

Reviews

Julian Cohen

All about Drugs & Young People: Essential Information and Advice for Parents and Professionals

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pp. 304

Fin Cullen

RECENT YEARS under austerity have seen severe cuts to drugs prevention and education and young people's drugs services. Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) remains non-statutory, with the rise of free schools and academies providing a hotchpotch of approaches to drugs education across the UK.

The past few years have also seen the demise of important UK agencies that supported good drugs education and treatment, from the Drugs Education Practitioners forum (closed in 2012) to the influential campaigning, training and research organisation, Drugscope (which also sadly closed, in March 2015). At the same time, Government Ministers heralded the Coalition's drugs strategy as successful, as drug use is at its lowest level since measurement began in 1996 (NTA, 2012) as cultural shifts impact on patterns of use (DOH, 2015). As I write in May 2015, I note another piece of curious – and potentially unworkable – legislation attempting to criminalise 'legal highs' in the draft psychoactive substances bill by outlawing anything that effects 'brain function' save for the legitimate taxable 'legal highs' of booze and cigarettes.

Into this highly politicised realm arrives Julian Cohen's new book, *All about Drugs & Young People*, which aims to provide advice and information for parents and professionals. I first came across Cohen's work some years ago – when working in the field I stumbled across a copy of a splendidly polemic and astute article on the limitations and expectations of drugs education (Cohen, 1996). Cohen works from a specific harm minimisation approach and his work as a youth and community worker – and later as an educator and trainer – provide a solid foundation for this book.

In Cohen's earlier 1996 article he notes the tensions inherent in drugs prevention and notes that that education cannot stop drug use, although it might contribute to supporting harm reduction. Springing from such a viewpoint, the new book continues to frame understandings and insights within such an approach. Cohen takes some time in establishing the wider context and asks readers to reflect on their own attitudes, feelings and autobiographical experiences with drugs. In the introduction Cohen states: 'It is my belief, apart from a very few purists, we all use drugs and the

experiences we have had with our own drug use, and that of the people around us greatly influences our feelings and attitudes towards drugs, and the people who use them ...' (p.15).

I appreciated that in his opening Cohen reflects on his own autobiographical experiences that framed his views from his 'first nip of Palwin' (a sherry-like wine) as part of religious family gatherings, through tobacco, alcohol, prescription medicine and his family's relationship with substances, to his own work in the drugs field. This autobiographical element provides an insightful grounding that is echoed later in section two where readers are encouraged to reflect on their own drugs career. I am reminded of my own experiences of leading and participating in drugs education sessions for professionals, and of how many of us arrive with coffees in hand with moral 'certainties' about 'drugs' – and a 'professional' refuting of our own everyday drug histories that can flatten the complexities and lived realities of substance use in 'real life' contexts.

As Cohen notes, the only permitted occasions where such a reveal is permissible are the exceptions where 'ex-addicts tell us in graphic detail about the terrible times they have endured while dependent on drugs' (p.15). Such narratives tend to take centre stage in drugs education over the more mundane everyday drugs careers of recreational and experimental use and the learning that might arise from these experiences. Indeed Cohen approaches this head on and asks the reader to reflect on their view and consider where they might place themselves on a liberal – conservative continuum, and how in or out of line their views might be in relation to the young people with whom they work.

This stepping out of the professional into the personal provides a valuable forum to think thorough with humility the ethical and cultural dimensions of practice, and the need to bring such critical insights into work with young people. I also imagine that this text would be a very helpful resource as a practice manual with its mix of quizzes and key harm reduction messages for young people and I could imagine it accompanying drug education group work and one-to-one resources.

This is an important and immensely practical book covering concrete advice for dealing with first aid emergencies, disclosures and working with young people involved in dependent use or supply. It offers a comprehensive overview of trends in use, the law, educational approaches, specific substances and a directory of further resources and organisations. For those involved in training youth practitioners on drug use and young people it would be helpful to read alongside Shane Blackman's excellent analysis, *Chilling Out*, which explores the socio-cultural and historical background to drug use and drug education in the UK. *All About Drugs and Young People* is a welcome addition to the library of any drugs educator, PSHE coordinator, youth worker, school nurse or any other youth practitioner, and hopefully will become an essential practice text on drugs and young people.

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Joel Best and Kathleen A. Bogle

Kids Gone Wild: From Rainbow Parties to Sexting, Understanding the Hype Over Teen Sex

New York University Press 2014

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pp. 177

Tracy Ramsey

THROUGHOUT HISTORY the lives of young people have been used as a barometer or 'social litmus test' (Davies, 1999:14) of the morality and stability of our society. Perhaps nowhere is this witnessed with more clarity than through the pages of the press reporting the sexual exploits of youth, highlighting the state we're in.

Young people the world over explore and experiment with their sexuality, often leaving adults struggling, only to demonstrate a blend of protection and panic as both parties navigate this tumultuous journey. With the expansion of the mass media, there is somewhat of a third person in this relationship there to muddle and mystify the process, playing hermeneutic games on both sides, leaving fear and confusion in its path.

Kids Gone Wild demonstrates just how powerful and complex the business of growing up in the global limelight is for both young people and their parents. Drawing on research and responses primarily from the United States, although internationally significant, Best and Bogle set the tone by highlighting the 2013 MTV performance by Miley Cyrus as a critical point at which

performance, meaning behaviour, stepped over a line. For some youth and community workers, the ‘twerking scandal’ that ensued provided a worrying yet interesting and useful resource for debate with young people, promoting consciousness raising (Freire, 1972) and exploring the ‘blurred lines’ of exploitation of their generation.

What follows is an analysis of the power play at work using the phenomena of sex bracelets and rainbow parties as the contemporary ‘myths’ which are the focus throughout. Best and Bogle dig below the surface in an attempt to understand this complexity and as a result present a wildness of a different sort. Media representations of the sex lives of young people are an increasingly tangled portrayal, of the ever younger, going ever further, encouraging us to believe in a moral and social deterioration which requires immediate adult attention and action. With this the central theme, the agenda Best and Bogle seek to illuminate concerns the reality and truth behind the hype.

Set within six accessible and engaging chapters, Best and Bogle present a challenging argument. In *These Kids Today*, they position the responsibility of parental protection for young people within a backdrop of an ever changing and more dangerous world, moving on to define and discuss the rise in notoriety of sex bracelets, rainbow parties and sexting. This chapter also usefully provides a wider historical and societal context providing early examples of youth culture, which drew similar concerns, whilst also recognising the shift from the external fear of adult exploitation to the recent fears of children and young people themselves being ‘out of control’. The notion of the moral panic is nothing new; Cohen (1972) enlightened us to the impact of media influences long before the birth of the internet provided additional tools for the job.

In a curious likeness to our own professional demand for improved outcomes, the media industry’s drive for increasing ratings provides, in this case, the pressure necessary for the culture of sensationalism to grow. In chapter 2, *How Legends Spread*, Best and Bogle devote attention to the nature of urban legends and folklore before detailing the extent and breadth of the research undertaken to find the stories of sex bracelets and rainbow parties, proceeding to unpick how these are shared across a variety of media.

The authors use numerous examples from ‘infotainment’ shows, radio talk shows and newspapers to highlight the spikes of interest in sex bracelets and rainbow parties, tenuously researched and fuelled by its self-perpetuating coverage. From the authors’ findings, the extent to which the tales are generated and exacerbated is evident. Leading the charge for moral recourse are trusted household names including American TV chat show hosts Oprah and Tyra Banks, displaying a sudden concern for the nation’s youth, adding credibility not only to the existence but also to the epidemic proportions, precariously based on a fragile evidential foundation.

Best and Bogle’s extensive research trawling online conversations, whilst creating methodological tensions, reveal a mixed picture of skeptics and believers using the same evidence to argue their

position. For some the very presence of the discussion is enough to substantiate their reality, fueling anxiety and driving the protectionist agenda for policy reform. Attitudes towards sexual health and relationship education are central to a dedicated chapter on sexting, with opposition argued for cause and effect. Sexting is another technological transformation as young people's lives become increasingly mobile; the reality, however, can include criminal records and sex offender registers. Best and Bogle again focus us on the actual rather than the alarm, deftly citing critique to the media presented frenzy. Whilst accepting that the evidence of sexting, though distorted by the media, is substantially more robust than for sex bracelets and rainbow parties, attention is given to the dilemmas in legal systems and the implications for social policy, particularly for the administration and accessibility of drugs that protect against cervical cancer or prevent pregnancy.

In the concluding chapter Best and Bogle draw together the central themes of the book, locating the debate of young people's sexual behaviour in contemporary society within a framework of more reputable research data providing analysis contrary to the popular press. The authors' analysis also includes data and discussion through the lens of ethnicity and class which, whilst presented as an undertone throughout, could have been strengthened, with a more challenging critique of the ongoing social divisions. In parts the rationale for the alarm presented through the media is centralised on concerns of the sexualisation of middle class, white girls.

The final call is for education for parents, young people, teachers, faith leaders and all those working with and for young people '... to become critical consumers of claims about what the younger generation is doing' (p.144). Whilst focused on heterosexual young people, largely within an American context, and at times unnecessarily repetitive, this book is a useful and accessible read, exposing the questionable connections between fact and fiction in the media story telling. This is ideal for those beginning their critical journey.

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Nigel Pimlott

Embracing the Passion – Christian Youth Work and Politics

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Jonathan Roberts

HERE'S A BOOK that gives the sort of definitions that will help us all. Christian youth work is above all about 'the motivation of the worker and who they work for rather than who they work with' (p.6). It is marked by voluntary participation by the young people and unconditional positive regard by the adults. Youth ministry is more about transmission inside the faith community (some readers will wince). Politics is about who gets what, when and how. And now we set off.

The Christian God is presented (chapter 2) as one who gives power to people. This God is concerned about justice, and what happens to the poor. Believers are to be a blessing: acting, making a difference, trusting God and not being distracted from what they are trying to do. Jesus (chapter 3) is the model for Christian lives. Jesus was political; he spoke to power and situations. He was an irritant and dissenter; a philosopher and pundit; an activist and liberator. It is a coherent life from the 'Nazareth manifesto' of good news for the poor (Luke 4) to crucifixion.

Pimlott asks, rightly, why social action is so far down the hierarchy of importance in the profile of Christian life. In particular; the dominant neoliberalism of current politics is a very long way from these core findings about God and Jesus. Prophecy is hard task requiring care. So, notice the values youth workers talk about and rehearse and practice what you are going to do. Here he draws in Alinsky and Freire with a strong focus on local action. But I particularly like the encouragement to deal with the trouble that comes calmly: his discussion of meekness is an outstanding application of one of Jesus' most famous statements (p.97): if you focus on God the worldly things are put in perspective and we can 'inherit the earth' without being crushed.

He highlights the barriers Christian youth work (and indeed good youth work generally) tackles (chapter 6). How can these be dealt with without political acts? He encourages readers to read their Bible carefully, see their faith as collective, above all do something for the common good (chapter 7). He sets out some good examples of opportunities (chapter 8), and practical success stories (chapter 9).

This is a great read and it should help youth workers grasp the links between what they do and what the Christian youth workers might be up to. Its first audience is undoubtedly Christian youth workers, particularly those like the author 'finding resonance in Anabaptist teachings' (p.14). It is rarely this obscure: full of detailed examples, vivid illustration, precise Bible references covering a wide range of sources, and drawing on an interesting survey of 111 youth workers. I can imagine a group of Christian youth workers finding it stimulating and practical in a support and development group.

I have two areas where I wish there was more development. The first is Catholic social teaching which he finds (contrary to his tribal habits) is rather good (p.140). It is a great shame that this is not more sure footed. The Catholic church has undertaken some great leadership in youth work, for example in local projects, and in the great international youth meetings led regularly from the Vatican. The teachings of Vatican 2 have a literature which is available. It ought to have been possible to cite the Catechism with an accurate date. There are excellent youth work educators, for example at Newman University, and a humble conversation would yield great rewards. I am not sure why we Christians are so anxious about working together.

The second is democracy. This is written for the UK. Politics has lots of manifestations, especially at local level. To encourage reflection I devised a list of 12 alternatives to democracy by which people get things done in their community (Roberts, 2009:34). For a Christian audience I might say that this sets out how sin operates in social settings. I do believe that democracy is a godly goal: people talking together, and compromising to move towards a fairer life together where the vulnerable are safeguarded. I agree that we have to practise, but we also have to build alliances and unite to be effective. Churches know this with the extraordinary success of Jubilee 2000. This is why political parties are formed and why Christians join them.

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Sam McCready and Richard Loudon

Investing in Lives: The History of the Youth Service in Northern Ireland (1844-1973)

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E-publication

pp. 176

Tom Wylie

THE LONG HISTORY of youth work provides an opportunity to consider how youth services emerge in different settings, evolve (or not) to meet changing needs, build an organisational infrastructure, and relate to the state. Bernard Davies' (1999a; 1999b; 2008) magisterial three volumes provide such an account for England (*A History of the Youth Service in England 1939 – 2007*). Now McCready and Loudon, academics at the University of Ulster, have begun to tell the story for Northern Ireland in a comprehensive account which reflects much devilling in various archives and official reports .

During most of the period reviewed here, youth provision in the province followed a similar trajectory to that in England. This is not surprising; many in Ulster saw themselves linked, economically and culturally, to Britain rather than to the rest of Ireland. This was especially the case in Belfast whose industrial base of linen mills, shipbuilding and engineering ensured that the city's social structure and character had more in common with Glasgow or Newcastle than Dublin. The poet, Louis MacNeice, described his birthplace as 'devout and profane and hard'. Into this challenging setting, with an ever-present undercurrent of sectarianism, arrived in turn the YMCA and YWCA, the Boys Brigade in 1888 (reflecting the local affinity with Scots Presbyterianism), in 1907 came Scouting, a little later the Guides and, in time, boys' clubs and youth clubs. Importantly, McCready and Loudon note the early emergence of a welfaring imperative for youth work with factory girls for whom, from 1904, The Hon. Ethel McNaughton took on a role similar to Maude Stanley's in England and oversaw the creation of the extensive Belfast Girls Club Union in 1908 with much emphasis on young members' participation in decision-making. The political partition of the island, and the consequent establishment of Northern Ireland in 1922, did not alter greatly the continuing development of voluntary youth organisations modelled on the English pattern with similar approaches in their leadership and programmes, including much use of sport especially in club-based provision .

As the twentieth century unfolded, structural questions similar to those in England also became evident: would the associations of Boys' Clubs and Youth Clubs merge? (No.) What, if any, would be the relationship with schools? How were youth workers to be supported and trained? Despite pressure from a sector growing in cohesion, there was a general lack of policy, drive and finance from successive Unionist governments at Stormont, apart from a brief flurry of activity including a White Paper in 1962. Nevertheless, the jurisdictions were beginning to diverge in their approach to local youth service structures: in Northern Ireland the churches continued to play a significant role though not always a benign or positive one while, echoing the situation in the Irish republic for a change, local authorities apart from a modest effort by Belfast city council, rarely made youth provision. Thus the traditional voluntary sector reigned supreme and, for the most part, was slow to respond innovatively to changing social needs, although in the late 1950s and 60s some notable new organisations such as Voluntary Service Belfast and a few other specialist interest groups emerged and a handful of outdoor education centres opened.

From 1969, however, the skies darkened as the province descended into 30 years of mayhem and murder, euphemistically described as 'the Troubles'. At this point the book escapes from its rather dry account of organisations, over-arching committees, and thwarted policy ideas by deploying illuminating, even inspiring, accounts by individual youth workers of the challenges they faced: club members beaten up, killed or drawn into paramilitary organisations; youth facilities occupied by the army; streets barricaded; youth workers' cars hijacked at gun point; the Scouts' Belfast headquarters bombed. While some youth projects closed, others struggled on and attempted to provide a semblance of normality or respite in young lives, often using residential or summertime

experiences to engage more intensively. Some individual units made particular efforts to hold back the tide of violence and to promote cross-community understanding, seen most obviously in the reconciliation work of Corrymeela. The imaginative and entrepreneurial Northern Ireland Association of Youth Clubs, ably championed by the indefatigable May Seth, continued to promote personal and social development through their affiliated clubs and in special projects and used their newly acquired residential centre to train volunteer youth workers across the divided community.

Deeper trends also came belatedly to the surface. In 1972 the Youth Service in Northern Ireland was given a clear statutory basis – to this day the most explicit in the British Isles – with specific duties and expectations placed on local education authorities. Although, ironically, this was enacted by a Conservative government (Stormont having been suspended), the decisive roles in its creation and implementation were played by two local civil servants, Ernie Martin and the influential Inspector Paddy McDermott, both of whom were also voluntary youth workers. Training for professional youth workers was at last established by the influential Derrick Wilson at the Ulster Polytechnic (now Ulster University): amongst his other important contributions to youth work's development in the province, Wilson would go on to write insightfully about the roles of youth workers in situations of community conflict. Learning how a Youth Service, now being re-shaped by these two vital pieces of policy architecture, responded to the long years of strife, the continuing blight of sectarianism, the growing separation between its major communities and to the consequences of endemic poverty will have to await the authors' promised second volume.

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