

# Youth Culture 101

Tips, Tools, and Thoughts for Understanding the World of Adolescents

## Definitions:

1. **Culture:** the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; also : the characteristic features of everyday existence (as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)
2. **System of Standards:** the sense of culture that frames expectations for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and performing. (Pamela Erwin)
3. **Assigned Character Traits:** the sense of culture that refers to specific attributes associated with or assigned to groups based on personal experience with members of that group. (Pamela Erwin)
4. **Operating Culture:** those standards or systems that a society chooses to guide its own thoughts and actions or to judge others' behavior. (Pamela Erwin)

Signs, symbols, rituals, and language all reveal and define culture.

## A Preface Concerning Practical Theology:

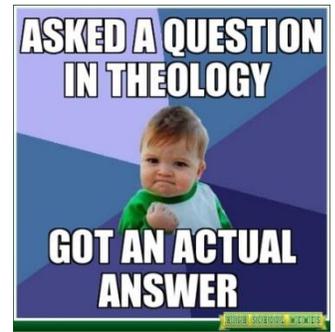
“...practical theology is theological reflection that is grounded in the life of the church, society, and the individual that both critically recovers the theology of the past and constructively develops theology for the future.”  
(Tony Jones)

Question: What does culture have to do with theology?

Answer: As a **communal** act of **fallen** humanity that has been made in the **image of God**, it hovers in the midst of our beliefs and actions.

Remember to consider:

- *Imago Dei*
- Community
- Sin
- Redemption



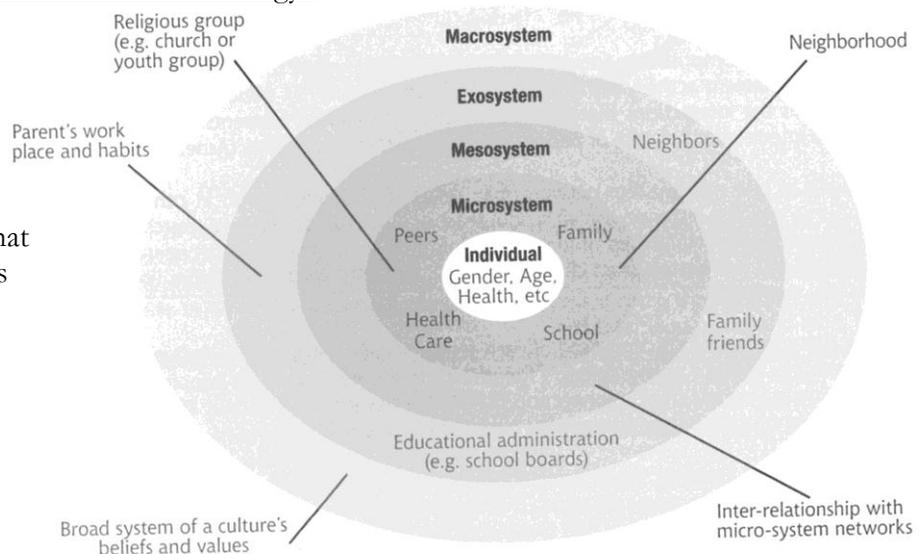
A Christian approach to culture is deliberately theological.

## Youth Culture & “Ecology”

Culture is global and local, communal and individual. Teen culture is, in addition, constantly in flux and developing.

Consider a student you know well. What are the different systems that affect this student?

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From Pamela Erwin, *A Critical Approach to Youth Culture*

## Some Guidelines:

- I. Observe carefully.
- II. Be humble and realistic.
- III. Withhold judgment.
- IV. Beware of the “tyranny of the visible.”
- V. Consider all factors, ecologies, and vantage points.
- VI. Beware the “back in my day” approach.
- VII. Ask: What does this tell you about the student(s) and their context?
- VIII. Ask: What does this tell you about humanity?
- IX. Ask: How does God/Scripture see this?
- X. Reflect on how culture(s) affect those involved.
- XI. Think/pray/meditate/consider first, act later.

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## Case Studies:

1. Culture as Circus: The Place of the “Cool” and the Idea of the Teenager
  - Justin Bieber, “Beauty and a Beat”
  - Macklemore, “Thrift Shop”
2. Probing the Thin Places: Culture as Mirror and Entry Point
  - “The Hunger Games”
  - Taylor Swift
3. Cultural Structures and Societal: Trends and Outliers
  - Facebook Fatigue (<http://www.sfgate.com/technology/businessinsider/article/It-s-Official-Teens-Are-Bored-With-Facebook-4324476.php>)
  - Teen Violence ([http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/watsonville/ci\\_22710703/two-teens-arrested-fatal-stabbing-20-year-old](http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/watsonville/ci_22710703/two-teens-arrested-fatal-stabbing-20-year-old))
4. Culture in Your Backyard
  - Race
  - Cliques
5. Culture as We Live It: The Place of the Individual



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## Suggested Books:

Clark, Chap. *Hurt 2.0* (2011).

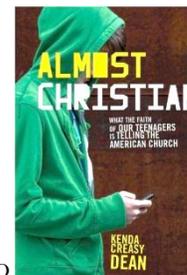
Dean, Kenda Creasy. *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (2010).

Erwin, Pamela. *A Critical Approach to Youth Culture* (2010).

Powell, Kara, Brad Griffin, and Cheryl A. Crawford. *Sticky Faith (Youth Worker Edition)* (2011).

Root, Andrew. *Children of Divorce* (2010).

Smith, Christian. *Soul Searching* (2005); *Souls in Transition* (2009); *Lost in Transition* (2011). See also [www.youthandreligion.org](http://www.youthandreligion.org) and/or a documentary about the findings of the NSYR called “Soul Searching.”



## Online Resources:

1. Center for Parent/Youth Understanding ([www.cpyu.org](http://www.cpyu.org))
2. HomeWord Center for Youth and Family Culture Blog ([www.homeword.com/blog.php](http://www.homeword.com/blog.php))
3. The Source for Youth Ministry Youth Culture Window ([www.thesource4ym.com/youthculturewindow/](http://www.thesource4ym.com/youthculturewindow/))
4. Plugged In Online ([www.pluggedin.com/](http://www.pluggedin.com/))
5. Youth Worker Youth Culture and News ([www.youthworker.com/youth-ministry-resources-ideas/youth-culture-news/](http://www.youthworker.com/youth-ministry-resources-ideas/youth-culture-news/))
6. Any other news site or magazine commenting on or discussing pop culture (*Relevant*, TMZ, MTV, etc.)