

The Jacob Marschak Interdisciplinary Colloquium on Mathematics in the Behavioral Sciences at UCLA

Young Research Library Conference Room 11360 | February 19, 2015 at 3-4:30 pm



Coping with social stressors during adolescence: A process model and intervention strategy

Speaker: David Yeager, Assistant Professor of Psychology, University of Texas at Austin
Host: Jenessa R. Shapiro, Associate Professor of Psychology and Management, UCLA

The transition to high school coincides with normative increases in stress and, for many students, the onset of depression and increased academic disengagement. Why is this? The transition to high school can be fraught with social difficulty, as teens gain or lose new friendships, social exclusion rises in frequency, and social hierarchies are shaken up. Combined with biological changes that focus attention on social hierarchy and a developing social-cognitive ability to project one's identity and social status far into the future, these can create a "perfect storm" for stress--or the sense that the demands of the environment exceed one's ability to cope with them. This stress can spill over into a number of domains of cognitive, physiological, and emotional functioning. My research seeks to understand why some adolescents cope differently during the transition to high school--why some interpret social difficulty as diagnostic of a bleak social future, leading to stress, academic underperformance, internalizing symptoms, and even a desire for violent revenge. It also shows the causal role of beliefs by changing them through intervention, improving adolescents' coping over time. In a number of studies, even time-limited messages have led to reductions in global stress, depressive symptoms, course failure, and aggressive retaliation many months later. Discussion will center on how social-cognitions can act as a "lens" for filtering adverse experience during difficult life transitions. Results have implications for biopsychosocial models of coping, lifespan theories of development, and social psychological theories of behavior change.

David Yeager is an experimental developmental psychologist. He examines the social cognitions and developmental contexts that affect adolescent behaviors such as bullying, depression, academic achievement, cheating, trust, or healthy eating. In May 2014, his research was profiled in the *New York Times Magazine* ("Who Gets to Graduate?"). In May, 2013, Dr. Yeager chaired and co-hosted a national summit on mindset interventions at the White House Office for Science and Technology Policy. This event led to the launch and co-chairing of the "Mindset Scholars Network," an interdisciplinary research network housed at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, where is a 2014-2015 fellow. He is also a William T. Grant Foundation scholar, a Fellow at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, a Faculty Research Associate at the UT Population Research Center, and a Faculty Research Fellow at the UT Dana Center. His research has earned awards from the Spencer Foundation, the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, the Society for Research on Child Development, the American Educational Research Association, Division 7 of the American Psychological Association (APA), the APA Science Directorate, and the International Society for Research on Aggression.