

Abstracts

Summaries of research reported in recent academic journals / BY **CAROLINE MORDAUNT**

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BEHAVIOUR

Keeping secrets from parents: Daily variations among poor, urban adolescents

J.G. Smetana, M. Villalobos, R.D. Rogge & M. Tasopoulos-Chan, *Journal of Adolescence*, v.33, n.2, 2010, pp.321-31.

Previous studies of adolescent secrecy have concentrated on European or European American samples, and have been limited by a lack of differentiation between the activities that adolescents conceal and a lack of attention to daily variations in what they conceal. This study extended previous research by taking into account 'daily variations in secrecy about different types of activities with mothers and fathers in a sample of lower socioeconomic status urban teens of diverse ethnicities'. In all, 108 participants in Grades 9 and 10 (average age 15.16 years) from an urban high school in northeastern USA completed 14-day daily diaries online. They rated what they 'concealed or kept secret' from parents across 14 behaviours ranging from 'my true feelings' to 'what I talked about with friends' to 'any problems I might have had'. There were significant daily fluctuations in adolescents' secrecy with

mothers, and adolescents kept from their mothers more secrets about personal activities than any other type of activity. Greater problem behaviour in youth was associated with secrecy with mothers. This detailed picture of secrecy with parents in youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds revealed that, in addition to daily fluctuations, secrecy was characterised by 'individual differences in problem behaviour and the quality of relationships with parents'. The authors recommend future studies look at the ways this cohort of teens manages information about their daily activities.

Investigating the mediating effects of emotional intelligence and coping on problem behaviours in adolescents

L.A. Downey, P.J. Johnston, K. Hansen, J. Birney & C. Stough, *Australian Journal of Psychology*, v.62, n.1, 2010, pp.20-29.

Up to 14% of young Australians under the age of 15 suffer from mental or behavioural problems, and these problems can have negative outcomes in adulthood. It is therefore critical to find ways to identify those at risk and also to find ways to improve the outcomes for those suffering from such behaviours. Emotional

intelligence (EI) may have a role to play in helping to predict at-risk individuals. In this Australian study, 145 students (aged 11 to 13) from a coeducational public school in Melbourne completed questionnaires that included questions covering self-report measures of EI, problem behaviour and coping strategies. The Youth Self-Report checklist was used to assess problem behaviours. This study assessed 'the mediation effects of coping behaviour on the relationship between EI and problem behaviours'. Those adolescents who were better able to manage emotions were, in turn, less likely to internalise or externalise problems that could be exhibited in antisocial or problem behaviours. Findings suggest that further research into EI-focused strategies for adolescents 'may limit development of adaptive stress coping strategies and ameliorate problem behaviours'.

BODY IMAGE/ HEALTH

Adolescent attitudes towards tanning: Does age matter?

L.K. Dennis, V. Kancherla & L.G. Snetselaar, *Pediatric Health*, v.3, n.6, 2009, pp.565-78.

Attitudes towards tanning appear to be the same for both adoles-

cents and adults. However, this American review article compares adolescents' attitudes with those of adults and concludes that age does have significance in terms of attitudes towards tanning safety. Tanning practices in adolescents begin in the early teens and increase steadily until they start to decline at around age 22. The top reasons for tanning include aesthetics, socialising and the fact that it is perceived to increase attractiveness. Around 30% of teenagers enjoy tanning, and knowledge of the harmful effect that ultraviolet radiation has on the skin appears to have 'little association with tanning behaviour'. The authors conclude that strategies to reduce tanning among adolescents should be centred around reducing exposure to risk, such as 'changing beliefs about the importance of a tanned appearance or use of sunless tanning products instead of UV radiation to achieve a tan'. However, they acknowledge that changes in behaviour by adolescents are likely to happen slowly, which is probably related to 'both the adolescent illusion of immortality and lifestyle changes related to completing schooling'. Melanoma rates are likely to continue to increase among teens until tanning salons become more regulated.

CARE AND PROTECTION

Proactive responses to offensive behaviours in out-of-home care

S. Larmar & J. Clark, *Children Australia*, v.34, n.4, 2009, pp.21-28.

Proactive responses to aggressive behaviours in out-of-home care

S. Larmar & J. Clark, *Children Australia*, v.35, n.1, 2010, pp.31-38.

Children and young people in out-of-home care experience significant challenges in the adjustment process, and may present challenging and antisocial behaviours to their carers.

The authors describe a model of antisocial behaviour that delineates a progression from less extreme oppositional behaviours that may progress to offensive behaviours, aggressive behaviours and, finally, delinquent behaviours. These papers are the second and third in a series of four, and provide practical strategies that carers can utilise to respond to the second and third levels of antisocial behaviour, i.e. offensive behaviour and aggressive behaviour. Both papers outline initial steps to be taken in appropriately responding to offensive or aggressive behaviours: identify and understand some of the underlying causes of a specific behaviour; establish a healthy set of boundaries that are consistently reinforced; model positive communication skills; maintain a supportive and caring position; and seek outside help when needed. Each paper then delineates four scenarios that illustrate proactive ways of responding to angered responses in children and adolescents that could appropriately translate to real-life contexts.

Moving from dependence to independence: A study of the experiences of 18 care leavers in a leaving care and

after care support service in Victoria

P. Mendes, *Children Australia*, v.35, n.1, 2010, pp.14-21.

Young people leaving state out-of-home care are arguably one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society, with many experiencing significant health, social and educational deficits. In recent years, most Australian states and territories have introduced specialist leaving-care and after-care programs and supports, but there has only been limited examination of the effectiveness of these programs. This paper examines the experiences of a group of young people involved in a leaving-care and after-care support program run by the Anglicare and Whitelion organisations in Bendigo, Victoria. In all, 18 care leavers, aged from 18 to 22 years, participated in semi-structured, in-depth interviews that aimed to explore their experience of transition to independent living and the impact of some of the key program initiatives around accommodation, employment and mentoring. Overall, this study underlines the importance of providing a broad structure of community-based supports for care leavers that attempts, at least in part, to replicate the usual supports that most young people in the community take for granted as they undertake the long transition from dependence to independent living.

CRIME AND JUSTICE

Young offending: Towards a radical/critical social policy

S. Rogowski, *Journal of Youth Studies*, v.13, n.2, 2010, pp.197-211.

Because young offending is regarded as a 'serious social problem' it attracts much media attention and is often near the top of the political agenda. In the UK, the move towards punishment rather than welfare/treatment to tackle the problem began in the

post-war years and was articulated in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 introduced by New Labour. This UK-based researcher posits that punishment rather than welfare/treatment is counterproductive and argues for a 'more radical/critical social policy based on equality and redistribution'. The pathologising in New Labour discourse of young people 'considered to be socially excluded' (risk factors include those from ethnic minorities, carers, the homeless, drug users and young offenders) has had further negative effects on this group. Young people interviewed by the author 'saw offending as related to boredom and material gain'. Instead of punitive measures, young people wanted school to be made more relevant, improved recreational facilities, 'genuine and meaningful' employment, and more help for their parents and carers. The author advocates policy changes that would redistribute taxation and lead to a more equal and just society, which would open the way for youth crime to be tackled seriously.

DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

How can we reduce alcohol-related road crash deaths among young Australians?

W.D. Hall, A.L. Wallace, L.J. Cobiac, C.M. Doran & T. Vos, *The Medical Journal of Australia*, v.192, n.8, 2010, pp.464-66.

In a short 'For debate' article, Hall et al. suggest ways in which the number of road crash deaths among young people in Australia could be reduced. The introduction of a series of policy experiments in the United States over a 20-year period has demonstrated that 'road crash death among young adults can be substantially reduced by raising the MLDA [minimum legal drinking age] to 21 years'. This strategy has not been considered in Australia where the MLDA has been 18 years since 1974. In Australia there are major political

obstacles to raising the MLDA, which were not present in the US context. These obstacles include: the longstanding MLDA of 18 years; young people being 'likely to oppose any such proposal'; the probable lack of support from the community for a change in the MLDA; the probable poor compliance of any new law, given the absence of broad public support; and opposition to the move by the alcohol industry. Hall et al. have proposed that one way to achieve a reduction in alcohol-related road deaths is to 'extend existing zero-tolerance laws from newly licensed drivers until the age of 22 years, as is the policy in Victoria'. It is estimated that in Australia 17 deaths and many serious injuries could have been avoided among youth 'as they aged from 18 to 21 years' if such a ruling had been introduced in 2003.

Individual trajectories of substance use in lesbian, gay and bisexual youth and heterosexual youth

M.P. Marshal, M.S. Friedman, R. Stall & A.L. Thompson, *Addiction*, v.104, n.6, pp.974-81.

Past research has shown that lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) adults are at greater risk of substance use and abuse. But no studies have been done into substance use in LGB youth compared to heterosexual youth to 'determine if they follow different trajectories into young adulthood'. The main aim behind this US longitudinal study was to look at the differences between substance use by self-identified LGB youth and heterosexual youth in this context. Data used for the current study was taken from the US National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health from a total of 10,670 youth from schools across the United States who completed three in-home interviews at intervals of one, two and six years. Only participants who supplied data about sexual orientation were included in the current study.

The participants were in Years 7–12 when they commenced the study, which looked at the use of alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana. Findings suggest that from an early stage LGB youth are 'on a high-risk substance use trajectory that extends well into young adulthood and is different from the trajectories of heterosexual youth'. The authors conclude that sexual orientation is 'an important risk marker for growth in adolescent substance use', and that during the transition to adulthood, the disparity between LGB and heterosexual youth increases.

FAMILIES

Achievement, aspiration and autonomy: How do youth from stepfather families compare with other young Australians?

P. Mance & P. Yu, *Australian Social Policy*, n.8, 2009, pp.1-34.

It is generally accepted that stepfamilies have emerged as a 'prominent group' in the past few years, and in 2008 the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimated that this type of family accounted for around 8% of all families with at least one child aged less than 18 years. Outcomes for adolescents with 'prior experience of living in a stepfamily' and those actually in stepfamilies are hypothesised as likely to be poorer than for those adolescents living in a family where the parent remains single post-separation. This study looked at two wellbeing indicators in young people – education and early independence – using a data source created from the Youth in Focus project. Findings from this study support earlier research that has shown that young people in separated families 'achieve lower levels of education and higher levels of independence' compared to those from intact families. But this research also found that youth who had at any stage lived in a family with a stepfather were 'less likely to attain Year 12' and more likely to be financially independent than young people living in

lone-parent families. Policies that help lone parents and stepfamilies to 'maintain ongoing positive family relationships', manage transition and reduce schooling instability are likely to result in improved outcomes for youth.

PARTICIPATION

'We didn't even realize that kids like us could go on the radio' – an evaluation of a Victorian schools youth development programme

R.S. Broadbent & T. Papadopoulos, *Journal of Youth Studies*, v.13, n.2, 2010, pp.235-54.

The school-based Advance program, which is run in Victoria, encourages young people to take part in a 'project of benefit to their communities'. Advance is a partnership between the Office for Youth, Victorian government secondary schools and community organisations. This paper reports on an evaluation of the program by Victoria University in 2007–2008. Pre- and post-surveys were taken of those who took part in the program, predominantly from Year 9. In all, 61 school campuses took part, with around 1000 young people completing surveys (slightly fewer participants completed post-surveys than pre-surveys). The success of the program was evident from the surveys; young people 'highly valued the experience of exploring and learning in their local communities' with some describing the program as 'life-changing'. It was also judged to be highly beneficial for teachers, who were able to develop new skills and 'enhance student engagement' as well as improve teacher–student relationships. At-risk and disengaged young people were felt to particularly benefit from the program. This survey confirms the view that programs such as this, which 'provide the opportunity for young people to be valued, connect with their community, develop new skills, and experience the world around them', are now an

important cornerstone of youth development.

SUBCULTURES

The gothic folk devils strike back! Theorizing folk devil reaction in the post-Columbine era

R. Griffiths, *Journal of Youth Studies*, v.13, n.3, 2010, pp.403-22.

Little research had been done prior to the early 2000s on the gothic subculture; rather, other subcultures such as punk and club were the focus of research. This paper, by a New Zealand-based researcher, looks at how goths became the subject of moral panics following the 1999 Columbine High School massacre in the USA by two young men identifying as goths. It also looks at the subsequent reaction of goths to the often-negative media attention that their subculture attracted. The term 'folk devils' is taken from the title of sociologist Stanley Cohen's seminal 1972 book about the Mods and Rockers subcultures, in which he posited 'more moral panics will be generated' by other youth subcultures. Examples are hoodie-wearing youth and Scottish boy racers. The research into post-Columbine reactions is based on the author's PhD thesis; he develops the arguments here to examine whether it is possible to talk about a 'post-Columbine gothic identity'. This is a fascinating look into the world of subcultures and will provide those interested in moral panics and youth culture with a substantial framework with which to better understand the topic.

SUICIDE PREVENTION

Suicidal events in adolescents: How clear are the warning signs?

N.N. Duke & I.W. Borowsky, *Pediatric Health*, v.3, n.6, 2009, pp.551-63.

Because the factors that affect the likelihood of adolescent 'self-directed violence' are many, youth advocates are often uncertain who is at risk when attempting to identify suicidal young people. This review article provides an update on current knowledge about the epidemiology of adolescent suicide. Worldwide, around 90,000 young people aged 10 to 19 years take their own lives annually – and this is set against the background of four million actual attempts at suicide each year. In carrying out this review, the authors set out to 'make the case for universal screening of adolescents in the primary health care setting' given the huge numbers of attempted suicides. No 'specific profile of symptoms has been deemed indicative of suicide outcomes beyond any doubt', so any indication of risk for suicide has to be taken seriously. The reason why many youth at risk of suicide go unnoticed is the lack of mental health infrastructure. This is a global problem with 40% of countries lacking a policy for mental health care and 25% of countries with a mental health policy lacking a budget to implement the policy. Limited access to care may lead to unclear warning signs of suicide. Confidentiality concerns among adolescents can also make it hard to identify those at risk. The authors conclude that 'youth self-directed violence is a preventable public health problem' and that the most effective ways to reduce youth suicide are comprehensive screening and counselling.

Suicidal behaviour among youth in five public sectors of care

D.A. Chavira, E.C. Accurso, A.F. Garland & R. Hough, *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, v.15, n.1, 2010, pp.44-51.

Young people in what is termed in the United States 'public sectors of care' (child welfare; juvenile justice; alcohol and drug sector;

mental health sector; and special education services) are vulnerable and have the potential for a high risk of suicidal behaviour. A total of 1057 young people, aged 11 to 18, in these five public sectors of care participated in this Californian study, which consisted of initial interviews and questionnaires followed by a two-year follow-up interview. Although suicidal thoughts and behaviours across the group were 'comparable to community norms', the rates of lifetime suicide attempts (20.1%) were higher than the norm, with youth in the special education sector showing 'significantly more' suicidal thoughts and behaviours. Female gender and depression also increased the likelihood of suicidal behaviour. The researchers conclude that screening and evidence-based interventions for depression and suicide in the public sector should be implemented, with particular emphasis on special education services since youth in this sector were found to be at a significantly higher risk of suicide.

TECHNOLOGY

More than just a game: Video game and internet use during emerging adulthood

L.M. Padilla-Walker, L.J. Nelson, J.S. Carroll & A.C. Jenson, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, v.39, n.2, 2010, pp.103-13.

There have been dramatic changes in emerging adults' leisure activities over the past 10 to 15 years; video game and internet use now dominate free time 'that is occupied increasingly by electronic leisure'. Despite this, there has been little scholarly research examining the role these forms of electronic leisure 'may play in individual development during emerging adulthood'. Researchers in this US study aimed to gain a better understanding of the use of these technologies and to look at 'how electronic leisure was related to risk behaviors ... perceptions of the self ... and relationships with others'. The 813 undergraduate participants (500 men, 313 women) in this study ranged in age from 18 to 26 and were drawn from six college sites across the United States. Participants completed an online questionnaire and were assessed in the areas of video game use, internet use, risk behaviours, self-perceptions and quality of social relationships. Findings suggested that

video game use was linked to 'negative outcomes' (increased drug use, alcohol consumption and 'lower relationship quality') for men and women. Unsurprisingly, 'different patterns of video game and internet use existed for men and women'. The researchers acknowledge that further study covering young people not attending college is needed as 'the internet may possess even fewer benefits for non-students'. Young peoples' choices of leisure activities may have 'particularly significant ramifications' for their future wellbeing and is deserving of scholarly research.

TRANSITIONS

How universal is emerging adulthood? An empirical example

L.B. Hendry & M. Kloep, *Journal of Youth Studies*, v.13, n.2, 2010, pp.169-79.

Researchers at the University of Glamorgan in Wales examined the 'concept of emerging adulthood as proposed by Arnett' by interviewing 38 young people aged 17 to 20 years who were not undertaking higher education. Arnett's conception of emerging

adulthood, posited in 2000, proposed that there is a 'distinct age stage between adolescence and adulthood'. The authors of this paper 'want to maintain that [Arnett's] concept mainly applies to young adults in higher education, who are still largely recruited from the middle class, while for others the routes into adulthood are much more diversified'. The study participants were questioned about their perceptions of 'being adult' and their lifestyles. The majority was still living at home and in full-time employment although a small number were in part-time work or unemployed. This research showed that 'through the views of young people themselves that there are considerable variations from the "standard emerging adult" transition even in modern Western societies'. Some (23) of the participants identified as being 'adult' while 13 identified as being 'in-between' and two identified as being 'adolescent'. The authors argued that although some young people fit into the description of 'emerging adult', many do not and these people should not be treated as 'deviant'. Future research should look at the processes involved in human change in the transition to adulthood.

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