what they were and weren't allowed to do, and extending childhood well past puberty – in effect, infantilising them. You believe passionately that this whole idea of adolescence needs rethinking, which would have huge consequences for our society.

What sparked your interest in this area and led you to study the subject so fully?

Epstein: It was more than 10 years ago now, and it had to do with my second son, Justin. Not my first son, oddly enough – he was a bit immature growing up, and he went through all kinds of typical difficulties during the teen years. But I noticed that when Justin was 14 or 15 he was incredibly mature. He seemed more mature than I was in some respects – in the way he balanced work and play and how he dealt with challenges in his life. But there were so many areas in which he was prevented from using his skills. For instance, he had business skills, but he wasn't allowed to do anything of a business nature. He had no incentive to do so, anyway, because he couldn't own property, had no privacy rights, and of course he was forced to go to school every day, which wasn't the best way for him to learn. I got very curious about whether it had always been like this for teens. And I found that it hadn't.

My book is data-based from beginning to end. I'm not expressing my personal opinion; I'm just laying out a very powerful set of facts in a way no one has ever taken the time to put together before. I didn't start out with the viewpoint I develop in this book, not at all. I believed, as most people do in the Western world, that teens were inherently incompetent and irresponsible. Through my research, I learned that I was wrong about that.

By the way, I was just contacted by some British television producers, who are considering doing an experiment in which teenagers will be given significant responsibility over their lives. They want to put some teens into housing on their own, so that they are entirely in charge of their lives in order to see just how much adult responsibility they can handle.

Bishop: That sounds very interesting. It seems to me, though, that adolescents may appear to adults to be out of control, but, if you look into their behaviour a little more carefully, they are not actually out of control; they are just trying to express their basic needs at this point in their lives in a way which, because they don't have a lot of options, adults find unacceptable. But it is certainly true that, for society as a whole, there is an enormous problem with troubled, out-of-control teenagers and, even if we accept your basic premise that this is a consequence of how we treat them, it is hard to see how we can burrow back out of this and create a world in which teenagers can get their needs met and express what they need to express in an acceptable way.

Epstein: Well, that's the problem. We have created such a huge pit of despair and conflict and depression and suicide and recklessness among teens, with almost no way for parents to reverse the process. Enormous forces are pushing us rapidly in the wrong direction. We see this in the US almost every day – court decisions, new restrictions being put on teens in high school, metal detectors and video cameras in schools, new inventions that reduce teen privacy. The latest here is called the SnoopStick. I don't think it's in the UK yet.

Bishop: Er, not yet, but it is bound to arrive soon. What does it do?

Epstein: You know those little memory sticks people carry in their pockets? The SnoopStick looks like a memory stick, except that it's designed to plug into your teen's computer, where it installs stealthy software. That software then allows the parent to monitor exactly what the teen is doing from any internet-connected computer—to see the teen's computer screen as he or she is typing. And we also have a new device called the DriveCam, which is manufactured right here in San Diego, California. You install it in your teen's car, and it uploads to the internet visual and auditory images of what is happening in the car, wirelessly. We have laws, practices and inventions all moving things in the wrong direction, with teens becoming more infantilised and restricted—and, as a result, more depressed and angry.

Meanwhile, many adults suffer from something that psychologists call “confirmation bias,” which makes us mistakenly believe that teens simply can’t perform better than they now do.

Bishop: The tendency to distort information based on what you expect to be the case, do you mean?

Epstein: Yes. Based on your beliefs, you pay selective attention to information in a way that confirms your beliefs. Adults do this every day with teens. We focus our attention on teens who are miserable or reckless and ignore signs that teens are competent. And there’s an even worse trend now, which is to mask teen problems with psychotropic drugs and other “treatments.” In my new book, I show that there has been a dramatic shift in how teen problems have been dealt with over the past century. A hundred years ago, social programs like Boys Town (in the US) straightened out troubled young men by giving them meaningful responsibility; now we label socially-created problems as psychological “disorders” and “treat” them with drugs and therapy. Rather than fixing the social phenomena that underlie problems like teen depression and suicide, we ply our young people with drugs. We are now spending more money on psychoactive drugs for teens in America than on all other prescription drugs combined, and that includes acne medication and antibiotics.

Bishop: That’s truly terrible. It seems to me that there is a continuous process of people looking at existing dangers and, where it is possible to do so, trying to mitigate them. It happens in the adult world as well, where we have ever-expanding health and safety laws, which change people’s perception of risk and make it more likely that they will have a different kind of accident. But, putting that to one side, you can’t blame the parent whose teenager wants to go out in a powerful car thinking, “Well, there *could* be an accident. What *could* I do to reduce the possibility of that accident actually happening?”

Epstein: This is the burrowing-out problem. Yes, parents are stuck in a system that puts them into an adversarial relationship with their own sons and daughters, and there is virtually no escape from this system. No, you can’t really blame the parent for the widespread problems of teens, because parents are simply trying to keep their offspring (notice I didn’t say “children”) safe. There are real threats out there, and of course parents want protect their offspring from those threats. The US government urges parents

to be aggressive in their efforts to protect teens. There is even a government-sponsored ad campaign in the U.S. right now in which parents are being told, “Embarrass them, harass them, freak them out. They’ll thank you – eventually.”

Bishop: There are areas in which teen competencies are different, aren’t there? While you are not in favour of the notion that there is an underdeveloped and dangerous teenage brain, is there not some evidence that there is a greater likelihood of taking risks at certain ages—

Epstein: —Let me interrupt you on that point. I think it is scientific fraud – and you can quote me on that – for people to assert that there is some sort of an underdeveloped or defective teenage brain that accounts for irresponsible behaviour by teens. There is no evidence whatsoever to support that idea. None. I am a researcher, and I have taught research methods and statistics courses at the doctoral level. I have looked carefully at the relevant studies, and not a single study supports the idea of a teen brain that programs teens to be irresponsible or incompetent.

Bishop: But there is still an actuarial difference, isn’t there? If you want to insure a car when you are 17 years old, it is many times more expensive – at least in this country – than to insure the same car when you are, say, 55.

Epstein: Of course, but that has nothing to do with any necessary properties of the teen brain.

Bishop: But there must be a difference in the amount of chaos caused by those drivers, given the actuarially calculated cost of insuring the car, so to what do you attribute the excess carnage caused by drivers of that age, if it is not difference in brain development?

Epstein: Teens who behave irresponsibly are doing so because they dislike being infantilised, because of the enormous restrictions to which they are subjected, and because they are isolated from adults and trapped in the idiotic world of teen culture. Surveys I have conducted show that American teens are subjected to ten times as many restrictions as mainstream adults, to twice as many restrictions as active-duty US Marines, and even to twice as many restrictions as incarcerated felons.

I show in my book that there is no teen turmoil whatsoever in more than a hundred cultures around the world. There is no teen risk-taking, no teen depression, no teen suicide, no conflict with parents. In many cultures, there isn't even a word for adolescence. To say that the teen turmoil we see in some Western countries is somehow caused by some sort of programming in the brain is laughable when you look at teens in other cultures or teens in history. If the teen brain necessarily produced turmoil, we would see that turmoil in teens in every culture. We don't. In any case, no scientist has ever shown a causal link between any specific properties of the brain and irresponsible behaviour in teens.

Because teens are isolated from adults and trapped in teen culture, the only people they want to please are their peers. In that sub-culture, you please your peers by being "cool," and one of the ways you show yourself to be cool is by taking risks. That is a phenomenon almost entirely unique to Western industrialised society. It does not occur in many cultures around the world, and it is certainly not true in pre-industrialised cultures; it is also not true in many industrialised cultures, such as Japan, which, until very recently, had no teen turmoil.

Bishop: It does seem to me, though, looking back over my own life, that I am more careful now in middle age than I was when I was a teenager. And I think that there are things that I know now about risks that I didn't know then. So wouldn't you expect me to be maybe less accident-prone in middle age than I was as a teenager?

Epstein: That has nothing to do with some sort of inherent properties of your brain.

Bishop: But you are learning, aren't you? You are acquiring additional experience.

Epstein: We certainly learn to be more cautious throughout our lives. At age three or four, we will run recklessly at high speed over any surface. After we fall and scrape our knees, we become a little more cautious. Life involves many kinds of risks and over the course of our lives we become more risk averse. Most of our cautiousness isn't learned during childhood or even during middle age; it's learned in old age, when even simple objects like a staircase become highly threatening and when a single fall can end one's life. To the extent that the teens in the US and the UK are highly risk-prone

in some areas, that is entirely a social phenomenon. They are desperate to show how powerful they are and how cool they are and how much control they can exert on their own lives, precisely because they are infantilised.

According to a study done in the US, American teens spend an average of 70 hours a week with peers. Studies in some cultures find teens spending as little as five hours a week with their peers. Most of their time is spent with adults. During most of human history, the teen years were a time for learning to become an adult, and that is still the case in many cultures. But that is not true today in many Western societies. We have isolated teens from adults, so all they care about is their peers. They're not trying to *become* adults; rather, they're trying to *break away* from adults, whom they often see as their oppressors.

Bishop: There might be some pockets of society, maybe in America and England, where contact with adults is one of the most important influences on a teenager's life. I'm thinking mostly of rural communities. I was lucky enough to spend quite a lot of time on a farm as a teenager and it was by far the happiest part of my adolescence, following the men around, learning how to herd animals, driving a tractor, doing milking and all that sort of thing. And getting an awful lot of lessons from the men at the same time in things not only to do with agricultural practices but about life.

Epstein: Yes. As a teen on a farm, you are usually not in conflict with adults because you are working with them; you respect what they do and they respect what you do, and you are learning to become an adult by working with them side by side. Farming communities or traditional subcultures like the Amish community in Pennsylvania, where young people have meaningful contact with adults, have no adolescence. Young people are simply integrated gradually into adult society or, as some scholars would put it, "the child-adult continuum" is intact.

A recent study with 25,000 subjects, conducted in the US by psychologist Jean Twenge, showed that, between 1960 and 2002, young people's perception of control over their lives plummeted. That corresponds to the increase in laws and restrictions over the same period, which I document in my book. What do you do if you feel you have no control over your life? Well, that depends on the individual. You might get depressed. You might take drugs. Some people get angry and buy weapons and commit horrible acts. The peak age at which most crimes are committed in the US is 18. For

some crimes, such as arson, it's about 14. I'm fairly certain that many of these crimes are committed because young people are trying show how powerful they are or because they are lashing out at their oppressors. And when the crime is serious enough, the perpetrator instantly *becomes* an adult. There are three ways that young people can instantly join the adult world: become pregnant, get married, or commit a serious crime.

Bishop: From our perspective as therapists, when someone is anxious or depressed or just not doing well in their life, one of our starting points is to look at how, if at all, they are getting their needs, such as those for security, control, meaning and emotional connections to other people, attention and status and self-esteem, met in the outside world. It has to be in the outside world; you can't do it in your head, because we are a social species. It just seems to be inevitable, from our experience with the human givens approach, that, when people are mentally unwell, there will always be serious deficiencies in the way they are meeting these emotional needs in their lives. They may be trying to get a sense of control in their lives but are doing it in completely inauthentic ways.

Epstein: That's absolutely correct. What a shame that it is so hard for the general public to see this.

Bishop: And it does lead to some unexpected conclusions. For instance, some antisocial youngsters might be put down as attention-seekers, but attention is an essential need. If they need attention, where are they not getting sufficient attention from? What is it about what they are doing, what they've learned to do socially, or the circumstances in which they find themselves, that means they are not getting the attention that they need?

Epstein: We need to give young people legitimate ways to satisfy their needs. In my teaching, both with young children and with college students, I've occasionally run into troublemakers who thrived on getting attention in inappropriate ways. I've usually been able to solve the problem by making those individuals my special assistants. Now they get lots of attention—by helping me run the class!

Bishop: One of the most corrosive influences on our whole society and the way that young people grow up, which you spend some time on in the book, is the media and the way that the teen culture is perpetrated. I was really astonished by the reference you make to a group of Inuit in Canada, who

went in 10 years from being a fiercely self-sufficient and highly disciplined community to a chaotic and dependent one. What they had become dependent on were television and social security.

Epstein: Yes, and the teen crime problem became so serious that they had to establish a police station for the first time in their history—just to deal with unruly teens.

Bishop: They had imported a complete problem, lock, stock and barrel, from another culture, and it had taken root and established itself in just 10 years. It is terrifying that such change is possible but maybe, just maybe, it shows that, if you can change the things that excite the imagination of a group of young people in such a short time by importing a new culture, an equally direct and rapid change could be generated in the opposite direction, if you could find something that grabbed the imagination of that teenage population in the same way that television had.

Epstein: Well, it's like that experiment the British television people want to do—putting teenagers in charge of their lives. It's an exciting concept, but a show like that will fire up the public's imagination for no more than a few weeks. The forces that are moving things in the direction of infantilisation and isolation of young people are so powerful that I believe they are going to make things worse for a long time. The only area where I think there might be some positive change, some reversal, is in the area of education, and that's because of technology. Before the industrial revolution, education was mainly the job of parents, siblings, and mentors—or perhaps tutors, if you were wealthy—but it wasn't done very much in classrooms. The industrial revolution changed that, creating the idea we had to educate *everyone* rapidly and efficiently in order to prepare them for a lifetime of work in business and industry.

Bishop: In some cases it was done sensibly. You mention in the book the 1852 Massachusetts statute, which exempted children from school if they could show that they didn't need it.

Epstein: Yes, that was a competency-based law, but the subsequent laws have ignored competency completely. They have been based entirely on age, and they have created many of the problems we have with teens today. The education system that was adopted during the industrial revolution was modelled after the new factories. The idea was that children are like cogs

and gears, and we can put them on an assembly line and teach them all the same way. Of course the main thing the assembly line teaches most students is to hate education. They leave school with an enormous sigh of relief, determined never to read a book again. Effective education needs to be individualised and self-paced—virtually impossible to achieve in a classroom. Every classroom teacher knows that. I believe that advances in computers and the internet will make personalized education increasingly practical and common, whether it takes place in the classroom or, more and more, at home. Home schooling—rapidly becoming more popular in the US—has the advantage of removing teens from teen culture. In our fast-pace world, education also needs to be spread out over our lifetime, not crammed into the early years.

Bishop: Your notion of awarding people freedoms based on competency is, it seems to me, an ideal, and it is difficult to see how it can work in practice. You could, as we have with the driving test, have tests for competency in managing property and money and looking after children, but it would require enormously complex and bureaucratic organisation.

Epstein: It would actually be quite simple. A team of qualified adults would establish the criteria, and a relevant test would be created—just as we have done with driving, as well as with plumbers, electricians, massage therapists, real estate brokers, therapists, and dozens of other professionals. Dr. John McCardell, the former president of Middlebury College, is now spearheading an effort in the US to grant young people 18 and over a licence to drink alcohol once they have completed some classes and taken a relevant test; he's doing this through a new organisation called Choose Responsibility. People get a licence in order to go fishing or buy a gun, after all. It's really quite simple. The military has been fanatical about competency testing for nearly a hundred years. Plumbers in California have to pass a rigorous test in order to get a plumbing licence. The system of testing I'm proposing that will allow teens to join the adult world in various ways isn't complicated at all; there are ample precedents for it in dozens, if not hundreds, of areas of human society.

We have finally shied away from judging people by their race or gender, and we have finally stopped judging the elderly by their age and tossing them all onto the rubbish heap at age 65. We need to judge people—and to award people rights and privileges—according to their abilities, not according to gender, race, or age. I'm simply proposing the obvious: that we need to

apply these lessons to our young people, at least once they have passed puberty and are no longer children.

Bishop: I suppose that, in a lot of pre-industrialised cultures, age wouldn't even have been known.

Epstein: Absolutely. Even in Europe, as I document in my book, in many cultures age was not carefully tracked, and people were indeed often judged by their abilities, not their age. That is also true in the Bible.

Bishop: But now that we do track age and we know exactly who is 17 and who isn't, you could end up with the equality lobby jumping in and saying, "Well, hang on a minute, it is unequal, unfair, to say that someone of 17 can drink and have a car and his next door neighbour, also aged 17, can't".

Epstein: But age is irrelevant to the issue. Should people automatically be allowed to practice medicine or law just because they've reached age 30? Shouldn't we be interested in whether or not they are *competent* to practice medicine or law?

A civil rights activist wrote to me recently, suggesting that our present aged-based system violates the most basic civil rights of teens. After puberty, we shouldn't judge *anyone* by his or her age, in my view. Even if, on average, young people currently behave more recklessly than adults, that doesn't tell you about their potential. When you treat people like children, they tend to behave like children. Years ago a psychologist friend of mine remarked that there is something very curious about teens: "They either behave like children or they behave like adults, with no in-between." This is undoubtedly because they *are* adults—but adults who, over their strong objections, are continuously treated like children.

Bishop: Well, that's absolutely right. I think the moments when you look at your own teenage offspring and think that they are behaving like adolescents are actually moments when you are seeing child's behaviour, because they are exhibiting an area of their personality in which they haven't yet developed an adult competence.

Epstein: Or they have developed such competence, but they are not going to show it to you because they are in an adversarial relationship with you. They are going to behave the way they *learned* to behave with you and the way

you indeed *expect* them to behave, which is like a child. But that doesn't mean they'll behave that way in other contexts.

Bishop: Very often, if parents have a teenage daughter who is on the verge of moving out of the family home and into a risky relationship with an unreliable young man, and they have been down the “You shouldn't do that” route and not got anywhere, they may finally say, “Okay, do it. You take the responsibility; you take the consequences.” And of course the end result is that the teenager doesn't move out. But it is a heck of a big risk for a parent to be taking, isn't it?

Epstein: I talk about this issue in the context of emancipation. Right now, it's extremely difficult for a young person to become emancipated in the US. It's done occasionally by very wealthy young actors, such as Macaulay Culkin, who want to control their earnings. It takes lawyers and courts, and there's an enormous burden of proof. But I think emancipation should be granted to any young person who can pass an appropriately designed test—perhaps requiring that a young person show him- or herself to be at least as competent as half of adults are in a wide variety of areas; that's quite a demanding criterion. Of course, the test could also merely determine whether the young person is as competent as most 18 year olds, but that would make it too easy.

How would test-based emancipation change things? Very profoundly, and in many positive ways. First and foremost, it would give young people a powerful incentive to master the basic skills and knowledge of adulthood. It would also give young people a straightforward way to enter the adult world. After emancipation, a young person would have the option of leaving home, and parents would be able to push their offspring out the door. The relationship between parents and their emancipated offspring becomes voluntary in some respects, just as is the relationship between parents and their offspring over the age of majority (18 in the US). True negotiation, based on mutual respect, becomes possible; it's virtually impossible in the context of the master-slave relationship that often exists between parents and their teenage sons and daughters. The voluntary relationship is the more mature one, and it's often quite successful. It's also becoming more common, because there are now so many young adults living with their parents.

If emancipation and other tests for teens are other put into place, we'll see the same thing happen with those tests that we now see with the driving test: Young people will be *highly* motivated to take the tests and pass them, and even if they can barely pass an elementary math course in school, they will try very hard to pass the tests that give them entry into the adult world; they all eventually pass the driving test, after all, even if they can barely function in school. Millions of young people will try repeatedly to pass such tests, which means, really, that they'll be trying very hard to become adults!

Bishop: How many tests would you have teenagers take?

Epstein: The big one is the emancipation test. Other than that, I think we would need fewer than a dozen specialized tests that would allow young people to obtain specific adult rights, with corresponding responsibilities, of course. The most fundamental rights—the ones that would probably be of greatest interest to many young people—are the right to own property, the right to privacy, the right to work, and the right to sign contracts. Some young people might seek a licence to drink alcohol or the right to make their own medical decisions or to marry. A licence to drink alcohol could be immediately revoked, of course, if it were abused—the same as with the drivers licence.

Bishop: There is a corollary, of course, to your argument. It is that there will be lots of people over that arbitrary age who are de facto adults, who in fact would never pass that test because they never would reach the median score for the adult population.

Epstein: Well, that's a rather tricky issue. Yes, if you apply my logic across the life span, you run into curious problems. We could end up, for example, denying a 40 year old the right to vote.

Bishop: Or drive or drink or have children.

Epstein: Yes, or to own property or start a business. That is an issue that needs to be explored, and I'll be doing that in another book. I'm collecting material now for a book called *The Ageless Society*. This book will be far more controversial than *The Case Against Adolescence*.

Bishop: It's a brave man who does it!

Epstein: Or a fool. The idea of an age-blind, competency-based society is well worth thinking about. How would it function? This may turn out to be another 10-year project, but I'm fascinated by it. There has never been such a society on earth. Long ago the Chinese used testing to find many of their government officials. What would a society be like that awarded all significant rights and privileges based on competence? If voting rights were competency based, for example, wouldn't that mean that society would consistently have highly qualified, highly competent leaders? Perhaps crime and poverty would quickly be eliminated in such a society.

Bishop: In the UK, some very sophisticated examinations used to have to be passed before people were appointed into senior civil service positions. So there were people who got into the civil service on competency at very young ages and lots of older people who never would have done so.

Epstein: I should look into that. We have never had that in the US. In earlier times, in order to vote here, you had to satisfy three criteria: you had to be white, male and a property owner. None of these criteria are relevant to competence in voting, of course.

Bishop: Here, in some boroughs, we used to have an additional qualification - that you had to have a fireplace large enough to boil, or wallop, a pot in. Potwalloper boroughs, they were called.

Epstein: That's remarkable. The question is, what happens if you eliminate these kinds of irrelevant criteria? A competent voter should probably have basic reasoning skills and should be familiar with the issues and the candidates. What would happen in a society if the only people who were allowed to vote were in fact competent voters—people who presumably couldn't easily be swayed by pretty advertising campaigns or a nice haircut.

Bishop: *The Case Against Adolescence* is a fascinating book and, I must say, it is very hard to argue against because, as you say, it is all data based and very rigorous. It does leave us in an interesting position at the end, though, because you come to a slightly pessimistic set of conclusions about the possibility of rolling back the tide of bureaucracy and media and commercial concerns, in whose interests it is to keep teens enslaved in this limbo, in which all they can do is spend ever increasing amounts of money on rubbish. But, for the parents whose teenagers are in this trap, what

recommendations do you have to help them help their teenagers cope with an environment which is inherently disenfranchising for them?

Epstein: That's my next book! It is called *Finding the Adult in Every Teen: a guide for parents*, and I'm in negotiations now with a publisher in New York about it. There are things parents can do to stimulate the "inner adult" in their teenage offspring. To bring about real social change, some parents will also need to become activists. They're going to have to elect and lobby politicians and administrators who will roll back the restrictions that govern the lives of our teens, and who will create incentives and opportunities for young people to join the adult world as soon as they can demonstrate readiness.

I try every day to integrate my own young children (ages 7 and 8) into our household in meaningful ways, and that does not simply mean giving them "chores"; it means that we function as a team in every way possible. My seven-year-old regularly drives our car up our driveway (it's quite long) when we return from trips, and my eight-year-old helps me with audio editing for my radio show. He's marvellous at it, in part because his reflexes are so fast and because he has been working with computers since he was 10 months old. Just this past weekend, while my little daughter was helping me clean her bathroom, she said to me, "I think we need to do a major clean up in the bedroom." Without my supervision, she and her brother spent the next two hours completely scouring their bedroom. They even removed toys they decided they no longer needed. Then she said to me, "Daddy, I can't carry the vacuum cleaner upstairs. Could you do it for me?" I did so instantly; this was admirable behavior I wanted to support.

There are many ways we can integrate young people into the adult world. We can give them more decision power, for example. I make very few decisions now for my children, even though they are quite young. I say, "You have a brain. You use it. What do you think is the best thing to do in this situation?" If you let young people know that they have capabilities and you allow them to use those capabilities and you nurture those capabilities, they become increasingly competent. In my home there has never been any crying or any fighting. My son and daughter help each other, and they also help me. My daughter has had homework four nights a week ever since kindergarten, and her brother has been in charge of checking her homework from the beginning. He tells her where she has made mistakes, and then she has to make corrections on her own. The assignments are almost always

completed flawlessly, and my son is proud of the fact that he has been given this kind of responsibility. It's rare for my children to come to me with a homework problem they can't solve on their own.

Bishop: In some other countries, they don't even start school until seven years old and somehow they manage to catch up.

Epstein: And they sometimes go way ahead of us—that is, ahead of students in the US—by the time high school is over!

Bishop: As I mentioned before, we find with adults who have difficulties in their emotional lives that, if we can help them see how to get their needs met well, they tend to get better. And, if there is no difference between adults and adolescents, then you would expect that doing this would generate a more meaningful and purposeful life in adolescence too.

Epstein: Yes, but that's not going to happen easily under the current system. Our teens are infantilised, and they're also isolated from adults. They're also exposed to enormous forces from media and peers, and living in a subculture with bizarre standards and values. We're going to need serious activism over generations to make significant changes in this system. I'm pessimistic about how rapidly change will occur, it's true. And I don't think I am going to become an activist myself, because I still have other contributions to make to society. I do hope that *The Case Against Adolescence* and the follow-up books will inspire other people and give them the ammunition they need to take substantive steps toward change.

Bishop: And I hope that television experiment comes off, even if, as you say, it turns out to be a fairly trivial event and only really engages the imagination for two or three weeks. It would at least alert more people to the notion that adolescence might be an artificial construction and get them thinking about whether the problem might be rooted in the lack of ability to have some agency in the world rather than an inherent difficulty built into teenagers. I wish you success in communicating your ideas.

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