

RESEARCH You May Have Missed

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RESEARCH YOU MAY HAVE MISSED . . . provides brief summaries of recent research relevant to youth development practice. It is designed to help youth development professionals keep up-to-date with contemporary research.

- Batiuk, M.E., Boland, J.A., & Wilcox, N. (2004).

Project Trust: Breaking down barriers between middle school children.

Adolescence, 39, 531-538.

Social exclusion in schools has been found to be related to school violence. To address this issue, many educators have called for curricular changes incorporatating programs in peace education and conflict resolution. This paper analyzes the success of a camp retreat weekend program called Project Trust involving middle school students and teachers. The goal of the camp was to break down barriers between cliques identified as active in the school and building team relationships across clique membership. The training emphasized a mutual and reflexive process of problem solving in which involved parties actively framed the understanding of both the problem and its solution. Eight cliques were identified after discussion with students and teachers: 1) the preps - smart and well dressed, well to do; (2) the alternatives - baggy clothes, various colors of hair, might be skaters, long hair; (3) jocks - athletes or individuals whose lives are dominated by sports interests, wearing NBA and NFL jerseys; (4) hoods/gangsters/thugs - rule-breakers, tough, like to fight, might be in a gang, wearing black; (5) dorks - geeks, socially awkward,

nonathletic; (6) cheerleaders - attractive and active girls; (7) hicks/hillbillies - rural kids, possibly live in trailer parks, like country music; and (8) dirties - poor kids, dirty and cannot help it, poor hygiene. A treatment group (campers, n=298) and comparison group (noncampers, n=215) were administered an adaptation of the Bogardus Social Distance Test and the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale before and after the camp. For all eight cliques, attendance at the camp significantly reduced perceptions of social distance. In addition, perceptions of social distance were significantly reduced for African-Americans but not whites. The authors explain this finding by suggesting that the mean score for whites was already low. The greatest change for campers was in their perceptions of "dirties", "dorks", and "hicks". Significant increases in self-concept were also found for campers. The authors discuss the findings suggesting that educational programs for middle school children that incorporate peace education and conflict resolution hold potential for reducing divisive student cliques built around difference, mistrust, and exclusion, which often result in the violence found in schools today. —AS

- Evans, W.D., Finkelstein, E.A., Kamerow, D.B., & Renaud, J.M. (2005).

Public perceptions of childhood obesity.

American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 28(1), 26-32.

This study used national random-digit-dialing methodology to survey 1,010 respondents about the importance of childhood obesity in comparison to

other issues affecting youth. The response rate was low (30.1%); 59% of respondents were female. The authors asked about six problems facing youth – drug abuse;

youth violence; underage drinking; teen sex; underage smoking; and childhood obesity. Among these, childhood obesity had the lowest rate of respondents believing it was a “very serious” problem (41%); drug abuse had the highest response (55%). They also asked what factors respondents believed contributed to childhood obesity; 77 percent responded “junk food and sodas”, while “crime” had the lowest response (18%). Fully 91% felt parents had the greatest responsibility to reduce childhood obesity; in addition, 30% of respondents believed that schools had “a lot of responsibility” to reduce childhood obesity, along with 27% who believed that health care providers or physicians had a lot of responsibility, and 17% who believed the government had a lot of responsibility.

The authors then asked about support for obesity prevention strategies. The most popular strategies included schools teaching nutrition and physical activity, changing the availability of unhealthy foods at schools, and evaluating children’s weight at schools to target programs. Overall, this study found strong support for public interventions to reduce childhood obesity. However, tax-based solutions, such as raising the prices for unhealthy foods, and regulatory solutions, such as banning unhealthy food from schools, tended to be less popular than physical education and nutrition programs. This study provides information about public feelings about the severity of childhood obesity, and guidance about which programs are likely to be most acceptable in combating the problem. —**KH**

- Henriksen, L., Feighery, E.C., Wang, Y., & Fortmann, S.P. (2004). **Association of retail tobacco marketing with adolescent smoking.** *American Journal of Public Health, 94*(12), 2081-2083.

Recent legal landmarks involving the tobacco industry, especially the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement with 46 state attorneys general, have resulted in advertising restrictions such as the elimination of tobacco ads on outdoor billboards. Therefore one may find it surprising that the tobacco industry’s expenditures for advertising and promotion have actually increased in recent years, although the forms of advertising have changed considerably. Most industry expenditures now go toward distribution of promotional items, marketing to targeted audiences, and point-of-purchase advertising in convenience stores and other retail locations. This study investigated adolescents’ exposure to tobacco marketing in retail stores and its relationship to whether they had ever smoked a

cigarette. Researchers at Stanford University surveyed a sample of 2125 middle school students in Tracy, California in spring 2003. Students who were exposed to retail tobacco marketing through visits to convenience, liquor, or small grocery stores were much more likely to have smoked. A statistically significant relationship between marketing exposure and ever smoking was found even after controlling for other important predictors of smoking such as parental smoking, friend smoking, school grades, risk taking, and exposure to other forms of tobacco marketing. The importance of this study lies in its suggestion that tobacco marketing may still be a potent influence on adolescent smoking, even in the wake of successful efforts to restrict several traditional modes of advertising. —**MB**

- Kitsantas, A., Ware, H.W., & Martinez-Arias, R. (2004). **Students’ perceptions of school safety: Effects by community, school environment, and substance use variables.** *Journal of Early Adolescence 24*(4), 412-430.

Very few studies have been conducted to determine how middle school students perceive the role of community in relation to their safety at school. The current study tested a model that sought to examine relations among known variables important in school safety. These included perceived safety in the neighborhoods, perceived safety of their school

relative to their neighborhood (also labeled ‘relative school safety’), students’ perceptions about levels of substance use at school, and perceptions of the general school environment. Students in the study were 3,092 sixth, seventh, and eighth graders who, along with their parents or legal guardians, responded to the School Safety and Discipline component of the 1993 National

Household Education Survey. Results indicated that community safety and school safety relative to the community positively influence adolescents' perceptions of school safety. Substance use in school affects students' school safety perceptions. Student perceptions of the school climate (e.g., being challenged, enjoying school, working for good grades and behaving in school) had a direct influence on both perceptions of school substance use and school safety,

indicating that adolescents might link academic expectations at school to perceptions of school safety. Results highlight the importance of neighborhood groups to work with their neighborhood schools to ensure the existence of a positive school climate and fairness in discipline by faculty and administration, to support student perceptions of safety in their neighborhoods and schools.

-RC

- Lamborn, S.D., & Nguyen, D.T. (2004).

African American adolescents' perceptions of family interactions: Kinship support, parent-child relationships and teen adjustment.

Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 33(6), 547-558

A majority of empirical studies on intergenerational relationships and the effect of kinship support among African American families have focused on at-risk populations and the role of grandmothers in rearing the children of teenage mothers. There is limited research on extended kinship as a normative family process, related to the development of youth. This paper considers the role of extended family systems in the lives of 158 African American students attending college prep classes in a Midwestern school. The researchers explored whether direct, mediated or interactive effects best characterized associations between kinship support and youth adjustment. The results of this study strongly supported an 'equivalence' model where kinship support is positively associated with youth adjustment, regardless

of the specific nature of perceived parental relationships. There was one interactive effect, in line with the compensatory model - kinship support became especially important for adolescents who lacked optimal relationships with their mothers. Kinship support was associated with higher self-reliance and work orientation, but only in single-parent families. The authors discuss these findings, suggesting that further research in the area of kinship support in the lives of youth would be helpful to better disentangle the causal effects from the relational ones. The study has, however, served to emphasize the importance of kinship support in the lives of African American youth. Understanding the various sources of support for particular family systems can be beneficial to the work of youth professionals. -AS

- Lerner, R.M., Lerner, J.V., Almerigi, J.B., Theokas, C., et al., (2005).

Positive youth development, participation in community youth development programs, and community contributions of fifth-grade adolescents: Findings from the first wave of the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development.

Journal of Early Adolescence, 25(1), 17-71.

This study of fifth-graders examined, first, whether positive youth development (PYD) is positively related to community participation, and negatively related to adolescent risk and problem behaviors; and second, whether PYD is associated with participation in community-based youth development programs. The authors use a theoretical framework of PYD specifically in contrast to a deficit model of youth development. This study attempts to test the model of

the "5 Cs," or primary indicators of PYD, which have been defined to include competence, confidence, connection, character and caring. Both youth (n=1,700, from 57 schools and four after-school sites in 13 states nationwide) and one of their parents (n=1,117) were surveyed. Students were predominantly European American (58%). Factor analysis was used to determine whether the 5 Cs were an accurate reflection of PYD among the youth surveyed. Data supported the 5 C model.

Correlations amongst the 5 C measures were fairly high; in addition, girls, students from higher-income families, and European American and Latino/a students tended to have higher scores than their

respective counterparts. This study is important because it provides empirical evidence for the value of a PYD model, rather than a deficit model, in describing youth development and behavior. **-KH**

- Shrake, E.K., & Rhee, S. (2004).

Ethnic identity as a predictor of problem behaviors among Korean American adolescents.

Adolescence, 39, 601-632.

There is relatively scant literature on Korean American youth's ethnic identity, as compared to the research on Hispanic and African-American populations. The present study aimed to examine overall differences in problem behaviors by key demographic variables among 217 Korean American adolescents with immigrant backgrounds, and to assess dimensions of ethnic identity as predictors of adolescent problem behaviors. Three dimensions of ethnic identity were studied: level of ethnic identity, attitudes toward other groups, and perceived discrimination. The students were selected from ethnically diverse high schools in the Los Angeles area. There were 123 females and 94 males, ranging in age from 13-18. About half (52.1%) were born in Korea and 46.1% were born in the United States; however, nearly three quarters of the respondents were raised and schooled primarily in the U.S. Youth were administered Phinney's (1992) Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (Level of Ethnic Identity, Attitudes toward Other Groups), the Perceived Discrimination Checklist (developed by the first author), and the Youth Self-Report (Achenbach,

1991) in addition to other demographic measures. Results showed that in general the Korean American respondents experienced slightly more internalizing than externalizing problems. The most frequent internalizing problem reported by the respondent was withdrawal syndrome, where as the most frequent externalizing problem was aggressive behavior. Adolescents with a high level of ethnic identity were less likely to experience internalizing as well as externalizing problems. Respondents with high perceptions of racial discrimination were more likely to engage in both internalizing and externalizing problems. Females showed more positive other-group attitudes, lower perceptions of racial discrimination and experienced less externalizing problems than did the males. In discussing these findings, the authors suggest that school counselors, mental health practitioners, peer support group facilitators, and family members pay particular attention to the importance of bicultural identity development for Korean American youths' successful psychological adjustment. **-AS**

- Unger, J.B., Reynolds, K., Shakib, S., Spruijt-Metz, D., Sung, P., & Johnson, C.A. (2004).

Acculturation, physical activity, and fast-food consumption among Asian-American and Hispanic adolescents.

Journal of Community Health, 29(6), 467-481.

For immigrant adolescents, the level of acculturation to the U.S. culture has been shown to be related to a variety of behaviors, including substance use, violent behavior, sexual behavior, and diet and nutrition. This study used an in-school self-administered survey of 619 Asian American and 1,385 Hispanic sixth graders

in southern California to examine whether acculturation was related to obesity-related behaviors, including fast-food consumption and physical activity. Acculturation was assessed using a standard scale for ethnically diverse adolescent populations. Results showed that most respondents were either US-oriented or bicultural.

Students were asked about languages they spoke most frequently and at home, how often they did physical activity, and how frequently they ate at several fast-food restaurants, as well as demographics. Hispanic students were somewhat more highly acculturated than Asian students, and reported more frequent fast-food consumption. Regression results showed that acculturation was associated with lower amounts of physical activity and a higher frequency of fast-food

consumption. No interaction was significant for ethnicity, indicating that the acculturation effects were similar for Asian and Hispanic students. An orientation toward the US for foreign-born adolescents appears to include less physical activity and more frequent consumption of fast food. This information may be useful for those attempting to reduce overweight among ethnically diverse adolescents. **-KH**

- Wainright, J.L, Russell, S.T., & Patterson, C.J. (2004). **Psychosocial adjustment, school outcomes, and romantic relationships of adolescents with same-sex parents.** *Child Development*, 75(6), 1886-1898.

A growing body of empirical research has examined psychosocial outcomes among children who are raised by parents who have same-sex partners. The topic is important both because of its implications for theories of socialization and because of its relevance to recent controversies in law and social policy. Earlier research, focusing primarily on parental sexual orientation and young children's well-being, has suggested that children's development is similar in many respects, whether they are raised by lesbian or by heterosexual parents. The present study focuses on adolescent well-being, including families drawn

from a large national survey sample of adolescents (Add Health). Participants included 44 12- to 18-year-old adolescents parented by same-sex couples and 44 same-aged adolescents parented by opposite-sex couples, matched on demographic characteristics. Results indicated very few differences between the groups on measures of psychosocial adjustment and school outcomes. Adolescent adjustment was not generally associated with family type, but was clearly linked with the qualities of relationships within the family. Regardless of family type, adolescents whose parents described closer relationships with them reported better school adjustment. **-RC**

- Wilkinson, R.B. (2004). **The role of parental and peer attachment in the psychological health and self-esteem of adolescents.** *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 33(6), 479-493.

Previous research has examined the extent of influence parental relationships have on adolescents' psychological health in comparison to other relationships. The purpose of the current paper is to present results from three different studies which consider the different relationships that parental and peer attachment may have with regard to adolescent self-esteem and how these differences then impact psychological health. Previous research has not focused on considering the role of peer attachment on both psychological health and self-esteem. The three separate studies include teenagers from Norway, and two groups from Australia, totaling 1,736 youth. The teens were asked to complete self-report measures on items assessing depression, self-esteem, parental

attachment, peer attachment and perceived (community) problems or unpleasant events. Results indicated that although no direct role of the quality of parental attachment on psychological health was found, much of parental attachment influence on psychological health is mediated by self-esteem. The quality of the attachment relationship between adolescent and parents tends to influence, to a moderate degree, the quality of peer attachment relationships. These findings lend support to a theory of internal working models establishing patterns of interpersonal relationships. Quality attachments appear to be related to how adolescents think of and judge themselves. Close, secure, and trustworthy relationships with parents and friends lead adolescents to evaluate their own attributes and worth more highly. A limitation to the

study is its use of cross-sectional methodology. Longitudinal data collection would indicate changes in relations between attachment variables and adjustment

outcomes, contributing to the understanding of the role of psychological attachments across the lifespan. **-RC**

Suggested Reading

- Garza, P., Borden, L.M., & Astroth, K.A. (Eds.) (2004). **Professional Development for Youth Workers.** In G.G. Noam (Ed.), *New Directions for Youth Development* (No. 104), Winter 2004. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.



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