

Abstracts

Summaries of research reported in recent academic journals / BY **KATE GROSS**

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AT-RISK YOUTH

Residential wilderness programs: The role of social support in influencing self-evaluations of male adolescents

E.C. Cook, *Adolescence*, v.43, n.172, 2008, pp.751-74.

Residential wilderness programs are believed to be effective in promoting “the healthful development of self” and helping at-risk youth to improve their self-evaluations. To determine the effect of such a program on self-evaluations, and the specific aspects of these programs that lead to improved self-evaluations, researchers interviewed 13 males aged 12–16 years who were involved in a 12-month residential wilderness program in the southeastern United States. Qualitative data were obtained through interviews conducted when participants began the program and again four months later. Analysis of interview data collected at Time 1 and Time 2 indicated that the majority of participants who reported low levels of self-esteem, self-expression and social competence, and problems with aggressive behaviour at Time 1 reported improvements in these elements at Time 2. Participants said that “activities that promoted high levels of social support”, particularly

cooperative activities and opportunities to express emotions, were responsible for the improvement in their self-evaluations. Future research should investigate the longitudinal effect of these programs following their completion.

DRUGS

Young Australians and the staging of intoxication and self-control

J. Lindsay, *Journal of Youth Studies*, v.21, n.4, 2009, pp.371-84.

Using a sociological approach, this study analyses data from two qualitative research projects that examined alcohol consumption among young adult Australians living in Victoria. This was done to explore how young people negotiate the “confusing and contradictory social context” of alcohol consumption in Australia, in which market forces and cultural expectations encourage alcohol consumption (often to excess), while health promotion imperatives encourage reduced alcohol consumption and responsible drinking. The data revealed two dominant themes associated with young people’s alcohol consumption: “staged intoxication” and self-control. Staged intoxication “... involves constant decision

making about consumption, including timing, and balancing and coordinating drinking, intoxication and its consequences”. Although self-control was a critical aspect in the way that participants managed their alcohol consumption, data also indicated that this self-control “... occurs much further along the continuum of consumption than what any recommended limits state”. As public health intervention tools, notions of self-control, monitoring health and managing risk may therefore not be as effective among young people as currently believed.

EMPLOYMENT

International student workers in Australia: A new vulnerable workforce

C. Nyland, H. Forbes-Mewett, S. Marginson, G. Ramia, E. Sawir & S. Smith, *Journal of Education and Work*, v.22, n.1, 2009, pp.1-14.

Research into vulnerable young workers has given little consideration to the experiences of international students working in Australia. To gain more information about the work experiences of international students, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 200 international students (101 females) from nine

universities around Australia. Approximately 70% of participants said that they had worked at some stage of their stay in Australia – a higher proportion than previous research had indicated. Responses indicated that international students constitute a “segregated and vulnerable workforce” in Australia. Many were employed in low-status occupations, where they were often forced to accept rates of pay “well below the legal minima”. While it was common for participants to work for employees from their own ethnic/cultural group, many students who worked or sought work reported experiencing difficulties “in relation to language and cultural adjustment”. The authors identified “an urgent need to match the nation’s effort at building the international education industry with a comparable effort designed to protect the employment rights of international students”.

FAMILIES

Parenting by cell phone: Parental monitoring of adolescents and family relations

R.S. Weisskirch, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, v.38, n.8, 2009, pp.1123-39.

This study explored the frequency, duration and nature of mobile (cell)

phone calls between adolescents and their parents to determine how these relate to: 1) parental knowledge of, and adolescent truthfulness about, adolescents' activities, and 2) parents' and adolescents' overall perceptions of family relationships. A total of 196 parent-adolescent dyads from across the United States (adolescents' average age = 16.25 years) were recruited for the study. Parents and adolescents completed separate questionnaires measuring demographic information, mobile phone use, adolescents' truthfulness when communicating with their parents via mobile phone, parental knowledge of adolescents' activities, and perceptions of family relationships. One general pattern that emerged from data analyses was that "parental knowledge and adolescent truthfulness may be maximised when the adolescent initiates the calls, and may be minimised when the parent initiates the calls." Likewise, better family relationships were generally reported when adolescents initiated calls to parents. To facilitate effective monitoring while maintaining good relationships, parents should "establish norms of expected behaviour" for adolescent-parent mobile phone communication.

HEALTH

Predictors of somatic symptoms in younger rural adolescents

L.M. Christiansen, E.P. Copeland & E. B. Stapert, *Adolescence*, v.43, n.172, pp.791-806.

Research suggests that stress, including "daily hassles", is associated with physical and psychological illness, particularly among individuals who do not have adequate coping styles or the ability to regulate negative mood. This study investigated the relationship between daily hassles, coping style, negative mood regulation and somatic symptomatology among a group of 138 students (78 females) aged 12-15 years who

were in seventh or eighth grades in schools located in rural areas of a midwestern state in the USA. Students completed assessment instruments for each of the study measures and also provided demographic information. Results found that hassles were the most significant predictor of somatic symptomatology among students. Substance use and seeking professional support were also related to symptomatology, as strong symptomatology is often present by the time these coping strategies are employed. Interpersonal coping strategies were found to ameliorate the relationship between hassles and symptomatology. More research is needed to investigate apparent gender differences in the use of interpersonal relationships and substance use as coping strategies.

INDIGENOUS YOUTH

Footprints Forwards blocked by a failure discourse: Issues in providing advice about medicine and other health science careers to Indigenous secondary school students

J. Chesters, M. Drysdale, I. Ellender, S. Faulkner, L. Turnbull, H. Kelly, A. Robinson & H. Chambers, *Australian Journal of Career Development*, v.18, n.1, 2009, pp.26-35.

As part of the Footprints Forward project investigating "opportunities for and barriers to Indigenous student entry to medical education", researchers designed a survey instrument to evaluate the type of advice and support that secondary school career counsellors would give to Indigenous students interested in a career in medicine or the health sciences. A total of 144 career counsellors from public and private secondary schools in Victoria, Australia, responded to the survey. Only 26 of the 144 respondents (18%) demonstrated that they had the knowledge, skills and understanding necessary to provide "complex student-centred, culturally appropriate career advice" to Indigenous students interested in

these careers. Many did not have an adequate knowledge of the multiple pathways into these careers. Researchers recommend that career development practitioners be given information on how to best assist Indigenous students and how to best advise students about careers in medicine and health. In addition, they recommend that the responsibility for providing career advice to Indigenous students be shared across a range of government, education and community agencies.

MEDIA

Sex objects, athletes and sexy athletes: How media representations of women athletes can impact adolescent girls and college women

E.A. Daniels, *Journal of Adolescent Research*, v.24, n.4, 2009, pp.399-422.

Idealised and sexualised media portrayals of women are known to have a "problematic impact" on the body image of girls and women. This Californian study examined the impact of sexualised and non-sexualised ("performance") images of female athletes on girls' and women's "tendency to engage in self-objectification". A total of 350 adolescent girls aged 13 to 18 years and 225 female college students aged 18 to 22 years were assigned to view five photographs from one of the following experimental groups: sexualised athletes, performance athletes, sexualised models and non-sexualised models. Participants wrote short responses to the photographs and then completed a questionnaire recording demographic information, sport participation, and the effect of viewing the photographs on state self-objectification.

Those who viewed performance images of female athletes were more likely to describe themselves positively, and in terms of their physicality ("what their bodies can do"), than participants who viewed other images. Performance images of female athletes "could be incorporated

into media-literacy interventions aimed at reducing self-objectification" among girls and women.

PREGNANCY & PARENTHOOD

Young mothers in late modernity: Sacrifice, respectability and the transformative neo-liberal subject

J. Baker, *Journal of Youth Studies*, v.12, n.3, 2009, pp.275-88.

In post-feminist, neo-liberal societies, the female subject has been recast as a "new site of limitless possibility" open to "endless self-reflexivity and transformation". In this Australian study, qualitative interviews were conducted with 20 young mothers aged 18-25 years to investigate how they experienced motherhood "against the new expectations of de-traditionalisation and self-determination". Just over half of these mothers said that their pregnancies were unintentional and 42% of children born to these mothers did not live with their fathers. Only one-quarter of these women had undertaken education beyond Year 12. In describing their experiences of motherhood, these women evoked "traditional ideas about sacrificial maternity". However, many also employed post-feminist, neo-liberal discourses of "personal choice and individualised resilience through personal transformation" to describe how they had chosen to embrace unplanned motherhood in spite of their difficult social and economic circumstances and "redefine themselves as suitable parents". In the biographies of these young mothers, the "supposedly superseded gendered features of family life are now encountered amidst the requirements of reflexive modernity".

Factors that adolescent males take into account in decisions about an unplanned pregnancy

C.J. Corkindale, J.T. Condon, A. Russell & J.A. Quinlivan, *Journal of Adolescence*, v.32, n.4, 2009, pp.995-1008.

In unplanned teenage pregnancies, male partners' influence in decisions about continuing or aborting a pregnancy has been found to affect the subsequent psychosocial adjustment of their female partner. To gain a clearer understanding of the factors that teenage males consider in these instances, Australian researchers recruited 330 male students from 26 urban and rural high schools in South Australia to participate in an "emotionally involving" electronic role-play simulation that required them to nominate their priorities and concerns when considering the unplanned pregnancy of a partner. A hierarchical cluster analysis identified three main response categories: a well-balanced group (80.6%) who "took almost all the decision-making issues into account"; an unwilling/unready group (10.9%) who were "more concerned with consequences to self than values"; and a family-centred group (8.5%) who were "less interested in taking account of abortion as an option". Membership of these groups was largely predictive of participants' "final pregnancy decision". Findings could be extended through further research with young men experiencing actual unplanned partner pregnancies.

SEXUALITY

Are teens 'post gay'? Contemporary adolescents' sexual identity labels

S.T. Russell, T.J. Clarke & J. Clary, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, v.38, n.7, 2009, pp.884-90.

This exploratory study examined adolescents' identification with sexuality labels to determine whether traditional LGB (lesbian, gay and bisexual) labels were still relevant for contemporary adolescents. Over a three-year period, 2,560 students from Californian middle and high schools were recruited to participate in a survey on harassment and sexual orientation. Responses were specifically sought from "sexual minority youth and their heterosexual allies". This survey included a question on sexual orientation. Participants could either nominate one of the labels provided or write in their own response. Of those who identified as non-heterosexual (n = 858), 71% chose a traditional LGB label, 13% identified as "questioning", 5% identified as "queer" and 9% chose to write in their own response. Content analysis of written-in responses found that the majority could be categorised as "pansexual" labels, while most others could be categorised as labels indicating ambivalence or curiosity/flexibility. These exploratory findings "challenge the conclusion that the complexities and fluidity identified in prior research are evidence of a rejection of LGB identities by young people".

TRANSITIONS

'You're only young once': Things college students report doing now before it's too late

R.D. Ravert, *Journal of Adolescent Research*, v.24, n.3, 2009, pp.376-96.

One school of thought in youth research asserts that 18- to 25-year-olds are in a transition period between adolescence and adulthood called "emerging adulthood", and may engage in risk behaviours as part of their identity exploration during this period. To further investigate this assertion, researchers conducted an exploratory study with 248 students aged 18-23 years from a large midwestern university in the United States. Surveys asked students how often they tried or engaged in "now or never behaviours": behaviours they felt they would lose the opportunity to do later in life. Just over three-quarters (76.6%) of students said that they engaged in at least one of these behaviours; 29.4% said that they engaged in these behaviours "often" or "all the time". These activities fell into eight broad categories: travel/adventure; social events; alcohol/tobacco/drug use; relationships; carefree lifestyle; sports/action; academic/career; and independence/personal expression. Responses indicated that risk-related behaviours and developmental tasks associated with emerging adulthood are "often closely intertwined", which may have implications for the design and

promotion of student development activities.

YOUTH WORK

Aristotle meets youth work: A case for virtue ethics

J. Bessant, *Journal of Youth Studies*, v.12, n.4, 2009, pp.423-38.

In recent years, many youth peak bodies and professional youth work organisations have been working to produce and implement codes of ethical practice for youth work. This paper investigates the question, "what kind of ethical ideas provide the best guide for contemporary youth work?". Limitations inherent to two of the most dominant modern ethical theories, utilitarianism and deontic ethics, make these theories unsuitable as guides for ethical youth work practice. Instead, virtue ethics is put forward as a more appropriate guide for ethical youth work practice and the education of youth workers for the following reasons: "its account of virtues expressed in our character, its focus on education to build character as a source of social transformation, its emphasis on our agential capacity to make choices, its interest in our capacity to think critically and act ethically, the connections it makes between the practice of virtues and social goods that define a good life individually or collectively, and its capacity to inform good professional judgement and good practice".

Addresses of abstracted publications

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