

# 'Lazy' teen-ager probably just tired

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**W**ake up and smell the competition. If baby boomers were worried that tech-savvy Generation Xers would take all the good jobs, wait until they get a load of the "millennials," the name for the newest generation of children.

Not only are these youngsters gadget-wise, they are book-smart — taught to be tested, thanks to accountability reforms imposed on schools nationwide. Despite continuing concerns about what children are learning — whether whole language or phonics works better for young readers and whether anyone can actually teach math anymore — both SAT and ACT scores increased in the late '90s, and a record number of students took the college-entrance and course-placement exams in 2000.

According to Neil Howe and William Strauss, authors of "Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation" (Vintage Books, 2000), today's teens are smarter, more ambitious and more motivated than either their boomer parents or their older siblings.

They also are "a consumer behemoth, riding atop a new youth economy of astounding scale and extravagance."

In other words, these teens have cash, and they know what to do with it. It starts with a pair of Nike tennis shoes purchased before they can walk and ends with . . . well, it never ends. The annual national survey of freshmen conducted by the University of California at Los Angeles found that affluence was one of the top priorities for those entering college last fall: 73.4 percent said they were "interested in being very well off financially."

Remember, though, that these youngsters are sharp. They know that someday they'll have to take over the payments on the lifestyle to which they became accustomed during economic good times, and they expect to work.

In fact, they have been working.

By the time they are 14 or 15, many adolescents have participated in at least one "job shadowing" program, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Also, internships aren't just for college students anymore — high schoolers are getting a head start on real-world skills through summer apprenticeships, career camps and school-based on-the-job-training programs. Some teens take honors classes at school, belong to a club or play on a team, volunteer in the community and work part time.

Of course, most teen-agers still manage to find time to sleep — often at the oddest hours — which contributes to that "lazy" image.

But if your 16-year-old son's size 13s aren't hitting the floor before noon on Saturdays and he is impossible to wake on school days, research shows it may not be just sloth. His internal clock likely has gone haywire. Once those notorious hormones start raging, sleep patterns are known to change, and "early to bed and early to rise" becomes a tall order for a teen-ager.

Schedules that don't take body chemistry into account can leave youngsters sleep-deprived, according to the National Sleep Foundation. Though teen-agers need between 8½ and 10 hours of sleep, just 15 percent get 8½ hours or more during the school week, and more than 25 percent sleep fewer than seven hours. Some high schools have taken note and bumped first period back a bit to better suit student bodies — but it's a slow-moving trend.