
Achievement culture in youth: Gender, class and community

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Broadening the Debate: Understanding the
Social Context of Youth Mental Health
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Oscar (17)

My form depends on - when I get up and look in the mirror, how I feel about myself then. Do I feel prepared, do I feel that I look good, do I feel smart, do I feel that I have friends. And if I feel good, it's a good day. But some days I get up and think ok, what am I doing, right, when you have to pull yourself together, then the day can be bad. Then I can feel quite low. (...) It's hard.

When you get bullied for your weight, and when you walk down the corridor and someone says 'ugh!' – about me! Those memories burn. It wasn't often, but it happened and when it did, it was hard. And I think: I'm not going to be worse than anyone else, right – it's just a matter of pushing oneself hard.

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Explaining the increase in
mental health problems:

Trauma or stress?

Social background and
life experiences



Oscar (17)

I felt it in primary school when I started getting grades. It started to get a bit hard. Like okay: Everything I'm going to do for the rest of my life is going to be measured. It really annoys me. If there is a 3 [mediocre grade] there, then my dreams are shattered. If it is a 6 [best grade], then there is a possibility. So when a 3 or 2 comes, I thought shit, I have no hope, I'm going to end up as a garbage man, then.

Anne (15)

Getting a 3 on a test can ruin your overall score on your report card, and then *everything* is ruined.

Mum and dad are both academics. They are stressed if they have a lecture, but not in the same way as me. Not long-term stressed. Their future is sort of set – they're going to keep working, retire and then die. My whole future is in front of me. I have to decide now what I want to achieve in life.

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Is the increase in mental health problems the school's fault?

Meritocracy

Acceleration

Oscar: «And I think: I'm not going to be worse than anyone else, right – it's just a matter of pushing oneself hard.»



The girls



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Thank you!

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