

The myth of the myth of the generation gap

This is a detailed condemnation of Alex Cramer's article 'The Myth of the Generation Gap' which appeared in last week's Excalibur, and dealt with the generation gap in terms of rock music and marijuana.

by Dennis Brennan

The article by Alex Cramer, "The Myth of the Generation Gap" in last week's Excalibur is poor and illogical. The article starts by describing this spring's 40,000 graduates trimming hair and shaving beards and heading for the labour market. No dispute there. Then Alex asks, "What then of the generation gap we keep hearing about?"

To start with, there is a time factor. People have been hearing about the generation gap for the last 15 years and describing it in various ways. So which way is Alex referring to? And if he is referring to the whole fifteen years of the phrase's use as one, he is being ridiculous. So if the article's question looks like a rhetorical question, it is only because it can't be answered.

Then the article says, "Aren't students supposed to be in revolt against the system? Well, taking either the colloquial or the more strict meaning of 'supposed', the answer is obviously 'No'. Perhaps in the eyes of some authoritarians, or just plain uninformed people, this is so. Mr. Cramer does not believe the reader to be among these groups, does he? There is a big difference between 'some students', and 'students'. The article's next sentence provides a little persuasion to answer the first question with an incorrect 'yes'. "After all," it says, "one looks at the unkempt appearance of many students and it seems reasonable to conclude that they are 'rebels'. It is obviously not reasonable to conclude that students of unkempt appearance are 'rebels'. It is certainly not a reasonable conclusion to make in the world outside school (as anyone's ordinary experience will tell him), and with greater freedom from restrictions concerning unkemptness in school, it is clearly and undoubtedly a false conclusion.

The succeeding paragraph continues: "What gives here? How can we reconcile what we see with all the articles and speeches on the generation in revolt?" Well, obviously no reconciliation is needed, since there is no contradiction. It is merely a complex situation involving thousands of people, and can be quite easily accounted for if one takes the time to delimit all the particularities. No one is saying we are all the same (or even should be) — not even the most simplistic and superficial of commentators — with the possible exception of Mr. Cramer.

The next paragraph says, "The answer is quite simple, really. Actually there never was a generation gap between the young and the old. What we are witnessing is a huge con game put on by industry and the mass media." But Alex is wrong. Using Alex's own example of graduates vs campus recruiters makes his error obvious.

Around 1947 Hiroshima happened. Huxley dropped acid. Catcher in the Rye got written. On the Road got written. Television started happening. Computers started happening. Ginsberg, Kerouac, Corso started turning on to Zen and vegetables. Around 1957 Sputnik happened. Beatniks happened. Howl came to the bookstores. Around 1961-2 Bob Dylan cleared out for good. Gutenberg Galaxy came out. Trout Fishing in America saw print. Alpert and Leary got (everybody) into acid. Across this whole time period a hell of a lot more people got into university.

These incidents are some of the bedrock experiences of great influence which spawned many sorts of generation gaps. After these it's been anybody's gap: everything happened. The changed environment changed sensibilities — especially of the young since they did not and do not know today through yesterday's filters and bullshit. They see the environment better. And they do not at first know gaps between young and old; they first feel them. These experiences get talked about and cause otherwise-inexplicable things.

Now the media comes in. For obviously the media is not the source of generation gaps. There is a feedback that involves some young people who come to know of the situation via media before they have felt it in themselves. But this still does not make generation gaps part of the put-ons by industry and mass media. Rather, the existence of such situations merely provides grist for their mill. As does talk of crime, world politics, and all human experiences — notably those bearing the greatest amounts of information, which is to say the most exciting, or most sensational. And I think Mr. Cramer knows this, and is only overly-bugged about the feedback instances, where media-reality is taken as the reality. But he needn't worry here.

Beyond basic necessities and a compact moral code — such as the Golden Rule — there are no priorities for establishing The Reality. To the extent a person can conceive of something, it is real for him. To the extent that large groups of people share a concept, it is real in their interaction.

Cramer's entire article, and many similar ones he has written, contain one overall thought: "You're all phonies!!" But with no way to determine what is objectively genuine, obviously there is no such thing as "phony".

Mr. Cramer's article puts forward an argument: "Actually there never was a generation gap between the young and the old." In order to prove it he finds fault with young people in various categories. Since this doesn't prove the argument the article falls flat on that basis alone.

In the article's seventh paragraph, Alex implies that advertising influences young people. He says young people support a market in North America amounting to billions of dollars. And apparently he believes this is the case because advertising has sold us on a life "unavailable to

the oldsters" (a generation gap) made up of "rock dances, sharp clothes and fast cars."

Surely young people are not at fault if advertising tries to cater to their interests. What would you have us do, Alex, short of leaving the planet?

And besides, advertising is after the fact. We can't help it if those assholes follow us around.

Is dancing a sin, Alex? Speed (fast cars) is a thrilling adventure and not an illegitimate experience. Young people show remarkable creativity, originality, and imagination in clothing, we go our own way, and advertising cannot keep up. We make our own clothing. We buy second-hand clothing. It is pretty funny to see Madison Avenue coming out with their 'old' new clothing: pre-scuffed sneakers, pre-faded jeans, 'army surplus' clothing. I call that a pretty desparate advertising industry. What product can you buy that has not gone through the business-industry-advertising mill? Indeed there is an answer, and that is: marijuana. An interesting coincidence, yes?

It seems the young people who dig rock have a few faults, too. Mr. Cramer tells us that "in the last three years progressive rock has emerged and split the rock world into two camps. This has led to a considerable amount of snobbery among university students who do the ego thing by taking pot shots at Herman's Hermits and the Ohio Express." What the hell is he talking about? Can't rock fans have opinions about rock music? What ego thing? What snobbery? The only snobbery Mr. Cramer snubbing our opinions.

The article says, "To believe the magazine philosophers of TIME and LIFE, rock is supposed to represent an expression of social rebellion." The implication is that Alex does not believe TIME and LIFE. But for some undivulged reason Alex does believe certain other magazines. For he says elsewhere, "Things don't change much at university as a glance at Playboy and Mademoiselle will indicate."

I always had the idea that first-hand acquaintance with university and the people in it would be how you learned about its changes, but then I haven't glanced into Mademoiselle in the longest while. . . Maybe they do have the inside dope. Just watch out for them media cons, Alex.

Mr. Cramer complains that even rock musicians are at fault: the songs still are based on the themes of love and loneliness are universal, and artists just have this thing about universal themes, you know?

But wait we learn that "There is no question that the progressive rock bands are tremendously creative and have a lot to say." Hmmm. What happened, Alex, was the article beginning to get too straightforward and consistent? Sorta want to put them down, but not really. . . something like that?

Now the article says, "But there seems to be little evidence that Procol Harum and the Moody Blues have really hit their listeners." What kind of evidence do you want, Alex? Surely not huge "commercial success" or something evil like that? I can't say that they exactly "hit" me, but they changed me around a bit. Should I have served you notification to that effect? You could have asked.

Now about these nasty vegetables: the article says, "Were drugs used properly, that is, as a tool to self-discovery, then there would be a real generation gap which no amount of bullshit could bridge. But if that were the case, then we wouldn't have 40,000 graduates turning into corporate

whores." But what happens if you use drugs so that self-discovery takes place, and you discover that what you really want is to be a corporate whore?

Grass, hash, and acid are routes to self-discovery no matter how you use them. At the very first level of high, cognition and perception filters fall away, and nothing within you or without you escapes this alteration. So I don't know what Alex means by "proper" use, unless it has to do with a few obvious precautions everyone takes.

He says that "Unfortunately 90 do it for kicks." But why "unfortunately?" What does this put-down amount to?

First, let me say that since he is quoting a survey, "kicks" is obviously the word that the survey-taker(s) came up with, not the people surveyed. (If that is not obvious then never mind reading this.)

Secondly, why does Alex find fault with "kicks"? Does it mean something nasty, or decadent? How very authoritarian of him, if he does.

The essence of the word (known only after it is felt) is information, super-information. What is information? New knowledge — something incongruous with the knowledge you presently have. Thus it can be seen that super-information would be information with a high degree of incongruity (an increase in quality) or else information in large quantity.

Dennis Brennan condemns Alex Cramer's evidence and logic by means of examples concerning advertising, marijuana, and style of life. He also supplies a positive ethic and a formula for correct living.

So of course raping eleven-year-old girls, or robbing graves, or beating up blind spinsters, or vandalizing schools, or stabbing random members of the general public, or smoking pot, are all experiences yielding super-information or "kicks". But while the first five experiences listed above are crimes against society, the last one, smoking pot, is not. Well, I mean sure it's against the law or something, but you know. . .

By the way, Alex, the word's contemporary usage (or meaning) originated with all us rocks of the good-old days of juvenile delinquency — it didn't originate with the media, or sociologists (feeling before knowing) — and I have felt kicks, that's how I presume to know. Have you ever felt any?

Now after accusing 90 of the fiends up here of lusting after kicks, Mr. Cramer says, "That is to say they consume pot in much the same way their parents take liquor." Well, here we go again. You mean people lay in a little supply, and then call a few friends together to share the nasties? You mean they are a little happy, and have a little empathy, and might even love one another sometimes? Hmmm. I may be a bit old-fashioned, Alex, but off-hand I just don't see what's wrong with. . . Because beyond these good, basic human experiences the similarity between drinking and smoking pot just isn't there. The significant effects of booze and pot are opposite to each other, and these effects have just a little influence on how the party goes.

More put-downs: "While stoned, rather than seeking each other out, they play head games. 'Wow, look at the New Human-

ties building. The architect must be a head.' 'You should see the Yellow Submarine stoned.' " Those aren't head-games, Alex, those are sentences.

'Seeking out' is to find out what people know and feel, what is their picture of reality.

Since pot removes cognitive-perceptual filters, we are all able to see more clearly, and have freer access to, our own various pictures of reality. We can toss these reality-pictures (which we don't necessarily believe fully but still formulate) among ourselves for comparison. This playing-catch with reality pictures, the ultimate 'seeking out' is what it is to play head games, Alex.

But enough about vegetables; now the article wants to go on to the grapefruit juice: "Acid has the power to change the direction of a person's life," he says. Good point. "But, most people want to use it like grass so they split a tab into 2 or even 4 parts which is just enough to space one out nicely but not strong enough for the user to confront himself."

While Alex no doubt gets his acid from Switzerland, most people have to fumble around in that funky black market down the block. And some bring home Donald Duck orange juice, some bring home speed, some bring home Sani-flush, some bring home softdogbugletread, and some bring home acid. But they all think it's acid. And criminal it may be, but more shopping trips yield that old traffic-jam,

than they do the real strawberry stuff. But that doesn't matter to Alex, they're supposed to shoot up the whole thing regardless.

Oh you wild dashing maniac, Dramer. Come on. Even if everybody had those real Swiss cuckoo-clocks like I hypothesize you must be into, your complaint is still empty.

Not only do you not know what you got till you do some, you also don't know how much. And with all the crashes (some say busts) this market takes, you're into new brands constantly. But let's assume even all these pitfalls are hurdled — there is still good reason to do a four-way tab one hit at a time.

This "self-confrontation" for the user which Alex talks about is a big operation. It needs preparation. It needs a safe, but free, environment. It needs time, a great deal of time, especially after. I assume Alex knows what he means when he says "self-confrontation". But the more I think about it, keeping his article in mind, the more I get the idea that he really hasn't the foggiest notion what he means — he's just using words. You have your self-confront now, Alex, what other people do is their business, isn't it? And there is one more good reason to split tabs and caps. It is scarcity. Ever hear of sharing, Alex? Ever hear "with a little help from my friends?"

The language situation gest banded around in the article too. This is supposed to be another argument for his statement that, "actually there never was a generation gap between the young and the old." What he says in fact clearly disproves this. He says, "the point is that there