

The Culture Translator Premium

Three Things This Week

1

From Snapchat to SCOTUS

What it is: On Wednesday, the Supreme Court heard arguments in the case of Levy (a former high school cheerleader) vs. the State of Pennsylvania.

Why it will set a standard: Freshman Brandi Levy was furious when she discovered, four years ago, that she wasn't going to advance to the varsity squad. So she did what many teens her age might do; she posted an expletive-filled rant to her private Snapchat account, which she anticipated would disappear after 24 hours. Instead, a screenshot of her post was shared with one of the cheer coaches, and Levy was kicked out of the program completely. A federal court [ruled](#) that Levy's speech took place off-campus, making it within her rights to post whatever she wanted. But social media has changed the way that many people define a "place," and the school argues that it's hard to pin down where "campus" ends and private life begins. Current free speech

protections for students are mostly based on a SCOTUS hearing on students' rights to protest the Vietnam War, a ruling that came down in 1969. The SCOTUS verdict, [expected in June](#), will likely set a landmark precedent for students' free speech rights on social media.

2

Willow Smith Gets Candid

What it is: Willow Smith, twenty-year-old daughter of Will Smith and Jada Pinkett, [has revealed](#) that she is polyamorous. Because it's 2021, she naturally made the pronouncement public on her family's Facebook talk show, Red Table Talk.

Why it reflects a changing norm: Willow's openly-stated desire to be in a relationship with both a man and a woman at the same time might seem pretty bold. But the younger Smith says that her polyamorous preferences come not from a desire to be promiscuous, but for a deep longing for multi-dimensional and personal connections. Smith implies that relationships that are open to other partners don't run the risk of concealed infidelity. Of course, polyamory isn't anything new (we can think of a few Bible characters whose relationships fit the bill) but unfortunately the lifestyle is becoming more and more [visibly mainstream](#). We can pray and have compassion for Willow, who, like many others her age, is grappling with how to frame sex in the context of her life choices. But we must outright condemn polyamory as a lifestyle in our family conversations. Polyamory is an option being presented to teens, and not as a fringe one, either, so we have to be willing to address it head-on. In conversations with your teen, note how even "consensual" non-monogamy has historically led to heartbreaking and explosive complications, particularly for women.

3

TikTokTarot

What it is: Publishing companies and online cultural observers agree that tarot is experiencing [a surge](#) in interest from 18-24 year olds. Tarot seems particularly popular on Instagram and TikTok.

Why it's all over the For You Page: As [Religion News Service](#) notes, an interest in tarot deck readings is not as constrained by religious conviction as it used to be. Young Catholics and evangelicals seem to be open to divination, psychics, the zodiac, and other practices that were once deemed to be occult. Popular tarot readers will post open-ended readings on TikTok without tagging a recipient, letting “the universe” do the work to reach the person who they believe is supposed to see it. Because of how TikTok sorts content, this means that these readings can end up on anyone’s For You Page, even if someone isn’t particularly interested in seeing them. But for the uninitiated young person, consuming tarot images (even unwittingly) can provoke some spiritual confusion at the very least. Get ahead of this by letting your teen know that while some spiritual questions and practices are worth asking about and experimenting with, others are definitely not.

Slang of the Week

issa vibe: when all the details of a situation come together to provoke one sensory feeling or experience. (Ex: “Ice cream, flip flops, my favorite tank top, the smell of the lake and an old beach blanket. Issa vibe.”)

The New Atheism Isn't Woke Enough

Evolutionary biologist and author of *The God Delusion* Richard Dawkins [recently tried to spark some discussion](#) about gender and race identity. He wondered why Rachel Dolezal (a White woman who identified as Black) incited such fury for her identification, while when it comes to transgender identity the fury is directed at anyone who questions it. Dawkins [tweeted](#), “Some men choose to identify as women, and some women choose to identify as men. You will be vilified if you deny that they literally are what they identify as. Discuss.”

People couldn't believe that such a well-known scientist would encourage such a discussion. The role of science, many seemed to think, should be to provide support for the current cultural orthodoxy. The American Humanist Association (whose [mission statement includes](#) advocating for “freethinkers”) retracted their 1996 Humanist of the Year award to Dawkins for “making statements that use the guise of scientific discourse to demean marginalized groups”. Many former fans of Dawkins likewise began advocating for his cancelation.

Just a few years ago, Dawkins rode evolutionary biology into battle against Christian faith in every way he could, and biology departments like his were often considered edgy, progressive, and dangerous to faith. Today, those same departments seem out-of-touch with the current cultural moment. And someday the transgender discussion too, with all its complexity, will likely yield its spotlight to some future cultural conversation.

Brett McCracken [sees all this as an opportunity](#) for the church: “In a world where we increasingly walk on eggshells—unsure when,

if, and how we're allowed to speak publicly on contested issues—Christianity can become a grace-filled haven for curious questioners, doubting dissidents... We should foster environments where the smart kids, the curious artists, the scientists, and the “freethinkers” feel welcome and—perhaps more than anywhere else in the world—inspired. Let the world be in the business of de-platforming, disinviting, and shutting down debate. Christianity should invite it.”

Here are some questions we hope might spark discussion with your teens:

- What do you think is more important: creating safe places where people can ask hard questions, or creating places where people don't have to hear ideas that offend them?
- Is it ever wrong to ask questions, even about hard things? Why or why not?

8 PREMIUM INSIGHTS

A broader look at the world that teens inhabit.

Skim our summary or click the links to read more.

Engage your teens in conversation about their world.

They said it best:

“Jesus went without comfort so that you might have it. He postponed joy so that you might share in it. He willingly chose isolation so that you might never be alone in your hurt and sorrow. He had no real fellowship so that fellowship might be yours, this moment. This alone is enough cause for great gratitude!” — Joni Eareckson Tada

Technology

Apps/Websites

1. **FYI:** Yahoo Answers, the [delightfully incoherent](#) question-and-answer platform, had a good run. Launched in 2005, it enabled users to crowdsource answers to questions such as “do vampires poop?” and “how do I become a mermaid?” Yahoo [will cease](#) to host Answers, which might seem inconsequential (even if it does make the internet a less hilarious place). But some would argue that the demise of Answers is just further evidence of the decline in Yahoo’s power as a tech trendsetter. It doesn’t look like the once highly-influential company has much in the works in terms of attracting a Gen Z user base.

Pop Culture

Film/TV/Streaming

2. **FYI:** *Shadow and Bone*, the bingeable adaptation of the YA book series by the same name, dropped last Friday. So should you feel comfortable letting your teen watch it? Ultimately, the choice is up to you. It does not seem like Netflix tried to transform *Shadow and Bone* into an adult show. The show contains some (infrequent) language, in addition to a lot of violence and fantasy magic. Sexual content is at a minimum, though Common Sense Media [notes](#) that some scenes take place in a brothel.

Social Media

3. Pew’s [social media report](#) for 2021 has been published, and the results probably won’t surprise you. YouTube and Reddit were the only platforms to demonstrate significant growth in usage, with Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Pinterest remaining basically unchanged. Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat continued to be most popular amongst a younger demographic.

Conversation Starter: *Is this report more or less along the lines of how your teens interact with their friends on social media? Are your teens using other social media apps (such as WhatsApp) to*

host their conversations? What other platforms would your teen have included in a survey like this one?

Trending/Memes

4. **FYI:** A TikTok [shape-shifting filter](#) spawned plenty of entertainment for users of the app. The filter “shapeshifts” your face to show you which famous person, Disney princess, or Marvel character you most resemble (among several other filter options). The filter hits the internet trend sweet-spot where it’s funny no matter what; either the shape-shift is hilariously wrong, or it’s so right that you’ve got to laugh. TikTokers love to be amused by memes and trends that provide easy, silly, and personalized categorization, so the shape-shifter will likely be going strong for some time.

Music

5. **FYI:** A new Billie Eilish [record](#) is on the horizon, and it looks to be a decided change of tone for the melancholic singer. The album will be called *Happier than Ever* and while, yes, the singer *is* crying in the promotional artwork, Eilish’s overall vibe indicates that the release will engage with lighter themes and ditch some of her trademark angst, but don’t expect bubblegum Billie. A single off the album, called “[Your Power](#),” dropped on Thursday and appears to reference a young woman in an abusive relationship.

Fashion/Beauty/Appearance

6. **FYI:** The “[prairie dress trend](#)” is not going away. Comfortable, flowing, patterned dresses will most likely continue to be in demand for younger consumers looking to dress up during the warmer months. The hit show *Bridgerton* brought corset-tops and smocked dresses even more into the mainstream, so expect this

summer's dresses to have a more Victorian look with puffed sleeves, lightly structured fabrics and empire waists.

Teen Culture

Gaming/Esports

7. **FYI:** The Oscars [tanked](#) with viewers this past Sunday, with the lowest-rated broadcast ratings the awards show has ever had. Some cultural observers suggest that this is just an example of how younger people have lost interest in long-esteemed cultural institutions and award shows in general. But viewership stats for the [Game Awards](#) challenge that belief. The award show, which allows public voting on awards and features exclusive game reveals, reached 83 million viewers in December 2020. Maybe it's not award shows that Gen Z doesn't like, but the way the awards are presented.

Going Deeper

8. Do nations with Christian governments end up with fewer Christians? A [newly published study](#) wonders if this could be the case. Two social scientists based out of Singapore analyzed data from 166 countries, and concluded that when certain faith traditions receive privileges from their governments, adherents to those faiths tend to lose their "fervor." By contrast, countries that actively persecute Christians may end up causing Christians to become more dedicated to their beliefs.

Of course, this is a phenomenon that might sound familiar to anyone who has read the book of Acts. When Christians are persecuted, God uses what men intend for evil for His greater glory. And the more believers that stand firmly in their faith, the more the real message of Jesus is proclaimed and understood.

Conversation Starter: *This is just one study, but it raises some interesting questions. In what way does having a government that*

“favors” Christians or simply protects religious freedom change the religious landscape? How does real physical persecution strengthen the faith of believers in other countries? And of course, how can we offer our support to others who are suffering for the name of Christ in other places?

Keep the Faith!

The Axis Team

Editor’s Note: Axis links to many different sources within this e-newsletter; **a link does not equal an endorsement.** We cannot guarantee the content of each site (especially its ads). Please be forewarned. Also, we highly recommend something like [AdBlock](#).

Was this email forwarded to you? Sign up [here!](#)

[Website](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#)