



Youths of They Never Asked Us: handing over airtime to an overlooked age group

TELEVISION

Testament of youth

Teens speak their minds in four new series

The question flouts the predictability of prime-time television. "Have you ever felt like killing anyone?" asks David Schatzky, host of the Vision TV series *They Never Asked Us* (Thursdays at 7:30 p.m.). On the floor around him, the seven teenagers who lounge casually on carpets and cushions begin to nod. "There's this guy, he screwed me over mentally," says one young man, "and he felt up girls while they were sleeping." "Family members," says a young woman, apparently meaning it. "My ex-boyfriend," adds another. Then, telling the others that they are being "too dramatic," another boy pipes in. "To actually kill somebody," he says, "you've got to have balls of steel." That candid exchange captures the spirit of four brash new documentary series airing on Canadian television in 1992—all devoted to letting teenagers and young adults speak openly about the world in which they live.

The 13-part half-hour series *They Never Asked Us*, which began on Vision TV on Jan. 2, is the only one of the four in which the young people do not actually tape the material. On the CBC, which is offering the other three series, teenagers themselves operate the video cameras. In its current season, which began on Jan. 3, the weekly, half-hour documentary series *Life: The Program* (Fridays at 7:30 p.m.) is

including short segments shot by, and about, adolescents in nine of its 11 episodes. On Feb. 24, the CBC will also launch a six-part weekly series of half-hour documentaries called *Degrassi Talks* (Mondays at 8:30 p.m.), hosted by the stars of the former dramatic series *Degrassi High* and *Degrassi Junior High*, and devoting entire episodes to such issues as teenage sex, drugs and depression.

As well, the CBC has launched a nationwide search for aspiring video-camera operators aged 18 to 25 to shoot a new documentary series called *Road Movies*. Set to begin production in the summer and airing in the fall, the 13-part series will be devoted to developing a dialogue among young adults in English and French Canada and native communities on such issues as constitutional reform and language rights.

Executives responsible for all four series say that they are committed to handing over airtime to an age group whose opinions and concerns, they argue, have historically been overlooked by television. Said Peter Flemington, director of programming for Vision TV, a nonprofit national cable service available to 5.5 million homes across the country: "It might sound funny to say this about teenagers, but we really felt that there was a need to give a voice to the voiceless." Angela Bruce, the creative

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