The Brown University Child and Adolescent Behavior Letter

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Highlights…

Our lead articles this month look at comorbid OCD and ADHD, and at challenges to diversity in private education.

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Monthly reports on the problems of children and adolescents growing up

CABL

ADHD, OCD

Comorbid OCD and ADHD in youth: Clinical implications and treatment recommendations

By Marika Marklin, B.S., Bryana Killion, Ph.D., Erin O'Connor, Ph.D., Kathrin Renschler, M.A., Jennifer B. Freeman, PhD.

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) affects up to 4% of children and adolescents (Nazeer et al., 2020). Childhood OCD impairs overall quality of life, particularly in familial, social and academic settings. For individuals with OCD, obsessions — unwanted, intrusive thoughts, images, or impulses that cause distress are subsequently reduced by compulsions — behaviors that are designed to assuage the distress of the obsessions, according to set rules or senses of completion (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Common obsessions surround core fears of harm avoidance, disgust and/or a sense of incompleteness, leading to common compulsions of repeating, checking, avoidance, and/or other rituals.

OCD is treatable and a robust body of research has demonstrated the effectiveness of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), specifically exposure with response prevention (E/RP), in the meaningful reduction of OCD symptoms. Nevertheless, some OCD cases remain difficult to treat, and many youth do not achieve remission following treatment (Farrell et al., 2020).

Diversity

Diversity in private education: The impact of racial discrimination on students' mental health

By Kiany Probherbs, B.A., and Jennifer Freeman, PhD

Historical and Social Context

Minority students and their families have viewed attending private schools as a way to increase their social and financial mobility. The Supreme Court case of Runyon vs McCrary (1976) prohibited private schools from excluding students based on race or ethnicity which led to increased access to quality education for racial and ethnic minorities. Private schools generally have more funding, resources, and due to smaller class sizes, students typically have more access to their teachers than students who attend public schools. Long-standing neglect of many racial and ethnic minority communities has resulted in their public schools being understaffed and

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students (n = 12) from New York City who were members of the Oliver Scholars Program. The Oliver Scholars program is a non-profit organization that helps high achieving racial and ethnic minority students from New York City be admitted at private day and boarding schools (Oliver Scholars, n.d.).

Results of the interviews found that students who experienced racial discrimination and microaggressions in their school environment were more likely to have a negative relationship with their school. This negative relationship affected students' ability to academically perform at their school which then negatively influenced their self-esteem and mental health. Study participants noted that despite their efforts to create a reciprocated sense of belonging, the feeling of isolation did not go away. Students talked about how schools failed in these areas and at times administrations even reinforced discriminatory behaviors or poorly responded to instances of discrimination. Students named the ways in which educators spoke about matters of race, like slavery, created moments of isolation in their classes and often fueled existing conflicts between students who actively discriminated against minority students. One participant described an experience where classmates went in their dorm, stole and desecrated their prayer rug and when they told the administration, the administration never disciplined the student's peers. Instances like these are key to modeling the value of respecting other peoples' identity and culture. When instances of disrespect are inadequately handled, this reinforces discriminatory behavior and can embolden students to push the boundaries of these interactions.

Social connection, self-esteem and racial socialization

Racial discrimination is a risk factor for onset of mental illness and study participants named experiencing many instances of racial discrimination while they were at their private high schools. Students who come from low- and middle-class minority communities often deal with stigma related to help seeking and using health services due to a history of mistrust and discrimination in these settings. Combined with the continuing disparity in access and equity to mental health services for racial and ethnic minorities, minorities at private schools are in an environment that can increase the

risk of developing a mental health disorder without adequate support. Dr. Edith Arrington and colleagues conducted a research study in 2003 where they evaluated the factors that contributed to African American success in independent schools. They found that a strong sense of connection with a students' school along with the state of students' self-esteem directly affected their academic success. They also found that students' mental health was directly affected by racial discrimination and limited their ability to academically succeed.

Students, and specifically teenagers, who are learning their place in the world need to be in environments that can positively influence their self-esteem and help them navigate healthy pathways to success. Socialization in environments is how students can learn how others perceive them based on their religion, background, racial identity, and other factors that people use as a measure of understanding someone. So, is it the role of a school to promote healthy racial socialization in their community? Arrington (2003) believes it is the responsibility of private schools to consider how students in their community respectfully and effectively socialize with each other. Socialization happens in several school settings such as sports, class, clubs, and students' time outside of class. Minorities at private independent schools may often exist in racially dissonant school contexts due to the lack of diversity in their peers and staff. Given these contexts, schools implement values based on what they believe to contribute to success and these values most often lack diversity in perspective and background. This lack of diversity in school administrations may cause the expectations of private schools to encourage values that are from white communities and lack cultural sensitivity. Without cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity in administrations or faculty, school values can diminish the importance and respect of other existing cultures and their values. It is important for schools to make additional efforts to create respectful conversations about race and other minority identities and model this for students to then use in their own conversations and relationships.

Racial socialization as a protective factor

How can this be changed? Neblett et al. (2012) detail the concept of racial socialization and identify it as an effective

solution to minimizing ignorance and disrespect for minority cultures in predominantly white settings. They explain how promotive and protective cultural factors like racial socialization can help mitigate the negative effects of racial discrimination on individuals. Racial socialization is how people are introduced and conceptualize their own perception of race in the broader context of how people from different racial backgrounds view their race. This includes adequately preparing students for how others may attack, misunderstand, or embrace their racial identity.

Racial socialization should be a conversation that is had within families to foster diverse perspectives of race that can enhance cultural compassion. These conversations need to be discussed amongst families of all racial and ethnic backgrounds who hope to offer the best educational experience to their children. Neblett et al. (2012) encourage families to discuss the nuances of race, including inter- and intra-racial stereotypes, help children decide how much their racial identity is of importance to their own identity, and to balance the expectations of identity driven from one's own race. These conversations can be extremely complex and should be had with proper resources and support for anyone having these conversations. Schools and non-profit organizations like Oliver Scholars (n.d.) can contribute to this by providing resources to families to help foster these conversations. Racial socialization can even be considered as a preventative or protective factor that may mitigate the negative effects of racial discrimination on mental health by helping support students who are actively dealing with discrimination. It may also help provide tools that families can use to make informed decisions on what institutions can properly support their students.

Conclusion

To help make the experiences of racial and ethnic minorities better as they attend private schools, it is imperative to explore what factors contribute to positive experiences at these schools and how those factors can be applied in racially dissonant settings that lack these supports. Furthermore, it is important to get a better understanding of how resilience manifests or is cultivated in minority students at private schools. One way to do this is to research how resilience functions as a protective factor in the face of

adversity and how to best support minority students in racially dissonant environments. There is continuing research about the negative effects of racial discrimination on people's mental health and it is equally important to gain a holistic understanding of how to make private educational experiences more equitable. To further our support for minority students, researchers should aim to understand what cultural or protective factors can mitigate the negative effects of racism in private school settings.

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What's New

Survey shows families need help communicating about illicit prescription drugs in fentanyl era

By Alison Knopf

Youth say parents don't talk about the dangers of misusing prescription drugs, parents say they do. Clearly, families need help, because young people are buying illicit and fake pills even over the internet — and overdosing and dying.

A survey funded by the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) released in September shows that four in 10 California young adults, and five in 10 teens, don't know about the dangers of misusing prescription pills. Overall, only three in 10 young adults say they have talked to their parents about misusing prescription drugs.

The survey was commissioned by Song for Charlie, a nonprofit charity dedicated to raising awareness about fake prescription pills made with illicit fentanyl.

Their parents, however, tell a very different story, with 70% of them saying they have talked to their children about prescription drug misuse.

How to explain this disconnect? We don't know. Teens sometimes are told things that "go in one ear and out the other."

A new web site developed by Song for Charlie and DHCS is designed to help deal with this this knowledge gap. The platform, called "The New Drug Talk: Connect to Protect," is designed to help families educate themselves about "fentapills," or fake prescription drugs which contain illicit fentanyl, which can be lethal.

"Charlie" is the late Charlie Ternan, who at the age of 22 in 2020 took what he thought was Percocet. It was "fake" Percocet and it contained fentanyl, which is much stronger.

The website has links for parents and youth, and discusses the dangers of self-medication and experimentation. It also helps families have high impact conversations about the rapidly changing drug landscape.

Many of the overdose victims in the fentanyl era are not addicts; in fact "naïve" users of opioids are much more likely to overdose than those who have built up a tolerance.

Many young adults and teens have stress and anxiety.

Ed and Mary Ternan, Charlie's parents, have now dedicated their lives to increasing awareness of fentapills.

"Opioids are killing our kids," said California Governor Gavin Newsom when the new platform and survey were announced. "Song for Charlie was borne out of loss and devastation. Charlie's parents have turned that loss into action, working to warn other families about the risks of fentanyl and laced substances often being sold on social media. Far too many families have been ravaged by the opioid crisis — we will continue our work to keep Californians safe."

"The California Department of Education is leading education, substance abuse prevention, and intervention efforts to ensure our students are safe as it relates to drugs," said California State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond.

"We're incredibly grateful that with The New Drug Talk, our state can lead the charge in reshaping the way education is used as a tool for families to have honest, informed discussions that keep our kids safe."

The survey, conducted by strategic communications and insights consultancy, Breakwater Strategy, was designed to assess this deadly gap in knowledge given the rapidly changing drug landscape and the prevalence of deadly synthetic drugs. Key findings include:

- Nearly 46% of young adults and 34% of teens are broadly aware of people taking prescription pills without prescriptions.
- Less than 60% of parents, while having awareness that people take pills without a prescription, know that people their children's age are taking prescription pills without prescriptions.
- Four in 10 young adults and half of teens say they aren't knowledgeable about the issue.
- Young adults cite fear of judgment, lack of comfort, and potential consequences as some of the most significant obstacles to discussing prescription pill misuse with their parents.
- Parents report "lacking enough knowledge" as a key barrier that keeps them from talking with their children about the issue.

"There is a clear and pressing need to provide an easy way for parents to understand the drug scene their kids are facing and to get the tools they need to connect with them on a topic that can be challenging," said Ed Ternan, president of Song for