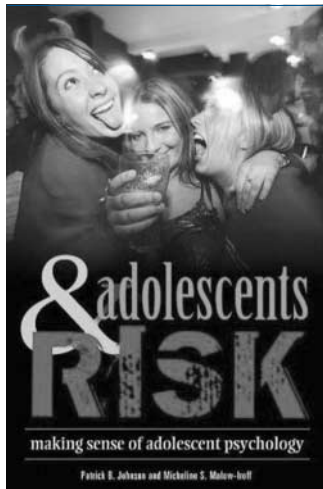


Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge, Femi Oyeboode
and Rosalind Ramsay



**Risk & Adolescents:
Making Sense
of Adolescent Psychology**

By Patrick B. Johnson
& Micheline S. Malow-Iroff.
Praeger Publishers. 2008.
US\$49.95 (hb). 160pp.
ISBN: 9780313336874

‘Oral sex has become an extension of what teens call “making out” or “hooking up” and for many teens is not considered sex,’ explain the authors in their assessment of adolescent risk-taking. This was news to me, and it made me think. The chapters on risks associated with suicide, drug-related violence and gambling were equally informative and thought-provoking.

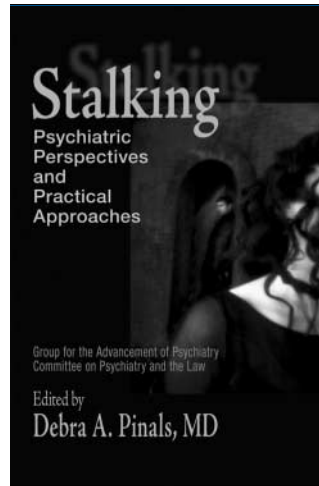
One of the most challenging views posed in the book is the assertion that hosting a poker game at home for a teenager’s birthday party is likely to have far greater adverse after-effects than poor parental policing of teenage sex. Sex, argue the authors, is natural and essential for the continuation of the species, and teenagers have had sex since the beginnings of time. Gambling, on the other hand, is a hidden and devastating addiction.

The information on what risks teenagers are taking, with whom and how is marvellous, packed with digests of reports and evidence. However, the chapter on possible causes of adolescent risk-taking is disappointingly speculative. By the time readers reach the chapter on preventing adolescent risk-taking, the book has taken a serious downward turn. One of the authors uses an anecdote of a friend who got divorced and whose husband, resisting the divorce, did not want to move out. The upshot was that the husband stayed in the family home and their teenage children witnessed arguing, which the authors believe caused excessive adolescent risk-taking. Their conclusion is that it would have been better for him to leave. This is, frankly, preposterous and the authors (a professor and an assistant professor) ought to know that personal anecdotes are not how causality or theories of prevention ought to be established.

These two rather woolly chapters aside, my main criticism of this book is its Americocentrism. Value judgements are made that simply don’t hold in other English-speaking cultures. Furthermore, all the statistics in the book come from the US and at times the narrative extrapolates these erroneously to other parts of the globe. These niggles aside, this book is a refreshingly sensible approach to a potentially emotive subject and avoids colluding with the hysteria that often taints the topic.

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**Stalking: Psychiatric
Perspectives and
Practical Approaches**

Edited by Debra A. Pinals.
Oxford University Press. 2007.
386pp. £26.99 (hb).
ISBN: 9780195189841

‘Stalkers’ understanding of rights is not individualistic, it is autistic.’

Stalking has become increasingly recognised in the general population, with some groups, including mental health professionals, being at particular risk. The behaviour has attracted a lot of interest in the media, much of it voyeuristic and sensational, but behind the frequent headlines lies a common and persistent behaviour which can wreck people’s lives and, not infrequently, end in violence or death.

This is an excellent book which evolved from discussions held by the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry (GAP) Committee on Psychiatry and the Law, whose members had a role in reviewing and editing each chapter. This process led to a consistency of style and distillation of information that adds to the relevance of its content. From Paul Mullen’s candid foreward, from which the above quotation was taken, to the detailed and highly readable content, the text provides an excellent, up-to-date review of the theoretical and practical aspects of stalking behaviour. Topics include same-gender stalking, immigrant victims of stalking, juvenile aspects of stalking, false victimisation and an update on cyberstalking and celebrity stalking.

Divided into four parts, the book covers clinical aspects of stalking, interface with the law, and stalking in different populations and settings. Many of the chapters include the expert opinion of the GAP committee. I initially found this a little off-putting, as it might be considered to give undue influence to the opinions of the committee, to the detriment of those of the reader and other research. However, as I proceeded through the book, I came to appreciate the authority, validity and clarity with which these opinions were expressed. Case vignettes illustrate particular scenarios, bringing the subject matter to life. These are usually followed by a challenging and balanced debate concerning assessment and management strategies. This is particularly successful in the chapter on competence and criminal responsibility.

The lack of duplication with other texts, and the unique subject matter covered, reflect the progress made in the field over the past decade in relation to research, assessment and management of stalking victimisation. Any quibbles? There is a whole chapter devoted to victim perspectives, but there could have been more on perpetrators and their management. Overall, however, I would highly recommend this book for its scope and clarity.

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