



**A Series of Information Resources  
on**

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

As calls for addressing barriers to student learning and improving schools increase, better understanding of youth subculture is essential. This series is intended to stimulate thinking about the implications for policy and practice of the complex, multifaceted subgroups with which youth come to be identified and/or assigned by peers.

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.

To these ends, the Center is producing a series of resources, such as this one, as aids for policy and practice analyses, research, education, and school and community improvement planning.

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**About “Mean Girls” as a  
Youth Culture Subgroup\***

Our focus here is on briefly highlighting:

- (1) Mean Girl subculture and identity
  - (2) the impact of this subgroup
  - (3) prevalent policy and practice efforts to address negative impact
  - (4) data on intervention efforts
  - (5) proposed new directions
  - (6) resources for more information.
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\*As with so many of the terms used by youth in referring to subgroups, the term “mean girls” is pejorative and offensive. We use it because it is youth subculture terminology. While we introduce it in quotes, we drop the quotation marks in keeping with common use.

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## About “Mean Girls” as a Youth Culture Subgroup\*

Peers identify those who do and do not share a given image or reputation or hang with a specific “crowd.” While some small youth subgroups are based primarily on social interaction patterns, Brown, Von Bank, and Steinberg (2007) stress that

“crowds are reputation-based entities that reflect important distinctions within the peer system in individual abilities, interests, social background (socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religion), or activity patterns. Ethnographic and interview or self-report studies consistently demonstrate that adolescent crowds are arranged in a social status hierarchy ... [and that] status distinctions tend to be central to the dynamics of interaction among groups in the middle school and early high school years.”

A specific “crowd” constitutes a youth culture subgroup, and the label assigned to the subgroup connotes status (e.g., level of mainstream disapproval or endorsement). And, the characteristics associated with the label provide benchmarks young people use to gauge their status in youth subculture. Research suggests these benchmarks are significantly but not inevitably related to feelings about self and to various forms of positive and negative functioning and that status distinctions tend to dissipate toward the end of high school.

Special attention has been paid to subgroups that engage in aggressive behavior, especially youth gangs and school bullies. As Chesney-Lind & Eliason (2006) emphasize “psychological definitions of aggression include all behaviors that are intended to hurt or harm others”; thus, a wide variety of actions fall under the category (e.g., from rolling one’s eyes and deliberately ignoring people to physical and sexual and emotional harassment).

With respect to intent, there is a special focus on *social* or *relational aggressive behavior* (e.g., behavior that directly or indirectly harms another’s social standing or interpersonal relationships). Such aggression (often referred to as *RA*) has been defined as behavior that is “directed toward harming another’s self-esteem, social status, or both, and may take such direct forms as verbal rejection, negative facial expression or body movement, or more indirect forms such as slanderous rumors or social exclusion” (Galen & Underwood, 1997). Relational aggression may be proactive and reactive. Common behavioral examples include malicious gossip and rumor spreading; taunting, insulting, teasing, and intimidating; using affection manipulatively; building alliances that exclude and ignore others. Advances in technology are seen as playing an increasing role in all this (e.g., cyberbullying).

Hawley, Little, and Card (2007) stress that:

“Traditionally, positive and negative behaviors (prosociality and antisociality) have been studied within separate traditions and have often been viewed as opposite ends of a single dimension. This view that positive, agreeable, and prosocial individuals are liked while hostile, pushy, and aggressive individuals are unskilled and therefore disliked may be an oversimplification. Aggressors can be socially skilled, can be socially attractive, can maintain and improve social status, and can have reciprocal friendships.”

Some discussions have addressed relational aggression in the context of efforts to gain dominance. For example, Pellegrini (2002) states:

“Dominance can be characterized by physically assertive behaviors (e.g., fighting, bullying peers), as well as affiliative behaviors (e.g., leadership, reconciliation, focus of attention). This constellation of behaviors is used by individuals as they compete with each other for access to valued resources in the early phases of group organization. As a result of a series of aversive and affiliative exchanges, hierarchies are formed. The most dominant individuals are at the top of the hierarchy and have preferred access to

resources. Once dominance hierarchies are established, they minimize within group aggression in that individuals know their place, and usually do not try to challenge the group order because of the high likelihood of defeat. The resulting social order also supports subsequent cooperation among group members. ... Changes in status occur when there are abrupt changes in circumstance, such as children changing schools or group members maturing at rapid rates.”

Broad discussions of the underlying factors motivating relational aggression encompass not only notions of power and control, but the desire for popularity, needing security, and escaping from fear. Other motives reported include a desire to create excitement and wanting to develop connectedness and close intimate relationships within a group (Owens, Shute, & Slee, 2000).

Research on relational aggression also looks for differences between males and females. In her review of Marion Underwood’s 2003 book (*Social Aggression Among Girls*), Horn (2004) highlights two matters: (1) Are girls more socially aggressive than boys? and (2) Do girls engage in more social than physical aggression? With respect to the first question, the research is equivocal. With respect to the second, girls generally do engage in more social than physical aggression, but the reasons may be related more to cultural context than gender per se.

With all this as background, our focus here is on the controversial designation of a *mean girl* subgroup. Widespread interest in this subgroup emerged from the popular media’s focus on what some have designated as *Mean Girl lit*. Examples include the 2002 book *Queen Bees and Wannabes*, the 2004 movie *Mean Girls*, the set of *Gossip Girl* novels and 2007 TV series based on them, and the 2008 reality TV series *Queen Bees*.

In January, 2010, the mean girls subgroup received special attention in connection with the suicide of a high school freshman in Massachusetts. The suicide was headlined and portrayed in some press coverage as follows:

*The untouchable Mean Girls*

“...she became the target of the Mean Girls, who decided that she didn’t know her place and she would pay. The name-calling, the stalking, the intimidation was relentless” (Cullen, 2010).

*For many, ‘mean girl’ practice starts early*

“... ‘mean girl’ behavior is not new. Girl-on-girl cruelty has long been the subject of books, TV shows, and movies about tween and teen girls...Though research on cruelty among girls is relatively new, it is clear that the use of friendship as a weapon begins as early as preschool” (English, 2010).

Other news coverage was more cautious:

*Mean girls: an overhyped stereotype*

“... hypermedia focus on Mean Girl Syndrome isn’t helping matters. On the contrary, it’s almost making it hip to be unkind. ...shows that portray kids as cynical and sniping perpetuate and glamorize such behavior ... the myth of mean prevails, like so many other urban and suburban legends” (Kibbe, 2010)

*The Myth of Mean Girls*

“...The mythical wave of girls’ violence and meanness is, in the end, contradicted by reams of evidence from almost every available and reliable source. Yet new media and myriad experts, seemingly eager to sensationalize every ‘crisis’ among young people, have aroused unwarranted worry in the public and policy arenas” (Males & Lind, 2010).

## Defining the Mean Girl subculture and identifying subgroup members

Are mean girls simply bullies? Mean girls, as do other subgroups that engage in some bullying behaviors (e.g., jocks), manifest some bullying behaviors. However, they manifest other behaviors that generate a defined youth culture subgroup. At the same time, there are within group variations in behavior, as well as underlying motivation.

As Horn (2004) notes, the portrayals in the popular media mainly generate a stereotypical picture of gossiping, back-biting and manipulation, and “try to make the case that this type of aggression is inherently female.” That is, the tendency is to cast the behavior as stemming from a personality trait rather than understanding social aggression as a function of group process and individual-group transactions in a cultural context. More specifically, Ringrose (2006) states: “Popular constructions of the mean girl are rooted in a developmental psychology debate on girls as indirectly and relationally aggressive. Constructions of the mean girl are linked to postfeminist gender anxieties over middle-class girl power and girl success.” A long-standing question is highlighted by such analyses: *Is strength being interpreted as pathology?*

Certainly, there is a constant focus on the negative facets of relational aggression. Pronk and Zimmer-Gembeck (2009) in the *Journal of Adolescent Research* studied the meaning of “mean” as described by victims, aggressors, and their peers. They found that the subgroup was characterized behaviorally as having unpredictable or inconsistent friendships -- excluding and ditching (cutting) friendships; practicing social intimidation; spreading rumors and gossip, including using notes but also engaging in cyber and technological aggression.

Similarly, Dellasega & Adamshick (2010) stress that adolescents use relational aggression to maintain their dominant, influential position in the peer group. They list the following as examples of the ways they do this: “gossip, manipulation, intimidation, exclusion, gestures, ridicule, saying something mean then pretending you were joking, name calling, teasing, cliques, campaigns, on again-off again friendships, betrayal of confidences, sending hurtful messages via cell phone or computer, other subtle or not so subtle forms of harassment.”

In a 1997 article in the journal *Sociology of Education*, Merten reports findings from a junior high study “exploring the meaning of meanness” as a starting point in understanding the connections between female competition, conflict, and popularity. The focus was on the “dirty dozen” which was the name several teachers assigned to a subgroup who were viewed as “cool, popular, and mean.” The researchers saw them as “a combination of cute, talented, affluent, conceited, and powerful.” While they were popular, they also were seen as scaring and intimidating peers. The report concludes that:

“Sometimes meanness was a byproduct of competition and conflict, but at other times, girls used meanness instrumentally to gain a competitive advantage in pursuit or protection of popularity. ... The sociocultural construction of meanness, is interrelated with the construction of popularity, the transformability of popularity into power, and the feelings of invulnerability and vulnerability that accompanied high levels of popularity. ... The most frequently heard reason for being mean to someone had to do with that person acting too big or stuck-up. ...meanness was a sanction against making unwarranted claims to a high status.”

The educational publishing company, Pearson, has a Family Education Network website with a section on “mean chicks” (see <http://life.familyeducation.com/girls/violence/55288.html?page=2> ). The site differentiates within the subgroup by designating five types: snobs, gossips, teasers, bullies, and traitors. The following definitions are paraphrased:

*Snobs* – judge the world and other girls only in terms of "wealth" or connection to important people.  
*Gossips* – spread and tend to embellish bits of information, with an emphasis on the negative.

*Teasers* – look for and needle others’ weaknesses or sore spots, constantly and meanly.  
*Bullies* – seen as rarer than the other types, these girls threaten to, or physically hurt, others.  
*Traitors* – seen as the most dangerous in the long run, these girls gain others’ confidence and then betray them by word or deed..

Another educational publishing company, YouthLight, Inc. (nd) also has focused on relational aggression among girls (e.g., see Randall & Bowen, 2007). Mean girls are grouped within a hierarchy of adolescent relational roles. They note that “some roles have been identified as being prevalent in most group situations. While the names may be different, the roles are the same. Within the group, roles and positions are not static.” Drawing on the works of authors such as Wiseman (2002), they label the roles as: Queen, Sidekick, Gossip, Floater, Torn Bystander, Wannabee, and Target” (see <http://www.spsk12.net/departments/special/Relational%20Aggression.htm>).

Gonick (2004) also draws on the book by Wiseman (2002) to emphasize that the dynamics of popularity produce a number of positions within girls cliques. “It is the ‘Queen Bee’ who controls and instills fear in other girls [whose positions include sidekick, banker, floater, and torn bystander], entrapping them in her insatiable hunger for power.”

Ironically, because mean girls are popular, *wikiHow* (nd) offers the following guidance on “How to be the ultimate mean girl” (<http://www.wikihow.com/Be-the-Ultimate-Mean-Girl>):

- > Become popular. Develop a great sense of style so that you get noticed (short skirts, fashionable jeans, beautiful purses, Burberry or Calvin Klein labels, natural makeup, straight hair).
- > Be assertive, charming and charismatic. Play off what other popular people do and say.
- > Once you become popular show your true self. Act bitchy and destroy friendships, making others loyal to you. Always do this undercover. Don’t target just one person, that’s bullying.
- > Act innocent around your parents so they think that you aren’t mean, just popular

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

Over the last decade, the increasing focus on mean girls has contributed to the societal impression that social or relational aggressive behavior, especially among girls, is on the rise (Horn, 2004). This appears to be more a matter of perception than solid evidence (Males & Lind, 2010).

Gonick (2004) suggests the public’s view of girls as vulnerable has been replaced by the mean girl stereotype. She states: “The hand-wringing so dominant in current discussions of the latest crisis of girlhood reflects a social agenda which makes individuals responsible for their own successes or failures at a time when so many social institutions, like that of education, that have the potential to create expanded possibilities in the lives of young women, are being dismantled.” Ringrose (2006) offers a postfeminist view; she suggests that the characterization of mean girls represents a move to re-pathologize the feminine.

Because children and adolescents use relational aggression to influence their social worlds, Pronk and Zimmer-Gembeck (2009) emphasize that relational aggression can serve social purposes and meet individual goals, and it can also be damaging to the mental health and relationships of both victims and aggressors. Given this, it is essential to consider both the potential positive and negative impact of any subgroup’s behavior.

On the positive side, relational aggression offer many advantages for those designated as mean girls. At school, for example, it probably facilitates academic success, grade and school transitions, and more. And, post school, such girls likely are well-positioned for career opportunities and advancement in many fields. Researchers need to pay greater attention to the positive side.

For victims a wide range of difficulties may be experienced. Skowronski, Weaver, Wise, & Kelly, (2005) highlight a variety of problems experienced at school. For example, victims are seen as often having difficulty finding ways to join in various teams and as finding hallways, cafeterias, buses, and locker rooms anxiety producing settings. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that bullying makes more than 850,000 U.S. teenagers stay home from school at least once a month.

More generally, Dellasega and Adamshick (2010) suggest that the negative impact for victims, especially those girls in the stage of identity formation, is seen in low self-esteem, disrupted peer relationships, lowered school performance, and mental and physical health (including adjustment and concentration problems, feeling physically ill or depressed, at risk for substance abuse, delinquency, and eating problems). These researchers also indicate that aggressors report negatives, including a sense of loneliness and depression. Owens, Slee, and Shute (2000) report that while victims may initially deny suffering from indirect relational aggression, their research found that the girls experienced significant psychological effects.

Related to all this is increasing concern about cyberbullying. Cyberbullying often is linked to mean girls (e.g., using instant messaging services, chat rooms, personal web sites, blogs, online journals, and cell phones to ridicule others, convey negative images and cruel or threatening messages). Any form of bullying raises concerns, especially for schools. Misuse of technological advances reverberates throughout society.

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

Given the positives and negatives related to mean girls, society and its schools have been advised to focus on both facets and also on the well-being of both perpetrators and victims. For example, Horn (2004) cautions: “If we are simply to treat social aggression as fundamentally negative and potentially pathological, our prevention and intervention programs will be simplistic and potentially ineffective.” And, it should be noted that because the focus is on girls, Ringrose (2006) warns that the “regulatory strategies emerging to manage mean girls are oriented toward maintaining appropriate modes of repressive, middle-class femininity.”

*The emphasis is on bullying.* The above concerns highlight one set of policy and practice issues related to mean girls. Another is the tendency for policy makers and practitioners to lump them with other subgroups such as bullies and to emphasize the negative behavior. This tendency has narrowed the nature and scope of interventions. As Dellasega & Adamschick (2010) stress, “while physical forms of aggression are targeted in traditional ‘bullying’ programs, relational aggression, or the use of relationships to hurt another, is often not detected or addressed.”

Understanding social aggression as a function of group process and individual-group transactions is essential in understanding why and where such aggression is likely to occur and how it causes harm. With this in mind, recommendations have been made about intervening with mean girls. It is noteworthy that most of these recommendations focus on bullying. For example, Besag (2006) suggests that because “most girls’ bullying falls within friendship or acquaintanceship groups, we need to pay attention to the formation and development of their friendship skills. The bullies may have sound leadership skills that could be used in a democratic rather than autocratic manner. Techniques built around negotiation, such as mediation and restorative justice, appear to be worth considering when working with girls in dispute. Problem solving modes such as those based on Solution Focused Practice are useful tools that can be taught to girls.”

In general, community responses focus mainly on “pathological” and abusive behaviors and criminal events (Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006). Interventions tend to be reactive (e.g., psychological treatment for victims, repressive legislation, criminal indictments, monitoring technology). School interventions for mean girls have tended to rely on rule setting, the prevalent approaches to bullying prevention and character education, and counseling for victims if available. However, schools (and

parents) also are under pressure to monitor, report, and investigate potential harm. For example, Eckholm and Zezima (2010) report that “following the January, 2010 suicide in MA, the state legislature proposed an anti-bullying law that would require school staff to report suspected incidents and principals to investigate them. It would also demand that schools teach about the dangers of bullying.” Forty-one states already have antibullying laws.

Note: The nine teenagers involved in the MA case were criminally charged with felonies, including violation of civil rights with bodily injury, harassment, and stalking. The prosecution described their taunting and physical threats as beyond the pale and the cause of the suicide.

*Sources for Resources.* Because of the mental and physical health implications, several major units in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services have paid significant attention to providing general recommendations and resources focused on bullying. For example:

- As part of its violence prevention agenda, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) focuses on bullying – see <http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/youthviolence/schoolviolence/index.html>
- The Health Resources Service Administration (HRSA) has a section on its website to *Stop Bullying Now!* – see <http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/kids/>
- Office of Women’s Health also has a Bullying section on its website – see <http://www.girlshealth.gov/bullying/>
- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) offers a variety of resources – see <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/15plus/aboutbullying.asp> . Of note, SAMHA suggests the following as principles and characteristics for a model bullying prevention program:
  - > Create both a school and home environment characterized by warmth, positive interest, and involvement with adults.
  - > Firm limits against unacceptable behavior need to be established.
  - > Nonphysical, nonhostile negative consequences must be applied
  - > Adults in the school and at home act as authorities and models

Because schools have focused on many facets of bullying, many resources are available. Most have not been well-researched. Ready access can be made either through our Center’s Online Clearinghouse Quick Find on *Bullying* (online at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/bully.htm> ) or by linking to *character education* on the U.S. Dept. of Education’s “What Works Clearinghouse” <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/Topic.aspx?tid=12>

With specific respect to social or relational aggression and mean girls, the National Education Association provides a list of “Resources for Empowering Girls and Combating Social Aggression” (online at <http://www.nea.org/home/16792.htm> ). Two of the programs listed are The Empower Program and programs from the Ophelia Project. As briefly described by Wiseman (2009), *The Empower Program* uses a curriculum called “Owning up.” It focuses on those between 12 and 21 and teaches them to own up and take responsibility as perpetrators, bystanders, and targets for unethical behavior. It “targets root causes of bullying and other forms of social cruelty [and] exposes the cultural expectations that teach young people to humiliate and dehumanize others as the way to achieve power and respect, then challenges them to transform this dynamic.”

Dellasega & Adamshick (2010) described *Camp Ophelia* and *Club Ophelia* as “two initiatives that function in a preventive mode for middle school age girls. These programs are designed to create safe environments for middle school girls to learn positive relational skills. The programs use an arts based curriculum and mentoring by high school girls. Girls first are taught about relational aggression and how it hurts others. They then relate relational aggression to their everyday lives,

and develop alternative behaviors. Finally, they integrate the new healthy relationship behaviors they have identified as feasible for them into their everyday life.”

And *wikiHow* (nd) offers the following to potential victims with respect to “How to Stop a Mean Girl Bully” (online at <http://www.wikihow.com/Stop-a-Mean-Girl-Bully> ):

1. Ignore her as often as possible
2. Tell a trusting adult
3. Make eye contact with her, it shows confidence.
4. Use your words, not your fists.
5. Find her weakness. Make her feel bad about bullying

Obviously, it is essential to fully understand the subculture; but such understanding clearly is shaped by how one perceives underlying motivation of the girls and of those formulating policy and practice.

### **Any data on intervention impact?**

Data are limited on the long-term impact of bullying and character education in general, and there are no data on the impact on mean girls.

It should be recognized, however, that there are criticisms of policies and practices. Besides those noted as issues in the preceding section, Verduzco-Baker (2008) stress:

“Current approaches to bullying and conflict are found to obscure ways in which power (i.e. social power rather than psychological or physical power) is salient to conflicts and to intervention strategies. During interviews staff demonstrate a common assumption that developmental or psychological problems cause children to be involved in conflicts and bullying. Furthermore, analysis of staff members’ descriptions of their intervention strategies show they rely on conflict resolution techniques derived from psychological frameworks that presume children enter a conflict on an equal playing field.. Further investigation of how current approaches to bullying and conflict may obscure or even reproduce children’s unequal access to social power are needed. Adding a sociological perspective to the current psychological perspective might account for and remediate power differentials between children.”

Gonick (2004) laments:

“On one hand, discussions about the ‘problem’ of young women’s relationships gone-wrong are used in the media as a cultural symbol of disorder, moral decay, and social instability in North American society more broadly. Yet at the same time, the treatment and resolution of the problem is almost always articulated in individualized and individualizing terms.”

### **New directions**

Despite the issues related to prevailing practices and their narrow focus on bullying, a considerable amount can be learned from the many available resources indicated above. However, the reality is that schools need to understand the impact of all youth subcultural groups. And, where any subgroup is significantly interfering with positive physical, cognitive, social and emotional development, action is warranted. The school’s stance, of course, must be proactive not reactive, and it must develop ways to address all problems in an integrated and comprehensive way.

A proactive, integrated, and comprehensive approach avoids traditional tendencies to wait for problems to arise. It avoids presuming every problem requires unique intervention strategies by understanding which concerns represent common youth cultural subgroup dynamics and which are associated mostly with one or a few subgroups. And, it analyzes a subgroup’s behavior in terms of



motivating factors (including efforts intended to enhance feelings of competence, self-determination, and connectedness to specific others), as well as social, cultural, and gender politics and economies.

From the perspective of our Center's work, development of a full continuum of interventions allows schools to begin with a focus on promoting healthy development and preventing problems for all students. Well designed systems for healthy development and prevention should be foundational features in every school and community. Beyond the benefits they provide directly, they also provide a platform for determining whether the impact of any subgroup is significantly interfering with positive physical, cognitive, social and emotional development and thus warrants special attention. Where it is clear that this is the case, early-after-onset interventions can be introduced based on an analysis of subgroup concerns associated with a particular lifestyle. Finally, if individuals are found to need specialized assistance, steps can be taken to address identified needs.

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

Below and in the box that follows, we illustrate approaching policy and practice proactively and with a full continuum of interventions. Embedded are a few examples to illustrate addressing concerns related to mean girls and those who feel victimized by the subculture.

- *Promoting healthy development and preventing problems*

Examples:

- > providing information to educate school and key community stakeholders and policy makers about the positive and negative features of youth subculture in general and the mean girl subculture specifically and about how to counter any negative impact
- > establishing dialogues with students identified as mean girls, with the intent of engaging them in ways that minimize identified problems they and others are experiencing in relation to the subgroup and promoting social emotional learning (e.g., providing leadership roles that encompass a wide range of students)
- > protecting all students (e.g., from injuries, from negative social and emotional impact, from discrimination and negative images)

- *Intervening when problems are noted*

Examples:

- > implementing agreed upon promising practices to respond as quickly as feasible (e.g., watching for mean girl cliques in order to redirect the group's energy and, if someone is being victimized, take corrective actions)
- > ensuring a student's status as a mean girl isn't interfering with success at school (e.g., enhancing regular attendance and motivated participation in classroom learning)
- > ensuring medical, mental health, and learning supports are available for all in need (e.g., related to injury recovery, eating problems, social, emotional, and learning problems)

- *Attending to chronic and severe problems*

For instance:

- > identifying and referring for appropriate individual interventions as necessary (e.g., to reduce serious and pervasive emotional and cognitive concerns)
- > establish a safety net of support (e.g., through school, family, community mental and physical health providers and agencies)

## A Perspective on What Schools Should Do Based on the Work of our Center at UCLA

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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### **Source for Additional Information**

See our Center's online clearinghouse Quick Find on *Youth Culture and Subgroups*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/youthculture.htm>

The Center's Series of Information Resources on *Youth Subcultures: Understanding Subgroups to Better Address Barriers to Learning & Improve Schools\**

**Online:**

*What is Youth Culture? A Brief Introduction*

*Glossary of Terms Related to Youth Culture Subgroups*

*Youth Subcultures: Annotated Bibliography and Related References*

*About Youth Gangs*

*About the Goth Youth Subculture*

*About Hip Hop Youth Subculture*

*About "Loners" and "Losers"*

*About "Jocks" as Youth Subculture*

*About Emo Youth Subculture*

*About Surfing and Skateboarding Youth Subcultures*

*About the Cheerleading Youth Subculture*

*About "Mean Girls" as a Youth Culture Subgroup*

*About "Nerds" and "Geeks" as an Identified Subculture*

*About "Preppies" as a Youth Culture Subgroup*

*About Sexual Minority (LGBT) Youth Subculture*

*Youth and Socially Interactive Technologies*

*About Raves as a Youth Culture Phenomenon*

**Others are in development**

\*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 *Information Resource* documents reflect the terms used by youth.