

Jessica Taylor

Adolescence Rebellion

Teenagers are talked about all over the news. “Statistically teens ages 16-19 are more likely to get in a car collision than...”, “a new app entertaining teenagers everywhere”, “teens' grades are dropping during this November, and here is why...”. Statistics surround their lives. As parents, it can be difficult to cope with the overwhelming news and stats presented about their children. Watching their kids closely, and enforcing more rules may give them peace, but often sparks a drive of rebellion in their adolescence. With teenagers' increasingly risky behavior, attempting to do the same things without the knowledge of their parents, the news and statistics grow, leading to a continuous loop. Elizabeth Kolbert is a staff writer at *The New Yorker*, and a parent herself. In her piece, *Terrible Teens* Kolbert talks about teen recklessness, and tries to inform parents of their children's ignorance.

In an article entirely about teenager behavior, one may assume the author expects a variety of readers, but Kolbert does not make this the case. *Terrible Teens* is a text that is very easily identifiable as geared towards the parents of these adolescents. The article uses language that actively ignores support for teenage intelligence, “They actually do understand that driving is dangerous; the problem is that they are having too much fun to care”(3). Kolbert seems to completely ignore the idea of diversity in adolescent minds and indirectly disregards any teenage input. Not all teenagers like to drive, some do it out of necessity, and some teens can enjoy driving while being cautious. An age number does not automatically determine intelligence, recklessness, or skill. Kolbert, as a mom herself, probably felt drawn to write this piece. No parent wants to hear ill news of their child, but news of accidents is extremely prevalent. “The leading cause of death among adolescents today is accidents; this is known as the ‘accident

hump”(2). These modern-day crises help parents feel driven to warn one another, no doubt being the reason behind Kolbert writing this article.

Teenagehood is a strange time. A mix between childhood and adulthood, freedom with restrictions. Elizabeth Kolbert creates her article as not only a writer but a mom. Kolbert’s experience in the aspect she writes about is somewhat compromising to her evidence. She brings in personal experiences and opinions, making it clear the writing includes a bias. “Take my kids’ driver’s-ed classes. From Steinberg’s perspective...” (3). When informing an audience, an author's best approach is usually to step back and inform without inserting themselves into the information, but Kolbert blatantly gives her own opinions and thoughts in the writing. This opens up many questions that now need to be answered. Is Kolbert credible enough to speak about this? She is not a professional, can her words be trusted? Is this piece now too biased to trust? One thing that helps Kolbert’s case is her bringing in professional scientists and research. “Given access to ethanol, C57BL/6J mice routinely suck away until the point that, were they to get behind the wheel of a Stuart Little-size roadster, they’d get pulled over for D.U.I.” (1). Kolbert uses this study done on mice, to the point that adolescent minds would exhibit similar behavior. This experiment, however, is done on mice. Human beings are not mice. A human teenager has much more common sense, and frankly comparing a human being to some mice is quite degrading. Everyone was a teenager at one point, everyone has made mistakes, that does not make teenagers equal to mice just because of their age. This insubstantial evidence also lowers Kolbert’s ethos level.

Along with her use of misplaced credibility, Kolbert also attempts to use emotions to sway these parents into fear. She gives terrifying stories about teenagers in dangerous situations. One of which, a girl on the brink of alcohol poisoning, “she has downed seventeen Jell-O shots”.

Another of a kid near drowning, “[Dan] gets drunk and, together with a bunch of friends, scales the fence at the local tennis club to take a 3 a.m. swim. The friends get out, get dressed, and rescale the fence, only to discover that Dan is no longer with them. When they return to the pool, they find him lying face down in it” (1). Kolbert uses these stories to try and activate a fear response in these parents’ minds. Throughout the entire article, Kolbert is relating what she says to her readers, leaving just enough empty details to let a parent imagine their child in the position. This emotional effect may work on a lot of people, but not everyone is so sensitive to these kinds of stories. In fact, most of Kolbert’s argument relies solely on emotional parents, wanting to save their children. The evidence she provides is often not very strong and does not even relate sufficiently to the topic. Even after the fear tactics and such are used throughout the piece, Kolbert still ends her article with a fairly unsympathetic attitude toward her sons. “I will keep telling my kids scary stories and why they will continue to ignore them” (4). Acting almost hypocritically to the advice she is giving her audience. Warning her audience to barricade, and hover over their children, but not doing the same with her own. She sends mixed messages of, lock up your kids, they could get hurt, and do not bother, they will find a way to get in trouble anyway.

Overall, Elizabeth Kolbert’s attempts to warn parents of how much danger their teens could be in are not put forward with good effort. She categorizes all teens under the same category, reckless, and leaves no room for differing personalities. Her teenage boys become a conflict of interest in her writing, turning it biased. Kolbert seems so convinced on teen recklessness is a surefire thing and speaks as though she was never a teenager herself. Her one-track mind does not even look into possible reasons for teen recklessness, such as stress,

hormones, or family pressure. Kolbalt's collective errors in her writing make it ineffective to communicate her argument.

WC: 1016