Youth Subcultures: Understanding Subgroups to Better Address Barriers to Learning & Improve Schools

Young people are all too easily viewed as a social problem. Always in trouble with sex & drugs & rock 'n roll. And that's unjustified I find. Youth culture has always seemed to me to be associated with idealism, with seeking new ways.

Rupa Huq

Public health and education policy makers, practitioners, researchers, and educators need to know as much as they can about the factors that lead youth to manifest behaviors stemming from group defined values, beliefs, attitudes, and interests. Such understanding is basic to promoting healthy development, preventing problems, intervening as soon as problems arise, and enhancing intervention impact on severe and chronic problems.

Unfortunately, the complexity of youth culture is not well captured in the professional literature. Therefore, as our Center delves into the topic, we are doing so in stages. The first involves developing a series of descriptive *Information Resources*. These include a brief introduction to the topic, a glossary, an annotated bibliography, a topical Quick Find for our Online Clearinghouse, and information briefs about specific subgroups. The series is intended to stimulate policy and practice thinking about complex, multifaceted subgroups such as youth gangs, Goths, the Hip hop subculture, Emos, skaters and surfers, "Jocks," cheerleaders, "loners" and "losers". These first products are really just working drafts that will be upgraded as we learn more from feedback, ongoing searches, and continued study. We invite you to direct us to references and resources – send to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

After the descriptive phase of the work, we will do analyses to clarify trends and issues of relevance to policy and practice. The products of this work will be a series of reports and issue briefs and practice guides.

Finally, we will tackle the problems of effective dissemination and diffusion by addressing the question of how best to inform health/mental health and education policy makers and practitioners about youth trends and subgroups in ways that have an impact on policy and practice.

What follows is drawn from the introduction to the series and the brief resource highlighting the Emo subculture. These and the rest of the series are online at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/materials/trainingpresentation.htm#fact

What is Youth Culture? A Brief Introduction

http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/youth/youthintro.pdf

A s a starting point, we highlight

- how youth culture is defined

- some background about the concept.

- why adults need to understand both the positive and negative facets of youth subgroups

- what schools should do

Definition. Defining *youth culture* is fraught with complexity. The term is generally used to designate "a youth-based subculture with distinct styles, behaviors, and interests." The term *counterculture* is used to designate subgroups that manifest hostility to the dominant culture. Youth subcultures allow and encourage members to have a special identity that separates them from the identity they are assigned by institutions such as the family and school.

Over the years, terms such as Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Z, and now Millennial Generation have found popular acceptance. However, these global labels tend not to shed much light on the many different subgroups with whom youth themselves identify or are grouped with by observers. More specific subgroup labels come and go. A few familiar examples include Hip-hoppers, Nerds, Geeks, Homies, Goths, Emos, Punks, Redneck Girls, specific youth gangs such as the Bloods and the Crips, and on and on.

And, the problem is compounded by differences between and within observer and actor perspectives. Both who is considered part of a subgroup and the positive and negative features ascribed vary markedly. All this complicates and often exacerbates the cultural clashes that arise across generations, social and economic classes, race, ethnicity, sex and gender identification, disabilities, and other ways differences and diversity are classified.

Some Background. Historians disagree about when youth culture first appeared. Some cite Plato crediting Socrates as stating: "The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers." This, however, is more a statement about the eternal generation gap than it is about youth culture.

Drawing from various sources, there seems to be some consensus that youth culture as we know it today blossomed after the Second World War. Prior to that time, most children pursued and were expected to pursue adulthood as early as feasible. Around the 1950s, the spending power of teenagers was markedly enhanced. They became an increasingly profitable market to which goods and services were directed. The result was the expansion and increasing diversification of teen-oriented products and types of cultural content with which subgroups associate. Not unrelatedly, the transition to adulthood was extended.
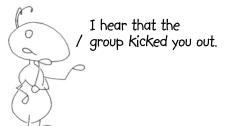
Marshall (1998) suggests that by the 1970s the study of youth culture took a turn.

> "Feminist writers pointed to the invisibility of girls in the mainstream literature on youth and have researched gender variations in youth culture. The experiences of youth among ethnic minorities have also received more attention. But, above all, the period since the mid-1970s has seen the demise of the notion of the independent teenage consumer and rebel. The focus of research has switched instead to the youth labour-market, and the dependence of young people on the household, as a result of growing unemployment and the vulnerability of youth to flexible employment."

Whatever the current direction, some observers argue that the media, advertisers, writers, and other shapers of contemporary thought have made youth the dominant culture of Western societies, and this contributes to many individuals maintaining "immature attitudes far into adulthood" (Danesi, 2003).

Signaling Subgroup Membership. Brakel (1985) sees youth subcultures as defined by modes of expression or lifestyles. These *meaning systems* are developed by groups in subordinate structural positions as a response to dominant systems. He stresses the forms adopted reflect an attempt to solve structural contradictions arising from the wider societal context.

Many subgroups try to indicate their identity by adopting distinctive and symbolic clothing, hairstyles, tattoos, makeup, vehicles (e.g., cars, motorcycles, scooters, skateboards, surf boards), and so forth. Others reflect their group identity through carefully delineated special interests, language patterns, and meeting places. Some groups pursue obscure or experimental musical genres or political views and adopt a strong in-group or tribal mentality; this exclusive subculture or faction may be referred to by the term *scene* (e.g., Goths), and the scene may be identified with a geographic setting (e.g., London Goths). And changes in subgroup scenes or contexts influence positive and negative development, learning, and behavior (Bradley, 2010; Straw, 1991; Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010).

*Many of the terms used by youth in referring to subgroups often are pejorative and offensive. We do not condone such language. We do, however, recognize the need to go beyond adultcentric definitions and descriptions of youth subgroups if we are to understand youth perceptions and perspectives. So the documents we produce reflect the terms used by youth.

Theories about Youth Subculture

From Wikipedia on Youth subculture – http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Youth_subculture

Early studies in youth culture were mainly produced by functionalist sociologists, and focus on youth as a single form of culture. In explaining the development of the culture, they utilized the concept of *anomie.* Talcott Parsons argued that as we move from the family and corresponding values to another sphere with differing values, (e.g. the workplace) we would experience an "anomie situation." The generalizations involved in this theory ignore the existence of subcultures.

Marxist theories account for some diversity, because they focus on classes and class-fractions rather than youth as a whole. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson described youth subcultures as symbolic or ritualistic attempts to resist the power of bourgeois hegemony by consciously adopting behavior that appears threatening to the establishment (Hall & Jefferson, 1993). Conversely, Marxists of the Frankfurt School of social studies argue that youth culture is inherently consumerist and integral to the divide-and-rule strategy of capitalism. They argue that it creates generation gaps and pits groups of youths against each other (e.g. mods and rockers), especially as youth culture is the dominant culture in the west.

Interactionist theorist Stan Cohen argues youth subcultures are not coherent social groupings that arise spontaneously as a reaction to social forces, but that mass media labeling results in the creation of youth subcultures by imposing an ideological framework in which people can locate their behavior (Cohen, 1964). Post-structuralist theories of subculture utilize many of the ideas from these other theories, including hegemony and the role of the media. Dick Hebdige describes subcultures as a reaction of subordinated groups that challenge the hegemony of the dominant culture (Hebdige, 1979). This theory accounts for factors such as gender, ethnicity and age. Youth can be seen as a subordinate group in relation to the dominant, adult society.

For additional conceptual discussion, see Bucholtz (2002).

Why Should Adults Try to Understand Youth Subgroups?

Many adults seem to have a love-hate relationship with youth culture. (*I want my kids to enjoy growing up! What's the matter with kids today?*) Reconciling this split involves enhancing appreciation that there are positives which can enrich the dominant culture and individual lives, and there are negative to be countered.

From a public health and public education perspective, it is imperative to understand both facets. Such understanding is the basis for promoting healthy development, preventing problems, intervening as soon as problems are identified, and providing effective ways to respond to pervasive, chronic, and serious problems.

For interveners, the more they understand about those aspects of youth subgroups that put individuals and society at risk (i.e., that call for protecting youth from hurting themselves and others), the more effective the interventions can be. Of particular importance is accounting for the considerable diversity that exists within each subgroup. The ongoing dilemma is one of avoiding stereotypes and maintaining an appreciation of individual differences at the same time one is enhancing understanding of youth subgroups and increasing one's competence for intervening when necessary.

All this is complicated by the often rapid change in what's in and what's out. The symbols signaling membership can change dramatically. Words literally flip flop in meaning (e.g., adopting the word "bad" to mean "good"); new forms of adornment replace those that become widely adopted; scenes shift.

What's Positive?

Go to book and music stores or simply enter the phrase *youth culture creativity* into an internet search engine and you rapidly see the many positive cultural contributions stemming from a variety of youth subgroups. Art, music, dance, video, literature, motion pictures, computer software and hardware, popular fashion, education, and more all are influenced. And, the influence is growing at an accelerating rate because of the social web that enables youth around the globe to interact.

Not only are youth expanding the world of learning for each other, adults are tuning in and benefitting as well. Many classroom teachers learned long ago to tap into the technological savvy of their students. And popular culture businesses and marketers rely heavily on youth input.

On another level are the benefits any group of people derive from identifying with subgroups. Such identification may provide status, support, safety, resources, nurturance, learning opportunities, a sense of community, and many other positive contributions to development and well-being.

Clearly, the stereotype of youth subculture as "less than" or strictly as a negative force in society is unwarranted.

What Should Concern Society?

In appreciating the positives of any subculture, it would be naive not to address problems that often emerge from subgroup participation and actions. Of concern is when a person's participation and actions as part of a youth subgroup result in harm to self or others. Obvious examples are when gangs engage in criminal behavior and when one group denigrates, harasses, victimizes, and stigmatizes another (Ortner, 2002; Peguero, 2009; Suarez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009). And there is the ubiquitous concern over the types of group-associated risk taking behaviors that jeopardize health/mental health and work against positive educational outcomes (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2007; Lyng, 2009; Staten, Birnbaum, Jobe, & Elder, 2006). As Steinberg (2003) suggests, it is a mistake to approach youth risk taking "as if it were an individual phenomenon when in reality it occurs in groups."

While it is essential not to ignore the negatives that stem from youth subgroupings, the aim in addressing the problems should be to deal with them without demonizing youth in general and specific subgroups in particular (Prothrow-Stith & Spivak, 2003). As a McKnight Foundation brief on youth in the media stresses (http://www.mcknight.org/hotissues/framing_youth.aspx):

> "Demonization of young people can reinforce racial discrimination and prevent the public from focusing on the reality of the lives of youth in America today. Moreover, it can create the very alienation and hopelessness that can produce criminal behavior. A longer-term, broader danger also lurks in the punitive policies adopted to protect the public from youth. That is, people fail to see youth as a society's primary asset."

What Should Schools Do?

Schools experience many overlapping concerns related to youth subgroups and youth subculture. Of special concern is addressing any negative impact (e.g., criminal acts, bullying, sexual harassment, interracial conflict, vandalism, mental health problems). But, also essential is a focus on promoting healthy development and fostering a positive school climate.

As always, the more we understand about subgroups and individual differences, the more effective our interventions can be. But to keep from the tendency to focus on each concern as if it is discrete, schools need to work in a new way.

Given the complexity of the negative behaviors that arise in relation to youth subgroups, those in the school, district, and community who have responsibility for gangs, safe schools, violence prevention, bullying, interracial conflict, substance abuse, vandalism, truancy, and school climate need to work collaboratively. The *immediate objectives* are to (1) educate others about motivational and behavioral factors associated with a particular subgroup, (2) counter the trend in policy and practice to establish initiatives in terms of separate categories that lead to a host of fragmented and too often ineffective programs and services, and (3) facilitate opportunities on campus for youth subgroups to engage positively in subcultural activity and connect with effective peer supports.

By working collaboratively and differentiating the causes of observed problems, school staff and community stakeholders can integrate fragmented and marginalized initiatives for promoting positive youth development, preventing problems, intervening as soon as problems are identified, and providing effective ways to respond to pervasive, chronic, and serious problems. *Longer-term*, the aim is to help develop a comprehensive system of student and learning supports that (a) addresses a wide range of barriers to learning, teaching, parenting, and development and (b) re-engages disconnected youth. Such a system encompasses a continuum of integrated school-community intervention systems that are fully integrated into the improvement agenda for schools and communities (Adelman & Taylor, 2006a, b).

Toward these ends, schools must reach out to the community and establish a collaborative mechanism where those with specialized knowledge not only bring that knowledge to the table, but also work to build the needed comprehensive system of student and learning supports that addresses a wide range of barriers to learning, teaching, parenting, and development (Adelman & Taylor, 2007). And it is essential to remember that those with specialized knowledge include youth themselves (Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2009).

Moving forward requires building a comprehensive and systemic continuum of interventions and fully integrating the system into the improvement agenda for schools and communities. To guide development of a systemic approach, we have suggested using a continuum of integrated school-community intervention systems as a unifying framework. This includes school-community systems for promoting healthy development, preventing problems, intervening early to address problems as soon after onset as is feasible, and addressing chronic and severe problems.

Policy that helps schools and communities develop the full continuum of interventions is essential to moving forward in enhancing equity of opportunity. Such policy must effectively establish a *comprehensive intervention framework* that can be used to map, analyze, and set priorities. It must guide fundamental *reworking of operational infrastructure* so that there is leadership and mechanisms for building integrated systems of interventions at schools and for connecting school and community resources. And, it must provide guidance for the difficulties inherent in facilitating major *systemic changes.* By working in this way, we can counter the trend in policy and practice to establish initiatives in terms of separate categories that lead to a host of fragmented and too often ineffective programs and services.

> For resource aids related to policy examples, intervention frameworks and related mapping tools, examples of ways to rework the operational infrastructure and develop key mechanisms such as a *Learning Support Resource Team*, guides for facilitating systemic change, and much more, see the Center's Toolkit at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm
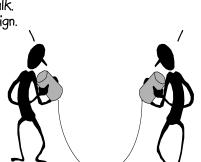
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Kids engaging in street talk.

Sidewalk.
Stop sign.
Curb.

Driveway.
Parking meter.
Pavement.

About Emo Youth Subculture

http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/youth/emo.pdf

In recent years, a growing number of teenagers have been dressing to articulate – or confound – gender identity and sexual orientation. Certainly they have been confounding school officials, whose responses have ranged from indifference to applause to bans. Dress code conflicts often reflect a generational divide, with students coming of age in a culture that is more accepting of ambiguity and difference than that of the adults who make the rules. ... Dress is always code, particularly for teenagers eager to telegraph evolving identities. ... In some districts, administrators seek to define the line between classroom distraction and the student's need for self-expression. ... Often a student's clothes, intended as a fashion statement can be misread as a billboard about sexuality.

Hoffman (2009)

Because of the way they dress and adorn themselves, some youth groups are viewed as threatening. And, societal concern seems to burgeon as these groups gain widespread popular media attention and are increasingly active and connected on the internet. One irony, as Wilson and Atkinson (2005) suggest, is that the growing attention often results in initially censured fashions subsequently becoming "incorporated into mainstream culture (e.g., by converting subcultural signs into mass produced objects)." Those youth who are called *Emos* provide a dramatic example of the type of subcultural group that has both raised concern and influenced mainstream fashions.

Emo subculture has emerged from its roots in Washington, D. C. in the 1980s to become a global phenomenon. While the precise origins of the term are debated, Grillo (2008) states: "Emo subculture is the latest movement on a continuum represented by goths in the '80's and alternative rockers in the '90's. In yearbooks, they're the kids who wear exaggerated haircuts and immerse themselves in moody music. In short: the kids jocks have been beating up for decades." Michaels (2008) notes that the subculture waned for a while, but saw a rebirth in the late 1990s and 2000s when it adopted elements of Glam and Goth culture, and integrated a stronger pop influence.

Defining Emo Subculture & Identifying Subgroup Members

The term Emo usually is depicted as originating from a melodic subgenre of punk rock music first called "emocore" or "emotional hardcore" and "has evolved to become a well recognized slang term to describe a group with particular preferences in clothes, music and behaviors" (Scott & Chur-Hansen, 2008).

Emo music is characterized as emphasizing emotional or personal turbulence, behaviors, attitudes and values. Themes include despair, depression, heart break, and self-loathing. The artistic elements are seen as a reaction to the increased violence within the hardcore punk scene. The new direction taken in the 1980s is attributed to the personal politics espoused by Ian MacKaye of the group *Minor Threat* who is described as turning the focus of the music "from the community back towards the individual" (Blush, 2001; Greenwald, 2003). Another seminal influence is attributed to Guy Picciotto who formed *Rites of Spring* in 1984 to break free of "hardcore's self-imposed boundaries in favor of melodic guitars, varied rhythms, and deeply personal, impassioned lyrics" that included nostalgia, romantic bitterness, and poetic desperation (Greenwald, 2003). Other bands emerged in D.C. and elsewhere; by the mid 1990s, several independent record labels were specializing in Emo style works; by the early 2000s, Emo broke into mainstream culture. "In recent years the term has been applied by critics and journalists to a variety of artists, including multiplatinum acts and groups with disparate styles and sounds" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emo).

In addition to music, Emo more generally is used to described a particular relationship between fans and artists and a subculture embracing a distinct set of values and behaviors. While their initial "fashions" in the early 2000s were described as "a clean cut look," as the style spread to younger teenagers, the image has darkened and now is characterized as including black stovepipe jeans, body-hugging T-shirts, scarves, tartans, studded belts and black wristbands, black sneakers and skate shoes, males wearing heavy eyeliner, and some males also wear thick, black horn-rimmed glasses. And, with respect to hairstyle, the emphasis has been on long side-swept bangs, sometimes covering one or both eyes; hair may be straightened and dyed black, but also some adopt short, choppy layers; bright colors, such as blue, pink, red, or bleached blond also are common (Hoffman, 2009; Phillipov, 2009).

From a mental health perspective, Emos are stereotyped as being emotional, sensitive, shy, introverted, or angst-ridden and as prone to depression, self-injury, and suicide. While it is a rather glib statement, Martin (2006) notes that in distinguishing Emos from Goths some have suggested that Emos hate themselves, while Goths hate everyone.

What is the impact of this subgroup on society and on subgroup members?

The degree to which this subgroup has been seen as a threat to society is noted by Michaels (2008):

"A bill to 'curb dangerous teen trends' in Russia's State Duma describes emos as 12-16 year olds with black and pink clothing, studded belts, painted fingernails, ear and eyebrow piercings, and black hair with fringes that cover half the face. The bill says emo culture's 'negative ideology' may encourage depression, social withdrawal and even suicide.

The degree to which elements in society have been a threat to Emos was reported online in a *Time* article on Emo-bashing in Mexico in 2008.

"The trio of long-haired teenagers grasped the plaza wall to shield their bodies as hundreds of youths kicked and punched them while filming the beating on cell phone cameras. "Kill the emos," shouted the assailants, who had organized over the Internet to launch the attack in Mexico's central city of Queretaro. After police eventually steamed in and made arrests, the bloody victims lay sobbing on the concrete waiting for ambulances while the mob ran through the nearby streets laughing and cheering. ...
       As well as running riot in Queretaro, a mob also attacked emos in the heart of Mexico City this month. Furthermore, emos complain they are being increasingly threatened and assaulted by smaller groups on the streets on a daily basis. 'It's getting dangerous for us to go out now. We get shouted at and spat on. We get things thrown at us. There is so much hate out there,' said Santino Bautista, a 16-year-old emo high school student sitting in a Mexico City plaza alongside other teenagers in tight black jeans and dark makeup. ...
       Most of all the assailants target the emos for dressing effeminately, still a provocative act for many in a macho Mexico. 'At the core of this is the homophobic issue. ... It is the conservative side of Mexican society fighting against something different.'
       The emos make a soft target for the aggressors. The vast majority are teenagers, often just 15 or 16 years old. Most are from

comfortable middle-class backgrounds with little experience of the street battles in Mexico's hardened barrios. And by its nature, the emo scene attracts followers who prefer intellectual indulgence to fistfights. In the lead-up to the mob attacks, there was increasingly aggressive talk against emos in online forums and TV music shows. Blogs raved about "killing emos" and showed cartoon drawings of decapitated long-haired heads."
(http://www.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1725839,00.html)

Society also has been concerned that members of the subgroup might be a suicide threat (Definis-Gojanovic, 2009; Martin, 2006). For example, because of their connection with the Emo subculture and Emo social networking on the internet, the deaths of two teenagers in two separate incidents in 2007 have been widely cited to support this concern. And, another teenager's murder was also discussed as related to Emo subculture. However, Phillipov (2009) has stressed that this link was only tenuously established and that "moral panic" in relation to youth music and subculture is a rather common feature of discussions in the media (e.g., media is seen as building-up concern to a degree that is disproportionate to what are likely to be actual risks).

On a more individual level, concern has been raised that members of this subgroup tend to be overly emotional, feel misunderstood, engage in self-harming behavior; they also often are targets for bullies – including homophobic attacks because of the effeminate look of some in the subgroup (Grillo, 2008; Scott & Chur-Hansen, 2008). And, at the same time, practitioners suggest that the group seems less likely to seek help for mental health concerns.

What are the prevalent policy and practice efforts to address negative impact?

Because of their dramatic general appearance, Emo youth have been a particular concern in discussions of school dress codes. Such discussions focus on fashions that distract students from instruction, go against community standards, raise safety and mental health concerns, and so forth. The difficulty in formulating and enforcing dress codes that are not discriminatory has kept schools from establishing common policy.

Stimulated by concerns about Emo and other youth subgroups, another frequent policy discussion is how such subgroups and their antagonists are using new technologies. Youth subculture is widely extolled and attacked through websites, e-mail, and text messaging. Particular concern has arisen in response to reports of individual harassment. David-Ferdon and Feldman (2007) indicate that "state and federal legislators and school officials are responding by passing, modifying, or enforcing laws. For example: school districts in Florida, South Carolina, Utah, and Oregon are creating new policies to deal with cyberbullying." At the same time, these researchers stress:

> "Stopping adolescents' access to and use of electronic media is not the answer.... Reliance upon blocking or filtering software is insufficient to address this issue. ... Research on parental monitoring and offline aggression indicates significantly higher rates of aggression in youth who report very low parental monitoring compared to those who report very high parental monitoring, suggesting that parental monitoring is a strategy that may be effective for the prevention of electronic aggression".

With respect to monitoring, the trend is to encourage parents and professionals to become more aware of what youth are communicating through the new technologies. This certainly is a way to grasp the positives and negatives related to subgroups such as Emos. Of course, the irony of adult monitoring of social networking sites is that the surveillance conflicts with the desire of youth for autonomy (e.g., from adult authority) and privacy.

Other practical recommendations reflect commonly advocated good parenting guidelines (e.g., spend quality time with your kids, open up communication, watch for warning signs, seek professional help when necessary) and suggestions for countering the subculture (e.g., encourage school dress codes, fight against Emo influence on the internet, try to mount media campaigns).

Any data on intervention impact?

There is no evidence of impact for social level efforts to counter the growth and impact of the Emo subculture. Data on interventions designed to deal with the negative impact of most youth subculture groups must be extrapolated from interventions designed to prevent or end specific behaviors or encourage youth to disassociate from groups such as gangs and cults.

In general, available findings indicate a variety of practices show promise for preventing specific behavior and emotional problems, but this is no recipe for those who want to stop youth from aligning with a subculture such as the Emos. There are no evidence based practices for addressing the complexities involved in preventing such involvement. Some interveners may be tempted to use practices designed to scare a youngster out of the subgroup or to employ techniques used by cult deprogrammers. Available evidence suggests that such efforts not only may do more harm than good, their use also raises significant legal and ethical issues. The same applies for efforts to control use of technologies used for social networking.

With respect to school interventions for regulating dress, the Education Commission of the States (n.d.) notes that there have been no long term empirical studies on the effectiveness of school uniforms or dress codes in improving student or school performance. The Commission stresses, however, that "proponents argue that the use of such policies can enhance schools' ability to achieve their basic academic purposes."

Schools Need to be Proactive

No agreement exists about the long-term impact on youth who adopt the Emo subculture lifestyle. As is evident from the information provided above, some of the concerns discussed are similar to those raised about other youth subgroups.

From the perspective of our Center's work, the reason for concern related to any youngster arises when it is evident that significant factors are interfering with positive physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. And, when those factors stem from or are maintained by association with a particular lifestyle, there is reason to address that lifestyle.

At the same time, it is essential to avoid traditional tendencies to wait for problems and then to approach such youth as if they required totally unique intervention strategies. Based on the general discussion of what schools should do in the previous article, below we highlight some specifics with the first emphasis on promotion of healthy development and preventing problems.

The emphasis is on developing and implementing a comprehensive intervention continuum that:

- *Promotes healthy development and prevents problems*

  For instance:
  > providing information to educate school and key community stakeholders about the positive and negative features of youth subculture in general and specific subgroups such as Emos that are in the locale and about how to counter any negative impact

  > establishing working alliances to dialogue with students designated as Emos and those who harass them, with the intent of minimizing negative encounters and promoting social emotional learning

- *Intervening when problems are noted*

  For instance:
  > implementing agreed upon promising practices to respond as quickly as feasible

  > protecting all students (e.g., from bullying or harassment and other negative impact)

  > ensuring a student's status as an Emo isn't interfering with success at school (e.g., enhancing regular attendance and motivated participation in classroom learning)

  > providing medical, mental health, and learning supports (e.g., related to social, emotional, and learning problems)

- *Attending to chronic and severe problems*

  For instance:
  > identifying and referring for appropriate individual interventions as necessary (e.g., related to negative emotional and cognitive impact)

  > establish a safety net of support (e.g., through school, family, community mental and physical health providers, social service and juvenile justice agencies)

In contrast to a waiting for problems, new directions thinking stresses a proactive approach to preventing social rejection, enhancing personal well-being, and improving academics, and using a continuum of interventions that contributes to enhancing a positive school climate.

> Policy that helps schools and communities develop a full continuum of interventions is essential to moving forward in enhancing equity of opportunity.

I care about our young people, and I wish them great success, because they are our Hope for the Future, and some day, when my generation retires, they will have to pay us trillions of dollars in social security.

Dave Barry

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My teacher told me that although she's getting older she's still hip.

Maybe, but she's sure lost her hop!

What's New?

The list of *Center Resources and Publications* is at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/selection.html . Below are a few new resources.

New from the Center

>Brief Information Resource series:

Youth Subcultures: Understanding Subgroups to Better Address Barriers to Learning and Improve Schools.

To date, we have drafted and put online the following:

What is Youth Culture? A Brief Introduction –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/youth/youthintro.pdf

Glossary of Terms Related to Youth Subculture –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/youth/youthgloss.pdf

Youth Subcultures: Annotated Bibliography –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/youth/youthref.pdf

About Youth Gangs –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/youth/youthgangs.pdf

About the Goth Youth Subculture –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/youth/goth.pdf

About Hip Hop Youth Subculture –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/youth/youthhiphop.pdf

About "Loners" and "Losers" –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/youth/loners.pdf

About "Jocks" as Youth Subculture –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/youth/jocks.pdf

About Emo Youth Subculture –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/youth/emo.pdf
Others are in development.

We also have developed for our Online Clearinghouse a Quick Find on *Youth Culture and Subgroups* which provides links to a range of other related online resources see – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/youthculture.htm

Each of these resources will be improved as we get feedback from around the country and abroad – send your feedback to ltaylor@ucla.edu

From Around the Country

>Report of Healthy Development: A Summit on Young Children's Mental Health

A summit was convened to advance recognition and provide due support for efforts to improve child mental health. With support from over 20 organizations, 42 individuals representing diverse stakeholders review and prioritize available scientific information.
http://www.apa.org/pi/families/summit-report.aspx

>Adolescent Health Services: Missing Opportunities

This policy-oriented report from the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine provides a review and offers major recommendations for strengthening the health system for adolescents in the United States.
http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=12063#toc

>Preventing Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders Among Young People: Progress and Possibilities

A review, analysis, and recommendations — also from the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies.
http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=12480#toc

For other reports and news items from across the country, go to *What's New* at
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/whatsnew/newsitems.htm

I am not young enough to know everything.

Oscar Wilde

School Turnaround: What about Addressing Barriers to Learning?

Referring to the nation's dropout problem, President Obama said. "The stakes are too high — for our children, for our economy, for our country. It's time for all of us to come together — parents and students, principals and teachers, business leaders and elected officials — to end America's dropout crisis."

There is no issue about it being time for all of us to come together. But just identifying high schools with poor graduation rates and applying one of the four school improvement reform models certainly is no more than a *first and insufficient step,* and one that will likely have some undesired consequences and that clearly doesn't provide a significant focus on bringing school and community stakeholders together. And, it is unclear how new investments in dropout prevention and recovery strategies will fit into a school's efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students.

We note that in reviewing the 2009 Brown Center Report on how well American students are learning, Tom Loveless of the Brooking Institute stresses that the report shows that "people who say we know how to make failing schools into successful ones but merely lack the will to do so are selling snake oil. In fact, successful turnaround stories are marked by idiosyncratic circumstances. The science of turnarounds is weak and devoid of practical, effective strategies for educators to employ. Examples of large-scale, system-wide turnarounds are nonexistent. A lot of work needs to be done before the odds of turning around failing schools begin to tip in a favorable direction."

Download at – http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2010/0317_education_loveless.aspx

A recent policy brief from our Center entitled, *Arguing About Charters VS. "Traditional" Schools Masks the Failure of School Improvement Policy and Practice to Enhance Equity of Opportunity* stresses that the more folks argue over charter vs. traditional schools, the less they discuss the ongoing failure of the majority of charters and traditional schools to substantially increase the percentage of youngsters who succeed at school over the long run. This colludes with the tendency to downplay the fact that school improvement policy and practice lacks a primary emphasis on addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. This brief report focuses on what's missing in most analyses of school improvement policy and practice and what type of policy shift is needed to stimulate development of a comprehensive, cohesive, and coherent system to replace the prevailing piecemeal and marginalized approach to student and learning supports.

Download at – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/chartermissing.pdf

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Want resources?
Need technical assistance?

Use our website: **http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu**
Or contact us at   E-mail: **smhp@ucla.edu**
  Ph: **(310) 825-3634** Toll Free Ph: **(866) 846-4843**
  Write: Center for Mental Health in Schools, Dept.
  of Psychology, UCLA, L.A., CA 90095-1563

If you're not receiving our monthly electronic newsletter (ENEWS) or our weekly *Practitioners' Exchange*, send your E-mail address to smhp@ucla.edu

For the latest on Center resources and activities, see **http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu** – click on *What's New*

Everytime they turn this school around, I just get dizzier!

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Improving and Turning Around Schools

The following are some Center resources to guide the focus on addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students.

These and other relevant resources can be downloaded at no charge from our website –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu

If a hardcopy of any of the following would be helpful, send a request with your contact info
to Ltaylor@ucla.edu or circle your request below, copy and fax to (310) 206-8716

   (1) *Rebuilding for Learning: Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching and*
       Re-engaging Students (see http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/rebuild/rebuildingtoc.htm)

   (2) *Toward Next Steps in School Improvement: Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching*
          (see http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/towardnextstep.pdf)

   (3) *Engaging the Strengths of Families, Youth, and Communities in Rebuilding Learning Supports*
          (see http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Newsletter/Spring07.pdf)

   Also, email any other requests, comments, or feedback to Ltaylor@ucla.edu