



Youth 'at risk'?

Young people, sexual health and consent

'Moral panic' over youth sexuality and youth sexual practices may be undermining sexual health and sexual violence/coercion prevention programs to the extent that these programs do not provide young people with the resources they need to maintain their sexual health and autonomy, according to a study published in the December 2007 edition of *Youth Studies Australia* (v.26, n.4, pp.21-28).

The study was conducted by Anastasia Powell, a doctoral candidate at the School of Political Science, Criminology and Sociology at the University of Melbourne. Powell collected interview and focus group data from 117 young people aged 14 to 24 years, applying a semi-structured interview schedule to allow participants to discuss their perceptions and experiences of love/sex relationships.

Focus group and interview responses obtained in this study indicated that young people desired more information about 'the social rather than biological aspect of negotiating safe and consensual sex'. This included more information and guidance relating to the law of sexual consent and its practical applications, and adequate information and resources for same sex

attracted young people – both of which, according to many of the study's participants, were not a part of their sexuality education experience.

To address the shortcomings of current sexuality and sexual violence prevention education, Powell says that such programs need to be 'delivered in a way that is relevant to young people's everyday lived experience ... must be grounded in consultation and engagement with young people in regard to their self-identified information needs, and ... must integrate real-life stories and scenarios that young people can relate to'. To be truly effective, these programs also need to work on 'challenging and changing the ways that many young men negotiate sex', rather than focusing on young women as 'the repository of many of the ill-effects associated with youth sexuality'. Finally, education and policy responses must move beyond the realm of school-based education programs to become part of a community-wide response to youth sexuality issues to ensure that all young people have access to relevant information and resources related to sexual health and the prevention of sexual violence and coercion.

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EXTRACTS FROM YOUTH MONITOR

YSA V.26 N.4

Eager to learn more

In September, the Australian Government's Financial Literacy Foundation released a report on Australians' attitudes and behaviours relating to their management of money. The report, *Financial literacy: Australians understanding money*, was based on a study of 7,500 Australians, including 553 young people aged 12–17 years. Most of these young people indicated that they were eager to improve aspects of their financial literacy such as budgeting, saving and managing debt (*Herald Sun*, 25/09/07, p.59; *Adelaide Advertiser*, 26/09/07, p.30).

Australia leads the way in further education

Australia has the highest number of young people entering further education among member countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), according to a report released in September. The OECD report, *Education at a glance 2007*, indicates that 82% of young Australians participate in some form of higher education, followed by Sweden (76%) and Norway (63%). In comparison, approximately 56% of young Americans and 51% of young Britons enter higher education (*Australian*, 26/09/07, p.30).

Tertiary problems for private school students

A study which examined the results of first-year students at Monash University over a four-year period suggests that

Abstracts from recent education-related youth studies



EXTRACTS FROM YOUTH MONITOR

YSA V.26 N.4

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students from non-selective government schools perform better than those from private schools or selective-entry government schools. The study found that, among students with an ENTER (tertiary entrance) score of 80 or above, students from government schools generally scored five marks more in their first-year results than students from other schools. Meanwhile, a study examining first-year results among agricultural economics students at the University of Sydney found that government school students earned an average of four marks more than their private school counterparts. Professor Richard James, director of the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at Melbourne University, said that private school students sometimes struggle when they begin university study because they no longer receive the level of support that they are used to (*Sunday Age*, 7/10/07, p.15).

Concerns over social and emotional health

In October, the Australian Scholarships Group released its *Student social and emotional health report*. The report found that around 40% of students experience a range of social and emotional problems. Findings were based on survey data gathered between 2003 and 2007 from over 10,000 students (ranging from kindergarten to Year 12) from 81 schools across Australia. In general, girls experienced higher levels of social and emotional health than boys, and students from the highest socioeconomic group experienced higher levels of social and emotional health than those from the lowest socioeconomic group. However, common problems such as 'bullying, getting into trouble, stress, feeling down and under-achievement' were present across all levels of social and emotional wellbeing (*Canberra Times*, 18/10/07, p.5).

Tagging as a social literacy practice

L. MacGillvray & M.S. Curwen, *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, v.50, n.5, 2007, pp.354-69.

A social theory of literacy (in which literacy practices are viewed as 'textually mediated activities' performed within everyday contexts to achieve specific purposes) is used in this study to examine tagging (painting stylised graffiti signatures) as an adolescent social literacy practice.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five Mexican-Americans (four male, one female), aged 18–24 years, involved in the tagging subculture in Los Angeles. Participants discussed issues such as their childhood writing practices, school literacy experiences and current tagging practices and norms.

Data analysis indicated that while most participants were academically motivated, some felt that school structure placed limitations on their learning. Participants used tagging to communicate their identity and develop and maintain status and relationships within their community. This community valued talent and creativity, but also quantity of production, and considered factors such as audience, context, form and genre in the creation of their texts.

Educators need to consider the everyday literacy practices of young people (such as tagging) when attempting to engage and support disenfranchised students.

'The boys' present ... Hegemonic masculinity: A performance of multiple acts

L. Dalley-Trim, *Gender and Education*, v.19, n.2, 2007, pp.199-217.

Critical incidents observed in two Year Nine English classrooms are analysed in this investigation of performances of hegemonic masculinities among male students in classroom settings.

Analysis indicated that the dominant boys in one class constructed identities as 'bad lads' through their use of sexualised body stylisations and homophobic language and threats of violence directed towards boys perceived as less masculine. These 'bad lads' subjected female students to sexual objectification, subjugation and silencing.

In contrast, the dominant boys in the second class were 'funny boys', who used verbal sparring and sexualised humour to assert their 'coolness' and 'power', and to position the 'other' boys in the class as 'subordinate masculine subjects'. Girls in the second class were 'rendered invisible' through the funny boys' domination of the classroom space. Although these dominant groups used different techniques to 'do' their masculinity, these findings 'exemplify the interconnectedness between displays of hegemonic masculinity and the subject positions afforded to students, both boys and girls, within the classroom site'.

Dalley Trim's research was the subject of a paper published in YSA September 2006 (v.25, n.3, pp.26-33).

» Youth Field Xpress

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