

Beginning with Chekhov

Young peoples interface
with their culture

Risk and young people

There is a complexity to this issue that defies the simple logic of an either / or argument between social (or structural) and individual psychological causality.

Another fundamental aspect needing to be considered is the existential dimension to the equation.

Risk and young people

“What is happening to young people is more than the specific consequences of discrete personal and socioeconomic events, but is also a consequence of the fundamental cultural framework of western civilisation.”

– Richard Eckersley (1995)

Basic Premise

By-and-large, the now-ubiquitous, media-driven ‘grand narratives’ of contemporary Western culture are not sufficiently robust enough to provide young people with any ‘reason for being’ in their lives, beyond individualism, material consumption, and the pursuit of the ‘validating experience’...

Basic Premise

...And that this 'crisis of meaning' is manifesting itself in the thinking and behaviour of young people, particularly in the area of adolescent risk-taking.

Viktor Frankl:

<http://www.viktorfrankl.org/e/lifeandwork.html>

“Every age has its own collective neurosis... The existential vacuum which is the mass neurosis of the present time can be described as a private and personal form of nihilism; for nihilism can be defined as the contention that being has no meaning.”

Viktor E. Frankl – *Man's Search for Meaning*

Richard Eckersley:

<http://www.metafuture.org/>

“Modern western culture is increasingly failing to meet the basic requirements of any culture, which are to provide people with a sense of meaning, belonging and purpose and so a sense of personal identity, worth and security; a measure of confidence or certainty about what the future holds for them; and a framework of moral values to guide their conduct.”

Richard Eckersley - *Values and Visions*.

Neil Postman:

<http://www.neilpostman.org/>

“Like the Sorcerer's Apprentice, we are awash in information, without even a broom to help us get rid of it. The tie between information and human purpose has been severed...We do not have...a loom to weave it all into fabric. No transcendent narratives to provide us with moral guidance, social purpose, intellectual economy. No stories to tell us what we need to know, and especially what we do *not* need to know.”

Neil Postman - *Science and the Story That We Need*

Martin Seligman:

<http://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/>

“There is one thing we know about meaning: that meaning consists in attachment to something bigger than you are. The self is not a very good site for meaning, and the larger the thing that you can credibly attach yourself to, the more meaning you get out of life.”

Eudaemonia – The Good Life: A Talk with Martin Seligman

Moral Panic?

What's the fuss?

- Historical record
- Cyclic nature

But...the research of many others; e.g.:

- John Carroll (Prof. of Sociology at La Trobe University)
- Michael Mason et. al. (Senior Research Fellow at ACU)

The evolution of modern literature

“We must...consider another development in modern storytelling...the way in which the works of so many twentieth-century playwrights, novelists and film-makers seemed to express the sense of having arrived at a kind of cosmic and spiritual dead end.”

- Christopher Booker: *The Seven Basic Plots: Why we tell stories* (P.425)

Anton Chekhov's Legacy

A preview of what lies at the end of the road...

- Characters:
 - never strong enough to take control of their lives
 - never embarking on that voyage of internal discovery which leads to transformation
 - without hope of maturity or wholeness
 - wraiths futilely chasing shadows in a world devoid of meaning

- Christopher Booker: *The Seven Basic Plots: Why we tell stories* (P.430-431)

The journey continues: Albert Camus

Albert Camus' *The Outsider* "carried the idea of the egocentric hero...to its logical conclusion.

...The idea of a hero who becomes admirable because he finds the centre of his identity solely within himself. He has been liberated from any sense of obligation to anyone or anything outside of him.

...He can see nothing outside his own existence as having any significance."

- Christopher Booker: *The Seven Basic Plots: Why we tell stories* (P.441-443)

Links with adolescent behaviour:

"Impulsivity is generally defined in the psychological literature as a relative preference for smaller, easier and immediate outcomes over larger but delayed alternatives...It is generally acknowledged by academics, and society at large, that impulsivity is a characteristic of adolescence, often leading to unhealthy choices."

- Kanayo Umeh: *Understanding Adolescent Health Behaviour* (P.212)

Links with adolescent behaviour:

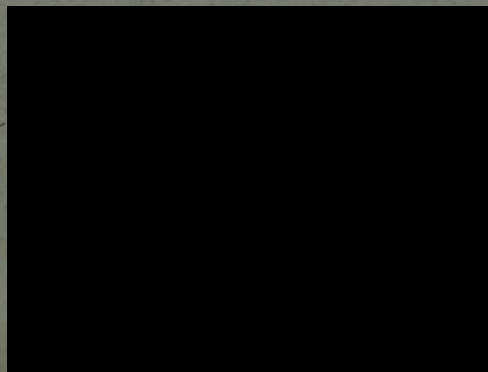
So, what does all this mean...?

Examples of two practical implications:

1. Young people and 'engagement'
2. Young people and 'being extreme'

Engagement:

A key distinctive of Gen.Y is the notion of "engagement"...positive and negative!



Engagement:

“The big difference from today is this: the kids back then [‘60s] didn’t expect to be engaged by everything they did. There were no video games, no CDs, no MP3s – none of today’s special effects. Those kids’ lives were a lot less rich – and not just in money: less rich in media, less rich in communication, much less rich in creative opportunities for students outside of school. Many if not most of them never even knew what real engagement feels like.

Engagement:

“But today, all kids do. All the students we teach have something in their lives that’s really engaging. ...Life for today’s kids may be a lot of things – including stressful – but it’s certainly not unengaging...[they are] empowered to choose what they want (“Two hundred channels! Products made just for you!”) and to see what interests them (“Log on! The entire world is at your fingertips!”) and to create their own personalized identity (“Download your own ring tone! Fill your iPod with precisely the music you want!”)”

- Marc Prensky: *Engage me or enrage me*

Engagement:

Facebook's '25 Things':

There are times...when a Facebook trend or application exists just for entertainment. That's the case with '25 Things'. "At one level, there's no point to these applications...People just get so used to it. It's like a 24-hour news cycle. You have to have breaking news all of the time to keep people watching. Facebook is like that. You have to keep having some activity going on to give people a reason to log in."

Confession for the noughties – Roy Bragg ("The Age" – February 21, 2009)

Engagement:

Gen Y employees – Levels of disengagement and the generation's uncertain quest:

"...Research indicates that younger employees, although they may yearn for 'bigger and better,' don't always know exactly what they're looking for. But 'bigger and better' does raise the bar. The lower proportion of Generation Y respondents with high satisfaction can be attributed to their expectations of what an organisation or a job can provide."

Blessingwhite Report : *The State of Employee Engagement* – 2008.

'Extreme Youth Culture':

Another key distinctive of Gen.Y is the notion of "extreme" ...

- Extreme games
- Extreme music
- Extreme makeover
- Extreme sports...and even...
- Extreme Pamplona!

'Extreme Youth Cultures':

'Parkour':
Started in 1997
by Frenchman
David Belle and
a number of
friends, who
created a group
called
'Yamakasi'.



Parkour:

Mainstream adoption of Parkour:

- Films: e.g. *Casino Royale*
- Music clips: e.g. Madonna
- Advertisements:
 - ✓ Nike
 - ✓ Toyota
 - ✓ Canon
 - ✓ Microsoft
- Promotions: e.g. BBC 1

Parkour:



'Extreme Youth Cultures':

"It's difficult for a movement to gain grassroots appeal if Madonna, James Bond, and the BBC are already into it. Increasingly, when new forms of youth culture survive, it's because they are things that the media wouldn't touch with a ten-foot pole..."

'Extreme Youth Culture':

"With everything...becoming a carefully placed marketing message, it's only at the outer limits of acceptability in society that grassroots movements can find meaning. And pushing people to the limits of acceptability isn't always a great idea."

Matt Mason, referring to Parkour in his book, *"The Pirate's Dilemma"*.

Happy slapping:



Extreme Body Piercing & Tattoos:



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Extreme Youth Cultures:

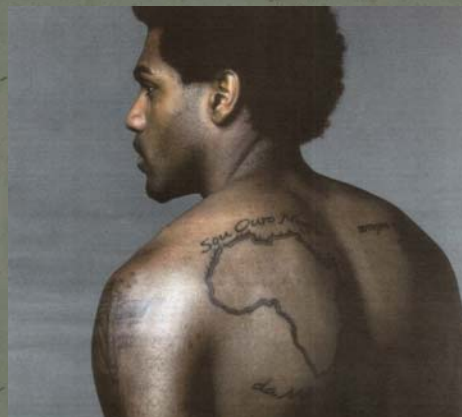
“New youth cultures can’t be as safe as those of days gone by, because if they stay within socially acceptable limits, marketers pounce, and before long they are just another branded spectacle. Teenagers are going to such extremes to create space for their identities...”

Matt Mason, referring to Parkour in his book, *“The Pirate’s Dilemma”*.

Negotiating passage to adulthood

- Glorifying violence – in place of genuine strength
- Boasting (dreaming?) of sexual conquests – in place of loving relationship
- Celebrating extreme intoxication – in place of life itself

Meaning and Identity:



Harry O'Brien

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Keith McGinn:

- Berwick TEC ICT Co-ordinator
- kmcginn@chisholm.edu.au
- 0405154370

