



Girls
and
Boys
Town

FAMILY SPOTLIGHT

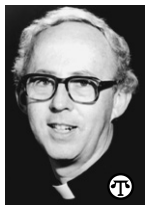
THOUGHTS FROM GIRLS AND BOYS TOWN

The Original Father Flanagan's Boys' Home

We Pay You To Be Stupid

by *Father Val Peter*

(NAPSA)—Many adults find it puzzling when adolescents wear bizarre clothes, dye their hair orange and green and act like fools.



Father Peter

Some explain it as a normal stage of adolescent rebellion. However, there is another factor and a lot of it has to do with advertising and marketing.

Many of these teenage behaviors did not exist before the modern age of advertising.

For example, MTV has a character called Jackass. You are told to imitate Jackass. A teen radio station in my area advertises: "We are the station that pays you to be stupid," holding contests for bizarre behavior.

Why are kids being targeted this way? For marketers, it is pure economics. They discovered children whose parents earn more than \$200,000 a year, receive an average of \$150 per week allowance. In fact, adolescents as a group have the largest amount of weekly disposable income in the nation.

So, how do advertisers get their fair share of this tremendous market?

By conducting more than 300 focus groups a year with adolescent boys and girls, marketers are learning what techniques work well for them. This is important business to them because the best pitches will gain tremendous market share and wealth from this lucrative segment.

What they have discovered may not surprise you, but how it is being used probably will. Marketers and advertisers are discovering it is effective to play on an adolescent's insecurity and need for acceptance.

Their first message to these teens is if you do anything with your family or enjoy things that are considered "normal"—"You are a dork." They repeat this message often and menacingly.

The second step is to ask: "Do you want to be cool?" For heaven's sake, most kids want to be part of the "cool" group.

To be cool, the answer, according to the advertisers, is loud and clear: "Follow us. Dress the way we tell you. Buy our clothes, our cosmetics, our hair dye, our music or our videos."

For the teen, the response is part instinct, part the need for acceptance and part fear that he might be left out or she may be made fun of for being a dork.

You are right if you believe some of this is due simply to the immaturity of adolescence. However, you must be cautious dismissing it without action.

Why? Because the same techniques have been used by every dictator from time immemorial.

Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin both used the same technique. Many adults have the ability to see through this, but kids are not equipped with the same "radar." We must help them.

How do you resist? First, help your child know he or she is not a dork and there are other things that make them distinctive and "cool."

Second, help your teen say "no" by getting two friends to say "no" with him or her.

P.S. This same technique also works with adults.

• *Father Val Peter is executive director of Girls and Boys Town, the original Father Flanagan's Boys' Home in Boys Town, Neb., and in California, New York, Louisiana, Texas, Florida, Nevada, Rhode Island, Iowa, Pennsylvania, Georgia and Washington, D.C.*