

The Teen Gene
by Dr. Daniel Wexler

I hear that when you are about to die your life flashes before your eyes. But what happens when you are just 14 and haven't had much of a life to flash?

Since 14 years came and went with little incident there is no way for me to know. Perhaps past lives are revisited? If consciousness persists after death I'm hoping I would have regretted not knowing the future that could have been. But young people have a special gene in their DNA that is extremely active. It is called cIteen for the normal cellular version of invulnerability in teenagers.

As a normal gene, cIteen plays a role in normal adolescent development. This implies that risk-taking in teens is natural, part and parcel of the growing up process. This also implies that teens with a mutant version of this gene will not mature properly and will be defective adults. But how do we define risk-taking? What kind of risks are we talking about?

The on-line Free Dictionary by Farlex with 1,238,231,108 visitors (and counting) states that risk is

- (1) The possibility of suffering harm or loss; danger.
- (2) A factor, thing, element, or course involving uncertain danger.

I really like the latter: "A...course involving uncertain danger". What could be uncertain and dangerous about a course in American History? How about Science and Math? And g_d forbid the English language?

Let's take Math. There's a lot to be afraid of there. It is a dangerous skill that threatens your lives with abilities no normal human being should have – the ability to count your change at the supermarket, balance your checkbook, do your taxes, figure out how many gallons of pink paint you need for your daughter-in-womb's room. It would seem that teenagers, being risk-takers, should naturally love math because it is fraught with the danger of miscalculation..Hah! Let's not delude ourselves. The genetic code of cIteen specifically exempts all uncertainly dangerous activities that involve the use of the brain's frontal lobe. As Shakespeare wrote in Hamlet, "Aye, there's the rub." This loophole in the teen risk-taking gene permits students to avoid mental mistakes by not being mental - if we don't think, then we can't risk failure in our thinking.

Here's how I know the teen gene exists. When I was 14 I lived in a mountainous area in upstate New York. One hazy fall morning I was hiking along a cliff trail and slipped on a carpet of wet leaves. I slid over the edge of the cliff and likely would have died or worse if I hadn't grabbed a tree root and pulled myself to safety. I know cIteen made me go on that dangerous hike because a week later it happened again, same cliff no less. Green and invulnerable my life did not flash before my eyes either time. Without the teen gene, I'm sure I would have worn Glacier boots and hired a Sherpa guide.

It could be worse. The many types of risky behaviors available today are dispensed as easily as candy from vending machines. Even in school, students have been caught having unprotected sex in stairwells, lighting joints in bathroom stalls, breaking into offices in full view of video surveillance cameras, and worst of all leaving cell phones out in plain sight. Tsk, tsk. Shouldn't such normal biological behavior be encouraged instead of punished?

The answer to the above question is “nope”. Just as wild animals can be tamed for pets, human beings can be trained to overcome their darker tendencies – lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy and pride (oh yes, the seven deadly sins). This is called being civilized and most often happens through the collusion of parents and teachers – these lessons are meant to suppress the teen gene, resulting in socialization and adulthood. The horror of it all.