

Johanna Wyn
Helen Cahill
Editors

Handbook of Children and Youth Studies

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With 47 Figures and 5 Tables

 Springer Reference

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Foreword

The Springer *Handbook of Childhood and Youth Studies* provides a comprehensive introduction to this exciting field of scholarship. This handbook challenges the dominant tendency to take a reductive problem-centric view of children and youth. It does this by emphasizing contemporary themes of thinking about children and young people, including Social Justice, Place, Well-Being, Citizenship, Learning, Identity, Time and Space, Labor, Bodies, Spirituality, and Play. The authors are drawn from 14 countries, providing important insights about children and young people in the Asia-Pacific region, Europe and the United Kingdom, North America, South America, Africa, and South Africa. A conscious decision has been made to feature the work of scholars who challenge common conceptions of childhood and youth and to emphasize overt discussion of the conceptual and methodological tools that researchers use to understand their lives. The result is a comprehensive and provocative collection that provides the reader with a plurality of views on the rapidly changing social and economic environments and landscapes in which childhood and youth are forged.

Melbourne
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Editors



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Professor Johanna Wyn is director of the Youth Research Centre in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia, and a fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences, Australia. Her work focuses on the processes and relationships that enable young people to have positive transitions and to engage productively in their communities. She leads the Life Patterns research program, a longitudinal panel study of two generations of Australian youth, corresponding with generations X and Y. Drawing on this evidence base and other studies, she has produced a substantial body of work on young people's transitions through education and beyond and the knowledge and skills young people need to be productive and engaged in the twenty-first century. Her work takes a sociological approach to youth in understanding the changing experience and meaning of youth and the changing nature of opportunities for young people and issues that are challenges for them and for society. It has played a role in defining the field of youth studies, setting new conceptual and policy directions, as presented in the following books: *Rethinking Youth* with Rob White; *Youth and Society: Exploring the Social Dynamics of Youth (3rd edition)* with Rob White; *Youth Health and Welfare*; *Touching the Future: Building Skills for Life and Work*; *The Making of a Generation: The Children of the 1970s in Adulthood* with Lesley Andres; *Touching the Future: Building Skills for Life and Work*, and *Making It Work: Continuity and Change in Rural Places* with Hernán Cuervo. Professor Wyn has held appointments at Glasgow University, the University of Groningen, the University of British Columbia, and the University of Toronto and is a regular keynote contributor to national and international conferences on youth.



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Part I

Thinking About Children and Youth

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Abstract

Childhood and youth are imagined in different ways. The chapters in this handbook make this their central focus, addressing the challenge of recognizing that the concepts we use make the objects of our research. They explore how conceptual frameworks constitute what we research. From a sociocultural perspective, childhood and youth (as well as adulthood) are fluid categories that are given definition and meaning by their social, cultural, political, institutional, locational, governmental, and economic contexts. As many of the chapters of this handbook illustrate, the experience of being a child or young person differs across time and place. From a developmental perspective, childhood and youth are distinctive phases of life that describe age-bounded developmental tasks. These approaches rest on different sets of assumptions, concepts, and frameworks about the nature, meaning, and experience of childhood and youth. Conceptual frameworks create truths and naturalize particular ways of thinking, and so create the discursive frameworks within which

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children and young people are understood, managed, and administered. With a focus on “thinking” about childhood and youth, the chapters in this handbook scrutinize theoretical orthodoxies and conceptual certainties. A focus on the tools we use to think about and define childhood and youth is essential because findings are never absolute and research is imperfect (and the order that institutional processes demand is elusive). This chapter explores key fault lines within the field that take up different positions in relation to the following questions: Is a “new” childhood and youth emerging and if so, does this require “new” concepts? Is the focus on problems and risks (new and old) and if so, what are they? Is the focus on childhood and youth on cultures, subjectivities, mobilities, hopes, and aspirations, and if so, what do these look like? Are childhood and youth a distinctive developmental phase of life? Are children and young people in an emergent state, incomplete and in deficit, until they make the transition into adulthood? Are the boundaries between the categories of childhood, youth, and adulthood blurring? This chapter addresses these key questions through an examination of theoretical orthodoxies and new developments. It takes a critical perspective on the dominant theoretical frameworks (and empirical studies) that have emerged from the global north, and, as in many of the chapters in this book, explores concepts and studies from the global south to account for current debates in this vibrant field.

Introduction

Who are, could, and should children and young people be or become? Children and young people are imagined, given meaning, and problematized in a wide range of ways by researchers, policy-makers, media, and professionals, drawing on different conceptual frameworks. The broad field of childhood and youth studies offers a range of often contradictory conceptual frameworks to make sense of children and young people’s worlds and to “know” them. These conceptual lenses make the objects of our research, and they create the discursive frameworks within which children and young people are understood, managed, and administered. Conceptual frameworks provide the tools for analysis, but when they become orthodoxies and are employed uncritically, they create “truths” and naturalize particular ways of thinking about children and young people.

This chapter discusses the framing of childhood and youth through an analysis of contemporary debates and fault lines. It draws on Bourdieu’s notion of field to analyze the work that concepts do within academic domains. Bourdieu (1998) sees a field as a structured space which is relatively autonomous, with its own logics and practices. His notion of field opens up a consideration of the internal structures of fields, their logics, and how they connect with and affect other fields as well as orienting us to the patterns of power relations and hierarchies that exist within and between them. This approach makes visible the ongoing struggle faced by researchers to “know” childhood and youth, drawing on (and creating) legacies that have an enduring impact on how youth and childhood are imagined, problematized, celebrated, and governed.

There is a strong contemporary body of research that recognizes the changing nature of childhood and youth (Kehily 2013; Lesko and Talbut 2012; White and Wyn 2012;

Leccardi and Ruspini 2006). This body of work rests on the understanding that childhood and youth (and adulthood) are fluid relationships that are given definition and meaning by their social, cultural, political, institutional, locational, governmental, and economic contexts. As many of the chapters of this book illustrate, the experience of being a child or young person differs across time and place (see especially the chapters in the section on Time and Space, introduced by Dan Woodman and Carmen Leccardi, and the section on Place, introduced by David Farrugia). Many of the authors who draw on a sociocultural perspective argue that new conceptual lenses are needed to understand how social change impacts on the experience and meaning of childhood and youth. For example, recognizing the significance of increasing mobility (within and across national borders), interest in place, and space has resulted in a burgeoning of research on children's and young people's "geographies" (see, e.g., Farrugia 2014; Cuervo and Wyn 2012; Hopkins and Pain 2007; Massey 1998). Much of this research is informed by new multidisciplinary frameworks, drawing on concepts from social geography, cultural studies, and youth transitions.

New mobilities of people, ideas, and cultures have also challenged the relevance of the nation-state as a concept that can capture the everyday social relations of children and young people (Anderson-Nathe and Gharabaghi 2013). These insights contribute to an emerging "project" that spans both youth and childhood studies, seeking to understand the nature of contemporary change and its impact on children and young people. As Pufall and Unsworth argue "who children are, what they can do, and how they negotiate their relationships with one another, with their parents and with the larger world around them – these are viewed much differently than they were three or four decades ago" (2004, p. xi). The same questions are relevant to young people.

There has also been a proliferation of work that challenges and interrogates the theoretical orthodoxies that have informed childhood (e.g., Kehily 2013; Pufall and Unsworth 2004; James and Prout 1997) and youth studies (e.g., Furlong 2009; White and Wyn 2013; Lesko and Talbut 2012; Kehily 2013). With regard to childhood research, Kehily (2013) argues that ideas about childhood are contested and struggled over at many levels and Pufall and Unsworth (2004) call for a "new paradigm" of childhood studies. Furlong (2013) argues that youth and young adulthood need to be reconceptualized, but notes that there is disagreement among youth researchers about the extent to which change should be emphasized at the expense of understanding continuities and about how to balance theorizing change. In the field of youth research, Leccardi and Ruspini (2006) explore the emergence of a "new youth" and Henderson et al. (2007) argue that young people are inventing "new adulthoods" while also recognizing that there are significant continuities with the past.

There are other significant debates that exercise researchers and practitioners in these fields. For example, there is ongoing debate about the extent to which childhood and youth can be seen as distinct developmental stages and about the significance of biological development. Tanner and Arnott argue that emerging adulthood constitutes a new phase in human development, distinguished from the stage of adolescence (that precedes emerging adulthood) and from young adulthood that follows (Tanner and Arnett 2009). Recently, debate about the biological basis of categories of childhood and youth has been reignited through advances in digital

imaging technologies enabling neuroscientists to argue that the frontal lobe cortex is not fully developed until the late twenties. This information has led some to argue that this is the physiological basis for poor judgment and high-risk behaviors that are thought to characterize adolescence (Seaton 2012). Interest in cognitive approaches to youth developmental approach has also been given impetus recently through the increasing popularity of positive psychology.

Yet there is also compelling evidence that childhood and youth are socially constructed and that the conditions of life (including historical, geographical, social, political, and economic conditions) mediate what childhood and youth mean and how they are experienced. This view has been given strong impetus by research from non-Western sources. For example, David Everatt (in this section) argues that categories of development and concepts of a “life course” that have been developed in relation to the experiences of childhoods and youth lives in the West bear little relation to those in South Africa. There is also a strong body of research from Western sources that provides evidence of the significance of context for childhood and youth, including research that draws on the concept of social generation (see especially Wyn and Woodman 2006) and on culture and mobility (see, e.g., Rizvi 2012; Nilan 2012). As Furlong (2013, p. 1) points out, childhood, youth, and adulthood are socially constructed phases that cannot be linked to specific age ranges, nor can their boundaries be linked to specific activities.

These are among the conceptual challenges that this section addresses. In the following sections, this chapter explores the struggle to theorize, understand, and develop effective practice in relation to youth through a brief analysis of research from the 1950s to the 1970s. Next, the chapter summarizes the dimensions of social change occurring over the last quarter of a century that are seen to have particularly impacted on children and young people. This leads to a more detailed discussion of the underpinnings of the fields of knowledge about youth and childhood, drawing on Bourdieu to understand the links and power relationships between fields of knowledge that draw on categorical and relational theories.

“Knowing” Childhood and Youth in Historical Focus

Accounts of the sociology of youth traditionally trace the emergence of contemporary research to the field of developmental psychology in the 1950s (in the UK and the USA) and the focus, by the 1970s, on youth cultures of leisure and resistance. The latter is traditionally represented by the studies of young people in the UK, conducted at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham (Hebdidge 1979). For recent examples of these accounts, see Woodman and Wyn (2014) and Furlong (2012). Departing from this tradition, this chapter illustrates the historical antecedents of the struggle to “know” young people through the work of sociologists and educators located in Australia in the period from the 1950s to the late 1970s. This work is of interest because although the theoretical concepts are derivative of the “northern theory” of the time, the

researchers were striving to understand what youth (in particular) meant in the context of an “emerging society” where the double-sided transition of both society and individual were being brought into sharp focus.

Growing Up in an Australian City by Connell et al. (1957) explored the lives of young people in Sydney in 1952. It was published by the Australian Council for Educational Research, marking out the distinctive location of interest in youth studies within the field of education in Australia. The framing of the questions the study seeks to answer was explicitly designed to support the design of educational curricula and systems that would serve both the society and young people.

The book identifies the hopes and anxieties for the emerging colony (Sydney) and for the young people, and thus provides an insight into research that focuses on both social and individual transitions. The researchers frame the project as addressing the tasks of education in a period of significant social change and insecurity. It is worth quoting in some detail the way this research is framed, because the description of the social conditions that were seen to be impacting on young Australians in the early 1950s (who were later to become known as the baby boomer generation) would not be out of place as a description of conditions that youth researchers see impacting on young people today:

The technological revolution and the educational expansion of the last hundred years have together wrought, throughout the world, and not the least in Sydney, a series of impressive changes. The nature and direction of the changes effected, nevertheless, have not been entirely clear.... Institutions, beliefs and standards have all been subjected to the same processes of radical modification, so that, in all this quick-silver age, it is not possible to point, with security, the direction in which the changes are trending except to say that they are productive of further change. The Sydney adolescent of the present day, therefore, finds himself in a situation whose stability is suspect, and the duration is uncertain. To learn how to cope with the insecurity of the present and with the problematic future involves him in the difficult task of learning not only knowledge, principles of present value, but also, and probably more importantly, the means and techniques whereby knowledge appropriate to new situations is acquired, and principles are modified, jettisoned, or adhered to, in the light of changing circumstances. (Connell et al. 1957, p. 207)

The sense of project that informs this study is unnervingly contemporary (even if the language is quite sexist). The explicit focus on social change and the reference to the 1950s as a “quicksilver age” have tended to be overlooked by the judgment, made with hindsight by subsequent researchers, that the baby boomers lived in a period of remarkable stability. Indeed, one of the assumptions usually made by youth researchers is that one of the distinctive features of the lives of Generation X (which follows the baby boomer generation) is instability, compared with the assumed stability of the lives of the boomers.

The 1952 study was followed by a new study of “city youth” in Sydney (Connell et al. 1975) which explicitly sets out to debunk theoretical orthodoxies. Chapter one boldly asserts:

The view that the teenage years 12 to 20 make up a developmental period of special significance and status within the human life span is a social invention of the 20th Century. (Connell et al. 1975, p. 1)

The project of this book is similar to the earlier *Growing Up in an Australian City* in that it explores the relationships between youth and the institution of education. By 1975, universal secondary education was accepted in Australia as an investment in both personal and economic prosperity. However, the research conveys a strong ambivalence about the nature of this institutional relationship and its impact on young people's lives. Above all, it pushes against the emerging "truth" that youth is a "subdivision" or emergent class in its own right, and seeks to understand "the promise" of secondary school completion at the cost of "economic dependency, social subordination, and sexual sublimation" and the postponement of satisfactions, rights, and status (1975, p. 3). Indeed, the analysis highlights the role of education in using age as "a convenient reference point to use in regulating behaviour," making young people the "objects of close, public scrutiny and concern" and portraying them as "unstable, unappreciative, muddled, exasperating, selfish, inconsiderate people threatening the rest of society with either teenage anarchy, delinquency or secession" (Connell et al. 1975, pp. 4–5).

As the authors of these books, over time, attempted to be reflexive about how (competing) theories of childhood and youth were gaining traction, they illustrate the tendency for particular views to coalesce and to become dominant. For example, they trace the ongoing and expanding influence of theories that conceptualize youth as a distinct phase of life. The researchers strive to understand the meaning and experience of youth in social context, responding to their perceptions of a rapidly changing world and to the impact of social institutions (especially education and the labor market) on youth.

Childhood research also reflects a struggle to balance differing views of childhood. However, instead of the negative stereotype that has tended to inform youth research, childhood studies have struggled with romantic ideals of childhood. This is highlighted by Kehily (2009) in a discussion of childhood studies that refers to Henry Mayhew's description of working-class lives in London during the early 1860s (Mayhew 1861). Kehily draws on Mayhew's description of "the Watercress Girl," an 8-year-old street vendor, whose life "challenges Mayhew's concept of childhood and disturbs his notion of what a child is and how a child behaves" because her childhood did not involve the elements of childhood as a time of innocence, protected from the harsh realities of making a living. As Smith in her chapter in this collection titled "► [Deconstructing Discourses to Rupture Fairytales of the "Ideal" Childhood](#)" (Chap. 2) illustrates, contemporary debates about childhood bear legacies from the past.

In the following sections, I revisit these issues in contemporary research.

Social Change

The imperative to open up new ways of thinking about childhood and youth is often given additional impetus from the impact of contemporary social change on children and young people's lives (as the previous section has illustrated). This is as relevant today as it was in the 1950s and 1970s. Today, political and cultural

borders are becoming increasingly porous and young people are at the forefront of unprecedented mobilities of populations across national boundaries. Although scholarship from the global north has dominated childhood and youth research, Asia is home to over 45 % of the young population, and this “youth bulge” is growing (UNESCAP 2013). Knowledge about and from the global south is essential to understanding children and youth today. Young people are also at the forefront of practices, including the use of digital technologies, to break down the barriers between local and global cultures and political movements to create new sites for the expression of youth cultures, and they are among the first to experience the effects of new inequality. Many social scientists argue that we are living in times of significant social transformation. For example, Evans and Helve (2013) explore the changing nature of youth transitions in Western and non-Western contexts. Chauvel (2010) argues that changing labor markets and life chances in France have created a distinctive generation at risk, and Brown et al. (2011) set out the case for a generation that has been failed by the neoliberal promise of high skill, secure work for educational credentials. Buckingham (2006) explores the nature of the digital generation for both children and young people. Changing social conditions are seen by some as heralding a crisis for childhood and youth. For example, the International Labour Organization (ILO 2010) sees a “crisis for youth” in chronic rates of youth unemployment globally, and Palmer (2006) writes about “toxic childhood.”

The literature on the changing social landscape within which childhood and youth are made possible tends to focus on three key areas globally: increasing rates of participation in education; global labor markets and new forms of work; and unprecedented urbanization.

Global Transition Regimes of Education and Work

Education has become implicated in global markets, with all countries aiming to increase educational participation. This means that children and young people in all countries are increasingly subject to the transition regimes of educational participation. The concept of transition regime (see du Bois-Reymond and Stauber 2005, p. 63) refers to the institutional processes, practices and discourses of education and welfare systems, and labor markets that shape the meaning and experience of youth through sanctioned institutional transition points, statuses, and pathways. For example, referring to young people in the UK, Mizen (2004) analyzes the role of welfare and social security systems in defining categories of deserving and undeserving youth and in framing the normative ages whereby transitions from education into the labor market should be accomplished. Transition regimes extend into childhood through the monitoring of normative age-based standards of numeracy and literacy during the primary school years that contribute to international programs such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) (OECD 1996).

One of the challenges for the legitimacy of contemporary transition regimes is that they are not always demonstrably based on robust processes. While education

is worthwhile in its own right, it is often depicted (in policies) as ensuring both personal and social prosperity because of the assumed links between educational credentials and the achievement of a favorable labor market position. Yet youth labor markets, globally, are now characterized as precarious (ILO 2013; Standing 2011). Even for the educated, transitions to decent work are slow, as Andres and Wyn (2010) describe in their study of Generation X in Canada and Australia. Against this backdrop, new categories of young people are being created, including NEET (or not in education, employment, or training), the overeducated, and the underemployed.

The global financial crisis of 2008 (GFC) has resulted in high unemployment in all countries, but there are areas of the world where unemployment rates for young people are projected to increase over the next decade: the Middle East, North Africa, Southeast Asia and the Pacific, East Asia, South Asia, and parts of sub-Saharan Africa, parts of Latin America, and the Caribbean (ILO 2013). Chronic patterns of unemployment and normative expectations of increased levels of participation in education have a powerful impact on the possibilities for children and young people. These circumstances create entrenched inequality that contribute to complex transnational relationships impacting on all. Even in countries where aggregate figures on unemployment rates are relatively low (e.g., in Australia), in some local areas youth unemployment is at 50 % and there are massive inequalities in youth employment within and between countries (ILO 2013).

It is also important to acknowledge that the meaning of jobs is changing. Profession and job titles, such as manager, consultant, and engineer, no longer tell us as much as they used to about income, job security, or career opportunities or where these jobs are. Echoing some of the themes in Berlant's "cruel optimism" Berlant (2011), Brown et al. (2011) refer to an "opportunity trap" in which people are forced to invest in educational activities that are increasingly unlikely to help them achieve their employment goals.

Urbanization

The prevalence of urbanization has contributed to a sense of urban ubiquity in youth and childhood studies. Urban lives are seen as the norm and as the spaces in which new developments and trends occur. Recently researchers have drawn attention to the tendency for young people and children in nonmetropolitan areas to be characterized as a ubiquitous "other" (see, e.g., Cuervo and Wyn 2012; Farrugia 2014; Hopkins and Pain 2007). As Farrugia (2014) argues, the assumption that "new" youth and childhood is forged in the metropolis has obscured the impact of global processes on rural areas (including new patterns of migration that build links between communities in rural and urban areas and the application of new technologies to enterprises in rural areas).

Urbanization has significant implications for children and young people's relationships with place, and for the temporal complexities that they have to manage in locations where life is "speeded up" (Rosa 2013; Woodman 2012).

The process of urbanization has been especially striking in some Asian countries, with 60 % of the world's population living in the Asia-Pacific region (around 4.3 billion in 2013) (UNESCAP 2013, p. 1). More than half of the world's megacities (i.e., 13 out of 22) are found in Asia and the Pacific, and seven of the world's ten most populated cities (i.e., Tokyo, Delhi, Shanghai, Mumbai, Beijing, Dhaka, and Kolkata) are in the Asia-Pacific region. These megacities are drivers of regional and global economic activity (UNESCAP 2013). Research on the implications of these developments in the Asia-Pacific region for children and young people will be at the forefront of knowledge about the impact of changing social conditions and the nature of childhood and youth.

One of the emerging areas of scholarship that is directly relevant to childhood and youth studies is the development and impact of new forms of inequality. A UNICEF report (2011, p. vii) notes that the world's top 20 % of the population enjoys 70 % of total income and the world's richest quintile gets 80 % of global income. This report notes that children and young people are overrepresented in the lowest groupings, with approximately 50 % of the world's children and young people living below the \$2-a-day poverty line. These developments involve new dynamics that interact with and overlay older dynamics and processes. This means that youth researchers need to be especially reflexive about their uses of theories and concepts.

To understand the ways in which these developments impact on who and what it is possible for children and young people to be and become, it is important to hold on to the relationship between biography and society, conceptualized as the triple helix of youth analysis: social change, individual transition, and personal identity (White and Wyn 2012). These elements are integral to understanding the connectedness of individual and society and of the relevance of place, time, and biography.

In the following section, I turn to the question of how the concepts we use both open up and obscure possibilities for analysis, creating youth and childhood as the objects of our research and defining the nature of problems and solutions. In seeking to employ frameworks that enable an understanding of the connectedness of childhood and youth with social conditions, it is important to be reflexive about the work that concepts do.

"Fields" of Knowledge

Bourdieu's notion of field provides a framework for understanding how concepts are being used and how one field influences another, despite their different senses of project (Bourdieu 1998). As discussed earlier in this chapter, field is a structured and relatively autonomous space with its own logics and practices. The discussion of the early youth research conducted by W. F. Connell and colleagues in Australia in the 1980s and in the 1970s provides an example of the significance of developmental psychology in laying out the logic of childhood and youth as discrete developmental phases of life. These phases have developmental milestones attached to them which, if not completed correctly, can be deleterious for the achievement of maturity in adulthood (Brown 2004). This logic leads to a range

of practices, including the identification of risks and the creation of interventions in young people's lives (see France 2007), a logic that is especially central to much of the research and policy on children's and young people's health and well-being (see Cahill's chapter titled "► [Approaches to Understanding Youth Well-Being](#)" (Chap. 7) in this collection).

An alternative logic through which childhood and youth are "known" is a sociocultural approach, which identifies childhood and youth as a product of social context. The logic of this approach is that different experiences of childhood and youth are made possible by the social, economic, and political conditions under which people are living, but childhood and youth do not exist as *a priori* entities outside of their location in place, space, and time. Cahill, in this collection, refers to this as an ecological approach, because it focuses attention on the contextual factors that either enable or limit children and young people's well-being. Pattman (also in this collection) discusses the ways in which the research process itself produces different ways of knowing children and young people.

A brief consideration of the concepts of identity and peer group, both of which are central to developmental psychology and to sociocultural approaches, reveals influence across these fields and demonstrates the significant legacy of developmental psychology to studies of childhood and youth. This makes visible the ongoing efforts by researchers to "know" childhood and youth. The concept of peer group has a central role within developmental psychology. It contributes to the conceptualization of identity as a process occurring during childhood and youth and that positions young people as adults in the making. It plays a significant role in theories of identity development leading to the formation of an adult identity. From this perspective, adolescence is a risky time, and peers constitute a necessary, but potentially dangerous influence. The idea of the peer group is integral to the logic that becoming adult involves a process of becoming independent from the family. Peer groups have the potential to divert individuals away from (positive) family influences on the development of the mature identity, and can lead young people into "frivolous and delinquent activity with patterns of interaction that undermine autonomy and self esteem" (Brown 2004, p. 363). Interestingly, although the development of a mature adult identity is seen as a universal developmental task of youth, there is a degree of voluntarism in this process, because the literature often characterizes young people as "experimenting" with different possible identities, before settling on their adult self (see, e.g., Northcote 2006 and Gilbert 2007). Identity is regarded as inherently unstable until adulthood has been reached.

The idea of identity as fixed, of youth as a process of becoming adult, and of the peer group as a significant source of influence in this process (alongside family) has made a powerful impact on youth research. For one thing, it has driven a research focus on peer relations almost to the exclusion of family within youth research (Gillies 2000; Wyn et al. 2012), and it has exerted a powerful influence on other fields within youth research, particularly in relation to the conceptualization of identity as fixed and youth and childhood as deficit versions of adulthood.

Sociological research on youth also constitutes a distinctive field, in Bourdieu's terms, with its own sets of assumptions, internal logics, and structures. Although in

much sociological research the idea of peer group is a tool for understanding “becoming adult,” recent work draws on the idea of peer group to refer to collective rather than individual practices of identity, which are seen as relatively fluid, connecting to contexts and social relations as much as to individuals. Drawing on the poststructuralist theorists including Butler (1990, 2000) and Davies (2004, 2006), research on childhood and youth argues that identity as a fixed property of individuals is a fiction, maintained through repetitive performances (Hey 2006) and that identity only exists at the point of action (Nayak and Kehily 2006). From this perspective, peer groups are one medium through which preexisting subject positions are practiced and modified. Identity is performed and practiced, recognized and denied in social settings, and forged within limited, possible subject positions that are historically and locationally specific. This conceptualization of identity locates it within social relations and practices rather than within individuals. Hence the peer group is an important reference point for these performances, but other kinds of social relations are also seen to be significant, including interactions with others in institutional settings such as schools (Youdell 2006) and workplaces (Stokes and Wyn 2007).

Sociological uses of the concept of the peer group ask questions about the resources that are used to enable identity performances. Kehily and Nayak (2008), for example, analyze the ways in which young women appropriate global cultural symbols to enable identity performances about womanhood. Framed through this lens, peer groups are integral to the process of subjectification – the process through which subjecthood is made possible (Davies 2006). The focus is not on how subjects are made but on how peer group practices create the fiction that there is a fixed identity to be made.

This approach makes the unstable nature of identities and the necessity to enact identity performances throughout life visible, and in so doing, enhances analysis of the changing meaning of childhood, youth, and adulthood within local and global contexts. This link to changing social contexts encourages awareness of “new” identities in an era where peers can be global and virtual as well as local (Kehily and Nayak 2008). This analysis of “thinking” about children and young people is a microcosm of larger distinctions with childhood and youth studies and is captured through the idea of categorical and relational approaches.

Categories, Relationships, and Metaphors

One way to understand what the concepts we use invite us to understand and what they obscure from our view is to take a closer look at the metaphors they draw on (for an extended discussion of this, see Cuervo and Wyn 2014). Metaphors enable us to understand our social world through the use of terms previously used for other things, because of a perceived similarity between them (Leary 1995). The new context extends the meaning of the original word, enabling us to see an aspect of social relationships that was not previously apparent, sharpening an existing focus. The metaphoric quality of theories has

nothing to do with “surface” similarities between a concept and what it represents (Brown 1976) – theories can only be more or less useful.

As Helen Cahill demonstrates her chapter in this collection titled “► [Approaches to Understanding Youth Well-Being](#)” (Chap. 7) metaphors provide a tool for exploring the explicit concepts and implicit assumptions within different approaches. Cahill draws attention to the differing “meta-messages” inscribed in approaches to young people’s well-being, which she describes as “the balance,” “the adventure tourist,” “the frog in the pond,” and “the performer.” The metaphor of “the balance,” for example, highlights the binary between risk and protective factors and behaviors in young people’s lives and sees well-being as a struggle for balance in life. The metaphor of “the frog in the pond” describes the assumptions underpinning ecological models of youth well-being and emphasizes the complex interrelationships and flows that influence young people’s well-being.

Over time, “master metaphors” come to dominate across fields. One of these is the master metaphor of transitions, which has widespread use within youth and childhood studies and in the related fields of education and labor market studies. The idea of transition dominates thinking about children and youth in the fields of education and health through a focus on normative progressions (some of which are through institutional processes and some are individual milestones, sanctioned by institutions). As identified above, transitions can be understood as a form of transition regime – normative institutional trajectories that become naturalized in thinking about children and young people. This approach imagines youth and childhood as a category, a space that is bounded by age through which people pass on the way to adulthood. For this reason, this approach is also sometimes referred to as “youth-as-transition,” since it is the immature, risk-laden, and deficit aspects of children and young people’s lives that come to the fore.

Because the institutional pathways are naturalized (or unquestioned) from this perspective, the focus moves (naturally) to identify and categorize those who do not conform (e.g., not in education, employment, or training or NEET) with the goal of bringing them into normative pathways (see OECD 2013). As Hayes (2011) explains in her study of reconnecting marginalized young people to learning, this logic fails to recognize that the institutionalized pathways, experienced as isolated and inflexible, alienate and marginalize young people. A transition approach also dominates research on children and young people’s health and well-being. It is common for health researchers to seek the precursors in a causal chain of health-related behaviors so that risk factors across the relevant populations can be identified and interventions put in place. This is discussed in detail in a number of chapters in the section of this handbook titled “► [Approaches to Understanding Youth Well-Being](#)” (Chap. 7).

The metaphor of transitions, which positions youth and childhood as a space through which children and young people travel, has very strong synergies with developmental approaches. This is evident in the assumption that childhood and youth are deficit, incomplete, and risky and that this is resolved on the completion of the “journey” when adulthood (independence and employment) is reached. Through its integration into policy frameworks, this approach has taken on the

quality of orthodoxy – a taken-for-granted way of framing childhood and youth. Although this approach focuses on categories, this focus is on individual characteristics (such as poor school performance or poor health), not on the wider social dynamics that create these characteristics. An example is the focus on NEET in OECD youth policies (2013). These formative policy documents take little account of the wider realities of precarious work and the destabilizing effect this has on families and communities, to focus with ever-increasing dedication to creating the “pathways” that will return NEETS to the education and training institutional pathways that are assumed to benefit them.

Discussing the parallel tendency within childhood studies, Walkerdine (2009) comments that the maintenance of a dualistic view, with sociological approaches on one side and psychological approaches on the other, has become orthodoxy. As she points out, there are two unhelpful effects of this dualism. One is that sociological accounts leave no room for a discussion of the psychological, and the other is that developmental psychology is replaced by hard “facts” derived from neuroscience. This has contributed to a conceptual cul-de-sac or dead end, where dualisms are maintained and the kind of reworking of psychological and sociological concepts that would engage with the limits and possibilities of master metaphors is hampered (Walkerdine 2009, p. 113). Positive psychology, with its emphasis on cognitive processes, has filled this gap.

A relational metaphor, which focuses on interrelationships, connection, and belonging, positions children and youth within their social context. A relational metaphor draws on a range of theories that see age as a social process and relationship (as argued by Lesko 1996 and Blatterer 2007). Relational metaphors support important theoretical traditions from Bourdieu, whose work has been dedicated to understanding how individuals “belong” to families, communities, and sectors of their society through the complex interrelationships of identity and society. Similarly, actor-network theories and the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) are focused on the interrelationships that are taken for granted or obscured by a focus on institutional processes. These approaches focus instead on the dynamic patterns of action and connection that create social realities. The term “assemblage” highlights the role of materials (e.g., places or language) as well as people in the associations that make lives. This is illustrated in the chapter by Nancy Lesko, Mary Ann Chacko, and Shenila Khoja-Moolji. Their discussion of “empowered girls” explicitly shifts away from an analysis of structured positions and the relationships between these (as a series or trajectory through a biographical pattern) to focus instead on the becoming process itself, as an assemblage. They argue that the idea of “empowered girls” exists as an “effect” that positions young women in the West as an ideal and young women in Muslim countries as “other.”

Similarly, Kylie Smith, in this section of the handbook, also draws on the relational metaphor of rhizomes (following Deleuze and Guattari) to deconstruct discourses of the “ideal” childhood in poststructuralist and postcolonial accounts of childhood. Here too, the focus is on what she calls “the middle” rather than the boundaries that provide the basis for categorizations of individuals, or patterns based on institutional trajectories.

A relational metaphor is also apparent in the emerging interest in young people's mobilities (Rizvi 2012), in the ways in which young people are connected to spaces and places (Massey 1998), and in the significance of belonging to a generation (Wyn and Woodman 2006). Research using a relational metaphor throws new light on patterns of inequality that have been well documented in research on youth transitions through school and into work. As the work of Farrugia and Watson (2011) and MacLean (2011) show, young people who are the most disadvantaged and marginalized from education and employment often work the hardest to belong. However, their struggles to perform the subject positions of "their times," drawing on the resources available to them, are not recognized within research and policy frames that focus on youth as a space of transition through normative trajectories.

Conclusion and Future Directions

In drawing this chapter to a close, I return to the issue of inequality. As I have discussed briefly above, new patterns of inequality are emerging, within countries and between countries, while older patterns of inequality remain, both of which impact directly on the possibilities for children and young people. Within many developed countries, including Australia, patterns of disadvantage in education, for example, have become entrenched. In Australia, children and young people from poor families, those who live in rural areas, and young Indigenous people remain the most disadvantaged in educational outcomes and in the labor market, and their health is significantly worse (AIHW 2012; FYA 2012). Increasingly sophisticated approaches to the measurement of the achievement of transition markers (such as school readiness, school completion, academic achievement, labor market engagement) have done little to address entrenched patterns of disadvantage. This suggests that in part, the failure to address inequality is linked to dominant policy frameworks and concepts that are incapable of addressing such strong historical patterns of inequality, because these concepts lead us to measure the wrong things, or not enough of the right things. Perhaps this is a call to resist orthodoxy in research and policy – and it may be that we are witnessing a response to this sense that dominant frameworks have not served us well.

One of the claims of relational analyses is the visibility given to "agency" – empowerment and voice, against the categorical approaches that are about children and young people. This has been especially actively pursued in the field of childhood and youth studies. Examples are found in the work of MacNaughton and Smith (2009), and in the chapter by Nicola Taylor and Anne Smith in this section. Both identify how children know their worlds and can be central to decision-making, and a significant body of work within youth studies analyzes how young people can be participants in learning, in well-being, and in the building of strong civic life.

In youth studies, many researchers have focussed on girlhood as a "new" phenomenon. As Nancy Lesko, Mary Ann Chacko, and Shenila S. Khoja-Moolji argue in this section, girl power is a progress narrative that enices, energizes, and focuses attention. It is a relational narrative, in which Western (white and

middle class) ideas of individual agency, individualization, and ambition are wished on “other” girls.

These authors argue that postfeminism mixes feminist and antifeminist discourses, policies, and affects along highly individualized dimensions. Within these postfeminist understandings, girl power suggests that gender issues in education in developed countries have been solved, that girl success is simple and formulaic regardless of setting, and that young women, who do not become ambitious and assertive, are responsible for their failures (Ringrose 2013). These elements represent an “individualistic turn,” drawing on a “positive” interpretation of developmental psychology, drawing on the example of “flow” – the ultimate innately positive psychic experience – it’s all about personal development and growth through cognitive processes.

In conclusion, this analysis returns to the influence of fields, through sets of discourses and concepts that come to dominate thinking and practice. The answer to the questions – who are, could, and should children and young people be or become and what kind of society does this presume – requires a critical understanding of the ways in which biography and history intersect in thinking about children and young people.

The answer also requires an understanding of the connectedness of individual and society, and of the relevance of place, time, and biography that shape the possibilities for being and the meaning and experience of childhood and youth. Perhaps most importantly, in a time of unprecedented inequality, it is important to use concepts that enable us to grasp the impact of new inequalities on the experience and meaning of childhood and youth.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Approaches to Understanding Youth Well-Being](#)
- ▶ [Bodies: Corporeality and Embodiment in Childhood and Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [Childhood and Youth Citizenship](#)
- ▶ [Critical Moments? The Importance of Timing in Young People’s Narratives of Transition](#)
- ▶ [Current Debates in Social Justice and Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [Deconstructing Discourses to Rupture Fairytales of the “Ideal” Childhood](#)
- ▶ [Gender Identity, Intergenerational Dynamics, and Educational Aspirations: Young Women’s Hopes for the Future](#)
- ▶ [Girls’ Embodied Experiences of Media Images](#)
- ▶ [Space and Place in Studies of Childhood and Youth](#)
- ▶ [The Politics of Non-belonging in the Developing World](#)
- ▶ [The Promises of Empowered Girls](#)
- ▶ [Thinking About Children: How Does It Influence Policy and Practice?](#)
- ▶ [Unemployment, Insecurity, and Poor Work: Young Adults in the New Economy](#)
- ▶ [Ways of Thinking About Young People in Participatory Interview Research](#)
- ▶ [Young People, Identity, Class, and the Family](#)

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Deconstructing Discourses to Rupture Fairytales of the “Ideal” Childhood

2

Kylie Smith

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Abstract

Discourses of childhood represent a wide range of ideas about who children are and can be, as well as how they should and could live their lives. Contemporary discourses of childhood privilege understandings of the innocent and/or the developing child. These discourses create singular understandings and representations, fairytales of what an “ideal” childhood should and can be. This chapter shows how rhizoanalysis can be used to deconstruct how we think about childhood and present alternative modes of thought – and therefore possibilities for children to operate within and perform multiple childhoods.

The aim of this chapter is to contest forms of domination within understandings of childhood to create respect for diverse cultural childhoods. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of rhizoanalysis, this chapter will map current discourses of childhood and trace poststructural and postcolonial theories over this mapping. In doing this the aim is to create ruptures and “new lines of flight” to make visible other fairer identity discourses for children and childhood. Rhizomes are about mapping new or unknown lines and entry points, not tracing old lines or patterns (Alvermann 2000; Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

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Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue that when mapping, there is no starting point or ending rather they discuss middles. To begin to examine this mapping and the complexity, a tracing is placed over the top so that deviations, breaks, or ruptures can be identified and what the effects of these are can be examined within the text (Alvermann 2000; Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Poststructural and postcolonial theories are used to create these ruptures because they recognize childhood as historically, politically, and socially constructed. It is argued that within these epistemological readings, childhood is multiple, shifting, contingent, contradictory, and strategic. Poststructural and postcolonial theories also engage with how power operates within and through discourses to silence and marginalize the “other.”

Introduction

Today children everywhere are thought of as normal. As such common sense is redolent with images and understandings that contrive to produce the child not just as normal but also as utterly natural. (Jenks 2005, p. 53)

Understandings of childhood as “normal” and “natural” can be traced back to 1762 in the work by Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Taylor 2013; Rousseau 2003). As Osgood (2012) points out, the idea of childhood as normal and natural romanticizes the early years of a person’s life as unproblematic, leisurely, and free of decision making, where adults protect children’s innocence from the corrupt (adult) world “out there” and teach and guide them to be successful (productive) adults (Osgood 2012). This marks the child as being separate from the adult world (society), who in early childhood does not have the cognitive capacity or lived experiences to make rational and reasonable decisions about what is or could happen to them. From this perspective, the adult’s role is to support the child from birth to adulthood to develop skills and knowledge “appropriate” to their age so that they can learn to become successful adults/citizens following their childhood. Rolfe (2008) argues that within this discourse, the adult’s role is also to act in the child’s “best interests” making decisions on their behalf to protect the child. To experience the adult world too soon would result in the child “losing their innocence” and in turn “losing their childhood.” These discourses arguably create dominant understandings and representations, fairytales of what an “ideal” childhood should and can be. As Cannella (1997) and many others have discussed, these discourses construct childhood as a universal stage of life, where the process of childhood is through the development of a predetermined and linear trajectory toward youth and then on to adulthood. This means that a child’s life or childhood is seen and assessed as “good,” “stable,” or “successful” if they are protected from harm, live within the family unit, learn and develop within age-appropriate stages, and attend institutions such as preschools and schools and are provided with maternal-child and health services that monitor, support, and intervene in the child’s progression through childhood. Where a child’s lived experiences deviate from this trajectory or environments such as working to support the family instead of attending school or dealing with an abusive event(s), a child’s childhood is seen

as “lost.” This notion of lost childhood continues to reinscribe the understanding of a singular childhood, that is, that there is only one “right” way to have a “good” childhood. To consider how this hegemonic discourse can be deconstructed, this chapter draws on Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of rhizomatics to make visible dominant childhood identities that privilege Western middle-class childhoods and “othering” childhoods that do not fit into these structures and understandings (Cannella and Viruru 2004).

Constructions of Childhood

Aries’ (1962) thesis examined the historical construction of childhood arguing that the separation and distinction between child and adult as human categories took place between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries. The study of childhood, termed “childhood studies,” has grown through individual disciplines such as education, sociology, psychology, medicine, literature, and history (see Corsaro 1997; James and Prout 1997; Qvortrup et al. 1994; Mayall 2002, 2013; Woodhead 2003), with an interdisciplinary approach emerging in the 1980s (Prout 2005). During the twentieth century, Western categories within childhood that mark and name periods of a child’s life have increased and changed. These categories mark children’s different linear developmental progressions based on age and capacity (see Fig. 1).

Development theories developed in the middle of the twentieth century identified young children as innocent and in need of protection until they were old and mature enough to deal with the “harsh” realities of the world. In the 1990s the rationale behind studying childhood was to understand the lives and experiences of children and to challenge the singular notion of the innocent child. Through this work the concept and recognition of children’s agency and capacities to actively participate in the world was recognized. Some developmental theories recognized children’s agency as young children developed cognitive skills into their teens and young adulthood (see Piaget 1977). Bronfenbrenner’s ecological approach to human development recognized the value and influence of relationships for children with and between their environments (such as home, the neighborhood, institutions, and social networks) and the impact on children’s well-being, development, and capacity to engage with the world. Within these developmental understandings of the child, the adult was tasked with creating and overseeing “appropriate” environments, activities, and topics that created environments to stimulate and scaffold the child’s learning and development but within the



Fig. 1 Western categories of childhood

confines of what was deemed by adults as appropriate for the age of the child (see ► [Chap. 1, “Thinking About Childhood and Youth”](#) in this section for an analysis of how developmental theories impact on thinking about children and youth). This adult direction or intervention supports the child to develop the cognitive skills to be able to make informed decisions about himself/herself as he/she matures, therefore protecting the child from engaging with inappropriate activities. This idea of innocence and dependency alongside agency became a binary with concerns that children were growing up too fast and “losing their childhood.” This meant that children were understood as either innocent or agentic.

The twentieth century was also a period of neoliberal policy reform within countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand (Angus 2012) where the focus was on the future success of the community (and country). According to this philosophy, which continues to prevail today, the economic success of a country rests on the site of the individual, and achieving this success is through workforce participation and productivity (Angus 2012; Comber and Nixon 2009). From this perspective, the individual child is primarily of value as a future citizen, creating an imperative to monitor and research childhood. This approach has in turn spawned an industry that maps and tracks the progress of children against normative standards of development, creating the rationale for interventions that prevent nonnormative development or that enable those who have gone “off track” to be returned to the mainstream. As Popkiwitz writes about approaches to childhood at this time:

The health and the sanctity of the child are said to be pivotal for national preservation, social regeneration, and the progress of humankind. (Popkiwitz 2003, p. 35)

Building on the idea of national preservation, the neoliberal turn focuses on the site of the individual to ensure the development of a productive citizen who contributes to the economic stability of society or a nation. Institutions such as education work to mold the child as a future citizen who contributes to the economy within a local and global market. McLaren and Farahmandpur (2004) argue that global capitalism has become the new imperialism and that this form of imperialism has had a huge impact on children and particularly education, as education is an institution that shapes and forms the child and how the child performs their childhood. This means that what knowledge children learn in the curriculum, how they are tested and assessed, and what behaviors and activities outside of school are deemed as appropriate are geared to future success both within Australia and internationally.

Childhood studies intensified in the 1990s, precipitated particularly in the United Kingdom by the death of James Bulger who was killed in February 1993 in Kirkby, Merseyside, England, by two 10-year-old children, Jon Venables and Robert Thompson. This case caused social outrage imbedded in the binary of the innocent/evil child. Media representation and the legal handling of this case depicted James’ killers as “evil” and raised questions about what type of children being produced today. This “crisis” in childhood has supported a more cross-disciplinary exploration of childhood; however the dominant discourses continue to privilege the child as innocent (see ► [Chap. 4, “Thinking About Children: How Does It Influence Policy and Practice?”](#))

and “Deconstructing Discourses to Rupture Fairytales of the ‘Ideal’ Childhood” in this collection). Where this innocence is not evident then moral panic occurs. This is particularly evident in the public discourse around digital technologies. For example, contemporary commentator Sue Palmer in her writing (2006) *Toxic Childhood: How the Modern World is Damaging our Children and What We Can Do About It* focuses attention on the digital age arguing that technology has affected cultural beliefs and practices which are “damaging the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children” (cited in Kehily 2013, p. 8). Researchers such as James et al. (1998), Mayall (2002), Alderson (1995), and Woodhead (1997, 1999) began exploring ways that sociology and writings such as Giddens (1991) might open up spaces to understand the child and their capacities, skills, knowledge, and identities differently. This work created a dialogue between researchers, teachers, medical practitioners, lawyers, and policy makers (and others) around the need for a more interdisciplinary approach to understanding childhood, highlighting the need to engage with children to seek their views and opinions as experts in their own lives. In many cases this work was still in the pursuit of understanding what “the ideal” childhood is or should be and developing policies and programs to “fix” childhoods or environments that might lead to the “loss” of childhood.

There is an emerging consensus within childhood studies that the binaries of adult/child and innocent/evil are unhelpful. An expanding body of research and literature seeks to disrupt these binaries and the contemporary discourses of childhood that privilege the Western minority world constructions of childhood as innocent and/or developing. Burman (2008) and Wyness (2000) contested the stranglehold of developmental psychology as a frame for understanding children and childhood raising questions about how else a child and childhood might be understood. To disrupt contemporary discourses of childhood, scholars are drawing on postmodern theories (e.g., feminist poststructuralist theories, critical race theories, and postcolonial theories) to explore the multiplicity of childhood(s) and children’s identities. Cannella and Viruru (2004), in their research, draw on postcolonial theories to deconstruct imperial capitalist powers that dominate and colonize childhoods to create space to explore and respect diverse cultural knowledge. For example, MacNaughton (2005), drawing on feminist poststructuralist theories in her research, examines the multiplicity of children’s identities and the intersectionality of gender, sexuality, “race,” culture, class, ability and religion, and the impact and complexity of children’s performance of childhood. Smith (2013), drawing on the work from the Deleuze and Guattari (1987) concept of rhizomatics, explores the shifting, contingent, strategic, and political performances of childhood.

Rhizomatic Childhood(s)

Early childhood poststructuralist thinkers such as MacNaughton (2005), Cannella (1997), Robinson and Jones Diaz (2006), and Osgood (2012) have argued that childhood is historically, politically, and socially constructed and that understandings of childhood are multiple, shifting, contingent, and contextual.

Childhood, the innovation of adults, affects adult needs and adult fears quite as much as it signifies the absences of adulthood. In the course of history children have been glorified, patronised, ignored or held in contempt depending upon the cultural assumptions of adults. (Walther 1979, p. 64 cited in Giltin, p. 36)

Dominant childhood discourses create a consensus about who the child is and how they should engage with the world. Consensus is possible through language and its meaning. How that agreement is reached will be different depending on the discourse. Discourses may include scientific understandings of a positivist discourse or what Habermas (1979) called communicative interaction within critical theory discourses. Habermas acknowledged the constraints and difficulties in reaching a consensus on the nature and meaning of social arrangements or processes. He argued that when the spoken word is understood, the speaker is genuine, the information or knowledge that is put forward is true, and, within the group debating the issue, there can be agreement upon the normative knowledge. Under these conditions, consensus is achievable (Habermas 1979). However, from a poststructuralist perspective, the idea of consensus fails to recognize that knowledge and power cannot be separated and hence “true” consensus is never possible (Cherryholmes 1988; Foucault 1997). The illusion of consensus is achieved by some groups remaining silent or “agreeing” because they believe it to be strategically and politically beneficial and accept the dominant ideology or discourse (Davies 2003). Lyotard (1979) argued that this dissensus creates practices of justice as seen when he wrote:

Consensus has become an outmoded and suspect value. But justice as a value is neither outmoded nor suspect. We must thus arrive at an idea and practice of justice that is not linked to that of consensus. (Lyotard 1979, p. 66)

To move from a totalizing of knowledge and break the surface appearance of consensus about who the child is is to create dissensus, illuminating the multiple realities of childhood. In diverse contexts there is a need to create ruptures in the dominant discourses of childhood to create “new lines of flight” that open up new ways of knowing the child (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

The concept of rhizomatics is a useful tool for opening up new ways of understanding childhood (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explain that multiplicity is not about the quantity of a subject or object, in this case the number of images of childhood, but rather the number of epistemological understandings. They write:

Multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature. (p. 8)

The principle of multiplicity examines the complexity of how a person speaks and acts and further how the listener hears and sees these words and performance. Multiplicity challenges a notion of universal truths and questions the possibility of measurement (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; MacNaughton 2005). From this poststructuralist perspective, the child and childhood cannot be defined or predicted (Sellers 2013; MacNaughton 2005; Smith 2007).

A rhizome can take on many forms such as a root system or burrows. For example, a tree progresses in a linear development pattern from the root system to the trunk, branches, and out to the leaves, which can be paralleled with understandings of linear development of the child. The progression or growth of a tree can be monitored, measured, and tracked. Where growth appears stunted, more water or fertilizer can be added to progress growth or the tree dug up and replanted in a more “nurturing environment” with better or different light. Where growth of the trunk or branches is not linear, stakes can be used to intervene, support, and (re) direct growth on the “correct” path. However a plant like an agapanthus, which is a rhizome, has a root system with no pattern of growth. The root system is unpredictable, with multiple entry points, rather than a starting or beginning point that can grow back into each other (Alvermann 2000; Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Lines are not linear or predictable. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue that there are lines of “articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories: but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization” (p. 3). Sellers (2013) explains rhizomes as ways to create chaotic understandings:

They open (to) a chaotic or differently ordered approach to thinking, writing and analysing research data, for example, as thoughts and ideas shift, (re)turn, (re)form (unlikely) connections, move in unexpected directions, perform surprises. (p. 11)

This is done through the investigation of language or discourses by examining what a text “does and how it connects with other things (including its reader, its author, its literary and non-literary context)” (Grosz 1994, p. 199).

Each point of a rhizome system is connected to another point within the system in nonhierarchical ways; therefore it is not possible to differentiate if one point came before or after another (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). When considering a rhizome as a metaphor for how a child develops and learns, it provides an image of how the child grows in diverse patterns and continually develops, inscribes, and reinscribes meaning through language, power relations, and epistemological knowledge. While not specifically related to the child and childhood, Deleuze and Guattari did write about this perpetually and with complexity. Deleuze and Guattari argued that:

A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggle. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 7)

To understand the process of creating new lines of flight to disrupt dominant Western concepts of the innocent child, it is helpful to draw on metaphors drawn from cartography and decalomania. Cartography and decalomania are about mapping new or unknown lines and entry points. Rhizoanalysis uses the mapping to trace over the top new text to create a break or rupture to illuminate questions and complexity within the text (Smith and Campbell 2014; Davis et al. 2009; Alvermann 2000; Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Smith 2013). This mapping is not a tracing which documents or re-documents old lines or patterns (Alvermann 2000; Deleuze and Guattari 1987). To ensure that this type

of retracing does not occur and that dominant discourses are not reinscribed, it is vital that texts are chosen with political intent. The intent of a rhizoanalysis is to use text (written, verbal, body (see ► [Chap. 21, “Performative Pedagogy: Poststructural Theory as a Tool to Engage in Identity Work Within a Youth-Led HIV Prevention Program”](#))) images), discourses, and theory to “cast a shadow” over mapped text to create tracings that disrupt and challenge what has been mapped. Randomly chosen text or choosing text that reflects dominating discourses of childhood would simply remap the epistemology of the child (Davis et al. 2009). This mapping constitutes and reconstitutes knowledge about the child and his/her world. New lines of flight make visible “other” ways of understanding childhood not to create a “new truth” but to complicate, interrogate, and disrupt heterogeneous discourses. This de-territorialization is an ongoing endeavor to glimpse the shifting, changing, and political operation of childhood(s). Sellers (2013) writes:

Through this ongoing engaging with a variation of variables, they generate circles of di/co/vergence so that reading the plateaus can start anywhere and be linked to any others – plateaus be(com)ing, (re)constituting an assemblage, connecting (within) multiplicities, interrupted and irrupting elsewhere. (p. 15)

There is a growing body of work across the age range of childhood that is drawing on rhizoanalysis to disrupt understandings of childhood. Davis et al. (2009) used rhizoanalysis to investigate preschool children’s (aged 3–4 years) racialized identities. This research explored how discourses of whiteness construct and reconstruct identities and possibilities for children and how the politics of “race” privileges white Western childhood identities. Sellers (2013) also drew on rhizome concepts in early childhood to de-territorialize to interpret and reinterpret children’s relationships with curriculum. Leafgren (2009) disrupted the binary of obedient/disobedient child in the kindergarten classroom (first year of primary school in the United States of America) to take a new line of flight to understanding children behaviors in the classroom in multiple ways. Leafgren (2009) observed social interactions and children’s behaviors during these interactions in the everyday kindergarten classroom. Through these observations, Leafgren identified the societal developmental norms and expectations that marked the children’s behaviors as disobedience or obedience. To deconstruct and disrupt these dominant discourses of the “difficult” or “disobedient” child, she layered discourses and texts from spirituality to take a new line of flight or another direction/reading of events. This continues to remap and reinscribe any other childhood(s) such as the child worker, and the child as head of the family as deficit. This ignites debate and often an understanding for the need for adult intervention to ensure that there is no “loss of childhood” or that childhood is restored. This meant that the child(ren) was also seen as a contributor and carer in the classroom rather than only in a negative light. Alvermann (2000) used rhizoanalysis to investigate how young people’s actions and interactions with peers and adults were influenced by institutional and societal contexts. In this work Alvermann (2000) researched with adolescents in a “Read and Talk Club” where she used rhizoanalysis to map and trace adolescents’

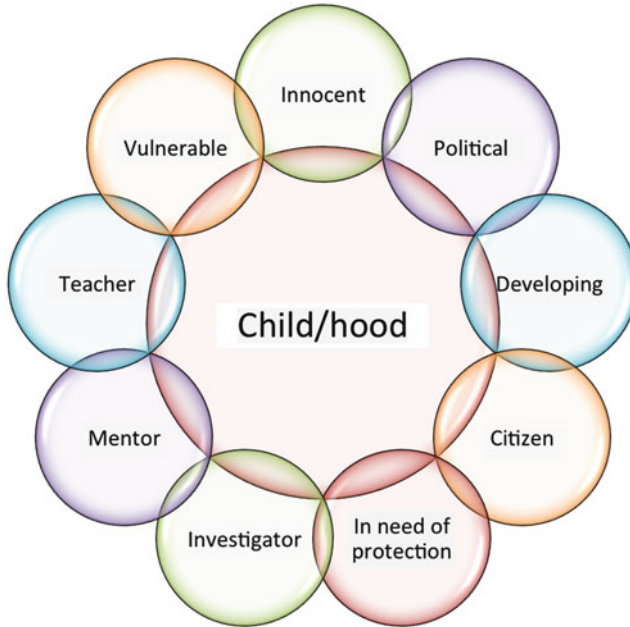


Fig. 2 Multiplicity of childhood

conversations and interpretations of readings. She then explored connections to popular culture to investigate social networks within the research group. The new lines of flight suggested in this research focused on new ways of seeing and engaging in and through educational identities. Through this research Alvermann (2000) found that public libraries created a safe place for adolescents and adults to experiment with alternative ways to engage in educational or school-like dialogue and debate. Alvermann (2000) also found that the public library provided a “climate of acceptance” (p. 115), and those adolescents were successful at exploring, developing, and performing new subjectivities (ways of speaking and acting) through this dialogue and debate.

Rhizomatic childhood(s) starts to illuminate what Siln (1995) describes as the “multiple realities in which they [children] live in” (p. 51). The multiple realities recognize children as innocent, in need of protection, developing, *and* rather than *or* in different moments experts, parents, caregivers, political activists, employee, etc. (see Fig. 2). These childhoods are partial, ever changing, and contextual within a moment and can shift at any point without prediction or planning.

Drawing on postcolonial text creates ruptures in how childhood is essentialized. Essentialism means that characteristics of a particular group become understood as natural and normal for all in that group and that these characteristics or behaviors are fixed in understanding who and what the group is (Robinson and Jones Diaz 2006).

Viruru (2005) links colonization closely with the assessment, monitoring, and interventions within childhood. She argues:

The idea of colonialism, as has been pointed out, can be said to have been modeled on particularly authoritative and repressive models of child rearing. Furthermore, dominant ideologies of how children grow and develop have become another of colonialism's truths that permit no questioning, and that is imposed unhesitatingly upon people around the world for their own good. The idea that 'real' truth exists somewhere far away, that the privileged can visit, learn and take back home continues. (p. 16)

Drawing on postcolonial theories supports the recognition of the childhoods that are not only (if any childhood is whole) about play, leisure, school, and vulnerability. Postcolonial theories recognize that there are multiple childhoods which include areas such as work and parenting and that the life of this child is not inferior or "primitive." For example, in Smith's (2003) doctoral thesis in an early childhood classroom in Australia, concern was being raised where a child aged 11 months was not crawling or appearing to develop skills to crawl. Children between the age of 6 and 10 months would be expected to be crawling under the discourses of educational development (Berk 1997). The family had recently arrived from Tanzania to study in Australia.

When layered text from postcolonial theories was traced over the developmental text of "crawling," a rupture was to be created to break or shatter the white Western developmental "norms" where a child is assessed as delayed and in need of intervention and questions to support a "new line of flight" through discourses that examine and question the cultural knowledge and expectations of mobility and independence. (See ► [Chap. 5, "The Politics of Non-belonging in the Developing World"](#) in this section for an in-depth analysis of the lack of fit between dominant, Western concepts in youth and childhood studies and the lives of non-Western children and young people). The family background, history, and cultural context and texts were about the importance of carrying the child and keeping the child close and safe from the natural environment until the age of at least 12 months. The child was not delayed but encouraged not to be mobile yet. This was not an uninformed or "primitive" belief of raising and supporting childhood but a protective culturally appropriate practice.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Dahlberg et al. (1999) wrote:

From our postmodern perspective, there is no such thing as 'the child' or 'childhood', an essential being and state waiting to be discovered, defined and realized, so that we can say to ourselves and others 'that is how children are, that is what childhood is'. Instead, there are many children and many childhoods, each constructed by our 'understandings of childhood and what children are and should be.' (p. 43)

Understanding many childhoods is not enough. You can understand childhood in many ways, but in a singular Western childhood where the child is seen as young, innocent, and developing over time, any other childhoods are marginalized or

childhood is seen as “lost.” In this case alternative understandings of childhood are “othered.” “Other” childhoods are seen as inferior and in need of intervention, and binaries such as normal/abnormal, advantaged/disadvantaged, and innocent/evil will prevail. This continues to remap and reinscribe any other childhood(s) such as the child worker, the child as head of the family as deficit and ignite the need for intervention to ensure that there is no “loss of childhood” or that childhood is restored. Singular Western views of the child fail to respect childhood(s) that shift and navigate in a complex and changing world. Concepts of rhizomes where political texts are drawn on to create ruptures and new lines of flight that recognize multiple childhood(s) with multiple competing discourses help dismantle or tangle binaries. To create these new lines of flight, it is vital to be nomadic when choosing texts. These texts can be drawn from scholarly work, popular culture, and text written by children, particularly biographical work. Rupturing fairytales and romantic images of the child requires society to think about “and” not “or.” That means building rhizomes like that below that recognize the multiple realities and (un)realities of children.

Rhizomatic childhood(s) creates or respects diverse childhoods enabling questions such as:

- How might children’s knowledge and ideas across ages be taken up, listened to, and acted on in legal systems?
- How might children be supported and recognized as workers with expertise and capacity for financial independence?
- How might children with behaviors that challenge discourses of the innocent child be seen and understood differently? And how might adult actions and interactions change?
- What might a rhizome look like when constructed, (dis)mantled, and (re)constructed with children?
- What texts would children choose to create ruptures in dominant discourses of the child and create new lines of flight?

Rhizomatic childhoods open up possibilities to embrace and celebrate multiple, shifting childhoods that, rather than demonizing the child, their family, and community where a childhood is seen as lost, recognize the cultural context and changing world children live in. In turn rhizomatic childhoods recognize the skills and knowledge children develop and draw on in different ways and in different moments. This means children are recognized as current citizens rather than future citizens.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Childhood and Youth Citizenship](#)
- ▶ [Citizenship: Inclusion and Exclusion](#)
- ▶ [Girls’ Embodied Experiences of Media Images](#)
- ▶ [Indigenous Girls, Social Justice, and Schooling: Addressing Issues of Disadvantage](#)

- ▶ [Participating as Young Citizens in Diverse Communities](#)
- ▶ [Possibilities for Learning Between Childhoods and Youth in the Minority and Majority Worlds: Youth Transitions as an Example of Cross-World Dialogue](#)
- ▶ [We Need to Talk About Learning: Dialogue and Learning Amongst South African Youth](#)

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Abstract

Everyone loves empowered girls – those “can-do” girls who succeed in school, postpone motherhood, have a voice, star in athletics, and believe they can have it all. Empowered girls solve social problems from intergenerational poverty to traditional gender imbalances in leadership, residual sexism in occupations and schooling, and work-family tensions. Successful girls, and the women they will become, make us happy. This chapter inquires into *girl success* as a global object of desire and into what *empowered girls* promise. This analysis explores the ideas of girls that are mobilized and the affective connections around girls, gender, poverty, and success through an examination of two transnational campaigns, *Stand Up For Malala* and *She Can, You Can*, to inquire into the conceptualizations of specific girls’ empowerment.

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Introduction

One signal that *girl power* had arrived was its inclusion in the 2001 *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, which defined the term as:

Power exercised by girls; spec. a self-reliant attitude among girls and young women manifested in ambition, assertiveness, and individualism. Although also used more widely (esp. as a slogan), the term has been ... associated with popular music; most notably in the early 1990s with the briefly prominent 'riot girl' movement in the United States (cf. RIOT GIRL n.); then, in the late 1990s, with the British all-female group, The Spice Girls.

The *OED*'s emphasis on ambition, assertiveness, and individualism skews girl power toward particular girls. In contrast, Grossberg's (1992) definition of youth empowerment, "the generation of energy and passion, the construction of possibility" (p. 64), offers a more capacious definition that might go in many different directions; his idea of empowerment is not linked to specific, individual actions.

By what means and with what effects has girl power moved in the period 1990–2013 from an association with a Riot grrrl ethic and Spice Girls fandom to a universal and philanthropic good? While elements of girl power began in celebrity music, the conditions of girls' lives were also addressed in policy statements. For example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1988) and Millennium Development Goals (2000) promoted better access to education for girls. The 2009 World Economic Forum included its first plenary session about girls in developing countries. David Bull (2013), the UK's UNICEF head, argues that girls' education is in *everyone's interest*: from human rights and equality activists to business leaders, as he invokes images of innocent young girls barred from school in "traditional" societies. Once again, a statement about *all girls* relies on knowledge and affects about specific girls for its impact and resonance.

Academic and popular writings on girls have accelerated in the last three decades in all parts of the globe. Some scholarship in English relevant to the articulation and critique of girl power include: Aapola et al. (2005), Adely (2012), Charles (2010), Gilligan (1982), Gonick (2006), Gonick et al. (2009), Harris (2004), Lamb (2002), McRobbie (2007, 2008), Moeller (2013), Murphy (2012/2013), Reay (2001), Ringrose (2013), Walkerdine (1991), Weems (2009), and Wiseman (2002). A journal dedicated solely to studies of girlhood in education, social service, and health care, *Girlhood Studies*, was founded in 2008. Given the ubiquity of girls and their empowerment, this chapter locates girl power within the dynamics of *postfeminism*, an entanglement of feminism and market-based polices. (See the chapters by Budgeon, "► [Theorizing Subjectivity and Feminine Embodiment: Feminist Approaches and Debates](#)" (Chap. 17) and by Coffey and Watson, "► [Bodies: Corporeality and Embodiment in Childhood and Youth Studies](#)" (Chap. 13) for a related discussion of feminist and postfeminist approaches to gender and embodiment in youth studies.)

Postfeminist Times

Postfeminism encompasses a wide range of theories that critique previous feminist discourses and include challenges to second-wave feminism's ideas and emphases within neoliberal, or market-based, contexts (McRobbie 2007; Ringrose 2013). Gill (2007) describes the mix of feminist and antifeminist discourses, policies, and affects in postfeminism. Relevant here are Gill's emphases on individual choice and empowerment, on self-surveillance and self-discipline, and on makeover narratives (2007, p. 153). Within these postfeminist politics, girl power suggests that gender issues in education in developed countries have been solved, that girl success is simple and formulaic regardless of setting, and that young women, who fail to become ambitious and assertive, are responsible for their plights.

The Breadwinner, a young adult novel used in schools, "constructs Muslim girls and women as vulnerable, naïve, ignorant, uncivilised and in need of rescue from the efforts, good will, and knowledge of educated, modern, civilised and *benevolent* subjects located in the West" (Sensoy and Marshall 2010, p. 298). There are a number of postfeminist elements here: the salvation narrative is of an individual girl, the focus is on empowerment, and a makeover story enacts good taste and good choices. According to Scharff (2011), young women in Britain and Germany portrayed themselves as empowered and, therefore, not in need of feminism while their self-presentations depended on constructing Muslim women as victims of oppression. Both examples show empowerment as relational and predicated upon the *disempowerment* of Muslim girls.

Elements of postfeminist girl power are also adopted by Muslim girls themselves. Confessional, first-person accounts by young Muslim women, such as *Living Islam Out Loud: American Muslim Women Speak* (Abdul-Ghafur 2005), *Love, Inshallah: The Secret Love Lives of American Muslim Women* (Maznavi and Mattu 2012), and *I Speak for Myself: American Women on Being Muslim* (Ebrahimji and Suratwala 2011), share a desire to disrupt the normative narrative about Muslim women. However, they employ the same postfeminist language in which empowerment involves a western-centric understanding of human capacity to achieve private and public good through individualized action and voice. (Everatt's chapter in this collection, "► [The Politics of Non-belonging in the Developing World](#)" (Chap. 5) also critiques the relevance of western-centric frameworks for understanding youth.)

Empowered girls appear in many contexts – popular music venues, UNICEF statements, academic scholarship, and contemporary novels and memoirs – and this ubiquity is complicated by simultaneous configurations of some women and girls as inferior and limited. The next section examines the affective charges of these images and narratives. How does an empowered girl move us? Why is support of girl power reasonable and pleasurable? What do empowered girls promise?

Happiness in Postfeminist Times

Happiness shapes what coheres as a world. (Ahmed 2010, p. 2)

A progress narrative is... a wish—to get past the beginning, to make good use of time, to know where one is going. (Wiegman 2012, p. 91)

Girl power is a progress narrative that entices, energizes, and focuses attention. It is a relational narrative, in which Western (white and middle class) ideas of agency, individualization, and ambition are wished on “other” girls. Empowered girls circulate as a form of happiness, as at-risk girls (constrained by patriarchal traditions, sexual predators, poverty, or lack of “grit”) evoke worry. Ahmed traces the popularization of happiness, the sprouting of happiness books on top ten book lists, and a “happiness industry” that associates “happiness with some life choices and not others” (2010, p. 2). Nations have happiness scores, and “happiness becomes a way of measuring progress” (Ahmed 2010, p. 4). Such how-to books and measures help to establish associations, and the “promise that happiness is what you get for having the right associations might be how we are directed toward certain things” (Ahmed 2012, p. 2). Stories of makeovers, disempowered youth transformations, form the centerpiece of fundraising campaigns and annual reports of youth-serving organizations (Lesko and Talburt 2012). The dense associations of donors, success stories, public relations, fundraising, and changed lives all flow through ideas of progress and happiness. In these mundane and material ways, happiness becomes associated with particular kinds of female success, market-based economic development, and donor supports. There is a well-established belief that increased levels of happiness function as a measure of human progress, and as narratives, as public relations, and as economic policy, those associations hold.

In the USA girls enrolled in single-sex schools are fantasized as powerful and happy; they are sheltered from boys (and from unwanted-and-wanted sexuality) and given greater opportunities in classrooms and in leadership. In single-sex school debates, the affective valence of girl power offers a temporary resolution of the complications and difficulties that heterosexual relations pose for women. Girl empowerment promotes the fluidity and effortlessness of “girls together” – another flowing toward happiness – yet this progress toward girls’ freedom in schooling is simultaneously trumpeted as evidence of the alleged hard-wired differences between girls and boys.

This section has complicated the possible meanings and effects of empowerment by introducing the postfeminist context and the multiple affective flows and happiness assemblages formed around and through girl power. The next sections move these ideas of postfeminism, multiplicity, progress, and happiness into examinations of girl power in Pakistan and India.

Affective Connections: *The Case of Malala Yousafzai*

In 2012, Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani girl then 14 years old, was shot in the head by a member of the Taliban, a transnational Islamist group. It is believed that it was her advocacy for the education for girls that incurred the wrath of the Taliban.

While she recovered shortly thereafter, this incident has since then received significant attention from local and international media outlets, transnational aid organizations, as well as the Government of Pakistan. Malala is presented as the ideal personage of an empowered, postfeminist Muslim girl. Hers is a story of individual triumph to be replicated by other Muslim girls. In this section, we explore some of the affects that bring Malala into effect. We also inquire into the types of interactions and relationships that Malala makes possible with other multiplicities of Muslim girls.

Malala accumulates the affects of vulnerability, compassion, fear, and hate and is composed of a set of different positions in relation to the multiplicity of Muslim girls as well as other assemblages. Colman (2005) notes that affects are part of the “Deleuzian project of trying-to-understand, and comprehend, and express all of the incredible, wondrous, tragic, painful and destructive configurations of things and bodies as temporally mediated, continuous events” (p. 11). Affects are therefore conceptualized as “trans-historical, trans-temporal, trans-spatial and autonomous” (Colman 2005, p. 11). In thinking about Malala as a set of affects then, we are directed to consider the intensities, changes, and collusions that arise as Malala, as a corporeal as well as an ideational body, comes into contact with other bodies.

Malala’s injury and its repetitive circulation by the media compels us – the observers, readers, politicians, philanthropists, educators, Muslim and non-Muslim activists, etc. – to share a bond of loss and vulnerability with her. Consider the barrage of photographs that feature Malala in blood-stained bandages, on a stretcher being taken to a hospital, or images of her after the surgery with an oxygen tube running through her nose and a teddy bear by her side. These images not only circulate on the television and online newspapers but are also (re)posted on social media websites such as Facebook and in the blogosphere. They evoke a plethora of feelings, from sympathy to fear. We imagine our own daughters, sisters, or mothers being in her position and feel a need to protect girls like her. Butler (2006) notes that the experience of loss and vulnerability makes a “tenuous ‘we’ out of all of us” (p. 10) and binds us with the other, as our fates seem inseparable. Loss and vulnerability then “implicate us in lives that are not our own” (Butler 2005, p. 25). In this state then, we are moved to identify the source of this loss and vulnerability in the hopes of addressing or attending to it in order to prevent potential injury.

One of the ways in which we do so is by extending our specific feelings for Malala to others. Malala’s plight is read as a representation of the plight of all Muslim girls (the Saussurean “structural patterns” are at work here). Specifically, we enter into an *alliance of compassion* with Malala and, through her, the multiplicity of Muslim girls. Sara Ahmed (2004a) terms this relationship as “charitable compassion” (p. 192). We believe that through our charitable and advocacy efforts (such as through participation in UNESCO’s “Stand Up for Malala” campaign), we can halt or at least interrupt the suffering that awaits all Muslim girls. We express compassion for Malala by donating to the Malala Fund, nominating her for the Nobel Peace Prize and rallying behind her calls for girls’ education. We even feel happy when we hear that she has secured a book deal worth three million dollars

and repost these announcements on social media outlets, such as Facebook, with pride. These feelings of compassion, which also activate feelings of happiness and pride, stick not only to the figure of Malala but also to the multiplicity of Muslim girls. We believe that if all Muslim girls have the courage to speak up like Malala and get an education, they too can be happy. This “promise of happiness” (Ahmed 2010) directs us to continue our charitable and advocacy efforts. Thus, a combination of loss, vulnerability, and compassion elicited by the figure of Malala enables us to form a “sense of political community” (Butler 2006, p. 22) not only with her but also with the multiplicity of Muslim girls. However, this sense of community is distorted/fallacious. Even though Malala is made to stand in for all Muslim girls, the category of “Muslim girl” is in fact internally differentiated by class, sexuality, age, geographic location, interpretation of Islam, etc. The project of representation, thus, is precarious.

Another way in which we come to know Muslim girls through Malala is by reciting (Butler 1990) her as an *object in crisis* and extending this status to all Muslim girls. Consider the ominous headline in the *New York Times*, “Taliban Gun Down Girl Who Spoke Up for Rights” (Walsh 2012) or the *New Yorker*, “The Shooting of Malala Yousafzai, The Girl who wanted to go to School” (Peer 2012). The language employed here constructs Malala as an ordinary girl, with ordinary dreams and desires, who is under attack. We are made to ask ourselves: if these everyday acts of going to school are under threat then what might happen next? We come to fear that the girl power embodied in, and enacted by, Malala – which we valorize and desire for all girls – may be destroyed. Significantly, we come to a realization that our ideals, our way of life, can be “undone” (Butler 2006, p. 23) by those who attacked Malala. We are therefore compelled to take urgent action and even extreme measures to “restore the loss or return the world to a former order” (Butler 2006, p. 30). Ahmed (2004b) points out that by declaring a fact/figure/event as a crisis we are able to transform “it into a fetish object that then acquires a life of its own. . . and can become the grounds for declaration of war against that which is read as the source of the threat” (p. 77). Through Malala, we transform Muslim girls into fetish objects by taking away all their complexity and representing them as victims of oppression. Muslim girls as objects in crisis are then deployed to justify military invasions and educational interventions in Muslim countries. It gives us a more intimate access to them; we can observe them, intervene, control, and refashion them according to our desires. We are positioned to try and reinvigorate the “fantasy” of a formerly ordered world (Butler 2006, p. 30).

Affects of vulnerability and fear also activate hatred toward those who are imagined as the disrupters of our ordered world. Instead of discussing the specific gunmen who shot Malala, blame is often assigned to an entire political party and ideology. For instance, in several news articles the perpetrators of the crime are often simply referred to as “Taliban,” as if it were a unified subject, whose identity is self-evident to the reader. In addition, broad terms such as “barbarous” and “gangsters” (Green 2013) or “enemies” (Brenner 2013) are often used to describe the perpetrators. The specificity of the event is thus made invisible, and hatred for

the gunmen moves sideways, forwards, and backwards, sticking to Taliban, Muslim men, Islam, Arabs, brown people, Middle East, and Pakistan. We end up with an assemblage of figures of hatred that are bound together as a “common threat.” Hate upon hate, over time, makes us feel certainties about this assemblage; we feel that we have finally located the source of our vulnerability. We feel confident that if we address this common threat, we may be able to forestall any “future injury” (Ahmed 2004b). However, this assemblage is elusive; we can never quite catch it. We are set up to always fail and keep alive this threat. Indeed, it is the “common” threat and “shared” feelings of fear that bind our heterogeneous communities together. We need this threat to sustain our own sense of self.

In short, Malala accumulates the affects of fear, vulnerability, compassion, and hate, which become the lines through which we – the readers, viewers, policymakers, politicians, philanthropists, etc. – come to know and access not only her but also the multiplicity of Muslim girls.

However, these affects incite us to represent Muslim girls as either empowered or disempowered, instead of observing the constantly shifting and elusive borders of the multiplicity of Muslim girls. Yet, if we read Malala as a set of affects that are fluid and constantly changing, then it may be possible to suspend our desire to name alliances between Muslim girls and other assemblages as either empowerment or oppression, disciplining or resistance. Instead, we keep Muslim girls a “permanent site of contest” (Butler 2000, p. 337).

She Can, You Can: The “Production of the Ordinary” in Tupperware’s Campaign for Women’s Empowerment

Tupperware Brands Corporation, with its vision to “Enlighten, Educate, and Empower” women across the world, is a direct selling multinational company with a predominantly all-women sales force. Tupperware India’s *She Can, You Can* ad campaign brings us real-life success stories of women – self-reliant, entrepreneurial, and empowered – to serve as role models for other women. Although the campaign employs television commercials, print advertisements, social media, below-the-line (BTL) activities, as well as seminars and workshops, this analysis will focus solely on the television commercials. Directed by the acclaimed Indian filmmaker, Shoojit Sircar, the *She Can, You Can* television ad campaign comprises of three docu-features of 40 seconds duration. Each ad portrays women whose individual success has entailed not only the realization of her own dreams but also the transformation of lives around her – Chhavi Rajawat was an executive at a multinational company who quit that job and the lure of “international glory” to become the *sarpanch* (elected head of the village government) of her village (Tupperware 2012a), Saloni Malhotra is an engineer who opened Knowledge Process Outsourcing (KPO) units in rural India, thereby opening up “a new world of opportunities” for its young men and women (Tupperware 2012b), and Hina Shah is an entrepreneur who has helped other women establish their own business enterprises (Tupperware 2013).

Economies of Affect

When a private enterprise like Tupperware declares enlightening, educating, and empowering women as a vision that is “deeply ingrained in the DNA of Tupperware” (George 2012, para 4), it alludes to the increasing tendency of the private sector to hoist private gain as public good. In fact, Kamat (2004) suggests that the increasing tendency of private enterprise to present itself as an agent of democracy “foretells a re-working of democracy in ways that coalesce with global capitalist interests” (p. 156). It is noteworthy that in the United Nations’ report on gender equality and equity (UNFPA 2005), women’s empowerment is overwhelmingly viewed in terms of economic gains such as the costs of gender discrimination for low-income countries, women’s tendency to invest their income for the welfare of their families thus multiplying their contributions for national development, and women as a poorly tapped labor force.

Collapsing the lives of third world women into a “few frozen indicators of their well-being” (Mohanty 2003, p. 48) can also be read in terms of the persistent influence of “Western feminisms’ appropriation and colonization of the constitutive complexities that characterize the lives of women in these countries” (Mohanty 2003, p. 19). However, global capitalism, neoliberalism, economic globalization, or even Western feminisms “do not in themselves begin to describe the situation we find ourselves in [but rather] leave them looking like dead effects imposed on an innocent world” (Stewart 2007, p. 1). We are hence encouraged to examine the “ordinary affects” (Stewart 2007) or “the power of sentiment” (Cvetkovich and Pellegrini 2003, p. 2) that animates these global and local encounters because they are “more directly compelling than ideologies” (Stewart 2007, p. 3). While Ahmed speaks of “affective economies” to illustrate the ways in which affect circulates, one could also redefine that phrase to gesture toward the circuits of national and global affects (Cvetkovich and Pellegrini 2003) that animate economic policies and their effects.

Tupperware’s campaign tugs at our emotions through its explicit commitment to women’s empowerment and its implicit commitment to the modernization of rural India – India’s “darkness” (Adiga 2008) where premodern and regressive attachments prevail. The plight of Indian women captured by horror stories of rape, honor killings, dowry deaths, and female infanticide, gender disparity in schooling, gender differences in access to resources, as well as the “backwardness” of Indian villages are sources of despair and humiliation and a threat to the hope, pride, assertiveness, and confidence generated by India’s emergence as a major global power (Moisi 2009). Thus a commitment to empower women, especially from small towns and villages, serves as a “metonymic slide” (Ahmed 2004b) and becomes readable as a commitment to the most legitimate of communities, that of the nation. Such a slide and its effect are evident when Shoojit Sircar, the director of the *She Can, You Can* campaign, points out that “what *pulled* [him] to this commercial is the story, especially these real-life heroes whom Tupperware is bringing forward and showcasing their work. . . You don’t see these kind of people, you know, on their own, silently in one corner, somewhere in India, they are doing their own job, and actually *helping the nation*” (Tupperware 2012c; italics added).

The focus on the empowerment of girls and women from small towns and villages in the Tupperware ad is also indicative of the specific woman who is the object of empowerment. It is noteworthy that while the *She Can, You Can* ad campaign captures the stories of women “who have risen against all odds, took up and overcame the challenges that were thrown at them and emerged victorious in the effort” (www.tupperwareshecanyoucan.com/), the focus is not on the individual journeys of these educated, middle class, urban women but rather on their efforts to empower other women, primarily, though not solely, from low-income and rural backgrounds. The preoccupation with economic empowerment in the third world as well as the dominant narrative about the “backwardness” of rural communities in these countries has placed the doubly marginalized “poor woman” or the “rural girl” at the heart of empowerment campaigns. They are imagined “not only as major agents of change in the family, but also as the vulnerable party in non-reciprocal relations of power within the family and society who need explicit support to reverse these. . .” (Devika and Thampi 2007, p. 37; see also Sharma 2011; Vavrus 2000). Tupperware promises these women the potential of upward mobility and entry into the world of Chhavi Rajawat, Saloni Malhotra, and Hina Shah who represent the “Everywoman” Tupperware assumes women want to be (Vincent 2003).

The Im/potential of Affective Promises

Sara Ahmed (2004a) conceives of affect primarily in terms of movement. She argues that it is the circulation of affect – such as from the woman’s body to that of the body of the nation – or “affective economies” that produce effects. She admits, however, that in some cases affects can and are lodged within bodies such as that of the black man who becomes an “object of fear” or poor and rural women who as objects of reform in empowerment narratives evoke hope but, also, anxiety. In the ad celebrating Chhavi Rajawat’s work as the sarpanch of her paternal village in the state of Rajasthan (Tupperware 2012a), Chhavi is presented in a pair of jeans and top. One frame of the ad foregrounds a smiling Chhavi while in the background we can spy a large group comprising of the married women of the village, their faces veiled with their *pallus* or the loose ends of their saris. In yet another frame, we see Chhavi surrounded by young girls of the village, dressed in the more pan-Indian, modern yet demure, *salwar kameez*, and to whom she is showing something on her laptop. In this juxtaposition of bodies, the figures of the veiled village women become containers of an unappealing and shameful past that needs to be left behind, while in the interaction between Chhavi and the young women, hope and confidence slides from one to the other, aligning Chhavi and Tupperware with the youthful and promising India thereby illustrating the “sticky relation between signs” (Ahmed 2004, p. 127).

The *She Can, You Can* campaign, one might argue, celebrates the “autonomous postfeminist subject” (Gill 2007, p. 13) who is unencumbered by “cultural traditions” and “primordial” markers of caste, religion, race, etc. As Gill (2007) notes,

“the notion that all our practices are freely chosen is central to postfeminist discourses which present women as autonomous agents no longer constrained by any inequalities or power imbalances whatsoever” (p. 12). Green (2000), in her critique of narratives of individual empowerment prioritized by development organizations in Tanzania, observes that empowerment is viewed as taking place at “the level of consciousness, in a vacuum divorced from actual social and political action” (p. 68) and thus glosses over the everyday realities of girls’ lives. For instance, in India girls are increasingly permitted or empowered *by* their families, since empowerment as Vavrus (2000) notes is “an exogenously performed act” (p. 234), to pursue their education or careers in towns and cities away from home. However, in the event that they break caste or religious barriers to choose a potential life partner whom they have come to know in their place of study or work, the decision is often condemned as misuse of “freedom” and “parental trust” and efforts of various kinds taken to protect family and community honor. Thus the rhetoric of “individual choice,” celebrated in discourses of (economic) empowerment, meets its limits in the social and cultural domain where it is often deemed illegitimate.

In other words, *woman*, who is the “ideal subject” of neoliberalism (Gill 2007; see also Harris 2004), is also simultaneously a metaphor for the sanctity of the “home” – nation/community/family – and thus bears what Lukose (2009) evocatively refers to as “the burden of locality” (Lukose 2009, p. 14; see also Chatterjee 1993), making her access to the opportunities offered by globalization ambivalent and contested (Lukose 2009). The potential dangers awaiting girls and women who gain access to the public sphere thereby necessitates surveillance – both “self-surveillance” and the “extensiveness of surveillance over entirely new spheres of life and intimate conduct” (Gill 2007, p. 14). This is illustrative of the fact that while liberalization of the economy in countries like India is often perceived to hold forth the promise of gender equality, “liberalizations’ promises [simultaneously] provoke anxious discourses and regulations of young women, their bodies, their sexuality, and their vulnerability” (Lukose 2009, p. 12) leading to an entrenchment of patriarchy.

Here the intention is not to suggest that third world cultures are inimical to women’s rights as often presented by “mainstream feminism” (Tamale 2008) but to emphasize that women’s economic empowerment does not guarantee the disruption of patriarchal norms. The dominant conception of women’s empowerment enables it to be “effected without much damage to prevailing gender norms” (Devika and Thampi 2007, p. 39) thereby underscoring that women’s economic empowerment and “reversing patriarchal power relations need to be tackled separately, but with equal seriousness” (Devika and Thampi 2007, p. 37). However, the unproblematic assumption of women’s economic empowerment as ensuring empowerment in other domains often invalidates the need for mobilizing women around feminist issues and concerns (Devika and Thampi 2007) indicating the suturing of feminism and antifeminism, capitalism and patriarchy, neoliberalism, and “tradition.”

Conclusion and Further Directions

The *OED* links girl power with individualistic ambition, which circulates as a form of “development” or “progress” that is presented as accessible by and advantageous for all. In this chapter, girl power is interrogated as postfeminist, as an assertion of girl success, *and* as the acceptance of the inferiority of some girls and women or in certain aspects of their lives. The circulation of affects in girl power is also examined, with happiness, empathy, progress, and a feeling of unity being centrally involved. However, the Malala story and the Tupperware campaign both disrupt the seemingly stable knowledge of what empowerment does, for whom, and with what effects. Through theorizations of empowerment as affective assemblages and as material and affective becomings that circulate, the case studies illustrate the complexity, dynamism, and multiplicities evoked and circulating in empowerment campaigns. Even the terms of the present analysis are called into question. For example, this chapter utilizes the idea of “postfeminism,” yet postfeminisms in the two cases play out quite differently.

The implications of this analysis lie in the affects and desires to find and show progress and to make authors, donors, and researchers happy. Happiness draws our attention and makes us feel that the world is heading in the right direction; happiness constructs an intelligible landscape and history. Even the details of Malala’s initial attack stick easily and well to feelings of unifying horror and surprise and happiness of her courage and initiative. Multiple desires are centrally implicated in empowerments’ promises. Empowerment promises headlines and stories of despair and rebirth, horror and uplift. The affectful objects of third world women and girls, patriarchal oppressions, poverty, and conflict are ready to stick to Malala and Tupperware campaigns. Stories and images of girl power help us (readers, youth studies scholars, activists, journalists, donors, bureaucrats, feminists, among others) feel *something* – feel human, feel oneness with other members of a *caring public*. Such sticky, affective associations are central to the promises of empowered girls.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Bodies In and Out of Place: Schooling and the Production of Gender Identities Through Embodied Experience](#)
- ▶ [Bodies: Corporeality and Embodiment in Childhood and Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [Deconstructing Discourses to Rupture Fairytales of the “Ideal” Childhood](#)
- ▶ [Gender Identity, Intergenerational Dynamics, and Educational Aspirations: Young Women’s Hopes for the Future](#)
- ▶ [Girls’ Embodied Experiences of Media Images](#)
- ▶ [Indigenous Girls, Social Justice, and Schooling: Addressing Issues of Disadvantage](#)
- ▶ [Performative Pedagogy: Poststructural Theory as a Tool to Engage in Identity Work Within a Youth-Led HIV Prevention Program](#)

- ▶ [The Gendering and Sexualization of Young Women Through Sex Educational Practices and Discourses in Southern Africa](#)
- ▶ [Theorizing Subjectivity and Feminine Embodiment: Feminist Approaches and Debates](#)

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Thinking About Children: How Does It Influence Policy and Practice?

4

Nicola Taylor and Anne B. Smith

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Abstract

Childhood studies and sociocultural theory, together with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, have influenced policy and practice initiatives, both within New Zealand and internationally. The integration of children's agency, rights, and well-being provides a conceptual framework for positioning children as participating subjects, knowers, and social actors, rather than as the passive objects of socialization. Children are now considered to be people who can make a difference and contribute to creating their own futures and to sustaining their families, schools, and communities. Children's ability to express their views and exercise responsibility is influenced by their social and cultural contexts and the extent to which there is space and support for their participation. Sociocultural contexts play an important part in inducting children into shared meanings, values, and practices and enabling children to participate and learn. This chapter highlights

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three specific examples of New Zealand's social policy and professional practice to explore how contemporary conceptions of childhood can influence children's rights and well-being – (1) early childhood education, (2) the abolition of physical punishment, and (3) ascertaining children's views in family law proceedings.

Introduction

Our thinking about children is influenced by the conceptions we hold about them. These are socially constructed generalizations that depict the prevailing images of childhood, and, unsurprisingly, they become reflected in our law and policy and help to shape research and professional practice with children and their families (see also the chapter “► [Deconstructing Discourses to Rupture Fairytales of the “Ideal” Childhood](#)” by Smith in this section). Conceptions change over time as shifts occur in our thinking about children. During the past two centuries, for example, children came to be seen as a future investment requiring proper nurture, socialization, and education (Foyster and Marten 2010). They were no longer just “little adults” occupying an ambiguous place, but rather began to fill a defined childhood space, the structure and boundaries of which were shaped by rapid developments in the psychological, legal, educational, medical, and welfare fields (Hendrick 1997). More recently, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), childhood studies, and sociocultural theory have been pivotal to our contemporary positioning of children as participating subjects, knowers, and social actors, rather than as the passive objects of socialization. Children are now considered to be people who can make a difference and contribute to creating their own futures and to sustaining their families, schools, and communities.

The UNCRC has been acclaimed as a turning point in the international movement on behalf of children's rights (Lansdown 1994). Its significance, following its adoption by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1989, lies in the fact it is the first international instrument bringing together States Parties' (i.e., ratifying countries) obligations with respect to the protection, provision, and participation rights of children under the age of 18 years. Articles 12 and 13 of the UNCRC reflect the fundamental basis of childhood studies in regarding children as social actors with agency who participate in society. They are not simply immature creatures in the process of becoming adults, but rather people in their own right who are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect and to have their perspective taken seriously (see “► [Chaps. 2, Deconstructing Discourses to Rupture Fairytales of the “Ideal” Childhood](#)” and “► [25, Childhood and Youth Citizenship](#)” in this section of the handbook). The Convention also recognizes that children are in an interdependent relationship with others and that their own interpretations of their experiences, while actively invented and constructed by the child, are developed in partnership with others. Giving children opportunities to participate in society assists them to develop the skills, abilities, and values of responsible citizens.

Childhood had previously been regarded as a transitional state of immaturity, irrationality, and incompetence on the way to a rational, competent, and autonomous

adulthood (see “► [Chap. 1, Thinking About Childhood and Youth](#)” in this section). Childhood studies has, however, shifted adult understandings of what it is to be a child and how this varies across time, as well as within and across societies (Qvortrup et al. 2009). The emphasis is now on childhood as a valued stage in the life course that is significant in its own right (see “► [Chap. 26, Citizenship: Inclusion and Exclusion](#)” in this handbook). Qvortrup (1994) aptly described this significant conceptual difference as one of dealing with children “as human beings rather than as human becomings” (p. 4). The concept of children’s agency is a core feature of childhood studies, with children and young people recognized as participating in the construction of their own childhoods. This helps to account for the wide diversity in children’s experiences both inter- and intra-culturally.

Another theoretical thread that aligns with childhood studies and children’s rights thinking is sociocultural theory (Smith 2002). This suggests that children’s competence is enhanced when they are provided with guidance and support. Children’s capacity to participate and act with agency depends on their interactions with others in social and cultural settings, especially the extent to which they are encouraged to express their views and take responsibility. Guided participation helps bridge the gap between what children know and what they do not know (Rogoff 1990), and this means knowing what they know and giving time, space, recognition, and structures for them to build on that knowledge. Sociocultural contexts play an important part in inducting children into shared meanings, values, and practices and enabling children to participate and learn.

The synergies between childhood studies, sociocultural theory, and Articles 12 and 13 of the UNCRC (Freeman 1998, 2012; Mayall 2000; Smith 2002) provide a conceptual framework for thinking about children. This chapter now turns to consider three case studies from New Zealand that illustrate how conceptualizations of childhood have influenced childhood policy in three areas: (1) early childhood education, (2) the abolition of physical punishment, and (3) ascertaining children’s views in family law proceedings.

Case Study 1: Early Childhood Education

New Zealand has an early childhood education system to be proud of, which has led the world in many ways because of its integrated administration, equitable funding, innovative holistic and bicultural curriculum, professional workforce, and narrative assessment approaches (Moss 2000, 2003; Nutbrown 1996). This case study focuses on two aspects of early childhood policy: the integrated system of administration and the curriculum, *Te Whāriki*.

The traditional ways of thinking about young children and their families were challenged during the early years of early childhood policy reforms in the 1970s and 1980s, as New Zealand moved from a divided system where childcare centers cared for children whose parents “had to” work (or were single parents) and middle-class parents whose children attended sessional preschool programs (kindergartens and playcenters) to be educated and prepared for school. This division was reflected

in the administration of childcare centers by the Department of Social Welfare and of sessional preschools by the Department of Education, with the bulk of the funding going to preschool centers. In 1986 the integration of all early childhood services into the Department of Education set the foundation for three decades of policy reforms. This integration reflected the understanding that it was impossible to separate education and care for young children and that warm, sensitive, and reciprocal adult-child interactions and relationships were most likely to set children on a path toward learning and support their right to an education. The movement toward integration reflected the focus of thinking at the time on the importance of rich early childhood contexts for young children and not just the imperative to provide substitute care for children while their parents worked.

Children's rights were part of the early thinking about early childhood education associated with changing policies. A policy refrain in the late 1970s and early 1980s was the right of children to a quality early childhood education regardless of whether their mother worked or whether they were attending a full or part-day early childhood program (Smith and May 2006). The influential Meade Report (1988) drew on the children's rights adopted during the 1979 International Year of the Child, including the right to free care and education, the right to play and recreation, and the right of access to a natural environment. Quality was defined in the Meade Report in terms of its impact on:

- The interests of children
- The interests of caregivers
- The interests of cultural survival and transmission to succeeding generations (Meade 1988)

The Meade Report and its philosophical framework of respect for the rights and dignity of the child had a dramatic effect on the funding for early childhood services. It highlighted the need for more equitable funding, a universal funding formula across the early childhood sector, and for a quality assurance system linked to higher levels of funding. The government accepted the principles of the report, and despite ongoing battles for resources during a time of neoliberal "reforms," a new funding system was introduced in 1990 (May 2009).

The second major policy development unique to New Zealand, which was greatly influenced by new ways of thinking about children, was the introduction in 1996 of a bicultural holistic early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*. Although part of a philosophy of orchestrating economic success through education from the early years, the document avoided the top-down approach of government telling the sector what to do and rejected an age- and staged-based or subject-based approach (Smith 2011a). The name of the curriculum was chosen as a metaphor, meaning a woven mat for all to stand on, to reflect its possibilities for creating many different patterns of ideas and philosophy. *Te Whāriki* was written by two prominent academics in early childhood education, Margaret Carr and Helen May, but was also shaped by prolonged consultation with the early childhood community in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Māori partners, Tilly and Tamati Reedy, developed a

Māori version of the curriculum (not just a translation). The Treaty of Waitangi (a 1,840 treaty between Māori and the Crown) was respected in the way that Māori people were separate but integrally related partners in the project. *Te Whāriki* is thus a bicultural document reflecting the cultural values of indigenous people as well as those of other New Zealanders. Consultation and subsequent resource investment in the curriculum have meant that early childhood teachers have a sense of ownership and acceptance of *Te Whāriki*, which has led to it being incorporated into the language and practice of early childhood educators throughout the country.

So what kind of thinking about children is incorporated in *Te Whāriki*? Although the published document does not mention children's rights, it incorporates a view of the child as a competent and active citizen and learner (Te One and Dalli 2010). The following well-known quotation illustrates its vision of childhood:

To grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society. (Ministry of Education 1996, p. 9)

There is a strong sociocultural theoretical base to *Te Whāriki*, so that learning is seen as arising out of children's activities in the context of social interactions and relationships (Smith 2011a). Rather than one developmental sequence (as implied by developmental psychology), there are a variety of potential developmental pathways that depend on cultural goals and the guidance of community practice. Children are seen as active co-constructors of their own knowledge and understanding, rather than as the passive recipients of their experiences. They acquire meanings through sharing everyday activities with social partners who are responsive and sensitive to their interests and knowledge.

Questions to help teachers focus and reflect on the purpose of the different curriculum strands from a child's perspective, and to acknowledge the child's voice, were posed by Carr et al. (2002). The following are the five child's voice questions aligned with the different curriculum strands:

- Contribution – Is this place fair for us?
- Belonging – Do you know me?
- Well-being – Can I trust you?
- Exploration – Do you let me fly?
- Communication – Do you hear me?

Learning Stories, the narrative formative assessment procedures developed by Carr (2001) to assess children's progress toward becoming confident and competent learners and communicators, also reflect a view of children as agents and active participants. Learning Stories document children's learning using a variety of material, including photographs, written narratives, and videos. Children's voices about their learning are incorporated into the stories and allow children to share meaning, power, and ownership over their learning (Carr and Lee 2012). Children are thought of in *Te Whāriki* as active participants in society who should be heard and treated fairly and with respect, allowed to participate, and encouraged to take

responsibility. Teachers are encouraged to listen to the voices and understand the perspectives of children.

These two aspects of policy both reflect conceptions about children that promote their agency and their right to participate in high-quality early childhood education. The integrated administrative system suggests that all New Zealand children are equally deserving of access to a high-quality appropriately funded early childhood education, regardless of their parents working or economic status. The curriculum *Te Whāriki* encourages teachers and parents to see children as competent and confident learners, promote their well-being and rights, and be sensitive to their perspectives. Currently early childhood education in New Zealand is struggling to maintain its funding in the face of fiscal restraints (May 2014), but the integrity of its way of valuing children within our early childhood system will not be easily challenged.

Case Study 2: Abolition of Physical Punishment

Physical punishment is defined as using force (however lightly) to cause pain and discomfort (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 2006, para 11). Physically punishing children in the name of discipline reflects a social construction of children as immature beings who must be shaped or “molded” into behaving appropriately (Smith 2011b). From this perspective, children are the property of their parents, and parents’ use of violence to control them is a justifiable and private family matter. The physical punishment of children within families and schools also reflects the dominant view of childhood “that constructs children as human becomings rather than human beings, and a power system that upholds ‘parents’ rights’ over children’s human rights” (Phillips and Alderson 2003, p. 7). According to Peter Newell (2011):

Corporal punishment is a direct assault on the human dignity of the child and a direct invasion of the child’s physical integrity. (p. 7)

Childhood studies theory considers children to be social actors and experiencing subjects, who have their own perspectives about fairness, justice, punishment, and rules, but children are not seen in this way in countries whose legal systems allow their physical punishment either at school or at home. Societies where physical punishment is lawful emanate a constant message about children’s low status and vulnerability, and the abolition of physical punishment is an important step toward advancing the status and protection of children (Freeman 1996).

Article 19 of the UNCRC says that children should be protected from all forms of physical or mental violence and refers to the importance of protective measures to prevent child maltreatment and to provide support for parents. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child made clear its view that physical punishment was a human rights infringement and that States were obligated to eliminate it, in General Comment Number 8 (2006). The Committee urged not only the elimination of physical punishment but also the undertaking of education and awareness-raising campaigns to change traditional attitudes toward physical punishment.

New Zealand is a country where, until recently, the use of physical punishment was widely accepted as a normal part of family discipline. A large-scale survey in 1981 reported 92 % of men and 86 % of women endorsed physical punishment in certain circumstances (Ritchie and Ritchie 1981). Yet, in June 2007, New Zealand became the first English-speaking country to prohibit all physical punishment of children when the *Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act* came into effect. Parents who are prosecuted for assaulting a child can no longer argue in their defense that they used reasonable force to correct their child. (Seventeen years previously, in 1990, corporal punishment in schools had been prohibited.) This 2007 amendment to the law remains controversial among the public and has been subject to campaigns seeking its repeal and reinstatement of the lawful use of physical punishment on children. However, the realization that physical punishment is damaging for children and a denial of their rights influenced the thinking of academics, professionals, staff in nongovernment agencies (NGOs, such as UNICEF and Save the Children), and eventually the politicians. This enabled the legislation to be passed, but public opinion has been slower to change.

The reform process began when a Bill, drafted by a Green Party MP, Sue Bradford, was drawn by ballot at a time when there was little political will for change (for more details see Wood et al. 2008; Taylor et al. 2011). The first reading of the Bill passed with a small majority (63 to 54), and it then spent 12 months being debated in a parliamentary select committee. During that time many submissions were received in support of the Bill from professional organizations (such as pediatricians), research centers (such as the Children's Issues Centre), and NGOs, although many submissions from individuals opposed it. A vigorous and highly publicized campaign with public marches against the Bill was mounted by some lobby groups. However, the Bill passed its second reading in March 2007 (70 MPs in favor and 51 against), allowing it to go forward to the next stage. A line-by-line debate followed in parliament, until the Easter recess, during which time the prime minister, Helen Clark, and Sue Bradford met with the then leader of the opposition, John Key. An amendment was drafted to give the Police discretion about whether they should prosecute, and on 2 May 2007, the Bill passed into law with cross-party agreement (113 MPs supported and 8 opposed it).

As an example of the type of public debate and media coverage that occurred during the select committee stage, the Children's Issues Centre submission suggested that the physical punishment of children was both a risk to children's health and a denial of their rights:

Just as with other risks to children's health (smoking, cot death) there is a responsibility on the part of the government not to encourage practices which are risky for children. Physical punishment has been shown to be associated with the following outcomes for children:- increased aggression and antisocial behaviour; poorer academic achievement; poorer quality parent-child relationships (attachment); adverse mental health outcomes (depression, anxiety, low self esteem); and diminished moral internalization (children's internalization of parental values and ability to control their own behaviour). (Children's Issues Centre 2006, p. 2)

The research of a Children's Issues Centre postgraduate student, Terry Dobbs, about New Zealand children's perspectives on physical punishment (Dobbs et al. 2006), was cited in the submission. It had shown that children reported being hit with spatulas, tennis rackets, spoons, belts, and canes as well as having unpleasant substances put in their mouths. They experienced physical punishment at the hands of parents, parents' girlfriends or boyfriends, siblings, stepparents, grandparents, uncles, cousins, and caregivers and felt scared, ashamed, unloved, sad, angry, and hateful toward their parents, who they reported as being generally angry with them at the time they were physically punished. This research was given widespread coverage in conference presentations and in the media and alongside presentations from an articulate and passionate advocate of abolition, Professor Joan Durrant from Manitoba, Canada.

There is some evidence, moreover, that the law reform has been followed by changes in attitudes toward more disapproval of the use of physical punishment. The law change was approved of by almost half (46 %) of a sample of parents of preschool children, with 27 % against and 27 % undecided, and the majority of parents used positive methods of discipline such as distraction or reasoning (Lawrence and Smith 2008). A Ministry of Health survey (2008) showed that when parents were asked what kind of discipline they had used in the last week, only 4.5 % had used physical punishment. The approval rating for physical punishment declined from about 90 % in 1981 to 58 % in 2008 (Children's Commissioner 2008), and a more recent survey showed a decline in approval to 40 % (Wood 2013).

Thus, the debate began to expose people to a new and different perspective on the physical punishment of children. It would be misleading, however, to suggest that thinking about physical punishment among the general public has changed radically. A referendum in 2009 showed that 87.4 % voted "No" in response to the question: "Should a smack as part of good parental correction be a criminal offence?" Reviews of the legislation by the Ministry of Social Development and the Police have, however, been positive and shown that parents are not being criminalized (Wood 2013).

The climate of acceptance toward physical punishment of children is changing in New Zealand and the new law is working as intended. Because of the political sensitivity of the topic, however, the government has done very little to explain the law change or to initiate an educational campaign. In order to achieve a climate where physical punishment is rejected, as in the Nordic countries (see Janson et al. 2011; Sandberg, 2011), New Zealand has some way to go. Attitude change may, however, be a consequence of legislative reform rather than a prerequisite for it.

Case Study 3: Ascertaining Children's Views in Family Law Proceedings

Children's participation rights are now generally accepted as an important principle of contemporary family law decision-making. While the debate continues internationally over the mechanisms by which this is best achieved (Taylor et al. 2012),

New Zealand's innovative approach to children's engagement in Family Court proceedings illustrates how legal policy and professional practice have changed in response to the realization that children are no longer just objects of the law. The conceptual developments that have influenced our thinking about children have thus helped to transform the way children can now contribute to the resolution of family law disputes between their parents/guardians (Taylor and Gollop 2013). Ascertaining children's views and providing opportunities for their direct engagement with lawyers and judges have become commonplace in contested legal proceedings in New Zealand. Current reforms are placing even greater emphasis on child-inclusive styles of practice within the earlier phases of family dispute resolution (including mediation).

The Family Court was first established in 1981 as a specialist court with specialist judges and its jurisdiction extends across all provinces of New Zealand. A range of dispute resolution processes is available within the court including counseling, mediation, and defended hearings. Judges are assisted in their task through the appointment of lawyers to represent children and the availability of specialist psychological, social work, medical, and cultural reports. Most private family law disputes are resolved by parents reaching agreement themselves or through legal negotiation, counseling, or mediation. Around 6 % of applications to the court are determined by a judge.

Previously, s23(2) of the Guardianship Act 1968 required the Family Court to ascertain the child's wishes if the child was able to express them. These wishes were to be taken into account to such extent as the court thought fit, "having regard to the age and maturity of the child." In practice this meant that children's wishes were often ignored purely on the basis that they were too young and immature. However, the UNCRC and the growing body of research and theory on children's participation (Smith et al. 2003; Taylor 2006; Taylor et al. 2007) led to children's views being accorded much greater prominence when the Care of Children Act 2004 replaced the Guardianship Act on 1 July 2005. This modernized the law governing guardianship, day-to-day care (formerly "custody"), and contact (formerly "access") and placed much greater emphasis on respecting children's right to participate. Section 6 considerably widened the requirement for the Family Court to ascertain children's views:

... a child must be given reasonable opportunities to express views on matters affecting the child; and any views the child expresses (either directly or through a representative) must be taken into account. (s6, Care of Children Act 2004)

This new world-leading statutory provision dispensed with the traditional "age and maturity" criteria, changed "wishes" to the broader concept of "views," and now requires the Family Court to take any of the child's expressed views into account regardless of the age of the child. The child's views are not (usually) determinative, but rather contribute to the weight of evidence considered by the judge. This amendment to the law "represents as unmistakable shift towards the recognition of greater rights for children and allows for their greater input into decision-making processes" (Boshier 2009, p. 1).

In contested proceedings, the child's views are now primarily ascertained in two ways – by the lawyer appointed to represent the child or via judicial meetings with children. Parents, of course, may well raise their children's views in their affidavits and oral evidence, and if a specialist psychological report is obtained by the court, then this will often explore the context influencing the nature of the child's views.

When a lawyer is appointed to represent a child in private law proceedings, then that lawyer must now meet with the child unless there are exceptional circumstances (s7(3) Care of Children Act 2004). A Practice Note (2011) issued by the Principal Family Court Judge further elaborates on the role of lawyer for the child so as to promote quality and consistency in practice across New Zealand. The lawyer's primary role is to provide independent representation and advice to the child. He or she has a duty to put before the court the views of the child (usually via a written report) and can call and cross-examine the parties and any witnesses. Following the court's decision, the lawyer must explain the effect of any parenting order to the child in a way that the child can understand (s55(4)). The child also has a right of appeal (s143(3)).

Judicial meetings with children have become increasingly common since the Care of Children Act took effect. While the appropriateness of this practice generates considerable debate internationally (Birnbaum et al. 2011; Fernando 2012), it has become “an invaluable part” of the judges' “toolbox” in the New Zealand Family Court (Boshier 2009, p. 6). A 2012 study documenting the practice of all 53 Family Court judges reported very positively on their experiences of meeting with children (Taylor and Caldwell 2013). Judges' anxiety about their competence to engage directly with children, and any natural justice concerns, had significantly reduced as they became more familiar with its use. Many appreciated the opportunity to better understand the child as a person and spoke respectfully of the child's right to participate in the process in accordance with Article 12 of the UNCRC and section 6 of the Care of Children Act 2004. As one judge said:

If you are able to make decisions that will perhaps change the life direction of a child, and have the confidence to do that, why not have the confidence to communicate with the person whose life you are changing? (Judge 33, Taylor and Caldwell 2013, p.462)

New Zealand's child-centered approach to children's engagement with lawyers and judges has unfortunately not been mirrored in the conciliation field where their participation in counseling and mediation processes remains relatively uncommon. Yet child inclusion in the earlier phases of proceedings has the potential to benefit so many more children whose parents are in dispute over their post-separation care. Just one child-inclusive mediation model has been empirically piloted in New Zealand (Goldson 2006), despite the more widespread use of such practices overseas – particularly in Australia (McIntosh, Long & Wells, 2009). Consequential amendments to the Care of Children Act 2004, as a result of the 2008 passage of the Family Court Matters Bill, allowed for the inclusion of children in counseling and mediation (Goldson and Taylor 2009), but the economic recession meant this initiative was never resourced. However, the current reform of the Family Court,

implementing Family Dispute Resolution (FDR), creates a new opportunity for child-participatory dispute resolution processes to be introduced from 2014 (Family Court Proceedings Reform Bill).

Conclusions and Future Directions

This chapter has shown how thinking about children, influenced by children's rights, childhood studies, and sociocultural theories, has helped reform policy and practice in three areas in Aotearoa, New Zealand – early childhood education, the law influencing family discipline, and children's participation in family law proceedings. This new thinking has challenged traditional constructions of children as dependent, lacking in competence, and the passive recipients of adult socialization practices. Both children's rights treaties and childhood studies thinking have made “universalized demands for democracy and challenged the belief that any class of people – even the smallest and most vulnerable – could be justifiably denied full recognition as persons entitled to human rights” (Melton et al. 2013, p. 26). These three areas of policy change all illustrate a shift in the direction of advancing social justice for children, promoting their agency, and recognizing their citizenship rights. The struggle for a high-quality early childhood education system in New Zealand reflects the belief that all children have a right to an education that allows them to meet their potential, viewing children as confident and competent learners who deserve support for their culture, contribution, and agency. Changing the law to abolish physical punishment is a recognition that this disciplinary practice is harmful for children's rights, threatens their well-being, and fails to offer them respect and dignity. New Zealand's family justice system has developed over time in ways that are far more respectful and inclusive of children. The alignment between legal policy and professional practices to promote opportunities for children to express their views has had the dual benefit of leading to better-informed decision-making as well as assisting children to share their feelings and be heard.

These new ways of thinking about children are important for professionals who work with children to understand and apply in practice. Offering guidance and space for children to develop competence and become social actors is critically important for the scaffolding of their emerging understandings and skills. Listening to children and interacting with them in a reciprocal, respectful way is thus a necessary first step in helping children to contribute to their own well-being.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Approaches to Understanding Youth Well-Being](#)
- ▶ [Bodies In and Out of Place: Schooling and the Production of Gender Identities Through Embodied Experience](#)
- ▶ [Citizenship: Inclusion and Exclusion](#)

- ▶ Deconstructing Discourses to Rupture Fairytales of the “Ideal” Childhood
- ▶ Education and the Politics of Belonging: Attachments and Actions
- ▶ Gender Identity, Intergenerational Dynamics, and Educational Aspirations: Young Women’s Hopes for the Future
- ▶ Reconsidering Youth Well-Being as Fluid and Relational: A Dynamic Process at the Intersection of Their Physical and Social Geographies
- ▶ Responding Effectively to Support the Mental Health and Well-Being of Young People
- ▶ The Gendering and Sexualization of Young Women Through Sex Educational Practices and Discourses in Southern Africa
- ▶ The Promises of Empowered Girls
- ▶ Thinking About Childhood and Youth
- ▶ Unemployment, Insecurity, and Poor Work: Young Adults in the New Economy
- ▶ Ways of Thinking About Young People in Participatory Interview Research
- ▶ Youth and Play: Identity, Politics, and Lifestyle

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The Politics of Non-belonging in the Developing World

5

David Everatt

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Abstract

Youth research (like most research) has long been dominated by approaches and concepts deriving from the Western/developed world. Unfortunately, it has meant that many of the primary concerns of youth researchers in Europe and America, in particular, have not spoken to the lived reality of the majority of young people in the developing world (and, to be precise about this chapter, South Africa), other than in the broadest terms, or as letting us know what we “should be like.” This is what dominant cultures do, and nowhere is this more evident than in the literature on life course and the transitions youth are seen to pass through, from school to higher education to work, backed up/supported by some form of nuclear family, in a stable society and (now perhaps less so) economy. This chapter draws on the concept of belonging to provide a critical lens on how youth from non-Western countries are conceptualized as other. It argues that in many developing countries, there is no “life course” available to youth that bears much, if any, resemblance to

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the tropes of current youth research. The natural searching for something to belong to occurs in a context where youth traditionally and culturally are literally to be seen but not heard, and thus structural social and economic barriers either stop or fail to provide sufficient support for belonging locally, which is replicated globally. A politics of non-belonging, as it were.

Introduction

Much if not most youth research, in the 1990s and beyond, has tended to focus on two primary areas, namely, life-course trajectories and associated transitions on the one hand and subcultures on the other. It may be unfair to characterize these as “what young people should be doing” (life course) and “why they aren’t doing it” (subcultures) though that captures a fair portion of the politics behind much youth research. For a nuanced approach to these issues, see the chapters by Thomson and Holland and by Furlong in this collection. But within this impressive body of work, it is notable how little of it talks to “the developing world,” that neat catchphrase (used throughout this chapter) where the vast majority of young (and older) people in the world live, in conditions where “subculture” is actually the dominant more and where life course has little purchase once one moves away from socio-economic elites (however, see the chapters by Mphaphuli, Cooper, and Bhana in this collection which go against this trend). Youth are expected to obey the injunction as much now as previously: “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord” (Colossians).

It is a function of dominant cultures to assume a normative value and automatically “other” cultures (and entire societies) – and to assert that the bedrock of our values is indeed culture (Eagleton 2009, p. 158). “The politics of belonging,” although often taken up with identity and intersectional debates about gender, race, and the like, is a global concern in and of itself. Not global merely in the sense that gender or race or other issues in its ambit are globally resonating issues. When most of the world’s young people are regarded as objects of distant fascination, fear, or voyeuristic peeking, while in fact comprising the majority of human beings on the planet, then their “non-belonging” to a normative Western set of values and behaviors is as pervasive academically as it is economically and socially; this is a fundamental problem of exclusion. Youth research – let alone youth themselves – must fit the appropriate boxes or will simply be ignored, a politics of exclusion and non-belonging. Unless “the politics of belonging” understands this unwanted baggage and finds ways of fighting it, it is itself in no small danger of being exclusionary, or a tool of exclusion, even though its objective appears to be the reverse. As Eagleton wrote of postmodernism generally, “denying the existence of universal values in the name of cultural difference” (Eagleton 2009, p. 152) can lead to very dangerous outcomes:

How could such a form of life accept that there is something profoundly amiss with our condition – that it simply does not add up, that it is in several respects intolerable, and that one of the chief signs of this incoherence and intolerability is the plight of the poor? (Eagleton 2009, p. 45).

With academic and research institutions, funding and academic publications dominated by northern/western interests, life course, and subculture have largely defined the terrain of youth research for some decades now, even though life-course work has very tenuous purchase in the developing world, and subculture research (the admixture of gangs and HIV/AIDS, e.g., neatly mixes the voyeuristic favorites of violence, sex, and death) has had the effect – locally and internationally – of masking the ordinary by making it appear as extreme.

In both cases (life course and subculture), the politics of belonging – which has been described as various political projects that create ways of belonging to specific collectives at specific times – becomes relevant (Nira 2006). There is a body of very important work that is methodologically insightful, generating debates over the differences in exclusions of, say, women, black women, lesbian women, and so on – the notion that no one walks a single path through life (see the chapters by Mphaphuli, Cooper, and Bhana and by Mitchell, in this collection). But there is perhaps less awareness – ironic, given the stress on positionality – of the extent to which these exclusions are mirrored worldwide, where entire societies, religions, cultures, and so on are excluded from mainstream local and global life.

This is given a sharper edge when Crowley extends the definition by adding that the politics of belonging is “the dirty work of boundary maintenance” (Crowley 1999). This is what the west and north do at a global scale, using violence to maintain and extend their boundaries and ensure exclusion for the majority of the world’s citizens. Is it really surprising to find that much subculture work, focusing on youth who are “marginalized” or “at risk” or are gang members, finds that they violently mimic what is happening not just in their locale but across the planet? The point is that “the politics of belonging” is a global concern, not (only) local. So when “dirty business” slips over into violent business, into placing and maintaining markers about who belongs and who does *not* belong in the day-to-day lives of the majority, it reflects their broader, violent exclusion from the global economy. The politics of belonging may find it has greater purchase in developing countries than “transitions” and “life courses,” though it may not be the purchase it sought.

“Developing” Countries

This chapter, with many caveats, uses South Africa as a mini case study for developing countries. Clearly, all developing countries have their own unique social, cultural, demographic, and economic makeup. The chapter does not seek to represent (or misrepresent) these at all nor to claim any special status for South Africa as emblematic of other developing countries. Firstly, the author is South African and has worked on youth issues in South Africa since the end of apartheid and has also worked on youth in Africa and the Middle East. More importantly, because of the extremes that marked South Africa under apartheid, which have proved stubbornly resistant to post-democratic change, the country often throws into stark relief trends that exist elsewhere (for youth as for other social groups). Although formally classified as a middle-income country, apartheid

ensured that the overwhelming majority of all black people were denied (in unequal measure) a decent education, economic opportunities, legal protections, or dignity. These have been slow to improve under democracy, so that the minority racial group may have lost political power forever, but it remains the most affluent and economically powerful segment of society – so “belonging” (or not) retains a distinct racial edge in contemporary South Africa.

The country has the advantage of reasonable data accessibility. It is also a space where youth have moved from being seen and described as animalistically violent (by the former government) to heroes of the struggle (as the struggle ended) to a partner in development (during and immediately after the transition to democracy) to a selfish group – the “born frees,” who don’t understand the sacrifices of their elders and are self-absorbed and “soft” (every election since 1994). Youth in South Africa now are no different, in other words, from youth anywhere else in time and space, including their ancient Greek forebears, as summarized in criticism attributed (though contested) to Socrates:

The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers. (Quoted in Patty and Johnson 1953, p. 277)

Demographically, South Africa looks like a developing country, where children and youth dominate numerically. Of the 52 million citizens enumerated in the 2011 census, over 5.6 million were under the age of 4, while 4.8 million children were aged 5–9, and close to 4.6 million were between the ages of 10 and 14. Just less than a third (29 %) were aged between 15 and 34 years, according to Statistics South Africa (StatsSA 2011).

Like much of Asia, there is also a growing black middle class (Everatt 2012) though, as ever, there is some debate about what it constitutes and how to measure it. Academic debate aside, democracy has brought a black middle class into existence, and they in turn are producing middle class children and youth. Rizvi (2012) sees a distinctive sociocultural youth formation flowing from the entrenched inequalities that class formation brings. However, in South Africa, liberation (particularly after Mandela’s era) has witnessed a rise in nationalism and a reassertion of tradition and conservatism. Part of this includes the assumption that women and youth (and other socially “inferior” groups) should know their place – which, in the case of youth, means deference, silence until asked to speak by an elder, enforced initiation, and the like. Social phenomena, such as class formation, do not play out in similar fashion in different parts of the world.

If we focus on the Gauteng City-Region (GCR), the demographic, economic, and political driver of South Africa and the spatial focus discussed in this chapter, and compare it with other city-regions on the database of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), for example (very few of which are to be found in developing countries, it need hardly be said), we find that it has the lowest ratio of people aged 65+ compared with those aged 15–64 (OECD 2011). The OECD average (using 2008 figures, shown in Fig. 1) stood at 20 %, whereas the GCR in

2008 stood at 6.1 %, increasing to 6.9 % by 2011 (OECD 2011). The dependency ratio vexes Europeans (European Social Network 2008) – and one of the possible solutions is to “import” more workers and allow them to “belong” in some shallow form in order to pay the taxes needed to care for the aging European population. Dependency in this form is simply not an issue in countries such as South Africa.

The GCR looks far worse if we turn to unemployment (all ages). As shown in Fig. 2, unemployment in the GCR was almost double that in Berlin, which came in second worst – and the unofficial definition of unemployment (which ignores whether or not someone “actively” sought work in the week prior to being interviewed) is higher than what appears below. In the third quarter of 2013, the “official” rate of unemployment (i.e., only measuring “active work-seekers”) stood at 24.7 %. Unofficially – i.e., when measuring everyone of working age, out of work, and able to work (e.g., not living on a disability grant, retired, etc.) – the figure is considerably higher, and among youth, especially black youth, it reaches catastrophic levels in excess of 60 % (see below).

In the developing world, where the population pyramids are the opposite of those in more developed countries, every policy is a youth policy. It is simply untenable to have a population that is overwhelmingly young – in South Africa almost 6 in 10 citizens is aged below 34 years of age – but develop policy and manage social institutions as if the adult population were as numerically dominant as in, say, Western Europe. By the same token, visible in the anger among young people shut out of economic activity in the “Arab Spring” uprisings, an economy that bars the majority of the population based solely on their age – young black South Africans, for example, are the best educated African cohort in the country’s history yet seemingly unemployable – is unsustainable. Yet this is what is happening, and among researchers as among policy makers, the most common response is to blame the youth for their “passivity” (CDE 2010, p. 17).

Youth and Youth Research

These major sociodemographic differences between developing and developed countries are reflected in different foci among their youth research communities, and Western-based journals dominate the field. While acknowledging that youth researchers in countries like South Africa have less access to funding to promote their research, nonetheless, it is important to ask: why have we failed to develop a localized praxis, one that focuses on the core issues facing youth in their specific contexts, while simultaneously speaking to issues of global justice?

Many high-quality local studies exist but do not achieve wider circulation in the mainstream journals. Where research from South Africa is published, it often reinforces (Western) stereotypes of South African youth as violent, recidivist, disadvantaged, and without hope (see, e.g., Isaacs and Savahl 2014). It is predictable that in a world so badly skewed, politically and economically, this is reflected in the academy and the type of research it rewards; that makes it no less palatable.

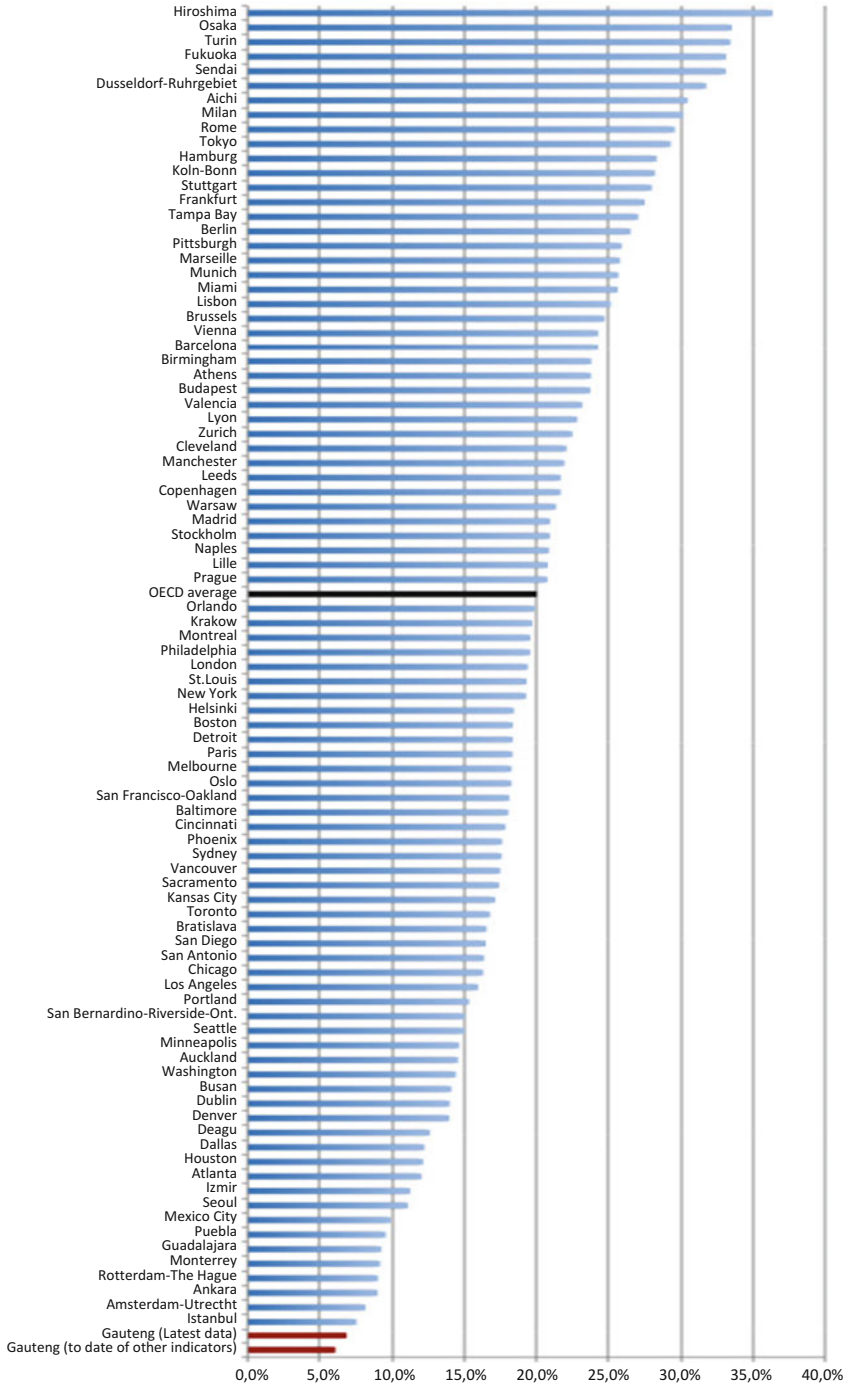


Fig. 1 Age ratio in OECD city-regions (Source: GCRO recalculation of OECD data)

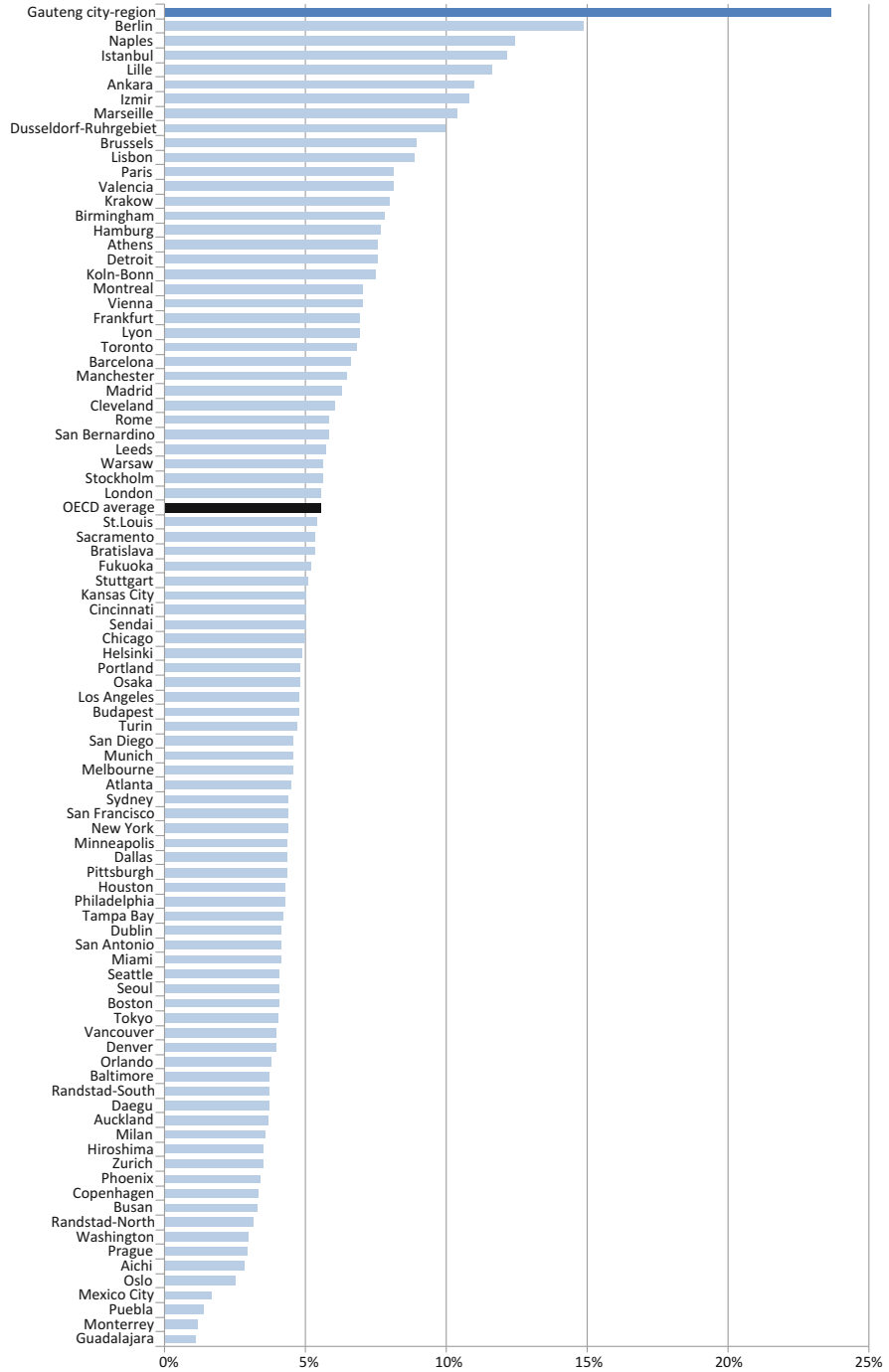
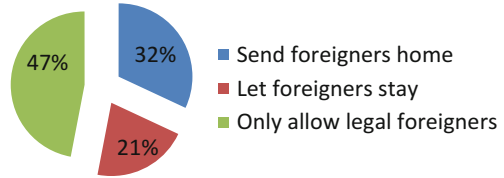


Fig. 2 Unemployment in OECD city-regions (Source: GCRO recalculation of OECD data)

Fig. 3 Xenophobia (Source: GCRO “Quality of Life” survey 2011)



This represents a challenge for youth researchers in the developing world to develop a more persuasive approach to a whole different set of problems not faced in the West.

“Outsiders” want to “belong” to a civilization (i.e., the West) that “regards itself as pretty well self-sufficient, as being more or less as good as it gets, or at least a spectacular advance on what went before” (Eagleton 2009, p. 45) but are seen as a threat, an influx that will topple civilization, and cannot be allowed to belong. Quite the reverse, they need to be turned into an efflux, by force if necessary. Youth get attention primarily as migrants and thus as a threat – *they* are coming (with potentially hidden but inevitably extremist agendas) and will take “our” jobs and “our” women and change “our way of life.” Wars are currently being fought in multiple countries to do “the dirty work of maintaining boundaries” as required by the politics deciding who belongs and who doesn’t.

Not surprisingly, these globally xenophobic attitudes are replicated in and among youth as they are among adults. Local boundaries are also violently policed. For example, a large survey in the GCR asked respondents, of all ages and races, about their attitudes to “foreigners” – the violent business of boundary maintenance in 2008 had seen 62 people murdered in the GCR because they were “too black” or did not know the isiZulu word for “elbow” (*indololwane*, for future reference), so it was a pertinent question. We offered three options, namely, that all foreigners should be sent home or that “the legal ones” should be allowed to stay and others repatriated or that all should be allowed to stay, given that many had been drawn to South Africa under apartheid and suffered the same conditions as black South Africans. Responses for the sample as a whole are shown below in Fig. 3.

Clearly, there is limited sympathy for foreigners (Everatt 2011). Just a fifth (21 %) of all respondents felt all foreigners should be allowed to stay, while just less than half (47 %) felt that it was alright for “the legal ones” to stay – and the remaining third (32 %) wanted all foreigners sent home. When negative social attitudes infect such a large proportion of the population, xenophobia seems to have become a social phenomenon. This was examined in detail from a range of angles in a special edition of *Politikon* (2011), which focused on both the xenophobic outbreak and responses to it from citizens, civil society and state.

Among youth, attitudes tended to harden with age. Between 18 and 24, respondents tended to be somewhat more open-minded than older cohorts. The two youngest cohorts (at 22 % and 23 %, respectively) were most likely to agree that all foreigners should be allowed to stay. But 28 % of 18–21-year-olds thought all foreigners should be sent home, as did 30 % of those aged 22–24, 28 % among those aged 25–30, and rising to 34 % among those aged above 30.

Part of the belonging metaphor is an emotional attachment to “home” (“place-belongingness” for Antonsich 2010) – but it has a darker side, namely, the forcible egression of those who do not deserve to belong. Young people (especially the youngest respondents) were most likely to have more tolerant attitudes toward belonging (if we clumsily use this question as a proto-proxy for a complex concept) and older people far less tolerant. This is despite the fact that youth themselves are feared and excluded from “belonging” to *inter alia* the economy because they are feared as uncontrollable, disrespecting of authority, and so on. The messy business of boundary marking in this instance became the violent business of murdering those who were believed not to “belong” due to their foreignness, or their skin color (they were “too black”), or their linguistic differences. Violently policing this boundary to belonging seems likely to continue. And why not, if western/northern societies go to war to ensure boundary markers are very clearly in place.

Youth and “Other”

In South Africa, the African youth – i.e., black, male, urban youth – have long been the subject of historical, sociological, legal, epidemiological, political, and other studies of their street gangs, criminal gangs, prison gangs, and political gangs, while during the anti-apartheid period this was accompanied (and/or explained away) by their role in the struggle, their apparent propensity for violence, and their status (hagiographic or hated, depending on the author) as the “young lions” who put their lives on the line. No sooner had apartheid been laid to rest than HIV and AIDS reared their heads, and the sexual mores and proclivities of black South Africans were even more interesting dinner-party chatter than before. Either way, “youth” meant black, mainly male, mainly urban, violent, and definitely far from mainstream. An entire generation was effectively turned into a subculture and has remained there.

Life-course analysis is not common in South Africa. How else can it be, in a society where unemployment accounts for some two-thirds of young black people, where many cannot afford to “transition” from (certainly improved if still less-than-stellar) schooling to unaffordable university, and anyway where all lessons, textbooks, and lectures are conducted not in the vernacular of any region but in English or Afrikaans? An attempt (1995) was made by the National Youth Development Forum (NYDF) to focus on “youth not in work or school,” an early precursor of today’s ubiquitous NEETs, about which Evans and Furlong (1997) and others have written eloquently – young people not in education, employment, or training. But precisely because this ended up including large cohorts of the entire generation, and occurred a year after the first democratic election which saw youth at the back of the queue for post-apartheid resource reallocation, the study remained merely a study, the NYDF soon folded, the policy recommendations were shelved, and youth slid, inexorably, into their traditional position – mistrusted, feared, easily blamed and rarely understood, best avoided, credit unworthy, and socially outcast.

Andy Furlong has noted that the term NEET became popular partly because of the negative connotations of having “no status” (Furlong 2006) (see also Furlong’s

chapter in this collection). He could most certainly have been talking about youth in South Africa, who in the mid-1990s were on a rapid downhill slide from “young lion” to the “idle threat” of previous decades. But the key difference, rarely acknowledged or possibly not understood in the international literature, is that NEETs in countries like South Africa and much of the developing world are *the majority*, not some delinquent minority. As such, detailed targeting mechanisms such as utilised by Alvarez et al. (2009) have a better chance of finding purchase, though (in this case) requiring social not health specificity. Subcultures are, in fact, often dominant forms of youth cultures – ways of belonging in societies that offer few if any alternatives for nonelites – i.e., for the majority of youth.

Youth, Status, and Quality of Life

Youth serve as a lens that provides a sharp focus on the ills of society. In the GCR, for example, the economy is lopsided – it is the largest subnational economy in Africa but has little place for un- or undereducated people. Youth should benefit, since they are in general terms far better educated than older (black) people – but they in fact suffer far higher unemployment. In the GCR, for example, 2.7 % of respondents had no formal education at all, of whom less than one in twenty-five was under twenty-four. Another 13.3 % had only completed their primary schooling: some 95 % of these citizens are aged above 24 years of age. At the tertiary level, the average stood at 19.6 %. The equivalent figure for 20–24-year-olds was 17.3 %, with a number still studying, rising to 19.9 % among 25–29-year-olds. So while things may slightly even out at the top of the youth cohort, they are deeply uneven – measured by age – at the base. No wonder these (better) educated youth seem to represent a threat to some of their un- or undereducated elders.

What happens to belonging, either the emotional desire to belong or to the politics of belonging, in such a context? In the large sample survey used for this chapter, among respondents aged between 20 and 24 years of age, less than a fifth (18 %) had found formal sector employment by 2011, plummeting to just 6 % working in the informal sector – and one in two (48 %) unemployed – illustrated below in Fig. 4. Move up a cohort, and unemployment stayed high at 47 % – while both formal and informal sector employment grew. Unemployment for the sample as a whole stood at 30 %, illustrating quite how hard young people find it to enter the economy – formal or informal.

These figures for all youth also hide the racial differentiation that continues to cut across most aspects of South African society. This is where the more traditional “politics of belonging” discourse may help, by reminding us that being young is one thing but being young and black is another. If we further analyzed this by sex, the same pattern would appear, even more starkly, since to be young, black, and female adds a whole new dimension to the politics of belonging.

Cuervo and Wyn (2014) tell us that

In the Australian context, there is added impetus for conceptual renewal in Youth research as patterns of disadvantage have become entrenched. Over a period of a quarter of a century, young people from poor families, those who live in rural areas and young

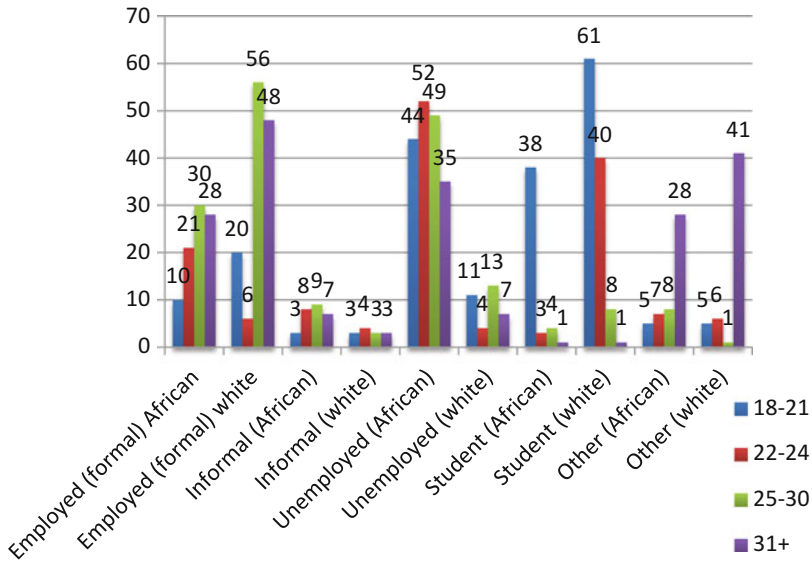


Fig. 4 Employment status by race and age (Source: 2011 GCRO “Quality of Life” survey)

Indigenous people remain the most disadvantaged in educational outcomes, in the labour market and their health is significantly worse.

They go on to note (referring to the work of Evans and Furlong from the 1990s) that

With the benefit of hindsight, it is now possible to see how the spatial character of the youth-as-transition metaphor has focused attention on the passage of young lives through the portals of education and employment. (ibid., p. 8)

The situation in the GCR described in this chapter underscores their broader point, as young black people, and young black women in particular, remain at the receiving end of education and economic advancement and bear the brunt of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. There is no teleological transition from school to university to work for vast numbers of people liberated two decades ago, and patterns of exclusion, disadvantage, and non-belonging remain in place. The notion of “belonging” has its obverse, namely, exclusion, the active or passive refusal to allow entry into higher education or formal employment or even adulthood. Metaphors are helpful but have their dark side that also needs examining and (as the authors note) their normative assumptions challenged.

Youth and Marginalization

A further aspect of belonging comprises the complex relationships in which young people are implicated. Using a multivariate technique to measure “marginalization” (among the 29 variables used are anomie, alienation, social capital, media access, civil society membership, racism, xenophobia, and so on) throws into relief some

key insights. It is a specific instrument for gauging the psychosocial status of respondents. This would be important anywhere in the world, but in post-apartheid Gauteng, we need to better understand who is doing well or badly in the psychosocial sense. For youth, the need to understand these complex relationships is even more pronounced, given that transitioning into work and mainstream life may be inconceivable or simply irrelevant.

An index was constructed using psychosocial and attitudinal variables. This approach has a reasonable pedigree in South African youth studies, where it formed the core of the youth mobilization, research, and policy development process in South Africa between 1991 and 1996; the index was used in different ways thereafter (see, e.g., Everatt and Orkin 1992; Everatt and Jennings 2001). The starting point of this approach is to analyze the 29 “interior” variables, which are then grouped in 10 “dimensions of concern” set out in Table 1 below.

A factor analysis is then used to see if there are relationships between variables that would otherwise be difficult to find; then we scale the scores, create an index of marginalization, and analyze that against demographic variables to find out who is suffering low or high marginalization.

In the marginalization index, there are four typologies: “fine,” “OK,” “at risk,” or “marginalized.” Those in the “fine” category barely registered on the scale, scoring below 1/10. Those who scored in the “OK” category were still performing well, scoring between 1 and 3,999 on the scale. The category labeled “at risk” was scoring reasonably high – between 4.0 and 4,999 – and so was “at risk” of falling downward into the “marginalized” category or, if appropriately supported, pulling themselves into the “OK” category, as we can see in Table 2 below.

Finally, at the “wrong” end of the scale – scoring high, meaning performing most worryingly – were respondents scoring high on five or more items in the index. These are people with extreme sociopolitical views, high levels of alienation and anomie, often victims of crime and suffering high poverty, deeply xenophobic and racist, and disconnected from society either through media or organizational participation.

As we can see in Fig. 5, among respondents aged 16–19 years of age, 2.3 % were “marginalized,” albeit rising to a more worrying 7.1 % who were “at risk” – but the common public discourse about the “lost generation” seems yet again based on prejudice, not fact or data. Youth are not a homogenous group, and it is often the differences among and between them that are most revealing. In this exercise, it is apparent that the youngest cohort enjoys high levels of good psychosocial health and low levels of marginalization, but while the “fine” category stays largely constant across all respondents (and all ages), as youth age, so their psychosocial status worsens and continues to do so into adulthood. If a transition is occurring, it is as discussed above into an economy that has little if any work to offer, in a deeply divided society in which more than one in ten young people does not feel they belong.

If one variable really correlates intensely with marginalization, it is education. Among respondents with no education, over a quarter (26.1 %) are either “marginalized” or “at risk,” and just 8.6 % are fine – the latter is three times lower than among those with a post-matric qualification, shown in Fig. 6 below.

Table 1 Dimensions of concern: marginalization index (reverse scored where appropriate)

Dimensions of concern	Indicator description	QoL Question
A. Relationships	Marriage	• dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with marriage
	Family life	• dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with family life
	Friends	• dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with friends
	Trust	• need to be careful dealing with community
B. Housing	Dissatisfaction with Dwelling	• dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with current dwelling
C. Connectivity	Television, radio, Internet	• no TV, no Radio, no Internet
D. Crime/safety	Crime Victim	• was a victim of crime in last 12 months
	Safe in the day	• feel a bit unsafe or very unsafe during the day
	Safe at night	• feel a bit unsafe or very unsafe after dark
	Safe at home	• feel a bit unsafe or very unsafe at home
E. Participation	Participation	• belongs to no civil society organisation
F. Health	Health status work	• agrees health status affects ability to work
	Health status social	• agrees health status affects social life
G. Hunger	Hunger: adults	• were times when skipped meal in the last year because no money
	Hunger: kids	• were times when no money to feed kids in past 12 months
H. Alienation/ extreme views	Voting	• agree or strongly agree my vote won't make any difference
	Alienation	• agree or strongly agree no-one cares about people like me
	Politics	• agree or strongly agree politics a waste of time
	Anomic	• agree or strongly agree people like me cannot influence community developments
	Country heading in wrong direction	• strongly disagree or disagree that country in right direction
	Elections	• strongly disagree or disagree election was free & fair
	Judiciary	• strongly disagree or disagree judiciary is independent
	Xenophobic	• agree or strongly agree Gauteng for South Africans only
	Race	• agree or strongly agree races will never trust each other
	Press freedom	• strongly disagree or disagree press is free
I. Government	Government performance	• dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with all 3 spheres of government
	Government contribution to QoL	• no sphere is doing anything for me
	Local government communication	• don't want to hear from government at all
J. Life Satisfaction	Life Satisfaction	• dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with life as a whole

Table 2 Marginalization index scores (entire sample)

Category	Percent 2013
1 Fine	18,6
2 OK	70,1
3 At risk	7
4 Marginalised	4,3

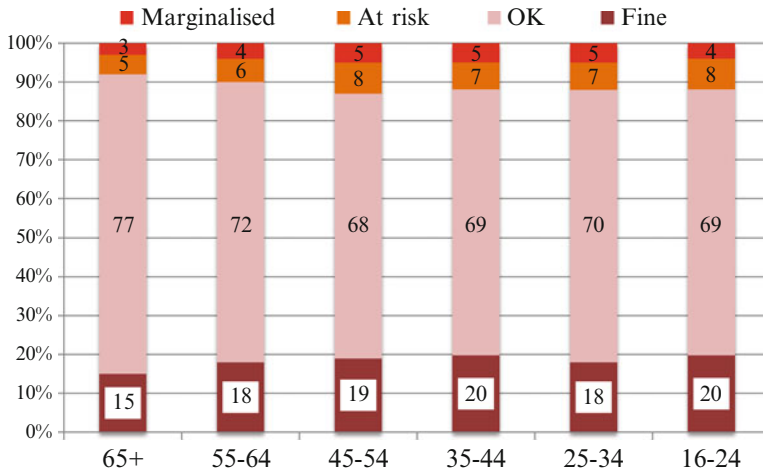


Fig. 5 Marginalization by age (Source: GCRO “Quality of Life” survey 2011)

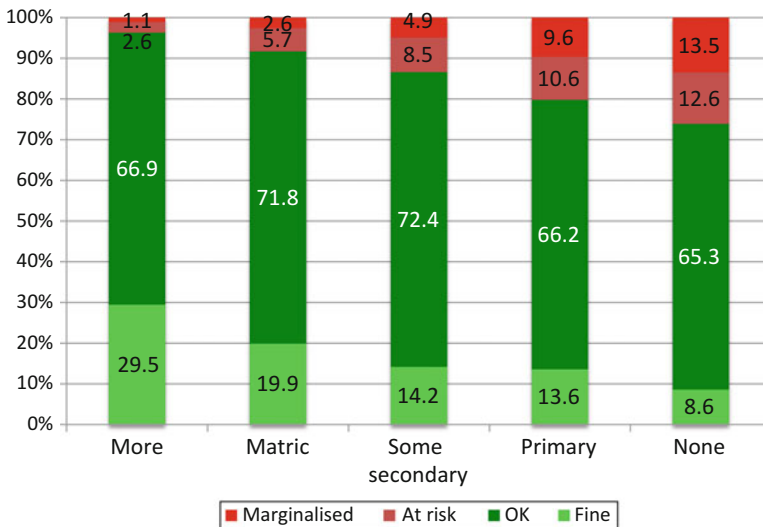


Fig. 6 Marginalization by education (Source: GCRO “Quality of Life” survey, 2011)

Conclusion and Future Directions

Belonging is a possible replacement concept for transitions (and all the other metaphors that preceded it). However, this chapter has argued that for some to belong, others must be denied. Youth themselves are denied membership of many things – formal sector employment most obviously – and so what youth researchers (i.e., older, qualified adults who belong to the academy) see as subculture is often the dominant culture and certainly true in the developing world whose citizens are denied the benefits of (let alone access to) the developed world.

Ironically, belonging is by definition exclusive. Until youth research is able to find ways of understanding why young people, everywhere in the world, suffer more harshly at the hands of the economy, disease, and of a whole range of social, cultural, political, and other factors, then youth research will allow youth in the developed world to “belong” to the canon, even those in subcultural formations like gangs – but the millions in Asia, Africa, South America, and elsewhere will continue to be excluded and written off in a patronizing sentence or two about poverty, violence, HIV, and AIDS in the developing world.

The key new direction (in truth a very old direction) that this chapter proposes for youth research is that the basic tenet of global justice must animate it. If belonging is to mean anything, it must mean something tangible to the teenager in Delhi or Nairobi or Bogota, not just to the academic sitting in London or Melbourne or Manhattan. If youth researchers cannot (or do not, to be precise) understand and articulate the interconnectedness of the global and local and that local exclusions (refusals of the right to belong) merely mimic identical (usually violent) global exclusions that litter the globe, then the concept will not find purchase or add value.

Cross-References

- ▶ [“Let’s Go 50/50”: The Everyday Embodiment of Sexuality Amongst African Young People](#)
- ▶ [Current Debates in Social Justice and Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [Dysfunctional Mobilities: International Education and the Chaos of Movement](#)
- ▶ [Enhancing Citizen Engagement at the Municipal Level: Youth’s Perspectives](#)
- ▶ [Learning Gender in the Early Years of Schooling in South Africa](#)
- ▶ [Performative Pedagogy: Poststructural Theory as a Tool to Engage in Identity Work Within a Youth-Led HIV Prevention Program](#)
- ▶ [Possibilities for Learning Between Childhoods and Youth in the Minority and Majority Worlds: Youth Transitions as an Example of Cross-World Dialogue](#)
- ▶ [Thinking About Childhood and Youth](#)
- ▶ [We Need to Talk About Learning: Dialogue and Learning Amongst South African Youth](#)
- ▶ [Who’s Learning or Whose Learning? Critical Perspectives on the Idea Youth-Led Policy-Making Related to Gender-Based Violence in a South African Classroom](#)

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Ways of Thinking About Young People in Participatory Interview Research

6

Rob Pattman

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Abstract

This chapter explores what it means to treat young people and children as being worthy of study in their own right, and not in terms of their relationship with adulthood. Moving from the adult-centric theories that have traditionally dominated childhood and youth research, this chapter highlights engaging with young people as active agents in research. Focusing on issues that are particularly relevant to young people (sexuality, HIV/AIDS), the chapter draws on participatory interviews to illustrate the inversion of power relations that enables researchers to engage with and learn from young people who are positioned as figures of authority. It is argued that an analysis of how research with children and young people can be democratized enables an understanding of the pedagogic implications of participatory research. Thinking about interviews as a social encounter between participants, rather than as a device to elicit information from young people opens up an understanding of the way in which interviews are spaces

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in which the discursive practices of the young person are displayed. Respecting these practices enables researchers to draw on young people's knowledge about issues such as HIV/AIDS, for example. The chapter concludes by elaborating on the pedagogical opportunities and risks of using participatory research to open up performance spaces for young people.

Introduction

James and Prout (1997) identify a paradigmatic shift in academic ways of thinking about youth and childhood, from defining and researching them only through their relations with adulthood to taking their identifications, relationships, and cultures as worthy of study in their own right. What this means and the implications of this for (adults) doing research with young people and children, especially in the context of social problems, are key concerns this chapter addresses.

What ways of academic thinking about children and youth have marginalized them in relation to adults and rendered them relatively passive or invisible in research?

James and Prout (1997) cite the influence of theories of "socialization" in sociology and anthropology which construct adults as instigators and teachers and children as passive products. Socialization is usually understood as "the process through which children are 'taught' the social mores pertinent to any particular society or culture" and has tended to be framed as something that is "done to children" (James and James 2012) through their interaction with adults. For example, Durkheim, writing in the early twentieth century, argues that norms and values are learned by children from adults through explicit processes of inculcation in churches, schools, or families or more implicitly through the models of behavior adults set for children (Durkheim 1982). Parsons, writing in the 1950s, focuses on the family or more specifically mothers and fathers in providing role models for what he sees as gender appropriate forms of socialization (Parsons 2002). Such theories have been criticized for presenting an "oversocialized" (Wong 1961) understanding of children and young people which denies them any kind of agency and raises questions about how "children do eventually grow up" (James and James 2012) and become adults and teachers and instigators.

Neither, according to James and Prout, have children and young people been accorded agency in their traditional home in developmental psychology which reduces children to adults-in-the-making, whose views and behavior can be read off from developmental phases.

Such theories, James and Prout (1997) argue, are "adult-centric" and are the product of cultures which take for granted adults as the norm against which children and young people are measured (see ► [Chap. 2, "Deconstructing Discourses to Rupture Fairytales of the 'Ideal' Childhood"](#) by Smith, K. and ► [Chap. 4, "Thinking About Children: How Does It Influence Policy and Practice?"](#) by Taylor, N. and Smith, A. in this collection). But adults are not neutral and, like children and young people, view the world from particular vantage points influenced by their very different experiences, interests, and identifications. What are the research implications

of ways of thinking about young people which challenge the construction of adults as representing the norm while seeking to encourage voices for children and young people? This is a question which is posed in this chapter which seeks to engage with examples of research with children and young people which aim to be “young person centered” (Frosh et al. 2002) and “allow children a. . . direct voice and participation in the production of sociological data” (James and Prout 1997).

This chapter discusses the importance of adult researchers engaging with young people as active agents in interview research, in order to learn from them, and especially about the nature of social problems which influence and affect them. It draws on participatory interviews to illustrate what it means to “invert power” relations and engage with learners as figures of authority in research. This involves **not** taking the interview as an instrument for eliciting information from them, but seeing it, instead, as a social encounter and context in which identifications are made and relations established between the participants, which affect how they present themselves and what they say (Pattman and Kehily 2004).

The chapter begins by elaborating on what it means to think about interviews as social encounters and connects this with concerns about democratizing research relations raised by feminist writers (Stanley and Wise 1983; Oakley 1981) as well as the insights of theorists who draw attention to the contextually specific ways people “present” themselves and “perform” (Goffman 1959; Butler 1990). It then explores the “performances” of participants in an interview-based participatory study with 11–14-year-old boys in London (which included me as the interviewer) and how they constructed and experienced this (Frosh et al. 2002). It then argues for the significance and importance of participatory interview research with young people as a research practice in Southern Africa in the context of HIV/AIDS and reflects on the pedagogic implications of this.

Thinking About Interviews as Social Encounters

In thinking about and engaging with interviews and focus group discussions as social encounters, this chapter draws on the work of feminist writers who have raised concerns about power and self-reflexivity in research and argued that relations of power are constructed in the very process of doing research and that these are particularly acute when they are hidden. This is when the researchers seek to minimize their influence by constructing apparent conditions of objectivity and relate to those they are researching as “mere objects there for the researcher to do research ‘on’” (Stanley and Wise 1983, p. 164).

This self-reflexive concern with the dynamics of the research encounter was exemplified in an interview study conducted in the late 1970s in England with women on a labor ward who were about to become mothers for the first time. The researcher, Ann Oakley (1981) wanted to elicit information from these women about their views concerning their future roles as mothers, but they were very quiet. Oakley was older than them and was, herself, a mother, as these women discovered, and they were anxious to know about her experiences of early motherhood.

At first Oakley was disinclined to respond, since her focus was on eliciting information from them. But then she started to respond, and by doing so and drawing on her own experiences as a mother, Oakley was able to engage in conversations with these young women which generated rich information about their views and anxieties about becoming mothers. Such information, she claims, could never have been obtained had she remained relatively detached as the research manuals advised her to do.

What this account of doing research serves to illustrate is that interviews are not simply tools or instruments for eliciting information from interviewees. Even the interviewer who seeks anonymity by simply posing already formulated questions or by not showing any emotions or by not responding (during the interview) to questions about herself establishes a relationship with her interviewees which affects and influences what they say. In such a relationship the interviewees (especially if they are relatively young) may view the interviewer as a figure of authority to whom they defer. This, Oakley argues, was how the young women related to her before she started addressing their questions and concerns and was illustrated in the relatively short staccato responses which they initially gave in response to her questions.

The concept of interviews as social encounters has been influenced by the “biographical turn” (Thomson 2007) in the social sciences which is based on the view that language is not simply descriptive but constitutive of realities (Foucault 1979), that experiences are never raw but always mediated and shaped by people’s narrative accounts of these (Riessman 1993). This implies that the narrative accounts of the interviewees are not simply windows on a real world “out there” but important resources through which they construct themselves and others. This means not taking for granted what the research participants say in these as if this is simply a reflection of their internal and external realities, but situating what they say in the context of the research encounter and the particular kinds of identities and relations they forge and fashion in this.

Martyn Hammersley (2013) argues that these constructionist arguments suggest that the analytic focus in interviews “should be on the discursive practices displayed in the informant’s talk” and the “cultural performances” of the participants. Indeed the very concept of “performativity” carries important implications for thinking about research events such as interviews as social encounters or contexts, as we see in the works of Goffman (1959) and Butler (1990), both of whom argue that identities are positions we construct through performances and that how we perform and present ourselves depends on the social context. Goffman argues that the social world is analogous to a stage and that individuals are like actors putting on performances which they consider appropriate with particular audiences in specific contexts. Judith Butler (1990) posits the idea of gender as something we do and perform and construct relationally rather than an essence we have, and argues, further, that our gendered performances become so naturalized through “repetition” that they create the impression that they are the outcome of certain fixed and essential attributes which make males and females behave in predetermined ways. But there is no “doer behind the deed” only the “deed.”

This raises questions, which this chapter addresses, about how to research (young) people, gender, and sexuality without contributing to the reification of these categories and taking them for granted as descriptors of who people fundamentally are or essences they have which make them behave in predictable and homogenous ways in relation to these but as categories constructed by the young people themselves from the cultural resources available to them (Pattman 2013).

How 11–14-Year-Old London Boys Perform in Participatory Interviews and Their Experiences of These

In their school-based interview study on “young masculinities” with 11–14-year-old boys in London, Frosh et al. (2002) argue for “a young person centered” and semi-structured approach to interviewing. In this the interviewer identifies broad themes to be addressed, such as views about school, interests and hobbies, and relations with girls and boys, but encourages the young people to set the agenda in relation to these by picking up on issues they raise and asking them to illustrate and elaborate. The pace and direction of the interviews depends very much on the particular young people being interviewed and the relationship they and the interviewer establish. But engaging in this way with boys as active agents in research does not imply, they argue, “an uncritical acceptance of boys” versions of themselves. For they take descriptions of experience as “discursive constructions,” ways of making sense of things, which involve articulating specific versions of self, identity, and the world (Scott 1992). Boys are positioned as social actors in the interviews, then, by encouraging them not only to talk about themselves and others in expansive ways but also to reflect on how they were identifying and categorizing people.

One of the findings of this research was how the experience of being interviewed conflicted with the expectations of most boys and the surprise and pleasure many boys expressed at being able to talk at length about their feelings and relationships. This was in part because they imagined the interviewer would be more like a didactic teacher figure, firing questions, putting them on the spot, and sitting at the top of the table, rather than in a circle. This caricature of the interviewer, informed by media representations and a societal context in which children rarely discuss their lives with adults, is one that school-based researchers frequently have to overcome. Other researchers conducting school-based ethnographies and interviews have reflected on how they came to be seen by pupils *not* as figures of authority in the way they positioned teachers (see e.g., Kehily and Nayak 1996; Thorne 1993; Davies 2003).

Frosh et al. are critical of the view that interviews simply present opportunities for people to put into words thoughts and feelings they already have, and draw attention to processes of identity construction going on in the interviews. They focus on how boys produce versions of themselves as they talk, and they address the interviewer (myself) not just as a facilitator but a co-constructor (Hollway and Jefferson 2004) who influences the conversation by his very presence as a particular kind of man, pursuing certain topics the boys raise, challenging them on specific issues, and communicating certain emotions.

Another key finding reported in the research concerns how different boys were in terms of what they said and how they behaved in the individual and group interviews which were conducted.

The group interviews were often characterized by much laughter, while in the individual interviews boys were more serious. When asked, after participating in both the group and individual interviews, which one they preferred, about half of the boys expressed a preference for the group interviews and enthused about the “fun” they had “having a laugh” with the other boys in the group. Through laughter, Frosh et al. argue boys displayed camaraderie with other boys and asserted themselves, too, as emotionally tough in contrast to girls or boys they feminized as vulnerable and weak. In some of the group interviews, they discerned the formation of hierarchies between boys with some boys being deferred to by others. When these boys spoke, there was less cross talking and they elicited the most laughs. In the group interviews, Frosh et al. (2002, p. 37) found “the boys were much more invested in asserting themselves against girls,” ridiculing girls for imagining they were more mature than boys, for wanting to play football with boys, for being favored by teachers, and for liking “girl power” (see also Prendergast and Forrest 1997; Gilbert and Gilbert 1998; Kenway et al. 1998).

As a male interviewer, I may have unwittingly contributed to this polarization of gender in the all-male peer group. As Frosh et al. (2002) found, some boys interviewed in groups accounted for the rapport they established with the interviewer in terms of their shared gender and their assumed shared distancing from females.

Maurice: it's not like talking to a woman (.) if you was like a woman we couldn't talk about the things we've talked about, we couldn't talk to a teacher about porn mags and things like that [laugh].

Benny: Yeah we couldn't say things about the girls cos she might disagree. (p. 37)

Frosh et al. found that the same boys when interviewed individually praised girls for their maturity and sensitivity, in contrast to boys. It was mainly in individual interviews that boys criticized other boys for being “uncommunicative, thick-skinned, aggressive and uncaring” – characteristics that were often key motifs of masculinity created in group interviews. These boys, they argue, were producing “softer” versions of masculinity, in the sense of being less loud and funny and speaking about emotions and relations in ways which would be derided as “soft” and “wimpish” with a group of boys or even with adult males. Interestingly, opportunities for “talking” and more specifically “talking about personal things” in a “serious way” without fear of others “laughing” at them were the most common reasons given by the boys who expressed a preference for the individual interviews.

I reported on the irony of some boys interviewed individually confiding in me – a man – about their problems, yet idealizing women and girls as sympathetic and supportive listeners. Rather than letting this pass, I challenged these boys to reflect upon how they were polarizing gender. For example, John was asked what would happen “if a boy rather than a girl was ‘quite tender and comforting towards you.’” (p. 192). John defined himself as “hard” and talked graphically about his commitment to fighting, yet spoke in a serious, reflective, and critical way about this and

expressed sadness about not seeing his estranged father and idealized girls and women as people with “fairer voices” who would sympathize with him about his relationship with his father. Responding to the interviewer, he says:

John: He'd be pushed aside.

RP: By you? Would you push him aside?

John: Well, depends if (2) depends if the boys would push him away first or if I don't get to hear him he might just be bugging me or something so I just push him to the side and then I feel sorry for them because they're trying to help me and then I don't, then I get angry and I'll lose my temper.

While responding to John's idealization of girls in relation to boys, I seem to be challenging him, here, to consider how invested *he* is in sustaining tough and hard relations with other boys. What is striking is the reluctance of John to say *he* would “push him aside,” presumably because he had been “critical of boys for being so unsympathetic and emotionally disengaged” and because he had developed a close relationship with me as the interviewer that enabled him to be so. When John generalizes that “he'd be pushed aside,” I ask if he would do this. John “admits” he might push him aside, though qualifies this with “just” as if diminishing the effect of his action. But he also speaks of getting angry, “as if he knows he has missed an opportunity.” This view of John's was co-constructed in the sense that it emerged as a result of the sort of relations being forged between the interviewer and interviewee. Here I appear to be picking up on John's attachment to myself as an interviewer and as a caring and interested man and challenging him to reflect upon his longing for these kinds of relations and his investment in a particular male identity collectively constructed and performed in opposition to versions of “softness.” Such moments of engagement between the researcher and respondent point to the fluidity of gender as a social category and the way it may be shaped by the research space.

When told about the marked discrepancies between what boys were like in individual and group interviews, some of the teachers attributed this to boys' presumed susceptibility to “peer pressure.” However, Frosh et al.'s view is that the individual interviews do not provide insight into what boys were *really* like, in contrast to the group interviews as the teachers assumed. As Bronwyn Davies (2003) notes, “contrary to much of our experience, a consistent thread running through our discursive practices is the idea of each person as unitary, coherent, non-contradictory and as fixed” (notably in relation to sex/gender). Interestingly, projections of “coherence” by teachers onto boys, in Frosh et al.'s study, seemed to carry moralistic injunctions, implying that many boys seduced by peer pressure were not behaving as boys should.

This also applies to social scientific research practices which have tended to ignore or “iron out contradictions” in their quest to elicit the truth (Pattman 2007). What the very different accounts of boys in these different modes of research suggested, according to Frosh et al., was they were taking up different (sometimes contradictory) discursive positions in different contexts, and modifying and also resisting these. Whereas in the group interviews they seemed to be

displaying aspects of what Raewyn Connell (1995) calls “hegemonic” masculinity – confidence, assertiveness, anger, and raucous humor – when talking about a range of themes and issues connected to their interests, identities, and relationships, in the individual interviews many of the same boys were addressing the sorts of problems for boys and men incurred by trying to live up to the unrealistic expectations imposed by these hegemonic ideals and fantasies.

The Significance of Participatory Interview-Based Research with Young People in Southern Africa in the Context of HIV/AIDS

This section focuses on another participatory interview study conducted with young people in Southern Africa in the context of HIV/AIDS. This was a UNICEF study which the author coordinated with Fatuma Chege between 2000 and 2003 with young people mainly in their teens (Pattman and Chege 2003; Pattman 2005). The rationale for conducting this research was to collect information from boys and girls about their lives in order to develop appropriate and relevant resources for life orientation programs being introduced into schools in the light of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. It was hoped that, in contrast to established forms of HIV/AIDS education which were largely didactic, these programs would actively engage with young people and their views, identifications, and experiences (HEAIDS Report 2010).

Until the late 1990s and early 2000s, little research had been conducted on the topic of young people and sexuality either in South Africa or other African countries “because it was deemed too private to make investigation either appropriate or feasible” (HEAIDS Report 2010, p. 27). This was, and still is, reinforced by cultural taboos concerning adults and young people talking about sexuality and by adult constructions of children, in many predominantly Christian countries, as nonsexual beings, through idealizations of youthful “innocence” (and ignorance) in relation to sexuality. Indeed, one of the main contributions that more recent research with young people on the topic of sexuality has made in Southern Africa is that young people are themselves sexual beings, a view which informs and is reinforced by further research. Sexuality, as these studies have attested, is not something that becomes meaningful and significant only as we approach adulthood, even if it has been constructed in South Africa (Bhana 2007), as in many other societies (Epstein and Johnson 1998; Kehily 2002; Reynold 2004), as a marker of adulthood by adults wishing “innocence” on children and imagining them as asexual.

Such research has been motivated mainly by the HIV/AIDS pandemic as well as other social issues and concerns, such as sexual harassment and gender-based violence. A body of qualitative (interview and ethnographic) research has emerged in South Africa which has attempted to explore the meanings and significance which young people, in particular communities and social contexts, attach to gender and sexuality and how these affect and influence their lives. Such research has raised important questions about young people’s knowledge or lack of knowledge about HIV/AIDS and modes of transmission; their own practices, desires, or concerns relating to sex and sexuality; their views about abstinence and condom

usage; and more generally about their experiences, identifications, relationships, and vulnerabilities, desires, and ambitions as young men and women in particular communities (e.g., Wood et al. 2007; Shefer and Foster 2009; Bhana and Pattman 2011; Jewkes and Morrell 2011; Msibi 2012). It has provided us with valuable insights and ways of understanding the power relations involved in the deployment of gender and sexuality as social categories.

Informing this kind of research are two key assumptions: one, that young people are sexual beings and two, that they are active agents who construct their everyday social worlds (even though, as social beings, they are never free and independent agents, but are always constrained by the social and material worlds they inhabit). But only a few researchers working within this paradigm have advocated participatory forms of research in which young people are addressed as potential authorities by encouraging them to “produce knowledge” (Stuart and Smith 2011) about their social worlds and, at same time, critically reflect on themselves, their identifications, and relationships through their participation in various kinds of research activities such as drawing, role play, and photo voice (see however ► Chap. 7, “Approaches to Understanding Youth Well-Being” by Cahill, H., and ► Chap. 21, “Performative Pedagogy: Poststructural Theory as a Tool to Engage in Identity Work Within a Youth-Led HIV Prevention Program” by Cahill, H. Coffey, J. and Beadle, S. in the section on Identity in this collection). In this kind of research, the “adult” researcher works with the young people, introducing them to the research activity and posing questions which relate to the problems they raise rather than deciding, in advance, what the research problem is and asking predetermined questions which relate to this. For example, concerns about being harassed sexually in the school toilets were raised by many female learners in a participatory research exercise in which learners attending a rural high school in KwaZulu-Natal were given disposable cameras and asked to take photos of safe and unsafe spaces in the school. These photographs became powerful resources for provoking reflexive discussion and for highlighting gendered concerns not usually communicated to adults and teachers (Mitchell et al. 2006).

The UNICEF research also sought to engage with young people in participatory ways and to encourage critical self-reflection, though this, as in Frosh et al. (2002), was pursued mainly through particular kinds of semi-structured interviews. Research assistants (men and women in their early 20s–50s) were trained to conduct interviews with young people about their lives and identities, addressing similar themes in Frosh et al.’s study but also engaging with their views about HIV/AIDS. They were trained to be self-reflexive, approachable, and “young person centered” in the way Frosh et al. (2002) describe. Prior to the interviews, all of which were conducted in mixed and single-sex groups, some of the interviewers engaged the young people in dance and clapping and short ritualistic games, and these seemed to be very effective in helping them to feel at ease with the interviewer.

Many of the young people reported enjoying taking the interview in directions they wished and being listened to by interested adults, with whom they established relations which enabled and encouraged some of them to put questions to the researchers

about concerns they had regarding HIV, condoms, and sexual relationships (for a discussion of participatory approaches to research with children, see Smith's ► [Chap. 25, "Childhood and Youth Citizenship"](#) in this collection).

Sexuality usually emerged spontaneously in the interviews with children of all ages – without it being introduced by the interviewers – most notably when young people were discussing their relations with contemporaries of the opposite sex. In fact questioning young people about their relations with contemporaries of the opposite sex often provoked laughter and some embarrassment as if cross-gender relationships were heterosexual relations. Significantly, narratives told by young people about cross-gender friendships were striking by their absence.

As well as being interviewed, some of the young people were given diaries to keep. When writing up their diaries which they were asked to do at the end of every day for a week, the young people were given certain questions to which to respond. These were about significant events, emotions, and relations were open-ended and encouraged the diary keeper to elaborate and provide illustrations.

Boys were much more misogynistic and likely to talk about girls in derogatory or impersonal ways when being interviewed in groups rather than when writing diaries. In single-sex interviews, for example, some boys boasted about sleeping with and dumping girls, yet, in the diaries they kept, wrote highly romanticized accounts of girlfriends. The idealization of girls in boys' diaries extended to praising them (and even women teachers) for the sound advice they offered and their more "sympathetic" nature, implying dissatisfaction with popular ways of being boys.

Boasting about having multiple sexual relations was not something that was done by any of the girls our researchers interviewed. Indeed, it seemed that most of the girls were keen to present themselves as "good" (as opposed to sexual). Good was mentioned four times by four different girls in the following extract from an interview with 16-year-old, urban Zimbabwean girls:

Elisabeth: I go around with good girls because when I do something wrong they tell me that it is bad.

Nyeredzi: I get along only with good girls because they tell me about life, because they know that my parents are both dead so they tell me how to survive.

Sarudzai: I like going out with friends who have good behavior and whom I tell my secrets to and share ideas.

Forgette: I go around with my friends who have good ideas and can give me good advice.

The absence of positive stories from girls about girls with boyfriends was striking. Most girls characterized these as inevitably oppressive relationships, which interfered with schoolwork, ended up in pregnancies and abuse, and conflicted with Christian or Islamic teachings. While boyfriend-girlfriend relations were very negative in the ways the girls described them, these girls had a powerful interest in presenting them like this. By doing so, they were showing themselves publicly – in the context of a group interview – to be good girls who resisted such relationships, contrasting themselves with bad girls who did not. Whereas boys could acquire status from their peers by speaking openly about their sex drive by constructing girls as objects for them, girls had to be careful not to talk about their sexual desires or about boyfriends for fear of being labeled as "bad" (Pattman 2005).

In their interview study with young girls growing up in Malawi about their knowledge regarding menstruation and other sexual themes, Helitzer-Allen et al. (1994) observed that the young women participants seemed to be reluctant to talk openly about sexuality in group discussions compared with in-depth interviews. For this reason they advise against research which employs mainly group discussions for assessing girls' sexual knowledge. But if we interpret individual and group interviews as particular contexts, in which girls (and boys) perform, then one could argue that girls' reluctance to talk about sexuality in group discussions represents, itself, an important finding. What was interesting about the diaries kept by the girls in the UNICEF study was how many wrote about their boyfriends and their enjoyment having them, in stark contrast to the ways they presented themselves in interviews. Whereas for the boys the diaries seemed to provide a safe space to be "romantic," for the girls they seemed to provide an opportunity for articulating sexual desire.

Conclusion and Future Directions

One of the features of participatory research with young people is that it carries implications for ways of working with them in educational settings and other contexts. The research practices and methodologies may, themselves, become models of (arguably) good pedagogic practices in the context of social problems such as forms of sexual abuse and bullying. How to promote forms of participatory research, and how participatory research can be used to contribute to the development of curricula materials and pedagogic practices which engage with girls and boys as complex and multidimensional people, as active agents, and as sexual beings, presents an important challenge.

A challenge for HIV/AIDS sex educators must be to encourage boys to "perform" in groups in ways that do not involve subordinating girls (MacNaughton 2000) but draw on the affection for girls that they express so vividly in more "private" contexts such as diaries and individual interviews. This is not to argue that boys should be encouraged to *idealize* instead of subordinate girls. For this reproduces stereotypes of girls as good and boys as bad which may generate problems for both boys and girls. On the contrary, sexuality education needs to raise possibilities of boys and girls relating to each other not as stereotypical opposites, but as potential equals and friends. The critique of the polarization of gender identities around sexuality has become particularly pressing in the light of HIV/AIDS. For if boys and girls construct themselves in opposition to each other, in part through sexuality, how can they develop relations with each other which enable them to interact and socialize, let alone relate sexually?

Encouraging boys to be less invested in defining themselves in opposition to girls may mean affirming boys when they talk in ways normally constructed as feminine (Raey 1990), or providing images of caring men (Salisbury and Jackson 1996) or male facilitators/researchers exemplifying such models, and, in contrast to the strong role models advocated by writers like Biddulph (2000), subverting gender polarities (Frosh et al. 2002).

Frosh et al. (2002) found that boys were most critical of hegemonic forms of masculinity when interviewed individually, also more likely to praise (or less likely to deride) girls and perform in “softer” and less raucous ways than in the single-sex group interviews. Rather than authenticating boys’ “individual” voices, as teachers tended to do by constructing boys as inauthentic and problematic in groups, Frosh et al. argue that such contradictory performances may characterize the lives of boys seduced by hegemonic ideals but also troubled by the competition, violence, anti-intellectualism, and homophobic policing which these engender, and that boys should be encouraged, in non-accusatory ways, to reflect on these contradictions.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Approaches to Understanding Youth Well-Being](#)
- ▶ [Deconstructing Discourses to Rupture Fairytales of the “Ideal” Childhood](#)
- ▶ [Learning Gender in the Early Years of Schooling in South Africa](#)
- ▶ [“Let’s Go 50/50”: The Everyday Embodiment of Sexuality Amongst African Young People](#)
- ▶ [Performative Pedagogy: Poststructural Theory as a Tool to Engage in Identity Work Within a Youth-Led HIV Prevention Program](#)
- ▶ [The Gendering and Sexualization of Young Women Through Sex Educational Practices and Discourses in Southern Africa](#)
- ▶ [Thinking About Children: How Does It Influence Policy and Practice?](#)

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Part II
Well-Being

Approaches to Understanding Youth Well-Being

7

Helen Cahill

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Abstract

Despite that young people are the population group least likely to experience the burden of disease, significant attention is paid to the “problem” of youth health. Young people and children are often discussed in terms of their risk status, whether “at risk” and in need of protection or engaged in risk-taking and in need of control or education. Traditionally health has been understood as the absence of disease. However, the term “well-being” is increasingly used to conjure a broader notion of physical, mental, social, material, and civic health.

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The attainment of “well-being” has gathered an increasingly idealized and individualized focus and has become a catchall descriptor conjuring notions of a successful transition to adulthood.

The definition of well-being itself is an emerging one. Is the state of well-being a right or a duty, a cause or an effect? Is it an individual or a social phenomenon? Is it an ideal or a measurable state? What are the measures and standards through which it should be defined? What are the strategies and policies through which it should be addressed? And what role should young people themselves have in defining and leading efforts to enhance their well-being?

Different types of “expertise” are harnessed to investigate and address concerns with youth well-being. This in itself creates a challenge because psychologists, epidemiologists, sociologists, and educators use different explanatory stories through which to account for the factors that influence youth well-being. Yet each of these traditions has something to offer to those seeking to understand and improve the health status of young people. This chapter outlines four possible frameworks through which to approach building an understanding of youth well-being. It recommends the use of interdisciplinary approaches which call from each of these models when seeking to understand how young people themselves experience the challenge of nurturing their own well-being.

Introduction

Well-being is a crosscutting theme in youth and childhood studies. It is a term that is inclusive of subjective appraisal of quality of life, and thus all domains of experience influence to some degree the way in which young people experience “well-being.” Studies of youth well-being are approached from many different disciplinary homes, each of which has a useful contribution to make to those seeking how best to devise policy or programs to address the needs of young people. Psychologists tend to discuss well-being in terms of individual development and social and emotional health. Epidemiologists focus on patterns that occur within subpopulation groups, identifying the way in which young people may be particularly at risk of harm due to activity that manifests at this life stage. Social geographers tend to discuss well-being in association with place, emphasizing the role of location and the impact of the cultural, the built, and the natural environment. Sociologists consider well-being in relation to the influence of culture, gender, location, class, and structural factors such as institutions and policy.

Defining Well-Being

Despite that young people are the population group least likely to experience the burden of disease, significant attention is paid to the “problem” of youth health. Young people are often discussed in terms of their risk status, whether “at risk” and

in need of protection or engaged in risk-taking and in need of control or education. Traditionally health has been understood as the absence of disease. However, the term “well-being” is increasingly used to conjure a broader notion of physical, mental, social, financial, and civic health. Awartani et al. note that well-being is a term that has been inadequately defined and that people use different tools and measures to collect knowledge about well-being (Awartani et al. 2008). These measures may range from socioeconomic indicators designed to capture information about the structural conditions that influence well-being, behavioral measures which indicate prevalence of risky health behaviors, prevalence measures which identify health status, and subjective measures designed to capture the individual’s sense of happiness or the quality of life. Klem and Connell use their research with 15–16-year-olds in Palestine, Lebanon, and Jordan to build a definition of well-being informed by young people’s perspectives as well as those derived from a review of the literature. The resultant definition includes nine domains of well-being, including physical well-being, physical and emotional safety, emotional well-being, satisfying relationships, confidence in capabilities, pleasure and joy in learning, inner strength and spirit, sense of interconnection with all of life, and overall satisfaction with life.

A concern with the lack of a viable definition for youth well-being is also expressed by Bourke and Geldens (2007). They point out that “well-being” is often conflated with either health or with happiness, with a consequent loss of attention to the way in which structural conditions such as poverty and access to education, housing, employment, and health services influence the lives of young people. They sought the views of young Australians to find what the term well-being meant to them. Their data showed that young people understood well-being to be a multidimensional construct inclusive of their interconnected relational, physical, and psychological health as well as their material circumstances.

Dodge et al. argue that the reason that definitions of well-being are inadequate is that they amount more to a set of descriptions of the multi-faceted nature of well-being rather than an actual definition as to what it means to experience a state of “well-being” (Dodge et al. 2012). They conducted a historical review of definitions of well-being, noting the evolution of interest in definitions which include positive effect, positive development and functioning, and more recently an interest within the field of positive psychology in the concept of “flourishing.” They propose a new definition of well-being as “the balance point between an individual’s resource pool and the challenges faced” (p. 230). Their definition identifies the state of well-being as the pivot point on a seesaw. One side of the seesaw is weighted by the challenges encountered by the individual (including their physical, social, and psychological challenges) and the other side is weighted by the resources (physical, social, and psychological) that the individual has to draw upon. The individual works to balance challenges and resources in order to attain a state of well-being. When faced with larger challenges, the individual must call upon more resources in order to preserve their well-being. They argue that “Stable wellbeing is when individuals have the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge” (Dodge et al. p. 230).

Within these discussions about the definitions of well-being, it can be seen that the social, emotional, and relational aspects of well-being are prominent, thus framing a strong interest in the psychosocial elements of wellness.

Well-Being and Concepts of “Youth” and “Adolescence”

As children progress from childhood to adulthood, definitions of well-being are also informed by cultural understandings of “youth” or “adolescence” or “childhood” and by what is understood to be healthy and normative development. “Youth studies” and “adolescent health” have emerged as distinct fields of study across the last century. “Adolescence” is the term most commonly used in the scientific tradition, informed by medicine and psychology, evoking notions of a biological developmental phase commencing upon reaching puberty and lasting until adulthood is attained. It forms part of a universal linear progression and is associated with discussions about puberty, brain development, the accomplishment of developmental tasks including separation from parents, and formation of an independent identity (France 2000). It is assumed to be a period of storm, stress, and risk-taking, experienced as part of the challenge of developing a separate adult identity. The interplay of risk and protective factors, operative at individual, family, school, and community levels, is assumed to influence the healthy progress towards adulthood (Beyers et al. 2004; Bond et al. 2007). The term “young people” is more commonly used in the sociological literature. Sociologists contest the notion that adolescence is a universal phase (Wyn and White 1997). France (2000), for example, points to anthropological research showing variation from culture to culture and across historical periods. He argues that “adolescence or youth can only be understood by recognition of the cultural, political and social contexts in which it is located” (2000, p. 322).

Among sociologists, discussion of youth tends to center on their participation, position, and context rather than on a psychobiological phase of development. The sociological tradition places greater emphasis on considering the impact of society on young people, or of young people on society, and the multiplicity of factors affecting the way in which young people construct their sense of self, including class, gender, sexual preference, ethnicity, location, culture, family, and education (Dwyer and Wyn 2001). Wyn and White (1997) note that a focus on adolescence as a developmental stage results in a static categorization of youth and that this occurs at the expense of a more longitudinal view of some of the commonalities that occur across the life course (such as gender, class, and ethnicity) as well as at the expense of a more relational perspective which considers the social meanings associated with “growing up.”

Context and Culture

The well-being of children and young people tends to be understood differently in the two disciplines of psychology and sociology. The ways in which “childhood” and “youth” are conceptualized can also differ from culture to culture and also

change across time (Kesby 2005). Discussion of youth has tended to be dominated by researchers using a Western analysis of the condition of young people. However, 85 % of the world's young people (defined as those aged 10–24) live in developing countries, with approximately 60 percent in Asia alone. The UN estimates that by 2015, 90 % of the world's young people will live in developing countries. Currently around 45 % of the world's young people live on less than \$2 a day with poverty and gender continuing to be the main markers that will influence their well-being (UNDESA 2005). Patel et al. point out that in many developing countries, there is no designated period of life called “adolescence” and children and young people may be regarded to be adults as soon as they have either left school, attained puberty, got married, or begun employment, even if they are only in their early teens (Patel et al. 2007).

In the developed world, concerns about the well-being of young people are often framed around the period of their “adolescence” and include concerns about mental and social health, risky behavior in relation to sex or drugs, and successful transition to employment and adulthood. In the developing world, where the vast proportion of young people live, well-being concerns are expressed around nutrition, hygiene, maternal mortality, HIV vulnerability, and survival. In developing countries, access to education has major well-being implications, particularly for females. Educated young women are more likely to use contraception, marry later, have fewer children, and be better informed about nutrition (Population Reference Bureau 2011). A child born to a mother who can read is 50 % more likely to survive past age 5 and her children are less likely to have stunted growth (Semba et al. 2008). However, access to education is influenced by gender, class, and location. For example, in Pakistan, both male and female urban adolescents in the top 20 % by wealth quintile get a full 9 years of schooling. However, those in the bottom wealth quintile adolescent boys are getting only 3 or 4 years in primary education, and the poorest 20 % of rural girls may only get 1 year in primary school (Crossette 2010).

Despite the prevailing impact of poverty on well-being of children and young people in developing countries, Saith and Wazir argue with the Indian context in mind that it is important that well-being approaches in these settings should not focus solely on poverty and material well-being, but should also be informed by the holistic approach to understand other aspects of well-being used in the global north (Saith and Wazir 2010). Consideration of poverty, gender, and access to education should be preserved while also encompassing interest in the psychosocial elements of well-being.

It is known that suicide is a leading cause of mortality for youth in both developed and developing countries and that mental health problems of depression and anxiety have a high prevalence regardless of the wealth of the country of origin (Patel et al. 2007; Patton et al. 2009). However, it is difficult to compare well-being outcomes globally, due to lack of consistent measures used to collect data and, in some instances, the lack of sufficient age-disaggregated data. Patton et al. identify the challenge in attaining internationally comparable health data for adolescents and young people (Patton et al. 2009). However, in working with the available

global data (using 2004 data), they were able to show that 40 % of deaths among young people aged 10–24 are due to intentional and unintentional injuries. Traffic accidents were the largest cause of death and accounted for 14 % of male and 5 % of female deaths. Violence was the cause of an additional 12 % of male deaths, and self-inflicted injury (suicide) accounted for 6 % of all deaths. Their research foregrounded some commonalities between countries around the prevalence of injury and mental health problems as major well-being issues in the lives of young people.

Historical Shifts Towards a Medicalization of Youth

Not only do concepts of childhood and youth and their well-being needs vary from culture to culture, but a historical perspective reveals the way in which constructs have changed over time in response to the developments in thinking and science. McLeod and Wright take a historical perspective to show how the introduction of a psychologized interest in the emotional life of the young person came to inform understandings of what constitutes positive youth development (McLeod and Wright 2013). According to Morch (2003), in the early twentieth century, “adolescence” came to be defined as a biologically based stage of psychological development, whereas formerly young people had been incorporated in a more fluid manner into the adult world. This medicalized distinction led to the understanding of youth as in need of nurture and discipline as they negotiated their growth. The 1950s and 1960s saw the development of concerns about youth as problematic and deviant. This led to a reactive focus and emphasis on the control and socialization of youth. By the 1970s and 1980s, there was a shift towards a view of youth as critics of a society that suppressed individual identity. This led to an interest in promoting self-expression and creativity in youth. The later decades of the century brought attention to problematic transitions to adulthood. Young people were seen to be making faulty transitions, failing to progress along previously recognizable pathways towards employment and domesticity (Morch 2003). The period of youth had become prolonged (now considered to be up to the age of 25, well past puberty) (Dwyer and Wyn 2001). This led to a concern with vulnerability and risk, and efforts to ensure effective transition into adult citizenship, largely denoted by participation in the labor force.

France (2000) considers the interplay between the psychological and sociological traditions of understanding youth and concludes that psychological traditions of understanding youth have come to dominate in our culture. Morch (2003) agrees, pointing out that there is a tendency now for people to relate to “social problems” as if they are individual psychological or developmental shortcomings rather than problems that occur as the result of social processes. Giroux (2000) argues that the trend nowadays is either to conceptualize youth as a threat to society or as defenseless and vulnerable. Dwyer and Wyn (2001) note this domination of the medicalized model. They point out that the term “at risk” has become identified with the status of youth as a whole. They argue that there has been a loss of focus on

the multiple dimensions of the lives of youth with a concomitant lack of attention on the way in which class, gender, location, and culture shape or moderate their life experiences.

Risk and Resilience

The constructs of risk and resilience and associated discourses regarding “healthy” transitions have come to dominate current understandings of youth well-being. Large-scale psychological studies have helped to shape current knowledge of factors associated with well-being (Beyers et al. 2004; Bond et al. 2007; McNeely et al. 2002). These longitudinal studies have identified a range of factors associated with an increased likelihood of negative health or learning outcomes. These are termed “risk factors.” A (different) set of factors has been found to be associated with positive health and learning outcomes. These are termed “protective factors.” This notion of risk and protection has become dominant in discourse about young people, and the stated goal of many initiatives is now to reduce risk factors while at the same time increase protective factors (ANCD 2004; WHO 2002).

A “wellness” focus initially prompted the interest in “resilience,” with investigators setting out to find out why it was that many young people turned out to be healthy citizens despite being raised in difficult circumstances or experiencing considerable adversity such as that associated with war, poverty, and poor parenting (Benard 2004). Initially the focus was on identifying the individual attributes associated with effective coping. Later came an additional focus on charting the environmental factors associated with resilience, that is, on identifying the nature of the family, school, or community within which the individual was more likely to thrive (Luthar et al. 2000). This inclusion of an environmental focus occurred alongside the developing public health and epidemiological research traditions in medicine which consider the broader patterns of health or illness and the role that environmental as well as behavioral and genetic factors play in establishing well-being (Nutbeam and Harris 2004).

In reviews of research conducted on both developed and developing countries, risk and protective factors are identified as occurring at the levels of the society, community, family, peers, school or work, as well as at the individual level (Beyers et al. 2004; Blum and Mmari 2005). Risk factors at the macro-level include poverty, corruption, violence, and harmful social norms. At the family level, they include parental neglect, parental mental health or drug problems, and single parent status. At a school level, risk factors include being a victim or perpetrator of bullying, poor attachment to school, and truancy. Peer risk factors include membership of a deviant peer group and social isolation. At an individual level, risk factors include temperament, low intelligence, chronic illness, early initiation into drug and alcohol use, being a victim of abuse, and mental illness. Protective factors include cultural identity and pride, good physical health, supportive parents, family harmony, responsibilities at home, social competence, optimism, problem-solving skills, adequate nutrition, a sense of belonging to school and community, membership

of a pro-social peer group, positive school climate, opportunities for success/recognition, and a good relationship with at least one adult (Beyers et al. 2004; Blum and Mmari 2005).

Longitudinal research into the individual, family, and school factors associated with resiliency in youth shows that the most significant of the protective factors, providing protection against negative health and learning outcomes, is the feeling of connectedness or belonging to family and/or school (McNeely et al. 2002; Resnick et al. 1997). However, some research conducted with marginalized indigenous communities (Hunter 2004), disadvantaged urban youth (McDonald 1999), and “high-risk” youth (Dishion et al. 2004, 1999) shows that a high level of bonding or connectedness can itself be a risk factor, particularly when the norms or benchmarks in that community involve risk behaviors, stigmatization, or separation. A range of explanatory models are used by those who note this, including Putnam’s (2000) social capital theory. In this theory, it is argued that “well” communities are high in both “bonding” and “bridging” practices, with reciprocal relationships occurring both between like and different groups. Applying this theory, Hunter (2004) points out that when communities are low in bridging practices, that is, low in the capacity to engage in reciprocal relationships outside their circle in order to attain employment, education, or services, that bonding or connectedness can in fact operate a risk factor as well as a protective factor.

More recently scholars have shown interest in combining aspects of the risk and resilience models with features of ecological models. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model (Bronfenbrenner 1979) is now often cited as providing a useful contextual approach to understanding child and adolescent development. His model depicts the way in which the individual is influenced at the proximal level by experiences directly encountered at the microlevel of their world, where they participate in the face-to-face settings of the home, school, clinic, and neighborhood. They are also influenced by a meso-system or the interrelationships, harmonious or otherwise, between these settings. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) model also encompasses a number of more distal levels of influence. He describes an “exo-level” through which the young person is influenced by the operations of the societal institutions that allocate resources, provide infrastructure and services, and develop and enact policy and laws. Within this model, the macro-level includes the shaping forces of culture, religion, economy, ideologies, and beliefs, and the chrono-level accounts for the way in which historical events and the passage of time influence all other levels. Those applying this ecological model use it to embrace the reciprocal nature of the relationship between individual and their social, cultural, and institutional ecologies. Betancourt’s research, for example, highlights the way in which use of an ecological model can help researchers to understand the complex needs of children and youth who live through experiences of armed conflict, and the protective factors that help them in their efforts to learn and live positively despite the distressing circumstances that they are caught up in (Betancourt and Khan 2008; Betancourt et al. 2013).

Ungar (2004, 2005) is among those who seek to critique and advance the way in which both the ecological model and the resilience model are used as approaches to understanding youth well-being (see also Ungar 2004, 2005). He uses constructivist

theory along with the experiences of his own clinical practice to critique the influence of the dominant medical and positivist tradition, noting the way in which it has tended to exclude the inputs of young people themselves. He notes that many of the established markers of resilience are simply indicators of conformity whereby those who used socially endorsed coping strategies are applauded and those who fashion less acceptable coping strategies to manage their way through adversity are labeled as deviant or unwell (Ungar 2004). Thus, seeking social support is seen as a positive coping strategy when young people turn to teachers or parents, but is labeled as a marker of deviance if they use gang membership to cater to this need. In this way, cultural labels which distinguish acceptable behaviors from those that are deviant or risky become entangled in the very measures that are used to describe youth well-being. Theron and Donald (2013) have similarly critiqued the western bias in much of the resiliency research. Drawing from their review of research conducted with disadvantaged youth in South Africa, they note that resiliency traits cannot be generalized across context, cultures, and circumstances. For example, in a collectivist kinship society, connectedness to extended family members may be more protective than connections with a parent, and the experience of being a parentless head of a household may build strength, and thus be protective, despite that loss of parents would usually be defined as a risk factor. Building on Ungar's work, Theron and Donald (2013) argue that resiliency is better understood through a bidirectional ecological metaphor whereby young people are understood to be in a fluid and reciprocal exchange with their ecology. In this way, Ungar (2004, 2005) and Theron and Donald (2013) interweave a discussion of risk and protective factors within the construct of the ecological model.

The “Risk Society”

The critical engagement with different approaches to youth well-being in the above discussion is more pronounced in the sociological tradition. While the risk and resilience model is compelling within the psychological and public health traditions, sociologists tend to locate risk in the society surrounding youth rather than in the youth themselves (Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Giddens 1991). Beck coined the term “the risk society” to convey this concept. Giddens and Beck both work from the thesis that society around youth has changed, and this has had an impact on the identity and well-being of young people. They believe that the escalation and dominance of the market economy has led to a breakdown in older markers of social identity such as class and gender. In the Western world, class, gender, and family no longer dictate choices; rather, these are encountered at an individual level.

Giddens (1991) argues that modernity has radically altered the nature of day-to-day social life bringing a level of uncertainty about the individual and shared future. This places an additional burden upon the individual in modernity to deal with the presence of the global within the communally impoverished local

domain. The individual must engage in a constant process of connecting personal, social, and global change and assessing choice in an uncertain world. This engenders a pervasive sense of anxiety and meaninglessness. Giddens describes this anxiety as “fear which has lost its object” (Giddens 1991, p. 44). This free-floating anxiety forms a backdrop to people’s lives. It leads to experiences of meaninglessness and alienation, and its diffused nature means it is difficult to deal with. Giddens argues that a resultant sense of personal meaninglessness has become a key psychic burden (Giddens 1991, p. 9). Giddens (1991) argues that the project of self-identity is no longer one just associated with youth but rather one that forms a “trajectory” across the life cycle. *How one shall live* becomes the question of modernity.

Beck (1992) also argues that in modernity, identity has increasingly become something that must be constructed rather than inherited or preordained in relation to one’s gender, class, location, and family. He (1992) terms this phenomenon “individualization,” describing effects as including a centering on the self and a loss of shared purpose and meaning. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argue that in the individualized society, identity becomes a task to be completed. They call this “the project of the self,” a project which has come to dominate our thinking. Augmenting the challenge of working on this “project of the self,” people now find that due to the highly differentiated and disconnected nature of society, they have a sense of playing a multitude of disconnected roles across their work and home life. Therefore, within the “project of the self,” there is a need to join up and make meaning of disparate parts of the self (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Beck’s individualization thesis has been debated by youth sociologists. Roberts (2010), for example, argues that the concept of “choice biography” underplays the continued importance of structural disadvantage related to class, whereas Woodman argues that Beck provides a new way of theorizing continued inequalities in new conditions (Woodman 2009, 2010).

According to these thinkers, young people growing up within the changing social conditions of modernity experience individualization, anxiety, disconnection from the self and others, and relentless requirement to work on the “project of the self.” From this model, it would be possible to conclude that experiences of social and psychological distress might emanate from the breakdown in societal patterns of cross-generational and intergenerational relationships.

Poststructuralist Models for Understanding Identity Construction

Poststructuralist theory informs different understandings of the well-being of young people. It reworks understandings of the process of identity construction and provides another approach through which to understand young people’s health and well-being. Within the poststructuralist tradition, the term “subjectivity” is used to refer to the ways that the social world is involved in shaping individuals’ identities (St. Pierre 2000, p. 502). The term “subjectivity” carries the idea that individuals do not, as a matter of free choice, fashion themselves out of an endless set of possibilities. Rather they learn what is “appropriate” for a male or a female of their

background, culture, ethnicity, religion, and class and then play into the membership categories that they perceive they belong to (Davies et al. 2001). Thus, gender scripts inform the way young people play into masculine or feminine norms that will show up in the way they use alcohol or cigarettes or transact their sexual relationships.

Poststructuralists argue that people internalize the norms learnt within their culture, and they self-monitor and enact the categories that pertain to themselves and others. Thus, “normalization” becomes a regulatory mechanism and a form of constraint or governance, and the mentality that the individual adopts about what is appropriate or desirable for themselves (and others) exerts a controlling influence over their actions and they become complicit in their own governance (Butler 2004, p. 50; Foucault 1980). By this argument, young men and young women will adopt practices that they see used by those within their membership. For example, a study of young people’s views about smoking in Indonesia found that smoking was seen as necessary to “becoming a man” as smoking is associated with “machismo” and self-assurance: “If we don’t follow our peers and smoke, they will call us feminine” (Ng et al. 2006, p. 798). Concomitantly, the smoking rate for girls in Indonesia (5.3 %) is much lower than for boys (38 %) (Ng et al. 2006).

Davies engages poststructural concepts to argue that the conditions of possibility affect the choices people make: “choice stems not so much from the individual, but from the conditions of possibility – the discourses which prescribe not only what is desirable, but what is recognisable as an acceptable form of subjectivity” (Davies et al. 2001, p. 172). Judith Butler (2004) argues that identity can be understood to be a form of performance (Butler 2004). People make an effort to play themselves “appropriately” to the real or imagined gaze of others, striving to fit and to belong within particular membership categories. In playing one’s self as a member of a category, the ongoing performance itself becomes evidence of the naturalness of one’s way of being and in doing so contributes to the persistence of the storyline (Butler 2004).

Poststructuralist theory highlights the way in which people internalize certain desires associated with the positions available to them, moderate themselves in relation to established norms, and self-monitor in our effort to enact the categories that they and others belong to (Davies et al. 2001). According to Butler, “our very sense of personhood is linked to the desire for recognition, and that desire places us outside ourselves, in a realm of social norms that we do not fully choose, but that provides the horizon and the resource for any sense of choice that we have.” (Butler 2004, p. 33). From this theoretical position, individuals make choices relating to well-being within a set of socially inherited storylines about what is possible or desirable. Thus, the image a person holds as to what the “right” life should constitute will inform their sense of satisfaction with the life that they have.

Metaphors and Meta-Messages: Inscribing Youth

Certain meta-messages are transmitted within each of the different approaches to understand youth well-being that are discussed here. It is important to distinguish these underlying images as they inform the way that researchers design their

approaches to investigating the well-being of children and young people and the way in which policy-makers and programmers design their prevention efforts and therapeutic interventions.

The Balance

The metaphor that underlies the risk and protective factors is binary in nature – conjuring the image of a seesaw. On one side sits the weight of the risk factors that the young person has accumulated. On the other side sits the pile of protective factors, the presence of which helps to ameliorate or outweigh the effect of the risk factors. Through this logic, an item cannot belong on both “sides” of the balance; it cannot be both positive and negative. Thus, a risk condition such as poverty, coming from a single parent family, or having a mentally unwell parent, is understood as a risk factor, without recognition that these circumstances may sometimes generate capacities such as compassion, sense of social justice, and persistence, capacities which would otherwise be considered protective factors. Likewise, the presence of protective factors whereby most young people in wealthy, developed countries have access to education, food, shelter, and relationships does not explain the high prevalence of mental health distress. Indeed, the original use of the term “resilience” related to the response to adversity. Without adversity or challenge, there can be no “resilience.”

When instances of deprivation or hardship are conceptualized within the metaphor of the balance, the logic of the model dictates that any success or mastery occurs because the risk factors are overridden in a form of negation or canceling out. It cannot be logical that possession of the risk factor is *casual* in the success. It also does not allow that the risk factors may be interwoven in a reciprocal relationship with protective factors, or may from time to time shift sides, with social advantage and education in some instances being a risk factor and then at other times being protective.

While at a medical and descriptive level, the terms risk and protection are logical and compelling, the binary is to some degree an artifact of the taxonomy of terms, and thus its explanatory power is confined. Overdependence on its use can potentially lead to a simplification of the interrelationship between adversity and mastery or failure. This is of concern when it leads to a reductionist mode of understanding people and when it overly moderates the design of health or education interventions. A simplistic understanding of risk can lead to an overemphasis on “helping” and to the storying of young people as victims, perpetrators, or deviants. Nonetheless, the data that has emerged about protective factors has informed understandings of the importance of harnessing a strength-based approach (Shoshani and Steinmetz 2013). This concept of a strength-based approach is central to the directions taken within the positive psychology and its growing focus on understanding methods to promote “flourishing” which is held to be a more optimal construct than resilience or coping.

The Adventure Tourist

Beck's notion of the "risk society," twinned with that of the "project of the self," conjures a different metaphor, that of navigating a dangerous journey through a smorgasbord of choice. As Beck points out, the tendency towards individualization leads to the placement of the individual and his or her choices and behavior as the central point of meaning. The adventure tourist is a metaphor which can be harnessed to conjure this prospect. As a tourist, the agent is free to choose their journey and its direction. The tourist metaphor carries notions that choice is pleasurable and unrestricted and that options are bountiful. When choice is conceptualized as a pleasure, what is missed is that it may amount to a burden of work, an endless task, or a fatiguing form of oppression in disguise as freedom. Beck's theories highlight that the presumption that options are unrestricted blurs attention to the reality of opportunity (or lack thereof) and places the burden of responsibility for any missteps on the individual, directing attention away from the broader conditions which continue to have a great bearing on the journey. Inherent in the "tourist" image is the story of the "good" path, the dangerous journey, the many branching moments of choice that determine the path taken, and, hopefully, the point of arrival. This "transitions" story of the dangerous journey into adulthood is another compelling explanatory metaphor of our times, denoting adulthood as a supposed point of arrival.

For young people themselves, the choice metaphor does not account well for the reality whereby one may choose, but be denied access, as when one fails to gain entry to the labor market in a particular profession despite having trained for it, simply because the job market is confined (see, e.g., te Riele 2004). With global unemployment rates three times higher for young people than for adults, this is a reality for many (International Labour Organisation 2013). In 2012 countries in the Middle East and North Africa had the highest global rates of youth unemployment, at 28.3 % and 23.7 %, respectively (International Labour Organisation 2013).

When attention is given to choice rather to the conditions that influence access, the individual is increasingly depoliticized and is left to construct failure in personal rather than in structural or contextual terms. (For a broader discussion of this issue, see the handbook sections on Place, Time and Space and Labor.) This model points to the importance of understanding the explanatory stories young people use to make sense of their lives. Individualized narratives of self can lead to self-blame, which may in turn lead to despair. Without a politicized critique, young people may not be able to distinguish the way their life is part of a broader pattern.

The Frog in the Pond

The ecological model draws from the biological sciences to emphasize the interconnected nature of organisms and their environments (which also comprise other organisms, some of whom are predators or who are competing for scarce resources and others who are benign or offer a resource to enhance survival). Within the ecological model, the frog cannot be understood without reference to

the pond. The health of the frog is affected by the health of the pond, which is integral to its survival. The pond itself is influenced by the larger weather and land systems that it is a part of. Drought, flood, or pollution will change the nature of the pond. Toxins leached into the pond will eventually sicken the frog, regardless of the frog's resourcefulness. The frog itself also works to influence its environment, playing its own part in the eco-balance as it feeds and procreates.

One of the attractions of this model is that it allows for an image of reciprocal influence at multiple layers and for a cyclical complexity of causality. Within the ecological image, a cause is also an effect, and the pathways of influence are cyclical rather than chronologically linear as they are in the two previous models.

A true use of this model would direct intervention efforts to the surrounding environments rather than directly to the individual, for example, targeting whole school environments, or broader cultural policies and practices around gender relations rather than primarily focusing on individualized educative interventions.

The Performer

Poststructuralist theorists such as Butler (2004) and Davies et al. (2001) conjure more performance-based metaphors for understanding young people and their well-being within a theatrical metaphor. Scripts and storylines preexist players. The self is a form of performance into the imagined gaze of self and others. It is fashioned from the socially learnt material that surrounds and informs ones' desires and actions. Norms provide moves in the game that players are likely to adopt upon entry to the rule-bound play.

Certain orientations can arise from use of the underpinning storylines inherent within each of these different metaphors.

- The seesaw: Life is a struggle for balance. Within the seesaw image which is central to the discussion of risk and resilience, children and young people are understood to call upon protective factors and resources to help them ameliorate the impact of risk and adversity while attempting to grow up well. They are in a struggle to do well against the odds and must be either resourceful (or lucky) in order to thrive. When informed by this image, approaches to promoting well-being would include efforts to reduce adversity or to strengthen capacities to deal with it. While attention has historically tended to center on reduction of risk factors at the individual level, more recently attention has swung to the importance of using strength-based approaches to enhance the resilience of young people by enhancing protective factors at both individual and structural levels. This has led to a logical connection with features of the ecological model.
- The frog: Life is the world you live in. In the ecological model, young people are influenced by the operations of their microworlds and the more distal influence of systems and culture that surround them. They are organisms existing within a complex ecology. They are more likely to do well when the world around them is well. Ecological models provide useful frameworks for policy and programming

efforts, because they emphasize investing in settings, systems, and services that work to support young people's development as well as targeting young people themselves as the site for change. They invite attention to the multi-directional nature of influences within the cultural, economic, and social contexts of people's lives. Response efforts include efforts to keep the institutions and families healthy in the belief that then children will quite naturally thrive.

- **The tourist:** Life is the journey you take. Within the concept of individualization, attention is given to the central choosing agent. The promise, the right, and the illusion of choice dominate the landscape of ideas about what it means to grow up. Young people are increasingly held to be responsible for their own life path and by default are more likely to feel a sense of loss or shame on failing to attain the good life. Informed by this image, programmers would seek to engage young people in a politicizing critique of the storyline about choice and of the source and impact of consumerized images of what a good life entails.
- **The performer:** Life is the self you make. Within this conceptual framework, the emphasis is on use of poststructuralist theory to inform understandings of identity formation and its relationship with health and well-being. The construct of subjectivity emphasizes the socially constructed nature of identity and highlights the influence of social norms upon desires, beliefs, and behaviors. Young people are informed by norms, scripts, positions, and storylines absorbed from the culture and structures that they inhabit. They improvise a performance utilizing tropes, storylines, and character positions that preexist their entry to the stage. They are players in a patterned game within which it is challenging, but possible, to change the rules. They are limited or enabled by the conditions of possibility that they inhabit or create. Informed by this image, programmers would seek to engage young people in deconstructing the cultural and institutional influences on their desires, fears, and associated behavior. This would include a focus on exploring the sociocultural influences which come to shape who young people think they can be or can become and on what others will allow them to do. Research or intervention programs informed by this approach would involve young people themselves in deconstructing the influences on their health-related beliefs and behaviors. They would additionally seek to involve young people themselves in creating the possibility of change which foregrounds efforts to make change.

These metaphors are intended to elucidate the way in which the assumptions made about children and young people and their relationship with the world can inform different approaches to understand and address their well-being.

Conclusion and Future Directions

This chapter has discussed emerging definitions of well-being and has noted the multi-faceted nature of the construct of well-being. Definitions of well-being which are informed by young people's perspectives highlight the importance of the

relational as well as the physical and psychological aspects of people's lives. It noted that good prevalence data can point to the impact of class, gender, location, education, and ethnicity of the well-being of subgroups in the population. It explored some of the different approaches to understanding youth well-being pursued within the disciplines of sociology and psychology, identifying four key metaphors for understanding youth well-being which encapsulate the contributions of the risk and resilience model, the ecological model, individualization theory, and the use of poststructuralist theory about subjectivity and identity construction. Input from the risk and resilience tradition highlights the importance of attending to mental health, given the prevalence of suicide and mental health problems in youth in both developed and developing countries. Discussions of insights from the sociological tradition of understanding youth development point to the larger ontological challenges of the era which impact upon well-being, including the experience of individualization, the quest for meaning, and the ongoing project of constructing the self.

The discussion foregrounded cautions about the tendency for the dominant risk and resilience models to lead to a medicalization or pathologizing of youth development. These cautions are particularly pertinent given the pressures of individualization felt by young people. The discussion emphasized the use of poststructuralist models and direct participatory input of young people to help to guard against this tendency. However, a historical perspective shows that each of these is evolving models, with the potential for hybridity to emerge within interdisciplinary approaches.

Given the multi-faceted nature of well-being, and the increasing recognition that complex social problems require interdisciplinary attention, ideally those working in the field of childhood and youth studies will increasingly draw upon knowledge created in each of the traditions and work to fashion hybrid models through which to further increase knowledge about how to advance the well-being of young people.

The chapters in this subsection address various issues pertaining to the social, mental, and sexual health of young people. The authors work variously from both the psychological and the sociological traditions of understanding wellness. *Debra Rickwood* discusses the high levels of mental distress experienced by young people and highlights the importance of proactive approaches to prevention and early intervention given the demonstrated reluctance of young people to seek help when dealing with mental health distress. *Lisa Wexler and Kristen Eglinton's* chapter highlights the relational nature of well-being, examining the way in which the wellness of a group of indigenous Alaskan young people living in a remote area is mediated by their social geographies. *Donna Cross and Amy Barnes* examine the way in which young people's online social relationships can influence their well-being in both positive and negative ways. *Lyn Harrison and Debbie Ollis* discuss the way in which internet-based pornography has become increasingly available and normalized as a medium through which young people learn about sexuality and discuss the need to address associated harmful impacts in approaches to sexuality education. *Claudia Mitchell* provides a critical discussion of the use of

participatory video-making as a mode through which to engage South African high school students in discussion about the effects of gender-based violence. She highlights the importance of involving young people themselves in initiatives designed to improve their health and well-being and the need for educators and researchers to select methods that will help them to learn from youth.

Cross-References

- ▶ Bodies In and Out of Place: Schooling and the Production of Gender Identities Through Embodied Experience
- ▶ Education and the Politics of Belonging: Attachments and Actions
- ▶ Girls' Embodied Experiences of Media Images
- ▶ Indigenous Girls, Social Justice, and Schooling: Addressing Issues of Disadvantage
- ▶ "Let's Go 50/50": The Everyday Embodiment of Sexuality Amongst African Young People
- ▶ Performative Pedagogy: Poststructural Theory as a Tool to Engage in Identity Work Within a Youth-Led HIV Prevention Program
- ▶ Protecting and Promoting Young People's Social and Emotional Health in Online and Offline Contexts
- ▶ Reconsidering Youth Well-Being as Fluid and Relational: A Dynamic Process at the Intersection of Their Physical and Social Geographies
- ▶ Responding Effectively to Support the Mental Health and Well-Being of Young People
- ▶ The Gendering and Sexualization of Young Women Through Sex Educational Practices and Discourses in Southern Africa
- ▶ Who's Learning or Whose Learning? Critical Perspectives on the Idea Youth-Led Policy-Making Related to Gender-Based Violence in a South African Classroom
- ▶ Young People, Pleasure, and the Normalization of Pornography: Sexual Health and Well-Being in a Time of Proliferation?
- ▶ Young People and Mobile Phone Technology in Botswana
- ▶ Youth Experience of Urban Inequality: Space, Class, and Gender in Mexico

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Protecting and Promoting Young People's Social and Emotional Health in Online and Offline Contexts

8

Donna Cross and Amy Barnes

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Abstract

Young people's use of mobile phones and access to the Internet have increased dramatically in the last decade, especially among those aged 9–15 years. Young people now rely on information and communication technologies for a considerable proportion of their social interaction, which can potentially have both positive and negative effects on their social and emotional well-being. Of particular concern is the extent to which ICT provides opportunities for cyberbullying. This chapter provides an overview of these issues, before reviewing research suggesting that positive social and emotional learning opportunities could enhance

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young people's online and offline relationships, as well as their academic performance. Among young people, supportive relationships with peers, parents, *and* teachers are associated with less bullying perpetration and victimization, fewer psychological health problems, and more effective coping strategies and with positive academic performance and positive social/emotional adjustment. Finally, this chapter highlights the importance of whole-community approaches to enhancing young people's social and emotional skills and to address negative online behaviors. Findings from a large-group randomized controlled trial addressing these issues, the Cyber Friendly Schools Project, are discussed. This study identified whole-school policy and practices that appear to enhance young people's online and offline peer relationships and well-being.

Introduction

The ways that children and young people relate to each other have become more complicated by their rapid and widespread access to new communication technologies including the Internet, mobile phones, and other mobile devices. While children and adolescents are enthusiastic users of these technologies, concerns about the detrimental consequences for their relationships, health, and well-being have been raised (e.g., Mishna et al. 2009; Valcke et al. 2011). In particular, cyberbullying has emerged as an issue of significant concern for young people, their families, schools, health professionals, and other community members.

For both those who are targeted and those who target others, bullying among children and young people is associated with anxiety, depression, suicidality, self-harm, low self-esteem, impaired social and emotional development, poor relationships, loneliness, drug and alcohol use, and other antisocial behaviors (Kim et al. 2011; Ttofi et al. 2012; Vreeman and Carroll 2007). Young people's relationships with others, especially their peers, are therefore key contributors to well-being. Given that 50 % of all cases of mental illness occur before age 14 (Kessler et al. 2005), childhood and early adolescence represent critical periods in which to protect and enhance emotional and psychological well-being. This chapter discusses young people's access to new communication technologies or social media, with particular focus on the Internet and mobile phones. The positive and negative aspects of this access, especially the potential for cyberbullying, will be considered. Finally, given the interconnectivity of young people's online and offline lives, it will be argued that multidimensional, whole-school interventions are needed to enhance young people's social and emotional well-being in both online and offline settings.

Young People's Use of Communication Technologies

The rate of Internet access and use, especially among children and adolescents, is increasing on a global scale (Lenhart et al. 2010; Livingstone and Haddon 2009). For example, in Australia the number of children and young people with household

Internet access has grown rapidly from only 7 % in 1995 to over 90 %, of which 76 % have broadband to maximize the speed and reliability of their access (ACMA 2007). Interestingly, Australian families with children are more likely to have Internet access in the home than families without children (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011), and 6–11 % of Australian 8–12-year-olds have Internet access in their own bedrooms (ACMA 2007). Ninety percent of Australian children aged 5–14 years reported having accessed the Internet (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009).

The increase in young people's access to online environments has been accompanied by considerable expansion of the online activities available to them. These activities include e-mailing, completing homework and educational tasks, social networking, connecting with friends, meeting strangers, playing games, engaging with music, movies, and television shows, and general online browsing (ACMA 2007; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009).

Worldwide mobile phone use also appears to be increasing rapidly (Agar 2013; Lenhart et al. 2010). For example, in the United States, 31 % of children aged 8–10 years owned a mobile phone in 2010, an increase of 10 % since 2004, and 69 % of those aged 11–14 years owned a mobile phone in 2010, a 33 % increase since 2004 (Rideout et al. 2010). On average, 8–10-year-olds spent at least 30 min per day using a mobile phone to make phone calls, listen to music, play games, and watch television (Rideout et al. 2010).

Mobile phones increasingly have advanced capabilities including Internet access, mobile television, and multimedia storage. Fifty-six percent of families in Australia own at least one mobile phone with these features, and on average each family owns three such devices (ACMA 2007). Four percent of Australian children aged 5–14 years used a mobile phone to access the Internet in 2008–2009, and the likelihood of doing so increases with age (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009).

Positive Aspects of Young People's Use of New Technologies

Unsurprisingly, the rapid increase in access to new communication technologies has changed the way young people communicate with others, seek information, build relationships, process social information, respond to conflict, and develop social skills. These changes are associated with benefits for their learning, health, and well-being. By enabling children and young people to access vast amounts of information and learning activities, and parents or educators to access new tools for supporting young people's learning, ICT use may benefit young people's academic performance, literacy, and visual and fine motor skills (Bolstad 2004; Straker et al. 2009). Opportunities for communication via the Internet and mobile phones may also contribute to a greater sense of social support, connectedness, and reduced loneliness, particularly for those who are isolated, unwell, or disabled (Shaw and Gant 2002; Srivastava 2005; Straker et al. 2009). Mobile phones, social networking sites, and other forms of online communication allow young people to seek help and maintain contact with their family members and friends, which is particularly advantageous when family members are living separately (Davie et al. 2004;

Weerakkody 2008). Some children and young people may also be able to seek support and information they feel unable or unwilling to access in face-to-face settings due to concerns about confidentiality (Straker et al. 2009).

There is also increasing evidence that interventions delivered online and via mobile phones can reduce children and young people's symptoms of anxiety and depression (Calear and Christensen 2010; Harrison et al. 2011), provide support during transition to high school (Maher 2010), promote physical activity and healthy food intake (Hillier 2008), and encourage young people's self-monitoring of diet, exercise, and mood (Bauer et al. 2010; Harrison et al. 2011).

Risks Associated with Young People's ICT Use

While the opportunities offered by communication technology can positively impact young people's social and emotional development, access to ICT without appropriate education and supervision can also pose risks for their safety, development, with well-being.

Mobile phone use by children and young people also involves privacy risks, including inappropriate camera use, storage of personal information, and theft (Bolstad 2004; Davie et al. 2004; Srivastava 2005). Unexpected phone bills can cause financial difficulty or family conflict (Weerakkody 2008). Mobile phones can also be a medium for bullying behaviors, with cyberbullying or harassment via phone calls and text and picture messages (Cross et al. 2009; Srivastava 2005).

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a risk which has received considerable community and professional attention in recent years. Defined as a particularly damaging form of covert aggression that involves "the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behaviour by an individual or group, that is intended to harm others" (Belsey 2006, p. 3), cyberbullying involves "[s]ending or posting harmful material or engaging in other forms of social aggression using the Internet or other digital technologies" (Willard 2007, p. 1). Cyberbullying is particularly difficult for parents and school staff to detect and address, as many cyber environments offer anonymity, few central controls, and limited opportunities for monitoring and supervision, while also having a wide audience and easy accessibility (Perren et al. 2010). Cyberbullying has been associated with severe effects on young people's health and well-being, including depression and anxiety, and young people who are cyberbullied, particularly boys, are even less likely to seek help than those who are bullied in traditional ways (Dooley et al. 2010).

The individual factors associated with cyberbullying include the characteristics of those involved and behavioral determinants, such as other bullying experiences, pro-victim attitudes, normative beliefs, connectedness to school and friends, peer support, social competence, and self-efficacy to deal with all forms of bullying.

The environmental determinants of cyberbullying behavior include school-wide organizational factors, school ethos and social climate, policy and practice, organization of the physical environment, student, parent, and school staff relationships, parent monitoring, and parent responses to cyberbullying (Cross et al. 2012). Anti-bullying intervention programs have tended to target more individual factors, largely through teaching and learning, rather than environmental factors (Vreeman and Carroll 2007). While whole-school anti-bullying teaching and learning is essential to enable common understandings, positive attitudes, and skills, it is likely to be insufficient to prevent or manage the complexity of student cyberbullying (Vreeman and Carroll 2007). To effectively address a systemic problem, the whole-school community must be engaged to model, support, and reinforce students' understandings, attitudes, normative beliefs, skills, and behaviors.

The Importance of Social and Emotional Learning

Given the extent of children's technology use and the potential consequences for their health and well-being, it is necessary to consider strategies to minimize its harms and maximize its benefits. A harm-minimization approach (Single 1995) recognizes that participation in online environments is a naturally occurring phenomenon in adolescents and focuses on reducing the potential hazards of this use by actively encouraging adolescents to explore concepts of "netiquette" and the interplay between identity, trust, and deception in the virtual world. This approach enhances their ability to assess the reliability of information and the trustworthiness of a confidant. As punitive-based solutions (such as school suspensions and withdrawing access to technology) to inappropriate online behavior may exacerbate the problem, raising awareness among students, parents, and educators about the harms associated with technology misuse, while also providing opportunities for students to experience, learn from, and benefit from new communication technology, is key to reducing harm.

A crucial part of this approach is supporting young people to develop the social and emotional skills needed to successfully overcome the potential harms associated with technology use. This can be done through social and emotional learning (SEL) programs, particularly in school-based settings. SEL refer to the processes that develop and provide practice to enhance important social and emotional understandings and skills. These can be grouped into five key areas (Collaborative For Academic Social and Emotional Learning 2003):

1. *Self-awareness skills* involve being able to identify and understand feelings and recognizing and having the confidence to use personal strengths and abilities.
2. *Self-management skills* enable a person to handle and direct their emotions in appropriate ways and strive for goals in spite of difficulties.
3. *Social awareness skills* refer to the ability to be aware and respectful of the feelings and perspectives of others.

4. *Relationship skills* allow individuals to deal positively with relationship challenges and social conflicts.
5. *Social decision-making skills* allow individuals to make thoughtful, effective decisions.

Effectively delivered SEL programs are associated with a range of positive outcomes for behavior and well-being. A review of 317 studies (Payton et al. 2008) demonstrated that SEL programs resulted in improved social, emotional, and coping skills, enhanced resistance to peer pressure, improved social behaviors and cooperation, and more positive attitudes toward self, others, and schooling. There also tended to be a decrease in risky, antisocial, and aggressive behaviors, and decreased emotional problems including anxiety and depression. These outcomes were found for students from kindergarten to the final years of secondary school, in rural and urban areas, and in both universal school-based and indicated school-based programs (Payton et al. 2008, p. 7). A 2011 meta-analysis also investigated the viability and effectiveness of school-based SEL programs, analyzing 213 controlled studies targeting students aged 5–18 years (Durlak et al. 2011), and found similar results.

These studies demonstrate the feasibility of school-based SEL to enhance young people's well-being, promote academic success and improve school attendance, heighten trust and respect for teachers, improve management of school-related stress, improve class participation, reduce suspensions (Durlak et al. 2011; Taylor and Dymnicki 2007; Zinns and Elias 2006). It is likely that enhancing young people's emotional and social skills contributes to their functioning in many areas of their (online and offline) social and educational lives by enabling them to better manage stress, use problem-solving skills, and overcome obstacles (Durlak et al. 2011).

Enhancing Young People's Online and Offline Peer Relationships: Cyber Friendly Schools Project

The most effective, non-stigmatizing means of enhancing social and emotional competence, and reducing bullying behavior among children and adolescents, is the implementation of a multicomponent whole-school program that includes both prevention and intervention elements (Cross et al. 2011; Payton et al. 2008; Rigby and Slee 2008; Vreeman and Carroll 2007). Within a socio-ecological framework, these interventions include strategies at the school level (policy, classroom/school climate, and health services), classroom level (curriculum), and individual level. These whole-school programs have been shown to reduce bullying perpetration by 20–23 % and victimization by 17–20 % (Farrington and Ttofi 2009).

The Cyber Friendly Schools Project (CFSP) was a 3-year group randomized controlled trial (2010–2012) assessing the impact of a whole-school online cyberbullying prevention and intervention program among 3,400 adolescents from 35 randomly selected schools. Schools in the intervention group received

the online whole-school (including parents) and student-level resources in Grade 8 and Grade 9 (aged 14 years) and a 1-year follow-up at age 15 in Grade 10. Student leaders (one to two years older than the study cohort) were recruited and trained for the first 2 years of the study to promote and implement aspects of the whole-school intervention.

The whole-school intervention that was developed, with significant input from young people, focused on: assisting schools to implement strategies related to their school's organizational context; providing a consistent understanding of cyberbullying with strategies to develop students' social relationships and peer support; policy development and implementation (e.g., mobile phone, IT policy, etc.), involving the school community; attention to school ethos and culture development; strategies to support student social and emotional development; positive behavior management strategies; pastoral care initiatives; and school-home-community links.

The teaching and learning component of the CFSP whole-school approach was designed to reduce student harm online via "5 Cs": (1) the online *contexts* where students were spending time (e.g., Facebook, chat rooms), (2) the online *contacts* they made, (3) the extent to which they managed their *confidentiality* (privacy), (4) their own *conduct* and online skills, and (5) the *content* they accessed. The teaching and learning program was aimed to enhance students' social and emotional skills, including their resilience, self-management, and social responsibility, with a strong emphasis on positive communication.

While the Cyber Friendly Schools Program was associated with no significant differences in cyberbullying experiences at posttest 1, fewer cyberbullying victimization experiences were found at follow-up. These findings suggest that school-based cyberbullying prevention and intervention programs that focus on group mechanisms of cyberbullying, normative social influence, social support, empathy, and outcome expectancies can reduce victimization experiences among adolescents.

Conclusion and Future Directions

The Internet and mobile phones enable adolescents to grow up immersed in technology as they communicate, socialize, study, and work, a generational change that has brought advantages and challenges for users, educators, parents, and policy makers alike (Bennett et al. 2008). Adults' responses to young people's technology use are limited by their inexperience and the speed of technological change and corresponding shifts in the "always on" culture and activity of young people. Further, adults may see communication technology as a practical tool, whereas young people perceive it to be a fundamental part of their social and personal lives.

Given young people's proficiency with technology, this generation gap in knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behavior can be reduced when adults actively engage with and learn from young people themselves, seeking young people's perspectives and contribution to decision-making. This increase in adult

understanding is likely to improve their ability to support young people's well-being in both online and offline contexts. This is especially important given that young people are *unlikely* to report negative online incidents to adults, largely because they think adults wouldn't understand the problem, would be unable to help, would "blame" the technology, or remove young people's access to this technology. Worse still, this type of adult response may encourage only technology-based solutions, such as family and school-enforced restrictions, when negative online behaviors and their outcomes are deeply embedded in relational issues.

While regulatory responses provide a way to protect and promote young people's well-being online (and offline), they are limited unless accompanied by education. School policies, for example, can assist in creating positive, supportive environments for social and emotional learning. However, the virtual nature of negative online behaviors, such as cyberbullying, blurs the boundaries for school supervision and responsibility, creating unique legal and educational concerns for schools (Shariff 2005). Without an adequate policy response, negative online incidents can escalate quickly at school, affecting students' learning and well-being. Thus, schools need to systematically review, communicate, and explain their regulatory practices, with input from young people and other members of the school community, to ensure they adequately address students' needs and concerns. These policies need to describe the rights and responsibilities of the whole-school community, particularly students' families, as cyberbullying incidents often occur outside school hours.

The socio-ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner 1977) emphasizes educational and ecological elements in actions to address negative behaviors. This multi-setting model assumes these behaviors are a group phenomenon influenced by multiple factors which interact over time (rather than a single factor, like technology) and are related to neighborhood, family, school, and/or peer contexts (Urbis 2011). Hence, strategies to address online behaviors need to address young people's interactions and relationships at school (policy, classroom and school climate, behavior support, peer support, school yard improvements), in the classroom (curriculum), in the community and at home (engaging and involving parents and the wider community), and with peers (Cross et al. 2011).

Involving the whole-school community as active participants in the planning, development, and implementation of (online and offline) social and emotional learning policies and practices can also enhance young people's well-being. A whole-school approach is collaborative and systematic, targeting social behavior at all levels of a school's ecology, including students, parents, teachers, and other school staff, as well as the wider community. This approach can help the whole-school community to encourage inclusive and positive behavior when using communication technology, for example discussing how to resolve relationship conflicts online and offline, assisting young people to define acceptable boundaries for their online (and offline) relationships, and even developing moral and positive behavioral values to enhance cyber safety (Bronfenbrenner 1977; Hodges et al. 1999).

Similarly, schools need to provide opportunities to enhance students' social interaction and collaborative learning experiences by actively using ICT mechanisms in the school. Examples of these approaches include helping young people understand how to use social networking sites more safely (such as securing their privacy settings) and being able to apply these practices to their learning about technology in the classroom (Beran and Li 2005). Ironically, many schools ban any student access to social networking sites during schooltime. These restrictive online policies and practices are analogous to teaching young people water safety without giving them the opportunity to practice these skills in the water.

The overlap between online and offline bullying also provides direction for how to best prevent and respond to bullying and support young people's well-being. Strategies to address offline bullying may also be beneficial in reducing online bullying behaviors. Data from the *KiVa* Project in Finland, for example, suggest that a whole-school approach to traditional (offline) bullying helps to reduce online bullying (Salmivalli et al. 2011). Likewise, the link between social development and well-being is strong in an offline context, and this may translate into online contexts also. For this reason, it is important for schools to encourage, create, and maintain supportive social environments online and offline (i.e., in all places where young people gather). This is especially true in school environments where strong associations are found between school climate, school connectedness, safety at school, and peer and emotional support (Cross et al. 2009). Schools can achieve this milieu by encouraging a supportive peer culture that promotes social responsibility where young people take positive social action to help others, such as those being harmed online. Peer intervention has been associated with better interpersonal and intrapersonal adjustments for the student who is being harmed, less peer-reported victimization, and less assignment of blame to the targeted student (Sainio et al. 2009).

In summary, a coordinated and consistent approach across families and school communities is needed to encourage positive and effective responses to negative behaviors associated with young people's social and emotional development. This is especially important for behaviors like online bullying, which arises in both home and school settings. Families and school staff need ongoing, comprehensive capacity building to support and to monitor children and young people's well-being, especially given the constant dynamic change and challenges experienced by young people in online environments.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Responding Effectively to Support the Mental Health and Well-Being of Young People](#)
- ▶ [Who's Learning or Whose Learning? Critical Perspectives on the Idea Youth-Led Policy-Making Related to Gender-Based Violence in a South African Classroom](#)
- ▶ [Young People and Mobile Phone Technology in Botswana](#)
- ▶ [Young People, Online Gaming Culture, and Education](#)

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Reconsidering Youth Well-Being as Fluid and Relational: A Dynamic Process at the Intersection of Their Physical and Social Geographies

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Abstract

Well-being is historically conceptualized in vague terms related to psychosocial variables and researched through the absence of poor health outcomes, including anxiety, depression, suicide risk, and poor overall mental health. However, recently, there has been a shift in the literature so that wellness scholarship includes basic rights and access to factors associated with mental health. The World Health Organization (2011) considers mental health synonymous with a state of “wellbeing, in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.” While this definition begins to hint at the historical, political, economic, and other socio-cultural systems that profoundly affect a person’s wellness, it continues to neglect the co-constitutive elements of a person in context. A co-constitutive understanding acknowledges and emphasizes a *relational* dynamic that includes

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the productive interactions between people, culture, and the various social and physical places and spaces they at once shape and inhabit. This predominant and limited understanding is particularly pronounced when considering young people's well-being. Developmental theories are frequently conceptualized in sequential, linear, decontextualized ways. Moreover, developmental processes are often understood as static, predetermined, and staged accomplishments that are linked in a de facto way to future prospects. Through this developmental perspective, young people are often understood *non-relationally* or through a series of dichotomies separating, for example, individual from society and person from place; youths are often characterized as passive non-agents: as dependent recipients or receptors of culture, history, and education or as victims of poverty, racism, class, etc. This dominant developmental perspective obscures young people's active roles in their life endeavors, their abilities to impact the very contexts that shape them, and their potential to reimagine their possible futures. This blind spot not only limits our understanding of the dynamic systems involved in youth well-being but hides from view the powerful impact young people are making in their own worlds as they at once create and are created by the places they live in and through. In this chapter, we reconsider youth well-being as a fluid, dynamic, and relational process that is constituted by and through historical, political, economic, physical, and social geographies. The chapter illustrates this process through examples from the lives of indigenous young people in New York City, NY, rural subarctic Canada, and a remote village in Alaska, USA.

Introduction

Youth well-being is a relatively new field. For youth, much of the well-being literature relates to psychosocial variables such as a young person's ability to *develop* "psychologically, emotionally, socially, intellectually; and spiritually" (Edwards 2003). In this literature, young people are not quite "finished humans" and are therefore subject to developmental scrutiny and targeted interventions to ensure "proper growth." This perspective can be classified as positive youth development. This research trend is underpinned by developmental systems theory and considers human development to be a process that is shaped by a person's developmental assets (Lerner et al. 2005). The positive youth development literature "stress[es] the relative plasticity of human development and argue[s] that this potential for systematic change in behavior exists as a consequence of mutually influential relationships between the developing person and his or her biology, psychological characteristics, family, community, culture, physical and designed ecology, and historical niche" (p. 11). This perspective is useful, yet it often emphasizes individual-level understandings rather than contextual ones. Context shapes individual experience and opportunities but in ways that are sometimes difficult to discern. This chapter considers the intersection between individual-level factors, experiences, and opportunities and the social, political,

economic, and physical contexts that give them shape. Our driving argument is that context matters greatly for youth well-being as young people both form and shape the contexts they inhabit.

It is well known (and unsurprising) that young people tend to enjoy better health when they have clear and positive ideas about who they are, how they fit into a larger group or contribute to a shared purpose, and have accessible and meaningful ways to do so (Armstrong et al. 2005; Barber 2013; Erikson 1968; Ungar 2004; Ungar 2011). If, as developmental theory posits, adolescence is a developmental period focused on identity exploration, commitment, or diffusion (Erikson 1968), it is a critical life stage that can establish a trajectory for a person's future. Young people who have key developmental assets, such as opportunities to engage in meaningful activities and gain competence, safe spaces to craft their sense of identity, and connect with adults, are better able to transition into healthy adulthood (Benson 2002; Benson et al. 2006; Eccles and Grootman 2002). For marginalized and economically struggling communities, these optimal developmental pathways for young people are more difficult to access.

The clear linkages between economic and social marginalization and youth health have gradually gained acceptance as “social determinants of health” in the public health literature (e.g., Levin and Browner 2005; Schulz and Northridge 2004). Recently, wellness scholarship includes basic rights and access to factors associated with mental health. The World Health Organization (2011) considers mental health synonymous with a state of “wellbeing, in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.” While this definition begins to place significance on the historical, political, economic, and social systems – and each individual's particular positioning within them – that profoundly affect a person's wellness, it theoretically neglects the co-constitutive elements of a person in context. A co-constitutive understanding acknowledges and emphasizes a relational dynamic that includes the interactions between persons, culture, and the various social and physical places and spaces they both shape and inhabit.

In research related to young people's well-being, it appears that this co-constitutive understanding is neglected. While there are many reasons for this neglect, a central reason is that theories underpinning much youth research conceptualize development in sequential, linear, decontextualized ways. There are two basic trends in the youth well-being literature. The first focuses on the social indicators of well-being, where the “emphasis is on the development of statistics that reflect important ‘social conditions’ and the monitoring of trends in a range of ‘areas of social concern’ over time”. The second trend focuses on subjective well-being and often seeks to measure people's satisfaction with their life circumstances and their level of happiness or positive affect. In this perspective, well-being is often conflated with “health-related quality of life” and measured by considering the physical health and aspects of psychological well-being, social relationships, role function, and environmental context of individuals.

Additionally, developmental processes are often understood as static, predetermined, and staged accomplishments linked to future prospects. Through this commonly employed developmental perspective, young people are often understood in a static way that cannot account for the fluid and interactional elements of lived youth well-being. When youth well-being is characterized *non-relationally*, it is often defined through a series of dichotomies separating, for example, individual from society and person from place; youth are often characterized as passive non-agents: as dependent recipients or receptors of culture, history, and education or as victims of poverty, racism, class, etc. Consequently, this dominant perspective obscures young people's active roles in their life endeavors, their abilities to impact the very contexts that shape them, and their potential to reimagine their possible futures. We argue that this blind spot not only limits our understanding of the dynamic systems involved in youth well-being but hides from view the powerful impact young people are making in their own worlds as they at once create and are created by the places they live in and through.

In an effort to rethink youth well-being as a fluid, relational process – a co-constitutive process which includes youth creating and being transformed by the sociocultural and physical worlds they inhabit – this chapter posits an inclusive theoretical framework that demonstrates how young people are continuously shaping and shaped by their worlds. The main argument is that this theoretical framework could offer a way forward for a more inclusive understanding of well-being: one that considers the importance of context and that reflects youth well-being as a fluid, dynamic, and relational process.

A Relational Theoretical Framework for Youth Well-Being

While several approaches are used to conceptualize youth development and engagement with their worlds, here the focus remains on two distinct perspectives: non-relational and relational. Non-relational means that young people, culture (including language, scripts, artifacts, and the like), and contexts they inhabit are understood as largely unrelated entities. These non-relational approaches are often dualistic: the theories (e.g., developmental theories) underpinning and guiding understanding often rest on a series of conceptual dichotomies separating culture from mind, mind from body, individual from society, and so forth. Translated into empirical inquiry, there is a focus on seeking universals in human behavior; culture is usually equated with a homogenized ethnic group (a “type” of people), and contextual elements are considered “independent variables” external to people (Rogoff and Angelillo 2002, pp. 211–216). More explicitly, people, place, and culture are conceptualized as essential isolated entities rather than as interrelated and inextricably linked.

A relational perspective, on the other hand, disputes this decontextualized, ahistorical understanding of youth engagement with their worlds and seeks to better understand the relationship among young people, culture, and contexts.

While various theories might underpin relational approaches, we suggest an approach grounded primarily by the growing interdisciplinary field of sociocultural research (see Lewis et al. 2007) and by concepts from human geography can offer a relational, non-dualistic understanding of youth development. These perspectives can help explain the relationship between culture, people, and place (or context) and provide a co-constitutive understanding of young people's engagement with the world as a mutually transformative sociocultural activity stimulated, enabled, and constrained by local places.

A broad array of disciplinary perspectives are necessary for a relational understanding of well-being, and one particularly helpful viewpoint comes from sociocultural theory. Sociocultural theory supports an understanding of people's development that includes the social and physical landscapes and the mutual transformative processes that make up these spaces. Importantly, sociocultural theory helps shift the focus away from youth, or place, or culture (or "artifacts" in sociocultural theory) and inspires us to think about these components as wholly linked and mutually productive. A significant and useful concept from sociocultural theory is "artifact mediation" or the "theory of mediation" which holds that people's actions and interactions with/in the world and with each other are mediated by cultural tools or artifacts (e.g., see Cole 1996; Vygotsky 1978; Wertsch 1995). Artifacts include the popular culture young people engage with daily: technology, sentient beings such as other people (parents, teachers, friends), as well as language, scripts, rituals, ways of acting, recipes, narratives, signs, beliefs, and the like (e.g., see Bruner 1990; Cole 1996). Artifacts (we could just say "culture") transform people and the environment with/in which they are produced and used (Cole and Engestrom 1993, p. 9). In fact, culture is the means by which the sociocultural world and young people (indeed all people) are connected, (re)produced, and transformed (ibid., p. 10).

Cultural artifacts are layered and multiple and mediate all of our actions and practices, as well as constrain and afford particular actions. What is more, cultural mediation does not happen in a vacuum. In fact, cultural mediation only exists in relation to and within particular contexts including, for instance, the physical place, social institutions, communities, and large discursive formations. For example, on a basic-level writing, this chapter is mediated by computers, by language, by models of chapters we have read before, and by our own values and standards which themselves are artifacts we have "internalized" from various sources including academic institutions as well as family and community. Moreover, our actions (and the artifacts mediating them) do not take place outside of particular contexts such as the "academia." What we do in the academy is informed and shaped by what we have done before and expect to do in the future. These actions are guided by the contexts (places, situations, and people) that make certain ways of behaving understandable, practical, valued, and necessary.

Perspectives from human geography help us to understand the complex contexts young people live within and through. Massey (1993, 1998; also Jess and Massey 1995) describes the relationship between place and space and argues that space consists of fluid social, cultural, political, and economic relations. Place is

intertwined with space and, for this framework, is conceptualized as the material space (i.e., physical space) as well as the “meeting place” of social relations, global flows, and movements (i.e., sociocultural space) (Massey 1993, pp. 65–66). Places are always in process. They are dynamic, productive, and, as Massey (1993, p. 68) underlines, *particular*. That is, places are a unique intersection of relations and political, cultural, and social discourses making up the places themselves. Sections of New York City (NYC), for example, are unique and continuously changing not only because of the physical landscape (for instance, some areas include skyscrapers and other areas low-rise housing and small ethnic grocery stores) but because of the particular people, relationships, rules, and regulations making up the place. For example, people’s arrivals and departures into places, their histories, the activities they enjoy, the clothes they wear, the rules they follow, and their values give particular places unique character and atmosphere. Some of these places in NYC, for instance, become known as neighborhoods such as Chinatown.

In cultural psychology, Cole (1996) points out that context is not simply something which “surrounds” and, hence, shapes the cultural tools we use (e.g., the language we might use or clothing we might wear at a particular time and place), but rather, context is “that which surrounds *and* that which weaves together” (p. 143; emphasis not in original). Artifacts, therefore, *are* contextual, at once invested with meaning in local places *and* constitute and produce local places themselves. Taking clothing as an example, in Eglinton’s (2013) ethnography of youth culture in two communities (New York City and subarctic Canada), the black and Latino young people she worked with in New York City described a “New York style” as baggy pants, puffy coats, sneakers, or big work boots, and girls in tight jeans. This “New York style” is a style born of hip-hop culture, which is connected to urban life, and represents “urban storms to be weathered” (Rose 1994, p. 38). As NYC youth wore their puffy coats and tight jeans, they produced and embodied a particular landscape (or style) of New York. Indeed, the distinctly *urban* style was also produced by youth in rural subarctic Canada but with different implications. The girls in subarctic Canada spoke about the various social difficulties encountered when wearing the tight jeans that the girls in New York described as “New York style.” They would be asked why they were “dressing city.” Specifically, these girls were challenged by people in their community who wanted to know why they were wearing a style that was not reflected in and constituted by local morays. By wearing “New York style” in a rural, subarctic community, young people created a contrast between the relaxed utility-oriented atmosphere that constituted their particular rural community and themselves.

Young people’s individual and collective lives, experiences, histories, and identities are implicated in the relationship between culture and place. People, in this case young people, construct their identities through cultural practices using multiple available cultural artifacts such as local values, language, and popular culture. As young people use and give meaning to cultural artifacts through human (inter)action, they are “internalized” (Vygotsky 1978) – at once (re)constructing and (re)producing aspects of self and worlds (Castells 2004, p. 7). In this proposed

co-constitutive framework, identities develop in concert with the social and cultural worlds that make up local places. Young people change, impact, and transform both themselves and the world around them as they use cultural artifacts and engage in mediated action (see Eglinton 2013 for further elaboration on a relational framework for understanding youth identities).

An Example of Youth Well-Being in an Alaska Native Context

An example from an Alaska Native research project illustrates how the use of this relational perspective can contribute to an understanding of youth well-being. The example examines most pointedly the power of context in shaping youth opportunities and points to the co-constitutive aspects of Alaska Native youth well-being. The research project analyzed digital stories produced by Inupiat young people in a rural region of Alaska. Digital stories are three- to five-minute visual narratives that synthesize images, video, audio recordings of voice, background music, and text to create personal stories (Gubrium and Turner 2011; Lambert 2006). Young people's digital stories are cultural artifacts that offer opportunities to explore their lives, inhabited spaces, cultural resources, and the ways in which they are negotiating their identities in a social landscape increasingly different from that of their parents and grandparents (Wexler 2013; Wexler et al. 2012). The digital stories themselves provide clues to better understand youth self-perceptions, their ideas of success, and – particularly focusing on those stories that underscored ideals, daily lives, and optimism – their representations of lived well-being. Digital stories, then, are places to rework ethnic pride and cultural identities that link to global youth culture and to traditional Inupiat ideas of masculinity and mastery. The methods employed in the research are described elsewhere (Wexler et al. 2012). Most relevant to this chapter is the analysis which focused on the young people's depictions of their successes, self-representations, and important relationships.

Young Inupiat people's digital stories illustrate forms of gender expression, ideas about achievement, and access to different forms of participation and cultural mores. For both boys and girls, sites of success or achievement were often linked to participation in particular activities. These activities were "naturalized" and most available to *either* girls or boys. Boys' successes focused largely on those spaces considered masculine, such as sports and riding fast machines (snow-gos, all-terrain vehicles, motor boats), whereas girls tended to depict achievement through participation in what are primarily considered feminine activities, such as participating in family life and taking care of children. For girls, the segments often highlighted more traditional adult roles, such as homemaking or supporting others' success. For boys, sites of achievement centered more firmly on hunting and fishing activities. Notably, sites of achievement were more varied and readily available to girls, when compared to those depicted in boys' stories.

It is important to consider how young people's depictions of their "sites of achievement" reflect social expectations, opportunities, and even economic

disparities that create different kinds of access to cultural resources. Specifically, understanding how young people are formulating their identities, conceptualizing their successes, building their relationships, and imagining their future is constrained and expanded by the local and the geopolitical. It is relational. In the digital storytelling project, the kinds of successes depicted by boys in their stories were more limited in scope and availability than those for girls. The activities in which young women engaged, such as child-rearing, babysitting, and school success, are not only deemed necessary and “natural” activities for young women in everyday life, they are also closely aligned with traditional Inupiat values and with culturally salient gender roles. In other words, not only are these gendered accomplishments highly accessible to girls, they are also valued by dominant society and by the girls’ local community. In this way, girls appear to have multiple acceptable, recognized, and valued sites of achievement available. These achievements included participating in youth culture (i.e., hanging out with friends, surfing the Internet, achieving in school) and activities that reflected traditional culture (i.e., taking care of children, caring for elders).

In contrast, boys had few “natural” and/or “necessary” culturally salient gender roles for them to play in the community. Cultural artifacts, such as gender roles, mediate boys’ understanding of what it means to be a successful male. Boys’ digital stories did not feature many opportunities that were at once valued culturally and by dominant society. Instead, their stories tended to embrace artifacts and cultural markers from marginalized groups (i.e., hip-hop, gangster poses) but deployed them in ways that reflected Inupiat cultural values. For instance, many of the boys’ digital stories had images of groups of same sex peers in baggy “New York style” pants, posing with their hands making “gang signs” in front of a particularly good fish catch. Very few boys highlighted academic or professional success. Instead – as the example above illustrates – boys’ sites of achievement depicted hunting, fishing, the ability to drive fast and skillfully (by snow machine, boat, four-wheeler, and automobile), and sports. Yet, although these are all culturally valued skills, expensive gas prices and equipment costs often preclude these activities. Therefore, not all boys have access to these sites of achievement. While boys certainly depicted images of successful friendship groups and belonging, it could be that their limited opportunities for participation in culturally valued (expensive) activities mean that there are fewer valued spaces for them to enjoy success.

As this example suggests, considering the accomplishments, events, and activities featured in the young people’s digital stories as valid and important, “artifacts” can provide insight into how young people in one community represent, produce, and negotiate their contexts, values, and selves. The scope and variability of young people’s “sites of achievement” provide insight into the ways that context – including gender and economic factors – can narrow (or expand) young people’s understanding of self and access to well-being. In this example, boys depict successes that focus more on factors relegated to “hobbies,” such as sports, riding things well, hunting, and fishing. While highly valued forms of achievement in Inupiat society, not all of these achievements are necessarily valued in dominant society. In addition, even those activities that are valued locally are not always

accessible due to monetary constraints. On the other hand, girls' sites of achievement include more practical skills and academics (i.e., childcare and graduation) and activities that are naturalized through gender expectations but are also necessary and perhaps easier to achieve given the opportunities available to them.

The digital storytelling project fits within our co-constitutive framework of well-being for a number of reasons. First, the project focused on youth-produced digital stories as cultural artifacts that are pregnant with significance on multiple levels. Youth digital stories provide insight to understand young people's individual and collective lives, experiences, histories, and identities. The local values, language, and popular culture references in these cultural artifacts help us understand the ways in which young Inupiat are shaped by, for instance, gendered constructions of achievement. Our exploration asks not only how young people construct their identities through cultural artifacts and interactions but also how these constructions may be "internalized" (Vygotsky 1978).

Since our framework emphasizes the co-constitutive elements of youth well-being, it is important to consider how identities can develop in concert with the social and cultural worlds that make up local places. For boys, opportunities for (re)constructing and (re)producing aspects of self and worlds are constrained by narrow gendered notions of success and by the economic resources required to access many male sites of achievement. It follows, then, that youth health disparities are greatest among indigenous males (Wexler et al. 2012). In contrast, young Inupiat women are reshaping their worlds through expanded opportunities for leadership and livelihood. Although traditionally a male-dominated society (Burch 2006), women are currently more likely to be the primary breadwinner of Inupiat families and are progressively leading more tribal organizations and government entities. Through this example, it is clear that youth well-being is a fluid and co-constituted state in which young people change, impact, and transform both themselves and the world as they use cultural artifacts and engage in mediated action (Eglinton 2013).

Conclusion and Future Directions

This chapter opens up thinking about youth well-being as a relational process which is both constrained and enabled by context or "place" including physical and social geographies. This perspective highlights some of the more static, linear, and narrow frameworks for conceptualizing youth well-being and, drawing on sociocultural theories and perspectives from human geography, began to offer a potential theoretical framework featuring a more inclusive and dynamic understanding. Specifically, a framework that takes into account the power of context in relation to well-being is needed in addition to the role youths themselves play in shaping and understanding their own identities and worlds. Illustrating aspects of this relational conceptualization of youth well-being, we discuss an example from the lives of indigenous young people in Northwest Alaska. The relational example illustrates the significance of context in shaping youth experiences, opportunities and

possibilities, and access to well-being. The insights provided through a relational lens help to pinpoint interactive mechanisms of resilience and well-being. With this perspective, young people work within the constraints of their sociocultural, economic, and political environments to reshape the contours of their local landscapes. The interactive, relational perspective, then, pushes the World Health Organization (2011) definition of well-being from one which focuses on coping strategies, productivity, and the ability to contribute to one's community to a conception of co-constituted well-being that manifests in one's ability to create their own potential through the remaking of their worlds.

Cross-References

- ▶ [“Black Neighborhoods” and “Race,” Placed Identities in Youth Transition to Adulthoods](#)
- ▶ [Time and Space in Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [Youth, Relationality, and Space: Conceptual Resources for Youth Studies from Critical Human Geography](#)

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Responding Effectively to Support the Mental Health and Well-Being of Young People

10

Debra Rickwood

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Abstract

The well-being of today's youth is undermined by high levels of psychological distress and emerging mental health problems. Young people face unique challenges during their increasingly extended transition from childhood to adulthood and experience a period of heightened vulnerability to mental health problems. It is essential to intervene early and effectively in the development of such problems to prevent their negative effects during adolescence and reduce ongoing impact through persistence and escalation into adulthood. One of the greatest challenges to intervening early and taking a preventive approach is the

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reluctance of young people to seek help, particularly from professional mental health care. This reluctance can be matched by the hesitancy of adults with significant roles in young people's lives to reach out and intervene. It is ironic that the life stages between late childhood and early adulthood are characterized by both the highest level of need for effective mental health care and the lowest level of service use. A range of developmental, social, and psychological factors impact on the help-seeking beliefs and behaviors of young people and the people who are in frequent contact with them. These must be understood so that associated barriers to seeking help can be overcome and young people are able to easily access the mental health care they need – when and where they need it. Effective responses require engagement of the whole community including family, peers, trusted adults in young people's lives, as well as relevant health, mental health, and community service providers. Technology has an increasingly important role in reaching out to and engaging young people in interventions that support their well-being in ways that are congruent with how young people live their technology-enhanced lives. Into the future, integrated systems of health and community services, with easily navigated gateways to transition between self-help, informal support, and professional services and between online and in-person environments, underpinned by a well-informed community, are urgently needed. We are on the cusp of realizing such systems in some countries, and these innovative approaches must be prioritized to mitigate mental health risks in the transition period between childhood and adulthood, so that today's young people are able to meet the challenges they will face as tomorrow's adults.

Introduction

The vulnerability of adolescents and young adults to mental health problems is well documented, with the years between 12 and 25 acknowledged as the time when most mental health problems and mental disorders emerge. Evidence from comprehensive studies, undertaken in many different parts of the world, shows that this is the peak period of incidence for mental disorder. There is growing consensus that within a 12-month period about one-quarter of young people will experience a clinically relevant mental disorder. A large national US survey reported that the prevalence of mental disorder with severe impairment was 22 % among 13–18 year olds (Merikangas et al. 2010), and the US national comorbidity study showed that 75 % of all mental disorders emerge before 25 years of age (Kessler et al. 2007). The 2007 Australian National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing revealed that 26 % of 16–24 year olds had experienced an anxiety, affective, or substance use disorder in the past 12 months and that this was the highest prevalence across the lifespan (Slade et al. 2009).

The mental health problems and mental disorders that are most likely to occur in adolescence are anxiety disorders, conduct disorders, mood disorders (particularly

depression), self-harm and suicidal ideation, and substance use disorders, and these problems generally emerge in this order over the course of adolescence (de Girolamo et al. 2012; Rickwood et al. 2007b). In late adolescence and early adulthood, psychotic disorders begin to emerge. Only some specific anxiety disorders and behavioral problems have a higher incidence earlier in life, during childhood, and mental disorders involving dementia have their highest incidence at the older end of the lifespan.

Major increases in psychosocial problems among young people have been observed since the Second World War. A review of trends over time between the 1950s and 1980s showed significant increases in many disorders for youth (Rutter and Smith 1995). More recent data show that this rise has plateaued for some disorders, although rates continue to increase for specific problems, including deliberate self-harm and suicidal ideation (Maughan et al. 2005). Disturbingly, a global school-based survey of suicidal ideation in 13–15 year olds reported the overall prevalence at 15.3 % (Page et al. 2013).

The high level of mental health problems among young people is not just a problem for the developed world. While national data collection limitations make comparisons difficult, several studies suggest that the magnitude of young people's mental health problems is similar across the globe, although the nature and causes differ culturally (Belfer 2008; Rescorla et al. 2007). Similar overall proportions have been reported in low- and middle-income countries compared with high-income countries (Kieling et al. 2011).

Adolescence has been acknowledged as a challenging life stage of emerging adulthood for over a hundred years (Hall 1904). Major changes occur in all areas of human development: physical, social, cognitive, and emotional. It commences with puberty, the onset of which is extremely variable but has declined markedly over past generations for both boys and girls (Patton and Viner 2007). The average age of menarche for Caucasian girls in western countries is now about 12 years of age (normal range from 9 to 15 years), and for boys major signs of puberty commence about age 14. Compounding the effect of an earlier start, the conclusion of adolescence, when a full adult role is adopted, is increasingly delayed until the mid- to late 20s in the developed world. This is due to extended time spent in education and later marriage, leaving home, and parenthood. Consequently, there is an increasing mismatch between the attainment of physical/sexual maturity and social maturity.

Most recently, the extraordinary advances in communication technologies and rise of social media that have occurred over the last decade have fundamentally changed life for many of today's young people. Alongside their many advantages, which include the facilitation of greater connectivity for young people, these technologies bring new risks for youth through the instant and ever-present ability to record, receive, and respond to text and images. Privacy has changed forever, and today's youth must manage an online identity and social reputation. Through online media they are immersed in a "super-peer" youth culture that magnifies peer and media influence (Patton and Viner 2007). There is online access to almost anything, including pornography, gambling, and online shopping for drugs.

Early Intervention

There can be serious, ongoing consequences of mental disorders that occur during adolescence and young adulthood, even from the onset of a relatively mild mental health problem. Problems often persist, escalate, and reoccur in later life, if not effectively managed. Mental health issues can have a profound impact on the foundations of adult life, affecting educational and vocational attainments, social relationships, cognitive skills, lifestyle decisions, and health attitudes (Kazdin 1993). While most young people successfully negotiate this period, getting off track at this time can potentially disrupt a person's life trajectory through lost opportunities in major life domains.

Early intervention is a part of a spectrum of interventions aimed at reducing the burden of mental ill health on individuals, families, and communities (Mrazek and Haggerty 1994). The spectrum is based on the premise that a broad strategy is needed to promote mental health and well-being for everyone, prevent the development of mental disorders for those at higher levels of risk, intervene early for those at imminent risk and showing the early signs of mental disorders, and provide recovery-focused continuing care and relapse prevention, as well as effective evidence-informed treatment (DHAC 2000). Early intervention aims to prevent the progression to a diagnosable disorder for people at high risk or experiencing early signs and symptoms of mental health problems. For those undergoing a first episode of mental disorders, it aims to reduce the impact of the disorder in terms of its duration and the damage it may cause to the person's life and to foster hope for future well-being.

Early intervention requires a different approach to traditional forms of mental health treatment. The least invasive and stigmatizing approaches need to be implemented because early intervention takes place when people are still at high risk and symptoms have not reached full threshold, when diagnosis is unclear, or during first episodes when prognosis is unpredictable. Interventions need to emphasize psychosocial risk and protective factors, so that essential connections with family, peers, and school/work, and a healthy lifestyle are maintained.

Seeking Help

Ironically, at the time of life when people most need additional support for their mental health, they are least likely to seek it. Fewer than one-third of the young women and only 13 % of young men aged 16–24 years who were experiencing clinically significant symptoms had sought professional help according to a national Australian survey (Slade et al. 2009). The US national comorbidity study revealed that less than one in five affected adolescents received help for anxiety, eating, or substance use disorders (Merikangas et al. 2011). In Switzerland, a large nationally representative sample of young adults aged 16–20 years reported that only 13 % who needed psychological help had consulted health care (Mauerhofer et al. 2009).

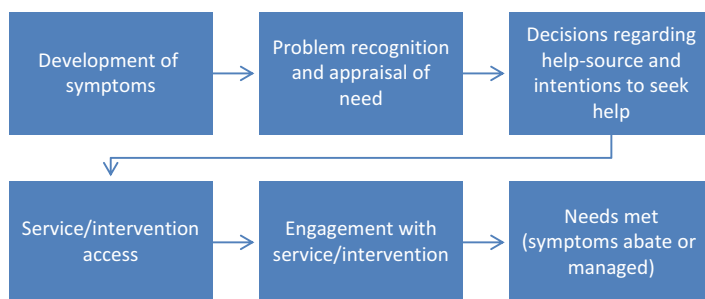


Fig. 1 Help-seeking process

Help for mental health problems can be sought from a wide range of sources that vary in their level of formality and expertise (Rickwood and Thomas 2012). *Informal help-seeking* is through informal social networks, such as family and friends. *Formal help-seeking* is from professionals who have a legitimate role and special training in providing relevant advice and/or treatment. Formal help-seeking is itself diverse and can include *semiformal* support from teachers, youth workers, and clergy, as well as formal professional support from generalist and specialist health-care providers. Recently, there has been a growing focus on *self-help*, particularly through increasing opportunities to access support and information online.

Seeking help is a complex and temporal process with multiple decision points (see Fig. 1). At each point a range of factors can accelerate or regress progress. A systematic review of barriers and facilitators to help-seeking in young people identified the major barriers as problems recognizing symptoms, a preference for self-reliance, and perceived stigma and embarrassment (Gulliver et al. 2010). Facilitators were mostly un-researched, but there was evidence for encouragement from others and positive past experience.

Symptom Recognition

The first step in the help-seeking process is the development of symptoms, but their presence alone does not automatically prompt seeking help. Many studies clearly demonstrate that the majority of young people with significant psychological disorder do not access professional help. Even at the highest percentile of anxiety and depression, only one-third of adolescents had sought help in a large Norwegian study (Zachrisson et al. 2006).

One of the main reasons that symptoms do not initiate help-seeking for young people is difficulty distinguishing normal from abnormal thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Because the teenage years are seen as a period of emotional instability and challenging behaviors, many symptoms are normalized as typical teenage behavior. Young people themselves, and their families and friends, are unsure

when symptoms warrant further attention. The high prevalence of clinically relevant symptoms during this period reinforces the belief that problems are common and to be expected and endured.

Compounding this, many of the symptoms that young people experience actively hinder seeking help. The help-negation effect was first noted for suicidal thoughts, where higher levels of ideation were associated with lower help-seeking intentions (Clark and Fawcett 1992). Similarly, the hopelessness and social withdrawal that accompany depression mitigate against reaching out to others for support (Wilson et al. 2007). Anxiety symptoms, particularly social phobia and agoraphobia, are also inhibiting. Substance use is often illicit and highly stigmatized, and its help-negating effect was evident in a national Australian survey where, for respondents aged 16–24 years, health professional consultation was lowest for those with substance use problems at 11 %, compared with 32 % and 49 % for those with anxiety and affective disorders, respectively (ABS 2010). Psychotic disorders frequently involve social withdrawal, lack of insight, and paranoia, all of which impede seeking help (Larsen et al. 2009).

Recognition that distress and symptoms are outside the norm is one factor that prompts help-seeking. In a large-scale US study, even among those with very high levels of distress, it was those who perceived themselves to be more distressed than others who were most likely to seek help (Mojtabai 2008). Social comparison and compared distress facilitate seeking help, along with good mental health literacy comprising knowledge of symptoms and appropriate responses (Jorm et al. 1997).

Self-Reliance

Even at high levels of distress, young people usually define their symptoms as something that should be managed on their own. Over one-third of Australian adolescents reported a preference to manage the problem alone as the most common reason for not seeking help (Sawyer et al. 2000). Similarly, a large US study revealed that a third of adolescents with serious suicidal ideation, depression, or substance use problems felt that they should deal with problems themselves without outside help (Gould et al. 2004). For more marginalized young people, the importance of self-reliance can be even stronger. A small qualitative study of homeless adolescents revealed that they placed a very high priority on self-sufficiency and were particularly untrusting of professional services (Collins and Barker 2009).

This is not surprising as the development of independence and self-reliance is one of the main goals of adolescence and a valued attainment in early adulthood. Becoming an independently functioning adult entails increasingly making one's own decisions, including health decisions. While equally important for both boys and girls, self-reliance may be a stronger barrier to seeking help for boys. Importantly, young people are more predisposed to seek help for others than for themselves (Raviv et al. 2009), and peer support and focusing on aiding a friend are ways to convey help-seeking information to young people.

Preference for Informal Support

When young people do reach out, the preference is for informal support rather than professional health care (Rickwood et al. 2007a). Most young people believe that informal support is sufficient and the most appropriate source of help for personal and mental health problems (Kuhl et al. 1997). Such beliefs are particularly strong among young people who are not part of mainstream western culture. Many of those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have strong norms regarding keeping personal information within family. A study of teenage refugees from seven different countries found that most were very reluctant to go beyond their close social relationships to seek help for psychosocial problems (de Anstiss and Ziaian 2010). Young people also prefer to disclose problems to people they know and trust and are reluctant to talk to strangers about very personal issues, finding it embarrassing and confronting (Rickwood et al. 2005). They also believe that people they do not know, particularly health professionals, will not understand them and their issues and that it is only within their informal networks of family and friends that their problems will be understood.

Negative perceptions of professional mental health care are common, and there is a pervasive belief that professional help does not work, a view held by most young people, along with their parents (Jorm et al. 2008). Thinking that “nothing could help” was the second most endorsed barrier to accessing mental health care in a national Australian survey (Slade et al. 2009). A common belief is that professional mental health care will do more harm than good (ten Have et al. 2010), and there are particularly negative views regarding psychotropic medication (Wright et al. 2005). Not surprisingly, young people who have had a poor past experience are much less likely to intend to seek professional care again (Rickwood 2005). The main factors accounting for negative past experience include not being helped, not feeling listened to, and not being taken seriously.

Stigma and Confidentiality

One of the most commonly reported reasons why young people prefer to keep their mental health problems to themselves is the stigma of mental illness. Stigma has long been recognized as a major barrier to mental health care for people of all ages (Corrigan 1994). It is a broad concept, however, and has several distinct forms. A recent large-scale survey of young people from 13 different universities in the USA revealed that it was only personally held stigmatizing attitudes that were related to reluctance to seek help, rather than perceptions of what others believe in the form of public stigma (Golberstein et al. 2009). Similarly, a systematic review concluded that it was concerns about what others, including the help providers, would think of them personally that were the basis of fears of stigma (Gulliver et al. 2010).

Fears of being identified as having a mental illness and being a service user are likely to be more salient during youth and adolescence than at other stages of life, and confidentiality is a major concern of young people seeking mental health care.

The primacy of the peer group makes confidentiality essential to maintain peer group status. Peers become increasingly important as a social reference point during adolescence and have maximal effect in middle adolescence (Monahan et al. 2009), at the same time that mental health problems are on the rise. Identity development is also a central issue during adolescence, and the stigma associated with mental illness means that young people are loath to adopt a mental illness identity.

Gateways to Care

Young people clearly need help to overcome the many barriers they have to accessing appropriate interventions to support their mental health, particularly professional mental health care. This requires significant effort from others in the community through outreach and encouragement. In contrast, however, there is often marked reluctance to intervene in relation to mental health and well-being until problems have escalated to an obvious crisis point. This reluctance must be overcome; young people's informal and formal networks need to know that it is OK to ask how a young person is faring – even to ask about suicidal thoughts if concerned – and be proactive in the help-seeking process (headspace 2009).

Encouragement from others is one of the best-established facilitators of health-care access. The informal support network is critical, as most young people turn to their family and friends before accessing professional help. The people closest to a young person are also those most likely to notice changes in mood and behavior that might indicate a need for intervention. Developmental patterns show that early in adolescence both boys and girls are most likely to seek help for their mental health problems from their parents, usually their mother. Not surprisingly, the younger the adolescent the more influential parents are in the help-seeking process. Parental help-seeking on behalf of a young person can also be a challenging experience with many barriers, however, and requires fortitude and persistence (Boulter and Rickwood 2013).

The capacity for self-referral develops during adolescence in line with growing autonomy from parents. Although reliance on parents declines, for most adolescents and many young adults, they continue to play a vital role in accessing professional treatment. A study of US college students confirmed that 47 % of those who had sought professional help had been encouraged to do so by their mother, whereas paternal influence was only 5 % (Vogel et al. 2007). Close friends become more important during adolescence, especially for girls, and partners assume a significant role in early adulthood, particularly for men (Bevan 2010).

Community Support

Young people are in regular contact with a range of other adults in their daily lives, including teachers, coaches, and youth workers. These people can act as gateways because, although they are not health professionals, they may be the first to identify

a problem and have been shown to account for over half the variance in service use (Stiffman et al. 2004). Such social resources need to be mobilized to actively reach out to young people, and the mental health literacy and help-seeking intentions of the gateway providers themselves need to be supportive to enable this (Mazzer and Rickwood 2009).

The role of school teachers is increasingly recognized as essential in the help-seeking pathway as almost all early and mid-adolescents in developed countries spend a large proportion of their time at school. Most teachers acknowledge that support for mental health is a routine part of their role and many are actively involved in identifying young people at risk and helping them access care (Mazzer and Rickwood 2013). The capacity of schools to support young people is enabled by good mental health literacy among school staff and the establishment of referral pathways into networks of appropriate care (Rickwood 2005). As the time spent in education extends beyond high school for a major proportion of young people, staff and structures within technical colleges, universities, and other institutes of higher education need to prioritize effective pastoral care.

Other adults in the community in regular contact with young people are also becoming acknowledged as having a gateway role. Sport and recreation activities are important to many young people, and coaches have been shown to be open to having a more active role in early intervention, with appropriate support and knowledge (Mazzer and Rickwood 2013). For young people at risk, youth workers are an essential point of contact (Rickwood and Mazzer 2012). More so than many other gateway providers, youth workers regularly come into contact with young people who are vulnerable and at high risk of mental health problems due to poor lifestyle, disadvantage, or living on the margins of the mainstream community. Such support is especially important for young people who do not have strong family connections.

Primary Care

Primary care providers have an obvious role in the help-seeking process. In most countries, specialist mental health care is rarely accessed directly, but rather through general health or counseling services. General practice, school-based health, counseling and guidance services, and community health centers have a critical role as major providers of youth mental health care and formal gatekeepers to specialist care. Such services, particularly psychological services, are scarce, however, in developing countries.

Nevertheless, young people are often reluctant to seek such help. In a large study, few young Australians saw the general practitioner as a preferred source of help, mentioned by only 4–13 % of adolescents and 19–34 % of young adults (Jorm et al. 2007). In contrast, parents much more frequently mention the doctor as a preferred source, comprising 40–72 % of the parents of adolescents and 61–76 % of the parents of young adults. The high accessibility of primary care for parents is important to maintain because it is parents who are often the first to recognize the

need for professional help. Moreover, young people access primary health care at least once a year, providing an opportunity for screening for mental health problems, which is warranted given the high prevalence of mental disorders and low level of recognition at this stage of life (Hickie et al. 2007).

Technology

Most recently, technology has emerged as a critical gateway for mental health care. Technology is embedded within young people's lives in developed countries and on the rise in the developing world. Its potential to provide interventions and guide young people to appropriate services is rapidly becoming realized. Figure 2 shows the growing e-spectrum of interventions available to support young people's mental health and well-being in ways that are congruent with how they live their technology-enhanced lives (Rickwood 2012). Technology has a role across the whole spectrum of interventions from mental health promotion through to continuing care and recovery.

Of special note, online communities can provide social support, connectivity, and a sense of belonging for young people in ways that were not previously possible. Easy access to psychoeducation and self-help screening tools can help young people, and their family and friends, to identify their mental health needs. Evidence shows that website use often leads on to professional service use (Nicholas 2010). Well-branded youth-friendly portals can now guide young people through to evidence-based applications, interventions, and appropriate service responses.

Computer- and smartphone-mediated communications have enormous capacity to reduce help-seeking barriers (Rickwood 2010). Such help-seeking does not require the direct person-to-person contact inherent in most other forms of support

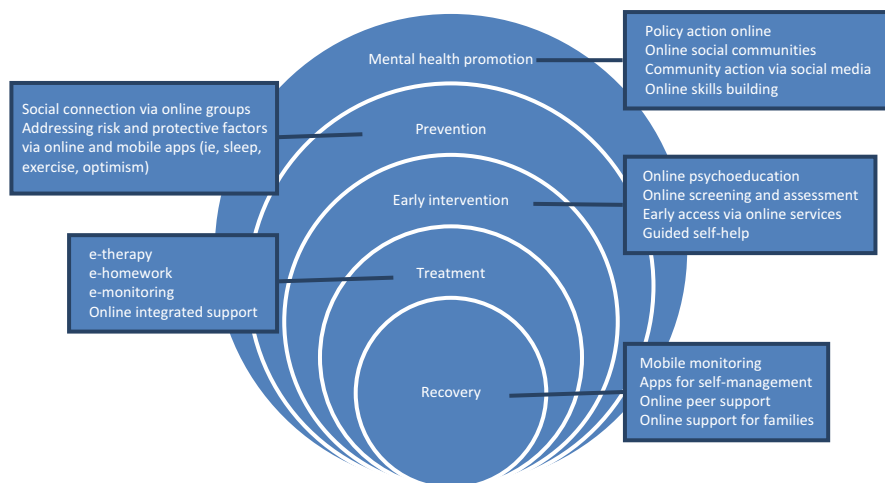


Fig. 2 The e-spectrum of interventions for youth mental health (Adapted from Rickwood (2012))

and can be undertaken anonymously. Online interventions can provide a “soft-entry” point, where young people can try out some aspects of mental health support. Of note, young people using online counseling say they find it easier to type than talk about personal issues and sensitive topics and prefer online to telephone counseling (Gould et al. 2006). The anonymity, ease of access, wide reach, and extraordinary versatility of the rapidly expanding range of technology-enabled interventions make them vital links in the help-seeking process.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Adolescence and young adulthood are a time of life full of new opportunities, but they are also the time of greatest vulnerability to mental health problems. It is imperative that systems of mental health care more effectively support young people as they mature into adulthood. Through earlier intervention, the development and impact of mental health problems can be attenuated, and it is in society’s best interests to maximize young people’s outcomes in adulthood. Much has been achieved with the growing focus on youth mental health over the past decade. The main factors affecting young people’s use of services that support their mental health and well-being are well established, and the challenge now is to reorient the mental health-care system to overcome the barriers and enhance facilitators. Some countries, such as Australia, are on the cusp of realizing innovative, integrated systems of care tailored to the needs of young people and working through the environments in which they live, both in person and online (McGorry et al. 2007).

While significant progress is being made, many challenges remain and ongoing advocacy and commitment are needed. Funding for mental health and youth services still lags behind other health priorities, and it is not only more, but also different types of funding arrangements that are needed to support innovation and integration. The realization of seamless systems of youth mental health care that span the entire spectrum of interventions from promoting positive mental health to ensuring continuing care for young people with complex mental health issues requires different funding arrangements from those traditionally outlaid. Funding must facilitate service and sector collaboration, rather than undermine it. Increasingly, access needs to be through well-recognized portals that lead to an appropriate mix of evidence-based services and resources. Such collaborative arrangements also depend on the development of common screening, assessment, and referral tools and ways to share client records, within and between services and sectors and between online and in-person environments.

Underpinning an improved treatment system is better mental health literacy for the whole community and reduced stigma related to seeking help. A clear future direction is more innovative approaches to mental health promotion and improving mental health literacy. Increasingly, technology is providing ways to maximally engage young people through the provision of individually tailored health information. This can focus on a person’s unique demographic characteristics, interests, and risk and protective factors. For example, framing seeking help within a mental

fitness context may be more engaging for young men. Social media, use of gamification, and personalized monitoring through smartphone applications and other new technologies will be used to promote mental health in increasingly sophisticated ways.

In the future, it will become accepted that most of the work to support mental well-being and address mental health problems happens outside the therapy room. There will be integration of self-help and guided self-help resources, for both young people and their families. Technology will be used to enhance self-management, including online peer support, and become a routine adjunct to clinical care. Better ways to monitor progress and increase communication with service providers between appointments will be enabled through new technologies.

It should not be forgotten, however, that there remains urgent need for more effective treatments for mental health problems and a stronger evidence base to inform best practice. Well-established approaches are not yet available for most mental health problems, particularly for the troubling areas of self-harm, suicidal ideation, and emerging personality disorder. While cognitive, behavioral, and psychosocial interventions should be prioritized due to their more benign nature, particularly for early intervention, greater investment to better understand both the psychosocial and biomedical mechanisms of mental illness is urgently needed. Mental health research needs higher priority, including the rapidly emerging field of genomic research, which may help to understand risk and vulnerability and point the way for development of more tailored and effective pharmaceuticals with fewer side effects.

The field of youth mental health is on the cusp of a whole new way of working in some parts of the world. Instead of waiting for mental health problems to escalate to full diagnosis and for crises to trigger intervention, young people are increasingly being supported to be more aware of their mental health and take early action to protect their well-being and address signs of mental health problems. Adults in the community who regularly interact with young people are developing the skills to reach out and guide young people through easily recognized and accessible gateways to effective interventions. Resources and services are becoming integrated in-person and online and incorporating self-help and Informal support alongside collaborative professional service networks. This new way of working is predicated on continued innovation in all aspects of youth mental health care, including new approaches to funding, treatment, collaboration, and enhanced technology.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Approaches to Understanding Youth Well-Being](#)
- ▶ [Citizenship: Inclusion and Exclusion](#)
- ▶ [Current Debates in Social Justice and Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [Education and the Politics of Belonging: Attachments and Actions](#)
- ▶ [Gender Identity, Intergenerational Dynamics, and Educational Aspirations: Young Women's Hopes for the Future](#)

- ▶ Girls' Embodied Experiences of Media Images
- ▶ Indigenous Youth, Nationhood, and the Politics of Belonging
- ▶ Participating as Young Citizens in Diverse Communities
- ▶ Protecting and Promoting Young People's Social and Emotional Health in Online and Offline Contexts
- ▶ Reconsidering Youth Well-Being as Fluid and Relational: A Dynamic Process at the Intersection of Their Physical and Social Geographies
- ▶ Spirituality, Religion, and Youth: An Introduction
- ▶ The Ambivalent Implications of Strong Belonging for Young People Living in Poor Neighborhoods
- ▶ Time and Space in Youth Studies
- ▶ Unemployment, Insecurity, and Poor Work: Young Adults in the New Economy
- ▶ Young People and Employability
- ▶ Young People, Identity, Class, and the Family
- ▶ Young People, Online Gaming Culture, and Education
- ▶ Young People, Pleasure, and the Normalization of Pornography: Sexual Health and Well-Being in a Time of Proliferation?
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- ▶ Youth and Play: Identity, Politics, and Lifestyle
- ▶ Youth Experience of Urban Inequality: Space, Class, and Gender in Mexico
- ▶ Youth, Consumption, and Creativity on Australia's Gold Coast

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Young People, Pleasure, and the Normalization of Pornography: Sexual Health and Well-Being in a Time of Proliferation?

Lyn Harrison and Debbie Ollis

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Abstract

It has been argued that pornography is the most prominent sex educator for young people today (Flood, M. (2010). Young men using pornography. In E. Boyle (Ed.), *Everyday Pornography* (pp. 164–178). Oxford: Routledge). Research indicates that first exposure to pornography can be as young as 11 years of age. There is evidence that exposure to pornography is shaping young people’s sexual expectations and practices (Häggström-Nordin et al. 2005). Many young people are learning what sex looks like from what they – or their partner or peers – observe in pornography. Significantly,

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pornography is normalizing sex acts that most women do not enjoy and may experience as degrading, painful, or violating. This raises serious implications for young people's capacity to develop a sexuality that incorporates mutual pleasure, respect, and negotiation of free and full consent.

While the results are complex and nuanced, research into the effects of pornography consumption provides reliable evidence that exposure to pornography increases aggressive attitudes and behavior towards women for some viewers (Malamuth et al. Annual Review of Sex Research 11, 26–91, 2000). Pornography consumption also has been found to be associated with sexual health risk taking and can impact negatively on body image and sense of self (Dean, L. (2007). *Young Men, Pornography and Sexual Health Promotion*, MA Research, Brighton University, Brighton, in possession of the author), and as such is a serious health and well-being issue, particularly for young women.

This chapter explores preservice teachers' reactions to pornography education using two examples from teaching of an elective *Teaching Sexuality in the Middle Years*, in 2011. These examples explore the complex emotions such teaching can generate and the challenges faced by preservice teachers when they are encouraged to confront the gendered and violent consequences of the normalization of pornography in a coeducational setting.

Introduction

It is clear that pornography elicits strong emotions and has the power to divide people. As sexuality educators, our concern is the normalization of pornography and its constant portrayal of women as sex objects, the increasing violence against women in so-called mainstream pornography, the early initiation into pornography, and the skewed view of human sexuality that it represents and its role as a medium for sexuality education.

While the results are complex and nuanced, research into the effects of pornography consumption provides reliable evidence that exposure to some pornography increases aggressive attitudes and behaviors towards women for some viewers (Malamuth et al. 2000). Pornography consumption also has been found to be associated with sexual health risk taking and can impact negatively on body image and sense of self (Dean 2007). As such it presents a serious health and well-being issue, particularly for young women.

In this chapter we explore preservice teachers' reactions to a gender/power analysis of pornography using a respectful relationships framework. We use two examples from our teaching of an elective unit *Teaching Sexuality in the Middle Years*. These examples explore the complex emotions such teaching can generate and the challenges faced by students (and teachers) in a coeducational setting when they are encouraged to confront the gendered and possibly violent consequences of the normalization of pornography.

Background

Sexuality issues are a constant backdrop to debate and discussion around young people and well-being. Over the past 20 years, in Australia and elsewhere, there has been an enormous progress in inclusive practices in regard to sexuality and gender diversity, acknowledgment of sexual activity, and improvement in the provision of resources to support sexuality services, including sexuality education in schools. These positive changes have happened alongside an increasing concern about the high levels of gender-based violence (GBV). The United Nations has identified gender-based violence as a major public health issue. This has resulted in countries across the world implementing policies and programs in an attempt to address what researchers are recognizing as a multifaceted issue, that is, cultural, contextual, and requiring the development of what Russo and Pirlott (2006b) have called “diversity mindfulness” (p. 180).

Increasingly authors are pointing to the broader structural aspects of gender relations as implicated in the cause and the solution. Gender-based entitlements, power, objectification, and status are now recognized as playing an instrumental role in the dynamics of gender-based violence (GBV) (Russo and Pirlott 2006a). The most recent reports on young people and gender-based violence have identified the role of media, sexualization, and access to pornography as a range of well-being issues for this group (Horvath et al. 2013).

Horvath et al. (2013, p. 4) reporting on an inquiry into young people’s exposure to and use of pornography in the UK found that it was pervasive in children’s and young people’s lives:

The use of and children’s access to pornography emerged as a key theme during the first year of the Inquiry. It was mentioned by boys in witness statements after being apprehended for the rape of a child, one of whom said it was “like being in a porn movie”; we had frequent accounts of both girls’ and boys’ expectations of sex being drawn from pornography they had seen; and professionals told us troubling stories of the extent to which teenagers and younger children routinely access pornography, including extreme and violent images. We also found compelling evidence that too many boys believe that they have an absolute entitlement to sex at any time, in any place, in any way, and with whomever they wish. Equally worryingly, we heard that too often girls feel they have no alternative but to submit to boys’ demands, regardless of their own wishes.

Similar rates of exposure to pornography can be found in Australia. In one study of 13–16 year olds, it was found that 61 % of girls and 92 % of boys had been exposed to pornography online (Fleming et al. 2006). Many young people are learning what sex looks like from what they – or their partner or peers – observe in pornography (Hägström-Nordin et al. 2005; Flood 2010).

GBV and violence against women are widely recognized as a serious issue in Australia – they are a bigger cause of death or serious injury for women under 45 than smoking, obesity, or high blood pressure. While Australian schools and governments have acknowledged the issue of bullying, violence, and child abuse or neglect, there has been less awareness of the pervasive problem of GBV such as

sexual assault (Dyson 2009), yet one in seven teenage boys apparently thinks it is acceptable to force girls to have sex if they had “flirted with them” and 20 % of women and 5 % of men over 15 have experienced sexual assault (Rance 2010).

There is a recognized need in the literature to challenge gender power structures as a prerequisite to tackling all such violence (Renold 2006; Kehler and Martino 2007) as well as an acknowledgment that groups excluded by dominant masculinities (including girls and same-sex-attracted students) challenge these power structures at the microlevel through strategies of resistance (Paechter 2010; Hillier and Harrison 2004).

A respectful relationships approach to violence prevention, currently advocated in Australia and elsewhere (Flood and Fergus 2009; DEECD, 2009), acknowledges both the agency of individuals (Renold 2006; Kehler and Martino 2007) and the influence of broader social structures such as gender, class, and ethnicity/culture which impact differentially on this agency (Ollis 2011). This approach starts from the assumption that sexuality is a positive aspect of self and links information and critical thinking with empowerment, choice, and support of diversity (Ollis et al. 2013; Formby et al. 2010; Sinkinson 2009). It further conceptualizes violence as a barrier to health and well-being. According to the World Health Organization, sexual health is seen as:

... a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. (World Health Organization 2006)

However, attempts to address GBV in schools are often piecemeal (Ollis 2013). The pedagogical construct of children’s stages of development, if it is conflated with either ideas of naïve childhood innocence (Keddie 2003; Renold 2006) or biological determinism (Keddie 2003; Martino et al. 2005), can support essentialist ideas of “boys will be boys.” These views can then be used to directly argue against the focus on gender equity or the structures of power that underlie gender relations (Ollis and Tomesvski 1993; Mills 2007). Under such frameworks, violence prevention programs are often short and based on information provision, focusing on how commonly violence occurs and how to avoid being a victim (Flood and Fergus 2009). They have often included a focus on abstinence and refusal skills on the part of girls that places the onus on them to avoid such situations and places the blame on the victim at the expense of examining the broader reasons why GBV occurs (Dyson 2009).

These concerns have been the impetus for an increasing focus on pornography and its possible links to GBV. Pornographic material, designed to arouse, is not necessarily in itself problematic; in fact for some young people, pornography can provide an important source of information where little else exists. However, researchers argue that mainstream pornography has become extremely violent. It depicts women enjoying violent sexual behaviors, provides unrealistic images of women’s and men’s bodies, and shows sexually unsafe behaviors such as

intercourse without condoms or oral sex and then anal sex without a condom. One key concern for a number of researchers in this area (Flood 2010; Crabbe and Corlett 2010) is the proliferation of easily accessed porn and its use by young people as a tool for learning about sex and relationships. They argue for the need to provide school-based education that can explore the myths associated with pornography and work to improve the health and well-being of young people.

Teaching Sexuality in the Middle Years: A Context for Teaching About Pornography

Teaching Sexuality Education in the Middle Years is a unit designed to prepare preservice teachers to teach sexuality education in primary and secondary schools in Victoria. The unit uses a feminist poststructural lens; provides students with knowledge, skills, understandings, and educational experiences promoting the need for sexuality education using current research on young people and sexuality, sexual health and well-being, and current policy and research on best practice; and identifies discourses and frameworks used to teach about sexuality and young people in resources, policy, and practice.

The students are engaged in the study of gender, sex, and sexuality moving from theory to practice. An examination of GBV and respectful relationships are a key feature of the unit and provide the backdrop to educational experiences that examine the role of pornography in the sex education of young people. Crabbe and Corlett from the “Reality and Risk Project” (2010) have developed a video which explores the normalization of pornography and its increasingly violent and degrading depictions of women. The video uses material from interviews with young people, academics, and representatives of the pornography industry here and overseas and is used by preservice teachers to explore the young people’s access to pornography, the mainstreaming and normalization of pornography, the often violent content of pornography and its role in sexuality education, the possible impact on them, and the approaches to teaching about these issues.

Preservice teachers maintain that utilizing the audio visual stimulus plus the educational materials and activities has an enormous impact on raising their awareness and understanding and in building their confidence to include issues of sexualization and pornography in their sexuality education teaching (Ollis et al. 2013).

Methodology

The methodological framework we are using to make sense of the proliferation of pornography and its effects on young people’s sexual well-being is drawn from the feminist poststructuralist appropriations of Foucault’s work on power/knowledge and uses of pleasure – his notion of discourse and his focus on the care of the self and its application in Moira Carmody’s work on sex and

ethics (2009, 2005; Carmody and Carrington 2000). Foucault's notion of "care of the self is synonymous with leading an ethical life" (Carmody 2009, p. 87), and for Carmody "...the ethical adventure is not finding or revealing who we *are*, but the work involved when exploring the self in this or that cultural and historical lineage." This is the key to Carmody's sexual ethics framework, and for her, drawing on Foucault:

The abuse of power manifested in exploitative sexual relations 'exceeds the legitimate exercise of one's own power and imposes one's fantasies, appetites and desires on others' (as cited in Rabinow 1997, p. 288). Therefore, 'one has not taken care of the self and has become a slave of one's desires' at the expense of another (ibid).

Carrie Paechter (2002, p. 42) argues that "discourses are intimately involved with power relations; one is not free to choose which discourse one wishes to operate in. Some discourses are more powerful than others." She reminds us that Foucault has argued that "wherever there are power relations, there are also relations of resistance" and states:

...the salience of resistance in Foucault's conceptualization of power allows us both to retain a place of human agency with respect to power relations, and to see how the deconstruction of discourses is an important aspect of and precursor to the construction of resistant counter-discourses. (p. 43)

This last point about resistance is important for us as teachers, and we return to it later in our analysis of the students' reactions to a gender/power analysis of pornography.

Methods

Preservice teachers' responses to education about GBV and pornography were both positive and negative. As a result we were interested in delving deeper into their experience of the material and their views on the implications for their students and for teaching sexuality education.

Ethics approval was granted to collect data on preservice teachers' experience of the unit and their preparedness and readiness to teach sexuality education following its completion. This was amended for continuation until the end of 2013 (HEAG (AE) 10–26).

Data has been collected from preservice teachers undertaking the unit for the past 4 years (2009–2013). Students elect to complete a pre-unit and post-unit online survey. Follow-up focus group interviews have been conducted with 20 students who indicated on the survey they would like to participate.

The authors conducted individual interviews with students who had covered the issue of gender-based violence as their elected assessment topic. The assessment involved the development and teaching to their peers of a targeted primary or secondary lesson on GBV or a pornography-related issue.

Kate and Sam: Exploring the Effects of Pornography

Our focus on pornography is as much about promoting preservice teachers' well-being as it is about them acquiring the skills to guide their students to become critical health consumers (Powell 2013) and to question the role of pornography in contributing to unequal gender power relations. Preservice teachers not only need an awareness of the impact of pornography on the health and well-being of their students but they need to explore their own personal and ethical frameworks around GBV and the role of pornography if they are going to promote the well-being of their future students and assist them to be critical consumers.

In the following case studies, we explore two students' reactions to and reflections on their learning about gender power relations while engaging in a critical analysis of the effects of pornography on promoting and maintaining respectful relationships.

Kate: I Have Never Watched Pornography

Kate is a mature-aged student, a mother of two who always wanted to be a teacher, but she "never really got around to it" (p. 1). She has always been a "sporter," and her passion was always to be a PE teacher. Doing the sexuality unit was the highlight of her 4 years at university. She really appreciated learning in a diverse group because, "What I consider to be a risk or something that could have dire consequences, a young person does not see that as a risk at all" (p. 3).

Gender, Power, and Pornography

When asked what she remembered about the unit *Teaching Sexuality in the Middle Years*, she said, "...the main things that stuck out for me were the discussions about gender and about power and gender, stereotyping, violence against women and then consent and relationships and then leading into pornography" (p. 4). She found this focus interesting because:

At that time my son in particular, and now it's my daughter and her group of friends, are going through that whole issue of the latest Instagram and all this sort of stuff. It made me really aware of how we need to educate young people and have conversations with them and give them the skills and advice - not tell them what they should and shouldn't be doing but inform them I suppose and educate them so that they can make the right - well that's a judgment call isn't it... informed decision. (p. 4)

Kate became visibly distressed when watching the documentary on pornography and young people and at one stage left the room in tears. What surprised her was that what she considered distressing or shocking, the younger people, especially the younger females in the group, did not.

Age as a Marker of Difference

I was probably shocked that not every female in that room was bursting into tears like me because just the content of what we saw and what these females had to endure. No matter how old you are I would never want any female to go through that so I was probably - yeah I was probably surprised that there weren't more people that were shocked.

But I know myself that I've made a conscious choice never to watch pornography because I just don't agree with the treatment and the situation that these people are put in. But obviously for some people it's not a shock for them so that shocked me I suppose. Maybe I think everybody else should think the way that I think. . .(p. 6)

Kate found it difficult to reconcile the fact that not everybody felt the same way as she did. When asked whether this was a gendered perspective, she actually thought that it was more about age. She was quite shocked that some of the young women were not shocked by the girls on the video who spoke frankly about their participation in porn movies and spoke of this participation in terms of free choice.

I don't think they maybe saw that person in the same way that I saw that person, that as I said before that she was somebody's daughter and sister. I don't think they would see it the same way. . . (p. 11)

Normalization and Choice

Not everyone thinks the same way as Kate has acknowledged. She reported that at lunch time there were "really good open discussions" between the younger and older females. Kate went on to say:

I know that they said they hadn't thought about it from that perspective, the fact that this was a real person and I suppose - and again as I said before I still couldn't get past my own moral set - that this person still thought yes but at least they're earning money and at least they're feeling good about themselves and - you know that's what they've chosen to do. (p. 14)

What exactly are they *choosing* to do here, and are all choices ethical choices? And within the context of this paper, do these choices contribute to the health and well-being of those young women who *choose* to participate in pornographic films? Kate herself provoked the students she was talking with to think about this:

Then we had the whole discussion about what choice, have they had a choice and tried to come up with all sorts of different scenarios about the situation this person might have found themselves in to go down this path and you know have they really got a choice. (p. 14)

Kate frames this as a problem of differences of opinion related to "age." But it is clear from our earlier reference to the normalization of porn that it is more than age that influences people's views about pornography.

Sam: "Never Again Have I Watched It. . ."

Sam grew up in inner Melbourne and went to an all-boys Catholic school. He loved school and got on well with the teachers but admits "I hated doing schoolwork."

He struggles with assignments but finds it frustrating “because I understand everything that’s going on.”

He presents as an affable but perhaps a typical “jock” – a football player and the coach of an under-19 side in his local community. The all-male environment at school he wouldn’t say was “sexist,” but “there was a bit of a group mentality.” He thinks that “those sort of boys” schools breed that sort of mentality’ (p. 4). He is careful to say however that his parents always reinforced the need to be respectful to women saying “there’s not a sexist bone in our blood” (p. 4).

He admits that “everything was new to me because we didn’t really do that much Sex Ed” (p. 3) at school. After completing the unit, he expressed disappointment that his school had not offered much in this subject, and as a result he thinks that “me and my mates are really naïve when it comes to that sort of stuff. But I actually don’t blame us because we didn’t know anything about it” (p. 4).

Gender, Power, and Pornography

When we ask him to reflect on what he learned in the unit, Sam remembers the focus on gender and power and pornography “being quite confronting,” and he “found it really awkward being in the room with people who were really offended by it”:

I didn’t enjoy watching [the video] but I wasn’t disgusted as much as some of the other people were. So it’s opened my eyes a lot to that sort of stuff. People were crying and stuff. I understand that’s their prerogative. I’m not judging them or anything. . . I felt like they were a bit naïve. . . I expected to see what I saw.

It’s a bit embarrassing to admit this – for some people – for me even – that’s where we sometimes learn what sex is about, which is horrible; but there would be some people even worse than me who that’s all they know about – disrespecting women and all that stuff. So when they get into their sex lives with their partner, that’s what they think the norm is. Whereas I’m smart enough and educated enough to know that’s a far out example of sex. . . But I think even me watching and then discussing with mates then that’s a small step you take. For me, never again have I watched it. Then you tell your mates and even now they’re offended by it. That whole course has changed my. . . I loved it. . . in my eyes it should be a core subject. (p. 10)

Normalization and Choice

When I was having a run through with my mates before I came here (for the interview). . . I talked about the documentary and they’re like. . . no one decides when they’re 16 or 17 to become a porn star. . . this is horrible where you’ve got yourself into but the big thing for me also is it’s still a decision that they make. It probably sounds bad what I am saying but you still . . . in my eyes everyone makes their own decisions really. It’s like whatever happens to you in life you’ve still got a decision to make. It’s a bit like the porn star; they’ve made a decision at some point along the . . . so I found that I wasn’t feeling as sorry for them as some of the other girls in the room were.

It is evident that Sam struggles with the normalization of pornography and is clearly surprised at some of the reactions in the classroom by students such as Kate. He rather shamefacedly admits to using pornography to find out about sex and declares that he stopped watching it after completing the unit, and it is clear that he

has been active in discussing sexual behaviors and respectful relationships with the boys he coaches and his friends. He does not want to be lumped in with all “males,” but at the same time, he thinks there is a “bit of male dominancy.” He struggles with resisting stereotypes while at the same time knowing there is some truth there. He does not think he has got “any of it” [disrespect for women] in his body while at the same time just by virtue of being male, he is implicated. He is also unwilling to acknowledge that the young women in the group could have experienced discrimination or GBV. He makes the point earlier that he thinks the girls are just as bad as the boys in drinking too much, and it is unclear what we are to make of this comment – that you are asking for it if you drink too much? Sam talks about “choice” a lot, while acknowledging when talking with his mates that no one would choose to be exploited. A lot of his views are contradictory, but it is clear that he has been forced to think about his views and actions during and after the unit.

Raby (2005), using the notion of misidentification, argues that:

...identities are fragmented, multiple, intersecting and constantly in flux, subjects therefore, will partially identify and counter-identify with a subject position, especially when ‘hailed by more than one minority identity component’ (Munoz 1999, p. 8) and when there may be antagonisms between identity components. (p. 165)

Discussion

On Agency and Resistance

Foucault sees resistance as integral to power relations and “exercised from innumerable points” (Raby 2005, p. 161) which makes it difficult to pin down its origins. For him both “dominating and resisting power are fragments and inconsistent, with each always containing elements of the other.” At the same time, this notion of power as relational and diffuse enables an analysis of local struggles and the identification of micro-practices of resistance and agency.

In Foucault’s later works, he identified technologies of the self “where individuals create their own identities through ethics and forms of self-constitution,” and according to Raby, individuals can “question the ‘naturalness’ of their identity and recognize themselves as subjects and with resistant agency” (Raby, p. 162). We suggest that both Kate and Sam, albeit in different ways, do come to question themselves and act with “resistant agency.”

The sense of unease that Sam experiences, the contradictions, and his efforts to “share the message” demonstrate that we can be “embedded within discourse but at the same time work on, with, and against a cultural form” (Munoz 1999, cited in Raby 2005, p. 165). Although Sam’s agency is not focused on challenging structural inequalities, he nonetheless has influence in the particular contexts in which he acts.

Kate’s reaction was not only about the exploitation of young women in porn movies but also about the normalization of porn for the younger female students in

the class. She was shocked that these younger women did not have the same views as her and engaged in conversations with them after class to try and work out where they were coming from. We can only speculate about their reasons, but again, individual choice is called on to explain why young women would engage in pornography. Kate has a well-developed sense of social justice and the ability to take into account structural inequalities as well as individual biographies in her critique of gender power relations. However, her interactions with the younger women in the group have caused her unease and forced her to realize that not everyone shares her values.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Our aim in this unit is to engage preservice teachers in forms of “social transformation,” so they are equipped with the capacity and agency to work with young people in primary and secondary schools in age-appropriate ways. To do this we engage them “collectively” in critical analysis with the intention of exploring ethical considerations as part of a gender and power framework designed to promote ethical practice.

Although Kate and Sam’s experience of our educational approach is not generalizable, it (and the experience of the other 130 preservice teachers who have undertaken the unit) does provide some important insights into the provision of education about GBV and pornography and improving student well-being. There is evidence that the theoretical analysis on gender and power presented to the students raised awareness of inequality and the structural nature of GBV, including violent and degrading pornography. The emotional reaction of the students to the young people in the film, the research on pornography, and the translation to practice in the classroom seemed to have the most enabling affect.

Even so, their experience also points to a need for a greater focus on exploring the notion of “choice.” What does “choice” mean in relation to sexual health and well-being? Can young people make choices about the use of pornography or other areas of sexuality if they have not explored the role of ethics, power, gender, and social structure in relation to equity, access, ability, culture, religion, and sexuality? Are we constructing educational experiences that play on shame and emotion? We do not have the answers to these questions at this stage, but are confident that improving the well-being of our young people relies on teachers who have had opportunities to explore the proliferation and normalization of pornography theoretically, personally, and professionally.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Girls’ Embodied Experiences of Media Images](#)
- ▶ [Theorizing Subjectivity and Feminine Embodiment: Feminist Approaches and Debates](#)

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Who's Learning or Whose Learning? Critical Perspectives on the Idea Youth-Led Policy-Making Related to Gender-Based Violence in a South African Classroom

12

Claudia Mitchell

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Abstract

This chapter comes out of a growing recognition that in spite of the seemingly rich policy context in South Africa for combating gender-based violence in and around schools, the rates remain unacceptably high. At the same time, rates of HIV, especially for girls and women and particularly for those in context of certain rural districts, are also unacceptably high. Taken together these two sets of “facts” about growing up in rural South Africa call for innovative approaches at the school level to influence the everyday realities. Several years ago in a participatory video-making workshop involving teachers, learners, community health-care workers, and parents, a group of learners produced a video called *Rape at School: Trust No One*. The video is a powerful

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indictment of the abuses of power by teachers and highlights an almost taken-for-grantedness that teachers are not to be trusted. While the focus of the video is on the abuses by a male teacher of a female student, there is an underlying sense that this is too common an occurrence to escape the notice of all teachers (female teachers as well as male teachers) and all learners. The chapter sets out to lay bare the learnings that are demonstrated by “the learners” (the preferred term by the South African Department of Education to refer to students in public school classrooms). It then goes on to consider the ways in which participatory visual activities such as participatory video can disrupt the everyday by calling attention to the all-too-common experiences of abuse and at the same time can offer the possibility for both youth and adults to engage in policy dialogue about issues of safety and security in and around schools. In so doing the chapter draws attention to the significance of the place of reflexivity and youth engagement if there is to be social change.

Introduction

“When images of the world’s disasters flash across our television screens” writes Jan Egeland in his Foreword to *Broken Bodies, Broken Dreams: Violence Against Women Exposed*, “more often than not, we are presented with a rough sketch of the humanitarian crisis. Rarely do the cameras venture beneath the surface to look at the hidden impact of a humanitarian crisis on affected communities. If they did they would find that virtually without exception, it is women and children who are the most vulnerable” (2005, p. 1). Egeland’s statement is a powerful one, particularly in the context of gender-based violence and particularly in relation to the idea that it is even rarer for the cameras which “venture beneath the surface” to be controlled by the very people who are most affected and from whom researchers have the most to learn. This chapter explores the ways in which working with the visual, in this case, participatory video, offers an entry point for adults (researchers and teachers) to learn from young people themselves how they see issues of safety and security in their lives, particularly in school contexts.

As is well documented in the *Scared at School* Human Rights Watch Study in South Africa (2001) produced more than a decade ago, as well as in countless other studies on gender violence in South Africa, gender violence is one of the factors that lead to girls dropping out of school. The perceived danger both at school and on the way to school often means that the environment for learning is not “girl friendly” and this contributes negatively to girls’ schooling and to diminished success.

Gender-based violence is also associated with the spread of the HIV virus. Globally, young people aged 15–24 make up 42 % of new HIV infections in people aged 15 and older, with the majority of these infections in 2010 among young people in sub-Saharan Africa (UNAIDS 2012). While the most recent statistics on HIV rates among youth show that infection rates are dropping in

16 of the hardest hit countries, including South Africa, a number of rural districts in the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, and Limpopo continue to report high rates of infection especially among girls and young women (see, e.g., Abdool Karim and Abdool Karim 2010). Various school-based studies have demonstrated that often the perpetrators of gender-based violence are the teachers themselves with male teachers insisting that girls have sex with them in return for favors or money or as extra marks and a passing grade (see Leach and Mitchell 2006): As one of the girls who was interviewed for the Human Rights Watch (2001) report described it:

I went to his door and walked to the lounge. He gave me a hooch. I was lame. I knew what was happening to me, but I couldn't move. He picked me up and took me to his room and started taking my clothes off. He took his clothes off. He's twice my size and like, five times my weight and has so many muscles. Then he penetrated me. When I came to and went to my door ... I was scared to tell anyone because I was afraid no one would believe me.. About a week later he asked me if I would come do Afrikaans with him, and that he would give me good marks. (Cited in OCHA/IRIN 2005, pp. 74–76)

The situation is paradoxical in that “at least on paper” South Africa has a constitution which enshrines gender equality and, nationally, has put into place the gender machinery that should make a difference: the office of the Status of Women, gender focal persons across ministries, a Gender Commission, a Human Rights Commission, and now a National Council to Address Gender-Based Violence. To date there have been many studies that have attempted to address the issues, especially in relation to the lives of school-going girls, but as a careful analysis of these document reveals (Moletsane et al. *in press*), there has been little progress since the Human Rights Watch *Scared at School* report (2001), and indeed the situation has been exacerbated in relation to the gendered face of HIV/AIDS. While the country has made huge strides in enrolling girls in primary education specifically, and with high gender parity indexes at all levels, the sustained participation of girls in the education system, and in particular the poor quality of their educational experience, remains an area requiring investigation. One of the most pervasive reasons for the poor participation and low success of girls in the schooling system is gender inequality, and in particular, its manifestations in violence against girls and women, and the consequent developmental problems including health (most notably HIV infections and reproductive health).

Engaging Young People Through Participatory Video

The problems have been well documented, but little has been done to explore young people's perspectives about the solutions to these problems. There is much that can be learned “from the inside” by working with young people themselves. One such effort is presented here, originally conceived of as part of the National Research Foundation study “Learning Together” (DeLange et al. (2003), and within the framework of learning itself. The project uses participatory video as a tool for cultural production. The strength of participatory video making as is highlighted

in Milne et al. (2012) is its capacity to engage communities in identifying the issues that they think are important and in representing the issues in ways that are locally relevant. The specific “no-editing-required” approach to participatory video as described by Mitchell and De Lange (2011) minimizes the actual technical knowledge of filmmaking and maximizes producer control. Elsewhere there is description of the no-editing-required work in a rural South African community which included young people (see Moletsane et al. 2009; Weber and Mitchell 2007). In the project, made up of two 1-day events, the participants, working in small groups facilitated produced short videos. The topics they chose to represent in their 3–5 min video films, all framed by an “in my life” prompt, offered a fascinating array of “takes” on what participants saw as important: poverty (Moletsane et al. 2009), barriers to schooling and the responsibilities of teachers (Mitchell 2009), and gender-based violence (Weber and Mitchell 2007; Mitchell 2011a, b, 2012; Moletsane et al. *in press*). Indeed, the topic chosen by five out of six of the groups of young people across the two schools was gender violence, represented through such titles as *Rape at School: Trust No One, Rape, Raping and HIV and AIDS, Vikea Abantwana (or Protect the children – A story about incest)*, and *Stop Sexual Abuse*. The actual treatment and location of gender violence is diverse: at home when a father rapes his daughter, male teachers as perpetrators, date and gang rape, and on the street (a girl is raped on her way to school). The genres, too, varied, from using interviews (following a talk show genre), to melodrama (with eight-scene changes in one short narrative), through to a type of public service announcement genre which included social messages such as “Stop Women Abuse,” “Forward with Legal Rights,” “Let Justice Be Done and Know Your Rights,” and “To Report Rape Issues You Can Contact 0800-55555.” Alongside the actual filming by the participants, two local videographers documented the process and created what have been termed composite videos made up of clips of the actual filmmaking in action as well as the final productions (see also Mitchell 2011c; De Lange and Mitchell 2012).

The focus here is on *Rape at School: Trust No One*, a video produced by a group made up of three boys and three girls, and dealing with the subject of male teachers sexually abusing female students. The making of this video is also the subject of the composite video *Our Stories* so that the key aspects of its production (brainstorming, storyboarding, learning to use the camera, filming, and screening) are all captured on film. The specific issue relates to keeping girls in after class, ostensibly to help them with homework, but instead subjecting them to sexual violence in a deserted school. The video is shot in a classroom. In the opening classroom scene, it is obvious that there is “something” between the teacher and one of the girls. The girl is asked by the teacher to come to his classroom at the end of the school day for extra help. As soon as the girl arrives, the male teacher puts his arm around her and forces her to have sex. The viewer does not actually see the attack as the camera focuses on the closed classroom door; only the screams of the girl are heard from the inside as she is being raped by the teacher. Powerfully and dramatically the camera lingers on the closed door. It is what the audience cannot see but can only imagine that gives this scene its dramatic and chilling impact.

In the very last shot, the teacher is seen coming out of the classroom and adjusting his somewhat dishevelled state of dress. The girl is on the floor of the classroom, picking up her papers and crying.

Whose Learning?

What learning is taking place through the construction and sharing of this video, and how might an analysis of this learning contribute to deepening an understanding of gender violence in and around schools? What can we learn about learning in relation to the process of making the video (learning through), in relation to the final production (learning from), as adult researchers working with youth (learning with), and finally, in relation to learning and social change (learning for)?

Learning Through

Building on previous work on youth identity and media production (Weber and Mitchell 2007), this section maps out five key areas of learning in relation to the process itself: (1) constructedness, (2) collectivity, (3) reflexivity, (4) convergence, and (5) embodiment. This analysis draws on the content of *Rape at School: Trust No One*, as well as the video footage in the composite video *Our Stories* (based on both the process footage of the making of the video and footage on the group's presentation of the video to the whole workshop gathering).

Constructedness

Working with video production as a group process (from initial concept through to storyboarding, planning shots, shooting, and initial screening) offers participants access to a type of socially constructed knowledge that is particularly significant to addressing themes and issues such as gender violence which are in and of themselves difficult to express through single (and fixed) images. The group brainstorms and chooses the themes, decides on the images, "constructs" the stage, and so on. In the case of video (versus live performance), there is a whole array of techniques that expand the possibilities for constructedness – from shot angles to dialogue and even to the choice of theme music. Participants can stop the process, can view and review the work, and can see themselves in action. In the composite video participants are seen engaging in discussion, arguing back and forth about the best way to represent the attack. They can be seen to be "making it up" and in doing so are co-constructing the storyline.

Collectivity

Schratz and Walker (1995) argue that a critical feature of interventions that lend themselves to social change is that they are in fact social in nature in the first place. They involve the group and cannot be managed "individually and in isolation" (p. 172). As they go on to write: "It (Motivation) requires a collaborative effort and

a reassessment of the nature of self in relation to social context, not a submerging of the individual within the collective, but a recognition that the person only exists in the light of significant others.” (p. 172). In the context of indigenous knowledge systems at play in South Africa in general and rural KwaZulu-Natal specifically, one might even see this collectivity as the South African *ubuntu* (or “I am because you are”) and *khomamani* (or working together). In participatory video, there is the possibility of creating a strong sense of a collective response, one that includes both producers and viewers and directors and actors. While it is possible that individual responses may sometimes be overshadowed in this collectivity, it could be argued that in the case of gender violence, which is social in nature and multilayered in meaning, the collective response is vital. In the production of the videos described above, everyone at one point tested out the camera and attended to details such as captions and title cards. At the end of the day’s screening, it was the work of the collective that was apparent, something that was evident in the footage of participants watching themselves in their production and in the footage in the composite video that captures the image of two male members of the group who filmed *Rape at School: Trust No One* introducing the video to the whole group: “We made this film to show what is for our sisters. We want to end gender violence.” The “we” in this statement is key.

Reflexivity

As Yang (2012) argues, a critical feature of participatory video is the way it facilitates reflexivity. Indeed, participatory video draws on important scholarship within feminist visual studies (e.g., Citron 1999; Knight 2001) that highlight the importance of reflexivity and also come out of work with the visual in anthropology and sociology. Visual anthropologist Jay Ruby (2000) discusses how reflexivity, autobiography, and self-awareness can figure into working with the film texts, something that is important to keep in mind in relation to working with young people and video on an issue like gender violence. It is particularly important in addressing an issue where the dominant images of sexism and power inequalities need to be challenged. The types of follow-up interventions that draw on reflexivity are extensive. How, for example, could the group “revision” their original documentary as a text which explicitly contests the traditional power dimensions, and how does video lend itself to this kind of critical awareness? They are asked to consider how teachers, other adults, and the education officials would respond to the video. Like the work of Barnes et al. (1997), who used collaborative video to work with HIV-positive mothers, the participants were able to “reproduce and understand their world as opposed to the dominant representations in the mass media” (p. 27, cited in Pink (2001), 86). In the process footage participants are deeply engaged in thinking about the what and why of the video making in a number of ways. First, their own media production (both through its processes and its outcomes) forces young people to look at themselves, sometimes through new eyes, providing feedback for further modification of their self-representations. Second, the source materials and modes of young people’s media production are often evident or transparent; the choices and processes that they use reveal and

identify them in ways that they themselves might not even realize. Third, through built-in response mechanisms or simply through audience response, media production invites other people's feedback and readings, sparking a dialectic that is inherent to mediating and reshaping how we see ourselves and how we think others see us.

Embodiment

How might we also look at this work in relation to embodiment and embodied learning? Bodies are front and center in *Rape at School: Trust No One* where the two main characters try on identities in embodied ways. The girl in the video is physically attacked by the teacher and there is an obvious physicality to the ways in which she tries to resist the advances of the teacher. As he leaves the classroom, he turns back and says to the girl "You tell and you die." The girl is in tears as she falls to the ground to try to pick up her school papers which are all over the floor. The sounds of her scream and her sobs are chilling for the viewer. At the same time, there are the physical actions of the teacher – grabbing the girl, forcing her to the floor, and then leaving the classroom and having to adjust his clothing. It is this measured action of adjusting his clothing that reminds us of what he has just done. Both learners who play these two characters have an all-too-familiar sense, it seems, of what actions are required in these enactments.

Convergence

Finally, the digital production itself sheds light on learning in the context of media production. Reading the digital production offers a unique glimpse into the intersection of old and new media. As Henry Jenkins writes: "Media convergence refers to a situation in which multiple media systems coexist and where media content flows fluidly across them. Convergence is understood here as an ongoing process or series of intersections between different media systems, not a fixed relationship" (Jenkins 2006, p. 282). In the production, *Rape at School: Trust No One*, young people perform identities using traditional forms of role play. One of the boys in the group must play the male teacher; he is also coached and directed by his peers. The girl who is raped may be acting out what is clearly an everyday scene, or at least a scene that is easily within the imagination of the group. Through their use of digital cameras, the group is able to work with an instant replay, where they can see if they have managed to capture the scene exactly as they wanted it. In one of the video productions created at the same time, one group manages to import a sound track through their cell phone.

Learning From

At a very basic level, what is learned from the video is that sexual violence in schools as a result of power imbalances, gender inequality, and breaches of Codes of Conduct is a common occurrence. In a sense it was "too easy" for the learners to play out this scenario. What is evident in the scenes described above is that learning

is mediated and social. In deepening an understanding of gender violence (at least in this context), it is key to recognize that young people can learn from each other and in so doing be resources to each other when it comes to challenging the power imbalances in school. The fact that they constructed and performed the scenario of a male teacher raping a female student, captured it on video, and screened it before an audience of adults (including their teachers and parents) and other youth says something about the ways in which they were willing to speak publicly about what appears to be common knowledge among students about the behavior of some male teachers.

At the same time, the ending of the video where the teacher simply adjusts his clothing and walks away suggests that the young people who made the video have no real knowledge of their own rights. Or perhaps what is dominant in their learning is not their lack of awareness of rights so much as a recognition of the absence of consequences for teachers who abuse their power. Interestingly, this was not the case for the other videos dealing with gender-based violence, where there were consequences (albeit unrealistic perhaps) for the perpetrator. In the case of *Vikea Abantwana* (or Protect the children – A story about incest), a young girl Phindelini is raped by her father. Eventually this is reported to the medical authorities and police and he is put in jail. In the final scene of the video, we see him imploring his wife to help him get out. In another video, *Rape*, the female character is raped by her boyfriend. She reports this to the police, and in the last scene of the video, we see him behind bars. He appears to show some remorse for what he has done, although not because of the impact of his actions on his girlfriend so much as what has happened to him in prison, where he himself is subjected to sexual violence.

Ei! I am now regretful. I raped my sweetheart. When I get out of here she will not even want to see me. Ei, I raped a person really. I am in prison now. It's tough... even to eat. It is me that is getting raped now. They mount me. Ei, now I regret what I did. I don't know what to say. I don't know what to do. I am in prison now. I raped a female person. I raped her and beat her and am in prison now. I don't know what to do now. The men in here mount me and beat me. Just look now, when I get out of here the babes in the location will leave me. I won't get another cherry because I am known to be a rapist now. But you, my brothers out there, I'm telling you, restrain yourselves, be strong, don't rape females because you will be sentenced and grow old inside (prison).

Learning With

The participatory work with youth in relation to gender violence also implicates adults (both teachers and researchers) as part of a “learning with” or “learning alongside of” framework. For the teachers who viewed *Rape at School: Trust No One* in the first place, what is their responsibility? How can an intervention of this nature move teachers to do something about the situation? While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to map out the full social history of this video project, it is important to acknowledge that change rarely comes without further pedagogical

interventions. One such intervention is to speak directly with teachers to see get their perspectives on gender violence (see Bhana et al. 2010; De Lange et al. 2012). Another that is now underway with teachers in the school where the video was produced is the idea of “speaking back” (to digital interventions) through further digital productions (see Mitchell and DeLange 2013).

This idea of “speaking back” also, though, relates to the work of researchers and the ethical responsibilities inherent in this work. As Moletsane et al. 2008 highlight, there are ethical responsibilities in relation to “doing least harm and most good.” In one of the videos produced in the project, *Raping*, there is the concern about the girl in the video that is shown “on screen” being raped by one of the boys. What are the responsibilities of the research team to let this happen in the first place? But the same argument could be made for *Rape at School: Trust No One*. While the viewer does not actually see the rape happen, the during and after of hearing the girl’s screams from behind a closed door and then seeing her sobbing as she picks up her papers are images that are no less graphic. What then do researchers learn in a self-reflexive way about not only “doing least harm and most good” but also about both facilitating the enactment of rape (even if it is only role play) and putting young people in the position of witnessing such acts?

Learning For

Finally, what are the moral obligations to see that something happens to change the situation? How might we take Choudry and Kapoor’s (2010) idea of “learning from the ground up” into a consideration of policy change? Work on health promotion in the area of gender and HIV/AIDS over the last decade suggests that unless young people are given a more significant voice in participating in policy dialogue about their own health, and sexuality, and in producing (and disseminating) locally relevant gender-sensitive messages, prevention and awareness programs organized “from the outside” (i.e., by adults, donors, and so on) are doomed to fail (see, e.g., Ford et al. 2003). A similar point was made in relation to interventions for addressing violence in schools (*UN Secretary-General’s Study on Violence Against Children, 2006*). These various approaches position “youth as knowledge producers” (Lankshear and Knobel 2003), or what Buckingham and Sefton-Greene (1994) term “youth as cultural producers.” Overall there is a recognition of the place of youth engagement in keeping young people hopeful and “alive and on board” as its own campaign or orientation to prevention, treatment, and care, and as central to conducting AIDS research related to the lives of young people. Such a position recognizes that although young people are sometimes victims of an invincible attitude that says “it can never happen to me,” simultaneously they are more likely to believe that they can contribute to change. And while there may be a “sick of AIDS” phenomenon or AIDS fatigue, in one sense, in that young people may be sick of hearing about AIDS (as well as sick literally), they are more likely to want to do something. An alternative, then, to adults developing

messages, campaigns, and prevention programs directed at young people, is to tap into the “let’s do something” creativity of young people themselves through art-based initiatives such as participatory video.

Conclusions and Future Directions

As a youth-centered tool, participatory video has been used in a number of youth-activism projects. These include Gerry Bloustien’s work (2003) in Australia with girls as video makers, as she describes in her book *Girl making*, Kristina Hackmann’s “video girl” work with preadolescent “tween” girls in Germany where she gave participants the opportunity to interrogate features of gender in their everyday lives (Hackmann 2005), and Shannon Walsh’s video-making work with girls and young women in South Africa (cited in Mitchell et al. 2007). Participatory video making is a particularly powerful tool in working with young people to address social issues because of the popularity of the medium itself within youth culture more generally (see also Stuart and Mitchell 2013; Weber and Mitchell 2007; Walsh 2012). At the same time participatory video, not unlike other visual approaches such as photovoice, presents a number of challenges to researchers. At the time that the videos were produced for the project described here, cost was a factor. Unlike drawing, performance, and even photovoice which are visual tools which are relatively inexpensive, filmmaking typically requires video cameras and where possible access to editing equipment and of course training in using editing equipment. In the case of the workshops noted above, the no-editing-required (NER) approach necessitated only that the participants had a basic introduction to the camera equipment, some idea of basic shots, and storyboarding. Experienced facilitators worked with each of the small groups to assist with the planning and execution. More recently, with the ubiquity of cell phones in South Africa, participatory video becomes even more cost-effective, drawing on the multimodality of the cell phone (see also Mitchell et al. *in press*; Mitchell and DeLange 2013). A second challenge is *technical expertise*. None of the participants in the workshop had ever been involved in filmmaking. Although the filmmaking workshop was directed by a filmmaker who had had previous experience in community video, obviously in a 1-day workshop which focused on both content and process, there was a limited amount of time given over to anything technical other than how to turn the cameras on, zoom, pan, and work with the tripod. In some cases where the shooting took place outside, wind and light were also concerns. At the same time we also saw in the screenings which took place at the end of the day a very forgiving and enthusiastic audience who appreciated fully the work of their peers. Again, though, the widespread use of cell phones is changing the landscape in terms of the requirements for technical expertise. The third challenge relates to ethical issues. Although visual anthropologists and ethnographers such as Banks, Ruby, and Pink all draw attention to some of the ethical issues of working with communities (ranging from who owns the images through to what counts as

informed consent and where/when can the videos be screened), much of this work is with adults and in the context of issues that are not necessarily life-threatening. International activist groups such as Witness have given hidden cameras to participants to expose human rights violations in their “see it, film it, change it” approach. Issues of safety and security are clearly a concern. Gender violence, particularly in the context of HIV and AIDS and in school settings where teachers and male students are perpetrators of violence, is a topic that is quickly thrown back to the research team (see DeLange et al. 2003) and to the points raised in the opening of this chapter. What can be learnt from those who are most vulnerable – and what can this learning (learning through, learning from, learning with, learning for) do to create social change?

Cross-References

- ▶ [Approaches to Understanding Youth Well-Being](#)
- ▶ [“Let’s Go 50/50”: The Everyday Embodiment of Sexuality Amongst African Young People](#)
- ▶ [Performative Pedagogy: Poststructural Theory as a Tool to Engage in Identity Work Within a Youth-Led HIV Prevention Program](#)
- ▶ [Reconsidering Youth Well-Being as Fluid and Relational: A Dynamic Process at the Intersection of Their Physical and Social Geographies](#)
- ▶ [The Gendering and Sexualization of Young Women Through Sex Educational Practices and Discourses in Southern Africa](#)
- ▶ [The Promises of Empowered Girls](#)
- ▶ [We Need to Talk About Learning: Dialogue and Learning Amongst South African Youth](#)
- ▶ [Young People and Mobile Phone Technology in Botswana](#)

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Part III

Bodies

Julia Coffey and Juliet Watson

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Abstract

The body has become a key theme of academic study across disciplines of sociology, cultural studies, anthropology, and psychology. Although the body has become a central focus of much theoretical work, in childhood and youth studies, the physicality and materiality of the body is more often than not taken for granted or is an “absent presence.” The body often remains implicit or as a site upon which societal inequalities play out, rather than an active force. Where the body *is* directly addressed in studies of childhood and youth, it is often identified as the site of social or cultural “problems,” such as in the growing alarm surrounding rates of childhood obesity and poor body image. Theories of embodiment aim to place the body and embodied experience at the forefront

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of analysis to highlight the active relations between bodies and the social world and to correct previous approaches in which the body is invisible or rendered inferior to the mind in a binary logic. Theories of the body have implications for research in childhood and youth studies, as all major “structural” inequalities such as gender, class, race, sexuality, disability, and place are necessarily embodied. This section places bodies at the center of discussions in the study of childhood and youth.

Introduction

The body, while implicitly central to the studies of childhood and youth, is simultaneously on the periphery of analysis. Traditionally children and young people and therefore their bodies have been located in lifeworlds, that is, social, cultural, and historical tropes which frame childhood and youth as “life stages.” The lived body has not received much attention, theoretical or otherwise, in childhood and youth studies (Notable exceptions include: Frost 2005; Farrugia 2011; Coffey 2013a; Budgeon 2003; Nayak and Kehily 2008 and Nayak 2003). Nevertheless, implicitly, the body has been present in a range of research in relation to children and young people. Investigating children and young people from a lived body perspective enables the imprinting of sociocultural signifiers (or embodiment) on material bodies to be explored.

While there is a significant output of work in childhood and youth studies that has explored lives in relation to gender, class, race and ethnicity, sexualities, and popular culture, the body is generally studied indirectly in relation to these broader themes (Frost 2001). More recently, poststructural and postmodern perspectives have theorized the body as an ongoing “unfinished” process, rather than a fixed entity or being. Understanding the body as a process is even more relevant to the physical changes associated with childhood and youth. Infants and young children “are positioned within a network of intense practices of embodiment which seek to regulate, normalise and civilise their bodies, to eventually render them more adult-like in their capacity for containment and control” (Lupton 2012b, p. 5–6). For example, establishing sleeping patterns and eating routines and methods such as “controlled crying” can be understood as practices which seek to discipline and civilize the infant body (Lupton 2012b). As children become young people, some bodily risks are perceived to increase and become more complex (particularly regarding sexuality) and more entrenched thus requiring different interventions. Childhood safety and hygiene also vary in different contexts, as there are increased safety and hygiene risks associated with poverty in developing countries, in refugee camps, and in emergency situations (Cahill et al. 2011).

The academic fields in which the bodies of children and young people *are* at the center of discussion are those of health, illness, and risk. The growing focus on young people’s bodies often center on young people’s bodies as the sites of “problems,” such as those related to health, for example, the “risks” related to growing figures of childhood and youth obesity (Lupton 2012a), poor body image,

eating disorders, binge drinking, and sexuality (Paechter 2006, 2011). The growing realm of “bodily concern” related to appearance links the body to issues of identity and self-image and explores the interplay between the body and self and broader sociocultural contexts. Here, theories which seek to explain this process of interplay between the self and society have been crucial in contributing to knowledge about the body’s importance in everyday life. Increased academic interest in the body can be understood in relation to a number of factors. Firstly, second-wave feminist theories critiqued the idea that gendered inequalities were a “natural” result of bodily sexual differences. Feminist theoretical work has continued to advance rethinking philosophical approaches to the body through poststructural theory in particular (see Grosz 1994). Secondly, the rise in attention to the body can also be understood in relation to shifts in post-industrial capitalist society related to the rise of consumer culture and the increasing centrality on appearance and physical control (Featherstone 1982). Third, technological advances such as transplant surgery, in vitro fertilization, and stem cell research have also contributed to uncertainty as to the “naturalness” or the human body (Shilling 2011). In short, recent theoretical and empirical interest in the body is concerned with understanding the relationships between bodies and the social world, both of which are increasingly understood as being in constant flux, though old inequalities and systems of power remain.

This section of the handbook draws together work in a range of fields to outline conceptual possibilities for placing the body at the center of analysis in the study of childhood and youth. This leads to a focus on embodiment as central, understanding bodies as sites of experience through which we embody and actively respond to our sociocultural and historical context. Differences in equality and context relating to children’s and young people’s bodies are explored here, followed by a discussion of developments in theories of the body.

Situating Bodies and Inequalities

There are vast differences in context, experience, and opportunity in the lives of children and youth across the globe. A vast majority of the world youth (85 %) live in developing countries (with approximately 60 % in Asia, 23 % in Africa, and 2 % in Latin America and the Caribbean, and it is projected that this figure will rise to 89.5 % by 2025 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division 2007)). It is important to recognize the ways the fields of body studies and childhood and youth studies are influenced by metropolitan thinking and reflect geopolitical inequalities (Epstein and Morrell 2012), as the vast majority of work in these fields originates from wealthy industrialized countries such as the UK, North America, and Australia. A broader and sustained focus on children and young people globally is needed to more fully engage with the different contexts in which youth and childhood are lived.

Differences and inequalities are lived through the body. This is apparent in discussions of how sex and gender, race, ethnicity, class, and ability mediate

children and young people's opportunities and experiences. The ways in which these structural factors and the discourses that surround children and young people are lived and experienced through the body are embodied often elude attention. Further global perspectives of embodiment are needed. Traditionally, concerns about the body have been focused on white Western bodies and how they have been culturally inscribed. Contemporary body theory must recognize the complex interaction between race, ability, sexuality, class, and gender in bodily experience. Embodiment is central to the production of race, whereby "the marking out of bodies" is "the *site* of racialisation itself" (Ahmed 2002, p. 46). Furthermore, Ali (2008) contends that to challenge the power of visible "race," the ways in which bodies are read needs to be contested. The concept of the "lived body" has evolved to recognize that fixed categories are insufficient in representing the variety of bodily experiences and how they are structurally and contextually shaped. The importance of challenging homogenous and therefore culturally uniform depictions of the body is highlighted in this chapter through Graham and Mphaphuli's examination of embodiment and youth sexuality in South Africa. The theoretical and material considerations they discuss are a useful starting point in bringing into focus the necessity of applying both global and local perspective to the lived body in childhood and youth studies. The ways that gender, class, and race intersect and are central to understandings of bodies in childhood and youth studies are explored below.

Core Themes in the Study of Childhood and Youth

Intersections of Gender, Class, and Race

Gender is a central conceptual category in the study of childhood and youth. A few brief points regarding how gender operates as a concept in relation to the body are necessary in the context of the theoretical points we have made above. It is important that gender and sex are not applied "naturalistically" to bodies such that female sex, for example, is not understood as linked essentially with femininity. Likewise, to link masculinity, for example, with boys a priori preserves the sex/gender binary (Nayak and Kehily 2008) and "invites biological essentialism in by the back door" (Warren 2003, p. 16). Conversely, gender is also more than merely an ideology; it has real, material, and embodied effects. As such, gender needs to be understood as both inscribed on the body through social and cultural discourses and having a material presence in embodied dispositions and practices, or as described by Warren, gender is "a discursive formation that is situated within real embodied practices" (2003, p.7). Similarly, Nayak and Kehily argue that gender is a lived process that is continually negotiated (2008). These conceptualizations of gender are also particularly important in addressing the needs and experiences of LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and intersex) youth who face significant discrimination and emotional stress related to the sex/gender binary (Almeida et al. 2009).

Gender has been thoroughly examined in empirical studies of young women and, more recently, young men. Young femininities have received significant empirical and theoretical attention, notably through the work of Harris (2004), Aapola et al. (2005), and McRobbie (2001, 2004, 2007). Likewise, young masculinities are a focal point of study through the work of Connell (1995), Frosh et al. (2002), Mac an Ghaill (1994), and Kenway et al. (2006), among others.

Particular attention has been given to the shaping of subjectivities and how gender intersects with class and race in the processes of subjectivity and identity construction (McLeod and Yates 2006; Walkerdine, Melody and Lucey 2001; Kenway and Willis 1990; Reay 2001). In Australia, McLeod and Yates' (2006) study of gender, subjectivity, and social change explored how social patterns and inequalities were negotiated and often perpetuated. The work of Bronwyn Davies (1989, 1993) involving the deconstruction of gender discourses with Australian school children is also significant here. These studies draw upon poststructural approaches to gender and identity to conceptualize the ways gender is lived and the self is negotiated in childhood and young adulthood.

Similarly, Nayak and Kehily's (2006, 2008) ethnographic study of young people's displays of gender embodiment in Britain examines the ways that gender is regulated, performed, and embodied in school-based cultures, focusing on the subversion, regulation, and embodiment of gender identities. Drawing on Butler's theorization of identity, the study understands identity as a "doing" that is only made manifest at the point of action rather than a known and knowable social category (Nayak and Kehily 2006). They argue that "the struggle for sex-gender signs (what it means to be a 'lesbian,' a 'proper boy,' and so on) is not an activity that is happening outside of our doing. Rather it is an intersubjective process wherein we both act and are acted upon: we are concurrently the subjects and objects of the sign-making world" (2006, p. 465).

Kehily's chapter (this section) "[► Bodies In and Out of Place: Schooling and the Production of Gender Identities Through Embodied Experience](#)" (Chap. 15) also focuses on the bodily dimensions of gender through the embodied changes associated with youth including sexuality and pregnancy. In a context of the concern for the increasing sexualization of children and young people, teen pregnancy is a key concern in youth policy in Western cultures such as the UK and Australia. Contrasting developmental perspectives of the adolescent pregnant body as "at risk" with poststructuralist perspectives of the body and as an inherently social process under continual renegotiation, Kehily foregrounds social context including class and gender as central to young men and women's lived experiences associated with bodily changes.

Gender can be productively understood as "an act of problematic being and unfulfilled becoming" (2006, p. 471), inextricably linked to the physical body as ideas about gender and the body are embodied (2006, p. 468). Gender can also be understood as an intersubjective process, involving affect (see Coffey 2013a). These understandings are significant for the ways that gender, identity, and bodies are conceptualized in this chapter.

Though gender is a core theme in studies of childhood and youth, many have argued that it is more productive to study gender as it intersects with other dimensions of embodiment such as class (Skeggs 1997, 2004; Walkerdine et al. 2001), poverty (Frost 2003), race, ethnicity and the invisibility of whiteness (Ali 2004; Ahmed 2007; Bird 2008; Nayak 2003; Riggs 2008; Unterhalter et al. 2004), disability (Addlakha 2008; Gibson et al. 2013), sexuality (Allen 2008; Butler 1993; Holland et al. 1994; Ringrose 2011), consumption (Frost 2003), and place (Nayak and Kehily, 2008). Nayak's (2003) study of race and ethnicity in the UK, for example, picks apart the complexities and "multiple interconnections" between race, gender, sexuality, and social class. Ethnicity plays an important role in youth cultures. What Nayak calls "zones of bodily consumption" including sport, music, hairstyles, and fashion are examples of young peoples' experimentation with "a new corporeal canvas." In South Africa, the ways in which increasingly middle-class black young people in Johannesburg are engaged in new modes of self-stylization related to cultures of the body have also been explored (Nuttall 2008). These practices of consumption are "embodied performances" and provide a way of exploring the construction of identity across boundaries of space, place, and nationhood (Nayak 2003, p. 10).

Consumption, Bodily Responsibility, and Body Image

Broad economic and social changes have led to a limiting of state involvement in the market economy and reduced welfare support. The decline in economic security has been accompanied by increased self-regulation, particularly of the body. Nikolas Rose (1996, 1999) and Bronwyn Davies (2006) have drawn on Foucault's "technologies of the self" to account for how self-regulation is understood as a matter of individual responsibility and choice. Not only does making the right choice at an individual level result in success (Davies 2006), according to the principles of neoliberal society, it is the individual's ethical responsibility to live as though there is freedom to make choices regardless of structural barriers (McRobbie 2009; Rose 1996). This context of individualized bodily responsibility has implications not only for how children and young people manage and maintain their bodies as "projects" (Giddens 1991) or "processes" (Coffey 2014), but also how individualizing discourses are embodied.

Recent Australian data from the Mission Australia survey of youth (2012) shows that the body is an important issue of concern for young people aged 15–19, with 33.6 % rating that they were extremely concerned or very concerned about body image (2012, p. 15). Mission Australia surveys from 2009 to 2013 show that body image concerns have increased steadily over time. Additionally, body concerns increase with age with the proportion of young people aged 20–24 concerned about body image rising to 41.1 % (Mission Australia 2011). Literature on body image primarily originates from the field of social psychology. Most research has focused on "the dissatisfaction with weight, particularly the desire to be thinner," and seen primarily as relevant to young women and girls (Grogan 2006). Appearance-based

disorders have been linked to poor mental health and self-harm for young women in particular, for whom “expressing dislike of their bodies is common” (Frost 2001). Sociological studies in this area tend to focus on body modification or body presentation practices related to other themes such as girlhood, gender, and consumer culture rather than specifically on “body image” (see Coffey 2013a, b). Many feminist authors have drawn upon Foucault’s (1979, 1990) theories of power and discourse to theorize women’s disciplinary body practices and self-surveillance in their relationships with their bodies (Bartky 1990; Davis 1995). More recent feminist analysis has explored girls’ engagements with media images in a way which seeks to understand how they construct their subjectivities, rather than studying the effects of images on the girls’ bodies (Coleman 2008, 2009). A study of young men’s and women’s engagements with body work practices (Coffey 2013a, b) also found that bodies and appearance were central to young people’s construction of identities.

Frost (2003, p. 54) argues that the environment in which the body and appearance has come to matter more for both young women and men in Western societies is related to the mass changes related to consumption and identification under late capitalism. In these conditions, boys’ and girls’ bodies have become the basis for “judgment and differentiation” (p. 60). Accordingly, damage can be inflicted on boys and girls in relation to their physicality and appearance along gender lines but also which may be connected with disability, class, race, and sexuality. Young bodies and how they are decorated and managed can provide a means of identification and acceptance or may result in exclusion (Frost 2003). As a result, as Frost argues, the most important structural inequality in relation to consumer-based image production relates to poverty and socioeconomic inequality as these factors exclude young people from participating in consumption practices.

In the very different context of the *bustees* of Kolkata, India (Chakrabortya 2009), girls have limited possibilities for displaying their public identity through clothing: “By wearing alternative [or Western] clothing young women would face teasing by men, become the victims of gossip, face strong disapproval and possibly violence from their immediate families, and overtly challenge the ideals of the ‘good Muslim girl’” (Chakrabortya 2009, p. 429). Numerous other studies explore the ways young women’s bodies are strictly regulated according to *pardah* norms in areas of Bangladesh (Haque 2002; Rashid and Michaud 2000; Verma et al. 2013), India (Krishnaswamy 2005; Lamb 2000; Leichy 2002), and Nepal (Leichy 1996, 2002).

Health and “Risky” Young Bodies

According to Eckersley (2011), young people are categorized through their health status through frameworks that separate the “normal” from those deemed as needing intervention. Typically, the focus is on the successful completion of developmental objectives with little consideration for economic, political, and cultural contexts as well as processes of negotiation (White and Wyn 1997). Normative development is conceptually tied to time and place, and therefore

there is inherent disregard of those children and young people who for many and complex reasons connected to gender, class, race, sexuality, and disability do not reach the required standards. The emphasis that is placed on health and meeting normative goals regarding children and young people's bodies also reveals anxiety about particular dangers these bodies pose to society in the present and in future adulthood. In Western society, this has centered around so-called lifestyle (and by implication preventable) health issues such as obesity, mental illness, eating disorders, and alcohol (particularly binge drinking) and other drug use.

Other key "risks" relate to youth sexuality and include issues such as "teen pregnancy," sexually transmitted infections, and "sexting" and accessing sexual content on the Internet and through social media (Thompson 2010). There is a paucity of information regarding positive sexual embodiment (see Graham and Mphaphuli, this section). One study, for example, links girls' pubertal timing with potential risks, arguing that "adolescent girls who experience puberty earlier than their peers may be at risk due to their perceived social deviance from same-age peers. To negotiate the meanings and labels associated with the pubertal body, early developing girls may be more likely than peers to engage in risky health behaviours such as substance use" (Tanner-Smith 2010, p. 1402). In developing countries there has been greater emphasis on illness through health inequity such as infant mortality, maternal mortality, the spread of HIV (also connected with sexual risk taking), and malnutrition. The onset of adolescence does entail new and different health factors which impact on the body and as such deserve attention. It has been noted by Patton et al. (2009) that the global focus on HIV/AIDS and maternal mortality is important, but that it is not adequate in responding to the complex lives of young people whereby two in five deaths are caused by intentional and unintentional injuries such as through traffic accidents, violence, and suicide. The common theme remains, however, that childhood and youth are risky periods that require intervention.

Lupton (2012a) connects the public health messages of individual responsibility for maintaining healthy bodies (e.g., through the association of "lifestyle" diseases with individual behaviors that do not account for structural/socioeconomic factors) with the continuing aim of controlling bodies. Ideologies and social practices are thus legitimated through health education campaigns that dictate how bodies should be fed, exercised, and utilized sexually (Lupton 2012a). The identification of the disciplining of bodies is of course not a new phenomenon. Foucault (1979, 1990) in particular is strongly associated with identifying how institutions govern the body and maintain power through discourse. Significantly, because health is considered to be a universal right in neoliberal society, individual measures should be a goal for all, masking the disciplinary discourse (Lupton 2012a). The personal responsibility of the individual to control his/her body is a taken-for-granted discourse embodied from childhood.

The experience of health for children and young people is shaped by the society in which they live and the changes that occur within it. These have included changing education and employment patterns, an increase in consumerism aimed at younger markets, and the growing acceptance of digital cultures as part of daily

life and increasing divide between the rich and poor on national and global scales (Wyn 2009). In postindustrial capitalist society, the framework of health has also been extended to include the concept of well-being. Well-being expands health to include more than just the physical workings of the body and thus has implications for how the body is understood. It is also differentiated from traditional, and body-centered, health because attention is given to the positive aspects of health and the factors that intersect to create well-being (Wyn 2009). Well-being rejects the mind/body dualism by allowing for a more integrative approach to health that locates the body within systems. As Johanna Wyn (2009) argues, *well-being* is broad in scope and includes economic, employment, consumer, educational, and spiritual elements. However, despite these conceptual developments, the emphasis remains with individuals to maintain and manage their own well-being.

Sexualization is another crucial theme related to bodily risk in childhood and youth studies. Feminist studies in Australia, New Zealand, and the UK have critiqued consumer society's demand for young women to embody hypersexualized modes of femininity (Renold & Ringrose 2008, Harris 2004, Gill 2007, McRobbie 2007, 2009). Images of girls' bodies proliferate in Western visual media, regulating "what it is to be a sexual subject" and providing a "technology of sexiness" (Gill 2008, p. 53). Jackson (this section) considers the complexity of sexualization discourses and how they are being negotiated and embodied by girls who are described in the media and marketed to as "tweens." Within Western society, youth and beauty (within a very narrow definition) are highly valued with body industries such as those associated with beauty, health, and fitness predicated on these ideals. Western body ideals are also shown to impact notions of "modern" femininity in countries undergoing rapid industrialization such as India (Munshi 2002). However, this does not mean that there is a direct transfer of Western bodily discourse, particularly sexualization, as it relates to children and young people to developing nations where consumerism is on the rise. Understandings of sexuality differ according to the social, political, and economic contexts. For example, In Kerala, India, Devika (2009) argues female sexuality has been historically marginalized and that sexuality and reproductive health is often obscured in development discourse. Likewise, in South Africa, Unterhalter et al.'s (2004) a study of class, race, gender, and sexuality in school children's understandings of social relationships shows a complex interweaving of social relations and personal relationships. They argue that "certain sexualized identities (are) linked to shifting family and community forms and insecure labour market conditions" (Unterhalter et al., p. 67). Mphaphuli and Graham (this section) also discuss bodily intersections of gender, race, and class through an examination of youth sexuality in South Africa. They highlight the necessity of considering alternative locales to gain a better understanding of processes of embodiment that create the sexual selves of young people. In particular, they argue it is necessary to transcend dominant paradigms that position masculine sexuality as dominant and feminine sexuality as subjugated. Instead, an emphasis on lived bodies through which young people experience their sexualities offers the opportunity for alternative narratives to emerge.

Locating the Body: Contesting Binary Understandings

A range of traditions across the social sciences and humanities have foregrounded the body over the past century. Elias' (1939) analysis of the ways the body has been involved in civilizing processes and how these have changed greatly over time provided one of the first examinations of the body in society, along with Goffman's (1969) theorizations of the body, social interaction, and presentation. More recently, Shilling (2007) has argued that technological advances have weakened the boundaries between science and bodies, contributing to uncertainty about the "reality" of the body. Sociological and feminist developments have theorized the body as not merely a natural, self-evident "thing" in the world but as intrinsically implicated in processes of acting upon (and being acted upon by) societal and structural forces. As Haraway (1991, p. 10) argues, "(n)either our personal bodies nor our social bodies may be seen as natural, in the sense of existing outside the self-creating process called human labour." In other words, the body in everyday life is not simply "natural" and self-evident but requires a great deal of management, maintenance, and work. Through this "labor," we are all involved in recreating and reproducing society and the conditions of social inequality as well as potential for change.

Core dualisms, such as male/female, mind/body, nature/culture, science/emotion, and public/private, have framed understandings of the body across most disciplines, stemming from Western metaphysics (Grosz 1994, Budgeon this section). Budgeon's chapter, "[► Theorizing Subjectivity and Feminine Embodiment: Feminist Approaches and Debates](#)" (Chap. 17) explores the impact of feminist theorizations of the gendered body as a site where gender is socially produced and tracks different feminist approaches over time. Budgeon's chapter explores several strategies through which women's bodies may "become meaningful" outside of ontological and epistemological approaches in which they are forever knowable as "man's other": egalitarian feminism, cultural feminism, and corporeal feminism.

Anti-foundationalist and antiessentialist movements and scholarship such as feminism, postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonial studies, and disability studies have sought to challenge core dualisms such as those above and have contributed to new and politicized readings of the body. A theory of bodies must account for the material, physical, and biological aspects that are located and transformed in time and space and subject to cultural and political inscriptions, coercion, exchange, and relations of power (Shilling 2012; Grosz 1994). Developing such understandings is crucial to the study of childhood and youth studies.

The body is also at the center of ontological questions surrounding the relationship between individuals and society. Much feminist theory on the body, for example, has shown the ways in which female and male bodily differences have served as excuses for structural inequality (Young 2005; Witz 2000). Budgeon (this section) argues gender as socially produced rather than a relation of naturalized inequality is a cornerstone of feminist understandings of the body. Through the

work of Butler (1993, 1995), the tensions between sex as a natural category and gender as a social construction were positioned as key areas of contention in feminist work. As Budgeon (this section) explains, these tensions impacted on the aims and priorities of feminist work, in which the body was seen as a location of constraint, disorder, and alienation in some approaches and as an active, creative relation through which new possibilities and transformations are possible in other feminist approaches. Budgeon argues that where the body is understood as in the “grips” of culture (Bordo 2003), such understandings risk casting women as “cultural dupes” or “victims of cultural constructions of femininity” (Budgeon 2003, p. 39).

Feminist and poststructural approaches have been criticized as privileging the metaphorical over “material realities” and inequalities. For example, in relation to disability, Thomas (2002, p. 76) argues that “significant impairments need to be seen as real differences from the “usual” body” while also understanding how the experience of difference is mediated through how meanings, constructions, and representations shape that experience. The theorization of bodies needs to account for the material, physical, and biological aspects that are located and transformed in time and space and subject to cultural and political inscriptions, coercion, and exchange and relations of power (Shilling 2012; Grosz 1994).

Material and constructivist understandings of the body need not operate in opposition (see Bourdieu 1984; Butler 1993; Grosz 1994; Haraway 1991; McNay 1999; Shilling 2012). The rejection of binaries provides the possibility for better understanding the links between aspects “inside” and “outside” the body (Kuhlmann and Babitsch 2002). Such approaches theorize the body as unfinished and malleable and require more complex, non-binaristic frameworks of analysis (Coffey 2013a, 2014). More productively, the body can be considered a site where the physical, symbolic, and sociological converge and as neither pure object nor subject (McNay 1999; Coleman 2009; Budgeon 2003). Instead, as argued by McNay (1999, p. 98), the body is a “threshold” through which experiences are integrated and understood. This perspective also has implications for how agency and structure is conceptualized, as attempts to advance understandings of bodies and relations with the world necessitate a focus on the embodied dimensions of action and experience (Coffey and Farrugia 2013).

Embodied or “lived body” perspectives are often associated with the work of Bourdieu (1990), who understands the body and embodied practice as central through the concept of habitus or the “feel for the game.” According to Bourdieu, the habitus is comprised of the embodied dispositions and practices which result from social conditioning related to the fields of engagement. Bourdieu’s model provides an explanation for how different amounts and types of capital (economic, social, and cultural) are accrued by agents and how certain dispositions are embodied (Skeggs 1997). Furthermore, according to Shilling (2012), Bourdieu’s theory of practice provides a way of conceptualizing the “unfinishedness” of the body and the materiality of embodiment, transcending preexisting biological/social dualisms. It also offers insight into how bodies exist, operate, and transform in the material and symbolic world and are thus “lived bodies.”

Conclusion and Future Directions

This chapter has discussed key areas of the study of children and youth related to the body and has provided an overview of some of the critical theoretical developments connected to theory of the body. We have argued that while there is significant extant work in childhood and youth studies that has explored lives in relation to, for example, gender, class, race and ethnicity, sexualities, and popular culture, the body is generally studied indirectly in relation to these broader themes, rather than being a central aspect of study in its own right. This section of the handbook draws together work in a range of fields and contexts to outline conceptual possibilities for placing the body at the center of analysis in the study of childhood and youth. A focus on embodiment is critical because it enables us to understand bodies as sites of experience through which we embody and actively respond to our sociocultural and historical context. We have also argued that it is crucial to recognize the ways the fields of body studies and childhood and youth studies are influenced by metropolitan thinking and reflect geopolitical inequalities. A sharper and sustained focus on children and young people in the developing world (who form the greatest proportion of the world's youth) is greatly needed. Future research which pairs an embodied approach to childhood and youth and develops theoretical perspectives appropriate to context will enable more detailed and critical perspectives in studies of youth and childhood.

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Cross-References

- ▶ [“Let’s Go 50/50”: The Everyday Embodiment of Sexuality Amongst African Young People](#)
- ▶ [Bodies In and Out of Place: Schooling and the Production of Gender Identities Through Embodied Experience](#)
- ▶ [Childhood and Youth Citizenship](#)
- ▶ [Girls’ Embodied Experiences of Media Images](#)
- ▶ [Serious Play: Young People’s Deployment of Culturally Subversive Sign Within Postmodern Capitalism](#)
- ▶ [Storing Our Lives of Now: The Pluritemporal Memories of Rural Youth Identity and Place](#)
- ▶ [Theorizing Subjectivity and Feminine Embodiment: Feminist Approaches and Debates](#)
- ▶ [Thinking About Childhood and Youth](#)
- ▶ [Youth and Play: Identity, Politics, and Lifestyle](#)
- ▶ [Youth Experience of Urban Inequality: Space, Class, and Gender in Mexico](#)

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“Let’s Go 50/50”: The Everyday Embodiment of Sexuality Amongst African Young People

Lauren Graham and Memory Mphaphuli

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Abstract

The ways in which young men and women embody dominant and alternative discourses of femininity and masculinity are profoundly shaped by their local realities, as well as the sociocultural discourses they are exposed to – something that is often overlooked in much literature regarding youth sexuality. While common theoretical conceptions of masculinity and femininity suggest that there are normative or dominant discourses of sexuality, emerging research focusing on the ways in which young people engage with multiple, seemingly contradictory discourses is sparse. This chapter considers the dominant ways in which young people’s sexuality has been considered in literature, particularly in literature focusing on Africa, and points to emerging bodies of literature that

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challenge researchers to more deliberately embody and contextually locate young people's sexuality. In doing so, two key arguments are made: firstly, that academic discussions of sexuality often refer to dominant norms and values regarding gender and sexuality, but very seldom consider local-level realities and negotiations of multiple and competing discourses of sexuality; and secondly, that in the context of HIV, very little research is aimed at understanding youth sexuality (and particularly African youth's sexuality) outside of a discourse of risk and risk prevention. By challenging these two dominant trends in the literature on youth sexuality and noting emerging literature that does the same, this chapter makes the case for a research agenda that seeks to consider youth sexualities in ways that are nonjudgmental, that seek to understand youth voices about their experience of sexuality, and are sufficiently contextually located. Such an approach would make way for a literature on youth sexualities that is far more embodied and revealing.

Introduction

Young people's bodies are the topic of a great deal of research interest in studies focusing on young people's sexuality. Most of this attention originates from the wide field of HIV and AIDS and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) research and is most often focused on how to understand and control young people's sexual risk-taking behavior. In the African context, research pertaining to young people's sexuality has been focused on efforts to better understand factors which promote and inhibit the transmission of HIV so as to shape effective policy and intervention. This situation is not unique to Africa. As Cahill argues in her chapter on "working beyond boundaries in youth well-being," young people's well-being is often discussed in relation to risk – how "at risk" they are and what interventions are necessary to protect them. In Africa, it is largely poor, black Africans, and socially marginalized young people that receive the bulk of attention in such research.

This chapter assesses the current state of the field of research on young people's bodies focusing particularly on their day-to-day expressions of sexualities. Specific attention is given to how youth sexualities have been conceptualized in Southern Africa. Three key themes have been identified that underpin research in this area.

In the first instance, research in the field of youth sexualities in Africa is often interpreted through narrow and dominant discourses of masculinity and femininity that are rooted in patriarchy. This results in research conceptualizing young people's sexual decision making through uncontested and commonly accepted understandings of sexuality. In doing so, such research leaves a real gap in the understanding of young people's sexual decision making – a gap that can only be addressed by focusing on the everyday embodied, lived experiences of sexuality within romantic relationships – and how they are shaped by multiple and contested local-level realities and discourses. The title of this chapter, for instance, draws on a popular song in South Africa in which the artist, Mandoza, sings "let's go fifty-fifty" referring to a more equal division of power and roles within relationships.

Alternative discourses such as this regarding sexuality are often overlooked when researchers analyze young people's sexualities within traditional understandings of gender and sexuality, and assumptions are made about the importance of these for young people.

Secondly, because the field of youth sexuality in Africa is strongly dominated by research that emerges from epidemiology and other fields interested in investigating HIV and risk prevention, much literature in the field tends to conflate youth sexuality with risk-taking, leading to the idea that youth sexuality is inherently risky and that young people are irrational in their sexual decision making. This leads to another key gap in our understanding of youth sexuality – one that considers that sexuality as inherently embodied, shaped by desire and Love, influenced by the embodiment of local-level discourses, and experienced through local-level realities. Too few studies attempt to examine these aspects of young people's sexuality.

Thirdly, most research in the field focuses on young, poor black people's bodies with the result that such bodies are often understood to be deviant and excessive (in the case of young men) or over-sexualized but passive (in the case of young women). As a result, there is little room to understand the ways in which young black men and women use their bodies in positive ways, to act for their own health, to experience pleasure, and to express individual identity.

This chapter is informed strongly by feminist and postcolonial theory and argues for a new approach to studies on youth sexuality in Southern Africa. Such an approach is already emerging; it focuses on what it means to be a young man or woman in particular contexts, how young people negotiate competing and contradictory discourses of masculinity and femininity at the local level, and how love and desire play out in their romantic and sexual relationships. This approach places greater emphasis on the body, on young people's being and acting, as a site of analysis for understanding how young people make their decisions and what influences these decisions, rather than aiming to understand supposedly logical decision-making sequence devoid of an analysis of the physical.

Having outlined the key arguments that are to be made in this chapter, the field of literature on youth sexualities is assessed. It is analysed by focusing on three major turns that have taken place: first, the shift from a focus on the rational thinking of the Health Belief Model to a realization of the importance of the body in explaining action; second, the shift from focusing on negative behavior to understanding the body in the everyday; and third, the shift from dominant to contested discourses of sexuality.

Turns in Understanding Youth Sexuality

From the Health Belief Model to Corporeality

As argued in Coffey and Watson's introduction to this section, studies concerning youth sexuality have until recently largely ignored the body as a site of study. Rather, focus has been placed on how to control sexual risk by appealing to the mind. As such, studies on youth sexuality have often focused on young people's knowledge of

sexual risk (Moji et al. 1999), their attitudes towards sex and safe sex behavior (Helleringer and Kohler 2005), and their perceptions of risk behavior (Anderson et al. 2007; Tenkorang et al. 2010). These studies, often located in the biomedical and public health fields, are premised on the Health Belief Model (Rosenstock 1990), which assumes that “knowledge of various aspects of HIV/AIDS [and other sex-related risks] allows for appropriate actions to be taken in relation to prevention” (Shisana et al. 2009, p. 51). This assumption persists despite awareness that knowledge is a poor predictor of behavior (Berten and Van Rossem 2009).

Shilling (2007, p. 1) makes the case for a “new approach towards the body” – one which acknowledges the ways in which the body is both shaped by structures and is a site of expression and experience worthy of study. Shilling argues that it is important that embodied experience is not wholly explained or reducible to dominant discourses (Shilling 2007, p. 12); lived and embodied experience can often be unpredictable. As such, there has been a slow turn in youth studies to addressing the body as a site of pleasure and impulse (Allen and Carmody 2012; Rasmussen 2012) and expression and identity (Pattman and Chege 2003). Within this turn towards corporeality in youth studies on sexuality, various traditions of understanding the body are revealed. For example, Machera (2004) discusses how the construction of female sexuality is influenced by meanings attached to the female genitalia, and Ratele (2004) discusses how bodies are seen as either white or black sexual bodies and not just bodies. Machera (2004) notes that female genitals are often perceived as “invisible,” “unmentionable,” and “shameful” and sometimes naming it in public is perceived as a grave insult to women. Thus, “A pattern emerges where female sexuality is inhibited by society’s definition of it,” whereas male sexuality is associated with performance, capabilities, and accomplishment (Machera 2004, p. 159). As a result, she concludes that women’s potential pleasure from the vagina is consciously misrepresented through the process of socialization. Furthermore, a woman’s body within such social context belongs to the social entity and not to her individual self.

Ratele (2004) noted that young people always see bodies in racialized terms. For instance, a 20-something-year-old black African male university student described that he “got attracted to Coloured women” because “Coloured women are more exposed to making love” and “more open than black women” (Ratele 2004, pp. 141–142) (“coloured” is one of the racial groups in South Africa used to describe racially heterogeneous group typically of European, Asian, and Khoisan descent). What this student means is that by their very “nature,” “coloured” women are more skilled in lovemaking when compared to “black” women that he has dated before. Ratele refers to such understandings of sexuality as *kinky politics*, which is the fetish of, and refetishises, race. He concludes that racism is kinky politics as it always involves a sexual bending of identity politics.

Having considered the ways in which the study of young people’s sexuality is shifting from a focus on attitudes and beliefs towards the study of the body, the chapter now moves to examine the ways in which multiple and conflicting messages and societal pressures find expression in the everyday sexualities and embodied experiences of young people.

From Malign to Mundane

For decades, writings on the body, sexuality, and gender have occupied a disputed space in Africa largely because the body and sexuality are subjected to power relations not only in terms of gender but also in relation to race, ethnicity, and the colonial and (in South Africa) apartheid projects. As such, research on African sexuality mainly focused on areas of pregnancy prevention and the curbing of sexual excesses and perversions (Tamale 2011). This has meant that sexual wellness and issues of eroticism and desire have been ignored, thus leading to limited theoretical framings of African sexualities (Undie and Benaya 2006, cited in Tamale 2011, p. 15).

After the colonial project, as a lens of investigating sexuality, primary focus shifted to (hetero)sexuality specifically and later its relationship to HIV and AIDS (Tamale 2011). Nonetheless, the tendency for essentializing and pathologizing heterosexuality persists in contemporary writings of sexuality. Black African men in particular continue to be portrayed as oversexed heterosexuals, with uncontrollable sexual urges that are typically blamed for the sexual violence against women and young girls and the spread of HIV/AIDS (Wood et al. 1998). As such, black female sexuality has an association with violence, victimization, and/or death and never with desire (Arnfred 2004). Moreover, according to Oinas and Anfred (2009), everyday aspects of people's sexualities have been largely ignored in research. Rather, African sexuality has been exoticized and objectified. Such trends continue today (Tamale 2011). Additionally, minimal resources were made available for the investigation of sexuality over and above issues of disease, reproduction, and violence (Tamale 2011, p. 22). Studies on African youth sexuality have often been confined to young black people's sexuality and framed in terms of what young black people do wrong in sexual decision making (Machel 2001; Eaton et al. 2003). It has also tended to emphasize male sexual domination over women (Hunter 2005) and women's lack of agency (Jewkes et al. 2005). As such, little is known about normative social expectations, which define and inform young people's everyday sexual self-conceptions and experiences. It is argued that the ways in which sexual desire or sexual practice is understood and performed by young people are simultaneously shaped by mundane social norms, which organize everyday life. These norms prescribe how sexual identities and practices must be organized in order to be recognized as legitimate (Budgeon 2008). For example, Selikow (2005) argues that young men and women experience and participate in sexual acts through their bodies and that these acts are understood through the available discourses and narratives. The number of discourses that young people have to choose from to account for their sexuality is limited. The ways in which they do this are within the means of embodiment, institutions, and materiality (Sims-Schouten and Riley 2007). The ways in which young women and men conceptualize sex, its meaning, and their sexual identities are shaped by structures that are beyond the individual. Thus, resulting sexual behavior cannot solely be viewed as an expression of personal agency but also as challenging and conforming to social, political, and economic structures on multiple levels. For example, in

post-apartheid South Africa, for “black youth growing up in metropolitan centres, consumption is closely coupled with sex, making for the overt sexualisation of style, status and power” (Posel 2011, p. 133). She continues to show that sexuality is gendered by illustrating that for large numbers of young women, sex is often the necessary mechanism for consumption and claiming a newfound agency or sexualized “freedom.” It is through such forms of assertive sexuality that a break can be seen between apartheid and post-apartheid generations, and from this perspective, it can be seen how sex has been politicized in an erotic of race, class, and generation (Posel 2011, p. 134). In this social context, the sexual attractiveness of an individual is invested in the body, in which young women, for example, wear tight clothing and short skirts and show lots of cleavage and young black middle-class men choose clothing that is designed to show off good physique (Posel 2011).

In sum, such empirical evidence illustrates how private physical intimate sexual relations, the sex acts, of every day/every night are also always interpreted through meanings, which are culturally and contextually available to young people (Jackson and Scott 2010).

From Hegemonic to Contested Sexualities

Kimmel (2005) argues that sexuality is socially constructed and that its intelligibility relies on gender. Furthermore, Butler (1990, p. 8) notes that the body is inconceivable without the cultural construction of gender: “Bodies cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender.” Gender is thus understood as a performance which gains its authority through reiterative practice. Therefore, notions of masculinity and femininity function as the primary building block of sexuality. It is through our understanding of masculinity and femininity that sexuality is constructed, and it is through our sexualities that the successful construction of our gender identity is confirmed (Kimmel 2005). It is also important to note that what is deemed masculine or feminine changes from culture to culture at any given historical moment.

While the starting point for understanding masculinity is the argument that there is a “hegemonic” masculinity (Connell 1995), that is, a dominant type of masculinity to which all ascribe to some degree, many have moved beyond this to argue for multiple masculinities (Barker and Ricardo 2005; Ampofo and Boateng 2011). This perspective contests the existence of a single “hegemonic” masculinity; rather, masculine identity may be seen to be a fluid concept, drawing on various available masculinities. Similarly, while Connell and Connell (1995) argue that femininity is necessarily subjugated, that is, always defined in relation to masculinity, increasingly researchers have become interested in the multiple ways in which women negotiate femininities (Reddy and Dunne 2007). Research has thus begun to shift towards understanding the multiple and contested notions of sexuality that exist (Sideris 2004; Langa 2010) and that are embodied through masculine and feminine practices and processes.

Accounting for Local Discourses in Youth Sexuality

As has been mentioned, within the vast body of literature that assesses youth sexuality, there are significant attempts to explain seemingly irrational sexual choices made by young people in terms of dominant discourses of both masculinity and femininity. Given the relative failure of the Health Belief Model to adequately predict young people's sexual choices, explanations rooted in the influence of social and cultural discourses – seemingly difficult meta-narratives to change – have been sought. Attention has been given to the ways in which gender norms shape sexual behavior. Within this body of literature, Connell's book *Masculinities* (1995) on hegemonic masculinity and subjugated femininity and Bourdieu's book *Masculine Domination* (2001) have been particularly influential. Both texts demonstrate that essentialized gender norms and values are reinforced in order to maintain strict gender roles that maintain the status quo of gender inequality and the patriarchal framework that informs young people's understanding of sexuality. Therefore, the dominant conception of gender identity and in turn sexuality draws on notions of the dominance of men within patriarchal societies and the relative subjugation of women's agency and power.

The broader examination of gender norms and sexuality has certainly shed a great deal of light on some of the more pervasive and "risky" behaviors that young people engage in when making decisions (or being subjected to other's decisions) regarding sex. Studies on hegemonic discourses of masculinity or dominant markers of masculinity and its influence on young men's risky behavior have provided particular insight. For instance, the work of Barker and Ricardo (2005) illustrates how the pressures that young men face to demonstrate a particular kind of masculinity that is physical and embraces danger encourage young men to engage in violent behavior.

Within studies on sexuality, such discourses are also found to have a profound influence on decision making. Research in South Africa has demonstrated how decision making about condom use has far more to do with maintaining reputations of a particular masculinity than with rational decision making (MacPhail and Campbell 2001) – a finding confirmed in other contexts such as Mexico (Castro-Vázquez 2000). This analysis fits with Barker and Ricardo's (2005) argument that manhood must be achieved through certain markers or behaviors, which are often associated with demonstrations of domination over women (Sideris 2004; Hunter 2005) and the approval of risk-taking (Carey et al. 2011). Other markers of masculinity may be linked to the ability to provide financially or to father a child (Richter and Morrell 2006; Swartz and Bhana 2010). Such expectations are also linked to risky behavior. The use of condoms, for instance, runs counter to a young man's ability to impregnate a woman.

However, masculinity operates only in relation to femininity. Far less research has focused on expressions of and dominant discourses of femininity, beyond the rhetoric of subjugation and lack of agency. In particular, analyses tend to address how women and girls are made "vulnerable" by the sexual behavior of boys, thus assuming that men always have power over women (Barker and Ricardo 2005,

p. 1). This framework persistently negates the power of young women in heterosexual relationships. Such studies have nevertheless exposed young women's experiences of sexual coercion and rape and their ability to negotiate safer sexual practices (Jewkes et al. 2005; Wood et al. 2008).

Research that attempts to understand sexual decision making among young people by locating it within dominant discourses of gender and sexuality has advanced the field of risk behavior research significantly. However, it has also overlooked other potential explanations of behavior that are only revealed when one attempts to understand youth sexuality from outside of a risk behavior lens and when one is willing to listen to the voices of young people. A new framework is beginning to emerge in research on youth sexualities – one that considers the varied and nuanced discourses of masculinity, femininity, and sexual practices that young people are exposed to, within communities, among peers, and through popular media. Because sexuality is informed by history and culture, there is a need to pay attention to the diverse practices, identities, and desires that foreground sexualities. As such, studies of sexualities must be cognizant of how sociopolitical and cultural processes intersect around class, race, gender, as well as the “politics of location” and how these are deeply intertwined within normative and alternative discourses of sexualities (Steyn and Van Zyl 2009).

Scholars have begun to critically look at how gender norms and expectations impact on sexuality and its nuanced pluralities and meanings within diverse communities (Tamale 2011, p. 23). For instance, in the urban townships in and around Gauteng province in South Africa, socioeconomic marginalization is gendered as many youth do not have access to employment (Selikow et al. 2002). While both young men and women struggle to find employment, gendered expectations place far more emphasis on young men providing financially for female partners, with the result that young women may opt out of work, preferring to seek a partner (or partners) who can provide financially for her. As a result, it is “normal” that some young women use sex as a commodity for conspicuous consumption such as fashionable clothes, cell phones, and styling their hair (Selikow et al. 2002, p. 26). This is not understood as prostitution but rather, as Hunter (2005, p. 251) terms it, “the materiality of everyday sex.” This however does not mean that sex has simply been commodified and exchanged in gift-like “obligations”; it also includes intimacy and emotion and may involve ties that last for some time (Hunter 2005). Within this social context, the masculinity that is dominant is that of the *ingagara*, a man who has multiple girlfriends and supports them through criminal activities. While the *ingagara* masculinity is admired in many townships (Selikow et al. 2002), such notions of masculine practices are concurrently perceived as distasteful by older men in rural areas such as Mandeni in KwaZulu-Natal province (Hunter 2002, p. 109). This suggests that there are contested notions of masculine sexuality and these are shaped by context.

Thus, as Langa (2010) notes, while there are different ways to be a man, there are also hierarchies of masculinities, making certain attributes more desirable or popular. In his study of masculinities among school boys in Alexandra, a South African township, Langa found that the *tsotsi* (gang member, criminal) masculinity was seen to be at the top of the hierarchy, suggesting that violent or

dominating behavior is perceived as a desirable feature of achieving manhood. However, there were a range of other masculinities that young men negotiated such as "academics" – those who were committed to doing well at school. Sideris (2004) also notes alternative markers of masculinity, including protecting and providing for one's spouse and children – a discourse of masculinity that is particularly strong among young fathers (Swartz and Bhana 2010). Graham (2012) also identifies competing notions of masculinity such as the "responsible community leader," the "doting father," and the "provider" which compete with masculinities that emphasize virility and dominance over women.

The ways in which young women negotiate a range of available discourses of femininity have received less attention. Where it has featured strongly is in research pertaining to the sexual relationships that young women engage in for consumption purposes (Selikow et al. 2002; Hunter 2002; Graham 2012), which points to the agency of young women in particularly vulnerable economic positions to choose partners for different purposes and engage in multiple partnerships. While these young women are still economically dependent on men, their use of their sexuality to assert agency in a context where the dominant discourse of femininity is one that denies women's agency is significant. Mphaphuli (2013) discusses young women's agency in greater detail and outlines young women's discussions of seeking relationships that fulfill their desires and in which they are able to negotiate the "fifty-fifty" relationship that is sung about in the aforementioned popular local song. Such research highlights the need for shifting "emphasis away from positioning young women as passive victims of various forms of cultural determinism to a more complex theorization of the relationship between gendered bodies, regimes of signification, and practices of self-identity" (as Budgeon argues in her chapter in this section).

These studies point to the importance of conducting local-level studies that focus on how young people use their bodies to express sexualities and which seek to engage young people to more fully understand the multiple influences that shape their sexualities – both in terms of socioeconomic contexts and the variety of discourses they are exposed to with regard to what it means to be a sexualized young man or woman.

Accounting for Desire and Lived Realities Within Studies on Youth Sexuality

As already noted, research on young African people's sexuality has largely been located within a concern for safe sexual practices in the context of HIV and AIDS. This means that a focus on desire, love, and the body, as key elements that shape sexualities and sexual decision making, has largely been absent. Since the early 1990s, HIV and AIDS in Africa and South Africa in particular have shaped the trajectory of writing about African sexualities (see Barker and Ricardo 2005; Bhana et al. 2006). Furthermore, research has focused on "risky sexual behavior" as understood by researchers, without adequately determining what this means for

young people. Tamale (2011, p. 21) contends “the discourse of ‘risky cultural practices’ was so intimately bound to the theories and explanations that had emerged on the continent that it became a main resource for public health advocates and policy-makers.” Another aspect of sexuality that has received much attention is sexual reproductive health in relation to disease and population control (Makiwa-Adebusoye and Tiemoko 2007). In sum, issues of diseases, violence, and reproduction have often been key issues considered in relation to the sexual bodies of young people.

However, beyond these dimensions, there is a further that is slowly gaining importance in studies of sexuality as it critically interrogates sexuality. Here, everyday experiences and practices of sexuality are seen as central. In such studies, a conscious move is made to break the traditional model of analyzing sexuality through the biomedical and public health frameworks.

Despite early calls for acknowledging desire as a key aspect of young people’s sexuality in sexuality education (Fine 1988), there is still very little research being conducted on the role of the body, desire, pleasure, and love in young people’s sexual decision making. Holzner and Oetomo (2004) in particular note the link that is often made between sex and danger or risk, rather than pleasure and competence, for young people. Fine and McClelland (2006) also note that desire simply does not feature in discussions on youth sexuality and particularly young women’s sexuality. The latter may be due to the fact that women’s desire in general is a silenced topic, the emphasis being placed instead on men’s desire where desire features in such studies at all (Tolman 2009).

The few studies that have considered desire and the sexual experience have revealed interesting insights. For instance, the importance of ejaculation for young men as a demonstration of completing the sexual act and demonstrating an ability to father has emerged in research in South Africa (Richter and Morrell 2006; Graham 2012). Further, pleasure and desire have been identified as key issues that limit the use of condoms among young men (MacPhail and Campbell 2001; Randolph et al. 2007). Such research highlights the importance of research that seeks to understand desire as a central aspect of sex and sexuality.

Yet, research with an emphasis on the body and desire is still to make a significant contribution to the body of literature on youth sexuality. As has been argued above, this is likely because youth sexuality research is so often focused on reducing risk, with interventions focused on restricting sexual activity among young people, rather than on understanding sexuality as “normal” and everyday. It may also be located within a lack of willingness or discomfort for researchers when it comes to talking frankly with young people about sex and sexuality and their bodies as a normal aspect of everyday life. Nevertheless, there is a need to build on emerging research which is interested in desire among young people. Tolman (2009), for instance, discusses the challenges that young women face in discussing pleasure within discussions regarding their own sexuality and open up a space for such frank discussions in their research. Their research reveals how young women tend to limit reflection on their own desire, preferring to emphasize their partner’s desire, and how this might be linked to a lack of competence or control

over sexual situations. Diamond (2009) too creates spaces for young women to talk openly about their sexual desire and particularly about the fluidity of sexuality. Connolly and McIsaac (2011) also point out how central pleasure is in romantic relationships for adolescence and how young people begin to experiment with pleasure and desire while negotiating romantic relationships. Mphaphuli (2013) demonstrates how young women express a desire for pleasure and talk openly about their own experiences of pleasure when provided with the space to do so. She notes how discourses about gender equality may be shaping the expectations of young women. She also notes, however, that despite their willingness to express their desire both to her as a researcher and to their partners, it is almost always overshadowed by the pleasure needs of their partners, indicating the prioritization of men's desire within the context of heterosexual relationships.

Such studies provide profound insights into the sexual lives of young people and are worthy in and of themselves as sites of study. However, by better understanding such motivations and experiences at the individual level, lessons may be learned about how to more adequately prepare young people not to fear their desire but to recognize it as normal and everyday and to feel a greater competence within sexual relationships (Holzner and Oetomo 2004). Such research is even more important in developing contexts where discussions about youth sexuality are so often considered taboo and are overshadowed by cultural notions of what can and cannot be said and what can and cannot be done (Chikovore et al. 2010).

Conclusion and Future Directions

The argument presented in this chapter is that there is a need to move beyond the dominant directions that studies on youth sexuality have taken. While research that has highlighted the ways in which dominant discourses of masculinity and sexuality find expression in unsafe sexual behavior have led to a great deal more understanding of youth sexuality and while risk prevention research has made some strides in promoting healthier youth sexual behavior, research continues to miss out on key elements of youth sexuality. Future research therefore needs to focus on the body as a site of pleasure and desires which drive behavior far more than attitudes and beliefs. It needs to prioritize the ways in which sexuality is engaged with in mundane and everyday ways, rather than focusing on young people's sexuality as inherently risky and deviant, in order to understand sexual decision making. Finally, research needs to identify the ways in which the body is a site of expression for multiple local and contextualized as well as dominant discourses of sexuality.

The overview of research presented in this chapter demonstrates that there is a need to acknowledge how the sexual selves of young people are embodied and are continuously developing through sexual interaction with others where meanings are made, remade, and bargained based on the social context in which they are embedded. Based on this perspective, it can be seen how a diversity of sexualities emerge and how sociocultural factors create various and competing discourses which young people draw from and which interact with each sexual encounter.

Understanding the power of such diverse discourses and how they intersect with local realities such as socioeconomic position, gender, and race are fundamental issues that need to be addressed in order to more fully understand youth sexuality.

In addition, it is evident that young women and men experience and participate in sexual acts through their bodies. While these acts are understood through the discourses and narratives available in order to conceptualize and comprehend them (Selikow 2005), they are driven by embodied sensations, social meanings related to passion, love, and desire – issues that are clearly overlooked in the bulk of research on youth sexuality that tend to exoticize young black people’s sexuality and which focus on deviance and risk.

This chapter thus argues for a shift in research on youth sexuality that seeks to prioritize the body and to place young people’s experience of sex, desire, and love at the center of inquiry. To do so requires a willingness to suspend judgment, to discuss sex outside of the discourse of risk, to divorce the body from the notion of danger, and to create spaces of trust for young people to articulate their experiences. Such discussions must also be located within an understanding of the power of dominant as well as alternative and emerging discourses of masculinity and sexuality that may profoundly influence how young people understand desire, pleasure, sex, and the body.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Bodies In and Out of Place: Schooling and the Production of Gender Identities Through Embodied Experience](#)
- ▶ [Childhood and Youth Citizenship](#)
- ▶ [Girls’ Embodied Experiences of Media Images](#)
- ▶ [Learning Gender in the Early Years of Schooling in South Africa](#)
- ▶ [Storing Our Lives of Now: The Pluritemporal Memories of Rural Youth Identity and Place](#)
- ▶ [Theorizing Subjectivity and Feminine Embodiment: Feminist Approaches and Debates](#)
- ▶ [Thinking About Childhood and Youth](#)
- ▶ [Who’s Learning or Whose Learning? Critical Perspectives on the Idea Youth-Led Policy-Making Related to Gender-Based Violence in a South African Classroom](#)
- ▶ [Youth Experience of Urban Inequality: Space, Class, and Gender in Mexico](#)

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Bodies In and Out of Place: Schooling and the Production of Gender Identities Through Embodied Experience

15

Mary Jane Kehily

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Abstract

This chapter explores femininity and masculinity as embodied experiences involving identity work and change for young women and men as they make the transition into adulthood. In Western neoliberal contexts, the bodies of girls and young women are commonly encoded as a “problem.” Policy documents and government initiatives in the UK, USA, and Australia over the last decade have focused on twin themes: the premature sexualization of girls and the reduction of teenage pregnancy. For young men, sexuality appears more muted at the level of policy; however, school-based policies on bullying and sexual harassment, for example, may be underscored by concerns with the dominant and sometimes violent character of male peer group cultures. A broader societal concern is articulated in terms of “crisis,” as young men lose their place in the labor market and the domestic sphere. Following up these themes in an analysis of empirical examples drawn from school-based research, the chapter considers the embodiment of young women and men as contextually

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specific gender performances. Developing insights based on the perspective of young women and men themselves, a central feature of the chapter explores the knowingness of youthful subjects as they prepare for the next stage in the life course. Within the context of shifting gender relations and late modern social change, the performance of femininity and masculinity can be seen as a living-in-the-skin expression of sex-gender identity and a developmental marker enacted for the self and others. Focusing on corporeality as a signifier of difference as expressed by young women and men themselves can be seen as a “conversation” with discourses that position girls as sexually innocent and boys as “in crisis.” For both groups, the body incites celebratory performance, embracing bodily change and particularly celebrating the presence of the body in an institutional context where the significance of corporeality is commonly under-acknowledged and underplayed.

Introduction

One day I found myself lying on the floor pinching my fat bits. This was followed by the serious business of comparing the wad of flab squeezed between thumb and forefinger with that of other girls in the room. There were moans, waves of disgust and shrieks of laughter. Her tummy, my upper arms and, oh my god, look at that blubber around the thighs. Was this a scene recalled from adolescence or a more recent memory – a *Bridget Jones* moment of weakness on a girlie night in with your mates? Well, actually it happened during a research encounter not so long ago, while I was doing an ethnographic study in a primary school.

I begin with this recollection from an earlier piece of research (Kehily et al. 2002; Kehily 2004) as a reminder of the presence of the body in ethnographic research with children and young people. During the course of fieldwork designed to explore the relationship cultures of preadolescent boys and girls, I was immersed in the highly charged and physically demanding social worlds of the 9- and 10-year-olds I was spending time with. This was an ethnographic experience that could be viewed through the flesh, as embodied experience appeared to take on heightened significance for children on the cusp of adolescence. Beginning with a photograph of Peter Andre passed to me by a girl with the question, “Do you like his six-pack?,” understanding the body and the way bodies feature in the lives of this group emerged as key to making sense of their friendships and relationships at a more general level. Observing children in the playground, Thorne (1993) noted the swift and seemingly chaotic movement as boys and girls that demanded meaning-making beyond the routine characterization of children at play. Similarly, my experience of children in primary school called for some explanation of what embodiment means in the school context and how preadolescent boys and girls live in and through their bodies.

Bodies in school can be seen in diverse ways: collectively as a student body to be controlled and moved about with ease; alternatively as individual bodies to be, simultaneously, trained and protected; or, as in the example above, a site of activity and engagement for the unfolding of student culture. Through schooling processes,

students become the object of disciplinary regimes aimed to control and regulate the body as well as the mind. Rules govern the physical use of spaces where students move – in classrooms, playground, and corridors. These spaces, in their architectural design and layout, also prescribe, to some extent, the type of movement that is possible and desirable. The latter can involve complex social formations which link institutional processes with everyday practice and bodily styles. Drawing upon Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, Shilling (1993) suggests that bodies in school are engaged in the production of "physical capital," a form of bodily management through which individuals can exercise agency and intervene in social affairs. In this chapter, I consider how theorizations of the body as gendered and performative can be applied to particular moments of childhood and youth. Specifically, the chapter explores femininity and masculinity as embodied performances involving identity work and change for girls and boys as they prepare for adolescence and adulthood. The bodies of children in policy documents and government initiatives are encoded in contradictory ways as in need of protection and in need of regulation. Recent policy documents on the sexualization of girls and the reduction of teenage pregnancy illustrate the ways in which young women may be positioned as both sexually innocent and sexually excessive (Papadopoulos 2010). Following up these themes in an analysis of two empirical examples, the chapter considers the embodiment of girls and boys as contextually specific performances of gendered subjectivity. Focusing on corporeality as a signifier of difference as expressed by young people themselves can be seen as a "conversation" with discourses that position girls as sexually innocent and young men as "in crisis." In contrast to policy perspectives, ethnographic school-based observations highlight how bodies in school incite celebratory performance, embrace bodily change, and particularly demonstrate a "knowingness" that is generally under-acknowledged in policy accounts.

Thinking Through the Body

The idea that the body is an important site for the exercise of power can be located within a Foucauldian framework in which the rise of capitalism can be seen to create a new domain of political life, referred to by Foucault as "bio-power" (1976, p. 140). Here power is conceptualized as decentralized and productive of social relations in commonplace encounters and exchanges. From this perspective, the politics of the body plays an important part in disciplining individual bodies and regulating collective bodies such as populations or specific social groups. For Foucault, the body is discursively constructed, realized in the play of power relations, and specifically targeted in the domain of the sexual. Foucault sees sex as a political issue, crucial to the emergence and deployment of bio-power.

It [sex] was at the pivot of the two axes along which developed the entire political technology of life. On the one hand it was tied to the disciplines of the body: the harnessing, intensification and distribution of forces, the adjustment and economy of energies. On the other hand, it was applied to the regulation of populations, through all the far-reaching effects of its activity. (Foucault 1976, p. 145)

Poststructuralist theory identifies ways in which gender relations are inscribed with power, but, as many sociological commentators have pointed out, such theoretical approaches commonly underplay the gestures, emotions, and performances of the body. Butler has suggested that in order to better understand how social processes are made to appear “as real,” we need also to comprehend how the discursive and the material are embodied in everyday life. Butler develops Foucault’s insight that even the human body – which fleshy and seemingly most “natural” of beings – is constituted in the discursive capillaries of medical, educational, judicial, military, and religious technologies. Foucault has argued that the body is subject to a historical and discursive genealogy, being part of what Butler (1990, p. 141) describes as a “social temporality.” The body is, in Foucauldian terminology, the product of a unique “bio-power” subject to levels of regulation including, most effectively, self-regulation (1978, p. 143). While Foucault (1978), in his early work, has been criticized for neglecting the materiality of the body through a type of “discursive determinism” which depicts the corporeal as “the inscribed surface of events, traced by language and dissolved by ideas,” Butler (1993) emphatically contends that bodies matter. Her concern, then, has not been to discount bodily experience as a few critics of *Gender Trouble* have suggested, but rather in “initiating new possibilities, new ways of bodies to matter” (1993, p. 30). Nevertheless, there is little discussion in Butler’s work of the anatomical constraints engendered by such bodily regimes as puberty, menstruation, childbirth, lactating, dieting, aging, disease, or disability, to say nothing of such racialized markers as color. Instead, in deploying the notion of embodiment, Butler has sought to reconcile the historically conceived signing of the body with an active notion of the performative. The way we style our bodies is neither a matter of sex (nature) nor simply an adjunct of the prevailing gender order (culture); rather it is one of the techniques through which we perform, enact, and “do” gender. In this respect, Butler regards sex and gender as “illusions of substance – that bodies are compelled to approximate, but never can” (1990, p. 146). In this reading, gender identity is an embodied action that does not exist outside of its “doings”; rather its performance is also a reiteration of previous “doings” that become intelligible as gender norms.

Contemporary social theory further considers issues of embodiment as a site upon which social categories and political principles can be played out (Bourdieu 1986; Frank 1991; Turner 1991). Turner (1991) suggests that social changes such as the growth of consumer culture, the development of postmodern themes, and the feminist movement have brought the body into prominence in contemporary analyses. Other theorists, however, appear keen to hold onto the materiality of the body and to assert its place in class-gender systems. In Bourdieu’s (1986) analysis, the body remains central to contemporary ways of conceptualizing the relationship between social class and aesthetic taste as “the most indisputable materialisation of class taste” (1986, p. 190). Guillaumin’s (1993) study suggests that “the body is the prime indicator of sex” (1993, p. 40) where external reproductive organs are ascribed a set of material and symbolic meanings elaborated in the construction of sexual difference. This separation of the sexes at the level of the body is duplicated by a material social relationship involving the sociosexual division of labor and the

distribution of power. Guillaumin indicates that the sexing of the body in society is a long-term project involving work at different levels: physical and mental labor, direct and indirect interventions, and the exercise of gender-specific social practices and competences. Bodies are constructed in societal contexts where ways of being in/with your body have material effects:

Restricting one's body or extending it and amplifying it are acts of rapport with the world, a felt vision of things. (Guillaumin 1993, p. 47)

Connell's (1995) study of masculinities is also concerned with the ways in which gender is understood and interpreted in relation to the body. She suggests that the physicality of the body remains central to the cultural interpretation and experience of gender. In Connell's analysis, as in Guillaumin's, the materiality of the body is important to individuals and to societal arrangements and can be seen to make a difference to the ways in which gender is learned and lived. Connell indicates that there is a need to assert the agency of bodies in social processes (1995, p. 60) in order to understand gender politics as an embodied social politics. Connell uses the term "body-reflexive practice" to suggest the ways in which bodies can be seen to be located within a complex circuit as both objects and agents of social practice. In this model, the body is located within a particular social order where bodily experience is productive of social relations (and socially structured bodily fantasy) that in turn can produce new bodily interactions (1995, pp. 61–2). "Body-reflexive practice" captures the dynamic interplay of bodily interactions working within societal and institutional constraints and also the sense of agency that suggests experiences at the level of the body offers possibilities for transgression and change.

Performing Femininity: The Biological Accomplishment of the Teenage Body

In a study of Children's Relationship Cultures in Years 5 and 6 (Kehily et al. 2002; Redman et al. 2002), discussions of bodily change were a recurrent feature of girls' talk. Girls' friendship groups provided a forum for sharing information and swapping stories, particularly about boys, puberty, and periods, in ways that challenge ideas of childhood innocence and the danger of premature sexualization (Kehily 2012). This can be seen as a self-generated resource for girls of their age who have not yet entered their teens, may not buy teen magazines but have noticed that their bodies are changing, and want to find ways of making sense of these experiences. Stories about "the first period" and the "first bra" were told and retold, often in great detail. Within the group, Selena was the only girl who had started menstruating. She tells her "coming on" story in the following way:

Selena: I didn't know... it was my first one. I'll tell you the first one, I was at my cousins and we were watching this, because I did my legs in their sink, I took my shaver with us, my shaver with me and I did my legs in the sink and my pants got all wet... That night after dinner there wasn't much beds in the house and we went to the play room and we set up

camp beds and got all the beds out. . . and we started watching *The Full Monty* and I usually always need the toilet in the night so I went, I looked in my pants and I saw this red and I went to my cousin and my cousin helped me out and it wasn't very heavy.

In Selena's account, her first period is remembered in episodic detail: where she was, what she was doing, and who she was with become nuggets of detail to be narrativized and shared. Like other moments of collective belonging articulated in prompts such as "What were you doing when you heard that Kennedy/John Lennon had been shot?" or "What was the first record you ever bought?," the first period is imbued with cultural significance. In such stories, the event and the telling of the tale become markers in a developmental process that says something about you in relation to your environment (see Prendergast 1995 for a further discussion of stories of menstruation).

In the next moment, however, Selena talks about menstruating as a practical difficulty causing stress and embarrassment within the confines of primary school routines:

Selena: Because we were doing PE I had to change my, my *Always* pad, so I didn't want nobody to notice but I had to because it was PE and I said, 'I really need the toilet' . . . and Ben and them lot goes, 'Why do you need the toilet?' and I go. . . 'because you don't want to know' and they're going, 'Yes we do' and I had to tell them.

Rina: She gave them a clue.

Selena: I gave them a clue.

Rina: She said 'Always'. And when she went to the toilet Ben and John. . . they figured it out and they said. . .

Selena: [The next day] We were in line. . . for dinner. . . and I was running up to them [Ben and John] and they were shouting, 'Have you got your period', shouting real loud. . . It was like everyone's there, not only the juniors.

Sarah: It was everyone in the whole school.

Lakbiah: It's really embarrassing too.

Selena: Yes it was really embarrassing. . . and they sometimes call me tampon lady.

Lakbiah: And Selena made up a plan the she was going to go up to them and say, 'Have you had your' what? What was you going to say?

Selena: Have you had your sperm count or whatever it is.

Lakbiah: That's it – you

The practical difficulties associated with having a period such as doing sport and changing your sanitary pad can be seen as a manifestation of the taboo or "etiquette" surrounding menstruation which acts as a form of social sanctioning for women (Oinas 2001; Martin 1987; Laws 1991). The etiquette of menstruation suggests that they should live as if they didn't have periods; they should not be spoken about, and others, especially men, should not notice. Selena's experiences point to the difficulties of maintaining the etiquette within the context of primary school routines where bodies are organized in time and space in inflexible way. The actions of the boys indicate that markers of gender difference can be utilized as a form of artillery, providing ammunition for rituals of name-calling and humiliation. However, there is also a sense in which Selena's clue to the boys, in the utterance "*Always*," is not so much a hint as a declaration. As the brand name of a heavily advertised sanitary protection product, "*Always*" is not so discreet and

unobtrusive as the manufacturers claim it to be. The name itself suggests a constant presence, an awareness, and a vigilance which women maintain in relation to menstruation. In saying “*Always*” to the boys in her class, Selena can be seen to refer to the product and her need for it in a very direct way, establishing in one word the continual and abiding presence of the menstrual cycle and her point within it. Why should she do this? My suggestion is that Selena is producing herself as a particular sort of girl. In the diary group, Selena’s experience of menstruation gives her status and authority; she has been through something which other girls can only anticipate. She can tell her story of biological development and embrace it as a specifically embodied version of femininity that has social significance for 10-year-old girls. As a girl with status, she is able to mediate and control while remaining essentially and undeniably feminine. Her experience of menstruation becomes a way of producing a version of femininity that is defined in relation to boys and to other girls who have not yet had periods. Selena’s sense of being a step ahead gives her access to the world of adolescent femininity which can be viewed and displayed as a *progression* from childhood to adulthood.

Performing Masculinity: Sex Talk and Sexual Practice

Connell (1995) uses the concept of “hegemonic masculinities” to discuss the relationship between different versions of masculinity and the ways in which issues of sexuality and embodiment feature in these accounts. Within the framework of hegemonic masculinities, specific relations of dominance and subordination are constantly struggled over in ways that point to both the fragility and normative power of dominant modes. Interactions between young men in school involve a set of social performances in relation to young women and other males. In an earlier study (Kehily 2002), ritualized and repeated enactments of boast and conquest infused male peer group talk. As Christian, put it, “All boys claim to be doing it with girls – everyone in the school.” However, while males in school may routinely engage in the sexual boast, there is evidence to suggest that the performance is not always believed:

Christian: I listen to what they say but you can’t take it seriously, you can’t always believe them ’cos they might just be saying that for their mates, to look strong or to make them look bigger.

Here the physical quality of looking “strong” and “big” in front of your mates can be seen as a symbolic attempt to display an exaggerated and inflated masculinity capable of achieving status in the male peer group. As other researchers have documented, sex talk between males serves many purposes and can be seen to have a range of regulatory effects: policing the boundaries of gender-appropriate behavior for young men and young women, providing an imaginary ideal of desirable masculinity, bolstering the reputation of particular males, concealing vulnerabilities, and producing heterosexual hierarchies (Kehily and Nayak 1997).

Further discussions with young men, however, suggest that heterosexuality may be constituted in other practices before girls are known and spoken about. In the absence of girls, in relationships or in discourse, young men may fantasize about having sex, imagining what it will be like and how they will feel. This fantasy space is usually accompanied by bodily practices such as masturbation. Peter Willmott's (1966) study of adolescent boys in East London reports that masturbation was "common, if not universal" (1966, p. 54) among males between the ages of 12 and 14. His study indicates that masturbation was spoken about in terms of "discovery" or initiation into the sexual domain. One of Willmott's respondents spoke of masturbation in the following terms, "I started at 14. When I first discovered it I went really mad over it. Then after a while it turned me off a bit" (1966, p. 54). Connell's (1995) study also suggests that masturbation plays a part in sexual learning for young males. One of Connell's respondents spoke of enjoying masturbation "too much"; the intensity of pleasure was such that he felt compelled to stop for fear that it would prevent him from enjoying sex with a woman (1995, p. 104). Through masturbation young men learn about and experience sexual pleasure; however, as Connell points out, they must then discipline their bodies to associate desire with heterosex rather than with autoeroticism or homoeroticism.

In the conversations with young men in school, the acknowledgment that masturbation was a common practice met with routine acceptance and denial:

Christian: People have told me you go through a phase where you start, like, wanking yourself off, stuff like that. I don't think it's true because I ain't gone through that phase yet and I don't think I'm gonna

Matthew: You don't know though

Adam: You don't know that

MJK: But don't you think that's one of the ways boys learn about sex?

All: [chorusing] Yeah, yeah

Yeah man

Admit it man

MJK: You know, through finding sources that make them feel excited and-

Christian: Like the computer or something

[laughs]

Matthew: Like my mate right, he's always on the computer saying, 'Look at this' right and he gets mad excited over his computer

Adam: The internet

Justin: Consolation, that's all it is, cut all that man, how people get like - obviously they don't care about sex. I know this boy who loves porno, guy's mad about, magazines everywhere, videos. He was telling me to watch one and I says, 'No, man, I ain't watching that dirtiness', getting excited for no reason, it ain't worth it.

In this exchange, the young men make a link between bodily practice and cultural resources such as pornographic magazines in evaluative terms as dirty, worthless, and second-rate. Justin's dominance in this discussion indicates that there may be a need to recuperate sex as heterosexual rather than autoerotic and pornography fuelled. Thomson's (1999) analysis of young men's accounts of pornography postulates that encounters with pornographic material is "one of the ways in which young men are brought into identification with a collective masculinity" (1999, p. 2). In recounting their engagement with pornographic material,

Thomson documents the ways in which individual young men attempt to evade agency by asserting that the magazine/video was obtained or initiated by a friend or a group of mates or something they just happen to stumble across. Significantly, both Justin and Matthew claim to have a mate who is into porn while placing their own interests in and access to such material at a distance.

Thomson suggests that for young men, “there is something potentially disempowering or emasculating about porn” (1999, p. 10) as it involves the practice of seeking sex without being desired. Justin’s insistence that pornography is “consolation,” a poor substitute for sex with a woman, can be seen as a vindication of Thomson’s point.

The Changing Landscape of Masculinities and Femininities

Processes of globalization characterized by the shrinking of time and space and the compression of world relations into a single market form the economic backdrop to young people’s lives. The ideal of global citizenship promised by high capitalism conjures up a planet of possibilities for young people as they work, play, and learn across multiple social sites. Global citizenship, however, is unlikely to be available to all. Cinematic explorations of masculine themes such as *Falling Down* and *Fight Club* depict the erosion of male privilege and desperate attempts of individual men to realize a coherent masculine identity in “new times.” Young men in school may also be represented as the recently dispossessed, pale shadows haunting a late modern landscape that no longer holds a place for them as workers or “breadwinners.” Within the “failing boys” discourse, it is assumed that young men are losing confidence: disenfranchised, de-motivated, and underachieving. Media discourses and popular sources point to a range of social indices to support the idea of masculinities in crisis: young men’s performance in literacy, public examinations, and higher education and increasing suicide rates, drug use, and ill-health (Nayak and Kehily 2013). Alongside the “going down” narrative is a parallel story of girls unprecedented success in school and the job market as the ideal neoliberal subjects who, unlike their male counterparts, are highly motivated and prepared to be flexible and mobile (Aapola et al. 2005).

There are, of course, limits to analyses of gender in “new times.” An obvious difficulty lies in the homogenization and polarization of gender categories, viewing *all* young men as subject to processes of decline and all young women as the opposite. Under closer scrutiny, intra-gender distinctions are clearly discernable among boys and girls. In the UK, boys’ underachievement appears to disproportionately affect working-class and ethnic minority young men, while working-class young women are less likely to be touched by the gold dust of the new girl order. There is little evidence to suggest that middle-class boys are the fall guys of feminization and “new times.” Additionally, it is important to make a distinction between the sexed body of young women and men and femininities and masculinities (Nayak and Kehily 2013). Following poststructuralist insights, it is possible to suggest that femininity and masculinity does not exist in “object” form.

Rather, they can be generatively understood as empty signs, social constructs with no tangible essence beyond the enactment of gender (Butler 1990).

Conclusion and Future Directions

It could be argued that the fragmentation of old-style masculine hegemonies prepares the way for more equitable gender relations in which roles and responsibilities can be negotiated between men and women in intimate relationships (Giddens 1993). The possibilities for a more progressive styling of gender relations in late modernity characterized by the “pure relationship” and new practices of intimacy have had apparently little impact upon school-based peer group cultures. The sexual cultures of young men in school appear curiously retrogressive in the light of changes in the ways in which sexuality is represented and lived in urban spaces. Within mainstream culture, however, sexual minorities appear to have emerged from the margins as an identity and a lifestyle that conveys flair, taste, and “cool.” Gay pubs and clubs can be found at the epicenter of city nightlife, patronized by gays and straights in search of a fun-filled night out, unfettered by inhibitions and the constraints of straight spaces (Bell and Jayne 2004). Sexual diversity within this context can be celebrated rather than struggled over. Viewed in the light of changes in popular culture and urban living, the regular and repeated game playing and rituals of young men in school appear as matter out of place, behavior that transgresses the boundaries of liberal tolerance and acceptability in the world beyond the institution. While *all* young men may not necessarily be in crisis, the “lads” of late modernity enact an obsolescent masculinity that, in metaphoric terms, leaves a rusty trail as the residual reminder of an industrial era they have prepared for but never inhabited.

This chapter has considered how theorizations of the body as gendered and performative can be productively applied to bodies in school. Recognizing the ways in which young people may live in their skin provides insights into particular moments of childhood and youth. The chapter explored femininity and masculinity from the perspective of upping people themselves, as embodied performances involving identity work and change for girls and boys as they prepare for adolescence and adulthood in specifically gendered ways. The chapter implicitly speaks back to conceptualizations of children’s bodies in policy documents and government initiatives where they are commonly positioned as both sexually innocent and sexually excessive (Papadopoulos 2010). The chapter pursues these themes through an analysis of two empirical examples that argue for approaching the embodiment of girls and boys as contextually specific performances of gendered subjectivity. By focusing on corporeality as a signifier of difference as expressed by young people themselves, the narrative arch of the chapter can be seen as “in conversation” with discourses that position girls as sexually innocent and young men as “in crisis.” In contrast to policy perspectives, ethnographic school-based observations illustrate how bodies in school incite celebratory performance, embrace bodily change, and particularly demonstrate a “knowingness” that is generally under-acknowledged in policy accounts.

Cross-References

- ▶ Belonging in Troubling Times: Considerations from the Vantage Point of Arab American Immigrant Youth
- ▶ Bodies: Corporeality and Embodiment in Childhood and Youth Studies
- ▶ Girls' Embodied Experiences of Media Images
- ▶ Indigenous Girls, Social Justice, and Schooling: Addressing Issues of Disadvantage
- ▶ Learning Gender in the Early Years of Schooling in South Africa
- ▶ Possibilities for Learning Between Childhoods and Youth in the Minority and Majority Worlds: Youth Transitions as an Example of Cross-World Dialogue
- ▶ The Gendering and Sexualization of Young Women Through Sex Educational Practices and Discourses in Southern Africa
- ▶ Theorizing Subjectivity and Feminine Embodiment: Feminist Approaches and Debates
- ▶ Who's Learning or Whose Learning? Critical Perspectives on the Idea Youth-Led Policy-Making Related to Gender-Based Violence in a South African Classroom
- ▶ Young People, Pleasure, and the Normalization of Pornography: Sexual Health and Well-Being in a Time of Proliferation?

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Abstract

Historically within western societies, girls’ embodied sexuality has persistently been problematized within discourses of risk and danger. In more recent years, these discourses have been reenergized in moral panics about preteen girls’ premature “sexualization,” argued to occur through their exposure to a sex-saturated media culture. Anxieties particularly cohere around Hyper-sexy bodies, characterized by body-revealing clothing and sexual moves. The process of sexualization, claimed by proponents of a sexualization argument, positions girls as readily influenced by media images such that they emulate the hyper-sexy images prolifically found in “tween” popular culture. Such claims of girls’ uncritical consumption and self-production as “sexualized” have been challenged by an emergent feminist literature that finds girls’ relationships with media are considerably more complicated. The goal of this chapter is to engage with this literature in order to paint an illuminating picture of the ways that girls make sense of the hyper-sexy images they encounter in popular culture and the extent to which they view them as a possibility for self. In so doing, the chapter identifies

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appropriateness, grounded in class, morality, and age discourses as a recurrent theme in girls' sense-making about hyper-sexy embodiment in relation to self and others. The appearance of the figure of the "slut" in girls' negotiations of hyper-sexiness suggests that regulatory discourses of female sexuality exert a significant constraining presence in ways the embodied sexual self may be understood. The chapter argues that the challenge for feminist research is to find ways to work with and for girls that will open up spaces for exploring pleasure in embodied practices of self that escape repressive, limiting boundaries.

Introduction

For young teenage girls in western capitalist societies, the sexual body has long been a contested site, their appearance and practices subject to intense surveillance and regulation around norms of age-based appropriateness. Discourses of risk and harm have functioned to legitimate monitoring of girls' sexuality, often articulated as concerns about vulnerability to rape, pregnancy, and sexual diseases. Over the last 5 years or so, however, the gaze on girls has more emphatically alighted on preteen girls through a discourse of sexualization that suggests girls to be readily influenced and subsequently harmed by the saturation of porno-chic-styled images of young women in contemporary media. Two institutional reports, one from the Australia Institute in 2006 (*Corporate Paedophilia*, Rush and La Nauze 2006) and the other from the American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls in 2007 (APA 2007), were instrumental to the sexualization of girls entering academic, media, and political domains as a "new," pressing, and sometimes contested social problem. A succession of ensuing popular culture texts on the subject of preteen girls' sexualization (e.g., Hamilton 2007; Levin and Kilbourne 2008; Opplinger 2008) and media reports has maintained a focus on the issue. A key thread running through this body of literature is the notion that girls' engagement with, and emulation of, hyper-sexy representations in popular culture propels them into premature sexuality. Arguments conferring sexualization rest heavily upon girls' bodies as both bearing witness to a sexualizing process (e.g., makeup and wearing body-exposing clothes, padded bras, G-strings, and so on) and serving as a testament to the harm of sexualized images (e.g., eating disorders, poor body image). In contrast to the girls' sexualization literature, popular culture texts of the contemporary postfeminist era promote young women and girls' bodies as a passport to empowerment through sexuality and consumption of products designed to enhance heterosexualized attractiveness (e.g., beauty products, fashion; Gill 2009; McRobbie 2008).

This chapter understands these contradictory contexts – girls' sexualization discourses and postfeminist media texts – as significant sites of meanings about girls' bodies in contemporary late capitalist societies. Notably, it is a particular body addressed in each of these contexts – heterosexual, middle class, and white – reflecting sexualization itself as a classed phenomenon on one hand ("low culture," contaminating of a middle-class aesthetic; Egan and Hawkes 2008) and postfeminism as a

middle-class sensibility on the other (Gill 2007). Studies with girls about sexualization or sexualized media, however, have typically included girls from diverse ethnic and social locations, and the voices of New Zealand girls in this chapter are reflective of this pattern. Drawing on this relatively small body of research literature which investigates sexualized media from the perspective of girls themselves, the chapter seeks to address three interrelated questions: How are bodies constructed within “tween” popular culture and sexualization discourses? How do girls make sense of these “hyper-sexy” bodies that are claimed to sexualize them? And how do girls negotiate hyper-sexy bodies in their own embodied practices of self?

Hyper-sexy Bodies in “Tween” Popular Culture

In late capitalist societies such as New Zealand, Australia, UK, and USA, the mainstreaming of porno-chic styling has become “commonplace” (Attwood 2009). This porno-styled aesthetic is one of excess: hyper-femininity (e.g., stiletto heels, heavy makeup, fake tan) merges with hypersexuality (e.g., body-exposing clothing) to produce hetero-sexiness (Dobson 2011; McRobbie 2009). Through media and the marketplace, sex and sexuality have become commercialized; desirability and sexual attractiveness of a young woman’s “sexy,” “hot” body bestow power and success, and the means to obtaining this body can prolifically be found in magazine culture, advertising, and television makeover shows (Gill 2009; McRobbie 2009). Incorporating the persistent slender cultural ideal, this commodified “sexy” body is distinctly characterized in media and popular culture as white, toned, young, carefully groomed, and, although slim, curvaceous (Dobson 2011; Gill 2009). Display of the “sexy” body emphasizes and/or exaggerates the body’s sexual and erogenous zones through clothes that cling and expose. The marketing of such clothing (i.e., tight-fitting crop tops, short skirts, padded bras, low-rider jeans, little bikinis) to girls has been highlighted in the previously mentioned girls’ sexualization literature and also critiqued within a wider feminist scholarship (e.g., McRobbie 2008).

“Tween” popular culture provides girls with an avalanche of materials that elides empowerment, sexuality, and clothing in the figure of the “sexy,” “cute,” and “hot” girl (Brookes and Kelly 2009; McRobbie 2008). In magazines for preteen girls, for example, girls are advised on ways to present themselves as desirable and attractive (to boys) through “hot” outfits, tamed hair, and kiss-worthy lips (Griffin 2004). Through fashion and makeup features, girls learn that at “any age they can have fun being sexy” (Lamb and Brown 2006). Observing the “sea change” in preteen girls’ magazines, McRobbie (2008, p. 545) comments that they “produce sexuality as both thinkable and recognisable through fashion items such as crop tops, thongs, low-rider jeans, tiny bikinis and provocative T-shirts.” Within these magazines and “tween” popular culture more broadly, celebrities provide a rich source of meanings around sexuality for girls, meanings that are “characterised by a hyperfeminine (but often classy) performance of sexiness within the domain of the fashion and beauty complex” (Evans and Riley 2012, p. 2). In music videos, for

example, body-revealing clothing (e.g., bra tops and brief shorts) is often coupled with acts of sexual simulation, self-touching, sexual poses, and so on in pop celebrity performances (Zaslow 2009). Not that this feature of pop music is anything new; Andsager and Roe (2003) comment in their content analysis review of two decades of pop music videos that sexuality “has long been a primary component of music video” where “scantly” clad women in “sexy,” “provocative” clothing are overrepresented. Similarly, Railton and Watson (2006) comment that “the performance of sexual attractiveness and availability are imbricated in the genetic codes” of music video (p. 52) and that “the display of the sexualised body and the potential for that body to be figured as an object of desire or fantasy are crucial to the economies of both pleasure and profit of the pop music video” (p. 52).

Perhaps what is rather more new is a strategic conflation of childhood innocence and sexuality that permeates both celebrity and broader popular culture representations (McRobbie 2008; Renold and Ringrose 2011). One example of this intertwining of innocence and sexuality is found in appropriation of the Playboy bunny logo for children’s items and clothing (Tankard Reist 2010). In a further example, McRobbie (2008) observes practices of “bestowing on objects of adult or teenage beautification (thong-style underwear, bikinis, body lotion, lipstick) the qualities of much loved toys” in magazines designed for young preteen girls. For teenage celebrities, however, performances of hypersexuality may be deployed strategically to signal leaving behind their childhood innocence and launching them as young adult women (Zaslow 2009). Miley Cyrus provides one example of such transition; much of the ire surrounding her semi-nude appearance on *Vanity Fair* in 2008 at age 15 centered on the notion of her being “too young to be/act sexy” (Lamb et al. 2013). More recently, her performance of “twerking” at the 2013 MTVZ Awards again wrought harsh criticism and concerns about the effects on girls. For example, an article in British newspaper *The Telegraph* headlined with “Pop’s sexy antics affect kids more than porn” carried an image of Cyrus’ sexualized performance and referenced her act as an example of “worse than porn” (*The Telegraph*, October 31, 2013). Similar to the Cyrus sexual makeover, Zaslow cites the “metamorphosis” of Britney Spears whose style, appearance, and dance moves when she first appeared at age 18 conveyed no explicit sexuality. Britney’s transformation at age 20 was marked by the video release for her single “Baby One More Time” in which she wore a nude chiffon halter and low cut pants and was surrounded by dancers writhing and grinding to music. However, as Zaslow points out, the “innocence” in such cases is often not completely shed but fused with hypersexuality and hyper-femininity; for example, the school uniform worn in ways that are “sexed up” (e.g., short with suspenders and black stockings) or scantily clad bodies in sexy poses with a cuddly soft toy.

The child sexualization concerns, or what some have dubbed panics (Egan and Hawkes 2008), about girls’ participation in this sex-saturated media culture organize around discourses of vulnerability, risk, and harm. Vulnerability is viewed by some as emanating from girls’ lack of maturity, knowledge, and experience which renders them unable to discern fantasy from reality (e.g., Durham 2008; Oppliger 2008; Papadopoulou 2010). This construction of girls underpins the

related notion that they try to emulate the hyper-sexy appearance of models, celebrities, and TV or movie characters (e.g., Papadopoulos 2010). Constructing girls as at risk and vulnerable to a powerful “sexualizing” media in this way resonates with a more general problematizing of both girls’ bodies and their sexuality (Aapola et al. 2005). The APA Task Force report on the Sexualization of Girls, which has had an influential impact internationally, specifies the risks and harm to girls as psychological (self-esteem), sexual (sexually precocious), and physical (e.g., eating disorders, poor body image). These claims of harm similarly permeate much of the child sexualization literature (e.g., Levin and Kilbourne 2008). After a lengthy history of concerns about and inquiry into girls’ body image, it is noteworthy that “problems” with girls’ body image are now being reconceptualized as an effect of “sexualization.” The APA report argues that girls’ sexualization leads to body dissatisfaction, body shame, eating disorders, and “feelings of disgust toward one’s physical self.” Girls, it claims, may feel they are “ugly” and “gross” or “untouchable.” Reflecting on this collapsing of beauty and appearance issues into sexualization, Gill (2012) states:

Indeed, if the 1990s was the decade of body image concerns (with public and policy anxieties about ‘anorexic models and their impact on girls’ self-esteem, culminating in the UK in the Body Image Summit held in Downing Street in 1998) then in the noughties these worries would seem to have been displaced onto ‘sexualisation.’ (p. 492)

Importantly, claims in the sexualization literature about the harmful effects on girls’ embodied selves rely on a psychological experimental/media effects literature, for example, pretesting girls on a body image measure, exposing them to “sexualized” media, and then retesting to assess the effects of viewing. The limitations of this approach have been widely critiqued around its “snapshot” nature, ecological validity (laboratory based), immediate versus longer-term effects, and assumptions of a causal link (e.g., Egan and Hawkes 2008; Gill 2012). Critiques of media effects models also take issue with the notion of the “duped,” uncritical audience, absorbing media in a “hypodermic” fashion (Gill 2012). Reviewing the child sexualization literature, however, perhaps the most significant issue is the marked absence of girls’ perspectives on the hypersexualized images they encounter in popular culture. Indeed, as a number of scholars observe (e.g., Attwood 2009; Jackson and Vares 2013; Renold and Ringrose 2011), relatively little research has been done with girls to explore how they are making sense of these representations of women and girls in media and popular culture. The remainder of the chapter draws on a small but increasing feminist research literature to illuminate work that shows both how girls understand hyper-sexy media bodies and how they negotiate them in terms of their own embodied subjectivities.

Girls’ Understandings of “Hyper-sexy” Bodies

Qualitative research with girls within feminist scholarship paints a more complex picture of girls’ encounters and engagement with representations of hyper-sexy

femininity than what is suggested by the “effects” model adopted within the child sexualization literature. This complexity unfolds through methodological frameworks that recognize girls must navigate their way and speak through competing discourses that construct and regulate girlhood sexuality (see McClelland and Fine 2008), for example, constructions as asexual in “child innocence” and “good girl” discourses but knowingly sexual in postfeminist media discourse. Renold and Ringrose (2011) refer to these kinds of contradictory discursive constructions as expressions of the normative “schizoid” conditions confronting girls in postfeminist societies. As these authors explain, girls may be pulled into regulatory discourses (and use them) but also push away from them in “lines of flight” or moments of rupturing such discourses. In addition to recognizing complexities of the “schizoid” conditions of girls within which embodied possibilities are made or unmade, so too does much of the recent feminist literature on girls’ sexuality and sexualization attend to complexities steeped in girls’ social locations of age, class, and ethnicity. Age, for example, draws a normative boundary for preteen girls around what sexual material and practices are deemed appropriate, while class may set down boundaries of what expressions of sexuality are considered (dis)tasteful (see Skeggs 2004). Thus, how girls speak about hyper-sexy media bodies and their own embodied negotiation of them may be constrained by what can “appropriately” be spoken through locations of age and class in relation to sexuality.

Complexity also emerges in qualitative studies through recognition and integration of the broader contexts of girls’ lives such as their friendship, family, and school networks. Studies uniformly underline that girls’ consumption of hyper-sexy media and fashion does not take place in a social vacuum (e.g., Buckingham et al. 2009; Renold and Ringrose 2011; Rysst 2010; Vares et al. 2011). Friends and peers may exert a strong influence on clothing choices or wearing makeup through surveillance (Buckingham et al. 2009). Parents may purchase products that could be potentially read as “sexualized” (e.g., the Playboy bunny tops bought by Tori’s mother in Renold and Ringrose’ study) or, conversely, regulate their daughter’s access to “sexualized” media and fashion. For example, Jessica (12) in Vares and Jackson’s study (2011) commented her parents “would kill” her if she acted like Miley Cyrus or Vanessa Hudgens “sending around” pictures of themselves naked, and, responding to these same celebrity performances, Carla (12) commented that her parents “didn’t bring her[me] up that way.” Participants in the study seemed to be aware of parental anxieties about possibilities of sexualized behavior as an effect of viewing “hyper-sexy” media images as in 12-year-old Lindsey’s statement that “it comes back to that whole like, slutty sort of thing, like they don’t want us to look at them and stuff, and if we look like that too. . . .” Rysst similarly found the preteen girls in her study to carry a consciousness about what parents might think when shopping for clothes. The research examples mentioned here highlight the limitations of the individualistic psychological media effects approach discussed earlier.

Consistent with the use of methodological frameworks that work with the contradictory discursive contexts of girls’ lives, studies exploring girls’ experiences of “sexualized” culture have shown girls’ engagement with hypersexual images to

be complicated. In the case of music, for example, although girls may view with pleasure “dirty” celebrity performances on video (Duits and van Zoonen 2011) or perform sexual moves to music (Baker 2004), confronted with a pop celebrity with “push up” bras, bared midriffs, and fishnet tights atop minimalist shorts, they are also likely to express disgust and derogate the celebrities as “sluts” (e.g., Jackson and Vares 2011, 2013; Lowe 2003). Indeed, across studies, girls’ disparagement of hypersexuality as “slutty” applies primarily to such bodily displays and styles of (un)dress rather than sexual behavior and practice (its more traditional associations). Pop celebrities seem to particularly evoke the figure of the slut. For girls in Jackson and Vares’ (2011, 2013) study, for example, the slut was signified in images of celebrities wearing miniskirts, low tops, and bikini or underwear styles (i.e., midriff baring): in short any “skimpy” form of clothing that exposed too much of the body. So too did the complete absence of clothing, as in nakedness or semi-nakedness, and sheer clothing construct the “slut.” In Lowe’s (2003) research, girls angrily rebuked Britney Spears as a “trashy slore” (slut and whore combined) for her porno-styled appearance (heavy makeup, see-through clothing, short shorts) in an issue of *Rolling Stone*. However, they also admired her talent and her moments of sexual power. Lowe argues it was not so much the performance of hypersexuality that the girls ultimately took issue with but Britney’s deployment of Lolita, producing herself as both child-like innocent and a sexy, sexually desiring woman (i.e., photographs of her in hypersexualized clothing posed with childhood toys). Baker (2004) also notes how Spears plays out the good/bad girl dichotomy through the images on her website where she is depicted both as a “sex siren” dressed in “scanty clothing” writhing with a python and as an “innocent” virginal girl. For Baker’s girls, however, it was an image of Spears in a bikini and sporting breast implants that “disgusted” the preteen girls viewing the website.

Disgust appears to be a commonly reported response to the excesses of hypersexuality across a range of studies not only with girls but also young women (e.g., Griffin et al. 2013; Raby 2010). Probyn (2000) discusses the classed nature of disgust, explaining that statements such as “that’s disgusting” function to distance one’s “uncomfortable” proximity to what is typically seen as “working class” and to affirm one’s position as “not disgusting.” For preteen girls this distancing also secures their age-appropriate positioning as asexual “good” girls. Girls in Jackson and Vares’ (2011) study consistently expressed disgust with pop celebrities depicted in body-revealing clothing, for example, girls’ exclams of “ew!” in response to the “slutty” Pussycat Dolls, who were uniformly referred to in this way (“slutty”) by girls in the study. But the most intensely discussed “slutty” celebrity in the study was Miley Cyrus in reaction to her *Vanity Fair* cover image mentioned earlier in the chapter. Although widely condemned for “trying to be a slut like everyone else” and being a “bad influence” on younger girls, the slippery line of where “slut” begins and ends was suggested in discussions of age (whether Miley was too young), extent of nakedness (whether she had clothes on underneath the bedsheet), and questions of fairness (pressure on her). Similarly, girls in Duits and Zoonen’s (2011) study seemed to draw a fuzzy boundary around “dirty videos”: the Pussycat Dolls “whore dancing and scantily clad bodies” was not “too dirty,”

only a “bit.” Such findings, once again, point to a somewhat more complex and nuanced picture of the relationship between girls and hyper-sexy media bodies than is suggested by the girls’ sexualization literature. Taken together, the studies referred to in this section also emphasize the stickiness of moralizing and regulatory discourses of femininity in the use of the term “slut,” a figure that constructs the hyper-sexy media body as undesirable rather than aspired to (as in girls’ sexualization discourse).

Negotiated Embodied Practices

The previous section canvassed knowledge garnered from research about the ways girls are responding to and negotiating representations of hypersexuality depicted in the media. In this section the focus is on whether and how girls may appropriate the porno-chic, hyper-sexy styles made available to them in the media in constructing their own identities or sense of self. As with their negotiation of media representations, perhaps even more so, girls’ embodied self-practices require careful management of the tensions between good girl/innocence discourses and postfeminist discourses of sexual empowerment and choice. More specifically, girls’ participation as consumers of sexualized media, or in practices that may potentially be read through sexual meanings, threatens their culturally normative positioning as ideal asexual, innocent subjects and simultaneously risks their derogation as sexually tarnished (as in the “kinderwhores,” “prostitots” terms used in some sexualization literature; Egan and Hawkes 2008). How then can/do girls walk the boundary between ideals of an innocent self and taboos of a sexual self as they move with and through a sexually saturated media landscape? Research with girls suggests that they engage a range of management strategies that allow them to maintain a self-positioning as the “good,” sexually innocent girls they are expected to be in the context of their consumption of media or products that connote sex or sexuality.

Girls’ widespread enjoyment of music (lyrics and videos) in which there is prolific sexual, often porno-chic-styled, content is a particular case in which participation may need to be carefully managed. Anxiety about the possibility of being caught out watching, singing, or dancing to “sexy” music by parents or teachers, highlighted by Duits and van Zoonen (2011), underscores girls’ acute awareness of the “bad” sexual/“good” asexual boundary that is reemphasized in sexualization discourses. Girls in Baker’s (2004, 2011) research deployed various management strategies that enabled them to access sexual content without fear of adult detection. For example, in the after-school homework room, one girl would monitor the corridor for approaching teachers as the other girls performed “sexy” moves to music on the desktops. In another situation, two girls using the computer in the after-school room deployed a Britney Spears website as a subterfuge to mask from teachers the viewing of a “porn” site online (2011) which they had discovered accidentally. In a third example, girls sang “ex bomb” instead of “sex bomb” in Tom Jones’ song of the same title (2004). By using such strategies, the girls were able to experience the pleasure of participation while maintaining an appearance of

appropriateness in relation to sexuality for the benefit of teachers. Away from adult surveillance girls may feel freer to participate in the “taboo” pleasures of sex sites, music, or “dirty dancing” (Walkerdine 1997). Just as Baker’s girls found ways to avert adult surveillance and regulation in order to engage with sexualized media, Casey and her friends in Renold and Ringrose’ (2011) study found the adult-free space of the lounge provided a place to engage in “sexualized dancing” to Ja Rule’s song “Caught Up,” described by the authors as “exemplify[ing] what sexuality scholars are conceptualizing as the pornification of popular culture” (p. 400). The intent of the authors’ analysis of Casey’s videos, however, is to complicate meanings of girls’ sexualized performances beyond “pornification” explanations.

Whereas “dirty dancing” in private spaces affords girls the opportunity to move their bodies in “sexy” ways outside of an adult gaze, mainstreaming of the Playboy bunny into fashion and accessories for girls explicitly grants them access to an icon laden with adult, sexual meanings. Commodification of the Playboy bunny in this way has been critiqued as an example of the way in which the eroticized has become conflated with child innocence (Tankard Reist 2010). For girls, however, the innocence or cuteness of the “bunny” (minus the Playboy) provides an alternative childhood discourse that manages the sexual meanings of which they are fully cognizant. Among Buckingham et al.’s (2009) participants, for example, the fashionability of the Playboy bunny had nothing to do with the sexual meanings; it was just “a fashionable icon” that everybody was “getting,” or it was just “a cute pink bunny” and childish rather than adult. Similarly, Tori, a participant in Renold and Ringrose’ (2011) research, explained the icon as being “like the Playboy mansion and all the girls and that but with girls it’s just the bunny and girls like rabbits.” Tori both used a Playboy background for the “skin” of her Bebo page and also placed a photo of herself in fluffy bunny ears on her profile. In contrast to Tori, it was signification of the Playboy bunny’s adult sexual meanings that Alicia alluded to in a video diary entry about her new Playboy bed cover (Jackson and Vares 2013) in which she exclaimed, “Ooh, here’s my Playboy be-ed! Playboy! (zooming in on bed) makes me feel much more grown up!” On the other hand, the following excerpt from Jackson and Vares’ research (2013) illustrates an antagonistic and critical response to girls whose embodied practices appropriate a “Playboy Mansion” image:

a lot of girls at my school are influenced by the whole (contemptuous expression) Playboy Mansion image, that whole miniskirts and tank-tops and crap (exasperated laugh). It’s, it’s sick, like, it’s seriously sick! Like the whole (puts on a ‘bimbo’ voice) ‘I wanna impress guys so I’m gonna wear a padded bra today!’ Or, or ‘I’m gonna make up my face so I look prettier for the guys today.’ [Erica, 12]

Girls’ harsh critiques of other girls who adopt hyper-sexy clothing styles characterize much of the small literature about girls growing up in sex-saturated societies. One expression of these critiques is the othering and labeling of girls as sluts, echoing the derogation of hyper-sexy celebrity bodies as slutty (Raby 2010; Ringrose 2008; Jackson and Vares 2013). And in similar fashion, modes of (un) dress function as signifiers of a slutty status, such as “obvious” thongs, tank tops

that barely cover “boobs,” and exposed cleavages (Raby 2010; Ringrose 2008). When girls invoke the slut as a response to sexualized appearances of other girls, they distance themselves from both the “low culture” classed status of the slut (Skeggs 2004) and also from sexuality deemed culturally inappropriate for their age (see Jackson and Vares 2013).

From another perspective, Ringrose (2008) locates girls’ use of the slut discourse within the competitive heterosexualized culture that girls inhabit, suggesting it to be a tool with which girls regulate one another’s “displays of heterosexualized femininity” (p. 44). As in the above quote from Erica, where girls perceive the embodiment of hyper-sexiness to be for the benefit of boys, regulatory condemnation is likely to be more harsh (e.g., Duits and van Zoonen 2011; Ringrose 2008; Raby 2010). Regulation works to mark out the boundaries of respectability, the line drawn between maintaining a “good” sexual reputation and falling into disrepute (Griffin et al. 2013). For preteen girls the boundary is also heavily age drawn through the dominance of an innocence discourse. Avoiding castigation as a slut requires careful navigation on the part of preteen girls, particularly given that (i) fashionable clothing for preteen girls may often be purchased from stores targeting teenage girls and young women and (ii) that fashionable clothing may incorporate styles that resonate with hyper-sexiness (Buckingham et al. 2009; Rysst 2010). Awareness about the need to negotiate age and respectability boundaries surfaced among participants in Buckingham et al.’s (2009) research who talked about “not getting it wrong” in terms of their dress and appearance; wearing too much makeup and wearing a too short skirt or too much flashy jewelry were considered “going too far” which invoked being categorized as a “chav” (classed term comparable to the slut). A balance had to be found between appearing “trendy” and “going too far,” although the boundary of appropriateness varied across schools and within different peer groups within those schools.

Tensions traverse girls’ decisions about their choices of clothing in the context of sexual readings that may be made of them. One tension operates around avoiding disapproval (parents, other girls) while still wanting to “age up” to a more teenage (potentially sexual) dress style (Rysst 2010) and another, as with Buckingham et al.’s (2009) participants, around wanting to still be fashionable without appearing “slutty.” In Duits and Zoonen’s (2011) study, Odecia managed the tensions by drawing a line at how much of the body could be shown; showing some “belly” (midriff) and “leg” was acceptable provided the exposure was modest. Girls in Jackson and Vares’ (2013) managed fashionability and age appropriateness through modifications to clothing: low tops pinned, short skirts worn with leggings, and sheer tops worn with tank tops underneath them. Rather than positioning themselves as emulating the hyper-sexy modes of representation in the media as suggested in the sexualization literature, girls have more typically been found to reject them as an embodied practice of self, affording themselves a position of respectability and appropriateness. Odecia (Duits and van Zoonen 2011), for example, rebuked the information her mother told her about research showing girls imitate “sexy” models and celebrities and claimed she would “never dress as vulgar as those chicks on TV” – “I wouldn’t think of it with my tiny brain to wear

such short things I mean..I'm not so vulgar." Daria (Jackson and Vares 2013) similarly recorded in her video diary that she would "never" dress in the see-through clothing worn by Rihanna in a girls' magazine photo, "not even in my own house where no-one can see me."

For some of the girls in the studies cited here, an awareness of the male gaze also factored in to decisions about their embodied self-presentations. Daria, quoted above, directly addressed the pedophilic gaze in her comment about an underwear photo shoot feature in a girls' magazine in which she viewed the girl as "only fourteen years of age and already posing half naked in a magazine that any old dirty man could pick up and get quite excited over" (Jackson and Vares 2013). As earlier, Daria told researchers via the video camera she would "never do that," adding "not at that age anyway." Concerns about the possibility of sexual harassment in relation to wearing body-revealing or tight clothing have arisen in some studies with girls (e.g., Raby 2010; Ringrose 2008), signaling girls' awareness of the discourses of danger and victimization (and also sexual double standard in some cases) that have perpetually inflected girlhood sexuality (Fine 1988). Participants in Buckingham et al.'s (2009) study also discussed the risks of girls "aging up" through wearing hyper-sexy clothing in terms of possibilities of sexual violence and, subsequently, blaming the victim. These concerns about risk and danger have brought this chapter full circle: girls' sexualization claims emphasize discourses of danger, harm, and risks to girls in their adoption of hypersexualized femininity; in their own negotiations of self-representation, girls demonstrate an awareness of these same discourses and may regulate the extent to which they adopt hyper-sexy codes of dress to avoid the sexualizing, risk-laden gaze of the male other.

Conclusion and Future Directions

The potential for even "innocent" parts of girls' bodies to be read in sexual ways (e.g., stomach, legs, hair) requiring girls to monitor and control how they appear to others – male and female – is nothing new (Aapola et al. 2005). The argument in this chapter, however, is that in recent years the body has not only more intensely been constructed as central to female identity (Gill 2007) but also normalized in postfeminist media as highly sexual and that these conditions are immensely challenging for girls who are so widely addressed as sexual subjects in contemporary popular culture. Such challenges materialize in the clothed body around fashion that exposes the body in various ways. For preteen girls, in particular, the sexual meanings that may accompany dress styles that reveal more than they conceal are rendered highly problematic through their construction in sexualization discourses as presexual, innocent subjects. The research that has been discussed in this chapter suggests girls find different ways to manage the hyper-sexy norms of the popular culture they consume. An overarching theme is that girls respond with critique and disgust to media representations of hyper-sexiness, invoking the "slut" or "slore" discourse which works to convey their own age appropriateness and (middle-class) respectability. At the same time, the studies point to girls' readings

as more complicated; the borders around what constitutes the slut, for example, are permeable rather than fixed. Nonetheless, it is the specter of the slut that maintains a presence in terms of girls' clothing choices, and the studies discussed here indicate that girls closely monitor self and others around a boundary of appropriateness. For some girls, this may involve a refusal to dress in ways associated with hypersexiness; for others creative solutions may be found through modifying clothing to bring into alignment with age and respectability norms. The question that needs to be asked in reviewing these practices is how possibilities for experiencing a pleasurable sexual body may be constrained through sexualization discourses that reinvest in the notion of girls' bodies as (sexually) dangerous. Perhaps as a counter to starting from a place of harm and risk, however, a useful focus for future research would be to investigate whether and how girls are able to find spaces of pleasure that spring from wearing particular clothing styles, moving their bodies in particular ways, or other experiences that simply make them feel good in their bodies. Although such spaces are bound to be complicated by the web of restraining discourses that operate in girls' lives, the challenge for researchers is to find ways that enable spaces of pleasure to be spoken or displayed.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Bodies In and Out of Place: Schooling and the Production of Gender Identities Through Embodied Experience](#)
- ▶ [Bodies: Corporeality and Embodiment in Childhood and Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [“Let’s Go 50/50”: The Everyday Embodiment of Sexuality Amongst African Young People](#)
- ▶ [Theorizing Subjectivity and Feminine Embodiment: Feminist Approaches and Debates](#)

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Theorizing Subjectivity and Feminine Embodiment: Feminist Approaches and Debates

17

Shelley Budgeon

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Abstract

This chapter traces the appearance of the body as it has manifest in feminist studies of young women. In particular, the discussion focuses on a shift in emphasis away from young women as passive victims of various forms of cultural determinism to approaches which seek to complicate the relationship of gendered bodies and regimes of signification. These approaches have often radically reconceptualized the role of the body in young women’s practice of self-identity and the social processes which contribute to young women’s subjectivation by emphasizing the active and processual nature of the self-body relation. Such approaches challenge many key aspects of earlier feminist analyses and critiques. Debates concerning the impact of this reconceptualization are assessed, and implications for the study of young femininities are discussed.

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Introduction

Feminist theory has been a central force in establishing that the body is a site where social relations find their expression. Whether by challenging biological essentialism, critiquing the gender binary, situating the practice of ethics, theorizing the maternal, questioning heterosexuality, examining representational practices in literature and art, or interrogating the construction of racialized and classed differences as they intersect with gender feminism has brought the body into focus as a key feature of the social. Brook (1999, p. 2) argues, “all feminist thinking might be described as an engagement of one sort or another with what it means to be, and to be perceived to be, a female body.” The material body perceived as the foundation for sexual difference has long served as the ground for justifying gender as a relation of naturalized difference and inequality. The centrality of the body to feminist theory, however, is precisely because “it offers no such ‘natural’ foundation for our pervasive cultural assumptions about femininity” (Conboy et al. 1997, p. 1).

Feminist theorizations of the body engage in a wide range of issues and proceed on the basis of varying approaches and different disciplinary traditions. They hold in common, however, the aim of challenging representations of women’s bodies in essentialized, devalued, and negated terms. Beginning with the establishment of the transcendental gendered subject of western metaphysics and ending with contemporary positions which seek to establish an alternative ontological grounding for comprehending the body, this chapter will examine how feminist theory has theorized the gendered body as a site where gender is socially produced. These latter approaches focus on the active, continuous, and irreducible nature of the self-body relation and challenge many key aspects of earlier feminist critiques particularly those which emphasize the body as a site of constraint, disorder, and alienation at the expense of exploring the body as a site of possibility and transformation. Studies of young women which shift emphasis away from the positioning of young women as passive victims subject to various forms of cultural determinism to a more complex theorization of the relationships between gendered bodies, regimes of signification, and practices of self-identity will illustrate how wider feminist debates have been applied in youth studies. Before considering these developments, the significance of the body for the development of feminist critique will be examined. This discussion provides insights into how and why the body has been established as a key problem for feminist thought and practice.

The Body Problematic

In the seventeenth century, a conceptual demarcation between subjectivity and matter was defined by a Cartesian dualism which privileged thinking as necessarily prior to being in the world. To be “human,” one had to conform to the definition of a transcendent subject whose constitution required conquering the flesh and bodily passions. To think rationally was to be self-defining and self-sufficient.

The gendered implications of such a formulation are readily apparent in this binary division upon which modern political thought was founded.

Woman in fact never makes the transition from the mythical 'state of nature' to the body politic. She *becomes* nature. She is necessary to the functioning of cultural life, she is the very ground which makes cultural life possible, yet she is not part of it. . . These divisions are conceptually and historically sexualised, with woman remaining mere nature, mere body, reproducing in the private, familial sphere. These associations are viewed as having their ground in woman's ontology. (Gatens 1996, p. 51)

This gendered constitution of the public and the private established a core problem for feminist theory – the need to challenge the exclusion of the body as the foundation of western metaphysics. This was deemed necessary if women were to gain access to the status of subject. The possibilities for theorizing both feminine and masculine subjectivity have intrinsically been bound by this opposition. The regulatory force of gendered relations was further bolstered not only by aligning women's bodies with nature but by defining feminine corporeality a priori as anarchic and disordered. Bound to an irrational and infirm essence which determined their embodied nature, women were seen to be wholly inadequately equipped to operate within the public sphere – an imagined space constituted on the very exclusion of women's bodies. Crucially, the association of women with the body contrasts with men whose behaviors are underdetermined, who as self-governing subjects are free to construct their own futures according to the exercise of rational choice. In contrast, woman's

nature has over-determined her behaviour, the limits of her intellectual endeavours, and the inevitabilities of her emotional journey through life. Whether she is construed as essentially immoral and irrational (a la Schopenhauer) or essentially kind and benevolent (a la Kant), she is always construed as an essential *something*. . . she is always the Object, a conglomeration of attributes to be predicted and controlled along with other natural phenomenon. (Alcoff 1995, pp. 434–5)

This brief account establishes the broad contours of a central problematic for feminist theory. The mind-body dualism is a structure which creates and then organizes sexual difference according to an exclusionary logic – a way of thinking that also underpins a range of other gendered binaries including culture-nature, reason-emotion, active-passive, subject-object, and so forth. A key binary which will serve as the focus of this discussion is the representation-materiality binary because the act of thinking, the preserve of rational men, is often critiqued by feminists as dependent upon the expulsion or repression of the material (maternal-feminine) body. Femininity is foremost a male construct – the product of patriarchal, phallogocentric representational practices which make gendered bodies meaningful. By diagnosing this problem, feminist theory has sought to challenge the exclusionary logic of the binary which establishes femininity as masculinity's negated and inferior other. A number of questions lay at the heart of theorizing women's embodied subjectivity. What is the relationship between the material body and the systems through which it becomes meaningful? How might women's bodies become meaningful outside of the systems of thought which have heretofore

made them knowable as rational man's other? In the first part of this chapter, several key strategies will be explained and evaluated. In the second half, this general overview of feminist theory will be accompanied by a discussion of how key elements in feminist debates have played out in the study of young women's relationship to representations of femininity and body image.

Egalitarian Feminism

In setting out to deny gender inequality is justified on the basis of innate sexual/bodily difference, feminism pursues an agenda which fundamentally challenges the meanings attributed to the body and the role of embodiment in organizing social relations. Different strategies have been developed in this regard, each having to grapple with whether to argue that women are equally able to transcend embodiment as men are deemed able, or alternatively, to seek to retrieve the female body from patriarchal representations so "the sexual (and radical) specificity of bodies and subjectivities" may be revalued and women granted recognition for their difference (Grosz 1994, p. 14). Egalitarian feminism argues women, like men, are equally capable of transcending the constraints imposed by their biology to participate in society as men's equals. For de Beauvoir, this meant the body was something to be conquered in favor of giving oneself to the life of the mind (Brook 1999, p. 15). These perspectives do not deny embodied sex differences; some even hint of devaluing the female body, but maintain that the sexual specificity of the body does not determine women's capacity to participate fully in male-defined social spheres and the realm of masculine privilege. This interpretation of sexual difference upholds the separation of nature and culture and underpins a central debate within feminism – the problem of equality versus difference.

In social constructionist versions of egalitarian feminism, the biological body is approached not as an obstacle in need of overcoming but a "biological object whose representation and functioning is political" (Grosz 1994, p. 16). The use of this strategy marked a key point in the development of feminist thought in the mid-twentieth century. As Oakley (1985) argued, "sex" refers to the visible and functional biological differences of male and female bodies while "gender" operates as a sociocultural system of classification into "masculine" and "feminine." Oakley stated "the constancy of sex must be admitted, but so too must the variability of gender" thereby providing evidence of the social rather than the natural origins of gender roles (Oakley 1985, p. 16, cited in Delphy 1993, p. 3). Culture, rather than the material body became determinate in questions over the significance of sexual difference for "if men and women are always already cultured and gendered then it makes no sense to ask about any essential or natural basis for difference" (Colebrook 2000, p. 77). This strategy critically argues that the "raw material of socialization are fundamentally the same for both sexes: each has an analogous biological or natural potential which is unequally developed because the social roles imposed on the two sexes are not equivalent" (Grosz 1995, p. 51). The solution to the devaluation and negation of the feminine, therefore, is to

intervene in systems of representation which define women in negative or stereotypical ways and create more accurate or positive representations to change attitudes, beliefs, and values. The sex-gender binary retains the notion of a biological body that is natural and the mind which is social and ideological (Grosz 1994, p. 17). For some feminists, however, the call to remove biology from the production of gender difference was not taken up. This is expressed in cultural feminism and versions of corporeal feminism.

Cultural Feminism

Theorists of sexual difference such as Rich (1977), Griffin (1978), and Daly (1984) advocate for reclaiming the female body and celebrating women in the name of their essential embodied difference. These feminists promote a solution that centers on rediscovering female essence and bonding with other women (Alcoff 1995, p. 437). The historical denigration of the feminine *as body* and the accompanying elevation of disembodied masculine virtues such as rationality are challenged by reversing the value of each term in the mind-body binary. A female essence, rooted in biological difference (and in many cases the maternal body) which for its proximity to nature and life-giving potential, is promoted as a source of ethical superiority. Driven by male envy and need, patriarchy seeks to subjugate and colonize this creative and powerful essence. Valorizing women's bodies as the site of feminine energy not only naturalizes sexual difference but defines female specificity within a body that precedes social construction thus asserting a body which is authentically woman.

Corporeal Feminism

Versions of corporeal feminism also focus on the existence of a pre-representational body and share a "commitment to a notion of the fundamental, irreducible differences between the sexes," but instead of accepting universalizing categories, it avoids essentialism by acknowledging the differences between members of the same sex (Grosz 1994, p. 18). The main premises of this complex set of feminist theoretical positions include the following. Firstly, representation is "founded upon the negation of the originary maternal-pre-oedipal-preconscious" (Budgeon 2003, p. 41). Secondly, the product of this negation is a dominant representational economy, phallogentrism, in which corporeality, materiality, and the female body are radically anterior to thought. As a result, it is impossible to know the feminine because representation is always already masculine, founded upon the negation of the feminine. The solution is to develop a way of knowing that evades or is outside the dominant representational systems that require exclusion as the basis for their operation (Grosz 1994). In its specificity, sexual difference can be recast in autonomous terms – as "the positive reinscription of gynocentric body image – an image that would remain uncontaminated by the representational impulses of a

phallogocentric representational economy” (Bray and Colebrook 1998, p. 39). This position despite its creative and nuanced arguments reacts against but does not dismantle Cartesian dualisms.

Poststructuralism

This anti-humanist “stance questions the idea that the body has a priori needs, desires or functions which determine the form of culture and politics” (Gatens 1996, pp. 51–2). Foucault posited that sociopolitical structures operate to create specific kinds of bodies constituted by particular needs and desires. The body is the primary site through which the power relations constitutive of the social realm are made visible. Both the outer surface of the body and its interiority are products of discursive inscription. Bodies are “intextuated, narrativized; simultaneously social codes, laws, norms and ideals become incarnated” (Grosz 1995, p. 35). Many feminist theorists implement a Foucauldian-inspired framework to examine how sexed bodies are products of discursive and disciplinary processes regulated by gendered regimes of truth (Bartky 1988; Bordo 1993). Foucault’s theory of power allows analyses of gendered bodies which avoid essentialism or biologism and engage with the sex-gender distinction without having to rely on a “true” or “real” material body. The material (power) and the nonmaterial (knowledge) are brought together in a recursive relationship, and thereby the binary is blurred (McNay 1992, p. 28). However, the charge has often been made that this account offers a socially overdetermined theory of the body in which women’s bodies are rendered docile (Bordo 1993).

Often criticized for imparting an overly linguistic account of gender and sex at the expense of engaging with the ontological status of materiality, Butler (1993) argues that the material is not a pre-representational ground but a discursive effect of representation which passes itself off as a grounding (Colebrook 2000, p. 77). Thus “we may seek to return to matter as prior to discourse to ground our claims about sexual difference only to discover that matter is fully sedimented with discourses on sex and sexuality that prefigure and constrain the uses to which that term can be put” (Butler 1993, p. 29). Sexed bodies, therefore, only appear as sexed through discourse, and the discourse of gender legitimates itself by positing sex as its ground (Colebrook 2000, p. 78). Butler’s crucial contribution to the debates is her attempt to overcome the main problem of social constructionism – an overly determinist model “whereby the social unilaterally acts on the natural and invests it with its parameters and meanings” (Butler 1993, p. 4). However, “by arguing that matter, while not purely prediscursive, is still other than discursive, Butler sustains an opposition between discourse and some ‘outside’” failing to escape the mind-body paradigm (Bray and Colebrook 1998, p. 43).

The unresolved problem that remains despite these varying strategic interventions is summed up precisely as a failure to elaborate analytical frameworks which transcend the fundamental binaries of western metaphysics. In feminist debates, “there is both an appeal to some body that would be more than a representational

type and a sense that the body is inescapably representational” (Bray and Colebrook 1998, p. 43). In short, feminist thought grapples with acknowledging the material body and its effects in ways that do not render it as a pre-representational surplus, a determining essence or a negated ground for the production of social relations.

An Ontological Reorientation

The task is to build a framework out of non-dualistic formulations. This involves questioning the ontological status of the body by rethinking difference in a way that does not produce a negated other because “as long as corporeality, materiality, and authentic sexual difference are understood as radically anterior to thought, or negated by representation, feminist critique will only be a reaction against dualism” (Bray and Colebrook 1998, p. 38). Reconceptualizing difference as *immanent* as a multiplicity of differing and irreducible forces in contrast to power as repressive and exclusionary is a key starting point (Grosz 1994, 1995). Once conceived as productive and multiple, a notion of difference which does not produce binary oppositions such as mind versus body may be deployed. Positive difference means identity is not the effect of a differentiating structure such as language but that existence itself is a field of **singularities** expressed through differing relations and effects, which then become the focus of evaluation (Bray and Colebrook 1998, p. 40).

Because it collapses the mind-body division, this conceptualization allows for non-mind-dependant analyses of the body which greatly facilitate feminist critique. Analyses of embodied subjectivity need not begin from some point beyond patriarchal or phallogocentric thought but start with questions about how *specific bodily practices* contribute to creative self-formation (Bray and Colebrook 1998, p. 36). When bodies are interpreted as an effect of idealized representations and image consumption, they are reduced to one practice among the many which make up the “event” of the body. The tendency to reduce the body to meanings determined by representational practices relies upon cause and effect logic. Alternatively, when the body is understood in terms of its capacities, forces, intensities, and so forth, the question becomes “what can a body do?” The body is not conceptualized as an image with a meaning to be interpreted. Rather the focus is on the effects or capacities, the body has to connect and form *relations* with other bodies and the resultant increase in capacity to form further relations. This approach seeks to understand the body in terms of action and affect, not cause and effect (Buchanan 1997, p. 74).

Young Femininity: The “Disturbed” Body?

The dominant tradition in the study of young women’s embodiment is strongly aligned with the feminist critique of women’s bodies as the site where patriarchal social relations find their expression. Research has focused more specifically on

how gender informs body image through the different fictions about women's and men's bodies embedded within wider ideological frameworks, the different fashions for women's and men's bodies communicated by formative socio-cultural agents, and the different biological and social functions served by women's and men's bodies that define their respective social roles and social value. (Calogero and Tylka 2010, p. 2)

While it is acknowledged that late modern capitalist consumer society increasingly problematizes the male body (Frost 2003; Gill et al. 2005; Hargreaves and Tiggemann 2006; Pope et al. 2000), these levels are seen to be greatly exceeded by those associated with feminine embodiment. For a variety of reasons, the achievement of a *positive* body image is held to be more difficult for young women. Studies of the disordered self-body relationship focus on interpersonal interactions in which young women are viewed and treated as a body, the circulation of media images which communicate normative definitions of the ideal body on a mass scale, and the role played by wider cultural prescriptions for appearance which intersect with gender to define class, ethnic, and racialized the dimensions of the idealized body (Calogero and Tylka 2010).

Body image has numerous dimensions including “bodily self-perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors” (Calogero and Tylka 2010, p. 1) and is “usually conceptualized as incorporating body size estimation, evaluation of body attractiveness and emotions associated with body shape and size” (Grogan 2006, p. 534). Although body image is a complex and multifaceted concept “the major focus of contemporary research has been on body shape and weight. Widespread dissatisfaction with these aspects of the body have been well documented in women from a number of countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia” (Tiggemann and Andrew 2012, p. 646). Unrealistically thin ideals are characteristic of Western societies (Frost 2005); however, weight dissatisfaction is also prevalent “even in cultures where traditional ideas of beauty have differed from the West and have not necessarily been about being slender” (see Dhillon and Dhawan 2011; Bardwell and Choudry 2000; Wassenaar et al. 2000). A recent, large-scale survey of body image ideals which takes into account 26 countries found very little difference in the degree of dissatisfaction women experience (Swami et al. 2010). Findings such as these have led many researchers to conclude that the experience of dissatisfaction with one's body has become a normative feature of female gender identity (Tiggemann and Miller 2010). It is the *young women* though who are seen to be most at risk of suffering the consequences of body image disorders (Liimakka 2008; Frost 2005; Wykes and Gunter 2005). Frost (2003, p. 56) notes “severe body alteration behaviours particularly effect young women. The peak age for eating disorders, self-harming behaviour and body dysmorphic disorder is 14–18 years, and all three of these conditions are more prevalent in female populations.”

Over 30 years of research on body image has focused to an overwhelming extent on young women partly because the roots of this tradition are in clinical psychology and psychiatric work focused on eating disorders within that population (Grogan 2006, p. 524). In practice, dissatisfaction manifests beyond body weight issues and is experienced by both women and men across the life course. However, the legacy

of psychological body image research is a massive empirical and theoretical literature which regards adolescence as a period of body image trouble and risk for young women. As a developmental period, adolescence is characterized by levels of increased “self-awareness, self-consciousness, introspectiveness, and preoccupation with self-image,” and a heightened awareness of bodily transformations which for young women, when compared to young men, moves them further away from the current societal ideal of thinness (Tiggemann and Miller 2010, p. 70). In Western culture, a woman is defined as a spectacle (Tseelson 1995). The incitement of women to value themselves in terms of appearance may be particularly acute for young women within late consumer capitalism because of the increased visibility of young femininity (McRobbie 2009) and an intensified form of address that stresses the importance of “doing appearance” (Frost 2003, p. 56).

Contemporary beauty ideals are reinforced and transmitted by several sociocultural influences including parents and peers (Tiggemann and Miller 2010), but arguably, the media has received the most critical attention to the extent that blaming the media for perpetuating unattainable models of femininity which cause young women to starve themselves “has almost become a popular truism” (Wykes and Gunter 2005, p. 3). In a review of existing evidence, Wykes and Gunter (2005, p. 216) highlight the view that the mass media significantly impacts young women’s self-identity and self-worth. Media texts are dominated by a thin esthetic positively associated with sex, success, and happiness located within a quite traditional heterosexual framework. The objectification theory, for instance, states that the circulation of images of women’s bodies in the mass media leads to the widespread and persistent sexual objectification of women (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). By internalizing these images as the norm, young women acquire a way of seeing “themselves in objectified terms, as an object to be looked at and evaluated on the basis of appearance” (Tiggemann and Andrew 2012, p. 647). Liimakka (2008, p. 143), for example, in her study of young women’s body image, found many “have learned to look at themselves through the evaluating eyes of ‘the other’ even when there is no other to evaluate their bodies. They have themselves become the other, looking at their body from the outside, and critically evaluating it as an image of a woman.” The result is significant dissatisfaction produced in the act of continuous self-monitoring intensified by the perpetual circulation of unrealistic ideals. The self that is bound up in self-objectification has “negative experiential consequences for women, most notably body-based shame and anxiety” (Tiggemann and Andrew (2012, p. 647) which manifests in a range of detrimental behaviors and emotional states including controlled and disordered eating patterns, self-surveillance and obsessive comparison of one’s body to images, depression, and psychological distress (Dhillon and Dhawan 2011; Tiggemann and Andrew 2012).

Experimental body image research which has produced vast numbers of studies rests upon a view that “women’s experience of their bodies is simply perceptual and cognitive, and that women’s’ difficult experiences of their bodies are located in the minds of individual women” (Blood 2005, p. 43). Body dysmorphic disorders

are explained as a problem of misperception – young women who are unhappy with their bodies are unable to accurately perceive what their “real” bodies look like. A link is often made between the consumption of media texts, the internalization of a thin ideal, and the expression of dissatisfaction. The media, it is posited, is a causal factor in this equation; however, an interest in moving beyond the claim that consuming representations *cause* eating disorders has led to alternative accounts that move away from a language of pathology, disorder, “false consciousness,” and passive victimhood (Gill 2008).

Dissatisfaction with theoretical approaches which cast women as passive victims is reflected in approaches that firmly locate the body and women’s subjectivities within a political and gendered analysis of the social realm. The repetitive and very narrowly defined media representations of women’s bodies do not cause but *reinforce* already existing norms of femininity. Here, gender is understood in much more fluid terms as something which is continually being brought into being through women’s active labor and engagement with behaviors such as dieting and cosmetic surgery. Far from being “pathological,” these acts may reasonably be conceived as expressions of the sociocultural imperative for women to make themselves into particular kinds of embodied subjects which are rendered intelligible by norms of femininity. The norms which constitute femininity “are part of the technology of power – capitalist and patriarchal but also heterosexual, white and Western and are also part of subjective consciousness” (Wykes and Gunter 2005, p. 208). As Bordo (1993, p. 166) argues, normative femininity subjects women to constant regulation, transformation, and “improvement” via their pursuit of elusive ideals. This perspective challenges approaches that maintain the existence of a natural body overlaid by culture and acknowledges that power operates through technologies of selfhood (Blood 2005). Gill (2008, p. 437), for instance, argues that the language of objectification perhaps has less purchase “at a moment when far from being presented as passive objects of an assumed male gaze (some) women are increasingly presented as active, desiring heterosexual subjects?” What Gill and others reveal is that young women are positioned within femininity in contradictory ways and that power works through this construction of subjects “not through top-down imposition but through negotiation, mediation, resistance and articulation” (Gill 2008, p. 437).

These accounts highlight the active nature of self-creation as a central process in becoming a gendered subject and illustrate femininity is rarely reproduced in a straightforward or linear fashion (Markula 2003; Thorpe 2008). Foucault’s assertion that resistance is a key dimension of power relations has, in particular, been central in shifting emphasis away from young women as cultural dupes of patriarchal and capitalist ideologies. Liimakka (2008, p. 132), for instance, has noted that “instead of seeing young women just as passive recipients of the images offered to them, many studies have begun to stress young women’s agency in resisting, ridiculing or transforming the images.” The young women in her study “in general seemed to pose contradictory opinions about whether media images of the ideal woman have an influence on them or not. Even the same person could express differing opinions about this during the flow of conversation”

(Liimakka 2008, p. 137). This research challenges assumptions often made about how the “objectified body” is lived and suggests it is possible for young women to, in some contexts, interrupt or make a “break” in the discourse of the female body as a spectacle or visual image.

Foucauldian approaches begin to blur the boundaries between representation and materiality (and related binaries) but ultimately the subject-object split is retained (Coleman 2008). Several theorists have pursued new approaches to young women’s embodied identity by rejecting the fundamental premises of the body image model. Dissatisfaction with this binary logic and, in a sense, this model offers an incomplete understanding of gendered embodiment that has led to proposals for a new starting point for the study of young women’s embodiment – one that rejects the separation of mind-body, subject-object, and representation-materiality (Budgeon 2003). These studies begin to illustrate new and useful insights into the complex understandings and experiences young women express when speaking about their embodied selves (Budgeon 2003; Coffey 2013; Coleman 2008, 2009).

Coleman (2008), for example, argues the oppositional mind-body binary underpinning the body image model implies the existence of a body prior to representation which serves as the object upon which cultural meanings are written via the consumption of images. The act of consumption determines what the body means and reduces the body to image. However, in her empirical research with young women, Coleman demonstrates that the photographic “capture” of the body is only partial or temporary. The young women she interviewed knowingly expressed feelings about those images and their bodies which exceeded that moment. When viewing a photo of themselves, they knew the body in the photograph was only one of the multiple other bodies they experienced outside the image. Coleman concludes the body is a process of becoming which is constantly transforming and experienced, understood, and lived in diverse ways. The body is never *just* the image in question; it is irreducible to any singular practice such as photography. Relations with images are one of many relations, or affects, through which the body becomes, but they are not determinant.

By deploying the Deleuzian concept of becoming, Coleman (2008) is able to move beyond a conceptualization of the social world as constituted by relatively stable and discrete forms of beings such as subjects-objects or images-bodies to one which emphasizes processes of movement. From this perspective, bodies are constituted through their multiple relations. The question Coleman poses is what does the body become through its relation with images? That relation is best evaluated by asking what capacities does that relation limit or extend. By asking this question “we can begin to explore how embodied selves are processes that give rise to new understandings, experiences and significances that operate beyond the effects of representational practices” (Budgeon 2003, p. 48). The young women in Budgeon’s (2008) study, for example, did not talk about their consumption of fashion magazine imagery in isolation from a range of other practices through which they made further connections which allowed them to develop a fuller and more complex understanding of their consumption of fashion magazine images thereby illustrating that

reading images cannot be more than one event among many others. This multiplicity renders reading images an unstable and unpredictable connection.

Coffey also adopts this position in her analysis of the body work practices of young women and men because it provides a way to “reconceptualise femininity from a symptom, effect, or product of patriarchal culture into an intensity exerting its own force” (Markula 2003, p. 36 cited in Coffey 2013, p. 7). Like Coleman (2009, p. 142) who states that “gender is one of the ways in which the affective capacities of bodies become organized and produced,” Coffey analyzes the multiple relations which the body connects and engages with, making body work not a discrete project but rather a process lived as a “series of practices of negotiations among many that are meaningful to the ways bodies are lived” and “connected with numerous social, cultural, and historical forces” (Coffey 2013, p. 7). She concludes that non-dualistic frameworks advance our knowledge of “what bodies are capable of rather than what bodies *are*, and what bodies may become rather than only the ways that certain bodies are constrained by “structures” such as gender” (Coffey 2013, p. 13).

Conclusion and Future Directions

The critique of gendered embodiment is at the core of feminist theory and practice. The diagnosis of how meanings associated with women’s bodies have served to limit the social and political recognition of women as subjects constitutes an ongoing focus. This chapter has traced key moments in the development of feminist critiques of embodied subjectivity starting with the primary problematic of the mind-body binary established in the Cartesian philosophical tradition. Strategies for challenging the patriarchal construction of embodied femininity have varied from arguing for transcendence of the body to advocating for the celebration of women’s unique embodied capacities to developing sophisticated accounts of how power works through the body in the production of gendered subjectivity to developing a starting point for understanding the mind and body in non-dualistic ways. The mind-body binary has generated a wide range of debates which have impacted on the study of young women where analyses have attempted to move beyond overly deterministic accounts of culture’s effects which derive from positing the body as an object which is separate from the feminine subject.

By orienting the study of young women’s embodied identities to a different starting point, these approaches help us to understand the complex *relational* nature of gendered subjectivity and in so doing opens up possibilities for the development of innovative studies of young people’s embodiment. In particular, this paradigm is consistent with many developments in new childhood studies informed by sociocultural approaches which emphasize children’s agency, their complex lived experiences, active negotiation of social relationships, and perceptive ways of knowing (James and Prout 1997; Mayall 2002). Children’s bodies are the sites where these dynamics are located, but the richness of relations which constitute their bodies has yet to be fully engaged with and understood.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Bodies In and Out of Place: Schooling and the Production of Gender Identities Through Embodied Experience](#)
- ▶ [Bodies: Corporeality and Embodiment in Childhood and Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [Girls' Embodied Experiences of Media Images](#)
- ▶ [The Gendering and Sexualization of Young Women Through Sex Educational Practices and Discourses in Southern Africa](#)
- ▶ [The Promises of Empowered Girls](#)

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Part IV
Identity

Helen Stokes, Sanna Aaltonen, and Julia Coffey

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Abstract

Identity is a crucial and wide-ranging concept and area in childhood and youth studies. Conceptual perspectives on identity differ across a range of disciplinary perspectives such as psychology and sociology. This chapter provides an overview of the current debates in regard to identity including differences between psychological and sociological approaches to conceptualizing identity. It discusses poststructural theories of power and subjectivity that are important in more recent sociological discussions of identity. Poststructural theorists

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understand identity (subjectivity) as socially constructed and processual, highlighting social factors, rather than individual traits as important to identity formation. The concept of identity is also discussed in relation to “identity politics,” with a focus on the tension between perspectives which argue the importance of identifying the way in which inequalities result from power and difference and those that are concerned that identification based on such categories can make differences appear “essential” or fixed. Finally, the chapter discusses the way in which the constructs of social class, family, and inequalities can be used to inform approaches to understanding identity when working with children and young people.

Introduction

Identity is a crucial concept and focus in childhood and youth studies. Its centrality is evidenced by the chapters in this handbook, over half of which use the concept of identity in relation to childhood and young people. Identity is a widely used concept and broad area of study. It is also a concept that is understood differently across a range of disciplinary perspectives, most notably psychology and sociology.

In the field of psychology, identity is a fundamental concept used to understand development from childhood through adolescence to adulthood. From this perspective, identity is understood as related to different stages of physical and mental development which ideally progress to a “stable” and “fixed” adult identity. In contrast, sociological understandings of childhood and youth challenge the idea that identity is ever “fixed” or completed and argue that identity is related to social context rather than to individual characteristics. Where psychological perspectives highlight identity as the innate property of an individual, sociological perspectives tend to understand identity as a property of interaction, arising from such societal divisions and categorizations such as gender, social class, race and ethnicity, sexuality, disability, and place (e.g., Côté 2009). Poststructural theorists understand identity (subjectivity) as socially constructed and processual and highlight social factors, rather than individual traits as important to identity formation.

Identity: Staged Development or Lifelong Project

Psychological perspectives characterize the late teenage years as a time in which identity is developed and formed. This perspective has a long history with Hall in 1906 describing adolescence as a period of “storm and stress” (Hall 1906), while Erikson in the 1960s developed a theory of different stages of adolescence and successful identity formation (Erikson 1968). Erikson proposed that every young person works through a series of crises or conflicts that must be resolved before moving to the next stage and that psychological capacities and identity are established during this process. Erikson also argued that the process of establishing a clear and coherent identity may extend well beyond adolescence into adulthood.

More recent psychological understandings of identity and youth include Arnett's (2000) theory of "emerging adulthood." Arnett (2000) describes the period from ages 18–25 as "emerging adulthood" and argues that in contemporary times, it is common for young people to have developed beyond the dependency of childhood and adolescence but have not yet undertaken the enduring responsibilities of adulthood that allows young people to "explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work and world views" (Arnett 2000, p. 469). He describes this as a period when many different directions remain possible and little about the future has been decided. Arnett argues that these years involve young people undertaking the character development necessary for the transition to adulthood including the acceptance of responsibility and making independent decisions (Arnett 1997).

Social theorists and sociologists tend to conceptualize identity very differently from those working in the psychological tradition. Indeed sociologists have critiqued the premise that a mature and healthy adult is one who has reached a state of stable or fixed identity. Theorists such as Beck (1992), Giddens (1991), Hall and Du Gay (1996), and Melucci (1996) argue that in late modernity, identity development has become a task or project that continues throughout a person's life rather than something that can be successfully "attained" during youth. From this perspective, identity is understood as needing to be continually redeveloped and renegotiated in response to changing and unpredictable social forces, rather than as limited to a particular life phase. Identity work becomes seen as an ongoing project, rather than something that can be "completed" or attained once one reaches a certain stage of development. Sociological perspectives highlight the multiple and sometimes contradictory transitions that young people undertake in the ongoing process of identity formation. Identity development is seen as a process that is nonlinear and nonsequential as young people play out multiple identities (e.g., both student and worker) and at times inhabit contradictory discourses (e.g., those associated with school and work) (Stokes and Wyn 2007). Sociological studies of young people have found identity formation, and reaching "adulthood" is not so much a task or project to be completed as a process requiring ongoing commitment and work (Dwyer et al. 2005).

This sociological understanding of identity places the central focus on the influence of societal context. Sociologists argue that the social changes associated with progression from modernity to late modernity have resulted in an increasingly globalized culture and society which have in turn led to the restructuring of key institutions of welfare, employment, family, and community (Cieslik and Pollock 2002; Beck 1992; Giddens 1991). As Beck (1992) has argued through his theory of "individualization," these changes have made collective sources for identity formation less available. Uncertainty related to changing work and social conditions necessitate "individualized" responses entailing increased flexibility and self-responsibility. Giddens (1991) argues identity is now reconfigured as "something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual" (p. 52). This means making pragmatic decisions, making do, and also keeping options open and balancing a number of different commitments to become

adult in different (Dwyer and Wyn 2001; Jenkins 2004). According to Beck (1992), individuals are required to respond to these social conditions through creating their own identities and “choice biographies” in reflexive and conscious manner (see Woodman 2009). Sociologists are critical of the emphasis on the individual that results from these social conditions as this can minimize acknowledgment of the impact that structural inequalities have on the life chances of young people.

Theories of Identity and Power

Poststructural theories of power and subjectivity are important in more recent sociological discussions of identity. Poststructural theorists understand identity (subjectivity) as socially constructed and processual and highlight the importance of social factors, rather than individual behavior. Social theories of power question the extent to which identity formation can be understood as a matter of individual choice. Foucault (1988) describes a shift in the way power is exercised in late modern societies. Foucault (1988) developed the concept of governmentality as a way of thinking power differently, where power is internalized rather than being imposed from outside. Rather than power being exercised through state-controlled agencies (e.g., the government and the church), power is exercised through seduction instead of repression. People engage in “technologies of self” (disciplinary practices) that are described as self-steering mechanisms or practices such as self-reflection and self-examination in which individuals experience, understand, judge, evaluate, and conduct themselves (Foucault 1988; Rose 1996).

Sociologists have drawn on this understanding of power to understand the day-to-day life of young people as they engage in processes of identity development and encounter economic and social change. Neoliberalism is a key economic discourse driving changes to social structures such as institutions and welfare arrangements. Neoliberal ideology has led to the deregulation of markets and limiting of government-provided state support. As a result, it has therefore been used as a means for the state to manage social relations (Mizen 2002). It has also led to a process of governing whereby responsibility for well-being has been appropriated as an individual responsibility. In this way the discourse of neoliberalism works as a form of governmentality. As Rose (1999) theorizes, neoliberalism functions at the level of individual subjects, who define themselves as free, despite being extensively governed.

Rose (1996) notes that certain kinds of productive and social capital such as mobility, improvisation, and risk taking are seen as most necessary to be able to engage competitively in the neoliberal economy. This has led to young people developing identity narratives that draw on subjectivities that in part are well suited to late modernity and the current neoliberal economic agenda. Young people are described as the “shape-shifting portfolio person” (Gee 1999) and the “enterprising self” (Kelly 2006). Young people are both positioned in and position themselves within this discourse and draw on identity traits such being enterprising and self-managing as they develop capacities to be reflexive and responsible and able

to make choices (Stokes 2012). They can appear, as Walkerdine (2003) notes, free from geographical, class, and gender constraints. However, in the process of identity construction, young people both act on and are acted upon by available discourses, and as Rose argues, people are “obliged to be free and enact their lives in terms of choice” (Rose 1999, p. 87). For those young people who are marginalized, choices are drawn from an ever-decreasing pool of options. Sociological perspectives thus highlight that identities are formed through the neoliberal rationalities that surround young people. Structural constraints therefore need to be acknowledged as they lead to “classed, gendered and radicalized identities” (Nairn and Higgins 2007, p. 262).

The impact of neoliberal discourses is explored by Nairn and Higgins (this section) who focus specifically on how identities and transitions of young people are negotiated in rural places. This is exemplified by drawing on case studies from young and rural New Zealanders who share similar experiences with their peers in many other postindustrial countries. The societal context for these case studies is neoliberalism that in the rural areas has manifested itself as declining rural economies and loss of jobs. Nairn and Higgins show that the public narratives arising from the neoliberal context and economic realities are intermingled with the personal narratives of young people who have to take a stand on time and space and specific notions of success and failure.

Identity as Narrative

Social theorists working from a “narrative” perspective argue that young people create meaning and sense of self through the construction of life stories or biographies. The construction of coherent personal narratives can enable young people to live with the change and uncertainty that characterizes late- or postmodernity. From a narrative perspective, self-identity is seen as being formed in a narrative which depicts a complex interaction between young peoples’ experience of events and imagination, the role of significant others, and routines and habits (Ezzy 1998). Narrative provides a way for these complex interactions to be synthesized by the young people in the production of selfhood. Narrative identity is therefore socially and culturally constructed with the narrative resources or story lines being available, culturally circulating, and dynamic to enable that identification (Chappell et al. 2003).

Nancy Worth (this section) develops these themes with a focus on transitions, life course, and interrelationships as well as the notion of “becoming” as she addresses identity from the point of view of human geography. Worth identifies a distinction between two concepts to think about youth identity in relation to the central concepts of youth geography: space and relationality. The two concepts emphasize either lived space or timespace. The idea of lived space sets the focus on different spaces such as school or local/global as well as on their interconnectedness. Within this thinking identity is acknowledged as being read and performed depending on space. The idea of timespace, in turn, highlights that space and time

are integral to one another and that temporalities and intergenerationality are important in understanding identities of young people.

A narrative perspective of identity is also often based in poststructural theory (see Davies 2006). This perspective holds that young people begin to develop narratives of who they are through taking part in discursive practices that provide meaning to story lines. In turn young people begin to recognize themselves and are recognized by others as being a member of a story line, and to do this, they must develop characteristics of that story line (Davies 2006). For example, a young person may develop identities as both a worker and a student as he/she takes up the characteristics of both story lines. One of those identities taken up by the young person may then impact on how they take up the other identity. Employment, for example, is a central source of identity (Miller and Rose 1993) and a means to redeem a respectable position in the community. The meaning of work in the development of identity can be particularly important for those young people who are mainly identified as disengaged or as failing at school. Through employment, or even short work placements, young people are able to produce proud narratives about what they “can do” and consequently challenge the singular identity of a deviant imposed upon them by authorities and school (see Aaltonen 2012; Shildrick et al. 2012). For these young people, work provides an opportunity to be perceived differently by the community, and they can develop a new and different story of who they are, regaining their learner/student identities through their successful worker identities (Stokes 2012).

The construction of identity is further extended through the poststructural feminist philosopher Judith Butler. Butler’s (1990) concept of performativity highlights identity as located in “doing” rather than the “being” (Butler 1990). This perspective shifts from seeing identity as innate and as a fixed entity to focusing on the ways subject positions are both produced and recognized as they are performed. As subject positions are constantly being performed and being recognized by others within a preexisting set of norms, then they begin to appear natural and believable. Youdell (2006) elaborates that identity from this perspective can be theorized as “an acceptance of the subject as a discursive constitution who appears to be abiding and natural not because s/he is so, but because discursive practices create this illusion” (p. 34).

Helen Cahill, Julia Coffey, and Sally Beadle (this section) provide an example and analysis of this process in regard to an HIV prevention program in South East Asia. This program emphasizes the repositioning of the young people from victim to leader. The authors have found that a poststructural focus on positioning and subjectivity emphasizes the socially constructed nature of identity and highlights the importance of social factors, rather than individual behavior, in the ways identities are formed and lived. The pedagogies used within the program are designed to facilitate a (re)positioning, (re)imagining, and (re)enactment of the self as participants are positioned as leaders and advocates rather than simply as members of key populations identified to be at higher risk of HIV exposure.

Deevia Bhana (this section) uses concepts of performativity to explore the social processes through which the early learning of gender manifests in the early years of

South African schooling. Bhana notes that the early years of primary schooling is a regulatory environment, where gender norms are reenacted and where sexual dangers and violence are rampant under specific conditions emanating from South Africa's structural, social, and economic inequalities manifesting in race/class tensions. She uses a poststructuralist feminist approach to draw attention to the ways girls and boys learn to perform gender differently in different kinds of contexts, for example, in and outside the classroom with peers of the same and opposite sex.

Hellen Venganai (this section) also picks up this discussion, exploring how and what young people (mainly women) learn about identity through sexuality and gender through forms of sex education in Southern Africa and how they are constructed as gendered and sexual beings. The article raises questions about continuities and discontinuities between the different forms of sexuality education (through "cultural" practices and discourses and through life orientation programs in schools) introduced in response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Drawing on the work of Foucault, Butler, and other poststructuralist feminists, Venganai explores how specific discourses (produced in and through cultural and educational practices) produce certain kinds of age and gender subjectivities in relation to sexuality.

Julie McLeod (this section) also works from a poststructural perspective, but contests claims that discourse constructs identity. She defines this as a kind of "discourse determinism." She develops the notion of the psychosocial subject through an examination of intergenerational relations between mothers and daughters from two extended case studies drawn from Australian research. This research explores the interplay of both social and psychic dimensions of identity (Walkerdine et al. 2001; Hollway and Jefferson 2001). Through a discussion of young women and the intersecting factors that shape gender as embodied subjectivity, she notes that subjectivity is not simply a sociological or discursive category and psychological aspects and unconscious processes also demand attention.

Identity Politics

"Identity politics" is another key strand of discussion and debate related to the concept of identity in youth and childhood studies. "Identity politics" politicizes difference and experience based on identity categories in line with gender, race and ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation in particular. "Identity politics" often relates specifically to activism and advocacy for the specific experience of different groups to be acknowledged. According to Bernstein, the term was first used by disability activists in an effort to transform self and societal perspectives of those with disabilities (Bernstein 2005). The term is used broadly across social sciences and humanities and in myriad contexts in relation to multiculturalism; feminism and the women's movement; civil rights; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer and intersex (LGBTQI) rights. It is also used in regard to often violent

ethnic and nationalist conflict in postcolonial Africa, for example (Dlamini 2005), as well as with the events of the Arab Spring and Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Much research focuses on identity politics in terms of “the activism engaged in by status-based social movements” (Bernstein 2005, p. 48). In the field of youth studies, discussions of identity politics also tend to organize around discussions of subcultural affiliations (Bennett 2000; Morgan and Warren 2011).

Claims for recognition of difference continue being important for both young and older people under shared banners such as LGBTQI – people whose rights for self-expression are continuously and seriously encroached in some countries. As Crenshaw argues, “this process of recognizing as social and systemic what was formerly perceived as isolated and individual has also characterized the identity politics of African Americans, other people of color, and gays and lesbians, among others” (Crenshaw 1991, p. 1241). Discussions about identity politics are underpinned by very different theoretical perspectives and understandings of the relationship between experience, culture, identity, politics, and power (Bernstein 2005). Many of the difficulties and problematics identified with the term relate to its use as an analytical tool (Bernstein 2005; Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Brubaker and Cooper argue that identity categories are “constitutive” rather than reflecting social reality:

Activists of identity politics deploy the language of bounded groupness not because it reflects social reality, but precisely because groupness is ambiguous and contested. Their groupist rhetoric has a performative, constitutive dimension, contributing, when it is successful, to the making of the groups it invokes. (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, pp. 31–32)

Some have cautioned that a problematic consequence of identity politics logic is that group identities and their boundaries may be asserted, reified, and simplified which has the impact of creating further new divisions (Fraser 2000; Youdell 2011). Others raise concerns around the potential for identification based on such categories to be seen as “essential” and fixed with reference to one particular biological characteristic, ignoring the diversity and inconsistencies regarding identity. In reference to women, Butler (1990), for example, argues that to promote their interests as a special group promotes binary thinking about men and women and prevents more fluid manifestations of gender.

Issues of difference, specificity, and equity also center on the conceptualizations of the body in relation to identity. Much feminist work in particular has advanced critical frameworks to assist understandings of the racial and sexual specificity of bodies and identities (see Grosz 1994). There are tensions between feminist critiques of biological essentialism and poststructural accounts which highlight non-essential dimensions of identity and experience regarding identity politics. Put simply, this debate centers on whether there is anything “fundamental” or natural about the body and identity or whether identity categories such as “man,” “woman,” “black,” or “white” are social constructions. One of the key moves of feminism was to deconstruct the idea that the female body is wholly “natural,” because such understandings also served to naturalize inequality based on the body and sexual difference (Young 2005). Numerous others however insist that identity categories

related to bodily differences such as sex, race, or ability are important in enabling the specificity and inequality of different social positions and identities to be acknowledged for political purposes (Crenshaw 1991; Davis 2007). For example, attempts to move away from dualistic and “natural” accounts of the sexed and gendered body have been particularly problematic and controversial for some feminist scholars because it is seen to “take the specificity of women away from women” (Driscoll 2002, p. 21 cited in Coffey 2013; Davis 2007).

Youdell (2011, p. 23) suggests that poststructural and deconstructionist theorizations that focus on identifications instead of identities and on “how categories themselves are constituted, how they relate to each other, how these constitutions are made in hierarchical relations and how these relations are implicated in creating intersecting inequalities” may be a useful way forward. Fraser (2000), in turn, has stated that politics of recognition and specificity should not be reduced to identity. She calls for “alternative politics of recognition, a *non-identitarian* [italics original] politics that can remedy misrecognition without encouraging displacement and reification” (Fraser 2000, p. 120).

This section has explored some of the theoretical complexities and different perspectives underpinning identity politics. Questions around how to retain a focus on difference as a mode of understanding and positioning without reducing differences to an ontological level of “natural” or “inherent” remain an ongoing issue related to identity politics as an analytical category. Brubaker and Cooper (2000) argue that although it may be too simplistic to understand identity categories as “bounded and solidary,” identity can still be mobilized as a useful and legitimate political tool. The role of identity in movements for social change is an important component of broader empirical and theoretical perspectives on identity.

Authors in this section discuss identity in relation to gender, sexuality, and place. Below, we develop a discussion of social class and the role of family as important components in the formation of young people’s identities.

Identity and Social Class

The discussions around young people and social class have evolved from studies of young people’s lives as material experiences of their class background to claims that the social class of a young person’s parents no longer defines a young person’s experience or opportunities (see Griffin 2011 on changing focuses of youth culture studies in Britain). From a Marxist point of view, class structure can be argued as having no relevance in the lives of young people since they do not own means of production and – particularly in western countries – they do not have to sell their labor power. Similarly, it is argued that classifying young people by their skills or education is not relevant either since most of them are only acquiring their educational qualifications. However, young people continue to be linked to the class structure via their parents and family background, though this may take new forms. Family remains a key channel for the transmission of resources and a crucial site for class reproduction (Crompton 2006; Heath et al. 2010; Thomson 1993/2005;

Stokes 2012). Ball (2003) therefore defines class as a learned position, an identity, and a lifestyle that provides a set of perspectives on the social world. From this definition, there is clearly a case to be made for the continuation of social class as a key mode of analysis related to young people and identity.

There are distinctions between “materialist” and “culturalist” accounts of class reproduction within families (Crompton 2006; Atkinson 2012). For example, those emphasizing economic aspects argue that poorer parents have to calculate costs and benefits of education more carefully and refrain from choosing ambitious educational options (Goldthorpe 2010), while the middle classes have gained positional advantage through accessing the education market (Ball 2003). Those highlighting cultural aspects (e.g., Reay 2000; Skeggs 2004) seek answers to class reproduction using theories relating to different forms of capitals (e.g., social capital). Much of this theoretical understanding is inspired by the work of Bourdieu who developed a concept of capital that included economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital to explore the reproduction of inequality within society (Bourdieu et al. 1994). According to Crompton (2006), both materialist and culturalist accounts can be criticized in relation to their descriptive and tautological nature as well as on their inability to identify sources of change. However, to understand class reproduction and the transmission of economic and cultural capital, both mechanisms have to be taken into account (Crompton 2006).

Studies of social class have moved from understanding class as a rigid, fixed, and given category defined in economic terms only towards exploring how class positions are ambiguous, dynamically (re)produced, constituted, and contested through cultural and moral valuations (e.g., Skeggs 1997, 2004). The shift has meant letting go of the “romantic baggage” of collective class consciousness and focusing more on class identity as a form of individualized awareness (Savage et al. 2001). This awareness can be seen as contributing to the making of class and class differences in contexts such as the educational system (Reay 2005). Young people have to deal with the sometimes narrow and predetermined identity positions and categorizations offered to them by the educational institutions. Skeggs (1997, 2005) states how young working-class women are subject to misrecognition by a middle-class gaze, positioned as matter out of place in educational contexts. These contexts may not enable young people to claim themselves alternative identity position, and they do not offer rhetorical spaces in which to speak and be heard in ways that do not keep them fixed in certain positions (c.f. Skeggs 2004).

While lifestyles have become individualized, social structure and class (along with gender, race and ethnicity, and place, among others) continue to be strong predictors of young people’s individual life chances and continue to shape young people’s educational opportunities and occupational outcomes (e.g., Ball et al. 2000; Dwyer and Wyn 2001; Furlong and Cartmel 1997). However, there are at least three factors that can further understanding of young people’s identities in relation to social class.

First, contemporary class identities are fundamentally ambivalent. The old divisions of working class, middle class, and upper class have blurred along with

the societal changes in working life and occupational structures. The blurring of these divisions has implications for young people. For instance, in Finland, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the notion that “we’re all middle class now” was presented as a universal device through which identity was constructed with middle class being linked to identification as “normal” and “ordinary” (Savage et al. 2001; Walkerdine et al. 2001). Further, some researchers have argued that identity politics have worked against class politics since struggles for the recognition of difference and denied identities related to gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and “race” have to a certain extent overshadowed alliances formed on the basis of class (Fraser 2000; Isin and Wood 1999).

A second factor that complicates traditional understandings of social class is in rhetoric used by young people, termed by Furlong and Cartmel (2007) as an “epistemological fallacy.” From this perspective, young people tend to see themselves as agents capable of shaping and controlling their own lives (as discussed previously through Beck’s (1992) concepts of individualization and the “choice biography”), seeking solutions on an individual rather than collective basis. As a result, class inequalities and structural constraints are made invisible (see also Dwyer and Wyn 2001). The kind of “can do” rhetoric related to the epistemological fallacy can thus be seen as a feature of an individualization process (Beck 1992) as well as a reflection of neoliberal discourses where young people are persuaded to believe they are able to make individualized choices. However, as others have argued, this rhetoric has to be accompanied by the requisite resources and opportunities in order to facilitate agency and control (Thomson et al. 2002, p. 351).

A third factor related to the need for new, complex understandings of class in relation to young peoples’ lives relates to the increased potential for change and social mobility. Family background remains significant for the aims and choices of young people, but depending on the openness and wealth of the society, there is some room for social mobility. Education is one of the keys to horizontal and upward mobility, and at certain transitional points within education, the idea of social mobility is intense and must be negotiated by young people. While the levels of education among subsequent generations have been rising (Teese et al. 2006; Wyn et al. 2008), there is also dispute about the use of higher education qualifications as a means to social mobility. In France, for example, an analysis of social generations depicts a generation of young people (*generation precaire*). Because of restrictive labor market policies that protect older working generations and make it impossible for the young to join the labor market, the young people are now middle class in terms of educational outcomes but are forming an underclass in regard to their socioeconomic status (Chauvel 2010).

Though social class cannot be generalized in any explicit way, it is clear that new complexities related to social class formations continue to be crucial for understanding young people’s identities. The discussion of class assists understandings of social structures and the individual who navigates those external reference points (Savage et al. 2001). Young people may not speak about themselves in terms of class, however, those who are lower in the social ladder are well aware of hierarchies and inequalities that affect their lives and diminish their opportunities.

New methods, such as the “social ladder” visual method, can assist discussions of material, social, and cultural differences in research (see Karvonen and Rahkonen 2011). Many researchers have argued that the ambivalence, denial, and dis-identification of class should not be taken at face value since it reveals the power of class, since even ambivalence itself can be seen as resulting from deeply “classed” structures of communication and identification (Griffin 2011; Savage et al. 2001; Skeggs 1997).

Young people construct their class identities in relation to others; to those in their close networks such as peers, family members, and other meaningful adults; as well as to those more distant points of reference (Skeggs 1997; Walkerdine et al. 2001). Much of the differentiation young people make in relation to their peers is related to such things as school motivation, youth cultures, or leisure. Even when class is not mentioned, these differences are often coded according to social class since different kinds of attributes are historically associated either to working class or middle class (Aapola et al. 2005; Skeggs 2005).

An example is the link between representations of wealth, class, and identity. Wealth is linked to a certain kind of style and (class) differences can be read from individual’s sense of style. While the wealthier are claimed as knowledgeable with restrained style, poorer girls are accused of being excessive in their representations of femininity (Skeggs 2004). Closely interlinked to the classed distinctions between excessive or restrained styles of girls is the valuation of female sexuality and the questions around sexual reputation. There is an abundance of literature demonstrating that earning a reputation of a “slag” is highly arbitrary and can be conceptualized rather as exercise of gendered power than as having much to do with actual sexual behavior of a girl (Aaltonen 2006; Kitzinger 1995; Lees 1993). Thus, a “slag” can be understood as a stigmatized identity that restricts the agency of girls and keeps them in their place (Goffman 1963) or as an act of misrecognition and an injury to one’s identity (Fraser 2000). In the process of making differentiations between acceptable and unacceptable (alleged) behavior of girls accused of being “slags,” middle-class girls have always had more say, positioning themselves as competent and knowledgeable in guarding one’s reputation. As Skeggs (1997) points out, “respectability is usually the concern of those who are not seen to have it” (p. 1).

Identity and the Family

Young people’s reliance on family resources is one of the significant factors they reveal as they go about the work of crafting class and social identity narratives. Reliance on family resources is heightened in a neoliberal economic environment in which responsibility for well-being is appropriated as an individual responsibility (Mizen 2002; Jamrozik 2001). Young people who are not able to access effective supports from their family are more likely to struggle, reinforcing the pattern of continuing inequalities in student outcomes (Chauvel 2010; Jones et al. 2004; Stokes 2012). Despite this Witz (1995) notes that in much educational research

on social class, families “appear like phantoms, clearly implicated in the intergenerational transmissions of social and economic advantage, and yet assuming a unitary status lacking in real social content” (p. 45).

Access to family resources is revealed in the futures that young people imagine and the way they access stories about those futures. Family relationships are one of the pivotal resources for young people as they craft their identities, and family members are often cited as a trusted source of information and emotional support in relation to career options (Stokes 2012; Higgins et al. 2008). Familial influence on decision making about education and in turn careers as a result of that education is part of a process of intergenerational class reproduction (Jones et al. 2004) as education is traditionally considered as one of the keys to horizontal and upward mobility.

While young people may initially insist that they make the decisions concerning their future career independently, they also acknowledge that the views and thoughts of their parents are important in their decision making (Green and White 2008). For many young people, this parental support is a positive influence with the young people’s interests, especially in the earlier years of secondary school, being related to what they have experienced either through family networks or extracurricular activities (Stokes 2012). This is a further example of intergenerational class reproduction with middle-class parents, particularly, using extracurricular activities in early childhood to develop appropriate social and class dispositions (Vincent and Ball 2007). McLeod (this section) explores intergenerational dynamics between mothers and daughters through a number of case studies of women (mothers and daughters) from lower socioeconomic areas. Intergenerational class reproduction played out quite differently here. Among the daughters there was a desire for differentiation from the mother figure across the generations, linked to dreams of escape – from the family, from the local area, and from emotional and social confinement. The daughters (like their mothers) wanted a better kind of life and wanted to make something of their lives. The mothers, too, wanted their daughters to have an adulthood that was fundamentally different in emotional and practical terms from their own. They wished for them security and happiness and wanted to avoid any generational repetition of poverty, job insecurity, or emotional distress.

In most western countries, the uptake of either an academic or vocational pathway is often closely related to identification with a particular class orientation defined by socioeconomic status (Polesel 2008; Teese and Wahlstab 2009). The separation of academic and vocational routes is often interpreted both by adults and young people as a dichotomy between “head” and “hand.” This dichotomous thinking and positioning of oneself as either bookish or clever with hands is used to negotiate class positions and to justify educational choices. Further, it can be argued to limit the imagination of young people, when it comes to feasible futures and their identity as a learner and a worker (Aaltonen 2012).

Young people’s decisions can be understood as pragmatic, grounded in culture, and bounded by “horizons of action” (Hodkinson et al. 1996). These bounded horizons of action, determined by structural factors such as class, ethnicity, and

gender, can then make pathways for certain young people appear “natural” and “seamless,” for example, which young people go to university, with there being little reflection on why the young person may be taking this direction (Higgins et al. 2008; Kehily and Pattman 2006). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, as identities are constantly being performed and being recognized by others within a preexisting set of norms, then they begin to appear natural and believable (Butler 1990; Youdell 2006).

Very different identity work can be recognized among young people who digress from the “natural” educational pathway. Studies on working-class students in higher education reveal how social class is present in their lives both socially and mentally generating hesitation, ambivalence, feelings of inadequacy, and doubts that they will be exposed as frauds, as not really belonging to the world of higher education. Respectively, the relations with their family may be affected by the negative attitudes of their parents towards academic learning resulting them feeling like a “guest” or a stranger in their own family (Käyhkö 2013; Reay 2005). An alternative picture of family acceptance and support is provided where the educational journey and expectations of middle-class young people are disrupted by the impact of well-being issues, lower than expected academic achievement, and financial affordability (Stokes 2012). While education is an important context that can either maintain or rework identities deriving from family background, these class-based identities cannot simply be changed or kept as a matter of one’s choice. Instead they have to be negotiated or adjusted according to the context.

Conclusions and Future Directions

This chapter has outlined some of the dominant understandings of identity as both a concept and a focus of study in childhood and youth studies. Each of the different approaches to understanding identity is useful in directing attention to different facets and aspects of the lives of children and young people. The chapter first provided an overview of prominent perspectives on identity from psychological and sociological traditions. A psychological perspective tends to focus on identity as an individual phenomenon that is developed primarily through childhood and young adulthood. Psychological perspectives can direct attention to the ways individuals’ particular traits and capacities develop and motivate behavior. In contrast, a sociological perspective draws attention to the centrality of social context for shaping young people’s identities. This perspective understands identity is continually redeveloped and renegotiated in response to changing and unpredictable social forces. Sociological understandings of identity direct attention to the role of power and social inequalities in the construction of identity. This perspective also explores that social context and constraints not of an individual’s choosing have bearing on the opportunities and identities that are available to young people. Sociological perspectives thus highlight that identities are formed through the social, historical, and cultural contexts that surround young people, and structural constraints impact most strongly on those who are marginalized or disadvantaged.

Poststructural theories of power and subjectivity have also contributed to sociological understandings of identity. This perspective outlines the ways that self-identity is often formed in a narrative and shaped by experience, events, imagination, significant others, and social forces. This perspective enables a focus on the ways children and young people produce and recognize their sense of self as natural and believable in relation to the complex social, cultural, and historical contexts that surround them.

Also discussed is the continuing debate around “identity politics.” There is tension between perspectives that see a need to identify inequalities that result from power and difference, and perspectives, concerned with identification based on such categories, that can make differences appear “essential” or fixed. This discussion of identity politics explored the different dimensions of the debate related to the concept of identity broadly and highlighted the importance of recognizing difference and inconsistencies regarding identity. This has implications for the ways identity and difference may be mobilized to advocate for children and young people.

Contemporary understandings of social class are also important in understanding how identity is formed and lived by children and youth. This was discussed in relation to three main factors: the ambivalence of class categories in contemporary times, the “epistemological fallacy” in which young people are less likely to recognize structural inequalities though they are as present as ever, and the impact of increased social mobility for understandings of social class. Young people’s reliance on family resources was also discussed as an integral factor in understanding contemporary class arrangements and the construction of identity. It has been argued that although class has become an ambiguous category, it is as important as ever to continue to explore the ways privilege and inequality operate in relation to blurred class divisions.

From a sociological perspective, inequalities and privileges related to class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, and place are understood to shape the identities of children and youth. The ways inequalities impact on possibilities for identity and who young people can become will remain a central focus for the fields of childhood and youth studies.

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Cross-References

- ▶ [Approaches to Understanding Youth Well-Being](#)
- ▶ [Belief, Not Religion: Youth Negotiations of Religious Identity in Canada](#)
- ▶ [“Black Neighborhoods” and “Race,” Placed Identities in Youth Transition to Adulthoods](#)
- ▶ [Belonging in Troubling Times: Considerations from the Vantage Point of Arab American Immigrant Youth](#)
- ▶ [Bodies In and Out of Place: Schooling and the Production of Gender Identities Through Embodied Experience](#)

- ▶ Bodies: Corporeality and Embodiment in Childhood and Youth Studies
- ▶ Critical Moments? The Importance of Timing in Young People's Narratives of Transition
- ▶ Current Debates in Social Justice and Youth Studies
- ▶ Deconstructing Discourses to Rupture Fairytales of the "Ideal" Childhood
- ▶ Indigenous Girls, Social Justice, and Schooling: Addressing Issues of Disadvantage
- ▶ Indigenous Youth, Nationhood, and the Politics of Belonging
- ▶ Juvenile Chronotopes: Space, Time, and Youth
- ▶ Participating as Young Citizens in Diverse Communities
- ▶ Reconsidering Youth Well-Being as Fluid and Relational: A Dynamic Process at the Intersection of Their Physical and Social Geographies
- ▶ Responding Effectively to Support the Mental Health and Well-Being of Young People
- ▶ Rhythms and Flow. Timing and Spacing the Digitally Mediated Everyday
- ▶ Space and Place in Studies of Childhood and Youth
- ▶ Spirituality, Religion, and Youth: An Introduction
- ▶ Storing Our Lives of Now: The Pluritemporal Memories of Rural Youth Identity and Place
- ▶ The Ambivalent Implications of Strong Belonging for Young People Living in Poor Neighborhoods
- ▶ The Promises of Empowered Girls
- ▶ Theorizing Subjectivity and Feminine Embodiment: Feminist Approaches and Debates
- ▶ Time and Space in Youth Studies
- ▶ We Need to Talk About Learning: Dialogue and Learning Amongst South African Youth
- ▶ Who's Learning or Whose Learning? Critical Perspectives on the Idea Youth-Led Policy-Making Related to Gender-Based Violence in a South African Classroom
- ▶ Young People and Religion and Spirituality in Europe: A Complex Picture
- ▶ Young People and Social Class in the United Kingdom
- ▶ Young People, Pleasure, and the Normalization of Pornography: Sexual Health and Well-Being in a Time of Proliferation?
- ▶ Youth and Religion in East and Southeast Asia
- ▶ Youth Experience of Urban Inequality: Space, Class, and Gender in Mexico
- ▶ Youth, Consumption, and Creativity on Australia's Gold Coast

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Abstract

What young school-going learners learn about and how they participate in formal and informal gendered and sexual cultures has received little attention in the literature on schooling, gender, sexuality, and education in South Africa. This chapter focuses on social processes through which the early learning of gender manifests in the early years of South African schooling. By drawing on the new sociology of childhood, the chapter argues that young children are active gendered agents, expressing and asserting themselves as boys and girls. Boys and girls learn to negotiate their identities within material, discursive, and cultural contexts. Of concern are the ways in which the learning of gender is embedded within unequal relations of power and through which male power is exercised. Addressing the learning of gender in the early years is important if gender power inequalities are to be reconstructed in ways that do not entail marginalization and violence.

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Introduction

When children come to school, they have already embarked upon the lifelong project of learning gender, having acquired various meanings and practices in their homes, neighborhoods, and families that regulate an understanding of a recognizable gender identity. Emerging in the last three decades or so are a range of feminist studies investigating the ways in which the early years of primary schooling are highly charged gendered environments where boys and girls learn to position themselves as “correctly” gendered (Davies 1993; Thorne 1993; Francis 1998; MacNaughton 2000; Paechter 2007). They do so as active gendered agents. Feminist researchers have argued that while children are situated in contexts not of their own making, they are able to reflect and act on their situations according to the available cultural resources within the context (Paechter 2007). As active gendered agents, children are not simply dupes of the social system, but they are self-reflexive. They act and express ideas in ways that may challenge, accommodate, and adjust dominant norms regarding gender.

They learn to position themselves as boys and girls and in doing so reach back to their families, homes, and communities as they learn and make sense of gender in school. The micro-social frameworks set up in the school provide opportunities for boys and girls to practice, perform, and learn gender as they shape and are shaped by their broader social environments. Butler (1990) has argued that gender, like sexuality, is a performance. Despite its appearance of solidity, Butler posits that gender identity is a “performance” rather than being individually possessed. Gender is repeatedly performed through the routine practices of everyday social and cultural life, but rather than a “fixed” identity, gender comes into being through daily performances and such performances are not automatically repeated but change and alter violating gender normative behavior. The normalcy is powerful, and despite the violations of gender norms, girls and boys often position themselves in ways that are practiced in accordance to these norms.

This chapter will explore gender as a salient feature of schooling in the early years focusing in two areas: masculinity and sexual dangers. Specifically, it will look at South African experiences of gendering of early childhood, both inside and outside the classroom as it focuses on the learning of masculinity and sexual dangers.

Theoretical Approaches to Gender and Primary Schooling

In her book *Shards of Glass: Children Reading and Writing Beyond Gendered Identities*, Bronwyn Davies (1993) argues that learning gender is discursively constructed:

As children learn the discursive practices of their society, they learn to position themselves correctly as male or female, since that is what is required of them to have a recognisable identity within the existing social order... Not to do so, in fact to resist, can lead to a perception of oneself as a social failure... (Davies 1989)

The early years of the primary school provides an important social framework where boys and girls interact with each other and with their teachers as they play out, perform, and enact masculinities and femininities. In performing and practicing gender, they consolidate, challenge, and reproduce gender norms in the school. In doing so, boys and girls show themselves up as active subjects positioning themselves as correctly male and female extending and elaborating upon the discursive practices through which they learn gender, and such learning is integral to making gender. Following Butler's (1990) idea that gender is a performance, the making of gender is based on the assumption that gender is not fixed but has to be constantly in the making. Children's subjective worlds are intricately related to power and systems of knowledge, and their learning of gender cannot stand outside these systems of power and knowledge. Learning gender is not about dualistic understanding of power in terms of male domination and female subordination. The problem with a dualistic understanding of power is that men and boys are regarded as possessing exclusive power over passive and docile girls and women. This understanding of power has been criticized by feminist research in early childhood (Blaise 2005; MacNaughton). Drawing from the work of Foucault (1976), feminist researchers have problematized power and agency, showing how very young children are capable of acting and expressing agency in ways that are far more complex than simple dualistic assumptions. From a Foucauldian perspective, power and agency cannot be viewed as repressive to girls and power for boys. Rather as Foucault (1976) suggests, power is productive and shifting through weblike relations located within different institutions. Such power has material, symbolic, and cultural effects and is never localized and where people can act, resist, and adapt as they can reproduce relations of oppression. In applying these ideas to the study of gender and childhood, while boys and girls are expected to conduct themselves as gendered beings within asymmetrical relations of power, they do so in highly fluid and unstable ways. The forms of power/knowledge position particular kinds of subjects, and they put pressure on boys and girls to adopt particular identities in order to avoid the failure to meet up with social expectations that prescribe gender roles and identities for boys and girls. The practice and performance of gender has powerful implications for pedagogy in the early years of schooling especially when these ideas draw from highly unequal gender relations.

The idea that children are capable gendered agents is often made invisible by dominant understandings of learning, underpinned developmental theories of learning where age and stage of development are expected to correlate with abstract issues like gender. Glenda MacNaughton (2000), in her book *Rethinking Gender in Early Childhood Education*, comprehensively outlines the different gender and feminist theories ranging from essentialist sex role theories and gender socialization to feminist poststructuralism providing insightful information about the discursive construction of gender and repudiating outdated ideas about children's learning of and their investments in gender. These elaborate discussions of different theories are not rehearsed in this chapter. Briefly, however, sex role and gender socialization and development theories, which continue to have dominance in early

childhood sectors, construct children as passive recipients of their biology and received knowledge, as powerless and unprotesting. This dominant idea that children learn gender as passive recipients of society has been challenged by feminist scholars working within the sociology of childhood studies. Ideas based on biology, development, and socialization is now inadequate to understand the gendering processes that go on inside schools and classrooms.

Feminist poststructuralist theories using the work of Foucault have made the greatest impact on the field of gender and early childhood (MacNaughton 2000). Moving beyond sex role theories, and theories of reproduction that often assume an essentialist characteristic in boys and girls, poststructuralist theories offer new ways of understanding children's learning of gender as a discursive construction suggesting that there is a range of subject positions that may be occupied in contradictory discourses (Davies 1993; Thorne 1993; MacNaughton 2000; Blaise 2005; Renold 2005; Paechter 2007; Connolly 2004; Jones 1996; Jordan 1995; Tobin 1997; Epstein and Johnson 1998; Francis 1998; Yelland 1998; Skelton 2001; Grieshaber and Cannella 2001; Paechter 2007). The idea that children are active social agents, occupying a range of positions, who exercise agency, albeit within varied patterns of constraint, is part of the development of work in the 1990s under the (then) new sociology of childhood studies (Thorne 1993; James et al. 1998). Poststructuralist feminists such as Davies (1993), MacNaughton (2000) and Thorne (1993), for instance, focus on how children learn, negotiate, construct, and perform gender in particular contexts. This exemplifies the new sociology of childhood paradigm with its focus on critical empathy that enables an understanding of how boys and girls construct their social worlds.

In recognizing primary schools as sites that actively construct gender identities, Thorne (1993, p. 199) argues against the ideas of gender as static and ahistorical, postulating that "power is central to the social relations of gender." In learning gender, children's knowledge of and their investments in being a boy and being a girl are intricately related to power and to versions of masculinities and femininities which are often rooted in unequal gender relations. Learning gender does not simply involve a passive absorption of social roles but a concern also to assert oneself as male or female in certain ways. In learning gender, boys and girls also learn what appropriate behavior is and learn to invest in these dominant ideas about gender. Learning also involves the active rejection of behavior that does not fit in with dominant ideas about gender.

Unlike the West however, the focus in South Africa, with a few exceptions (Bhana 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2013), has failed to bring young children into sociological thought, as active gendered agents. While there has been an expansion of research of gender and secondary schooling in the country (Morrell 1998; Morrell et al. 2009; Bhana and Anderson 2013), studies that focus on gender issues in the early years are rare (Bhana 2003). The research in gender and learning in secondary schooling reflects the heightened concerns about gender and sexual violence in the country, the role of men and boys in the perpetration of violence and the scourge of HIV which has resulted in a crisis for

young women between the ages of 15 and 24 years old despite global evidence of a decline in infection (UNAIDS 2013). More than a decade ago, the Human Rights Watch (2001) noted the scourge of gender and sexual violence in South African schools and the particular sexual vulnerabilities faced by girls in relation to male teachers and male peers. Since then, attempts to address gender and sexual violence have been incorporated into life orientation programs emphasizing gender-equitable relationships and prevention of HIV. In research, the focus on gender has been within a relational dimension with both Morrell (1998) and Bhana (2005) adopting a relational understanding of gender in South African schooling. Taking a relational understanding of gender means connecting ways about learning to be male with constructions of femininity and vice versa.

Gender relational theory, as Connell (2012) elucidates, pays attention to a multiple dimension of power embedded within economic, cultural, and symbolic contexts, both within and across various social institutions. Within gender relational theory, the hierarchical relations between men and women are constituted within gender as a social structure. Gender relational theory explores the ways in which the social practices adjust and shape gender as a social structure. Secondary school research has expanded to consider boys and masculinity in relation to gender and sexual violence noting the social and political economy and the context specific manifestations of violent masculinities (Morrell 1998). The research base on gender and early childhood is still limited in South Africa, with a few exceptions. Adopting a gender relational approach, much of Bhana's (2003, 2005, 2009) work suggests how boys and girls between the ages of 6 and 9 construct relations of masculinity and femininity and how the social and symbolic relations of power impact upon, as children too impact the meaning of gender. Young children are active agents with capabilities to make meaning of gender and sexuality, and the school and the classroom are important places where such meanings are negotiated, mediated, rejected, and in this process learnt.

Preventing Social Failure: Regulating Masculinity in Early Childhood

Feminist ethnographies of primary schools have argued that the school environment is an important social and cultural site where boys and girls produce and reproduce gendered norms and sexual meanings and power relations (Thorne 1993; Renold 2005; Swain 2005; Skelton 2001; Paechter 2007; Keddie 2003; Skelton 2001). Research in the West shows that girls remain marginalized both in and outside of the classroom both by male peers and teachers (Francis 1998). In research conducted in South Africa, young boys use spaces within the classroom both within the formal and informal curriculum as key sites for the gendered display of hegemonic forms of masculinity and the subordination of alternatives and femininities. The focus on hegemonic masculinity particularly in secondary schools has been a research concern in South Africa.

Hegemonic masculinity is a mode of masculinity that at any one point is “culturally exalted.” (Connell 1995; Swain). This concept has been used in research in South African schools and allows the unbalanced nature of gendered power relations in children’s lives to be explored as well as recognizing that the dominant exalted position has to be constantly won (Skelton 2001). Kenway and Fitzclarence (1997, p. 87) suggest that:

Masculinity may be thought of as a social construction about what it means to be male in certain times and places. Masculinity is constructed by various meaning making practices or systems of representations in various social settings. . . These settings and their discourses on masculinity offer a range of ways of being male but separately and together privilege some as superior.

The ideal hegemonic and superior pattern is authoritative, aggressive, heterosexual, brave, adventurous, assertive, strong, and competitive and possesses public knowledge (Skelton 1997). This hegemonic pattern is celebrated as an ideal for boys. There is no one hegemonic pattern although all patterns draw upon, exaggerate, modify, and distort the hegemonic patterns of conduct. Not all boys embody the hegemonic pattern, but the hierarchy is an important means through which particular kinds of identities are established. Conflict among boys and with girls often involves homophobic and misogynist taunts establishing patterns of hierarchy and exclusion for both boys and girls. Bhana’s study of predominantly white middle-class boys aged 7 and 8 finds that “ruggerbugger” masculinity based on hegemonic patterns produces relations of domination and subordination in relation to sport.

Bhana’s (2008) study of boys in different social/racial contexts with wide variation in economic conditions shows how sport plays a key role in young masculinities and in the denigration of weak boys and girls and through the constant policing of gender identities. Sport is a key element in the development of the hierarchical organization of masculinities, which is produced within a dynamic of competition and differentiation and policed through gender and racial polarizations (Frosh et al. 2002). In the vastly different primary schools with one poor and the other elite, both black and white boys invest in and celebrate toughness and endurance and encourage the language of domination. The social dynamics among boys are potent. In constructing and regulating restrictive understandings of masculinity, the male body is mobilized around the capacity to signify aggression and physical domination and underpinned by subordination and marginalization of other masculinities and femininities – constructed as “weakest links.” Bhana’s study shows further that not only does sport make available an ideological position of domination over other boys and girls, but boys’ attitudes toward sport are inextricably linked with their experiences of social and cultural differences in South Africa with involvement with soccer (associated with black) and rugby (associated with white) affect how boys see themselves and others.

As far as teachers are concerned, Bhana’s (2003) work illustrates how the boys’ patterns of behavior are normalized by deploying familiar taken-for-granted assumptions about gender and young children (see MacNaughton 2000). Teachers are unaware of how they are implicated in producing gendered differences between

learners. Though they respond to boys and girls differently, they imagine that this simply reflects innate and essential differences between boys and girls.

While teachers attempt to homogenize boys' experiences under the "boys will be boys" rubric, Bhana's (2009) work finds a range of masculinities within the early years of the primary school. Teachers, however, contribute to gender inequalities by legitimizing hegemonic masculine values by reinforcing that boys are naturally aggressive and girls passive.

Sexual Dangers

Feminist research in South Africa has highlighted the school as a dangerous social site in which teachers and male peers often produce the school as a dangerous sexual zone particularly in the high school (Bhana 2012; Human Rights Watch 2001). Bhana's research with young children aged between 6 and 9 has examined the ways in which sexual harassment, name calling, and physical violence is a routine feature of school life. Such forms, Bhana has argued, have contextual specificity and are a cause and consequence of the histories of inequalities and violence in South Africa. However, sexual harassment was also evident in middle-class schools. Bhana (2013) shows how girls were critical of boys who swear:

Lisa: Ross and Oliver like Stacy but Stacy likes Oliver better cos Ross swears. He said the 'f' word to Elizabeth. He also said the 'f' ball. . .

Bhana shows that boys were often named as bullies by girls and girls rejected boys who verbally harassed them or swore but also recognized their vulnerability within patriarchal conditions.

Sexual harassment and gender violence was exacerbated in contexts of massive social distress. How young children live gender in schools draws attention to broader gender arrangements within a context that is characterized by poverty and violence. Bhana (2005) identified *tsotsi* masculinity as a hegemonic form aligned to dominant patterns of aggression and violence as a means to maintain a sense of status and through such enactments gain material dividends. In this study, boys' patterns of violence and the effects on other boys and girls were explained through the formations of masculinity which reflected the social organization of the broader context. While not all boys in Bhana's study were violent, it was girls who suffered severely as the following illustrates:

Me: Do you like boys? . . .

Eli: I am scared of them. . . They are rough. . . They hit. I am scared of him [pointing to Spesihle]. I am scared that he is going to hit me. I'm scared of hitting.

Within this school setting, boys' interaction with girls was based on the demonstration of power over girls and included the use of the body to attack and get rewards. The following field notes taken during the play break demonstrate how some boys draw on violent masculinity thus perpetuating unequal relations of power:

Thoko had bought a 50c packet of chips and a vetkoek [cake]. Sifiso demanded the vetkoek. Bullying. Thoko refused. Sifiso pushed her, his voice raised. She refused. He slapped her. She hit him back and ran from him. He went after her and grabbed and hit her again before he ran off with the vetkoek.

In the context of food insecurity, violent social relations remain an important means to get rewards. Through the enactment of violence, Sifiso learns that vetkoeks or other resources will come to him and will continue to come to him through the enactment of violence. There were other means to demonstrate power over girls and had violent effects. For instance, power over girls was demonstrated by dominating conversations between boys and girls. Girls were expected to show deference:

Me: Why don't you like girls, Andile?

Andile: Girls are rude. They are funny. The girls try to impress the teacher and I hit them.

Being rude and talking too much, and the overall degree of freedom that talking too much and being rude represent, must be understood as a challenge to male entitlement and to the power males feel that they are entitled to. Male violence is often seen as a desperate attempt to prove maleness. In the context of poverty, history of apartheid legacies, dislocated family structures, and high rates of gender violence in the country, young boys see violence as readily available and are caught up in violence.

Conclusion and Future Directions

This chapter has focused on two areas of gender and childhood: masculinities and sexual dangers. While the chapter does not wish to frame girls as victims of boys' conduct, the focus has centered on how gender is learnt and negotiated. They are not simply reenacted. A poststructuralist feminist approach has drawn attention to the ways girls and boys learn to perform gender differently in different kinds of contexts, for example, in and outside the classroom with peers of the same and opposite sex. The early years of primary schooling is a regulatory environment, where gender norms are reenacted and where sexual dangers and violence are rampant under specific conditions emanating from South Africa's structural, social, and economic inequalities manifesting in race/class tensions.

It is particularly disturbing to note the early manifestations of gender inequalities across social and cultural contexts where male power is forged with denigrating and unequal effects for girls. Sexual harassment is enacted and learnt from the early years with negative effects for girls but also for young boys who begin to manufacture ideas about sexual entitlements and the subordination of girls. In the context of deep poverty and structural inequalities, the manifestation of physical violence and fear as well as the restrictions placed on girls' agency is troubling.

Such findings that bring attention to the need to focus on learning and negotiating versions of gender in the early years of schooling are especially significant in

the context of limited research and interventions. A focus on teachers and their restrictive understandings of learning and performing gender must be factored to challenge gender inequalities. While the South African government has much more to do in relation to poverty alleviation and addressing structural and persistent economic and racial inequalities, interventions in the early years must begin to focus heavily on gender and the construction of masculinities which produce toxic environments for boys and girls.

Cross-References

- ▶ [The Promises of Empowered Girls](#)
- ▶ [Theorizing Subjectivity and Feminine Embodiment: Feminist Approaches and Debates](#)
- ▶ [Thinking About Childhood and Youth](#)

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The Gendering and Sexualization of Young Women Through Sex Educational Practices and Discourses in Southern Africa

20

Hellen Venganai

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Abstract

The article explores how and what young people (mainly women) learn about identity through sexuality and gender through forms of sex education in Southern Africa and how they are constructed as gendered and sexual beings. The article focuses on sexuality education in the form of “cultural” or “traditional” sexual practices and as it is taught in schools in Southern Africa both historically and in contemporary times. It examines how forms of sexuality education produce specific discourses which influence and constrain the ways girls and boys learn, think about, and experience sexual identities as well as gender. In critically reviewing this literature, the article draws mainly on research informed by the work of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and other poststructuralist

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feminists, which explores how specific kinds of discourses (produced in and through cultural and educational practices) produce certain kinds of age and gender subjectivities in relation to sexuality. Influenced by poststructuralist feminism, the article argues for ways of conceptualizing sexuality not as a biological given which itself produces predictable urges or desires which are then addressed through forms of sexuality education.

Introduction

Sexuality as another key aspect of identity construction has often in the past been linked only to adulthood (Pattman and Chege 2003; Fischer 2006). However in Southern Africa in recent years, largely influenced by HIV/AIDS research and access to the western media (see Posel 2004), there has been a growing recognition that children and young people are also sexual beings (Pattman 2005) who are active agents in the construction of their individual identities albeit in constrained environments (MacNaughton 2000). This chapter explores what and how young women (and young men) learn about identity construction in relation to sexuality and gender within and outside the context of formal sex education institutions in Southern Africa. More specifically it focuses on the contributions to an understanding of identifications with reference to researchers who have studied (1) “cultural” or “traditional” sexual practices and (2) sex education as taught in schools in Southern Africa historically and in contemporary times. The article focuses on research informed by Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and other poststructuralist feminists, which explores how specific kinds of age and gender subjectivities and gendered identities are produced through discourse in cultural and educational institutions and practices.

What Is Identity and How Are Gendered and Social Identities Produced, Negotiated, and Learned?

Researching identity remains an unstable terrain where the use of the concept “identity” in its singular form continues to be problematized (*see* Butler 1990). This is because, as suggested by Stuart Hall (1996, p. 1), there is no “integral, originary and unified identity.” Central to Hall’s argument is the idea that the notion of “identity” is limiting in that it gives an impression of coherence and homogeneity in social organization, hence the adoption of the plural “identities” in recent studies on identity formation as a way of acknowledging individual differences within groups, cultures, and sexualities. This has been particularly articulated in poststructuralist perspectives on identity who argue that multiple identities exist and such they should not be studied and analyzed in isolation. As Rob (2007) who looked at identity construction among young men in the United Kingdom argues, gender identities, for instance, cannot be fully understood if analyzed in isolation since they are also intrinsically linked to other versions of social identity such as

ethnicity, sexuality, and class. Similarly, Hall (1996) argues that contemporary theorization of identities should take into account social transformations that have occurred through modernity, globalization, and migration since these elements challenge the simplistic traditional understandings of identity formations. Therefore, “identity” can no longer be understood as unidirectional and neither can it continue to be perceived as static. In this regard, Hall (1996, p. 2) adopts the term “identification” rather than “identity” in articulating that identity construction is an ongoing process produced through specific discursive practices. Discourse as it relates to identities and how these are constructed relationally to gender and sexuality is the overarching theme of this chapter.

The idea that sexuality and identity are social constructions rooted in historical, cultural, and social contexts (Lesch and Anthony 2007; Tolman et al. 2003; Irvine 2003; Parker 2009) conflicts with common presumptions that it is rooted in nature and instinctual, and in critiquing these, the article draws on the work of Foucault who focuses on how identities in relation to sexuality are constructed through particular dominant discourses in different historical contexts. According to Foucault, discourses are not descriptive but productive and normative; discourses about sexuality do not describe an “essence” rooted in biology which females and males possess but construct sexuality in normative and pejorative ways. Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* traces how different discourses about sexuality become institutionalized and produce gendered subjectivities inscribed in relations of power (Foucault 1978). While emphasizing the role played by institutional power in producing dominant discourses, Foucault argues that human beings are not passive subjects who simply internalize and reproduce dominant discursive norms and values, but show agency by negotiating their identities produced from these discursive constructions even in ways that challenge these dominant identity constructions (Sawicki 1991; see also Stainton Rogers 2003).

In this sense identification through sexuality, though constrained by dominant discourses, also involves agency, and this entails, as poststructuralist feminist writers like Judith Butler have argued, learning to “do” or “perform” gendered identities in everyday social contexts in institutions such as schools and families. Through repetition, Butler (1988) argues, gendered performances appear to reflect essential gender characteristics which inhere in males and females, and this is reinforced through a tendency to see and construct sex as biological, rather than social. Butler and other poststructuralist feminist writers in education like Glenda MacNaughton (2000) are critical of versions of feminism which draw on versions of *social learning theory* which conceptualizes gender as social and learned through institutionalized processes of socialization while rendering sex biological and unlearned. Such an approach which has been enormously influential in the development of sex education does not address how sex operates as a key medium through which people construct their gendered identities (MacNaughton 2000). She further argues that this “sponge model of identity formation” fails to engage with the ways institutionalized forms of sex education are implicated in the production of gendered and sexualized subjects and it reifies the social and cultural

in ways which fail to engage with the agency of young women in processes of learning about their own identities in relation to gender and sexuality (MacNaughton 2000, p. 19).

Poststructuralist feminists further problematize the essentialist categorizing of “women” as a homogenous category while also challenging feminist perspectives that project women as essentially passive (*see* Mohanty 1988; Butler 1988). They further see gender and identity as fluid concepts in that they play out differently when they intersect with identification markers such as race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality (Butler 1990). Since gender is constructed relationally (Vance 1991), the chapter, while focusing on young women, also explores how young men’s identities are constructed in relation to those of young women with regards to sexuality. Particularly, it examines how forms of sex education affect, constrain, and influence the ways girls and boys learn, think about, and experience gendered identifications.

Historical Accounts of the Construction of Young Women, Gender, and Sexuality in Missionary Schools in Zimbabwe

Before addressing how young women in contemporary Southern Africa construct their identities, it is imperative to give a historical account of identity formation in the colonial era in order to show the role that missionary schools contributed in discursively framing African women’s (as well as men’s) “ideal” identities and sexualities. The work by Elizabeth Schmidt (1992), who explored the creation of customary law in colonial Zimbabwe and missionary education for Shona girls and how that was influential in the constructing of African femininity, provides a thought-provoking account of the centrality of institutions in producing racial and gendered identities through discourse. Schmidt (1992) observes how sexuality, especially that of the native black Zimbabwean woman, was constantly policed during colonialism (*see also* Stoler 1989) in similar ways to apartheid South Africa (Posel 2004). African women were constructed by both missionaries and colonial administrators not only as oversexed but uncontrollable which made them “principal offenders” in cases of adultery (Schmidt 1992, p. 100). As Schmidt further highlights, so powerful were these discursive constructions that repressive laws were introduced notably the Natives Adultery Punishment Ordinance which criminalized adultery committed between African men with married women in particular. This meant that African men were constructed as free agents to engage in multiple heterosexual sex regardless of their marital status as long as it was not with married African women. The constraining of married African women’s sexuality in particular had less to do with genuine concerns over rising infidelity but more to do with colonial government wanting to retain African male labor by assuring these laborers that their wives remain faithful even in their absence (Schmidt 1992).

With regard to colonial missionary education, the classroom was already a gendered space because boys and girls were taught different subjects which

reinforced their socially subscribed roles. Schmidt (1992, p. 122) documents how boys from an early age were taught how to be “breadwinners, household heads, and figures of authority” yet girls were taught about motherly roles including how to cook, how to maintain a clean home, and how to be good mothers and good wives. In ensuring that girls remained true to these expectations, missionaries and colonial administrators tried by all means to offer them only elementary education while boys would progress to higher grades (Schmidt 1992). In essence these ways of educating young boys and girls worked to construct what they considered ideal African masculinity and femininity. Feminine identities, as argued by Stainton Rogers (2003, p. 255), are rarely constituted outside their sexuality and biology, in the process rendering them “walking wombs,” a patriarchal position that continues to be challenged by other feminists. Missionary colonial education was also instrumental in creating and reinforcing gendered and docile bodies (in boys and men) through teaching that encouraged hard work and obedience (Schmidt 1992) to ensure a constant supply of a disciplined workforce. In Schmidt’s work, one can observe how colonizers constructed themselves as possessing superior identities to those of the natives. However, as Schmidt further argues, this went beyond race because African women were positioned differently to African men, meaning that race in its intersections with gender demonstrated how African (and even European) women’s identities were discursively constituted as inferior.

How Contemporary Forms of Sexuality Education in South Africa Produce Gendered and Sexual Identifications

Sexuality Education Through Cultural Practices

“Culture” is often used in Southern Africa in ways which construct this as being central to the formation of identifications and notably sexual identifications (Vance 1991; Braun and Kitzinger 2001; Fischer 2006; Amadiume 2006). This follows the resurgence of certain practices that had disappeared with the advent of Christianity which converted Africans from traditional practices on the grounds that they were uncivilized and ungodly (Makahamadze and Sibanda 2008). This resurgence has been taken as a confrontation to imperialist “western femininity” which promotes a specific type of dressing for “modern” women (Lewis 2005) especially African females who dressed in trousers, attracting the “prostitute” label in the process (Pattman 2001). This labeling occurs within discourses of “culture” and “tradition” as well as “modernity.” Weeks (1999) argues this was because women’s sexuality and gender identities were continually under male gaze because they are essentially male constructs.

Pattman (2001) problematizes how the notion of “traditional culture” is equated with Christian values of morality. He also questions the selective application of discourses of “culture” to female students who went against typical constructions of normative women, for example, those who were vocal in class and those who wore trousers were seen as violating “culture.” However

this “cultural violation” was never directed at men. That there is something specific that groups term their “cultural identity” needs to be questioned because as argued by Hall (1996), this is just an illusion. If it was not a fictitious social construct, then poststructuralist feminists question why mostly women should be the ones to always display this “cultural identity.” Hall (1996) and Narayan (2000) encourage the deconstruction of notions of “identity” and “culture” as way of acknowledging the complex forms they have assumed owing to historical transformations. More and more researches show how people constantly resist these constructions of stable cultural identities. Mudaly (2012), for instance, presents research on young women engaging in bisexuality and multiple sexual relationships, something that is constructed as being outside African culture. Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) also criticize frameworks that take individuals as perfect bearers of specific cultures problematizing the notion of culture as something that is fixed and non-gendered.

The anthropological study by Delius and Glaser (2002) which looked at the sexual socialization of young people in South Africa seems to fall into this trap. They argue that in precolonial times South Africa, sex was actually promoted during adolescence years through practices such as “thigh sex” practiced in *Xhosa* and *Zulu* societies which encouraged young men to explore their sexual desires. The authors also seem to suggest that the current silences about sexuality often attributed to African “culture” are not a true reflection of African sexuality. In as much as their analysis remains valuable, the authors fail to question why girls were given the responsibility of ensuring that penetrative sex did not occur; neither did they also problematize why, at the initiating ceremonies, boys were taught that “menstruating women were as source of impurity and danger” (Delius and Glaser 2002, p. 33) and how these discourses influence young men in constructing young women’s sexual identity as dangerous and shameful. In other words, their analysis is rather simplistic in that they construct *Zulu* and *Xhosa* cultures as non-gendered.

Cultural identity formations by young women also entail engaging in specific cultural yet gendered practices linked to sexuality such as labia elongation common among the *Basotho* and the *Shona* of South Africa and Zimbabwe, respectively (see Khau 2012; Mano 2004). Labia elongation forms part of the construction of feminine identities in these communities although presently not all women feel obliged to engage in this practice (Mano 2004). Discursively this practice was constructed as a practice that increased young women’s chances of getting married and also ensuring fidelity in marriage by enhancing male pleasure (Mano 2004; Khau 2012). The absence of elongated labia not only attracted stigma but also provided good grounds for a man to divorce his wife because essentially without enlarged labia, a woman was deemed “incomplete” (Khau 2012). What appears problematic in Khau’s construction of this practice is how she seems to blanket all *Basotho* women as powerless victims of *Basotho* culture, male victimization, and sexual oppression, a critique offered by Mohanty (1988) when she challenged the tendency by some feminists to represent Third World women as a coherent group lacking agency.

These discourses of the “perfect vagina, and . . . the imperfect but perfectible vagina” (Braun and Kitzinger 2001) express how young women’s bodies are constantly under surveillance as objects of what Foucault termed disciplinary power (Sawicki 1991). In all these sexuality teachings, it seems it is the woman only who had to package her body perfectly for the sexual gratification of future or present husband, hence making women gendered objects of male desire. The virginity status of the young unmarried men is, for instance, not questioned, while that of young women is put under scrutiny (Delius and Glaser 2002; Mudaly 2012). The implicit assumptions in these accounts is that boys are expected to explore their sexuality while girls should only experience their sexuality in full only through marriage (Rubin 1984) thereby limiting their desires for premarital sex. According to Khau (2012), “proper [Basotho] girls” would not think of making sexual advances as this was constructed as men’s prerogative. Girls who defied this attracted negative labels such as prostitutes. Implicitly therefore young women were taught to be sexually passive hence the construction of their sexual identities as equally passive. It becomes clear that what are considered moral or immoral sexual acts are social constructions whose meaning is derived not from the act itself but from the social actor performing them (Fischer 2006). Amadiume (2006) suggests a more complex analysis that recognizes the ambiguities surrounding “traditional” sexuality where young women are exposed to discourses of desire and at the same time exposed to practices that regulated their sexuality. Such an approach would also pay attention to how young women construct and negotiate their identities even when they constantly face constraints (Stainton Rogers 2003; see also MacNaughton 2000).

Sexuality Education in Schools

While the lives and identifications of African women (and men) during colonialism were regulated through sexuality by both missionaries and the colonial government, as Schmidt (1992) describes, sexuality was also constructed as a relatively “private” topic. This contrasts dramatically with contemporary Southern Africa, in which sexuality has entered public discourse in the wake of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, (Posel 2004) which has forced most African governments to respond institutionally by introducing sex education in schools in the 1990s (Francis 2010). This has often been in the face of strong opposition from particular religious institutions which have regarded these programs as sanctioning immorality among the young people (Makahamadze and Sibanda 2008).

Internationally writers such as Harrison (2008), Fine (1988), Holly (1989), and Fine and McClelland (2006) have expressed concerns about the absence or “missing discourse” of desire (and especially women’s and girl’s desires) in much of sex education. When contemporary forms of sexuality education were introduced in Southern Africa in response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, it was in didactic ways: either in the form of moralizing about young people and especially women for not controlling their sexual desires and being sexually active or providing information

about the nature and causes of HIV/AIDS and safer sex (Pattman and Chege 2003). This persistent focus on the negative and biological aspects of sexuality (Francis 2010; Fine and McClelland 2006) while silencing discourses of desire in the content of sexual education in schools projects sex as specifically dangerous for women (Harrison 2008; Pattman 2005; Fine 1988; Fine and McClelland 2006). It also constructs adolescent women as having identities only through reproduction rather than as sexual beings. Just as under colonial education, contemporary forms of sexuality education may present sexuality in terms of reproduction rather than engaging with the meanings sexuality carries for young women and men and the significance which they attach to this both as a source of identification and as a dimension of power and inequality (Pattman 2005). In treating sexuality as a biological given which itself produces predictable urges or desires, sex education may seem quite didactic and detached from the sexual cultures and identities which young people construct in their everyday lives in and out of school (Epstein and Johnson 1998).

“Life Orientation” programs were introduced in school sexuality education curriculum in countries in Southern Africa in response to the perceived failure of information giving and moralistic approaches to sex education to impact on young people’s engagement in unsafe sexual practices. These widened the scope of sex education to engage with the meanings and significance which young people attached to sexuality in their everyday lives and adopted a pedagogic approach which centered upon the students or learners as active agents (Pattman and Chege 2003). But the effects of this have been limited by contradictions which many life orientation teachers experience between social and cultural expectations about their role as adults in relation to children and taboos about discussing sexuality in non- moralistic ways with children, let alone facilitating conversations which encourage children to talk about sexuality (Baxen 2006; Holly 1989). There are reports in South African studies where, because of teachers’ religious standing, abstinence was the only topic taught in Life Orientation classes (HEAIDS 2010, p. 40). Indeed in response to the difficulties posed by expectations of teachers acting as facilitators of discussions about sexuality with young people, peer educational initiatives which employ “participatory approaches” have been introduced in some schools and universities (HEAIDS 2010, p. 40).

Despite these changes, the classroom often remains a gendered space that continually reinforces gendered identities when teachers fail to introduce strategies to engage female students in gender-mixed classes who may be quite reticent to speak much in class for fear of being labeled overly sexual and bad and as violating culture (Pattman and Chege 2003). Equally problematic is how sexuality education in schools in Southern Africa takes a heteronormative form, which essentially constructs heterosexual relationships as wholly representing young people’s sexual identities (Rubin 1984; Msibi 2012).

Studies such as these reveal the limitations of sex education programs in Southern Africa premised upon assumptions that learners represent a homogenous category by virtue of them being learners (Gutiérrez and Rogoff 2003). It fails to acknowledge the multiplicity of identities among learners by approaching them

as inherently “innocent” and ignorant of sexuality issues (Stainton Rogers 2003) despite evidence that some are already engaging in sexual acts (Pattman and Chege 2003). Equally, racial and gendered sexualities are invoked within this supposedly coherent category of young women and men (Pattman and Bhana 2009; Reddy and Dunne 2007). Ultimately, these differences have a profound impact on how different young women construct their identities and sexualities.

The Connections

The two forms of sex education explored in this article, though presented as separate entities, are by no means entirely disconnected for the reason that young men and women in schools do not leave their culturally constructed identities outside the school gates. There are complexities and contradictions between sexuality education taught in school environments and through culturally specific cultural practices. In the former, Amadiume (2006) observes the relative absence of discussion about sexual acts and the uneasiness of both learners and teachers to discuss these in the company of each other. In stark contrast the latter are characterized by the elaborate and comprehensive nature of sexual education given in the “bush” where at times “clay objects” are used to teach about sexual acts. In other words, on one hand young women are constructed as sexual beings because of their exposure to discourses of desire at a very early age within the “cultural” setting, while in the school setting they may be constructed as asexual or as sexual beings in the making. Yet in both learning contexts, young women’s sexualities may be constructed in subordination to those of men Holly (1989). This is explicit in “cultural” practices and discourses about labia elongation, which construct this in terms of enhancing the pleasure of potential husbands. In formal forms of sexuality education in schools, it may be more implicitly communicated, for example, through the kinds of relations boys and girls develop with each other in conversations about sex and sexuality in class.

However as theorized by Michel Foucault, power is not only repressive but productive as it flows in social relations creating opportunities of resistance (Sawicki 1991; Stainton Rogers 2003). This critique is useful in understanding why some young people, despite the hegemonic discourses seeking to construct their identities in particular ways, find themselves openly or quietly resisting normative femininity or masculinity (*see* Pattman 2007; Rob 2007). It has been noted how young women perform different identities depending on context by acting “ignorant” of sexuality issues depending on context. Shefer and Foster (2001) showed, for instance, how young women were more likely to present themselves as asexual in their conversations with prospective suitors so that they are seen as good women suitable for marriage. Similarly, learners act as “good” and “sexually ignorant” in front of their teachers or parents (Harrison 2008). Judith Butler (1988) theorized this as gender performativity which is understood as “the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification.” In other words, gender does not remain static but it is performed differently

depending on the context, although this should not be misconstrued as passivity. Stainton Rogers (2003) in the same breadth argues that this relates to Foucault's idea of self-regulation whereby because of excessive control of sexuality, people find themselves acting out identities at appropriate times as if they were under surveillance to avoid stigmatization. While performing "wrong" identities attracts punishment, this in no way leads to the avoidance of sexuality deviance, as articulated in Schmidt (1992) where some of the Christian girls constructed as models of morality engaged in acts of immorality.

Conclusion and Future Directions

The chapter has engaged with empirical research influenced by Foucault and poststructuralist feminist perspectives in showing how sex education is packaged through specific discourses either in schools or in cultural practices demonstrating how institutional power operates in producing certain kinds of gendered subjectivities. While acknowledging that identity formation should be best understood as an ongoing process, the article has shown that this process is never unidirectional and predictable, by showing the complex ways in which identities are learned and constructed by young people, especially young women in Southern Africa in line with the shifting sociocultural contexts. What further complicates this process is the presence of multiple discourses which are often contradictory. What emerges in the chapter is how notions of femininity and masculinity as forms of gendered identities are intrinsically linked to the construction of sexuality. Additionally, identities remain fluid as they are constantly being organized and reorganized when linked to other social identities constituted in gender, race, culture, and religion as important signifiers.

The chapter has engaged with also raised questions about continuities and discontinuities between different forms of sex education through "cultural" practices and discourse and through life orientation programs in schools introduced in response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. How these are experienced and understood symbolically by young women (and men) who experience both or who experience one or the other is a topic which needs to be researched. Do they experience these as contradictory in terms of the messages which are communicated and which they read about gender and sexuality and how do their interpretations of these contribute to and depend upon the ways they construct their identities as young men and women living in contemporary societies in Southern Africa in the postcolonial, postapartheid era?

Cross-References

- ▶ [Bodies In and Out of Place: Schooling and the Production of Gender Identities Through Embodied Experience](#)
- ▶ [Learning Gender in the Early Years of Schooling in South Africa](#)
- ▶ ["Let's Go 50/50": The Everyday Embodiment of Sexuality Amongst African Young People](#)

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Performative Pedagogy: Poststructural Theory as a Tool to Engage in Identity Work Within a Youth-Led HIV Prevention Program

21

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Abstract

This chapter discusses the use of poststructural theory as a way to inform identity work within a youth-led HIV prevention program in Asia, entitled NewGen. Many HIV prevention programs which serve those “at risk” focus on changing the behaviors that are deemed to put the individual at risk; however, this places a disproportionate focus on individual rather than sociocultural explanations and can inadvertently lead to stigmatization and exclusion. Using a logic of change informed by a poststructuralist understanding of identity opens the space to create

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a different kind of program, one in which the emphasis is on a repositioning from victim to leader. A poststructural focus on positioning and subjectivity emphasizes the socially constructed nature of identity and highlights the importance of social factors, rather than individual behavior, in the ways identities are formed and lived. The pedagogies used within the program are designed to facilitate a (re) positioning, (re)imagining, and (re)enactment of the self. The course positions participants as leaders and advocates rather than simply as members of key populations identified to be at higher risk of HIV exposure. In this chapter the ways poststructural theory informs the design of the NewGen course are discussed. Data collected about participants' experiences of the NewGen course illustrates their response to the methodology as a form of identity work.

Introduction

The chapter discusses the use of poststructural theory as a way to inform pedagogies of change work within a youth-led HIV prevention program. In 2010, Youth LEAD, an organization representing young HIV advocates from across the Asia-Pacific, identified the need for a leadership program designed specifically to equip young people from key populations to gain knowledge and skills in communication, advocacy, and leadership. The program entitled NewGen targets identified young key populations at higher risk of HIV exposure (herein referred to as “young key populations”) and has an Asia-Pacific regional focus. Key populations are both key to the HIV epidemic and key to the response in concentrated HIV epidemics which are characteristic in most countries in Asia. In all countries, key populations include people living with HIV. In the Asia-Pacific region, other key populations include men who have sex with men, transgender persons, people who inject drugs, people who sell or buy sex, and seronegative partners in serodiscordant couples (UNAIDS 2011b). It is increasingly recognized that it is essential to recognize and work with *young* people from key populations in prevention and response work (UNAIDS 2011a).

NewGen deviates significantly from the type of course usually provided to develop transmission management skills and HIV-related knowledge. Informed by a poststructuralist approach to understanding identity, it emphasizes the need to interrupt shaming storylines, repositioning participants as leaders of change efforts, and creating new ways of performing and recognizing the self. Using a logic of change informed by a poststructuralist understanding of identity opens the space to create a different kind of program, one in which the emphasis is on a repositioning from victim to leader, on performing oneself into this new identity, and on recognizing both one's self and one's peers as advocates and agents of change.

Poststructural Theory as a Tool to Engage in Identity Work

The concept of identity has been approached differently within the disciplinary traditions of psychology and sociology. In the psychological tradition, the focus on

identity tends to reside around the inner life of the individual and the way in which the internal life of desire or motivation drives behavior. Key areas of interest include self-esteem, communication, and social competence. Sociologists, on the other hand, have tended to focus on the social aspects of identity or the individual as a member of defining groups such as class, gender, age, or culture (France 2000).

Alongside the difference between the individual and the social orientation in understanding identity, there is an important ontological distinction between those who conceptualize identity as inherent (employing a humanist understanding of identity) and those who conceive of identity as constructed (employing a poststructuralist understanding of identity). Poststructuralism is a term used to describe a tradition of academic theorizing which offers an ongoing critique of humanism, including the understanding of the self or subject. Theorists who have contributed to this evolving field of thought tend to share an interest in the constitutive power of discourse and to focus on the way in which identity is shaped through discourse (Davies 1994). Here the term discourse refers to the way in which stories, traditions, practices, ideas, categories, and definitions operate to organize thinking and behavior.

Foucault (1980) argues that we inherit a way of understanding the world established in the discourses or sets of cultural ideas, explanatory models, and practices that preexist and surround us. He conceptualizes identity as shaped when we adopt subject positions that are already part of the discourse. He argues that from the time of industrialization, various dividing practices, such as the segregation of the poor, the deviant, and the mentally unwell, have become mechanisms through which we define and construct identity. These segregating practices, together with the process of medical and scientific classification, have increasingly become mechanisms through which we define ourselves and each other. In addition, the processes of observation, measurement, and categorization have established norms and deviations against which people moderate themselves. People internalize the definitions and norms learned within their culture, and they self-monitor and enact the categories that pertain to themselves and others. Thus, the processes of segregation, classification, and normalization form part of a mechanism of control and power whereby individuals monitor their own behaviors to fit within the norms of society and construct their sense of identity or membership of certain categories (Foucault 1980).

This understanding of identity is useful as a lens through which to consider the current category of “young key populations” at higher risk of HIV exposure. In the Asia-Pacific region, most of the new infections driving the HIV epidemic occur among people within “key affected population” groups. These groups include men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs, people who sell or buy sex, transgender persons, and seronegative partners in serodiscordant couples (UNAIDS 2011b). A significant proportion of new infections within key populations are among young people under the age of 25 (UNAIDS 2011a). Within health discourse they are termed “young key populations” (YKPs), as they are understood to be key to the progress, the impact, and potentially the response to the epidemic. This medicalized term, and the categories within it, categorizes young people in terms of

their relationship with a risk behavior or chronic communicable disease and separates them out from those who are presumed to be not vulnerable. This is a very limiting and depersonalizing way to understand identity and well-being. Additionally, within broader society, these young people tend to be understood within segregating and individualizing storylines which position them either as victims (of a disease), as deviants (who brought contagion on themselves through immoral sexual or drug-related behavior), or as threats (who may pass the contagious disease on to unsuspecting others).

A range of stigmatizing categorizations are applied to YKP, including HIV positive, sex worker, drug user, MSM, or transgender. Applying Foucault's thesis about identity to the effect of this labeling, reinforced as it is by discriminatory laws and practices, it can be assumed that thus segregated and classified, young people would come to understand themselves in terms of these segregating and shaming storylines. When binary markers such as sick and well and tainted and untainted become normalized, they gain the status of a "natural" law and thus come to ascribe identities.

Subjectification

In discussing the way sense of identity is constructed, Davies (1993) argues that "people are not socialised into the social world, but that they go through a process of *subjectification*" (12). The term subjectification refers to the production of our sense of who we are. The concept of subjectification entails a focus on how the person actively takes up discourses as if they were their own, internalizing the desire to be a certain way. In contrast, in socialization theory the focus is on how others shape individuals. In order to understand the process of subjectification, we must think of ourselves both as actors and as those who are acted upon, experiencing the "complex conditions of mutual formation" (Davies 2006).

Davies (1989) argues that subjectification involves four processes. One entails the *learning of binary categories* that include and exclude, such as male/female. The second mechanism through which we learn who we are is by *participating in discursive practices* through which meanings and storylines are allocated to these categories. We learn such things as what males and females are supposed to do. The third mechanism through which we develop our sense of who we are is through *positioning ourselves in terms of these categories and storylines*. This entails seeing oneself as belonging in one category and not another. The fourth mechanism entails recognizing oneself as having the characteristics of a category. That is, *developing a sense of fit and membership*. This involves an investment and emotional commitment to that membership, along with beliefs and values that fit with that membership. We are thus in part shaped by the desire to be appropriate, seeking to "fit" and to please, within our membership categories as we play ourselves to the imagined audience of others (Davies et al. 2001).

Identity as Performed

Butler (1999), building on the work of Foucault, uses a theatrical metaphor to carry her concept that identity is located in "doing" rather than in "being." In this it is a

performative act. We are who we play ourselves to be, and the more we play out ourselves, the more it seems true or natural to be who we are. Butler develops this thesis through her discussion of gender. She describes gender as something which appears natural and becomes believable simply because it is constantly being performed. The performances of gender appear within a collective agreement or set of norms and expectations that operate in such a way as to compel our agreement and belief in the “naturalness” of gender. Thus, Butler argues that gender attributes “are not expressive but performative” (Butler 1999, p. 180).

This notion of identity as performative is fundamentally distinct from the notion of identity as inherent. In Butler’s (2004) view, gender is an incessant kind of “doing,” a form of improvisation that occurs with or for another:

If gender is a kind of doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one’s knowing and without one’s willing, it is not for that reason automatic or mechanical. On the contrary, it is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint. Moreover, one does not “do” one’s gender alone. One is always “doing” with or for another, even if the other is always imaginary. (Butler 2004, p. 1)

Thus from her ontological premise, Butler argues that there is no natural or essential gender identity. Rather, gender meanings are created as part of the culture. The often-played story becomes its own evidence for the naturalness of the existence of a certain phenomenon. In this the story enacted becomes evidence that the story is true, thus contributing to the survival of the story and the belief that its occurrence is natural.

Though Butler’s foundational work is done in relation to gender, this concept of identity as performance is relevant to consideration of “young key populations” (YKPs). Using Butler’s notion of performativity, being part of a YKP group may be seen as an act that is played out or performed into a set of cultural agreements that preexist the individual. Via this mechanism the divide between YKPs and mainstream can come to be understood to be natural and inevitable. As the often-played story, the oppositional divide will come to be known as the “truth” of how things are.

Positioning

The interest in subjectification is linked to an associated interest in how the individual attains agency. In the humanist tradition, the individual is assumed to possess free will and agency, but within the poststructuralist paradigm, will and agency are understood to be to some degree already shaped and attuned or constructed by the casting discourses and the subject positions available within them. Thus, a poststructuralist thinker will understand the formation of identity as the ongoing taking up and/or resisting of the various subject positions available within the discourses or organizing set of ideas and practices of society. Here the concept of “positioning” comes into play. The term “positioning” encapsulates a concept that is rather more extensive than that of role. One’s role can be adopted or put aside and is understood to be something separate from the “self” (Davies 1994). Davies outlines the difference in the two concepts of position and role:

Position is a much more fluid concept than role and recognises the constitutive force of discourse to make/fabricate the stories or narratives through which meaningful lives are made. (Davies 1994, p. 23)

Using this concept of positioning, it can be seen that our sense of identity is drawn from and informed by a series of patterns already available in our cultural stories. Thus when we play a role in real life, we also embrace a larger position which will inform that role (Davies 2006). What are the positions available within the dominant storylines about key populations vulnerable to HIV? How might these positions inform their sense of identity? How might they be interrupted and reshaped to permit a more positive sense of self?

Fantasy and Change

The focus on the generative power of discourse may sound like a deterministic philosophy, carrying a notion that the individual is entirely pre-scripted or wired up. This is an oversimplification of the concept of subjectification. Rather, it is argued within the poststructuralist tradition that there is always the possibility of reconstruction, which can be fostered through practices of deconstruction, imagination, and resistance. Thus identity work can be understood as an ongoing task of resistance and innovation. St. Pierre (2000) argues that:

we have the ability to analyse, contest, and change practices that are being used to construct ourselves and the world, as well as the practices we ourselves are using in this work of praxis. (p. 493)

Thus in the poststructuralist tradition, agency is understood to involve resistance, and change is achieved via an alertness to the shaping nature of the discourses. Davies describes this as the subject having available to them certain “conditions of possibility” which he or she can then take up or resist (Davies et al. 2001). What is imagined to be possible and desirable will influence actions.

Butler (2004) discusses the role that the imagined and the imaginary play in enabling learning and change in the self. She describes fantasy as:

the art of the articulation of the possible; it moves us beyond what is merely actual and present into a realm of possibility, the not yet actualized or the not actualizable... Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home. (Butler 2004, pp. 28–29)

Recognition and Identity

Deepening her discussion of identity as performative, Butler points to the desire for recognition or for an “audience” for one’s performance. She asserts:

our very sense of personhood is linked to the desire for recognition, and that desire places us outside ourselves, in a realm of social norms that we do not fully choose, but that provides the horizon and the resource for any sense of choice that we have. (Butler 2004, p. 33)

The mechanism of recognition can be understood as an interaction between audience and player where each party fulfills both functions of the observer and the

observed. Butler describes “recognition” as the process of the subject and the other seeing themselves reflected in each other while still remaining separate.

Butler argues that when an account is given of oneself to another, there is engagement in an act of recognition. One seeks both to be recognized and to recognize the other. Every act of recognition is bound and enabled by the preexisting ideas one has of the world, the self, and the other. In this “the regime of truth offers a framework for the scene of recognition, delineating who will qualify as a subject of recognition and offering available norms for the act of recognition itself” (Butler 2007, p. 30).

Because recognition can only occur in the presence (real or imagined) of the other, it is always inherently social. The account of the self is given to another. The “I” assumes a “you” and thus the telling of the story of the self entails a parallel act of exposure, which is not the story itself, but the act of *giving* the story to the other (Butler 2007).

In this yearning for recognition, the self is vulnerable, for without recognition one is invisible and thus does not “exist.” Without “you” there cannot be “I.” Thus, recognition is a paradoxical process that requires the assumption of both difference and similarity. For members of YKP, the embodied playing of the self reinscribes a separate and shamed status. To replay oneself and to be recognized by others as a “leader” offers an opportunity to disrupt this confining story and to rework a more generous identity. To be recognized as a leader is to be seen differently and to come into existence as this being.

Butler argues that “new norms are brought into being when unanticipated forms of recognition take place” (Butler 2007, p. 31). The NewGen leadership training workshops seek to provide opportunities for certain “unanticipated forms of recognition” to take place and to provide opportunity for the participants to collectively play themselves as leaders and to recognize and realize this new membership and identity.

History and Methodology

Development of the NewGen leadership training course was initiated by Youth LEAD, an Asia-Pacific network of people representing the young key populations. Youth LEAD recognized that many of their network members needed to develop their leadership and advocacy skills so as they could better campaign for much needed changes in policy, law, education, and health service provision. They initiated a partnership with the authors to develop a 5-day leadership short course for members of their networks. The program was designed to support a process of youth-led training, and hence a Training of Trainer (ToT) was co-led by youth partners working with the lead author, with the subsequent country-based trainings to be led by youth facilitators.

A regional ToT provided the young participants with a 5-day sampling of all activities in the course, followed by an additional 2 days of exercises focusing on the development of their skills as trainers to be able to lead the course in their own

country settings. The first ToT took place in Bangkok, Thailand, in September 2012, following a pilot in the Philippines. It included 21 young people from Myanmar, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and Indonesia. A second ToT was carried out in November 2013, involving 16 participants from China, Nepal, Thailand, Cambodia, Bangladesh, and Fiji. The participants in the 2012 training went on to lead various iterations of the course in their own countries. At the time of writing, the 2013 delegates had yet to run their own training.

Participants in both trainings completed an anonymous electronic survey and semi-structured video interview both prior to and immediately following the training. The interviews were conducted to gain insight into the needs and views of those participating in the course and to gain more depth and understanding of participants' experiences of the training. The survey featured questions about the demographics of participants, as well as questions to assess the impact of the training on skills, understandings of topics covered, and communication competencies, as well as evaluating daily activities. Interviews were recorded to promote the delivery of future NewGen training, and transcripts were made of the recorded interviews so that data could be shared without identifying the source. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym. This research has ethics approval from the University of Melbourne (Ethics ID134058). Full details of these results are reported elsewhere (Helen Cahill et al. 2013).

Curriculum and Pedagogy

The course was framed within a poststructuralist understanding of the logic of identity construction. The workshops were designed to enable the participants to reframe themselves as leaders and change agents. The course uses a highly participatory approach, including cooperative learning tasks such as role-play and simulation, small-group problem-solving exercises, critical thinking tasks, and themed games. There is a strong emphasis on the use of embodied play via dramatization and simulation. Drama-based approaches are also used to help participants rehearse the enrollment, assertion, advocacy, and leadership skills needed to engage in collective efforts toward social change. The participants construct and dramatize their vision of the preferred future and work backward from this future to illustrate the key steps accomplished to make it come true. This projection of the future is one way to create a sense of possibility to play into (Cahill 2010). Rather than simply show the problem (H. Cahill 2014b), they create the solutions and then work out what it that must happen to build this solution. This invitation to play oneself within the possibility of the preferred future helps to generate and model new possibilities for action (Cahill et al. 2013).

The participants also engage in more conventional exercises such as leading meetings and focus groups, conducting enrollment conversations, and making data-informed speeches with specific step for structural change. This approach to playing the self as if already a leader carries the idea that the way in which we perform our "self" shapes our sense of who we are and who we can be (Cahill 2010b, 2012).

From Reenactment to Recognition

The data shows that the participants were very aware of the impact of stigmatizing storylines and the way in which their inscription as YKP rendered them as either invisible or tainted. (The acronym YKAP stands for young key affected population and has been replaced by the terminology young key populations (at higher risk of HIV). “YKAP” is the terminology used in the following examples.)

As Mae from China says:

People are always labelled as – discrimination – stigma – they are immoral or they must have some bad behaviour. People think that you do not deserve to have your rights because of your sexuality. This is something that NewGen can change, challenge for people to realise that they can be a leader to change the discrimination. (Mae, China, 2013 post-interview)

The participants describe the work together as something that causes a shift in the self. The becoming of the self as a leader is a form of humanizing, an elevation from the exclusion or invisibility or shame previously felt. The leader has a voice and has goals and a sense of responsibility to work for social change. The leader is politicized rather than just individualized and sees the need for structural change, not just individual behavioral change.

A young Filipino man who identifies as gay and HIV positive describes this process of recognition:

You finally, you not see yourself not as a YKAP only, but you’re starting to see yourself as a leader – and that’s different, because when you say I’m a YKAP you just see yourself as...part of a big population. But then when you see yourself as leader of this young key affected populations...you start...to think of yourself as a leader and to have clear goals...it’s better actually to see yourself as a YKAP leader, not only as a YKAP. (Mikel, Philippines, 2012 post-interview)

The identity shift occurs in part through the civic nature of the orientation of a leader as one who takes action for the good of others, rather than just for themselves. An awareness of the effect of this shift in positioning from pupil to leader can be heard in Mae’s response:

Previously in trainings I thought about just learning information for myself, but now in this training we have to think about how we can take this to more YKP and to involve them in more, and make them to express the voice. We have a responsibility. (Mae, China, 2013 post-interview)

Participants’ Experiences of the Performative Pedagogy

There are many pedagogical features of the program that seem to assist the participants to engage in a form of identity work. Early in the workshop the participants map what they think members of the YKP need from each of the layers of their world as represented via the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner 1979). This model depicts the way in which the individual is influenced at the proximal level by experiences directly encountered at the micro levels of their world, where they participate in the face-to-face settings of the home, school, clinic, and neighborhood. It also

encompasses a number of more distal levels of influence, including an “exo-level” through which the young person is influenced by the operations of the societal institutions, structures, and systems that allocate resources, provide infrastructure and services, and develop and enact policy and laws. At a more overarching level, the model provides for the influence of operations at the macro level wherein reside the big shaping forces of culture, religion, the economy, ideologies, and beliefs.

As the participants use this model to map out what they think YKPs need from each level in the system, they chart the interconnected and structural nature of disadvantage. In mapping themselves on to this model, they begin to disrupt the individualized understandings of blame and shame related to HIV by adding a sense of the structural conditions – that is, the social, economic, and cultural circumstances which the young people live within – which to a degree shape what is possible for them (Cahill 2011). The “blame” and responsibility become a matter to be shared at large by society.

Most participants mention how useful the ecological model is as a tool which helps them to rethink their situation. “The ecological model is good because it shows how things are structured and fit together” (Vina, Indonesia, 2012 post-interview). This system-thinking tool is very different from the usual condom rehearsal exercises which aim to equip the individual to control their risk. It locates the risk in the practices of society itself, for example, in the failure to provide comprehensive sexuality education, in the exclusion and stigmatization of those who are same sex preferred (SSP), on the way in which transgender people are rendered invisible or nonexistent, on laws that prohibit same sex relations and hence leave some young people without social recognition and support, on the material poverty that forces young people into sex work, and on the personal and material distress associated with many on a pathway into injecting drug use. This recognition of the way in which the ecology contributes to shaping the life of the individual helps to dislodge the individualized story of causality and shame.

The participants also enjoy the use of themed games to engage them in a playful, humorous, and embodied way with constructing their own key messages about the characteristics of effective leadership. Here laughter and collective play dislodges the air of tragedy that typically surrounds conversations about HIV and permits the participants to build a community of relatedness and regard for each other. Using playful modes of interaction typically reserved for children, they recognize and respond to each other as fellow players and meaning makers.

Many participants report on their speech-making activities as a key moment in which they witness their own and each others’ shift in identity. A young woman from Nepal reports on her experience of release from the doubled stigma of being both a woman (thus lesser) and a drug user (thus shamed):

Before coming to NewGen I am nothing. But now I am something, I think I am a leader, a speaker, and I can speak, you know, in front of public. (Rina, Nepal, 2013 post-interview)

There are many moments of “becoming” in which participants recognize or witness the shifts each makes. They feel and see the shift from a position of erasure or deviant or nothingness to one of voice, power, and public recognition.

This suggests that the process of working together facilitates a re-storying of self and each other to allow for an enhanced recognition.

Rather than the typical focus on methods to reduce transmission, they address ways to create social change. Rather than focus specifically on managing behaviors which might cause them or others to be at risk, they address how they might create change in the conditions that produce disadvantage or hold it in place. This focus on advocacy and social change positions them as agents and leaders. This helps to shift the script from one of blame to one of responsibility. The orientation is civic in nature, rather than individualized.

The Space of Becoming

Kesby argues that “participatory discourses and practices whose effects are empowerment must be seen as spatially embedded” (Kesby 2005, p. 2038). The material spaces of participatory programs such as NewGen are important in the process of repositioning. The workshop context provides a permissive performative space within which to challenge social and cultural norms surrounding identities in relation to HIV. The “enabling” space in which these activities take place is integral to the shifts that occur. Given the contextual and relational nature of these shifts, Kesby (2005) argues that the features of the participatory enabling space may need to be recreated via ongoing support groups to enable the re-performance and lasting inscription of these positive identities. This is a similar construct to Butler’s notion that it is the often-repeated performance that creates a sense of the real or the natural. Following the NewGen training of trainer courses described in this chapter, participants returned to their home countries to facilitate the course themselves. This reiteration and re-habitation of the participatory space potentially gives the opportunity for the leadership and advocacy identities performed in the training space to be re-performed and embodied.

Conclusion and Future Directions

The assumption is often made that programs which serve those “at risk” should focus on changing the behaviors that are deemed to put the individual at risk. Thus, there is an emphasis in HIV prevention programs on the use of condoms or use of clean injecting equipment to minimize risk of transmission. This emphasis on individual behavior change, though of potential practical benefit, can inadvertently lead to an ongoing reinscription of individualized blaming stories which stigmatize some, excuse others, and fail to point to the broader structural and social conditions that hold the epidemic in place.

This assumption that the “cure” must take place within the individual neglects to acknowledge explanations that locate causality outside the individual such as with structural patterns that hold disadvantage, stigma, and discrimination in place. It also neglects to consider the way in which certain social norms and culturally

transmitted storylines work to perpetuate labeling and associated blame, and to foreclose on the possibility that things might be done differently.

Use of a logic of change informed by poststructuralist theory opens the space to create a different kind of program, one in which the emphasis is on identity work rather than just on behavior (H. Cahill 2014a). In the case of the NewGen program, this includes use of the key concepts of performativity, positioning, and recognition. Performativity is the understanding that we are who we play ourselves to be, and the more we play out ourselves, the more it seems “true” or natural that we are this way. Positioning is the understanding that who we can play ourselves to be is drawn from patterns that are culturally and socially available to us. These positions influence what options are understood to be possible or desirable for us to perform. Recognition is the understanding that the account of self that is given to another creates a sense of self. If we cannot be seen or recognized differently, it is difficult to “become” different. These concepts, drawn from poststructuralist theory, help to explain how dominant storylines such as those of blame and shame associated with HIV infection are perpetuated and can be inadvertently replicated within education interventions. Activities informed by these concepts create new positions for participants to embody and occupy. As they perform themselves into the position of leaders, advocates, and change agents, participants begin to reframe their sense of self and recognize each other.

The participants describe the work as something that causes a shift in the self. The becoming of the self as leader is a form of humanizing, an elevation from the exclusion, invisibility, or shame previously felt. They construct the “leader” to be someone who has a voice and has goals and a sense of responsibility to work for social change. This leader sees the need for structural change, not just individual behavior change. Participants in the NewGen course find that this focus on advocacy and leadership positions them as agents of social change, and opens new possibilities for subsequent action.

Where other courses aim primarily to improve transmission management skills and HIV-related knowledge, NewGen addresses identity as construct which is central to understanding what is deemed to be possible or desirable in terms of individual or collective behavior. Potentially, poststructural theory and associated concepts relating to identity and subjectivity could inform the development of more effective education interventions addressing the needs of those young people suffering from forms of social and economic disadvantage.

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Cross-References

- ▶ [Approaches to Understanding Youth Well-Being](#)
- ▶ [“Black Neighborhoods” and “Race,” Placed Identities in Youth Transition to Adulthoods](#)

- ▶ Bodies: Corporeality and Embodiment in Childhood and Youth Studies
- ▶ Bodies In and Out of Place: Schooling and the Production of Gender Identities Through Embodied Experience
- ▶ Girls' Embodied Experiences of Media Images
- ▶ Indigenous Girls, Social Justice, and Schooling: Addressing Issues of Disadvantage
- ▶ Learning Gender in the Early Years of Schooling in South Africa
- ▶ "Let's Go 50/50": The Everyday Embodiment of Sexuality Amongst African Young People
- ▶ Participating as Young Citizens in Diverse Communities
- ▶ Reconsidering Youth Well-Being as Fluid and Relational: A Dynamic Process at the Intersection of Their Physical and Social Geographies
- ▶ Responding Effectively to Support the Mental Health and Well-Being of Young People
- ▶ The Gendering and Sexualization of Young Women Through Sex Educational Practices and Discourses in Southern Africa
- ▶ Theorizing Subjectivity and Feminine Embodiment: Feminist Approaches and Debates
- ▶ We Need to Talk About Learning: Dialogue and Learning Amongst South African Youth
- ▶ Who's Learning or Whose Learning? Critical Perspectives on the Idea Youth-Led Policy-Making Related to Gender-Based Violence in a South African Classroom
- ▶ Young People and Mobile Phone Technology in Botswana
- ▶ Young People, Pleasure, and the Normalization of Pornography: Sexual Health and Well-Being in a Time of Proliferation?

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Gender Identity, Intergenerational Dynamics, and Educational Aspirations: Young Women's Hopes for the Future

22

Julie McLeod

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Abstract

This chapter examines intergenerational relations between mothers and daughters and the intersecting factors that shape gender as embodied subjectivity and as integral to the organization of social life. Its focus is young women and educational and social aspirations, and the discussion proceeds via two extended case studies drawn from Australian research projects that engage longitudinal, cross-generational, and comparative perspectives. Everyday and interpersonal dynamics are explored as sites for understanding gender relations and identity in the making. An account of identity is proposed that acknowledges psycho-social and intergenerational dynamics, and it is argued that the situated, sociological, and historical dimensions of gender relations need to be examined alongside the interplay of emotion and desire. Much youth studies scholarship addresses the structural and macrosociological contexts in which young people's lives take shape: this is undeniably important. Yet, it is argued that too often such approaches can obscure from view the salience of interpersonal and familial relations, the affective realm in which imagining and enacting the self unfolds.

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Identity is not a static project produced by discourse or shaped simply by either sociological or psychological imperatives. In the scenarios discussed in this chapter, identity is understood as situated, intersectional, and relational. Young women's social class, their school and residential location, and their family relations are highlighted, both as intersecting influences and as points of entry for a close-up look at the process of making gender and making futures.

The last half-century has witnessed striking shifts in gender relations in many parts of the world, reflecting remarkable social and educational changes. Young people's lives and expectations are commonly held up as key barometers of social change, and this is also the case when considering the scope, form, and reach of changes in gender identities and relations. It would be unwise, however, to overstate the extent of such changes or to ignore some of the equally potent ways in which gender-based inequalities and discriminations continue. Violence against women and girls persists, and there remain differential rates and patterns of educational participation and outcomes, between males and females and among nations and regions (UN Women 2014). Social changes are unevenly experienced, mediated by combinations of structural and identity categories, including the cross-cutting intersection of gender with class, location, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, and disability/ability. Intergenerational relations are also important in the making of gender identities and in associated processes of continuities and changes in gender relations.

There are many ways to examine gender identity within youth studies scholarship. One direction is a policy pathway, identifying how social, education, and youth policy does or does not notice gender as a category warranting attention and reform. Another is to consider the gains and losses in gender reform. Yet another is to address large-scale databases and document the relative position of boys and girls or of girls and young women over time and to review progress towards equality. This chapter turns to the realm of everyday and interpersonal dynamics as sites for understanding gender relations and identity in the making. It examines intergenerational relations between mothers and daughters and the intersecting factors that shape gender as embodied subjectivity and as integral to the organization of social life. Its focus is young women and educational and social aspirations, and the discussion proceeds via two extended case studies drawn from Australian research projects that engage longitudinal, cross-generational, and comparative perspectives.

Gender equality as a formal aspiration is enshrined in policies in developed and developing countries and in the goals of international agencies such as the United Nations. The UN *Millennium Development Goals* include the target to "Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015" (United Nations 2014). Such targets and monitoring of gender-based inequality remain fundamentally important. They position gender discrimination as a visible social problem and drive considerable reforms, many leading to demonstrable improvements in the lives and experiences of women and girls. This chapter, however, focuses on how gender is negotiated in the educational experiences and aspirations of young women.

A close-up focus on gender-identity work among young people can reveal how broader social patterns and transformations are lived and mediated biographically, highlighting points of contention and uncertainty as well as the daily and interpersonal practices through which gender identities are realized and enacted. In turn, this helps to illuminate the relationship between historical change and individual lives, revealing the interplay between past and present in understanding gender identities and relations; and it keeps gender identity in view as both a cultural and a biographical process and as situated and intersectional (Brah and Phoenix 2004). Robust understandings of gender identities in the present inevitably rely on comparative and historical perspectives. In documenting the specificities and contours of the present, one is often drawing temporal and spatial comparisons between “then” and “now” and between “there” and “here.” How does difference or change or continuity emerge and under what circumstances is it noticed?

The following section briefly considers influential approaches in youth and educational studies to understanding the formation of gender identity. A psycho-social account of identity is proposed that allows a focus on both biographical and historical influences and changes. It then presents two case studies of young women’s schooling experiences and future plans, drawing out sociological and intergenerational contexts alongside the interplay of emotion and desire.

Identity as Intersectional and Psycho-social

A large body of scholarship has explored the making of young people’s gender identity. This flourished from the 1980s onward, much of it bearing the influence of poststructuralism and addressing the social and discursive production of subjectivity (Davies 1989; Francis and Skelton 2001; MacLure 2003). Subjectivity was examined as “constructed” not natural, as multiple not singular, and as fluid not fixed. These theoretical moves generated many important insights, emphasizing the processual nature of subjectivity and showing how it might be contested and open to change, underscoring gender identity as shaped in particular historical and cultural settings. Yet these valuable perspectives also gave rise to some rather formulaic and one-dimensional accounts of identity, accounts that often became stuck repeating claims that discourse constructs identity (a kind of “discourse determinism”), without illuminating much about the nuances of that process or the many factors that combine to shape gender identity. The complex biographical, historical, sociological, and psychological process of subjectivity is not adequately captured in gestures to the constitutive power of discourse to construct identity. There was a tendency to slip analytically from discourses to subjectivities as if they were the same thing, with individual subjects principally understood as relatively passive bearers of or effects of discourse. Yet, subjectivity is not coterminous with discourses, and it can exceed or disrupt dominant cultural discourses. Subjectivity is not simply a sociological or discursive category, and psychological aspects and unconscious processes also demand attention. In response to such matters, the notion of the psycho-social subject has become influential in exploring the interplay of social and psychic dimensions of

identity (Hollway and Jefferson 2001; Wetherell 2008). From a psychological or psychoanalytic perspective, a psycho-social approach underlines that the “the social and societal parts of analysis should be inextricable from the psychoanalytic” (Hollway 2008, p. 137). Conversely, from a sociological perspective, it seeks to avoid bracketing psychological and emotional processes as separate or additional concerns, positioning them as central in understanding the relationships between subjectivity and the social realm, that is how people live in and interact with the world around them (Walkerdine et al. 2001).

Freud’s metaphor of the self as a “magic writing pad” in which the subject is understood as a kind of palimpsest is useful for thinking about gender identity as psycho-social and for understanding its formation in biographical time and over historical time. The magic writing pad “consists of two layers: a soft wax slate and over it a thin, transparent leaf of paper”: it “receives new inscriptions upon it without having the old ones erased” (Nielsen 1996, p. 7). According to Bjerrum Nielsen, sometimes the earlier marks might not be readily visible, but their effects can linger, remaining as traces of the past underneath the newer marks (Nielsen 1996, p. 7). The metaphor of the self as a magic writing pad invites a view of gender identity formation as a recursive process, one that is neither characterized simply by psychological developmental imperatives nor by discursive constructions. It offers a way of thinking about the intersections between life histories, narratives of the self, social practices, institutional effects, and so on, and the relative impact of these “inscriptions” at different ages and stages; it does not mean that the past determines the present in any straightforward or inevitable sense or that subjectivity is not open to remaking. While still analyzing subjectivity as produced and discourses as constitutive, it suggests a way of understanding how sociological and cultural practices, in conjunction with psychological and emotional dynamics, shape the formation of subjectivity over time. It is possible to see how at different times some discursive traces are more pronounced than at others and that their influence is not neatly predictable and their markings never completely erased (McLeod and Thomson 2009, p. 9). In summary, this metaphor invites attention to cultural and biographical processes and fosters a historical sensibility regarding the shifting meanings and manifestations of gender in interaction with other social categories. Intergenerational dynamics are also part of the shadow and light of historical processes shaping who we are and how we are becoming.

The benefits of historical and comparative perspectives are particularly evident when considering gender identity formation over biographical time, as is illustrated in the following discussion drawn from a qualitative longitudinal study of young people aged 12 to 18 (McLeod and Yates 2006). First, the study is described, then a closer look is taken at the aspirations of one young woman, in light of intergenerational dynamics and psycho-social processes. The time and setting provide a point of comparison for considering gender identities in the present, and the longitudinal design offers insight into the nuances of gender identity in the making, during a life stage – adolescence – typically understood as a time of significant personal change and upheaval in the journey from childhood to adulthood.

Scenario: "Taking It as It Comes"

In the "Making Modern Lives" study, 26 students attending four contrasting Australian secondary schools during the 1990s and early 2000s were followed from the start to the end of their secondary schooling and into their first year post-school, and interviewed twice a year over 8 years (McLeod and Yates 2006). Changing patterns over time among students from different types of schools (metropolitan and rural, private and government, elite, middle class, and working class) and developments within individuals over the course of their secondary schooling were examined. Key themes were the shaping of gendered subjectivity, young people's changing engagements with and attitudes to school, and students' thinking about their futures. Comparisons were synchronic – across different groups of students at the same age level – and diachronic – developments and changes in individuals over time, allowing for historical, cohort, and biographical comparisons. Differences between girls and boys (what's changing, what's staying much the same) were explored as well as the production of individual students as gendered and classed subjects. Researching gender identity in this way looked at patterns of overt self-description and self-conscious ascriptions of gender as well as more indirect expressions and representations of gendered conduct and attitudes.

The experiences and future thinking of one of the participants, Keren, illustrate nuances in how place, gender, and class intersect and how generational dynamics, and in the cases discussed here, relations between mothers and daughters, are central to understanding the making and remaking of gender identities and aspirations (McLeod 2000). Keren lived in a small country town with her mother and sisters and, at the end of primary school, seemed happy at school, smiling a lot, and said that she would like to be a teacher and was excited about going to high school. She talked often about helping out at home, cooking, and looking after her siblings. By early high school, she was not so happy and enthusiastic about school, indicated that she was being bullied, said she liked "technical subjects" but was not any good at mathematics, and was seeing a specialist teacher for extra help. She did not like the way she looked and she was less bouncy and positive. Instead of wanting to be a teacher, she now saw herself becoming a cook or a childcare worker. When she talked about the future, she said she would "just take it as it comes." She wanted enough money to have "a car that works," and she dreamt of having a nice house, but that was "imaginary, very very imaginary." The kind of future that would make her really happy was one characterized by conventional fantasies of wealth and modest expectations: "If I get the job I want, I win Tattsлото [the lottery], basically just to have a good life . . . Well, I don't want to be a millionaire, but good wealth, a house, a car that runs." At the end of school, a happy future for her would be a "stable one," "not too rich, just comfortable." In almost all her interviews, when asked what she thinks about the future, Keren replied in matter-of-fact way: "just take it as it comes" and this remained a prominent theme in her thoughts about herself and her future. She attended a school where the majority of students left before the end of school, but Keren stayed on and passed her final exams and

enrolled in a one-year training certificate to become a nursing assistant and was saving to move into an apartment of her own.

At one level, this summary could be another story about the reproduction of class and gender identities – nursing for a country working-class girl, alienation from the culture of the school, a modest and circumscribed view of future possibilities, and a constrained sense of agency and capacity to act on the world. In terms of influential accounts of social reproduction, Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) points to how certain dispositions and orientations to the world take shape, suggesting that class and gender relations remain relatively stable. But changes are taking place in gender and class identities, for Keren and for young women like her, and other interpretations are also possible. This is suggested in two recurring themes in Keren's narratives: her relationship with her mother and her perception of work.

While the repeated phrase, "just take it as it comes," might suggest resignation to a curtailed future, Keren does not simply do that. She effects changes, plans strategically, envisages, and works towards an independent future, outside immediate familial responsibilities. Keren is shaped by both relatively traditional, rural, working-class expectations for girls, and a newer set of discourses and possibilities afforded by, among other changes, the expansion in school retention, by the growth of tertiary education (especially the further education sector), and by feminism and its legacy of greater possibilities for the economic and emotional independence of women. These are important for both Keren and her mother. In interviews, Keren seemed close to her mother, and Keren appeared to have a strong identification with the organizational responsibilities of being a mother. In other ways too, her activities and plans develop in relation to her mother's work and study. As a single parent, her mother manages to care for five children, undertake paid and voluntary work, and study part time in a welfare course at a local technical college. Around this time, Keren starts to focus more on school and study and shows a strong determination to complete school. She also begins voluntary work at an agency providing food and housing assistance. In year 12, she decides she wants to do nursing, and we hear then that her mother is very happy about this decision as she too had initially trained as a nurse.

Keren's path through school is negotiated in dialogue with changes in her mother's life. Her choices and plans are not simply the result of conscious imitation, but they do suggest the complexity of that psychodynamic relation, one that had some productive effects for Keren. For both mother and daughter, going to school, staying at school, and finishing and returning to school are recurring themes. So, too, is managing the demands of family and domestic responsibilities and working at building a life away from that sphere. Expressions of resignation towards the future coexist with Keren's experience of success and evidence of strategic planning and hard work. These two orientations point to patterns of continuity and change in her gender and class identity which cannot be adequately explained by reference to the impact of "dominant gender discourses" or to developmental patterns and crises in growing up, or as signs of identity as multiple, simply comprising shifting subject positions. Taking a longitudinal view on

Keren's narratives and identity work reveals traces of psychodynamic relations (between her mother and herself), the formation of particular orientations to the world (her habitus to use sociological language), and the effects of specific cultural and historical changes. Returning to the metaphor of the magic writing pad, certain inscriptions persist, and new ones also appear, but they do not completely erase the old.

This research scenario, from a longitudinal study of young people at the turn of the twentieth century, offers a vantage point for reflecting on contemporary gender identities. On the one hand, Keren's dreams of the future underscore some continuities in gendered aspirations, particularly in interaction with class and location. On the other hand, her actions hint at the opening up of new possibilities and ways of being for young women. While evidence abounds on the persistence of gender-based differentials, particularly in post-school pathways for young women and men, it is equally important to recognize when such patterns begin to unsettle, even in modest ways, and small seeds of change take root. Glimpses of change are evident too in the following scenario, drawn from a study undertaken of young women and schooling in the mid-2000s, a midpoint between the time of Keren's experience of schooling and circumstances today. Another parallel is the force of intergenerational dynamics and the relational worlds of young women, again underlining the value of psycho-social perspectives on gender identity. Themes of making the most in difficult circumstances echo through the second scenario, which continues a focus on gender, class, and place but turns to highlight emotional and affective responses (Wetherell 2012) and especially the emotional resources of hope and longing in how mothers and daughters negotiated their immediate lives and looked to future possibilities.

Scenario: "I Just Want Her to Be Happy"

Studies of young peoples' transition from school to work continue to document significant differences in pathways and outcomes according to social categories of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and location (FYA 2013). Young women who leave school early are more likely than their male counterparts to remain disadvantaged in the labor market and to undertake part-time work. A recent Australian survey found that young women not in employment, education, or training are "occupied with childcare or domestic duties, while males are more likely to be travelling or on holidays" (FYA 2013, p.7). While data on such patterns are essential, so too are the experiences and aspirations of at-risk young women. These are considered in the following example from a cross-generational study of at-risk young women and their mothers. Two themes are relevant to the focus on generational change and concepts of identity as psycho-social and intersectional: desires for happiness and openness and mother-daughter dynamics and processes of identification and differentiation.

The larger cross-generational project investigated the educational, social, work, and biographical experiences of young women and their mothers who were living in

socially stigmatized areas: the daughters attended schools with poor reputations, facing concerns about low rates of school completions and students' post-school pathways (Allard 2005; McLeod and Wright 2009; Bullen and Kenway 2005). Many were living in difficult circumstances, with some of the young women having already left school early and others identified as at risk of not completing secondary school. Interviews and focus group discussions were held with more than 60 participants – young women, their mothers, teachers, and youth workers – in two communities. Both were located on the urban–rural fringe of major cities, with poor economic and social infrastructure, and a significant number of families on low incomes or social welfare benefits. Jobs were in short supply or poorly paid, public transport was minimal, and public housing estates existed but did not meet local demand. Key social services and post-school education and training institutions were located some distance by bus, and the young women saw the towns as places where “not much is happening.”

This brief description of the location points to some of the challenges facing the young women as they imagined their futures, yet that is only part of the picture. Their future imaginings were also shaped by interpersonal dynamics and histories. The concepts of *habitus* and the “magic writing pad,” introduced above, are also relevant here, illuminating how hopes and longings take shape in particular socio-spatial and economic settings and bear the traces of biographical histories, in this case those of the daughters as well as those of their mothers (McLeod 2007).

In discussing future plans and daydreams, the mothers readily turned to thinking of their relationship with their own mother and then onto what they wanted for their daughter: happiness, respect, staying on at school, feeling and being safe, and having good relationships. Reflecting on her hopes for her daughter, Louise replied:

I want her to be happy, I want her to, I want us to be friends, which I think we are, I want her to be able to talk to me about anything. I want her to be safe and hopefully still at school, still learning to be something and do something good.

In the context of growing pressure on young people to become visible high achievers, these might seem to be modest ambitions. The pressures middle-class young women now face, or place themselves under, to become successful and seek out opportunities, have been well documented (Walkerdine et al. 2001; McLeod and Yates 2006). This is linked in part to the impact of “girls can do anything” feminism, in part to middle-class insecurities about class mobility and status positioning and in part to girls scrutinizing themselves through the eyes of others and taking on discourses that girls and women can never be good enough. For the girls and their mothers here, however, success or looking to the future meant something quite different; it was not about stellar success and individual hyper-achievement. Rather, hoping for a good future was more commonly linked to having good relationships, to getting by and “hanging in,” and to being happy and free from gripping worries. Repeated expression of desires to be happy resonates with other research on the experiences of working-class girls navigating educational success (Lucey et al. 2003).

The mothers spoke of their desire for closer relations with their daughters than they had experienced with their own mothers and emphasized the value to them of open communication and support (McLeod and Wright 2009). One mother recalled that she had never really had a close relationship with her own mother: “she sort of shut down the emotional side.” She was determined to have a more open relationship with her daughter: “just trying to be there if they want to talk to you and just – I always wanted my girls to feel secure and happy in their life.” As with the other mothers, dreams for her daughter were cut through with memories of her relationship with her own mother – pointing to the overlaying of past memories, present experiences, as well as future hopes, which the idea of the magic writing pad seeks to capture.

For the daughters, imagining their future was implicated in a biographical project of differentiating themselves from their mother, escaping both her future and the local area. “I don’t want to be like my mum” was a common refrain. For some, staying at school was a strategy to ensure that they did not become “like mum” (McLeod 2007). Most of the mothers interviewed for the study had left school early (aged 15 or younger), mainly to work in low-paid, low-status jobs before marrying and having children, often by age 19 or 20. At least for some of the daughters, school and a qualification were a means to escape from what they saw as the drudgery of their own mothers’ lives. Their mothers, they felt, lacked freedom, economic independence, and personal choice. Sarah, aged 15, reflected: “I don’t reckon my life is going to be like my Mum’s because she had kids early and she married early. . . and she’s just been like a housewife all that time . . . Whereas, I want to do something with my life.”

The desire for differentiation from the mother figured across the generations, linked to dreams of escape – from the family, from the local area, and from emotional and social confinement. The daughters (like their mothers) wanted a better kind of life and wanted to make something of their lives. The mothers, too, wanted their daughters to have an adulthood that was fundamentally different in emotional and practical terms from their own. They wished for them security and happiness and wanted to avoid any generational repetition of poverty, job insecurity, or emotional distress. Again, such expressions of differentiation and identification express the complexity and poignancy of intergenerational dynamics in the work of making futures as well as constructing narratives about the past. In important ways, the daughters inherit some of their mother’s own memories, taking traces of them into their sense of who they are and who they would like to become.

Hopefulness for the future can be understood as a strategy for dealing with difficulties in the present, by looking to better times ahead. For the mothers and daughters here, it is also about mobility, but not in the sense of ruthlessly climbing the class ladder or of achieving extreme wealth and mega success. Rather, they express desires to avoid trouble and unhappiness and to be secure and safe, and for the mothers and daughters, the quality of relationships – at school, in the labor market, and among family and friends – was vital to their sense of what mattered in life.

The hopes mothers hold for their daughters are part of a longer historical and cultural narrative of maternal love. Equally, expressions of hope are a response to one's present circumstances, formed in particular social, spatial, local, and historical contexts (Hage 2001), in this case, those of inequality, of poverty, and of changes in the labor market and growing job insecurity. Hope is not only a subjective emotion that is idiosyncratically and intensely experienced. Of importance are the social and place-based conditions that make possible and sustain hopefulness, the spatialized and different ways in which hope (or lack of hope) is generated: having or mobilizing hope is usefully understood as both a biographical and social project. The concept of habitus is helpful here, as it accounts for the structured ways in which social, economic, and family circumstances shape personal dispositions, including orientations to the future. With regard to the experience of hopefulness and the conditions of possibility for generating hope, McNay (2003) has argued that there is a widening gap between objective circumstances and subjective longing. Drawing on Bourdieu (2000), McNay argues that "power relations overdetermine the experience of hope and anticipation through the shaping of the agent's expectations and orientations to the future" (McNay 2003, p. 14). In the current era, she proposes that there are "systemic tendencies towards social complexity and uncertainty, such as increasing occupational insecurity and social fluidity [leading to]... progressively more mismatches between expectations and objective chances" (ibid).

The daughters' uncertain hopes for their futures emerged in a social climate in which not to stay at school is increasingly experienced as risking a precarious life and in which opportunities for security are severely constrained. This produces pressure to stay on at school, hoping to be successful and to counteract the fear of future insecurity or downward mobility. As with Keren's story, a complex intersection of sociological, place-based, psychological, emotional, and intergenerational factors shapes how these young women see themselves in the present and anticipate their future. For some it is a sense of a resigned destiny contradicted by self-making, for others, a sense of navigating uncertainly towards who they hope to become, or not be like, in the future. Emotions, as Sara Ahmed argues, are not merely a "private matter": "emotions are not simply 'within' or 'without' but [...] they define the contours of the multiple worlds that are inhabited by different subjects" (Ahmed 2004, p. 25; Wetherell 2012). Taking account of emotions of longing, hope, uncertainty, or resignation and ambition (in the case of Keren) in relation to socially situated intergenerational dynamics is essential for understanding the nuances in how changes and continuities in gender identities are unfolding in everyday ways.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Much youth studies scholarship addresses the structural and macrosociological contexts in which young people's lives take shape: this is undeniably important. Yet too often such approaches can obscure from view the salience of interpersonal

and familial relations, the affective realm in which imagining and enacting the self unfolds. Identity is not a static project produced by discourse or shaped simply by either sociological or psychological imperatives. In the scenarios discussed in this chapter, identity has been understood as situated and intersectional, and as also arising from within psycho-social and intergenerational dynamics. Young women's social class, their school and residential location, and their family relations were highlighted, both as intersecting influences and as points of entry for a close-up look at the process of making gender and making futures. Other factors are also relevant, such as sexuality, religion, and race and ethnicity – the girls and their families were predominantly white and Anglo-European – but it has not been possible to address these in a meaningful way in this short chapter. Nevertheless, the overall focus on exploring the intersectional, place-based, and psycho-social dimensions of identity underscores the formation of identity over (historical, generational, biographical) time and in specific social, class, educational, and family settings. Of course, this identity work happens in relation to broader social and political trends – nationally, transnationally, via media, popular culture, policy mandates, and so forth. The aim of this chapter has not been to dismiss these influential realms but to show gender identity as relational and as tied to orientations to the future, not only to enactments in the present. Intergenerational dynamics are especially revealing for understanding this because they mediate between past and present, in both everyday encounters and flash points of change, conflict, and constancy, and in doing so presage the multilayered ways in which these might be carried into the future.

For youth studies, there are both opportunities and challenges in developing intergenerational studies of identity and gender relations, with some important comparative and longitudinal studies of young people's pathways offering helpful directions for investigating patterns of generational change (Andres and Wyn 2010; Thomson 2009). Further research is needed that develops analyses of the emotional and affective dimensions of young people's socially situated negotiations of gender, alongside research that expands the historical gaze, keeping an eye on the present but bringing forward a critical focus on temporality and movements between past, present, and future.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Bodies: Corporeality and Embodiment in Childhood and Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [Bodies In and Out of Place: Schooling and the Production of Gender Identities Through Embodied Experience](#)
- ▶ [Critical Moments? The Importance of Timing in Young People's Narratives of Transition](#)
- ▶ [The Promises of Empowered Girls](#)
- ▶ [Theorizing Subjectivity and Feminine Embodiment: Feminist Approaches and Debates](#)

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Stay or Go? Reading Identity Through Young People's Lives in Rural Places

23

Karen Nairn and Jane Higgins

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Abstract

The relationship between place and identity is at the heart of this chapter. The data is drawn from a study of young people who grew up during the time of New Zealand's neoliberal reforms in the late 1980s and 1990s (Nairn et al. 2012). These young people, who were in transition from school in the mid-2000s, drew on discourses inflected by neoliberalism to craft meaningful narratives of their lives in the context of family, friends, places, education, employment, leisure, and spirituality. The focus here is on four case studies of participants living in a small provincial town who were interviewed for over two (in some cases, three) years. Each one of this group had to consider whether to

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stay in their town post-school or to leave to pursue tertiary education or employment elsewhere. To many who had just left school, leaving town was perceived as “making it” in the wider world as though mobility and where one lives (or moves to) were physical manifestations of a “successful” transition to adulthood. Those who stayed “behind” were often perceived as unambitious. But this dualism belies the complex ways in which the relationship of these young people to their town developed during their immediate post-school years. Many left, but not all. Some stayed in spite of their desire to leave, others stayed because they could not imagine living anywhere else, while others left but returned after a year or so away. The chapter explores the intersections between place, biography, and wider social changes wrought by neoliberal policies, particularly those promoting higher education as the next step after high school.

Introduction

This chapter follows the post-school transition stories of four young people from a rural area in Southland, New Zealand, tracing the intersections in their lives between biography, place, and wider social change. These young people were grappling with the promises of the knowledge economy discourse, the attractions of the city and of overseas travel, the globalization of the labor market, and the competing public narratives of rural–urban differentiation. Within this context they were actively engaged in identity work, that is, in working with available material and discursive resources to craft identities and make meaning in their lives. The chapter explores how these identities (or subjectivities) were “formulated through discourses, given substance and pattern through storyline and deployed in social interaction” (Davies and Banks 1992, p. 3).

Method

The four young people in the case studies in this chapter were drawn from a larger group of interviews with 93 young people in a study conducted between 2003 and 2007 (Nairn et al. 2012). They were interviewed towards the end of their last year of high school and again about a year later, once decisions made in that final school year had begun to take effect. The interviews focused on school and family life, leisure and work, and imagined futures. The first interview took place at a moment of border crossing: from childhood to young adulthood, from school to tertiary education and/or employment, and from living in a rural town to the possibility of living an urban life elsewhere. The second interview showed that (apart from leaving high school) these border crossings were seldom either unidirectional or singular (Archer et al. 2000; Archer and Yamashita 2003; Ball et al. 1999, 2002; McDowell 2002; Reay et al. 2001; Wyn and White 1997).

The interviews encouraged the articulation of ontological narratives (Somers 1994), that is, narratives told by the young people about themselves in which they

made sense of their lives through the crafting of story lines about, for example, growing up in rural New Zealand. In asking about “life so far” as well as about “imagined futures” (Ball et al. 2000; Stokes and Wyn 2007), the interviews tended to confer a chronological structure on the stories told and so encouraged a linear telling of participants’ lives. The researchers recognized, however, that transitions tend to be more complex than a linear narrative allows (Dwyer et al. 2005; EGRIS 2001; Raffe 2003; Wyn and Dwyer 2000) and that identity in transition is complex and multiple (Ball et al. 2000; Bottrell 2007; Higgins et al. 2008; Valentine 2000). An alternative, participant-led form of interview, using a research tool called an “anti-CV,” was therefore offered to participants (Higgins et al. 2009). This invited them to construct a portfolio in which they expressed identity in ways not possible in a standard CV. This could include music, photography, writing, and artwork, anything the creator felt conveyed aspects of their identity at that moment in time (Pink 2001; Rose 2001). Each creator of an anti-CV was interviewed, using the portfolio items to guide the interview.

Both the researcher-led interview and the participant-led portfolio interview were opportunities for identity work, as the case studies below will show. Analysis of these transcripts shows how these young people drew on well-known public narratives, but their own exercise of agency is also clear in choosing how to use these discursive resources to make meaning of their “selves” in place at this liminal moment.

Identity Work in Neoliberal Times

Exploring the constitution of subjectivities in neoliberal times, Walkerdine and Bansel (2010) argue for more attention to be paid to “the subtle experiences of subjectivity in particular locations” and for “the central importance of space/time for an understanding of how people in different locations and with different histories live neoliberal change” (p. 501). The neoliberal change experienced by the rural young people in the study was not major industrial upheaval (as was the case in Hall et al. 2009) but a transformation of expectations and perceived opportunities inflected by the intersection of new discourses of the knowledge economy and globalization and old discourses of the rural idyll on one hand and the marginality of “small town New Zealand” on the other (Nairn et al. 2012, also see Atwool 1999; Kelsey 1995; Lauder et al. 1999; Nairn et al. 2003; Ormond 2001).

New Zealand’s neoliberal transformation took place in the 1980s and 1990s in the years when these young people were growing up. Local rural economies across the country, including Southland’s, experienced the neoliberal shift as a significant crisis: jobs disappeared from many provincial towns as farmers left the land and as meat processing works, forestry, and manufacturing downsized. The country, as a whole, experienced widespread deindustrialization (Dalziel and Lattimore 2004; Higgins and Alfeld 2006). Some of the participants in the study (Nairn et al. 2012) are the children of farmers who managed to stay on the land and prosper. Others are from families living in a small local town where most employment is

associated with servicing the rural economy. Many of the young people themselves had part-time after-school and holiday jobs in the service sector (e.g., in retail and tourism) and so were familiar with the expanding landscape of low-wage work in this sector in the wake of deindustrialization.

Generally these were holiday jobs, not “real” jobs in the eyes of these young people (Higgins et al. 2010). The “real” jobs lay in the future and were the subject of one of the most prevalent and powerful discourses of deindustrialization, that of the knowledge economy. In the knowledge economy discourse, the young people in the study heard a promise that qualifications, particularly university qualifications, provided a passport to assured labor market power (Brown and Hesketh 2004; Brown et al. 2010; Higgins and Nairn 2006; Nairn et al. 2012). It was common to hear comments such as Caroline’s (whose case study appears below): “Anything that gets your hands dirty and requires a lot of physical effort, there’s not really a huge amount of people wanting to go into it because everyone is driving them towards uni and office work and all of that sort of thing” (all names are code names).

Almost all participants in the study set their sights on some kind of tertiary qualification, although often they were unclear about which qualification they would pursue and had no planned pathway through their tertiary education into employment (Brown et al. 2010; Higgins et al. 2010; Nairn et al. 2012). There was no tertiary education facility in their town so, unlike their city counterparts, pursuing this goal meant leaving home. In the decision-making that accompanied this transition, it is possible to see what Vanderbeck and Dunkley (2003, p. 242) refer to as “place-based notions and their associated imaginative geographies” at work (see also Holloway and Valentine 2000; Philo 2000) and, specifically, “the influence of particular public narratives on young people’s understandings of their home places and on their processes of identification and disidentification” (Vanderbeck and Dunkley 2003, p. 242).

The discursive resources available to feed their imaginative geographies included narratives (some highly gendered) of the New Zealand countryside as rural idyll (e.g., Campbell 2006; Campbell et al. 1999), as a settler’s paradise where owning one’s own plot of land is feasible if one is prepared to put in the hard physical work that is necessary, and as “clean, green New Zealand” in which, as one participant put it, a person can escape “the toxicity” of city life. Pushing against these narratives is the “small town New Zealand” narrative, expressed rather bitterly by Mike (whose case study appears below): “I was pretty drunk and ah, this lady on the side of the road she said to me, yeah this is a good town, easy to get in. Ah no, she actually said this is a dead town, it’s easy to get in, hard to get out” (also see Kenway et al. 2006). For many young New Zealanders, including those in our study, the way “out” is on an “OE,” that is, an overseas experience in which young Kiwis, feeling acutely the marginality of their home on the face of the globe, travel for weeks or months or, sometimes, years (Nairn et al. 2012; Wilson 2014).

In this study identity work involved participants in crafting their own narratives, but the public narratives mentioned above were discernable in this process (Nairn et al. 2012). In particular, the young people’s narratives were embedded in

webs of relationships, specific to time and place: as Walkerdine and Bansel (2010) observe, family, sociality, and community all come into play in these processes. For some participants, family relationships were seen in a new light in relation to this double move: away from the family home and out of the rural town (which we call Southtown) to the city. Processes of identification and disidentification were expressed by many: some, like Mike in the case study below, were glad to be gone and to disassociate themselves from their rural background, but others, like Murray (below), found the pull of that background too powerful to ignore.

The case studies that follow explore the identity work of four participants whose post-school lives took a range of trajectories. Caroline actively resisted leaving for university, staying in Southtown and consolidating her rural life there. Mike, who initially stayed in Southtown, leapt at the opportunity to move to a job in a northern city; he welcomed leaving, grateful for a lucky escape. Neither Caroline nor Mike entertained leaving for university. In contrast, both Laura and Murray, like many of their peers, pursued the goal of tertiary education, particularly university, as the logical next step after high school. But Laura did not meet the prerequisites for university entry and reluctantly remained in Southtown. Murray did go to university but missed his rural life and when a job back home came up, he took it. Each case study demonstrates the significance of reading identity *in relation to* place in order to better understand how young people's imaginative geographies are a resource drawn on in the crafting of identity (Holloway and Valentine 2000; Said 1978).

Staying as an Act of Resistance: Caroline

Caroline actively resisted societal pressures to go to university after high school and stayed in the Southtown area. In doing so she employed a counter-narrative of the rural as superior to the urban, a reversal of the rural/urban hierarchy popular among her schoolmates (Vanderbeck and Dunkley 2003). Caroline made sense of her rural identity in relation to an implied urban and female "other," via the ontological narrative of the research interview (Somers 1994; Holloway and Jefferson 2000). As part of her narrative, and when prompted during interviews, she compared her life with those of her peers at university, identifying how she was "not like" them. Her pride in her physical work, the importance of land and physical space, and a shared rural code of conduct were all significant features of her identity narrative.

After finishing school Caroline found work as a laborer on a dairy farm. She was proud of the physical demands this work entailed:

because I'm carrying around calves like I said and...that sort of physical work...means that I'm just as fit as the girls who go to the gym every second day or whatever, to do weights or do running or anything like that. I feel that my lifestyle fills that gap so I don't need to.

The importance of land and physical space was another recurring theme. Accommodation on the farm where Caroline worked was part of her employment

contract, and she appreciated the physical space it afforded, especially for her dog. She compared this favorably with her experience of living in a rural town when her family left their farm. Although she acknowledged some advantages of living in Southtown, such as being closer to her rugby games and other facilities, she missed her family's farm "for the fact that you can go outside and talk really, really loudly and then go back inside again and no one will have heard you, it's great."

Underlying her gratitude for the space a rural location afforded was an appreciation of the constellations of relationships (Somers 1994; Smith et al. 2002; Walkerdine and Bansel 2010), which facilitated a rural code of conduct and trust. She gave examples of respect for landowners and their land, citing, for example, the time when she advised a visitor who had inadvertently churned up the land where she was living with their vehicle, to tell her boss "because it's not actually your land." She also spoke of the way in which, in rural pubs, it is possible to "leave your change from a drink on the bar and come back to it 20 minutes later and it's still there."

Caroline proudly located herself in a rural narrative against the powerful public narrative of "young people leaving rural towns for university." But her narrative depends on this public narrative to make sense, and it is in her comparisons with university-going peers that it is possible to discern the discursive resources she is working with to make sense of her life:

In ways, like I'm jealous of [uni. peers'] life in a few ways, but then I'm glad that I don't [do] it a lot more, because they just seem to spend money and drink and do nothing. . . . So I feel that even like my life is hard but at least I've got a sane grip on how the world works and you need to make money before you spend it. . . . They get to go out a lot more than what I thought I was but now I suppose it doesn't really matter because I still go out quite a bit anyway so I've still got their life in that little bit that I was sort of jealous of to begin with, but I have it in moderation so it's better.

Here, Caroline's envy of her university peers, especially of their social lives, is moderated by her view of her own, more modest, social life. Her imaginative geography of her rural life was defined, in part at least, in relation to the lives of her urban, university-bound peers. Rural young people, whether they stay or leave, must take account of this broader public narrative of "leaving town for university."

A Lucky Escape: Mike

Mike found a job near Southtown and it seemed that he would stay. But when family members encouraged him to consider a job opportunity in a North Island city he was "out of there." Mike's experience of Southtown was different from Caroline's: people living in the same place may live in different worlds (Vanderbeck and Dunkley 2003; also see Borell 2005). Ethnicity plays a role in creating this distinction – Mike is Māori and Caroline is Pākehā. Mike's descriptions of the places where he lived were "racialized" in ways that were more overt than in Pākehā participants' descriptions (Wall 2000). This is not surprising

for members of New Zealand's majority ethnicity (Pākehā), where the "whiteness" of a place can seem invisible unless it is "not white" (Frankenberg 1993; Nairn 2005; Wall 2000).

To move to the North Island, where Māori are more visible than in the South Island, was a revelation for Mike: "I've never seen so much Māori in my whole life. . . That's what it was like. Ah, my whole life changed around. . . and here's me from the South Island. . . and I'm real mellowed out." In contrast, Mike called Southtown a "baldhead town," which was his code for Pākehā "skinheads" who drive around in cars, whom others referred to as "bogans." In this new place with so many Māoris, Mike felt that he fitted in: "I can see myself totally in this world." Although Mike found it hard to put into words what it meant to find a match between sense of self and place, there was no doubting its significance: "Just ah, pretty hard to explain but it's like, ah, I don't know what it is, . . . totally different. Ah, I can't explain it, it's just, yeah build a whole new life."

Mike had arrived in a new place literally and metaphorically. Leaving his rural town led to an encounter with a wider world, "my eyes opened up to the world," which in turn prompted him to (re)view where he had come from "like even that town opened my eyes up." Leaving to live elsewhere meant he now had a point of comparison, and his second interview offered an opportunity to construct an ontological narrative to make sense of his life in a new place in relation to the place he had left.

Moving north was a catalyst as well as a metaphor for other key changes, as Mike outlined:

I don't drink no more. Yeah I used to drink my money away. Ah not all of it though. . . had money and then nothing to do, that sort of stuff and swearing a lot, a lot [laughs]. *And since I've moved up here ah I've found out what manners were. . . and that they work. And now when I hear like people my age and that, my mates swear like. . . can nobody say please or something?* (emphasis added).

Mike's narrative of change beautifully illustrates how "narratives are constellations of *relationships* (connected parts) embedded in *time and space*, constituted by *causal emplotment*" (Somers 1994, p. 608, emphasis in original). His relationships with people and places shifted markedly over time and space, a shift Mike attributed to moving north and finding out "what manners were." Although he did not elaborate about the people who were also likely influences, his narrative of transformation was clearly embedded in, and driven by, changes in time and space. These changes seemed to facilitate more generous readings of the rural town where he spent his early years, which he had described as "a hole" in his first interview but later appreciated as a place where he learned things. This rural town is nevertheless a place he thought that friends should escape from: "When I went down for Christmas I told [a mate] 'ahh, you should come up here, there's a job up here and you should get *out of here* and do things and you know, *get a life*'" (emphasis added).

From Mike's perspective, "getting a life" is constrained in small rural towns. He thus (re)produced the familiar public narrative of limited opportunities in rural

locations (Kenway et al. 2006; Vanderbeck and Dunkley 2003). In leaving, Mike showed how significant a place can be in constructing an alternative narrative of self (also see Borell 2005).

Reluctant to Remain: Laura

Laura expected to leave Southtown to go to university. Two public narratives can be discerned in Laura's plans for the future: that tertiary should follow secondary education, as mentioned above, and that success is symbolized in the act of leaving town.

Laura saw two groups in Southtown: those who have "been away and stuff, like lived overseas and been to university and things" – "they're cool"; and those who have stayed "and just know Southtown, you know" – "most of them are just no hoppers." Laura planned to leave Southtown to attend university but was thwarted by gaining insufficient grades for university entry so she remained, reluctantly, conscious of how staying symbolized failure.

A farewell for peers who were leaving for university made Laura's feelings about staying more poignant: "there was only a few of us that were staying in Southtown and we were just like, everyone just thought we were crazy pretty much [because] I suppose everyone's been waiting to get out of Southtown since they were younger, but yeah they were just all excited." Here the public narrative of "must leave Southtown" in effect creates a normative evaluation of how Laura "should" feel about remaining (Somers 1994). She negotiated her sense of identity *in relation to her peers* who were leaving; *in relation to place*, where to remain is symbolic of failure; and *in relation to time*, that by a certain age it is expected that you would leave Southtown.

This sense of failure to make the "right" kind of transition to university was displayed for all to see, which produced feelings of guilt: "just coz I'm still in Southtown and people, it looks as if I'm not really doing a lot. ..." Although Laura was in paid work and involved in a range of local events, she perceived her status through the eyes of people she encountered in town, believing they would judge her more favorably if she had "a job that's leading somewhere."

Laura's description of her feelings about the place she expected to leave was particularly revealing of the public narratives that she and her rural peers were negotiating. In the past, young women remaining in rural locations did not represent failure in the way that Laura now so keenly felt: for example, she explained a female friend's decision to stay as a lack of ambition. Laura's narrative of identity was shaped by a constellation of relationships (Somers 1994), pulling in different directions, ranging from expectations among family and peers that she would leave for university to the significance of workplace relationships and friends who stayed in Southtown.

The research interview provided an opportunity to make sense of staying, which Laura acknowledged had impacted on how she might act once she eventually got to university. Reflecting hypothetically on how she might have acted if she had left for

university directly after school, she admitted: "I think I would probably just be exactly like them, the ones that think that uni is the end of the world and that is all you can do, and ['Uni-town'] is great and everything. I probably would have been like that. Yeah and I would think I was cool probably." But with the benefit of insights gained from staying, Laura anticipated "now I would put some effort into [university], because... the money that goes into it. Yeah, I know that there is a work force out there as well that I can always go into, which makes a difference." In the process of the ontological narrative of the interview, Laura's initial narrative equating her rural town with limited opportunities was reimagined somewhat, and she engaged in a form of narrative repair in which remaining in Southtown became an opportunity for her to mature so that, unlike her peers, when she did get to university she would be able to make the most of what it offers (Nelson 2001; also see Holloway and Valentine 2000; Vanderbeck and Dunkley 2003).

Appreciating Rural Life (Leaving and Returning): Murray

Murray left Southtown for university, along with many of his peers, but he felt out of place there and welcomed an employment opportunity that meant he could return. His experience of both the urban and the rural and his realization of where he felt most comfortable reveal how place and identity interact in mutually constitutive ways. For Murray, the rural seemed to provide the most meaningful context for his interests and sense of self. Yet he did not default to a simplistic reification of the rural over the urban. Instead he offered a nuanced analysis of the identities rural and urban places seemed to make possible.

Murray appreciated the location of his family's farm, "I like living there because it's a rural sort of community and got the place to yourself, not surrounded by heaps of houses and stuff and just the rural life." After finishing high school, he went to university in a nearby city, prompted by parents and teachers' expectations for someone who exhibited academic ability.

Both the university and the city itself were places where it seemed possible to enact a greater range of identities than those Murray had witnessed in Southtown. He observed: "I do love mixing with people [at university] that I would have never ever met in, just staying in, Southtown or going straight into a job because Southtown's sort of, everyone's similar... If anyone is different, then *you get taken down*... whereas in ['Uni-city'] they're probably more accepting of difference because there's just such a variety" (emphasis added).

When asked more about who might be "taken down," Murray elaborated: "Well, um, being a homosexual was a big one in Southtown... [which has] a reputation for being homophobic... it's just because we're really conservative." Here some interesting identity work is taking place as Murray (re)produces the familiar narrative of rural conservatism (Kenway et al. 2006; Vanderbeck and Dunkley 2003), yet his repeated appreciation of diversity indicates that he does not necessarily share these conservative attitudes, despite his use of "we."

Ironically, however, he felt out of place in the city, despite its avowed diversity, because there was no space for rural pursuits: “yeah, all the sort of farm boy activities and stuff like motorbikes and like I’m really into cars and motorbikes and that sort of thing.”

It’s just probably all the things that I enjoy at home I cannot do here. . . I’m used to having, well, cats and dogs and stuff all around, and they’re sort of like the centre of our life at home. . . and now we don’t have that in the flat it sort of feels empty like just without that. . . I have my car here in [Uni-city] but I feel like a bit of an idiot going out on the side of the road and trying to tinker with it. . . I see people walk past and look at you funny and you’re sort of like, ah ok [laughs]. It’s sort of everything that I enjoy I just can’t really do. . .and that’s probably why I feel like a bit of a fish out of water.

The city’s physical environment of “concrete and roads. . . everywhere’s just concrete” literally shapes what it is possible to be in this particular urban environment, in contrast to “the wide open spaces” of his family’s farm.

In making sense of which places he prefers and why, Murray’s ontological narrative demonstrated how rural and urban places offer significant resources for constituting identities, especially when understood in relation to each other. Murray’s narrative (re)produced both the rural idyll of open spaces, where there was space to fix cars and look after animals, as well as the spectre of rural conservatism for young people who are same-sex attracted. On the urban side of the equation, Murray acknowledged how the urban environment seemed to simultaneously offer spaces of possibility for diverse ways of being, as well as constraints.

Murray’s nuanced urban/rural comparison contrasts with Caroline’s more black and white version. His experience of a city enabled him to realize where he felt most at ease, (re)appreciating his rural home in the process, whereas Caroline’s (re)appreciation of her rural location was in relation to the imagined geography of an urban “other,” which she rejected. Both value the rural but do so in different ways.

Conclusion and Future Directions

“The rural” occupies an ambiguous position in rural young people’s imaginative geographies. In the case studies above, deciding to stay or leave entailed ontological tussles with some of the dominant narratives and economic realities associated with neoliberal change in New Zealand: respectively, the importance of pursuing tertiary education to gain labor market power and the relatively low-paid-wage labor available to young people living in rural areas in an era of increasing deindustrialization and globalization. When leaving town is integral to the public narrative of “success” in rural areas, it is not surprising that young people who do not leave have to engage in considerable identity work to maintain their sense of self. This is exemplified by Laura who talked at length about how she felt she was perceived by others in Southtown and was convinced that remaining “behind” was a relatively minor deviation in her transition path: her commitment to attending university remained firm. Although Caroline chose to stay, she still compared

herself to her university peers and clearly felt the need to justify her decision to stay, as though it was not a logical decision to make (also see Nairn et al. 2012).

In the case studies presented here, it is possible to discern different scales of “narrative repair” taking place as part of this identity work (Nelson 2001). Caroline actively defended her rural identity against an imagined urban “other,” while Mike felt lucky to escape Southtown and related with delight his discovery of “fitting in” in his new location. For Laura, remaining in Southtown initially symbolized failure, but she also gained a new understanding of her own potential to mature and make better use, than her peers, of her chance at university when it came. Finally, in returning to Southtown, Murray (re)appreciated his rural home in ways that might not have been possible had he not left in the first place. Each of them constructs a narrative in which place carries a significant, and historically specific, symbolic load in relation to perceived success and failure. Their identity work draws on discourses that are themselves historically specific, showing how space and time – geography and historical moment – are fundamentally important in the constitution of subjectivities.

Cross-References

- ▶ [“Black Neighborhoods” and “Race,” Placed Identities in Youth Transition to Adulthoods](#)
- ▶ [Indigenous Youth, Nationhood, and the Politics of Belonging](#)
- ▶ [Reconsidering Youth Well-Being as Fluid and Relational: A Dynamic Process at the Intersection of Their Physical and Social Geographies](#)
- ▶ [Storing Our Lives of Now: The Pluritemporal Memories of Rural Youth Identity and Place](#)
- ▶ [Youth, Relationality, and Space: Conceptual Resources for Youth Studies from Critical Human Geography](#)

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Youth, Relationality, and Space: Conceptual Resources for Youth Studies from Critical Human Geography

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Nancy Worth

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Abstract

This chapter takes up a relational understanding of space (Massey 2005) to make sense of conceptual resources for research with young people from critical human geography. After a brief discussion of relationality, the second section begins with the understanding that relationality needs to be grounded, examining the concept of **lived space**. The chapter considers how space is integral to young people's experiences, from the macro, how global changes interact with young people's lived experiences (Hörschelmann and Schäfer 2005; Jeffrey and Dyson 2008), down to the micro, as Valentine (2003, p. 48) states, there is a need to explore the "importance of different life spaces and the interconnections between them (e.g., school and work, work and home)" while also exploring

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how young people are both actors in space and constrained by it. The third section picks up geographic work with **timespace**, considering the relationship of time to space in the lives of young people, highlighting critical work on temporalities and intergenerationality in geography (Thrift and May 2001; Dodgshon 2008; Vanderbeck 2007).

Introduction: Relationality and Youth Research in Critical Human Geography

Much work on youth identity is rooted in literature from psychology, building on the development perspectives of Piaget and Erikson. In other disciplines, research on identity is more postmodern – embracing context and subjectivity and an inherent relationality (Rattansi and Phoenix 1997). This chapter picks up on the “relational turn” within geography and in geographic work on youth and young adulthood in particular. The chapter considers what geographers’ ever-present preoccupation – the *spatial* offers to a relational approach to research with young people. For geographers, social experience is contingent on understanding space – from physical location but also social and embodied forms of space. Therefore, this chapter uses a relational understanding of space (Massey 2005) to make sense of conceptual resources for research with young people.

In this first section the concept of relationality is briefly traced through sociology as well as its use by youth geographers. The second section begins with the understanding that relationality needs to be grounded, examining the concept of **lived space**. The section considers how space is integral to young people’s experiences, from the macro, how global changes interact with young people’s lived experiences (Hörschelmann and Schäfer 2005; Jeffrey and Dyson 2008), down to the micro, as Valentine (2003, p. 48) states, there is a need to explore the “importance of different life spaces and the interconnections between them (e.g., school and work, work and home)” while also exploring how young people are both actors in space and constrained by it. The third section examines geographic work with **timespace**, considering the relationship of time to space in the lives of young people, highlighting critical work on temporalities and intergenerationality in geography (Thrift and May 2001; Dodgshon 2008; Vanderbeck 2007).

The Relational Turn

In sociology, Donati (2012, p. i) has extended a relational approach to social life that “society is constituted by the relations people create with one another, their emergent properties and powers, and internal and external causal effects.” This is also taken forward by Nick Crossley (2011, p. i), whose book *Towards a Relational Sociology* moves between classic binaries of structure/agency, individual/whole, and micro/macro in favor of interaction, where “relations are lived trajectories of iterated interaction, built up through a history of interaction, but also entailing

Table 1 Two ways of thinking youth identity as spatial-relational

Lived space	Timespace
Situated identities	Generation
Intersectionality	Lifecourse
Encounter	Transitions, futurity, and “becoming”
Translocal interactions	Intergenerationality
Thirdspace	Time as momentary, biographical, and transitional
Network society	Everyday life/micro-geographies of actors
“Distance” as socio-relational rather than physical	Time poverty
Performing/encountering difference in “social space”	Nonlinearity
Mobilities	Time geography
Scale	

anticipation of future interaction.” In geography, the relation turn focuses more on space than people (Andrews et al. 2012), and for work with young people in particular, a relational approach has developed through an engagement with spatiality (e.g., Gill Valentine (2003) uses a metaphor of boundary crossing to discuss geographic research with children and young people). In a review of geographic literature on young people, Evans (2008) frames the contributions from youth geography as a new territory, differentiating itself from a stronger focus on children through a discussion of youth transitions and how young people interact with public space. Just a few years later, geographers are increasing using the concept of lifecourse (Hörschelmann 2011; Hopkins and Pain 2007) to consider youth and young adulthood within a wider understanding of sociospatial experience that considers age relationally.

The table below highlights some key ideas for how geographers are thinking about youth identity as spatial-relational (Table 1). The table sets out two thematic (but not mutually exclusive) areas of youth geographers’ engagement with issues of identity and relationality. The first, lived space, considers the connections between/ across different spaces, including how spaces produce and reinforce relations of power, difference and identity. The second, timespace, reflects geographers’ growing interest in temporality, exploring the relationship between time and space to offer a dynamic understanding of identity.

Lived Space

The emergence of relationality in geography is often credited to the work of Doreen Massey et al. (1999, 2005) (space as emergence, as network). Other geographers have further developed a relational understanding of space, often drawing on the work of Henri Lefebvre and his famous trialectic of space as perceived, conceived, and lived. Stuart Elden (2001, pp. 814–5) claims that

This Lefebvrian schema sees a unity between physical, mental and social space. The first of these takes space as physical form, space that is generated and used. The second is the space of savoir (knowledge) and logic, of maps and mathematics, of space as the instrumental space of social engineers and urban planners. The third sees space as produced and modified over time and through its use, spaces invested with symbolism and meaning, the space of connaissance (less formal or more local forms of knowledge), space as it is lived, social space.

Youth geographers have been especially interested in what's been called "social space" or "lived space" – as a way of understanding both the material and the ideal. This has been most useful as a way of understanding the lifecourse not though time but through different microspaces like school, home, work, and street – recognizing that identity is both read and performed differently across space.

This interest in lived space is also an important part of geographic research that takes an intersectional approach to identity. Rather than adding or multiplying categories of social difference, an intersectional approach involves understanding how different social identities are "imbricated, co-constituted, or intermeshed" (Brown 2012, p. 542). Space becomes critical to understanding the subject, as places can reveal some identity intersections over others, and more research is needed into the relationality of social spaces and subjectivity (Hopkins and Pain 2007). Gill Valentine (2007, p. 19) has argued that paying attention to intersectionality – the relational complexity of lived experience – is inherently spatial as

identities are highly contingent and situated accomplishments. In other words space and identities are co-implicated. Where [we are] located is constitutive of [our] identity, not incidental to it, so that [we] understand ourselves differently when at school than when in at home, or when in the office environment The identity of particular spaces—the home, the school, the workplace, or a community space . . .—are in turn produced and stabilized through the repetition of the intersectional identities of the dominant groups that occupy them such that particular groups claim the right to these spaces.

In the subsections that follow, geographic work on youth identity that picks on particular lived spaces at a variety of scales is highlighted, including the local (using the example of school), the urban/rural, and the global.

School

School has been a central interest to youth geographers, as it is the space that many young people spend most of their time. While geographers are interested in school as an institution and education as a social-political process, there is also a vibrant area of research that argues for a more student-centered approach. For example, Holloway et al.'s (2010) *Progress Report* on the geographies of education contends that young people need to be the subjects of education – paying attention to their diverse experiences of school and learning. Going further, Cook and Hemming's (2011, p. 1) editorial for a special issue on geographies of education in *Social & Cultural Geography* highlights work that values the body and embodiment: "(as a source of space and existing within space), [and] the three interlinked dimensions of space (physical, social and mental/cultural)." They also productively

use Massey's (1993) concept of "power geometries" to think more deeply about how social relations operate within and beyond schools.

Considerations of power and social relationships are central to Louise Holt's research on the intersection of disability and school spaces. She develops the concept of embodied social capital to understand how young people with mind-body-emotional differences make sense of social networks at school (Holt 2010). Other research has taken an explicitly relational approach to understand how young people who are visually impaired understand their experiences of sociality in mainstream and specialist schools. Rather than the traditional "school to work" transitions literature, this focus on sociality and its possibilities and restrictions is fundamentally connected to school buildings, classroom arrangements, and kinds of relationships with peers, teaching assistants, and teachers that are encouraged or subverted in school (Worth 2012).

Urban/Rural

One of the microspaces of the city of interest to geographers is the street – what it means for young people to be visible in public space – from David's Ley's (1975) classic work on street gangs to Matthew's (2003) conceptualization of the street as a liminal space and Cahill's (2000) work on urban neighborhoods and Kraftl et al.'s work on new communities (2013). Moving up from the scale of the street, in a special issue of *Urban Studies*, Skelton and Gough (2013, p. 459) argue that young people need to be recognized as social actors in cities – "interact(ing) and construct(ing) urban environments," recognizing both young people and cities as relational constructs and providing "glimpses into the liminal and interstitial places of the city, the everywhere and everything where young people can be found." Thinking about young people's mobility in cities helps draw out this relational approach – moving beyond notions of fixity in favor of the "messy, moving and morphing" city as a social space for young people. In other research about young people's urban experience, the focus shifts to how age identity can get caught up in the production of independent mobility; rather than how young people moved around the city, the focus is on how young people invoked specific strategies to be recognized as a "competent spatial actor" by others in public space – here the street, the young person, and the observing stranger all became a function of identity maintenance (Worth 2013).

The significance of the rural-urban divide for young people's identities is a central concern for youth geographers. These two environments, with all their culturally attributed meanings, are important to how young people make sense of who they are, who is an "outsider," as well as wider youth cultures (Vanderbeck and Morse Dunkley 2003). This "betweenness" is a theme that is also explored by Leyshon (2008). In another paper, Leyshon and Bull (2011) use Bergson's work on memory and Ricoeur's on narrative to connect stories and memories to both place and personal identity – what they term "a bricolage of the here." In this work place/locale becomes integral to young people's identities – where young people position themselves not just in relation to family and social networks but also to their local village.

Globalization and Mobile Lives

Relationality implicitly crosses spatial scales, from the body, what Adrienne Rich calls “the geography closest in” (see also Teather 1999), to the nation-state and beyond and the intersection with processes of globalization – finding the global in the local has been a fundamental to geographies of young people. While the previous two sections consider how broader spatial scales are implicated through more local scales of the school or the street, for geographers interested in investigating the global there is often a more explicit crossing of scale – reading the global through the local. For example, Cindi’s Katz’s (2004) work values the local within the global scale in her foundational research in New York and Sudan. She considers the relationship between capitalism and social reproduction, moving between working class families in New York and young people in Howa, a Sudanese village. Hörschelmann and Schäfer (2007) have researched how globalization links into young people’s everyday experiences in Berlin, considering “young people are [differently] positioned in networks of global–local connectivity.”

This insight also connects to a set of literature about young people’s transnational and migration experiences. In a review by Ni Laoire et al. (2012), it highlights that young people’s experiences of migration tend to be overlooked by geographers, and more research is needed about the roles children and young people play in migration decisions and the impact of mobility and young people’s sense of belonging. One interesting example of research that focuses on the experiences of young people is Mas Giralt and Bailey’s (Mas Giralt and Bailey 2010) research with Latin-American families in the United Kingdom. Drawing on Bauman’s thesis on liquid modernity, they use the concept of “liquid life paths” to examine the “spatial imaginaries” involved in how migration stories impact personal identity. Finally, a collection by Jeffrey and Dyson, *Telling Young Lives: Portraits of Global Youth* (2004), provides an interesting insight into what Sue Ruddick has called “the politics of everyday life” for young people, considering how young people’s life chances and aspirations are interconnected with where they’re from, using ethnographic accounts from around the world. Much of the work in geography makes use of different (micro)spaces to situate its analysis, even using the local to examine the global; however, geographers are increasingly interested in how research with young people can work across scale (see ► [Chap. 53, “Scales of Young People’s Lives”](#) in this Handbook).

Timespace

Geographic research on time stretches back to Hagerstrand’s timespace paths in the 1950s, mapping people’s movements and interactions across both time and space in “fish bowls” of activity (see discussion in Pred 1981). More recently, feminist geography and work on nonrepresentational theory (especially Thrift and May’s (2001) *Timespace: Geographies of Temporality*) have moved geographers’ interest beyond chronological understandings of time. Doreen “Massey (2005), in

particular, has outlined how space and time ‘are integral to one another’, ‘distinct’ but ‘co-implicated’, and ‘it is on both of them, necessarily together, that rests the liveliness of the world’ (pp. 47, 55, 56), and she has convincingly argued that relational approaches to time-space can enable us to reconnect the spatial with the political, (. . .)” (Merriman et al. 2012). Taking up this critique within geographic work on the lifecourse, Jarvis et al. (2011), p. 522) contend that an important aspect of relationality for work on the lifecourse is path dependency: “So many aspects of our lives our travel, our work, our family, and social relations are structured to at least some extent by structures and relations that were constructed in the (often distant) past.” Their editorial highlights that relationality is not just an important spatial concern but one with temporal demands as well.

Within the geographic youth transitions literature, Skelton (2002) argues that some particular uses of time (see Allat 1997) can be “developmentalist,” denying the agency of young people by invoking the fallacy of child as becoming, adult as being. Instead Skelton argues that young adulthood is an important “time of knowing,” where young people are actively “living the present and making the most of the time they have” (Skelton 2002, p.105) (the time and space section of this Handbook links to literature beyond youth geography).

Everyday Time

Youth geographers most often engage with timespace through the lens of everyday time. Horton and Kraftl (Horton and Kraftl 2006) argue that while geographies of children and young people have “persistently engaged with the empirics of children’s everyday geographies, in a variety of contexts (for instance Beazley 2003, Tucker 2003; Valentine 2003; Thomson and Philo 2004; Chant and Jones 2005; [. . .])” the subfield could deepen its engagement with theories of everyday life – developing spatially informed concepts about everyday life. In the last few years, youth geographers have taken up this challenge, returning to the work of Henri Lefebvre.

Nicola Ansell and colleagues (2011, p. 526) have used timespace as a way of scaling up from the individual and recognizing the contingencies of young people’s lives in their research on the consequence of AIDS. They use the framework of everyday time, arguing that it is “composed principally of repetition and routine (thus circular rather than linear) (Crang 2005), constitutes the fabric of daily life and builds the ‘temporal rhythms’ of societies (Panelli 2007).” In a similar discussion, Evans (2012) has used timespace to consider young people’s bodily practices, especially around caring in sibling-headed households. Evans uses Lefebvre’s (2004) work on rhythmanalysis to:

help to analyse the interdependence or ‘reciprocal action’ between time and space in everyday life. Lefebvre distinguishes between the repetitions or recurrences of linear time (‘clock time’ resulting from social practice and human activity) and cyclical time (resulting from [. . .] days, nights, biological rhythms of sleep, hunger, and bodily changes) (Elden 2004; Simonsen 2005). The body is central to Lefebvre’s mode of analysis, as the point of contact where diverse social and biological rhythms co-exist, referred to as ‘polyrhythmia.’

Evans (2012, p. 832) work focuses on places where different rhythms of time conflict for young people – especially the “linear rhythms of schooling and work” and the “cyclical rhythms of everyday life, such as the body’s daily needs for food, rest and sleep and seasonal agricultural labour demands.”

Transitions

In two editorials, geographers (Jarvis et al. 2011; Schwanen et al. 2012) have argued that timespace reinvigorates our understanding of identity and the lifecourse, embracing nonlinearity and paying attention to “ruptures and discontinuities of . . . transitions,” a particularly helpful way of thinking though inequalities and constraints. Schwanen et al. argue that, following Deleuze, it can be helpful to think about the lifecourse in terms of folds, a “dynamic shaping and pleating over time,” where “the encountered discourses, ideas, technologies, landscapes, the lives of other people, etcetera are folded and refolded into a person’s embodied subjectivity, [. . .] As a result, linear representations of lifecourses as trajectories or pathways are traded for more complex, topological understandings of spacetime and provisionality and uncertainty can be articulated.” (Schwanen et al. 2012, p. 1294). In essence timespace helps to reveal the complex, contingent, and contextual nature of the lifecourse.

Youth geographers have highlighted the need to consider a more complex understanding of temporality that moves away from the linear and chronological, by engaging with theories of “becoming” beyond a developmental sense (Worth 2009; Ansell et al. 2011). This work theorizes ways of moving beyond the dominant sense of chronology, working with Bergsonian concepts like “duration,” where the past, present, and possible futures exist within an individual’s identity all at once. In this sense, “time is not abstract but rooted in context. Temporality refers not to the linear passage of time but rather to the way in which an individual is anchored in a present that is made meaningful by past experiences and by the person’s anticipated future” (Davies 1996). In essence this is an understanding of time that embraces the idea of lifecourse, and its focus is on interrelationships, rather than the more individualistic idea of life cycle. Becoming is a useful way to think beyond the dominance of linearity – seeing youth transition as a constantly evolving experience, embracing its changeability and instability. It is vital for theories of youth transition to incorporate a multiplicity of futures and ways of understanding the self, and the concept of becoming is one way of engaging with that complexity. The central tenet of becoming is its focus on change and the future, working against the regulative nature of endpoints, complicating notions of adulthood as well (Lee 2001).

Generation

Widening timespace enquiries beyond everyday time and youth transitions/life trajectories is a growing body of geographic work about generation. According to

Vanderbeck (2007, p. 205), “this perspective emphasizes the interplay between structure and agency as individuals and groups negotiate, challenge and (re)construct generational identities and structures’ in particular spaces.” In a forthcoming edited collection entitled *Intergenerational Space* (2014), Vanderbeck and Worth examine the importance of space, place, and geography for understanding relations between generations. Individual chapters highlight the role of young people within intergenerational “encounters,” including issues of well-being and social justice between and within generations.

In another example, Smith’s (2013, p. 572) research with young people in Kashmir examines how hope/aspirations of future territories are connected to a generation of young people through parents, grandparents, and young people themselves. She develops the concept of “generational vertigo, a mixture of apprehension and anticipation regarding the future, and suggest that attending to how and why this vertigo is manifest provides a way to think through relationships between young people, time and territory.” While much of geographers’ work with generation and identity is intrafamilial (see Tarrant 2010; Hallman 2011), interfamilial encounters across generation is increasing a subject for research, including young people’s religious identities (Hopkins et al. 2011), and building sustainable communities (Pain 2005); this is a fruitful area for further research by geographers, developing conceptual resources around identity, age, and space.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Youth geographers have diverse theoretical approaches and innovative methods for examining questions of identity. Their understanding of identity is situated within different ways of conceptualizing the spatial – from particular spaces, like home, school, the city – or through time, from the everyday to generations. Moving forward, one of the key concepts that youth geographers will continue to attend to is power, challenging dominant constructions of what is meant to be a young person in a particular place, as well as drawing attention to persistent inequalities and marginalization that young people encounter. Finally, youth geographers could do more to highlight their work on relationality and space, fostering a more reciprocal relationship with related fields.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Possibilities for Learning Between Childhoods and Youth in the Minority and Majority Worlds: Youth Transitions as an Example of Cross-World Dialogue](#)
- ▶ [Reconsidering Youth Well-Being as Fluid and Relational: A Dynamic Process at the Intersection of Their Physical and Social Geographies](#)
- ▶ [Rhythms and Flow. Timing and Spacing the Digitally Mediated Everyday](#)
- ▶ [Scales of Young People’s Lives](#)

- ▶ [Stay or Go? Reading Identity Through Young People's Lives in Rural Places](#)
- ▶ [Storing Our Lives of Now: The Pluritemporal Memories of Rural Youth Identity and Place](#)
- ▶ [Time and Space in Youth Studies](#)

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Part V
Citizenship

Kylie Smith

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Abstract

Discourses and theories of citizenship are embedded in notions of rights, competence, agency, autonomy, independence, and participation. Thus, discussion about the citizenship of children and young people raises questions about whether they should or can actively participate as citizens or whether they should be prepared for their role as “future” citizens. There is an associated interest in “child participation” and “youth voice” as mechanisms through which to recognize the contribution that children and young people can make or as means through which to recognize their rights to be heard in matters that affect them. A focus on citizenship also encompasses an interest in equity and in the

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structural and cultural conditions that establish a hierarchy of who is recognized or can participate in civic life. The use of an equity lens shows that children and young people who are indigenous, have diverse abilities, live in poverty, have a home or community language that is not English, or are under 8 years of age are least likely to be provided with opportunities for civic participation.

Introduction

The construct of citizenship is defined and conceptualized in diverse ways by academics and policymakers. Discourses and theories of citizenship are multiple and address concepts such as rights and responsibilities, equality, membership, identity, dignity, competence, independence, and participation (Coady 2008; Invernizzi and Williams 2008). In a time of globalization and increased migration, communities are becoming more and more diverse. This diversity brings differing beliefs and practices, which can cause tension, disconnection, and at times conflict within communities. Enhancing children's and young people's citizenship has been used as a way to support social cohesion through teaching children and youth their roles and responsibilities within the community now and in the future. Across a range of disciplines, including urban planning and architecture, philosophy, education, public policy, law, and medicine, childhood and youth citizenship is conceptualized in terms of civic engagement, *identity* (see the sections in this collection by Stokes, Aaltonen, and Coffey), *belonging, place*, and *well-being* (see the section in this collection by Cahill). Sociologists consider citizenship in relation to identity and the influences of gender, culture, "race," class, religion, and ability connected to institutions and social structures and practices. Sociologists argue that even very young children are active meaning makers and social actors who actively engage in their worlds and are therefore citizens now not in the future (Kehily 2013; Prout and James 1997; Woodhead 2009). Urban planners and architects focus on child and youth citizenship in association with independent mobility and connection to place, community, and the environment. Educators drawing strongly on psychology consider citizenship in terms of individual development and learning, specifically about what it means to actively engage and connect with society and to be a productive member of the community. Yet there is debate about children's and young people's citizenship in relation to age, capacity, and legislation with tensions between notions of future citizenship and current citizens.

This chapter explores conceptualizations of childhood and the way in which shifting understandings of childhood influence adults' recognition of the child's capacity to participate in civic engagement. It discusses the contested notion of citizenship and highlights the influence of rights discourses, which argue the central role of the right to participation in the lives of children and to some extent of young people. It examines arguments that citizenship is hierarchical and that as for adults, many children and youth are denied access to full citizenship due to economic, social, and/or political constraints.

Defining Citizenship

Lister (2003) argues that the meaning of citizenship is socially, politically, and culturally constructed and that these meanings also shift over time. As a result there are diverse understandings of citizenship between and within communities and countries. Philosophers have been debating concepts and practices of citizenship for centuries (see the paper in this collection by *Margaret Coady*). Considerations of child as citizen can be traced back to ancient Greece and Rome, noting that while certain social structures supported political and civic engagement, others determined that civic participation is exclusive, elitist, and patriarchal in nature (Coady 2008). Within these communities, citizenship was about people (men) expressing their views and ideas through political participation. Key political philosophers, ranging from Aristotle, Aquinas, Augustine, Marilius, Hobbs, Locke, and Kant and, in more recent times, Marshall, have contributed to understandings of citizenship (Coady 2008). Analysis of the debates and definitions of these philosophers highlights what Coady (2008) says is a tension between understandings of *de jure* citizenship (a legal or quasi-legal such as the convention citizenship) and *de facto* citizenship (where we say many people have citizenship rights, despite that they cannot be put into practice for a range of reasons (Coady 2008)).

In modern understandings of citizenship, Marshall (1965) and Coady (2008) note the development of the recognition of peoples' civic rights including, freedom of speech, legal rights within the law, land ownership, universal manhood suffrage (and later women's), and, later in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, social and welfare rights (e.g., education and social security). During this period of the emergence of a rights focus, children were not seen as equal citizens, but rather as future citizens or "becoming" citizens. However, shifting images of the child prompted by awareness-raising initiatives such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989), as well as sociological discussion about identity (Bennett 2000; Brake 2013; Gilbert 2007; White and Wyn 2012), and concerns about youth disengagement and well-being (Priest et al. 2013; Wierenga and Guevara 2013; Wyn et al. 2000) have led to a rethinking of the concept of child and youth citizenship, with some approaching citizenship as a right, and others discussing it as a form of developmental work or as a "solution" to certain social problems.

Citizenship Identity: "Becoming" or "Being" a Citizen?

Through a critical analysis of the child in liberal theory, Barbara Arneil (2002) examined the role of the child as "one of citizen in waiting" or the child "becoming" (p. 70). This notion of the child as future citizen is tangled up with citizenship definitions that are attached to activities such as voting, holding public office, and ideas of autonomy and agency. Work by Phillips (2010) reinforces the future citizenship idea arguing that models of participation and citizenship have

predominantly been adult centric (see also Pattman's chapter in this collection). Further to this Lister (2008, 2003) offers the definition of citizenship as an understanding of membership. While children's engagement with community may look and sound different from adult engagement, nonetheless children are members of society and they engage and participate within it. Building on this understanding of citizenship as membership, Roche (1999) argues that it is vital that adults recognize children as members of society. Roche wrote:

...the demand that children be included in citizenship is simply a request that children be seen as members of society too, with a legitimate and valuable voice and perspectives. (1999, p. 479)

One of the ways in which this recognition of children as members of society has been advanced is through research that focuses on the relationship between citizenship and identity. For example, Hall, Coffey, and Williamson (1999) shift the focus of citizenship from national identity and place emphasis on the "lived citizenship" that occurs within local contexts of place and space. They use the idea of performances of citizenship to describe the way in which children and youth explore and perform their identities within shifting and changing spaces, places, and local contexts. Performances of citizenship are about the everyday realities of life and the way in which children and young people make connections and disconnections and develop a sense of belonging.

Contesting Childhood and Youth Citizenship

With the plethora of research on children and youth citizenship, there is an increasing body of literature that critiques the notion of children's citizenship. For example, feminist writer Lister (2008, p. 26) questions citizenship as a "universalist promise," challenging the extent to which children have equal rights with adults. Others such as Roche (1999) and Stasiulis (2002) question the ethics of burdening children with the same responsibilities as adults and challenge the devaluing of rights to play and the right to be children. This argument frames the child and childhood as a time of innocence where the adult makes decisions for the child until they progress into adulthood (see the chapter in this section by Taylor and Smith).

Translating the concept of children's citizenship into everyday life within programs and policy through the idea of child/youth or pupil "voice" has also been critiqued. Lundy (2007) states that "voice" is not enough, arguing that simply asking children and youth for their views and opinions on topics or events does not therefore make them citizens. How children and young people are listened to and their ideas are taken up or given weight makes the difference to recognizing "the child as a full human being with integrity and personality and the ability to participate freely in society" (Freeman 1996, p. 37). This understanding is further advanced by Devine (2002), who notes that power relations between adult-child or teacher-student must be acknowledged and that hierarchical patterns of

interdependency and connectedness can either and both limit or support children's citizenship.

The nature of Globalization identification and a sense of belonging or membership to one community has changed how people particularly youth understand their identity (Arnot 2000; Phillips 2000; Rizvi and Lingard 2000). Children and youth are interconnected to multiple communities both physically and virtually which means that understandings or connections of citizenship to a state or "community" are marked problematic and privilege or silence some people over others creating hierarchies of citizenship for children (and adults). Phillips (2000, p. 37) notes:

Part of the problem of second class citizenship is that those outside the norm get defined by their differences in ways that those inside do not, in that women are gendered, men are not, that black people are racialised, that white people are not, that Bangladeshis are seen as ethnic while white European is just an empty residual category.

Discourse of Rights: Childhood and Youth Citizenship

According to Doek (2008) citizenship is a fundamental human right for both adults and children, encompassing the right to birth registration, a nationality, protection, and be an active member of society. Approaching children's and youth citizenship through a rights discourse has diverse meanings, but essentially the goal of a rights approach is to ensure the well-being, safety, and participation within society of children from birth to 18 years of age. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) requires all children to be recognized and respected as persons within their own right and asserts that children have the right to protection, provision, and participation. The convention recognizes younger and older children's agency and emerging capacities and their active membership within the family, communities, and the broader society. Key articles in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) specifically recognize children's participatory rights to be consulted and heard in matters affecting them, including:

- The right to express their views on all matters affecting them and for their views to be taken seriously (Article 12)
- The right to freedom of expression, including freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds through any media they choose (Article 13)
- The right to education that promotes children's emotional, intellectual, and physical development; that fosters awareness and understanding of parents' roles and of the importance of cultural identity, language, and values; and that prepares children for a responsible life in society (Article 29)

The convention proclaims that children have the right to enjoy leisure, recreation, and cultural activities and to enjoy and practice their own culture, religion, and language without fear of persecution or discrimination (Article 31). Protective rights and autonomy rights of the child are woven through this document.

Each signatory to the convention pledges that all its citizens have access to primary, secondary, and higher education, together with vocational guidance and that discipline in schools respects the child's dignity (Article 28).

Realizing these rights in practice has been guided by two key General comments: United Nations General Comment No. 12 (*The child's right to be heard*) and General Comment No. 7 (*Implementing child rights in early childhood*). General Comment No. 12 (*The child's right to be heard*) emphasizes children's participation in society as being more than a tokenistic activity and involving ongoing dialogue where children are not only listened to but their ideas and concerns are ethically acted upon:

The exercise of the child's or children's and youth's right to be heard is a crucial element . . . The concept of participation emphasizes that including children and youth should not only be a momentary act, (*but includes their participation in*) development of policies, programmes and measures in all relevant contexts of children and youth's lives. (p. 5)

The last decade has seen the emergence of several models of children's participation (e.g., Arnstein 1969; Fajerman 2001; Hart 1992; Holdsworth 2000; Mason and Urquhart 2001; Reimer 2003; Shepherd and Treseder 2002). Arnstein's (1969) "ladder of citizen participation" has been a common yet contentious model of children's participation that influenced many deviations to this model. For example, Hart (1992) adapted Arnstein's (1969) "ladder of citizen participation," describing participation as a step-by-step process, each step representing the degree of power and control that children and adults assume in the process. The bottom rung of the ladder is a position where adults manipulate children; the top rung is a position where children are in control, that is, where children initiate and direct the process. Burfoot (2003) criticizes Hart's model for representing the process as a hierarchy, implying "more value for one type of participation over another" (p. 44). Following from this, Fajerman (2001, p. 8) has adapted Arnstein's ladder into a non-hierarchical model of citizenship. This model recognizes that social relationships are ever-changing and that children can't always assume complete control within institutions such as schools or social contexts. Holdsworth (2000) distinguished between the "voice" and "agency" of children who become involved in decisions about matters affecting them and the type of listening that is brought to bear when they speak:

These are issues that are concerned, not with questions of whether young people have anything important to say, nor with the capacity of young people to speak up, but whether anyone is listening seriously. (Holdsworth 2000, p. 253)

This analysis emphasizes the reciprocal nature of participation as a transaction between parties.

In line with the notions of lived citizenship proposed by Hall, Coffey, and Williamson (1999), Matthews argues that children and youth will choose to participate where the topic or issue is relevant and has meaning for them and when there is a sense that the adults recognize the value of this knowledge. Matthews (2002, p. 272) writes:

While adults following top-down agendas may exude enthusiasm, ambition and good intent, unless the work resonates with the experiences and lifeworlds of those taking part, young people will have little incentive or motivation to get involved. Successful projects are likely to be those that take account of the issues from the way that young people see them.

Drawing on these insights, governments, non-government organizations (NGOs), and researchers have been developing toolkits and participatory models to increase civic engagement to support children and youth to be connected to the community and have a sense of belonging.

While there is a growing number of “how to” toolkits and frameworks for participation, it is important to recognize that any tools or methods need to be contextual to the children and youth and that they cannot be universalized. Cultural, social, historical, and political constructions of communities and engagement mean that how, why, and when children and youth (and adults) participate in civic engagement and citizenship will differ. The CREATE Foundation, an organization that represents the voices of children and young people in out-of-home care, cautions against trying to prescribe a one-size-fits-all model to design or appraise youth participation:

There is no simple prescription for enhancing participation. To impose uniformity or to simply rely on one model is counter-productive because children and young people are not all the same. The participatory process is one that continually evolves and changes to meet the needs of individual children and young people as they receive a service. . . . Children and young people may move between the different ways of participating, even within the same process, dependent on circumstances. (CREATE 2000, p. 7)

They argue that tools or models to facilitate child and youth participation need to be diverse and contextually applied so as to engage effectively with the interests and skills of the child. Thus, in this model, participation is understood to be contextual, relational, and located.

Youth engagement has taken on many forms, changing with shifts in social consensus about the value and function of child voice. One common mechanism for promoting children’s and young people’s voice is the use of youth councils and youth parliaments, instituted to provide spaces through which to enact the rights of young people to participate in the government (Pinkerton 2004; Wyse 2001). These have been principally provided for teenagers rather than for children under the age of 12 years. An example of this is the Bangladesh Child Parliament where children 12–18 years are represented in governance structures in all 64 districts of Bangladesh. Children actively contribute to the implementation and monitoring of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in their respective districts. An interest in child and youth voice is also seen in research with investigators using participatory methodologies to support the inclusion of youth perspectives on diverse issues. For example, Campbell, McGuire, and Stockley (2012) talked with 13 young people to inform policy recommendations to support children experiencing educational disadvantage. Issues raised by the young people were in relation to bullying, equal access to learning experiences, the need for additional learning assistance, and a call by young people for adults to have a better

understanding of the issues facing young people and the affects for engagement in education and to consider alternative educational settings. In this way, youth “voice” has provided valuable insight to adults about their values and beliefs. There are increasing opportunities for youth to be consulted about their views and opinions during key events within civic society, for example, during elections, and through activities or events that have been set up specifically to bring youth, government, academics, and the business world together such as the G20 Youth Forums. Another example of youth voice is Lee, Shah, and McLeod’s (2012) exploration of the varied roles that communication played in socializing youth aged 12–17 into democratic citizenship during the 2008 general election in the United States of America. This research showed that information across traditional and digital media supported citizen communication, which in turn encouraged youth civic engagement. This supports the development of planning and communication engagement strategies for future elections.

Digital technologies have also changed patterns of youth participation in virtual communities, influencing children’s and young people’s identities and sense of belonging in a global world. Sociologists Harris, Wyn, and Younes (2010) note that young people now have more resources to assist them to engage with and act upon social, environmental, and political issues, both at a local and at a global level. The use of text, Facebook, Twitter, and email allows opportunities for youth to engage with civic life in both local and global arenas and provides them with the opportunity for dialogue and action in real time. They argue that the nature of participation is changing and that while youth may be disengaging from education and government, they are engaging with short-term relationships and commitments through social media. Young people no longer have stable or fixed identities attached to stable lifelong commitments or relationships to institutions place, space, and people. Rather, young people have fluid, weak(er) ties that are short lived or that are less formal or informal with institutions or organizations. This changing “story” of young peoples’ citizenship is described by Vinken (2005) as a “new biography of citizenship” (p. 155).

Young people are actively engaged in discussing and examining the intersections of identities, political activism, and well-being (*see the section in this collection on well-being*) in relation to independence and future opportunities and possibilities. For example, researching the views and experiences of young Australians aged between 15 and 18 years, at the stage of their lives immediately prior or just on the age of majority which occurs at age 18, Harris, Wyn, and Younes (2010) found that they were concerned about personal issues (employment, academic success, well-being, independence, finance), national issues (war, environment, employment, government, poverty), and global issues (war, environment, poverty, governmentality, health, and well-being). These authors found that for a majority of participants, political activism took the shape of everyday activities such as recycling and donating money to a cause (p. 22). Habashi’s (2008) study of children in Palestine also highlights the personal, local, national, and global intersections in their concerns and understandings of national identity and agency. Habashi (2008) interviewed 12 Palestinian children aged 10–13 from cities,

villages, and refugee camps in the West Bank to understand the multiplicity of their sense of national identity and within the understanding of children as geopolitical agents. The children were able to discuss the political reality of navigating their identities within their historical and political context.

Children's Rights

While there is a large body of work reporting on youth engagement, there has been less attention to the engagement and participation of children under the age of 8. This began to change with the 2005 release of the United Nations General Comment (No. 7) on *Implementing child rights in early childhood*, bringing a new emphasis on supporting children under 8 years of age to be recognized as active citizens and participants in civic life. Comment No. 7 states that the young child's right to express their views and feelings should be taken into account in "the development of policies and services, including through research and consultations" (OHCHR 2005, p. 7). Recognizing the failure of adults to acknowledge children's agency, this document notes:

In many countries and regions, traditional beliefs have emphasised young children's need for training and socialisation. They have been regarded as undeveloped, lacking even basic capacities for understanding, communicating and making choices. They have been powerless within their families, and often voiceless and invisible within society. As holders of rights, even the youngest children are entitled to express their views, which should be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. (General comment 7, Para 14)

The operationalization of the concept of child citizenship supported through the rights discourse influences research, programs, and curricula for young children. Children's rights and particularly General Comment No.7 provided an important platform for sociologists and educational researchers to advocate, develop, and implement strategies and policies to recognize children under the age of eight's capacities to engage in civic society. This supported research and programs that consulted with young children on areas such as transition to school, the effects of war, migration, and engagement in local government.

Enacting Young Children's Citizenship Rights

The UN directive to seek young children's citizenship rights is supported by a significant body of knowledge about how children are experiencing war, migration, the legal system, education, and family life. For example, Diaz Soto (2005) researched with children aged 4–8 years of age living in New York when the World Trade Center was destroyed. Children shared their experiences of this, which was through either witnessing the event personally or through the media and community events of mourning. Children talked and drew pictures which showed their experiences of sadness, adversity, and hope. In another example,

educational researchers Dockett and Perry (2006) sought the views of 50 children aged between 4½ and 5½ about their experiences in moving from preschool to school. Children raised issues about the need to understand what the rules were, the importance of relationships with teachers and peers, skills and knowledge (e.g., need to know how to tie your shoelaces), and scale (in relation to the physical space and buildings and the size of “big” kids). Drawing on critical race and postcolonial theories, MacNaughton, Davis, and Smith (2009) researched with 3- and 4-year-olds to explore young children’s understandings of cultural and racial diversity. Through the use of drawings, interviews, and stories, children were able to share their experiences of inclusion and exclusion through play and “friendships” based on their own and others’ “skin color,” gender, and culture. This showed how children through the use of skin color as “racial” markers of identity and Australian citizenship and belonging blocked their civic participation. Furthermore, research on well-being and coping strategies by Deans, Frydenberg, and Liang (2012) facilitated communication between parents and preschool children to support children to discuss coping and coping-related activities using visual images from Early Years Coping Cards. This work showed how 3- and 4-year-olds were able to discuss well-being and stress in supported ways. Working with prep class (first year of school), Phillips (2010) explored how storytelling workshops supported children’s citizenship as political activists where they developed a petition around animal rights and protection which was presented to the minister. The storytelling enabled children to express themselves and listen to other peoples’ views and opinions on a topic and open up opportunities to talk and act on concerns.

These research projects and many others provide evidence that young children have the capacity to share their views and opinions about their world and that these ideas give valuable insights to adults. Children’s engagement provides important knowledge about what it means to live within diverse contexts and the impact on children’s identity, sense of belonging, and well-being and their connection to family and the communities they live in. The challenge of supporting children’s engagement in citizenship activities isn’t a lack of children’s capacities but a shortcoming in adults’ imagination, enabling them to support children with diverse capacities to express their views.

UNICEF Child Friendly Cities

One programming response to the concept of citizenship within child rights discourses can be seen in the development of the Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI). The CFCI is a global program led by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). The CFCI aims to improve children’s well-being by making cities safer and more livable for children by embedding their rights in a city’s policies, programs, and decision-making. The CFCI is based on the belief that children’s well-being is the ultimate indicator of a healthy and democratic society and that cities bring particular challenges and opportunities for children’s well-being

and for their rights. UNICEF's intention in launching the initiative is to develop an ever-growing network of cities whose habitats enhance children's well-being by meeting their rights.

UNICEF launched the CFCI in 1996 at the second UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) that explored how best to ensure that cities were livable spaces for all, including children. Carriage of the CFCI is through The International Secretariat for Child Friendly Cities at the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in Florence, Italy. The Secretariat collects research data and monitors activities associated with the CFCI, acts as an information exchange about CFCs, and creates networks of local, rights-based plans and agendas for children (Riggio and Kilbane 2000). These plans and agendas specifically support children's well-being and safety and recognize children's civic engagement across diverse rural and urban settings.

Children's voice is central to the definition of a Child Friendly City (CFC) where "the voices," needs, priorities, and rights of children are an integral part of public policies, budgets, programs, and decisions. It is, as a result, a city that is fit for all (UNICEF 2004). More specifically, UNICEF defines a Child Friendly City as one that enhances children's well-being by actively fulfilling children's rights to:

1. Influence decisions about their city
2. Express their opinion on the city they want
3. Participate in family, community, and social life
4. Receive basic services such as health care and education
5. Drink safe water and have access to proper sanitation
6. Be protected from exploitation, violence, and abuse
7. Walk safely in the streets on their own
8. Meet friends and play
9. Have green spaces for plants and animals
10. Live in an unpolluted environment
11. Participate in cultural and social events
12. Be an equal citizen of their city with access to every service, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, income, gender, or disability (UNICEF 2002)

These rights acknowledge children as valuable and active citizens within their communities who need environment, infrastructures, policies, and practices to facilitate community engagement and sense of well-being and connectedness.

This initiative has influenced how urban planners and public policymakers engage with children and youth citizenship in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of services, facilities, and policies within places and spaces. A whole-of-council approach to supporting young children's participation in civic life was supported by Smith, Alexander, and MacNaughton (2008) who worked with an inner-city local government in Melbourne, Australia. In this research project, 152 children worked with council employees or people providing services within the municipality across services of education, libraries, health and community

services, parks and recreation, arts and culture, and transport and mobility and with councillors. A child-friendly methodology enabled children to share their views and ideas about what it meant to live, study, or visit in the City of Port Phillip for themselves, their family, their friends, and neighbors. Children highlighted their connection to natural spaces and places and said they wanted more green spaces, raised concerns about the care and protection of environments and their own need for support to become more independently mobile. They talked about the way in which traffic, street lighting, and a general sense of safety restricted their movement. Through these exchanges, children's ideas were used to change policy, redistribute budgets to support road and urban development, and develop new facilities. This highlights that children and youth citizenship is not just about providing children with opportunities to share their ideas but about developing the appropriate processes for taking them seriously, with follow-up actions and reporting back to children and youth on what ideas have been taken up and what have not been considered and why.

A part of civic engagement is not just "voice" but physical participation and mobility within the community. Research exploring independent mobility for children living in cities has been undertaken by Whitzman and Mizrachi (2009), who have examined what supports children need when living in high-rise apartments. This research was undertaken with 40 children and their parents to explore the physical and social environmental determinants of children's independent mobility. Children were invited to share their lived experiences through "a week with a camera" and then create a collage of their pictures; they completed a travel activity diary, and GPS monitoring provided additional information about where children are going during the day. This study also surveyed parents and undertook a policy review (Whitzman and Mizrachi 2009, p. 3). The research found that children living in public high-rise housing had greater levels of independent mobility than those in other housing. These children traveled more widely to engage with the community and environments and used a wider range of public space, transport, and commercial facilities. The researchers found that children wanted services and amenities that were accessible and closer to home and a range of play and socialization opportunities (Whitzman and Mizrachi 2009, p. 3). The research provided opportunities for children to share their lived experiences as citizens through multimedia.

Conventions such as the United Nations on the Rights of the Child and initiatives such as the Child Friendly Cities Initiative provide adults with evidence that can support advocacy for children and youths' citizenship. It opens up opportunities for exploration of understandings of citizenship as "voice," that is, opportunities to speak or express ideas through multiple mediums, as well as citizenship as the physical engagement of interacting and having a presence in the community. This highlights the point that children and youth citizenship is not just about voting rights or responsibilities for the future economic viability of a nation. Citizenship for children and youth is also about the lived realities of children and youths' lives and how they navigate places, spaces, and relationships as today's citizens.

Teaching Citizenship

Citizenship or civic education has been included as a focus of study within the school curriculum in countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia. A review of research, policy, and practice of education for democratic citizenship in schools in England between 1995 and 2005 by Osler and Starkley (2006) argues that citizenship education was introduced as a way to respect diversity and support unity and social cohesion in a time of globalization and consequently migration. The importance of citizenship education as a site to debate issues of social inclusion and equity is highlighted by Osler and Starkley (2006) who noted:

This perspective and the need for education designed to challenge inequality and injustice has been strengthened since 11 September 2001 because of a growing perception of links between poverty, injustice and inequality in the world and terrorist movements. (p. 6)

For many countries the move to introduce citizenship education was linked to the blaming of youth for problems and challenges faced within their societies particularly related to youth disengagement and antisocial behaviors (Griffin 1993; Nutbrown and Clough 2009; Osler and Starkley 2006; Osler and Starkey 2003). Citizenship education was seen as an intervention to connect youth back into the community and to strengthen democracy. “Teaching” citizenship education has been contested by writers such as Osler and Starkley (2006) who argue that this approach places the child and youth as a future or becoming citizen rather than recognizing them as current citizens. In contrast it has been argued that teaching citizenship in schools demonstrates to children practical ways to participate in civic engagement and to gain a greater insight into the needs of people within the local and broader community and the issues affecting them (Adams 2005). Enhancing student “voice” and “action” has also been seen as a way to support children’s inclusion and sense of belonging within institutions such as schools and within a broader social context (*see the section in this collection on well-being*). These programs can take a whole-of-curriculum approach or through dedicated programs.

Citizenship education, while subject to criticism, does provide children with an opportunity to learn about what living in a democratic society means. It gives children access to language and strategies to support engagement within the school structures and processes and to experiment in sharing ideas and activities. Citizenship education also provides opportunities for children to reflect on, discuss and debates issues of diversity, social inclusion and advocate for themselves and others where exclusion occurs. Further, it creates a site for adults (educators, parents, and governments) to gain a greater insight into what it means to be children and youth citizens within their context, to understand the complexity and shifting nature of childhood and citizenship.

How children and youth are understood as future or current citizens is influenced by how adults conceptualize the child (see Taylor and Smith in this collection). It is therefore important to explore different images of the child and the affects of these

understandings on how children are included or excluded as citizenships based on capacity, rationality, and life experiences. This will be examined in more detail in the next section.

Images of Children and Youth

There are three key ways that children are conceptualized within discussion of child citizenship: the child as innocent, the child as participant, and the child as social actor.

The Child as Innocent

The concept of child as innocent emerged from the humanism of theorists such as Rousseau (Moss and Petrie 2002; Porter 2003; Woodrow 1999). The innocent child is positioned as in need of protection, care, and nurture by adults and is not recognized as being able to contribute to decision-making, as their life experiences are limited (MacNaughton 2005; Smith 2003; Moss and Petrie 2002; Lloyd-Smith and Tarr 2000). Consequently, the adult speaks for and on behalf of the innocent child, rendering the child powerless (Stasiulis 2002). The adults use their expert knowledge to assess the innocent child's needs and interests and then develop policies and practices that enable the innocent child to develop (in universally applicable stages) into a mature adult (Porter 2003; Lloyd-Smith and Tarr 2000). This concept of childhood would mean that the young child would not be considered a citizen rather a future citizen who is protected and guided by adults until the age of 18.

The Child as Participant

Discussions of the child as participant highlight the way in which children can participate in decisions that adults regard them as competent to make (Lloyd-Smith and Tarr 2000). From this perspective, the child is an "apprentice" to a "master." Recent early childhood writers have argued that a curriculum founded on the child as participant necessarily includes children's voices (e.g., Patterson and Fleet 2003; Dahlberg et al. 1999). However, while the child as participant certainly has ideas and views about themselves and their circumstances, the adult uses their expert knowledge to decide when it is appropriate to acknowledge those ideas and views and creates a curriculum to facilitate and extend the child's development. Adult adherents to this model certainly consult with children but reserve decision-making power to themselves. For instance, the child can "co-construct" a curriculum, policy, or programs, but it is the adult's observations and interpretations that drive the development, implementation, and evaluation. This means that the child and youth are understood as future citizens. As children get older with the guidance of an adult, they can be taught the responsibilities of being a citizen and begin to explore citizenship ideas and practices overseen by the adult.

The Child as Social Actor

Recent developments in developmental psychology, in sociology, and in the consumer movement (in recognition of children as service users and recipients (Fajerman 2001) have generated images of the young child as a social actor and “active” citizen. Within this image the child is understood to be someone who shapes her/his identities, creates and communicates valid views about the social world, and has a right to participate in it (Alderson 1999, 2000; Buckingham 1996; Corsaro 1997; Hill and Tisdall 1997). The belief that young children can be autonomous meaning makers challenges traditional developmental views of the child as passive, weak, dependent, or an “incomplete” adult, not yet equipped to make decisions about their life. These traditional developmental views of the child exclude children from decisions that affect them. As a “social actor,” the child is presumed to have valid ideas, values, and understandings of herself/himself and of the world and is presumed to be able to act as a partner with adults to develop new policies and practices (O’Brien 1997; Reimer 2003). As Christensen and James (2000) argue, to regard children as social actors is to treat them as active participants in “contexts where, traditionally, they have been denied those rights of participation and their voices have remained unheard” (p. 2).

Understanding children as social actors and active citizens embodies and expresses three key ideas:

- Young children can make valid meanings about the world and their place in it.
- Children’s knowledge of the world is different (not inferior) to adults’ knowledge.
- Children’s insights and perspectives on the world can improve adults’ understandings of children’s experiences.

(Alderson 1999, 2000; Clarke 2000; MacNaughton 2000; Woodhead and Faulkner 2008; Cannella 1997; Corsaro 1997; Hill and Tisdall 1997; Buckingham 1996; Wyness 1996)

This means the child and youth are seen as current citizens who contribute to society now and in the future. It recognizes that the child does not sit outside the adult world but is an active member who experiences the issues, events, and relationships in similar and different ways as adults do. The recognition of children and youth as citizens sometimes evokes the fear that if children have too much of a say, there will be societal chaos and “children out of control.” However, like adults in any democratic society, there are rights and responsibilities and rules and laws that need to be followed by all people – adults, children, and youth. Like adults, children should have the right to debate, question, and inform the development, enactment, and evaluation of rights, responsibilities, rules, and laws.

It is important to note that this chapter does not argue that children are not in need of protection or that they are not developing and in need of guidance by adults and peers. However, if children are not recognized as social actors and powerful meaning makers, then valuable knowledge about the local and global context of society from children’s perspectives is missing from society. Further, children and

youth can experience disconnection from society and disenchantment about the possible present and future opportunities, relationships, and connections, which can cause issues, related to well-being, belonging, and a sense of identity. To ask adults to recognize children as social actors who are citizens, we calling for a shift in power relationships between adults and children. This means that adults are not always the expert, leading, or in control but are also learners and listeners, and children and youth are at different moments experts, teachers, informants, and mentors.

Conclusion and Future Directions

The chapter argues that to begin to engage with children and young people as citizens, it is vital that they are recognized as competent meaning makers and social actors, with valid and important knowledge about their world that is “different” not inferior to adult knowledge (Woodhead and Faulkner 2008; Kotsanas 2009; MacNaughton and Smith 2008, 2009). Research has shown that even very young children can tell adults about their experiences and about the concerns that they have for people close to them and for their immediate environment (e.g., Alderson 2008; Diaz Soto 2005; Lundy and McEvoy 2009; MacNaughton and Smith 2008; Perry and Dockett 2011). Not only do young children have the capacity to enter into dialogue about their lives, but according to the UNCRC, they also have a right to do so.

The chapters in this subsection address various issues connected to children and youth citizenship. The authors’ works draw on philosophy, sociology, and psychology to understand citizenship. *Margaret Coady* explores the meaning of citizenship from a philosophical perspective and the inclusive and exclusive categories of citizen. *Natasha Blanchet-Cohen and Juan Torres* examine young peoples’ participation and civic engagement through the Child Friendly Cities Initiative and the Growing Up in Cities Canada program. *Bronwyn Brown* draws on Bourdieu’s “species of capital” to interrogate and understand diverse practices of citizenship participation as “participatory capital.” *Adam Cooper* examines the pedagogical approach of dialogic learning as a method to support young peoples’ engagement with regard to issues such as xenophobic violence, masculinities, gang involvement and participatory HIV/AIDS curriculum development. *Thea Renda Abu* troubles the understanding of citizenship to explore transnationalism and changing nation of belonging from Arab American youths’ perspectives in a post-September 11 time.

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Abstract

This chapter will look at what has been meant by citizenship and analyze debates about citizenship and the criteria used for inclusion in or exclusion from the category of citizen. Place of residence may seem a clear criterion for inclusion. But there were differences between states on this issue even in ancient times with different policies in Athens from those in Rome. Rome made residents of their captured lands “cives sine suffragio,” possibly a doubtful benefit since while these citizens were liable for military service, they could not vote or hold office in Rome. Clearly however being a citizen was generally desirable and was connected with the ability of individuals to have an influence on the kind of community in which they wanted to live and with being able to claim the rights which go along with citizenship status.

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In spite of the fact that philosophers from Aristotle through Augustine, Marsilius, Hobbes, Locke, and Kant gave close analysis to the idea of citizenship, in practice the two most important criteria for citizenship in the modern state were being male and being adult. Being white and owning property could be added as two other criteria for citizenship in many states.

These exclusionary criteria have been challenged over the last 200 years. Slaves, indigenous groups, women, and refugees are some of the excluded groups who have challenged their exclusion from citizenship. It is interesting to note that though at the same time women and slaves were gaining recognition as citizens, children were, according to some writers (Schmidt 2003, p. 175), being more excluded from participation in the daily life of the community. However children were not being entirely ignored. A selection of them, again selected using the criteria of gender, class, and color, were being prepared to be citizens. But they were citizens of the future, not of the present.

This chapter goes on to trace the development of children's rights over the course of the twentieth century, demonstrating the move from seeing the child as passive to seeing the child as a participating citizen. Concepts of rights are closely connected to concepts of citizenship, and disagreements about the nature of rights led to disagreements about the kind of citizenship appropriate for children. The chapter analyzes and critiques some of the rationales given for exclusion of children from citizenship, such as the rationale based on competency and that based on the need for protection. However this writer points out that the arguments of some writers in favor of greater recognition of children's rights are in danger of showing children once again as being objects of the state.

Introduction

Debates about the nature of citizenship have occurred over many centuries though perhaps more vehemently in some centuries than others. From these debates we can distinguish two different models of citizenship with very different criteria for inclusion in or exclusion from the category of citizenship.

The first could be called the identification model and the second the participatory model. Both could claim ancient origins, in one case the Roman Empire and in the other the Athenian polis. "The (Roman) Empire's expansion resulted in citizenship rights being extended to conquered peoples, profoundly transforming the concept's meaning. Citizenship meant being protected by the law rather than participating in its formulation or execution" (Leydet 2011). Rome (Clarke 1994) made residents of their captured lands "cives sine suffragio" (citizens without the vote), possibly a doubtful benefit since while these citizens were liable for military service, they could not vote or hold office in Rome. Nevertheless in this example of model one, place of residence was a clear criterion for inclusion. This identification citizenship is closely related to demography. As Bhabha et al. (2003) point out, being a citizen can simply mean one can identify with a particular country and be entitled to a

passport and certain protections from the officials of that country. It has long been recognized in many countries that children have this kind of citizenship either through the accident of birth or through their parents' citizenship. With increasing numbers of refugees around the globe, this kind of citizenship, particularly if it is citizenship of a relatively peaceful and prosperous country, has been seen as highly desirable. The inclusiveness or exclusiveness of this kind of citizenship relates to territories, borders, and an individual's history, and debates around citizenship of this kind usually relate to entitlements and protections, rather than participation. Questions such as whether one is entitled to citizenship just by reason of place of birth and whether the parents and/or future children of this child are thereby also entitled to citizenship have been debated (Bhabha et al. 2003). This first model of citizenship involves some protections and freedoms, such as freedom to enter or remain in a country, and carries some responsibilities, possibly military service and/or paying taxes or equivalent, but it is a relatively passive citizenship. It is interesting that St Paul when he claimed to be a citizen of Rome saw himself as a citizen of the first kind, as Walzer says (1989) "as the passive recipient of specific rights and entitlements," p. 215 rather than participating in any way in government.

A paradigm of the second model of citizenship was that which Hannah Arendt (1958) admired when she gave a glowing account of the Athenian polis of ancient Greece. She paints this as the ideal community where equals can interact to assert the highest human expression, which was, in their eyes, political participation. Political activity was the domain of the citizen. Under this notion of citizenship, to be a citizen is to play a public role in political society. The right to vote on the issues of the day and therefore have some determining force in the public world was central on this model. Citizens were free and equal actors in the public world. This is the ideal of the participatory model of citizenship. However this kind of citizenship was for an elite group. The Athenian citizenship was reserved for those who could free themselves from working for the necessities of life and who could therefore be free to take part in the life of the polis. It was not for workers, slaves, women, or children.

Whatever the model of citizenship, there are implications that some others are noncitizens, who do not meet the criteria for citizenship, whether it is because they are born in the wrong country, from the wrong parents, or because they do not have the correct physical, mental, or moral characteristics. According to Bader (1997), "Citizenship had always meant the exclusion of non-members" (p. 28).

Philosophers from Aristotle through Augustine, Marsilius, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Kant have given differing analyses of citizenship. But it is Rousseau whom Walzer (1989) picks out as giving philosophical grounding to the modern idea of the citizen as one who is involved in making the laws of the community. "Obedience to the law which we prescribe to ourselves is liberty" (*Social Contract*, Book I, chapter 8). This is very much the participatory model of citizenship. The citizen is freely and autonomously making the laws which he obeys. The male pronoun is appropriate here at least until the twentieth century in most Western countries. Here equal participation was the ideal, but it was by no means the reality in the early modern state. In practice the two most important criteria for citizenship

in the modern state were being male and being adult. Being white and owning property could be added as two other criteria for citizenship in some jurisdictions. These exclusionary criteria have been challenged over the last 200 years. Slaves, indigenous groups, and women are some of the excluded groups who have successfully challenged their exclusion from citizenship.

Rights and Citizenship

Several writers have argued that full participation as citizens depends on the recognition of a wide range of rights, not just the right to vote. One of the most interesting analyses of this modern notion of citizenship is that of T. H. Marshall (1965). Describing the development of citizenship in Britain, Marshall sees three stages of the recognition of different kinds of rights and with each stage an extension of those who could see themselves as citizens. The first stage occurred with the rise of the bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century leading to the recognition of the civil rights to freedom of speech, equality before the law, and the right to own property. The second stage occurred in the nineteenth century when political rights with universal manhood suffrage were established. This made it easier for more working class men to see themselves as citizens and raised the possibility of a much wider group of people being able to participate in political decision making. The third stage of citizenship for Marshall depended on the gaining of social rights such as the universal right to education, to social security, and to welfare, achieved during the latter part of the nineteenth century and in the twentieth century. Important for full citizenship was the idea of equality of all through recognition of civil, political, and social rights:

For Marshall, the fullest expression of citizenship requires a liberal-democratic welfare state. By guaranteeing civil, political and social rights to all, the welfare state ensures that every member of society feels like a full member of society, able to participate in and enjoy the common life of society. Where any of these rights are withheld or violated, people will be marginalized and unable to participate. (Kymlicka and Norman 1994, p. 354)

But even this rich notion of equal citizenship described by Marshall was not equality of all. Though women may have followed the same trajectory of gaining citizenship rights as males did, they lagged considerably behind. Children as full citizens were left out of the equation, but they were not ignored. However Marshall does discuss the central importance of the establishment of compulsory education in the training of the future citizen. The status of children was that not of citizens but of future citizens. They were seen as human becomings, not human beings. The compulsory education system would form or mold them into citizens. They were to be acted upon rather than acting. It is interesting to note that though at the same time women and slaves were gaining recognition as citizens, children were, according to some writers (Schmidt 2003, p. 175), being even more excluded from participation in the daily life of the community and increasingly being controlled by the state:

As other excluded groups fought for and won admission to the formal processes of the state, every young person became an incipient citizen. The answer to the puzzle was compulsory education: young people would be trained to be the citizens of the future. (Schmidt 2003, p. 175)

The Two-Edged Sword of Protection

Marshall's comments on the citizenship status of women in the nineteenth-century Britain are revealing and important for a consideration of the citizenship rights of children. Marshall (1965) points out that the early Factory Acts:

refrained from giving. . . protection directly to the adult male - the citizen par excellence. And they did so out of respect of his status as a citizen, on the grounds that enforced protective measures curtailed the civil right to conclude a free contract of employment. Protection was confined to women and children, and champions of women's rights were quick to detect the implied insult. Women were protected because they were not citizens. If they wished to enjoy full and responsible citizenship, they must forgo protection. (p. 89)

Here protection becomes not something to be enjoyed, but a restricting, demeaning feature of human interrelationships. The idea here is that people were either able to look after their own affairs, to make their own decisions, or they were not and, if they were not independent of others, they were in need of protection and the accompanying restrictions.

Protection was a major concern in the history of the recognition of children's rights in the twentieth century. According to Marshall's categorization, civil and political rights came first in the temporal sequence of men gaining citizenship rights, and social rights came last. However the first category of rights received, or at least proposed, for children, was social rights, and they were motivated by the desire to protect children. The first international declaration of children's rights occurred in 1924 with the Declaration of the Rights of the Child promulgated by the League of Nations (Van Bueren 1995b). This Declaration is primarily concerned with the child receiving the material and spiritual necessities for its well-being and development. Many of the provisions are similar to later declarations of children's rights. The provisions cover protection of children from poverty, hunger, and exploitation. The Declaration does not allow children to make claims; instead it exhorts all adults to recognize their duty to children. The rights recognized here are far from the rights of adult citizens of a modern democratic state.

By the time of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child proclaimed in 1959, not much had changed. This Declaration (Van Bueren 2005b) has many similarities to the earlier declaration covering children's need for protection, adequate nutrition, housing, and medical services. But it also includes added rights to education and to recreation. An influential addition is the reference to the "best interests of the child" as the guiding consideration. An important difference from the earlier document is that this Declaration is directed at governments. However there is still no reference to civil or political rights, and in one aspect, namely, employment, the 1959 Declaration is even more protective than

the earlier Declaration. Principle 9 of the 1959 Declaration states, “The child shall not be admitted to employment before an appropriate minimum age.” The 1924 principle 4 states, “The child must be put in a position to earn a livelihood, and must be protected against every form of exploitation” (Van Bueren 1995b). Here is a hint of a social right of the kind appropriate to full citizens, namely, the right to work. But protection is still the main emphasis. But the hint had disappeared in the 1959 UN Declaration of Children’s Rights, and protection remained the overwhelming theme.

Demands for Participatory Rights for Children

The 1970s writers saw radical demands for change from writers who accepted the participation and consent model of citizenship but saw children as capable of participating in such a society. John Holt (1974) and Richard Farson (1974) argued that rights for children would only be achieved if children were allowed to be self-determining. For these child liberationists, children were similar to other groups seeking recognition of their rights. They argued that calls for the protection of women had covered up endemic exploitation of women and similarly, in the case of children, appeals to protective rights in fact meant that children were deprived of many of the rights held by adults. In *Escape from Childhood*, Holt (1975) went as far as demanding that all children should have the right to vote, arguing that any group which does not have representation on law-making bodies will inevitably be exploited. Holt also argued that children should have the right to work for money, and in this regard is closer to the 1924 Declaration than the 1959 Declaration. Other child liberationists argued that the child’s right to self-determination was fundamental to any understanding of children’s rights. In the tension which exists between rights understood as the free exercise of autonomy and rights understood as paternalist provision of the necessities of life, closer to Marshall’s social rights, the liberationists were on the side of the free exercise of autonomy. It was argued that the right to vote was central to being a citizen (Farson 1974). The analogy with women getting the vote was frequently expounded, but was rejected from a feminist point of view by writers such as Judith Hughes: “We did not spend a couple of centuries arguing that we were not children but adults, she said, simply to be told that, in that case, children are too” (Hughes 1989, p. 37).

Some writers, while not being as radical as the liberationists, recognized the problem involved in children being citizens while not having the vote. Koocher (1976) pointed out that “children are constantly subjected to benign oppression and to all the other violations that any under-represented minority group experiences” (p. 2). Hillary Rodham (later Clinton) (1973), in discussing the *Wisconsin v. Yoder* case, disagreed with the majority decision which gave Amish parents the right to disregard the compulsory education law in order to follow the religious and cultural practices of the Amish. Rodham’s argument was that the Amish children had their own interests separate from the interests of their families. They also had the competence to recognize and express their own interests. The children, she argued,

should have been consulted before a decision was made about whether the compulsory education law would be enforced.

While the arguments for children's suffrage were not widely accepted, the arguments that children had a right to be consulted were much more effective. The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations 1989) went beyond protective rights and included some civil and political rights for children, taking them a step further toward citizenship. Article 12 assures to the child:

who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters which affect the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. It goes on to say, for this purpose, the child shall be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child.

Article 13 gives the child the right to freedom of expression, subject to some standard restrictions. Article 14 recognizes the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, while also recognizing the rights and duties of the parents to provide direction to the child *in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child*. Article 15 recognizes the rights of the child to peaceful assembly and Article 16 the child's rights to privacy. The recognition of these rights in the Convention marks a change in official UN thinking about children's rights, and this is the most controversial aspect of the Convention. These are rights which recognize that the child is a human being able to have and to consider reasons for actions and with interests which may be separate from those of his or her family. They are rights which may be called freedom rights and which some of their critics (Hafen and Hafen 1996) have referred to as "autonomy" rights. Although the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has received wide international recognition, it was also the object of much-heated criticism. There are indeed attempts to persuade some countries which have already ratified the Convention to withdraw or modify their support for it. One example of this occurred in Australia in 1997 when a Senate Committee of the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia was reexamining Australia's commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Competency Criterion

The main criterion which excluded children from being full citizens of a participatory democracy was, it was argued, their lack of rationality and therefore of capacity to give informed consent to the laws of the state. Much of the advocacy of children's right to vote adopted the premises of this argument but gave evidence of children's, particularly older children's, rationality (Stevens 1982), and rationality was often construed in very narrow cognitive terms (Hughes 1989, p. 46).

But competency can be understood more broadly than cognitive ability. J. S. Mill (1865) argued that the importance of the freedoms in a liberal society was based on the fact that individuals were usually in the best position to know their

own interests. In other words individuals were more competent than others when it came to knowing their own interests. Could it be said that children had the kind of competence necessary to being participating citizens? Mill did not believe so and was not prepared to include children in this category of those who knew what was their own best interest. However it does seem that Hillary Rodham and the framers of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Article 12 who argue that the views of the child should be given *due weight* (*Article 12.1 UNCROC*) do accept that children are knowledgeable about their own interests and therefore must be consulted. The Convention, while not proposing voting rights for children, suggests a participatory model of citizenship rather than a more passive identification model.

Schrag (2004) argues that it is inconsistent to rule out children from political participation since many adults are as politically immature as children:

None of the standard theoretical defenses of democracy . . . provides a reason for excluding children that would not be the same time be applicable to some proportion of adults. (Schrag 2004, p. 369)

Andrew Rehfeld (2011) rejects the idea of children being given full political rights, but accepts that the spirit of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child demands some institutional changes, possibly including fractional votes for children, so that children's voices will be more effective in the wider polity.

Disagreements About Rights

The concept of rights is complex and disputed, and different understandings will lead to opposing conclusions about the nature of children's citizenship. Archard (2003, pp. 4–28) has an extensive discussion about the nature of rights and their relationship to the competency requirement. He notes that there are two contrasting theories of rights, the will or claim theory which sees rights as the protected exercise of choice and the welfare or interest theory which sees some interests as so important that they impose on others the duty to protect these interests for them. The will theory seems more compatible with a view of right holders as having some control over decisions which affect them, whereas the interest or welfare view is more compatible with a passive right holder. Archard puts the argument that acceptance of the will theory means that rights are about making protected choices; children, because of immaturity in volitional and cognitive capacities, are not capable of making choices and therefore do not have rights in this sense.

Must we then settle for the interest theory of rights with its view of a more passive role for children? In arguing for a will theory of rights, Hart (1973, p. 184, n. 86), admittedly in a note, accepted that children have claim or will rights, but the claims must be made for them by representatives. Archard points out the difficulties here, one of which is the difficulty of determining who should be the representatives. This however is not an insuperable difficulty. The difference between children having claim rights and not just interest rights is that in the latter case a representative of the child can simply determine what is in the child's best interest,

whereas if children have claim rights attention must be given to the actual claims made by the child. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child seems to, in Article 12, offer a practical way out of the dilemma of children having claim rights, since according to that article, children's claims should be listened to and considered even if the wishes of the child are not finally determinative.

The Participatory Rights of Very Young Children

While it may be easy to accept that older children are able to exercise participatory rights, some people (as noted in the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 2005, 2009) do have difficulty in seeing how Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child can apply to very young children. Priscilla Alderson (2008) has been at the forefront of demonstrating that even very young children can form and express preferences and show cooperation to achieve these. Some of Alderson's examples show convincingly how adults can learn from the views of very young children. There has been a wealth of material (e.g., Berglund 2008; Clark 2005; Goulart and Roth 2010; Smith 2009) demonstrating sensitive and perceptive ways of allowing children to form and express their points of view.

However the most fervent advocates of participatory rights for children can at times slip back into assumptions which are inimical to such rights. Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) point to this in discussing participatory methods in research with children where they believe that even in using some methods designed to elicit children's views, "researchers are expressly taking advantage of children's schooled docility towards such activities" (p. 506). They argue that "This is somewhat at odds with claims that such activities promote children's participation on the basis of active, informed decisions" (p. 506). Alderson (2008) herself falls back on pointing out the economic advantages which a community will achieve through working with a young premature baby in a neonatal intensive care unit to "achieve his goals," one of which is to make "consistent efforts to breathe on his own" (p. 111). The words "goals" and "competencies" suggest an attempt to fit into a particular adult-centered economic model rather than listening to any point of view the child may have.

Communitarianism and Citizenship

Some writers (Arneil 2002; Cockburn 2013) in rethinking children and citizenship have turned to the communitarian view of society. Arneil (2002) quotes with approval the communitarian critics of liberalism who criticize rights discourse claiming that the dimension of sociality is missing from it. Communitarians argue, against the liberal view, that people are in important ways constituted by their social ties and that the rights discourse assumes an isolated individual who may have interests opposed to the social groupings to which the child belongs. This could have the effect of heightening tensions within and between these social

groupings. Arneil believes that the communitarian view is a particularly realistic view of community as far as children are concerned and that it would be more likely to fulfill children's needs than the rights-based approach.

In terms of citizenship, on this view children are accepted as citizens from birth, but they are passive citizens. Critics (Freeman 2007; Coady 2005) of the communitarian view of a child's citizenship have rejected this view on the grounds that it is unrealistic, that it ignores the dynamics of power in communities, and that it once again views the child as an object rather than a participant. This is certainly not the second model of participatory citizenship which this chapter sketched. It is closer to the first identification model, though its proponents may argue that in its stress on an active community concern for all members, it takes children's needs more seriously.

Rights and Responsibilities

Another way in which the notion of children's participatory rights has been diluted is through the assumption that right holders necessarily incur responsibilities. Glendon (1991) complains:

In its silence concerning responsibilities, (rights talk) seems to condone acceptance of the benefits of living in a democratic social welfare state, without accepting the corresponding personal and civic obligations. (p. 14)

This view of the relationship between rights and responsibilities seems to depend on a limited contract notion of rights whereby we receive rights in return for fulfilling responsibilities. And so we return to the question of competence to make a contract. There has certainly been a tension between ascribing responsibility to children and acknowledging rights (Archard 2005; Coady 2005a). In practice we are very ready to impose responsibilities on children. Freeman (2007, p. 10) complains that "we are prepared to impose responsibility on children, including criminal responsibility, often long before we are disposed to confer rights on them" (p. 10). He cites the *Bulger* case in England in which a 2 year old was murdered by two 10 year olds who became the youngest convicted murderers in modern English history.

That holding rights, even claiming rights, does not depend on agreeing to a social contract can be illustrated by considering the examples of a terminally ill child or a terminally ill adult. Neither of these are nor will be in the future capable of contributing to society, yet it could be argued they have a range of rights, including a right to have their wishes heard. Their right depends not on any contract but simply on the fact that they are human beings.

Conclusion and Future Directions

How we understand children's citizenship will depend on a number of contested concepts. These include the varying concepts of citizenship, of competence, of rights, and of responsibility. This chapter has argued for an understanding of child

citizenship whereby the child has rights to participation in decisions which affect her/him. This participation may at times be assisted through those who care for the child – parents, teachers, and others. Though we have moved a long way from the kind of participative but exclusionary citizenship envisaged by Aristotle and Rousseau, the citizenship suggested for the child in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is inclusive while genuinely participatory.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Belonging in Troubling Times: Considerations from the Vantage Point of Arab American Immigrant Youth](#)
- ▶ [Childhood and Youth Citizenship](#)
- ▶ [Current Debates in Social Justice and Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [Entering the Precariat: Young People's Precarious Transitions in Japan](#)
- ▶ [Indigenous Girls, Social Justice, and Schooling: Addressing Issues of Disadvantage](#)
- ▶ [Indigenous Youth, Nationhood, and the Politics of Belonging](#)
- ▶ [Participating as Young Citizens in Diverse Communities](#)
- ▶ [The Ambivalent Implications of Strong Belonging for Young People Living in Poor Neighborhoods](#)
- ▶ [Thinking About Childhood and Youth](#)
- ▶ [Youth Experience of Urban Inequality: Space, Class, and Gender in Mexico](#)

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Abstract

Despite evidence of the benefits of young people's participation, civic youth engagement is limited mostly to youth representation on councils or committees. Drawing on action research in the Child Friendly Cities initiative and the Growing Up in Cities Canada program, this chapter calls for a broader definition of engagement that encompasses membership, rights, responsibilities, and equality of status. It considers that enhanced municipal engagement concretizes citizenship; municipalities need more knowledge and adapted tools if they are to provide young people with multiple dimensions of citizenship. There are three

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priority areas for youth: (a) reaching out to youth by drawing on established networks and reviving communication tools; (b) creating a collaborative space in which youth are welcomed and fully informed so as to enable them to meaningfully participate; and (c) applying appropriate tools that are adapted and effective, such as exploratory walks, community events, and surveys that involve youth in design and analysis.

Introduction

A citizen is a person who lives in a city, who has opinions, and who wants to be heard. It is not only someone who is 18 years old and who has the right to vote. Josianne, 17, Canada

Beyond a set of rights and duties, citizenship can be understood more broadly as active participation in collective decision-making. This larger meaning, following the ancient Greek and Roman traditions, makes youth citizenship an important and complex issue related not so much to the legal voting age as to the capacity of youth and their communities to engage in collaborative processes.

Internationally and nationally, policies recognize children's right to participate and the positive outcomes of such participation. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)(1989) identifies for instance the right of all persons below the age of 18 to information, expression, and association. The 1996 preamble to the United Nations Habitat Agenda affirms the importance of considering children and youth with respect to their living environment, "this is in order to secure the living conditions of children and of youth and to make use of their insights, creativity and thoughts on the environment" (United Nations, 1996, para. 13). This statement has inspired programs such as the Child Friendly Cities initiative, spearheaded by UNICEF, which promotes formal commitments to ensuring child and youth rights at the level of municipal governance.

Young people's citizen engagement at the municipal level is important because municipalities have jurisdiction over environments, services, and programs that directly affect youth every day (Checkoway et al. 2005). Actualizing citizenship in ways that can be motivating for youth is also more likely at the local level, where they have direct contact with authority. Despite evidence of the multiple benefits of youth participation to young people themselves and to society more generally (Zeldin et al. 2007), putting policies into practice to promote active citizenship remains challenging. Experience shows that simply establishing policies or structures is no guarantee for effectively engaging youth. Youth civic engagement has often embodied a narrow idea of citizenship, for instance, reduced to token representation of youth on councils or committees (Hart 1997; Theis 2010). Contributing to this reductionist approach is a lack of know-how among municipal staff for reaching out and engaging youth (Torres and Blanchet-Cohen *in press*), as well as among youth on how to connect with the municipality.

This chapter focuses on youth's perspectives on ways of enhancing citizen engagement at the municipal level. Young people such as Josianne want to participate in decision-making well before their legal voting age. They want to have their

opinions considered seriously. They have competence to contribute to their communities, thereby challenging classic representations of citizenship and dominant conceptions of childhood, which have considered children and young people as citizens of the future or adults in the making (Lister 2007). Mechanisms are needed to provide meaningful opportunities for children to participate in governance and for their voices to be heard in government and institutional settings.

This chapter is based on action research undertaken in the context of two initiatives: Child Friendly Cities (CFC) and Growing Up in Cities Canada (GUIC Canada). It highlights three priority areas to enable citizenship at the municipal level: (a) reaching out to youth, (b) creating a collaborative space, and (c) using appropriate tools. Before presenting these, the paper examines the concept of youth citizenship and the CFC and GUIC initiatives as experienced globally and in Canada.

Conceptualizing Youth Citizenship

The citizenship of young people has historically been ignored perhaps because they lack political franchise. However, increasing evidence suggests that children effectively engage as citizens well before the legal voting age, going beyond established institutional and electoral processes, and that conceptualizations of citizenship need to be revisited to reflect young people's competency and lived realities (Sherrod et al. 2002).

Youth are engaged in civic behavior as they connect with and contribute through their families, schools, volunteer experiences, organizations, and communities (Cahill and Hart 2007). These represent a microcosm of larger society and reflect the fact that young people enact citizenship in both formal and nonformal settings (Liebel 2012). Biesta et al. (2009) point to the importance of young people learning about democracy and citizenship "through their participation in the range of different practices that make up their lives" (p. 7) including with family or peers, at school, during leisure activities, and so forth. The recognition that children are agents who actively respond to their environments and incrementally contribute to redefining childhood and establishing favorable social policies (James and James 2004) remains necessary even after 20 years of progress in children's rights (Thomas 2009). In Western countries, school curricula on citizenship education have narrowly focused on teaching skills, knowledge, and attitudes related to citizenship as "apprenticeship," ignoring the fact that children in different cultural contexts actively participate in political processes related to their own everyday lives (Liebel 2012). This apprenticeship approach also ignores that the UNCRC encompasses a broader understanding of political participation in which citizenship is enacted in both formal and nonformal settings (Smith 2009).

Opportunities for civic engagement are shown to be beneficial to young people themselves and to society in general (Flanagan et al. 2012). Zeldin et al. (2007) identify the importance of youth engagement to fulfilling the rights provided for in the UNCRC, as well as to building civil society and promoting youth development.

Research indicates that engaged young people are more likely to have greater levels of self-esteem, obtain higher grades in school, and commit to friends, families, and communities (Ferreira et al. 2012). In turn, community programs that make young people feel that they matter and have a voice in decision-making are most likely to be successful. Involvement of young people in the design, implementation, and evaluation of municipal services provides for more effective and responsive programming (Checkoway et al. 2005).

Grounding this chapter is Lister's (2007) multidimensional understanding of children's citizenship as encompassing four elements:

- *Membership* which reflects children's claim to belonging
- *Rights* particularly to participation as stated in the UNCRC
- *Responsibilities* of children to obey the law and to be accountable in their everyday lives, including in their families and schools
- *Equality of status, respect, and recognition* which considers the right of citizens to be different yet equal

This way of thinking of young people's citizenship reflects a relational conceptualization of citizenship, which considers both the need for opportunities and the active role of young people in exercising membership, rights, and responsibilities and attempting to achieve equality. Young people as competent agents are able and willing to connect with and contribute to a group larger than themselves (Sherrod et al. 2002). This provides for children's sense of belonging, identity, and need for recognition (Smith 2010). Youth citizenship does not however operate in a vacuum but requires the support of adults and institutions (Wyness 2009a). How does a municipality therefore recognize young people's citizenship and then provide opportunities for them to exercise it? This question is central to realizing meaningful citizenship that is active as opposed to passive (Theis 2010), "thick" instead of "thin" (Lister 2007), and results in citizenship as practice versus citizenship as achievement (Biesta and Lawy 2006).

The Importance of the Municipal Level

In practice, citizenship is dynamic, and embodying youth engagement has both an immediate and prospective dimension that contributes toward a collective project. For municipalities, youth engagement represents an often untapped resource for managing current issues, implementing local change, and planning for future development.

Youth citizenship at the municipal level is considered particularly important because local policies and programs directly impact children every day. In Canada, for instance, municipal jurisdiction affects housing, parks and open spaces, health services, workplaces, and transportation (Blanchet-Cohen 2006). To realize young people's right to participation, a dominant response has been to establish youth councils or youth representation on committees. While such a formal commitment is beneficial, youth representation and ambiguity around purpose and power have

limited the effectiveness of this type of youth involvement. Wyness' (2009b) research in the UK suggests that youth councils mostly neglect the issue of diversity: "Formal electoral arrangements for articulating children's interests connect with the commitments and experiences of children who have certain advantages over other children...[and] these formal structures can have the effect of silencing groups of young people already marginalized within society" (p. 549).

Similarly, in Canada, youth councils have been shown to attract "high-functioning" youth who are willing to follow city procedures (Blanchet-Cohen 2006). This approach corresponds to what Francis and Lorenzo (2002) call the "institutional realm" (p. 164) for children participation, where young participants navigate within boundaries set by adults. If this approach brings lasting opportunities for participation, it nevertheless "...tends to create limited results or results counter to what children really want" (p. 162). While youth policies and strategies have been adopted, municipalities experience difficulties in working *with* youth and not only *for* youth. Some of the common challenges identified by municipalities are found in Box 1.

Box 1: Challenges for Municipalities to Involve Young People (Adapted from Blanchet-Cohen and Cook 2005)

- Acknowledging that young people have something to offer
- Commitment to incorporating young people's ideas and perspectives
- Taking the time to build relationships with young people and properly engaging them in a meaningful process on a continuous basis.
- Willingness to change structures and adapt them to make them child-youth friendly
- Understanding that different groups of young people have different perspectives
- Appropriately budgeting and planning for the human and financial needs of youth (i.e., money for food, travel, or honoraria)

The Child Friendly Cities Initiative

An impetus for paying attention to the multiple forms of children's participation at the municipal level has been the CFC initiative in which more than 1,000 cities around the world have registered on UNICEF's database to furthering children's rights at the municipal level. It recognizes that while much progress has been made in many countries to develop national policies, strategies, and programs to achieve children's rights, there is a need to do more to bring the children's rights agenda down to the local level. The CFC approach is based on promoting nine building blocks, including establishing a child-friendly legal framework, a children's budget, and a citywide children's plan, while children's participation cuts across all building blocks (see www.child-friendlycities.org). A child-friendly community is one in which local government officials work in partnership with civil society to fulfill children's rights.

Reflecting enthusiasm and a commitment to the CFC initiative, the *Carrefour action municipale et famille* (CAMF), a nongovernmental organization with a province-wide mandate to work with municipalities on family-related issues, has established an accreditation process for municipalities to be recognized as child-friendly. Over 20 municipalities in Québec have received the child-friendly accreditation since 2009 based on their commitments to child and youth planning (see www.carrefourmunicipal.qc.ca). Criteria for accreditation include not only environmental quality and diversity of services but also children and youth capacity to influence decisions about their city and express their perspectives on the city they want (UNICEF 2013). Lessons learned from 15 years of implementation suggest that the labeling is attractive to a range of different-sized settings and has furthered children's rights. Nevertheless, implementation remains difficult, and the impact from the perspective of children is uneven because of a lack of awareness and knowledge on how to become truly child-friendly cities (UNICEF 2013).

The Growing Up in Cities Canada

Another global project that has been well documented and informs knowledge of the potential of involving youth in municipal planning is the Growing Up in Cities program of UNESCO. Initiated by urban planner Kevin Lynch in the 1970s and revived in the 1990s, GUIC involves young people between 10 and 15 years old in action research projects using a variety of methods (Chawla 2002; Driskell 2002). Global experiences demonstrate the ability of young people and the impact of engaging them in community change. Chawla et al. (2005) state that “the core of GUIC is its focus on young people as allies in caring for their localities and improving the urban environment, as well as ethical principles for working respectfully with young people as partners” (p. 81). Involvement of children in evaluating their community has repeatedly shown young people's unique understanding of their nearby environments and the limitations of depending on adult decision-makers for the design and implementation of programs and services.

The following section proposes guidelines for fostering effective participation as an expression of citizenship. It draws upon youth's perspectives in action research projects undertaken in the context of the CFC and GUIC Canada, where both authors have been involved (Blanchet-Cohen 2006; Torres and Lessard 2007; Torres and Blanchet-Cohen [in press](#)).

Youth's Perspectives

Particularly in adolescence, many youth feel excluded from decision-making in their communities. A 14-year-old participating in CFC action research explained: “It seems like adults are scared of us. They do not have confidence in us. Just because we are teenagers doesn't mean we are going to misbehave.” Indeed, dominant myths persist such as the notion that teenagers are all the same, usually

problematic, unrealistic, and singularly focused on leisure. These myths may make it difficult to reach out, collaborate, and motivate youth to take part in decision-making processes.

Learnings from youth in action research in the Canadian municipalities involved in GUIC or CFC initiatives indicate that actualizing youth's citizenship at the local level involves paying attention to three areas: (a) reaching out to youth, (b) creating a collaborative space, and (c) using appropriate tools. These aspects are discussed below.

Reaching Out to Youth

One primary stumbling block that prevents youth from practicing active citizenship is the inability to connect with the municipality. Young people are often unaware about either the scope of services and programs under municipal jurisdictions or simply how to reach the municipality. For many, the municipal government itself could be intimidating, as suggested through comments such as this one from a 17-year-old from Victoriaville, a small city in Québec: "It is still really difficult to have the guts to go to the City." In turn, municipalities find it difficult to access youth in order to engage them. "It is really hard to involve them, even more to sustain their involvement," reflected a municipal staff member from Sainte-Julie, a municipality on the outskirts of Montréal.

According to youth, the overarching recommendation to municipalities is to diversify both the ways of reaching out and the type of young people involved. In fact, many youth are concerned about narrow representation; those who participate are particularly sensitive to this issue.

Involvement of a variety of youth is considered essential because youth use different municipal services and programs in distinct ways. For instance, the redesign of a skate park needs to consider different types of uses (i.e., skateboard, BMX, or inline skating), various levels of experience of the users (beginners or experts), age, and many other factors. When choosing participants, it is important for large and small municipalities to consider gender, age, culture, level of involvement in issues and activities, as well as the size of city.

To ensure equality of status, respect, and recognition (Lister 2007), municipalities should be proactive and go where young people are, as opposed to expecting youth to come to municipalities' offices or attend their programs and simply fit into those structures and institutions. This is particularly important for marginalized youth who have often been prevented from exercising citizenship, unless specific opportunities are created (Blanchet-Cohen and Salazar 2010). To achieve diversity, two strategies are considered important by youth.

Draw on Established Networks

Young people identified the importance of using established networks to reach out to youth. In each locality, there are services and programs regularly used by youth, such as schools, youth centers, community health centers, and local organizations.

Municipalities should draw on these existing networks and identify adult allies to facilitate youth engagement in municipal services and programs, for instance, school staff responsible for extracurricular activities and clubs, the student council, or other structures. These adults could act as intermediaries to help young people navigate the system and get their voices heard, while for municipalities, they could offer a means to reach out to youth more effectively. In the case of marginalized young people, an entry point could be through their peers.

Revive Communication Tools

Youth are also concerned about how municipalities communicate with young people. Actualizing participation opportunities for active citizenship depends partly on the adoption of child-oriented communication practices (Thomas 2009). These could include keeping abreast of modern forms of communication, such as social media. Young people were critical of municipalities' unattractive and infrequent use of these media and made suggestions for developing an effective presence (see Box 2). They emphasized dynamism and interactivity as qualities to develop. In some cases, this would require municipalities to modify internal policies to allow use of social media as a work tool.

Box 2: Youth's Tips for Creating an Effective Presence on Social Media

1. Provide regular updates. Too many or too few updates can result in disuse of page.
2. Be responsive. A page where an administrator responds to comments and suggestions will make it more active.
3. Be informative. Provide information to guide young people to appropriate resources when they have projects or questions.
4. Communicate on past events. A page that reports back on events by, for example, uploading photos will be visited more often.
5. Disseminate information. Do not use it to take long surveys.
6. Ensure confidentiality. Establish procedures to ensure youth privacy is respected.
7. Create a lively design.

Creating a Collaborative Space

Once connected, young people need a space to collaborate with adults and with each other. This aspect reflects young people's concern with enabling membership. A sense of belonging comes from creating a space that allows young people to express themselves, a point similarly emphasized by Lundy (2007) who describes the need to create a safe and inclusive space if children's right to express themselves is to be realized. It is part of ensuring that youth engagement is authentic and will not fall into tokenism or decoration (Hart 1997).

Provide Full Information to Youth

Within the collaborative space, it is essential that young people are fully informed. This involves municipalities being transparent from the beginning about the type and degree of youth involvement. Hart's (1997) well-known ladder of participation, for instance, distinguishes among simply being informed, being consulted, and actually sharing in decision-making. Sharing relevant information is indicative of respect and may also facilitate deliberation. An illustrative case of this is a participatory process held in 2011 at Sainte-Julie to redesign the skate park. Recreation and park staff stated upfront that youth were being consulted about a \$25,000 remodel of the park. After having reached out to youth by organizing information activities at the skate park and informing the youth about why and how they wanted to hear from the users of the skate parks, they held design workshops for different users to identify problems and proposals for upgrading. The process resulted in valuable information for the recreation and sport department, and youth felt they meaningfully exercised their citizenship because their contributions were seriously considered and influenced decisions. A municipal staff member reflected, "I realized that the process worked because youth had realistic ideas based on their assessment of the situation. We often say "oh youth, they do not know what they want or they only want big things"... but our process showed that youth are realistic when they are well supported."

Ensure a Welcoming Space

Creating a welcoming space includes paying attention to the room setup, as well as to body and verbal language, as identified in Box 3. It can also involve preparing young people prior to meetings, and during meetings, allocating time to build relationships, and clarifying expectations and roles. One reason this is so important is to reflect the expertise of young people and enable them to be recognized for it. Without establishing this welcoming space, young people may be too intimidated to share their views; providing an appropriate space can enable them to more fully participate and practice active citizenship. In establishing a welcoming place, a municipality is addressing the obstacles that often prevent young people from engaging (see Box 1).

Box 3: Tips for Adults to Create a Welcoming Space for Collaboration

1. Select easily accessible meeting places that reflect young people's scheduling and transportation needs.
2. Consider layout of the room: don't place all the chairs in rows facing the front of the room.
3. Be aware of your body language and position.
4. Do not monopolize conversation; establish a turn to speak.
5. Select the words with which you express yourself. Take time to define more abstract concepts and avoid acronyms.

(continued)

6. Participate in activities with young people rather than simply observe.
7. Provide and share meals/snacks.
8. Avoid stereotyping, even when it seems positive. If you seem constantly surprised by the quality of their interventions, they will end up believing that you're surprised that they can have opinions.

Using Appropriate Tools

Once the connection is made with young people and the space created for them to exercise citizenship, municipalities need appropriate tools to engage young people in decision-making. As shown by urban planner Kevin Lynch in the 1970s and then throughout the eight countries involved in the GUIC program, giving appropriate tools to young people can result in insightful and creative solutions for municipalities (Chawla and Driskell 2006; Driskell 2002). Tools that allow young people to share their views and perspectives allow them to exercise their citizenship. Indeed, the choice of tools depends on the issue, context, and function. Many tools such as the opinion survey, exploratory walks, and workshops are well known within the research community (Hörschelmann and van Blerk 2011), but according to youth need to be adapted. Here, they are briefly presented to illustrate the types of issues to consider in applying them with young people.

Surveys

To rapidly gather quantifiable information, municipalities often prioritize the use of multiple-choice questionnaire surveys. Youth were critical however of administering lengthy questionnaires and suspicious about the reliability of the collected data. If needed, they suggested, simplify questionnaires and use language easily understood by youth. To ensure comprehension and correct interpretation, a youth group could be involved in reviewing and piloting the questionnaire and subsequently in the result analysis. If, as was the case, about half of young people identified that they were not heard by either their municipality or school and that slightly more than half also felt that the municipality itself was somewhat interested in young people's views, youth and municipal staff need to reflect together on ways to move forward. Partnering with youth to interpret and respond to the results would be essential.

Exploratory Walks

This tool enables youth to share information about their living environment through alternative means (Driskell 2002). Rasmussen and Smidt (2003) explain: "The body and its movements are vital building blocks in making meaning of the environment... Knowledge about the neighbourhood is therefore not always expressed in verbal language, but is rather expressed through a physical 'knowhow'" (p. 88). Exploratory walks generate knowledge about youth's daily places and activities. By directly observing the issues youth identify, adults less

familiar with youth environments and activities gain more accurate understanding. The exploratory tours by walking or on bike are rewarding for youth who become guides within their neighborhoods. In encouraging interactions between people of different ages, these activities also create a playful and perhaps even festive atmosphere in the participatory process.

Community Forums

This tool provides a space for participants to come together around a given issue. Early in the participatory process, community forums can be useful for getting input about local issues, foreseeing possible solutions, and fostering public awareness of the process (Driskell 2002). Later in the process, communication forums can be useful in communicating the results of participatory processes and exploring ways for implementation. Usually held as a festive activity, this tool requires a high level of organization in order to enable real participation from youth, particularly from different kinds of youth. Schedule, place, goals, and activities in the forum need to be carefully planned. Experiences from the GUIC initiative suggest that foreseeing participants' interests and skills are key. Collaborating with universities and local practitioners can be useful to facilitate organization.

Conclusion and Future Directions

As discussed throughout this chapter, municipalities could provide a unique opportunity for actualizing youth citizenship. Developing young people's involvement in issues that affect their everyday lives is beneficial to them as individuals and helps build healthier and more responsive relationships between state and communities in order to more effectively address current challenges (Smith 2010; Youniss et al. 2002). Broadening the definition of citizenship calls however for new ways of engaging with youth that go beyond the status quo. Adopting policies to foster youth participation is an important step, but their application is most significant and, usually, challenging.

Action research in two initiatives, CFC and GUIC, shows that reaching out to youth, creating a space for collaboration, and using appropriate tools are integral to strengthening youth citizenship at the municipal level. Adopting a communication culture (Thomas 2009) that recognizes youth's rights and capacity is essential to actualizing the multiple dimensions of citizenship including membership, rights, responsibilities, and equality of status.

A key consideration is capacity building of adult staff and young people. Adults need to adopt new ways of connecting with youth and apply appropriate tools. At times, young people may also be unaware of their own skills; finding ways of involving those who feel disconnected is essential in moving forward so that young people like Josianne can actualize their citizenship and contribute to their municipalities.

More generally, this chapter points to the importance of broadening partnerships for more fruitful and authentic collaborations. Municipal jurisdiction extends into

many areas that affect young people's lives including recreation and leisure, housing, transportation, health, economy, and policing. Building alliances across these sectors as well as with other levels of government and including adult allies in civil society who interact with young people are essential. Even reaching out to universities can be beneficial because of their resources (ideas, energy, time, etc.), to support municipal staff who often lack the time and space to innovate and take the risks of engaging youth. As pointed out by Chawla et al. (2005), building multilevel alliances will ensure sustainability of participatory youth processes.

As municipalities increase commitment and gain experience in engaging youth in the design and use of local services and facilities, one can hope that this practice extends across decision-making issues in municipalities as well as beyond. Youth citizen engagement needs to ultimately become the *modus operandi* in our societies.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Childhood and Youth Citizenship](#)
- ▶ [Citizenship: Inclusion and Exclusion](#)
- ▶ [Participating as Young Citizens in Diverse Communities](#)

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Abstract

Despite the plethora of social, educational, and youth-related policies that have encouraged children and young people’s citizenship participation in the past two decades, it is increasingly apparent that the landscape of youth participation is far from even or equal. Moreover, the application of uniform notions of identity and narrowly conceived categories of “what counts” as participation has had the effect of excluding many young people who fall outside of the normative majority culture. So how can we understand and theorize the unevenness of young people’s citizenship and practices in ways which give account of their differing experiences of citizenship in diverse communities?

In this chapter, a critical social constructivist theoretical framework is proposed that draws on Bourdieu’s “species of capital” (social, economic, cultural, and symbolic) to interrogate and understand diverse practices of citizenship participation. Analyzing the “participatory capital” held by young people in two ethnic minority communities in New Zealand and England shows how

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citizen imaginaries are inseparable from gender, class, and race and the everyday experiences of being a citizen within social and spatial contexts. This analysis describes how participatory capital was created and generated in such communities, contributing to a fresh vision of the potential for transformative and collective understandings of youth citizenship within everyday spaces and places.

Introduction

In the past two decades, there has been an “explosion” (Brooks and Holford 2009, p. 86) of interest in children and young people’s citizenship participation. Many attribute the beginning of this youthful “citizenship renaissance” with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNHCR 1989) and its call to empower young people to participate as full citizens. The ratification of this convention has led to a wide range of policy initiatives that aim to enhance children and young people’s political, economic, and cultural participation (Prout et al. 2006). These policies have promoted the representation and inclusion of children and young people in some decision making processes and political processes (e.g., Youth parliaments) as well as citizen-consumers in society (Prout et al. 2006).

In response to these pro-participation policy initiatives for children and young people, it is possible to identify two broad narratives that have emerged in recent research. The first is that “young people can do nothing.” Such research confirms a “democratic deficit” by showing growing rates of youth citizenship disengagement in many western nations (Crick 1998; Furlong and Cartmel 2007; Print 2007; Putnam 2000). This in turn has fuelled further youth citizenship policies. For example, in England, an initial motivation for a compulsory citizenship curriculum was observations of “worrying levels of apathy, ignorance and cynicism about public life” (Crick 1998, p. 14).

An emerging counter-narrative depicts that “young people can do everything,” by highlighting their agency, autonomy, and active participation as young citizens (Montgomery et al. 2004; Robertson 2009). Such studies tend to (at times uncritically) celebrate youth activists as autonomous actors who are enabled by emergent technologies to engage in unconventional and new forms of participation. However, as Wierenga et al. (2003, p. 8) point out, both these narratives about youth – “young people can do everything” and “young people can do nothing” – leave young people alienated and unsupported. Both narratives also overlook the significance of increasing inequalities and differences *between* groups of young people (Wyn and Woodman 2006). Moreover, both positions (“apathetic” and “activist”) overlook the many ways that “ordinary” young people are participating as citizens in informal and everyday spaces (Harris et al. 2010).

In response to these critiques, we need to find alternative ways to conceptualize and theorize how citizenship is defined and where citizenship is studied. The following two premises underpin an alternative vision of youth citizenship

research. First, many studies of children and young people's citizenship participation have employed narrow definitions of citizenship participation. Primarily these have focused on what Norris (2007) refers to as "mainstream politics" – largely adult-centered and formal expressions of citizenship in the public sphere (such as voting, running for office, or signing petitions). In the absence of evidence of participation in such traditional processes, many contemporary discourses locate the problem of democratic disengagement within young people themselves (Kennelly and Dillabough 2008). However, feminist research has pointed out that such studies overlook the significance of everyday lived experiences of young people which are different from those of adults. Children and young people occupy largely private and domestic spheres as citizens (Lister 2008) and far less commonly participate in formal arenas. We need a focus that enables us to see how their experiences of citizenship are shaped in these sites and contexts and rooted in their everyday lives (Harris et al. 2010).

A second premise is founded closely on these more inclusive definitions of citizenship participation and pays attention to structural, spatial, and material differences between groups of young people (see also Stokes and Aaltonen, *Thinking About the Future: Young People, Identity, and Class* this volume). This approach is informed by critical theory which seeks to critique the very structures which young people operate in to expose their discriminatory aspects and imbalances of power. This includes a much closer analysis of how socio-spatial and relational and intergenerational aspects shape children and young people's citizenship participation (Mannion 2007). These two premises bring us to a fresh starting point for examining youth citizenship that is centered on hearing from young people themselves and examining the contextual factors that contribute to their citizenship identities and dispositions.

This chapter builds on these two premises by proposing a conceptual and theoretical framework that documents more closely young people's experience of *being* a citizen – an experience which is situated in everyday relationships and places and is uniquely linked to young people's life trajectories (Biesta et al. 2009). The chapter begins by describing the uneven landscape of youth participation in order to justify the need for a new, alternative vision for understanding youth citizenship. This is followed by an explanation of a critical, social constructivist theoretical framework employing the notion of "participatory capital" and how this could be applied to examine youth citizenship. Founded upon Bourdieu's (1986) "species" of capital, participatory capital is defined as "the combined and interrelated social, economic and cultural capital related to the logic, network and practices of citizenship participation within a social field" (Wood 2013, p. 2). Research from a Pacific Island community in New Zealand and a Black Caribbean community in England is introduced to illustrate how a participatory capital analysis sheds new light on youth citizenship identities and practices within specific neighborhoods. This analysis offers fresh potential for transformative and collective understandings of youth citizenship within everyday spaces and places.

Uneven Landscapes of Citizenship Participation

Emerging citizenship research has confirmed that landscapes of youth citizenship participation are far from even or equal. It is apparent that there are significant differences *between* and *within* different groups of young people. Studies focusing on structural and economic factors show that young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds have lower rates of civic and political participation and are less likely to participate politically in the future (Black 2011; Lopes et al. 2009; Marsh et al. 2007; Spring et al. 2007). For example, young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds in America have lower rates of volunteering while they are young and are less likely to participate in their communities in the future (Spring et al. 2007). There is also evidence that structured lived experiences (class, gender, and ethnicity) significantly affect the way young people negotiate their political identities. Marsh et al.'s (2007) research across six Birmingham sites varying in ethnicity, class, and educational outcomes revealed that the differing economic, cultural, and social resources young people accessed significantly shaped how they defined politics and viewed political institutions. They concluded that researchers need to develop much more nuanced understandings of the relationship between structured lived experiences and young people's engagement and interest in politics.

A second set of studies have drawn attention to the normative assumptions underpinning citizenship and participation policies. These have shown that many youth citizenship policies endorse forms of citizenship which are the norm of ethnically dominant and middle-class communities (Olssen 2004). Such policies present a single national and cultural identity that gives little recognition to difference. This has the effect of excluding many young people who fall outside of the normative majority culture (Kennelly and Dillabough 2008; Marsh et al. 2007; Smith et al. 2002). For example, in England, Olssen (2004) argues that the narrow, unitary notion of "Britishness" embedded in the 1999 United Kingdom citizenship education curriculum presented certain ethnic minorities as "other" when discussing cultural diversity and therefore assumed a liberal model of assimilation or integration. The subsequent introduction of the "*Identity and Diversity*" strand of citizenship education (DfES 2007) has attempted to counter this critique, with a renewed emphasis on diversity.

Some examples of how these exclusionary patterns are experienced by groups of young people can be observed by examining marginalized groups within western democracies. In New Zealand, "not being able to participate as citizens in the public domain" was a commonly voiced theme by rural indigenous Maori young people (Smith et al. 2002, p. 175). They described how the abuse of some young people's rights by authorities within schools and by the police meant that they were highly cynical and were "turned off" the existing models of youth participation such as consultation meetings, youth councils, and youth parliaments (Smith et al. 2002). In Canada, Kennelly and Dillabough (2008) describe the stratified subcultural articulations of citizenship expressed by young people from the "hard edge of the political economy" (p. 505) in urban, inner-city Vancouver. Their sociological

analysis exposed the deeply coded forms of “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu 1986) which operated through culturally contingent structures, symbolic processes, and cultural meanings to exclude some disadvantaged young people from the experience of full citizenship.

These examples show how normative expectations of citizenship participation exclude many young people who do not fit into such narrow, mainstream models. This highlights the inadequacy of a one-size-fits-all approach to citizenship which inevitably fails to account for the contextualized and unique ingredients that contribute to young people’s experiences and expressions of citizenship and participation (Malone and Hartung 2010). As a way to try to explain and theorize this unevenness between diverse communities and in light of the paucity of theoretical insights to explain diverse and contextualized experiences of citizenship participation (Malone and Hartung 2010), the notion of “participatory capital” is introduced.

Participatory Capital

This section elaborates how Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977, 1990) theory of practice could provide insights into youth citizenship participation in diverse communities. In this theory, Bourdieu sets out a conceptual triad composed of capital, habitus, and field to explain “practice,” or the actions of men and women. He proposes that there are a variety of *capitals* that individuals can possess: these include social, cultural, economic, and symbolic capitals which contain “concealed intergenerational processes that serve to reproduce socio-economic advantage, disadvantage and privilege” (Holt 2008, p. 234). According to Bourdieu, one form of capital is necessarily understood within the context of other related capital: “it is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in one form” (Bourdieu 1986, p. 15). Moreover, Bourdieu (1977) suggests that capitals need to be understood to exist within the logic, networks, and practices of a *field* – or the social space within which individuals operate – and as a result of the *habitus*, or dispositions people embody as a result of social conditioning.

However, in spite of Bourdieu’s understanding of the interrelated application of capitals alongside habitus and field, the majority of studies in youth citizenship have applied a singular approach to Bourdieu’s capitals and only rarely examined habitus and field as the following studies reveal.

Social Capital: Bourdieu refers to social capital as the sum of resources (actual or virtual) that accrue to an individual or group as a result of social connections and relationships (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Social capital is held to be an important driver of civic action “because it facilitates the development of the type of co-operative social relations that are a prerequisite of collective action” (Fahmy 2006, p. 103). The application social capital has been widely applied as a way of understanding children and young people’s citizenship participation (Fahmy 2006; Kirsby 2009; Morrow 1999; Putnam 2000; Weller 2006; Weller and Bruegel 2009). These studies show how young people’s social networks and sociability, levels of

trust and reciprocity, and sense of belonging within their communities shape their civic participation. Putnam (2000) differentiates between *bonding* social capital – the type of social capital that is inward-looking and focuses on networks and relationships of trust and reciprocity within a group – and *bridging* capital, which includes outward-looking networks between different groups. Weller and Bruegel (2009) suggest that children are involved in both forms of social capital in their neighborhoods and propose that children not only inherit social capital but also build social capital (see also Weller 2006). These studies have shown that the relationship between social capital and civic action is not uniform, “but differs across the lifecycle and in relation to the type of participation under investigation” (Fahmy 2006, p. 115).

Cultural and Economic Capital: Cultural capital refers to the knowledge, skills, and information people acquire through formal or informal education, while *economic* capital refers to the income and assets people own. Bourdieu proposes that cultural capital can exist as an embodied state (such as jargon, music), as an objectified form (such as books, scientific instruments), and in an institutionalized form, most often represented by educational credentials. In relation to citizenship, knowledge about civic and political processes and the skills to participate in civic action have been found to be linked to higher levels of cultural and economic capital. For example, the significant correlations between young people from less-advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds and lower levels of civic knowledge have been found (although this did not necessarily translate into less interest in political issues) (Schulz et al. 2010). Similarly, McFarland and Thomas (2006) found that young people from wealthier, higher-educated families and young people from all social backgrounds who had participated in political and social volunteering as youth both had higher levels of “political capital” as adults later in life.

These studies have helped to advance the field of youth citizenship through a critical, social constructivist view of youth citizenship. However, as they have tended to examine capitals in isolation and neglected Bourdieu’s interrelated conceptual triad (capital, habitus, and field), they can leave us with a limited vision. The notion of participatory capital sets out to address some of these limitations and holds that capitals need to be understood as interrelated and situated within specific social contexts or a “field” (Wood 2013). Moreover, rather than focus on “political capital” (McFarland and Thomas 2006), which is closely aligned with adultist and mainstream notions of civic participation, a broader, more inclusive, and everyday notion of citizenship participation is anticipated. In particular, a participatory capital approach enables a focus on the interrelated capitals that are embedded within specific communities or social fields that demonstrates participation as citizens in the broadest sense – citizenship acts and dispositions which show commitment, solidarity, protection, and transformation regarding specific places and people.

This provides the basis for an approach which examines how participatory capital is generated, developed, and enhanced within communities through everyday relationships and activities (Wood 2012). The following section discusses empirical research from two ethnic minority communities in New Zealand and

England that are characterized by socioeconomic disadvantage and low levels of formal political engagement. In both examples, attention is paid to the socio-spatial construction of young people's citizenship and how participatory capital is developed and generated.

Participatory Capital and Citizenship in Ethnic Minority Communities

Aotearoa, New Zealand: Youth Citizenship in a "Pacific" Community

The research referred to in this section was part of a research project exploring citizenship identities and experiences of New Zealand-born young people (ages 15–17 years) with Pacific backgrounds (Wood 2012, 2013). The community examined here is located within one of the lowest socioeconomic school communities in New Zealand and given a "decile 1" rating, indicating that it falls within the lowest 10 % of all school communities (Ministry of Education (NZ), 2011). Historically, this working class suburb developed in response to the arrival of migrants from the Pacific Islands (such as Samoa, Tokelau, and Tonga) as well as rural Maori who arrived to work within the rapidly expanding manufacturing sector in urban New Zealand in the 1960s.

Young people in this suburb had low levels of economic and political capital. For example, they had limited knowledge about their rights in society but spoke a lot about their responsibilities to be good role models for others, to look after younger children, and to do well in their schooling. While these young people were active in leadership in their school and church communities, they laughed out loud when asked whether their opinions and contributions would be valued by local government – they felt they were not "famous enough" to contribute to such discussions.

In contrast they had very high levels of *bonding capital*. The participants showed strong emotional affiliation to this community, describing it as "a Pacific community", where "everyone just gets along." Community-mindedness, looking out for each other and giving back to society or "service," was highly valued. Most participants were very involved in Pacific Island cultural and church groups and worked to retain Pacific languages. They described the importance of being a sociable member of this community with good communication skills and a great sense of humor.

Bonding social capital has been critiqued for being inward-looking and clannish in nature (Putnam 2000). Yet there were also examples of how this tight-knit bonding social capital could be used as a source of *bridging* capital across ethnic groups. Young people talked of how they addressed social challenges in their community (such as exclusion, cultural misunderstandings, and racism) through relational approaches. This included *socializing* across cultural, class, and race boundaries in order to reduce conflict and misunderstandings between different groups. The young people's gaze was also sharply attuned to aspects of social injustice and inequality in society. For example, they were keenly aware of the

negative impact of local gangs, liquor outlets targeting youth and high rates of truancy on their community. Their attention to such issues and their commitment as citizens to participate collectively to improve the well-being of all in their community showed high levels of participatory capital.

Britain: Youth Citizenship in Black Caribbean Communities

The second example derives from a research project exploring experiences and ethnic identity formation of Caribbean young people in Britain (see Reynolds 2006, 2013 and Reynolds, ► Chap. 45, ““Black Neighborhoods” and “Race,” Placed Identities in Youth Transition to Adulthoods” in this volume for further details). The participants were young people living in socially deprived “Black neighborhoods” in London with low levels of economic and political capital. In light of frequent experiences of social exclusion and racial discrimination (such as the labor market, education, and criminal justice system), the study sought to examine how experience of solidarity and community participation in these Black neighborhoods contributed to “getting on” in terms of social mobility (Reynolds 2013). As an ethnic collective group in Britain, Caribbean people demonstrate one of the lowest rates of voting of any ethnic minority group and exhibit low rates of political party participation (although the exception of a small number of high-profile politicians from this community is also noted by Reynolds (2006)).

Similar to Wood’s study, the participants in this study had high levels of *bonding* social capital. They created and maintained strong ethnic ties and solidarity within these Black neighborhoods, as well as with Caribbean diasporic and transnational family networks (Reynolds 2006). Most participants were active in ethnic social events and community organizations such as Black-led youth groups, church groups, and supplementary Saturday school.

Reynolds (2006) argues that young Black people understood bonding capital as a precursor to *bridging* capital across ethnic groups. Drawing on Helpert (2005, p. 262), she describes how maintaining a strong internal sense of identity and bonding social capital enabled young people to interact and reach out across cultural divides. She describes a number of participants who had gained confidence in multicultural settings as a result of the pride and security they held in their own ethnic community. Such ties of reciprocal trust and solidarity also enabled new opportunities for civic participation. She cites youth involvement in a number of community programs in these neighborhoods which acted as a resource for politics, collective mobilization, and reaffirming ethnic identity and consciousness (Reynolds 2013).

Discussion

An examination of these two groups of young people through a participatory capital lens moves us beyond the binaries of civic deficit or autonomous actor positions. Instead, through a contextual analysis of flows of capital and social resources,

a picture is rendered which shows that these young people were indeed active citizens with high levels of participatory capital within the “field” of such neighborhoods. As such, they demonstrated civic dispositions and interest (citizenship habitus) in addressing social issues which had relevance to their neighborhoods of “field,” and they were currently looking at ways that they themselves could take action to address racism, ethnic misunderstandings, and issues of poverty (citizenship practice). These findings also showed how citizen imaginaries were inseparable from gender, class, and race and the actual experiences of living as citizens alongside others.

This socially contextualized analysis was undertaken within specific geographic communities. Rather than overlook such sites in these so-called “global times,” it is more important than ever to interrogate such spaces in order for us to understand how citizenship is practiced within the microterritories of the local (Harris and Wyn 2009). Analyzing youth citizenship *within* such spaces allows us to scrutinize the highly variegated ways that different groups of young people understand and perform their citizenship. Bourdieu understands such sites as a “social field” which has its own internal logic, networks, and practices. Within these neighborhoods, social resources exist that generate “acceptance, belonging and social progress” (Reynolds 2013, p. 495). Through utilizing such resources, new forms of participatory capital were generated through social capital (networks, relationships, and solidarity) that required local knowledge (cultural capital) that centered on addressing specific issues of social justice and exclusion (such as cultural misunderstandings and racism).

An “everyday” approach in such sites also draws attention to daily embedded and embodied acts of citizenship, not just public and formal acts. In these two examples, young people were seen to draw heavily on everyday relationships within their communities. While this could be seen to be “clannish” (Putnam 2000), an alternative is to see relationships at the very core of citizenship. Families and communities move back into center stage instead of being relegated to the edges as some explorations of youth citizenship and agency propose. Both groups of young people themselves were directly involved in not only utilizing the participatory capital they held but also in creating and generating such participatory capital in these neighborhoods. Such participatory capital holds the potential to actively combat racial inequality and exclusion which these young people experience as part of their everyday lives (Reynolds 2013).

However, it is important to not overlook some of the limiting and negative effects of such neighborhoods. Reynolds (2013) describes how the cultural and social conditions in such neighborhoods can serve to limit aspirations (habitus) and contribute to further isolation from formal civic and political avenues. A number of studies involving marginalized youth also confirm this isolation (see Kennelly and Dillabough 2008; Smith et al. 2002). The lack of political agency in mainstream forms of civic participation in both these ethnic minority communities also highlights the continuing significance of structural constraints and discriminatory determinants upon young people’s citizenship participation. Low levels of civic agency

are likely to be strongly linked to experiences of marginalization within the dominant cultures of both these countries. These alienating experiences as “other” potentially shape citizenship dispositions toward involvement in civic culture. Marsh et al. (2007) suggest that exploring how young people *live* citizenship in their everyday lives provides a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between their lived experiences and their engagement in politics. This has implications for youth citizenship research as it requires research which is attuned to situated and contextual difference, as well as providing opportunities to hear and see how young people themselves speak and live their politics.

Conclusion and Future Directions

In recent years, the growth in youth citizenship research has enabled us to move beyond the simple question of whether children and young people are active citizens or not into a space which begins to describe and explain *how* they experience and express citizenship participation. As such, it is time to support new citizenship research with a deeper degree of theorizing in order to explain the uneven patterns of citizenship participation which are now evident in society.

This chapter proposes the idea of participatory capital that relies on Bourdieu’s interrelated species of capital, habitus, and field. Turning the spotlight on two specific ethnic minority communities that sit within two western nations provides an opportunity to see the emerging citizenship identities and imaginaries within specific geographic communities. Examining the participatory capital of the young New Zealand-based Pacific Island and British Black Caribbean young people reveals a rich picture of their dispositions and practices as young citizens. Moving beyond a focus on their limitations in formal political participation, a participatory capital view draws attention to the significance of socially, spatially, and ethnically derived citizenship experiences and practices and how these interrelate to utilize, create, and generate participatory capital. Such participatory capital is forged within relationships between community members and relates to specific knowledge about neighborhoods and community spaces with an aim of improving and transforming such places. This analysis has also pointed to the enduring structural factors and discriminatory practices which continue to exclude some young people from full citizenship, arguing that we need to know these contextualized aspects of citizenship even more deeply in order to understand political and citizenship participation within society.

In an era of globalized and increasingly neoliberal versions of citizenship, citizenship will continue to hold an almost “universal appeal” (Faulks 2000, p. 1) to government officials and policy makers alike. In such times, it is even more important to build our understandings of how diverse groups of young people “conceptualise, embody and ultimately perform their particular understandings of citizenship” (Kennelly and Dillabough 2008, p. 505). An exploration of young people’s participatory capital may provide one way forward toward this aim.

Cross-References

- ▶ Belonging in Troubling Times: Considerations from the Vantage Point of Arab American Immigrant Youth
- ▶ Childhood and Youth Citizenship
- ▶ Current Debates in Social Justice and Youth Studies
- ▶ Education and the Politics of Belonging: Attachments and Actions
- ▶ Indigenous Girls, Social Justice, and Schooling: Addressing Issues of Disadvantage
- ▶ Indigenous Youth, Nationhood, and the Politics of Belonging
- ▶ Social Justice and Youth Transitions: Understanding Young People's Lives in Rural Andhra Pradesh, India, and Ethiopia
- ▶ The Ambivalent Implications of Strong Belonging for Young People Living in Poor Neighborhoods
- ▶ Thinking About Childhood and Youth
- ▶ Unemployment, Insecurity, and Poor Work: Young Adults in the New Economy
- ▶ Youth Experience of Urban Inequality: Space, Class, and Gender in Mexico

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We Need to Talk About Learning: Dialogue and Learning Amongst South African Youth

29

Adam Cooper

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Abstract

In this chapter a pedagogical approach called dialogic learning is unpacked, and its relevance is discussed for contexts like South Africa, where young people have no living memory of apartheid but their lives are emphatically segregated along lines of class, race, gender, and age. Dialogic learning helps to transgress these social divisions, as it involves multiple perspectives existing simultaneously, as people are forced to consider and reflect on these different positions, including their own and those of others. This form of learning and reflection may subsequently catalyze personal transformation. Despite these benefits, qualitative research indicates that interpersonal interactions between South African youth and adults, such as teachers and parents, do not contain a great dialogue through which different parties interact verbally. At the institutional level, authoritative school-based norms and discourses, often dominated by forms of “whiteness,” militate against dialogical learning. Some examples of dialogic learning have occurred through participatory research, studies which are

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explored in the chapter. These pieces of research engage young people with regard to issues such as xenophobic violence, masculinities and gang involvement, and participatory HIV/AIDS curriculum development. The value of this kind of research lies in the safe spaces that are created through the research process, as young people's linguistic resources and perspectives are valued. There is also immense benefit for both parties in the reciprocal nature of the exchanges, whereby researchers are educated in terms of the lives of youth, and young people are able to reflect on their own perspectives, emotions, and worldviews, as well as those of others.

Introduction

Dialogic learning involves people engaging with the perspectives of others through using the language and concepts that they have at their disposal. This form of learning therefore entails the coexistence of multiple perspectives, concurrently held together in tension, such that young people reflect on different points of view and concepts (Alexander 2008). It is crucial that young people acquire the kinds of skills that are used in dialogue if they are to participate fully in social, political, and economic life as citizens, as each of these spheres necessarily involves some form of dialogic interaction. Through, for example, dialogues related to political debates, discussions at places of employment, or negotiations amongst civil society organizations, people build upon and challenge each other's perspectives, cocreating meaningful dialogic threads and collectively producing forms of knowledge. Dialogue therefore does not revolve around asserting one's own point of view, but entails a communion with others (Gadamer 1975).

This kind of learning would seem, logically, to be very important in a country like South Africa, which contains 11 national languages and multiple cultural influences. However, research on post-apartheid South African youth indicates that dialogue between youth and adults is quite rare. Qualitative, ethnographic research in this chapter indicates that policies and practices, in schools, homes, and informal learning contexts militate against dialogic interactions in which difference is valued, understanding is strived for, and personal transformation may be attained. Although post-apartheid South Africa is commonly perceived in the popular imaginary as being born out of dialogic processes, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which is assumed to have contributed toward peaceful unity between race groups and a "content rainbow nation," research indicates that dialogue is absent in everyday social relations that involve young people. In the final section of the chapter, participatory, qualitative research is reviewed and conceptualized as a potential form of dialogic pedagogy and learning.

What Is “Dialogism” and What Distinguishes a “Dialogical” Theory of Learning?

To expand on dialogic learning, this approach differs from cognitivist theories of learning that focus on thought processes as they occur *within* individuals, theories that are sometimes called “jug and mug” (Merret, Merret 2000) or “banking” (Freire 1970) approaches to learning. Cognitivist learning theories imply that knowledge is able, metaphorically, to be poured into or stored within the heads of passive learners. Dialogic learning theories also differ from sociocultural learning frameworks that are largely based on the work of the Russian scholar Lev Vygotsky (1986). Sociocultural approaches focus on interactions between people and learning environments, analyzing how these person-environment interactions lead to pathways of development for individual people (Wegerif 2011).

In contradistinction to cognitive and sociocultural learning theories, dialogical forms of learning involve intersubjective processes in which people collectively make meaning of each other’s perspectives. Through joint inquiry, people create a shared space. As Volosinov states:

To understand another person’s utterance means to orient oneself with respect to it. . . For each word of the utterance that we are in process of understanding, we, as it were, lay down a set of our own answering words. (Volosinov 1973, p. 102)

Dialogic learning is therefore produced through different people contributing to sequences of utterances, as people consider the previous statement and generate an appropriate response. An utterance is therefore always one link in a chain of responses and needs to be interpreted in relation to other links and the chain as a whole (Wegerif 2007). Through establishing the shared meaning contained in different utterances, concepts are formed and developed. Thus, in the form of dialogue, language, and concept formation, young people actively perform the communication of situated and shared meanings (Gadamer 1975). Meaning is not something that preexists in relation to the dialogue, but it is created and recreated in the dialogic process, part of which includes internal dialogues of thought (Wegerif 2011). This process of creating shared meanings and building connections can be thoroughly transformative for individuals, for as Gadamer (1975, p. 371) states:

To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one’s point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were.

Concepts and utterances generated through dialogue need to be interpreted in relation to the immediate and historical contexts in which they emerge. The preeminent scholar of dialogic theory, Mikale Bakhtin (1981, 1986), used a literary analysis of the novel to demonstrate how dialogue manifests through the contributions of the author, narrator, and characters, interacting with the space and time of the reader. These perspectives conveyed the author’s intentions, albeit in a refracted

manner. Dialogue between people is therefore embedded in broader relationships between individual people, groups, and historical contexts. Making sense of individual utterances and dialogic learning requires an analysis of the relationship between various utterances and the contexts in which they transpire.

Researchers have used dialogic theory to study different kinds of classroom talk, as students may position themselves in competition with one another, they may simply agree with other participants, or their individual identities could be suspended in the interests of the best argument “winning.” These kinds of classroom talk have been labelled as disputational, cumulative, and exploratory talk, respectively (Wegerif and Mercer 1997). Researchers argue that exploratory talk is best for classroom learning, a situation in which young people’s arguments, and not their personal dispositions, are debated and the best arguments are co-opted by the entire group and then built upon in a cumulative manner. Personal identities are therefore postponed, as a form of psychological detachment ensues, both from oneself and from the group (Wegerif and Mercer 1997).

In this chapter a slightly different form of dialogic learning is explored. While it may be possible to suspend personal identifications in the context of, for example, classroom-based mathematics, science, or geography lessons, in other places, where young people are engaging with issues of intense personal and social relevance and in which pertinent societal power relations are at play, suspending personal identities is neither possible nor desirable. While the ideal speech situation assumes that participants are equally empowered, in real-life contexts, this is rarely the case. Dialogic learning therefore requires that young citizens become aware of power differences between individuals, are able to discern the associated histories of particular social groups, and can reflect on their own position in the social structure. This is particularly true in contexts like South Africa, where participants regularly make utterances from specific social positions, with associated histories and contemporary inequalities attached to these positions. These identifications need to be reflected upon and brought into conversations, regarding individual Citizenship and society, not excluded in the interests of “rational” debate.

Post-Apartheid South African Youth and Opportunities for Dialogic Learning

Dialogic learning taking place through highlighting different perspectives, questioning assumptions, and generating forms of critical self-reflection may be used to challenge some of the taken-for-granted norms and “hangovers” that remain from the apartheid past. To be more specific, this form of learning may catalyze critical thinking amongst youth, disrupting taken-for-granted and polarized identifications which are habitually made across lines of race, class, gender, and age. By highlighting the complexities that exist in the South African social landscape through questioning and reflection, the paradoxes related to the intersections of race, class, gender, and other identities may be illuminated, leading to forms of transformation.

This assertion requires some contextualization of youth in post-apartheid South Africa. The demise of apartheid was primarily the result of the South African urban working-class doubling in size between the 1950s and the 1980s (Nattrass and Seekings 1998). Urbanization created a large group of city dwellers who were exposed to radical new ideas and who yearned for the benefits that citizens assume accompany a democratic state, such as schooling, housing, and employment (Nattrass and Seekings 1998). Democracy led to groups of the newly urbanized poor assuming that they would shortly attain many of these political and social rights. In reality this has not been the case: although contemporary South African youth experience greater opportunities than their parents did, most young people remain severely restricted by their societal position, experience some of the highest global rates of inequality, and endure many social problems – such as violence and alcoholism (Bray et al. 2010). This state of affairs is compounded by the lack of mobility which young people experience, a result of the apartheid legacy of spatial segregation, meaning that poor youth struggle to access social networks, as well as valuable resources and discourses that lie beyond the township's perimeter (Bray et al. 2010; Soudien 2007). A disjunction therefore exists in many newly democratized states like South Africa between “formal Citizenship,” membership within the nation, and “substantive citizenship” – comprised of political, civil, socioeconomic, and cultural rights, for groups of citizens. Cadeira and Holston (1999) argue that this disjunction occurs fairly commonly and can be observed in the new democracies of Latin America, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Africa. In some cases, groups within these countries may claim these rights through productive social movements and forms of what Holston (2007) calls “insurgent citizenship.”

This divided and unequal society, in which most young people do not have “substantive citizenship,” continues to be primarily perceived in racial terms by young South Africans, militating against the notion of the rainbow nation – where each color has its equal place – that exists in popular consciousness. For post-apartheid youth, “race” functions as a master trope around which a range of social signifiers of difference cluster, such as class-based and linguistic identities (Bray et al. 2010; Dolby 2002, 2003). Despite inequality now existing primarily along class and not racial lines (Seekings and Nattrass 2005), young people express inequalities almost exclusively in racial terms. Many of these racial discourses are persecutory. For example, some youth who speak English, attend schools outside of the townships, and express academic identities through, for example, carrying books, are teased for “playing white” by their township peers (Ramphela 2002). These types of peer interactions function to police racial boundaries and shame individuals, as jealousy and resentment results from perceived attempts at upward social mobility.

Space too continues to be racialized by young people. Although schools and neighborhoods are no longer legally segregated, these places are described by youth as, for example, “black neighborhoods” or “white schools” (Bray et al. 2010). Most of the sought-after spaces, linked to desirable statuses and lifestyles, continue to be located in (former) “white” areas, such as shopping malls, elite schools, and recreational facilities (Bray et al. 2010). Research shows that valued objects and

lifestyles are epitomized by “the shopping mall.” Bray et al. (2010) describe young people in poor areas of Cape Town, drawing shopping malls in mapping exercises, despite these places often being considerably inaccessible to township youth. In these pictures the particular stores were often named and painted in colors that accurately depicted their branding. These drawings differed from the pictures of young people’s residential neighborhoods, which contained little detail and were usually colored red to signify danger. Similarly, Nkuna (2006) found that “The Zone” in Rosebank Mall, Johannesburg, was the most sought-after social space named by youth, a place where they could recreate themselves in and through objects, brands, and practices that they associated with desirable lifestyles.

Young people therefore reconstruct apartheid categories in new ways, through, for example, spatially racialized identifications, and these discourses often function to recreate old, “binarized” ways of thinking that are largely portrayed in “black and white.” Dialogic forms of learning therefore hold the potential for researchers to learn from young people about what is meaningful to them in their lives and also to challenge youth critically to reflect on these assumptions and, possibly, generate new ways of thinking about entrenched social formations.

A Dearth of Dialogue

Qualitative studies have found that South African youth endorse dialogic interactions and open communication with adults, yet few admit to experiencing these kinds of relationships regularly in their everyday lives (Soudien 2007; Bray et al. 2010; Ramphele 2002). A lack of dialogue is compounded by adult-youth relationships containing high levels of violence. Corporal punishment remains commonplace in the home and the school (Ramphele 2002). Despite corporal punishment at school becoming illegal and classified as assault in 1996, a survey of 4,000 learners found that 49.8 % of youth claimed to have been hit, spanked, or caned by educators for wrongdoing (Burton and Leoschut 2013). It is obviously difficult to promote and sustain dialogues in contexts where the threat of violence is commonplace. These hierarchical, intergenerational practices are likely to function to silence youth and militate against dialogue.

Qualitative research has further indicated that learners feel that teachers often fail to realize that youth do not understand academic work due to broken communication between teachers and students, and youth state that educators lack the will to make space for and feel threatened by questions (Bray et al. 2010). Engaging in dialogue means relinquishing control, and this may be threatening for teachers in South Africa, a context in which teachers’ authority generally remains unquestioned and order is maintained through distinct lines of authority (Morrell 2001). Although there are some signs that intergenerational norms and values are being disrupted by changing contexts and new practices, many family-based interactions continue to be dominated by notions of “respect,” discouraging young people from expressing their opinions to adults (Bray et al. 2010). In summary, the number of older people with whom youth can engage in intimate dialogues is

severely limited in South Africa, militating against dialogic learning and inhibiting knowledge co-construction between adults and youth (Soudien 2007).

At the institutional level, dialogue is suppressed by the authoritative discourses that pervade South African schools. At schools that were previously reserved for “white” children, these authoritative discourses are often based on pedagogies and cultural practices characterized by forms of “whiteness” that have been inherited from colonialism and apartheid (Soudien 2012). For example, a new multiracial middle class disseminates notions of “good schooling, quality and the maintenance of standards” (Soudien 2012). Middle-class parents agree amongst themselves that the preservation of the character and traditions of the “good school” are essential to maintaining “quality education and high standards” (Soudien 2012). This discourse of “standards needing to be kept” is often used by middle-class parents to set school fee policies that essentially ensure the exclusion of other groups. This authoritarian discourse of “standards” does not promote dialogue that interrogates what “standards” consist of, but rather assumes that a particular set of criteria innately constitute these standards. These authoritative, historically situated discourses therefore promote dialogues amongst parents, teachers and students that contain uncontested objects and ideas, only able to be agreed or disagreed with and not modified or debated.

These kinds of authoritative discourses are not only observed at affluent schools. Historically, poor South African schools have experienced regular conflict over lines of authority and strategies to maintain order (Christie 1998). Conflict ensued between school leadership, educators, and students during the apartheid period, and political violence was commonly planned and initiated at schools (Christie 1998). As has already been mentioned, violent disciplinary practices, which were legal under apartheid, still occur in many township schools (Burton and Leoschut 2013). In general, South African schools have therefore yet to develop institutional cultures based on negotiating conflict and dealing with challenges through consultative dialogue and other democratic practices. This is compounded by the fact that learners are not conceptualized as agents who are encouraged to participate in dialogues, a phenomenon that occurs throughout the schooling system and is enshrined in the South African Schools Act. The South African Schools’ Act states that “the learner” is “any person receiving or obliged to receive education” (RSA 1996, p. 4). South African youth are therefore conceptualized as passive subjects with certain rights that they are “obliged to receive,” which says nothing about what they are “obliged to contribute” (Soudien 2011).

Participatory Research and Dialogic Learning

In this context of limited opportunities for intergenerational dialogic learning, forms of participatory research hold great potential for working with young people to open up spaces of dialogue and for demonstrating alternative pedagogical practices. Unlike conventional research methods, participatory research does not involve a solo, principal investigator trying to solve a problem, but rather comprises of intergenerationally diverse groups of people collectively trying to understand an

issue (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). This kind of research consists of multiple inquirers and knowledge producers reflecting on their social worlds and sharing different perspectives. Young people therefore function as research equals and are assumed to be valuable reservoirs of knowledge. Participatory research methods are also distinctly pedagogical, linked to Freire's (1970) notion of praxis, whereby critical reflection may lead to action and social change. This approach to research encourages the exploration of intersectionality or the existence of multiple identities. Participatory research is emergent in nature, taking cues from what appears to be meaningful to the young people themselves, rather than working from a predetermined agenda and set of research questions (Cammarota and Fine 2008). Finally, the knowledge that emerges from participatory research is critical in nature, understood through historically situated power relations that serve to reproduce forms of oppression.

One example of participatory research that contained rich dialogue involved students from a high school in Dunoon, Cape Town, where apparently "xenophobic" violence first took place in this city in 2008. Dunoon youth described themselves as "black" and "Xhosa" (Xhosa is one of the 11 national languages in South Africa and an ethnic identity), using these identities to portray local township social and economic processes (Cooper 2009b). In discussion groups and individual interviews, "black Xhosa" people were portrayed as less educated, with lower incomes in comparison to local Somali shopkeepers, who also lived in the area. Dunoon youth also spoke of their aspirations to become modern, urban citizens who shop at the mall and use communication technology. Participants then stated that the reason for the violence toward foreign nationals was that people in Dunoon "were hungry" (Cooper 2009b). This explanation was provided even though Somali shopkeepers stated that the product most regularly seized by looters was cellular telephone airtime.

Through dialogue, questioning, and self-reflection, it appeared as though the plethora of identifications described by the young participants – as "black," "Xhosa," and "modern citizens" – implied that the reason provided for the violence, namely, hunger, was partially being used metaphorically to describe a set of aspirations for "modern black Xhosa" people (Cooper 2009b). These identities illuminated young people experiencing relative deprivation in the context of aspirant urbanism and feelings of disappointment in the newly democratized state. People in Dunoon need sufficient food, but they are also hungry for televisions, laptop computers, and airtime for their cell phones. The fact that these markers of a modern, middle-class lifestyle remain substantially elusive for the urban poor leads to resentment and frustration (Cooper 2009b). Violence may ensue when others, such as Somalis, have access to these commodities and are deemed not to have lived in South Africa for a long period of time or "waited in line" for these items (Cooper 2009b). People in Dunoon may well regularly experience hunger; however, hunger is more likely to lead to violent actions when concurrent beliefs and ideologies exist that assess that a situation is illegitimate and that it is justified to take action and bring about change.

The research therefore generated forms of frank dialogue and collective inquiry into the events of May 2008, as the worldviews of these young people were

powerfully communicated and functioned to educate the researcher. Simultaneously, a number of interesting paradoxes were raised with the young people – who, for example, described themselves and not the Somali shopkeepers as “black.” Blackness, for the young participants, was therefore associated with oppression and relative deprivation. Asking questions through the research process and highlighting the contradictions illuminated by these forms of racial identification challenged the young participants to reflect on their assumptions regarding race. Language played a central role in the research with concepts, such as particular racial identities, “hunger,” “poverty,” and “urban” versus “rural” discussed at length in the research interviews (Cooper 2009b). Conversely, through the researcher asking key questions, such as “are Somalis not black people?” and “if people are hungry, why was a great deal of ‘airtime’ stolen?” participants observed some of the paradoxes in their explanations.

Another example of participatory research that contained a wealth of dialogue is a project that explored the masculinities of 25 colored young men awaiting trial in Cape Town (Cooper and Foster 2008; Cooper 2009a). The term “colored” refers to a creole identity forged in the colonial experience, which had relevance under apartheid and which many people, especially in the Western Cape region, continue to identify with today. These young men had almost all been involved in gangs and were accused of a range of offences. Through linguistic descriptions of their practices, the boys simultaneously inserted themselves within three intersecting discourses of masculinity, as they strived to be a tough gangster, a “gentleman” who provides for and protects his family and a loving son (Cooper and Foster 2008). Discourses of masculinity are popular cultural representations of “what a man is.” The first discourse of masculinity, called hyper-masculinity by Cooper and Foster (2008), was observed in narratives of initiation into gangsterism, shooting guns, as well as in misogynistic descriptions of young women. This discourse was characterized by violent behavior, taking risks, overcoming adverse conditions, and subjugating others (Cooper 2009a).

Concurrently, these young men described themselves, in English, as “gentlemen,” detached from gang life and criminal activities, striving to be respectable men who, for example, raise a family, work in an office, carry a briefcase, and wear a suit and tie (Cooper and Foster 2008). Although these two discourses of the “gangster” and the “gentleman” may seem incongruent, the values underpinning these forms of masculinity and of being esteemed, wealthy, successful, and independent are actually fairly compatible. Finally, in one of the most surprising aspects of the research, these boys spoke openly, emotionally, and at length about their mothers. These young men – who at times described themselves as violent gangsters – also portrayed themselves as sons who converse freely and openly with their mothers, expressing emotion toward these women and declaring their love for them.

The boys in this study therefore invested in various discourses of masculinity in attempts to navigate a range of anxieties in their tumultuous lives (Cooper and Foster 2008). The bravado they describe in terms of hyper-masculinity is a reaction to the emasculation they experience through marginalization. They therefore depict

themselves as movie star-type men: successful, powerful, and in control of their lives. However, in the context of the Cape Flats, the area in Cape Town where people classified as “black,” “Indian,” or “colored” were forced to live under apartheid, this leads to other anxieties, such as being perceived as a common, uneducated “ruffian.” The gentleman partially functions to relieve this air of disrespectability; however, without the material and educational means to fulfill this identity, these anxieties are only temporarily assuaged (Cooper and Foster 2008). The loving son is projected in relation to the only person who generally supported these young men, the one who they ultimately disappoint through their incarceration.

These contradictory discourses and divided subjectivities therefore resulted in a great deal of confusion and paradox. Becoming men in particular ritualized ways are collective attempted solutions to specific cultural problems and contradictions (Frosh et al. 2002). The masculinities which these boys display were therefore inextricably linked to the history of the Cape Flats, the marginalization of certain groups of people in South Africa, and their tenuous current situation as children with “rights” but without legitimate channels for social insertion (Cooper and Foster 2008; Cooper 2009a).

The dialogues that comprised the research taught the researchers a great deal about life for young men on the Cape Flats and their struggles to attain respectable personhood using the resources at their disposal. Their linguistic constructions, using terms like “gentleman,” “sterkbene” (strong legs), “bangetjie” (someone who is scared and small), “tjappie” (tattoo), and “berk” (boyfriend) all conveyed the lifeworlds of these youth (see Cooper and Foster 2008 for further explanations of these terms). Simultaneously, through the researcher asking questions, drawing connections between paradoxical forms of masculinity, and stimulating these boys to self-reflect on the pertinently contextual nature of their masculinities, the research process functioned to stimulate forms of dialogical learning with the young men.

In a final example of dialogic learning with youth in Cape Town, forums involving teachers, consultants, parents, and learners were created at three schools. These forums, called Curriculum Development Groups (CDGs), were established such that teachers, learners, and parents could collectively design an HIV/AIDS curriculum through eliciting learners’ experiences and existing knowledges (Scott et al. 2014; McLaughlin et al. 2012). It was envisioned that information from these discussions and engagements would be included in lesson plans for Life Orientation classes. Life Orientation is a school subject for students in all grades at South African schools. Thus, teacher-led classroom pedagogy would be enriched and democratized, with students participating more extensively in designing classroom sessions.

To expand on the logistics of this participatory project called ASKAIDS, the program involved a multitiered process whereby the University of Cambridge recruited local African research partners to engage schools and teachers. These actors needed to understand and champion the project, as well as recruit parents and students to participate in the CDGs (Scott et al. 2014). This model, described as

“cascading participation” by the researchers, differs from “participation” in the academic literature, which is described as consisting of binary relations between “lowers or the poor” and “uppers or the powerful” (see, e.g., Chambers 1994; Pretty 1995). Teachers are not simply “poor” or “powerful,” but are differentially positioned in relation to the multiple individuals and groups – such as principals, officials, universities, learners, and parents – with whom they interact (Scott et al. 2014). In the project teachers were provided with a toolkit that was constructed by the University of Cambridge, a document that detailed how it was envisioned that the CDGs would operate (McLaughlin et al. 2012).

In the ASKAIDS project, participation was hindered by teachers not fully understanding the program methodology and their lack of confidence, in terms of implementing the project, facilitating the Curriculum Development Groups, and leading dialogues on HIV/AIDS and sexual practices (Scott et al. 2014). In turn, parent and student involvement in the project was minimal due to the limited participation of teachers. The minimal role of the school principal also limited overall participation in the project (Scott et al. 2014).

The benefit of projects like ASKAIDS is that a structure – the CDG – is established at schools, drawing in people who regularly interact with youth, like teachers and parents, meaning that a sustainable, ongoing form of dialogic interaction could be created for young people to share their knowledges with regard to sexual practices and HIV/AIDS. However, as already stated, participatory, dialogic practices are somewhat alien to many South African adults, who need to be provided with time and space to engage with new methodologies on their own terms and find ways of making content and practices meaningful for themselves. Initial dialogues with teachers therefore needed to take place, in which they could have explored their own attitudes and opinions regarding these sensitive topics, a process that could have led to personal transformation. In order for dialogic learning to be meaningful and appealing to both youth and adults, people need to interact as equals and collectively create knowledge (Scott et al. 2014). Handing people a “toolkit” is simply inadequate. This kind of preparatory dialogue did not occur, meaning that educators failed to invest in and “roll out” the project.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Participatory research with young people in Cape Town has demonstrated the reciprocal value of eliciting stories and knowledges from youth in order to generate deep descriptions and understand their worldviews while simultaneously providing them with spaces for self-reflection in their development as young Citizenship. This kind of learning is dialogical in nature, as both parties seek to find a common language for communication and concepts with which to engage. Through this process, the boundaries between researcher and participants are renegotiated, comprising a form of what Fine (1994) calls “working the hyphens” or exploring the in-between spaces that exist in research processes involving different people. Participatory, dialogical research is particularly necessary in contexts like

South Africa, where dialogues on sensitive topics between adults and young people are uncommon and youth struggle to make sense of themselves and the changing social and political contexts in which socialization takes place. These kinds of participatory dialogues therefore hold great potential for disrupting taken-for-granted assumptions regarding race, class, gender, and other forms of identity, as well as aiding in the production of considerate and inquiring forms of citizenship. Through the processes described in this chapter, forms of transformation that are catalyzed by dialogue are equally possible for the researchers and other adults that are involved, as they are for the younger participants, meaning that dialogic learning is not a “one-way street.” It does, however, require that all of the parties are open to what is unknown and to what they may become in the dialogic process. Participating in forms of social, political, cultural, and economic life as active citizens, in interactions with others, therefore necessarily involves and is buttressed by forms of dialogic learning. This relates both to the ways in which a person treats and listens to the perspectives of others, as well as how they view and develop themselves.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Education and the Politics of Belonging: Attachments and Actions](#)
- ▶ [Participating as Young Citizens in Diverse Communities](#)
- ▶ [Performative Pedagogy: Poststructural Theory as a Tool to Engage in Identity Work Within a Youth-Led HIV Prevention Program](#)
- ▶ [Ways of Thinking About Young People in Participatory Interview Research](#)
- ▶ [Who’s Learning or Whose Learning? Critical Perspectives on the Idea Youth-Led Policy-Making Related to Gender-Based Violence in a South African Classroom](#)

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Belonging in Troubling Times: Considerations from the Vantage Point of Arab American Immigrant Youth

30

Thea Renda Abu El-Haj

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Abstract

This chapter examines how the perspectives and experiences of Arab American youth from immigrant communities challenge dominant models of citizenship – models that rely on the development of primary affective affiliation with the nation-state in which they reside. Contemporary processes of globalization have changed the nature of migration in ways that allow more and more people to sustain affective, economic, sociocultural, and political affiliations with multiple nations across the generations. These new facts on the ground make belonging and citizenship a complex affair for many young people whose lives play out across transnational fields. Listening closely to the perspectives and experiences of Arab American youth from immigrant communities illustrates new

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possibilities for conceptualizing education to account for the changing meaning of citizenship and belonging in these times.

A multi-site ethnography with Arab American youth from immigrant communities illustrates the ways that these young people lay claim to transnational forms of belonging that help them to mobilize economic, political, and social rights across international borders, even as they encounter a complex and nuanced set of ideologies and practices that position them outside the US national imaginary. This research tracks a different set of questions than those that have dominated the debates on US immigrant education. In concert with a growing field of scholarship, this research calls into question the dominant assimilation-accommodation framework for it implicitly takes the nation-state as the boundary for our investigations (Harvard Educational Review, 77(3), 285–316, 2007; Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 40(1), 1–19, 2009; Hall 2004; Lukose 2009; Maira 2009). Shifting from a focus on the category of immigrant, this chapter attends to the ways in which contemporary processes of globalization and migration lead many young people to forge a sense of belonging and citizenship across transnational fields.

This move opens up new pathways for inquiry. Rather than exploring how young people navigate between cultural norms, values, and beliefs they learn in their homes and communities, and those they encounter in schools, this framework suggests that young people are producing multifaceted practices that creatively respond to the transnational spaces across which their lives unfold. Thus, this framework moves away from seeing youth as negotiating between cultural identities to thinking about how they develop discourses and practices of belonging and citizenship across transnational fields. This perspective takes seriously the notion that young people are actively creating new ways of enacting belonging and engaging in citizenship practices – practices at odds with dominant models based around the borders of the nation-state. This chapter concludes with implications for educational programs and practices.

Introduction

We're sitting in the auditorium full of Americans in the morning. When we get up and Americans look at us, and they're like, "Oh my God. She's wearing a mandeel (headscarf), and she's standing for our flag." Even though I'm not saying the Pledge of Allegiance, I stand up as a matter of respect toward those people. I love when they look at me, especially those teachers and they're like, "Look. She has respect toward herself and others because she's standing up for our flag." Even though it is my flag too, because I'm living in the United States of America. I don't feel that it's my flag, but the truth is, you're a US citizen, so it's your flag. . . I feel like they're pledging for—there are the American troops in Iraq killing Arabs. So when I think about it, it's like me praying for the troops to kill more Arabs. That's how I think of pledging to the flag. (Samira, Palestinian American high school junior)

Samira's discussion of the daily recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance reflects the complex nature of belonging and citizenship in the contexts of global migration and the United States' "war on terror." Samira felt conflicted about her relationship to the US flag and, despite her status as a citizen, found herself positioned as different from "Americans." The conflicted nature of this relationship came from multiple sources. As a Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, and US citizen, she felt unable to pledge allegiance to the United States because, from her perspective, this implied support for the war in Iraq that is, as she says, "killing Arabs." Moreover, in the post-September 11, 2001 context, as a young woman who was visibly a practicing Muslim, Samira felt a need to show "Americans" respect by "standing up for [their] flag." Samira and a majority of her Arab American Muslim peers believed, with reason, that their actions were often read as representative of all Arabs and Muslims. (It must be remembered that not all Arabs are Muslims, and most Muslims are not Arabs.) Many Arab and South Asian Muslim youth living in the United States today must constantly combat the widespread belief that they are dangerous enemies and must find ways to assert their rights as members of this society. At the same time, they are cognizant of the impact of US foreign policy on the countries from which they or their families migrated, and they are often critical of these policies (Abu El-Haj 2007; Maira 2004). Samira's words suggest the ways that, in contemporary times, belonging and citizenship are no simple matter.

Drawing on anthropological perspectives, this chapter takes belonging and citizenship to be related but distinct terms. Belonging references the affective and embodied ways that people construct a sense of affiliation to the communities with which they identify. Citizenship entails practices through which people act upon the world in which they live, negotiating social, cultural, and political membership (Abu El-Haj 2007; Levinson 2005; Lukose 2007; Ong 1999; Yuval-Davis 2011). Belonging is, as Yuval-Davis, Anthias, and Kofman (2005) argue, a "thicker concept than citizenship"; however, the two are intimately interwoven. For example, a sense of belonging may strengthen young people's desire to participate in active citizenship practices in their communities. At the same time, the rights of citizenship are often constrained for people who are viewed as "not belonging" to the body politic, as has been the case for Muslim and Latino immigrant communities in the United States.

This chapter examines how the perspectives and experiences of Arab American youth from immigrant communities can help educational researchers and teachers think about what it means to teach young people to forge a sense of belonging and citizenship – to become active participants in the social, civic, and political spheres within and across the boundaries of nation-states. Arab American youth's perspectives are reflective of the transnational nature of their life experiences, as well as the unfortunate ways they have been positioned as enemy outsiders to the United States in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Listening closely to the experiences and perspectives of these young people yields concrete implications for designing citizenship education that reflects the changing nature of belonging in contemporary times. This research suggests that we stop thinking about citizenship primarily

in relation to national identifications and begin to see it as a set of critical *practices* – practices that give young people the tools to understand structural inequalities and work for social change within and across the boundaries of nation-states, strengthening their sense of belonging to the multiple communities in which they participate.

Belonging and Citizenship in an Era of Transnational Migration

Transnational migration patterns are reconfiguring the modern world and reshaping the contours of nation-states. Although today's global migration is not an unprecedented phenomenon, new technologies that facilitate the movement of information, goods, and peoples across borders have reshaped the capacity that people have to stay physically and emotionally connected to the places they have left. Immigrant communities often maintain psychological, cultural, and economic ties to multiple nation-states. This new reality requires that we reconsider the meaning and practice of citizenship education in light of what belonging and citizenship mean for young people growing up in today's world.

Although transnational migration has dramatically changed the contexts for citizenship education in our schools, the models of citizenship education that dominate US schools do not reflect this new reality. Dominant frameworks ignore questions of identity and belonging and fail to consider how they affect an individual's ability to be fully included in society and also influence her or his capacity and desire to take up the mantle of active democratic participation (Abowitz and Harnish 2006; Abu El-Haj 2007; Banks 2004; Castles 2004; Ladson-Billings 2004; Rubin 2007.) Moreover, these models do not question the premise that rights should be bequeathed to those who hold national citizenship, failing to address contemporary "facts on the ground." As more and more people live lives across the boundaries of nation-states, we may need more inclusive models that help *all* people realize economic, civil, social, political, and human rights (Abowitz and Harnish 2006; Abu El-Haj 2007; Bosniak 2006; Soysal 1998). In what follows, the perspectives of Arab American youth from immigrant communities suggest how our practices of citizenship education can, and indeed must, transform to reflect the changing meaning of belonging in the modern era.

Research with Arab American Youth from Immigrant Communities

This chapter draws on a (2002–2009) multi-site, qualitative study of 1.5- and second-generation Arab American youth from immigrant communities living in and around a major US city. Given the post-September 11, 2001 context, this study was designed within the traditions of activist and critical ethnography (Foley et al. 2001; Foley and Valenzuela 2005). In addition to traditional ethnographic methods (interviews and participant observation), the research involved the

researcher, community activists, and Arab American youth co-created community spaces in which they could collectively dialogue, study, and respond to the political and cultural discourses and policies that were framing their communities as “not belonging” – as outsiders to the imagined nation of the United States. This chapter draws on this research to explore new forms of citizenship education that focus on critical practices through which young people can draw on their multiple sources of belonging and learn tools for becoming active members of local and global communities.

Arab American Youth Perspectives

Belonging Is Different from Citizenship

Although citizenship education is usually premised on the idea that citizenship and a sense of national belonging go hand in hand, for Arab American youth in this research, belonging and citizenship are not equivalent terms. For them, citizenship marks the myriad rights that legal status confers on them and their families. Arab American youth highly valued US citizenship for the economic, political, and social rights that it entailed. For Palestinian American youth, in particular, direct experience with the harsh realities of what it means to live under Israeli military occupation without citizenship heightened appreciation for the importance of democratic citizenship that guarantees certain basic rights.

Citizenship entailed several important functions for these young people and their families. First, it facilitated economic opportunities that were often unavailable “back home” and helped them support families in the Middle East who faced extreme financial hardships. A second important function of citizenship was to guarantee social rights. Social rights refer to a broad range of rights that guarantee citizens’ minimum standards for economic security, well-being, and social inclusion, such as equal educational opportunity and entitlements to health and other welfare services (Abowitz and Harnish 2006; Castles and Davidson 2000; Marshall 1950/1998). Many students appreciated the opportunities afforded by US public education. Finally, these Arab American youth described the importance of US citizenship for guaranteeing political and civil rights (see Castles and Davidson 2000; Marshall 1950/1998) that were often difficult to exercise in the countries from which they came. At the same time, they were concerned about the ways that the “war on terror” was threatening rights – particularly of Muslims – that they believed the United States had a responsibility to uphold (Akram and Johnson 2004; Murray 2004; Volpp 2002).

Arab American students understood citizenship to be related to rights; however, they often felt a *sense of belonging* – of connection and affiliation – to a national identity different from that of the United States. Some Arab American youth clearly distinguished their national identity from their citizenship status. In the story about the Pledge of Allegiance that begins this article, Samira’s words exemplify an idea expressed by many Arab American youth. Having US citizenship is not the same as

being “American.” In fact, asked to describe herself, Samira began an interview with the words, “I am from Palestine.” Samira was born in the United States, and with the exception of a visit as a 2-year-old, she had not spent time in Palestine. However, growing up in a community with ongoing ties to Palestine, Samira felt a strong sense of belonging to what she called the *bilad* (homeland). Adam, who lived a majority of his 18 years in his family’s West Bank village, described a difference between *being* Palestinian and *having* US citizenship. “I’m an Arab, *Falastini* [Palestinian] Arab. I got an American citizen[ship]. I was born here, but my home, it’s not here.” Hani, a Lebanese American boy who spends summers in Beirut, described his relationship to Lebanon, “I feel like I’m home there, more than I am in America sometimes because everyone understands the—our customs, I guess.” As members of transnational communities – communities that maintain ties through economic remittances, constant communication, satellite television, and recurrent travel – Hani, Samira, Adam, and many other Arab American youth felt they belonged to a national community that was different from the one in which they held citizenship. There is an important distinction here between cultural/ethnic and national identifications. It was not simply that the Palestinian or Lebanese youth felt a sense of cultural belonging to their “homelands”; they also identified with the political struggles of the nations from which they came.

Other youth experienced more fluid and complex relationships of belonging. In a video-poem, Amal, an Egyptian American, expressed this complexity as follows:

An Egyptian American, the long division in my life. I travel to my homeland yet there is a border. An outsider looking in. . . In America, English is my native tongue, yet there is still a difference. An outsider looking in. . . I am an Egyptian American. Will I ever belong? Will this boundary ever be broken?

Amal’s story highlights the richness and challenges of forging a sense of belonging in transnational contexts. She describes her “homeland” as Egypt even as she speaks of English as her “native tongue.” She straddles two societies and in each, feels a sense of separation marked by differences in clothing, religious traditions, social customs, and political convictions. Whereas her final questions ring with some longing for resolution, they also suggest the ways that, in today’s world, navigating belonging frequently entails developing one’s sense of identity in relation to multiple nation-states.

The Politics of Belonging and Not Belonging

If the boundary that Amal described was partly an outcome of the conditions of modern global migration patterns, it also resulted from the contradictions between the promises of US democratic equality and experiences of marginalization in this society. Overall, the youth in this research felt fortunate that their families had been relatively unharmed after September 11, 2001, given the widespread attacks on Muslim, Arab, and South Asian communities across the country (Ahmad 2002; Ibish 2003, 2008; Volpp 2002). However, they shared myriad stories about

harassment in public places, “random” stops by police and at airports and borders, and confrontations with teachers and fellow students that continued long after September 11, 2001. Samia, a 14-year-old Palestinian American, told the following story:

My grandmother wears a headdress and we went to Walmart one day and this lady refused to help her. This associate, the Walmart associate. And it just made me so mad. And so I got really, really mad and I went to the manager. And I was like, “This lady won’t help my grandmother and she’s just racist and it makes me so mad.” And he’s like, “Well, then just leave.” And we just had to leave because no one would help her.

Students told numerous stories of explicit discrimination directed at their families. These experiences continually reinforced the idea that Arab and Muslim identities are incompatible with American identity – that they could not belong to this national community.

Sadly, for many, school was the primary place in which they learned this lesson. Peers were often the source of this message. For example, Zayd, a Palestinian American, recounted how students tried to incite fights with Arab youth in his school immediately after September 11, 2001:

They would say, “Oh, you come to this school thinking like it’s over? You’re going to bomb the towers and then sit here? Get the hell out of this school. Dirty animals.” And then that would start a fight.

In hallways, classrooms, and playgrounds, Arab American youth across the United States have, since September 11, 2001, continually confronted beliefs that Arabs and Muslims are terrorists and enemy aliens (Ibish 2008).

The most distressing stories that young people in this research told involved teachers who either failed to address peer harassment or, even more egregiously, actively participated in similar behavior (see also Ibish 2008). For example, one girl reported that a teacher told her to take off her headscarf or face a disciplinary sanction, while another described a teacher who told her, “You look like a disgrace in that thing [i.e. headscarf].” At the start of the US invasion of Iraq, a Palestinian student reported witnessing her teacher yell at an Iraqi boy, “Go back to where you come from.” In multiple contexts, Arab American youth in this research received messages that they and their communities did not belong to this society.

These myriad experiences of “not belonging” in schools and public spaces led some to fear that the privileges of citizenship were tenuous for members of their community. Long after September 11, 2001, some Arab American youth discussed the possibility that their communities might be rounded up en masse or expelled from the United States. Given the history of Japanese internment during World War II, some students felt this was a plausible threat. Moreover, the detention of many Arabs and Muslims after September 11, 2001, created a context of uncertainty that made some young people like Adam worry, “Maybe they’re going to kick all Arabs from America. Go back home!” For Adam and many of his peers, contemporary politics and policies raised questions about their membership in US society and their capacity to exercise fully their rights as citizens

(see Akram and Johnson 2004; Moore 1999; Murray 2004; Volpp 2002). It is important, then, to understand that, for young Arab Americans from immigrant communities, the sense that they are not “American” and that they do not belong here is partly an outcome of the position in which their communities have been placed in relation to the current “war on terror.”

Contentious Politics

Another source of Arab American youth’s conflicted sense of belonging derived from political perspectives, on subjects ranging from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to the United States-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, that diverged from those that dominate the US media and political sphere (see also Ibish 2008).

Arab American youth were frequently critical of US foreign policy, particularly in relation to the war in Iraq. Leila, an Iraqi American, puzzled through the rationale for the war as follows:

It’s all in the best interest of the US, their decision. I mean with the war it’s all like, “We’re restoring freedom.” And the execution of it now is terrible. And you look back and you’re like, Why didn’t the US help Rwanda and other countries? Because they can’t benefit out of it. It’s crazy because the US all of a sudden cares about the freedom of the Iraqi people? But why? Like they say it’s all freedom, but they wouldn’t have cared if there was no oil that they could get something out of.

Leila, who was in close contact with relatives in Baghdad, was skeptical about US claims that supported the war in Iraq on the ground of democratic goals. Through travel and residency, personal communication, and access to Arab media sources, a majority of Arab American youth in this study maintained strong connections with the economic, social, and political struggles in the Middle East and, as a result, were often critical of the role the United States played in that region. For many youth, a deep sense of belonging to other places led them to act in support of these struggles by, for example, seeking opportunities to educate the US public or raising money for humanitarian relief in the Middle East.

Unfortunately, interviews with teachers and students revealed that a majority of their teachers viewed Arab American students’ political commitments as problematic and indicative of both an insufficient allegiance to the United States and an alliance with terrorism. This stance often led teachers to make unwarranted assumptions about their Arab American students. Moreover, rather than engage Arab American students in constructive dialogue about contentious political issues, a majority of their teachers avoided or actively combated the positions these young people expressed. In a majority of cases, there appeared to be a difference between teachers’ expectations that a sense of belonging should be aligned with national allegiance to the United States and Arab American students’ affiliations and political commitments that reflected their experiences as members of transnational communities. Although fortunately there are US teachers designing and teaching thoughtful curriculum about the “war on terror” (see, e.g., Rethinking Schools 2006),

the research described here – echoing the findings of larger studies (Ibish 2008) – suggests that, since September 11, 2001, multifaceted and critical perspectives have come under attack in schools across the country.

Focusing Citizenship Education Around Critical Practices for Democratic Engagement

This final section asks how listening to the voices of Arab American youth can help educators reimagine citizenship education to account for and learn from the complex sense of belonging that youth from transnational communities have developed. Global migration trends are challenging notions of belonging and citizenship that depend on affiliation with and assimilation to a single nation-state. Many young people hold multilayered affiliations and a sense of belonging that crosses the borders of nation-states, and as a result, they may continue to be engaged with struggles for the rights of people living elsewhere. For many young people, transnationalism shapes their identities, political sensibilities, and civic and political participation both in this society and on a global stage. In this changing world, citizenship may be better described as a guarantor of rights than a marker of identity. That is, transnational communities suggest a need to disentangle citizenship rights from people's sense of belonging.

Unfortunately, for a majority of Arab American youth in this research, their education did not help them explore the complexity of belonging and citizenship in today's world nor did it offer opportunities for learning active democratic participation. Indeed, their educational experiences often reinforced the idea that *being Arab* and *being American* were incompatible identities, thus exacerbating the challenges of belonging *and* participation for these young people. In a sense, the kind of citizenship that was on offer was one that Arab American youth found difficult, if not impossible, to take up. It was hard to comply with the implicit and explicit requirements that as a condition of belonging, they pledge allegiance to the United States, remain uncritical of US foreign policy, or choose between their identities as Arabs and Muslims and as Americans. As a result, many were pessimistic about their capacity to act upon and make a difference in this society – to participate as active democratic citizens.

Nevertheless, Arab American youth in this study were anything but civically and politically disengaged. Through speech, writing, and film, they spoke back to the dominant, negative images of their families and their communities. Many tried to contribute productively to alleviate suffering in Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq. However, for the most part, they learned the tools for civic and political participation in out-of-school spaces rather than within their school's citizenship education curriculum. In fact, educators concerned with transforming youth civic engagement and citizenship practices often work in out-of-school sites to promote this work (see, e.g., Abu El-Haj 2009a; Flores-Gonzalez et al. 2006; Kwon 2006). While these out-of-school spaces are key sites for reinvigorating youth civic and political

engagement, schools still remain the primary site for incorporating youth from immigrant communities in their new societies.

Conclusion and Future Directions

The question then is: How can we reimagine citizenship education *in our schools* to encourage these young people to become full participants in their multiple worlds? A key implication of this research is that citizenship education should focus on cultivating practices of active citizenship that help them to build a strong sense of social belonging and civic engagement (see, e.g., Abu El-Haj 2009a; Levinson 2005, 2012; Rubin 2007; Torre and Fine 2006; Westheimer and Kahne 2004).

Cultivating practices of active citizenship means helping young people investigate and respond to key issues that affect their communities, particularly in ways that support them to examine the structural inequalities that engender these issues (see, e.g., Abu El-Haj 2009a; Cammarota 2008; Guajardo and Guajardo 2008; Roberts et al. 2008; Rubin and Hayes 2008; Westheimer and Kahne 2004).

In the study described in this chapter, for example, the researcher co-taught video workshops for teenagers at an Arab American community arts organization. The 3-week video workshops were organized around a theme and began with an intensive investigation of that theme. One summer, the workshop examined the history of US migration and immigration, connecting this history to the personal migration stories of the participants and their families. Using the arts as a primary medium, the workshop explored key issues, including the American Dream, the social construction of race, citizenship policies, and the contemporaneous Congressional legislative proposal on immigration (HR 4437, passed 12/16/05). The workshop also explored possibilities for social and political action, focusing on historical and contemporary examples of resistance to unjust policies, while also asking participants to consider times when they took a stance for justice in their everyday lives.

After a week of study, the participants chose a theme from which to develop a film that spoke back to dominant images that cast Arab and Muslim immigrant communities as a threat to the United States. Through stories and images, they seeded alternate narratives about their communities. As the youth listened to each other, interviewed their family and community members, and related these stories to what they were learning about US history and contemporary immigration policies, they developed social and political critiques that linked deeply entrenched structural inequalities to their local experiences. Importantly, through this work, the participants learned useful skills (such as research, critique, and representation) through which they could actively respond to a problem affecting their community. This represents a kind of democratic citizenship education which Levinson (2005) has aptly defined as, “efforts to educate members of social groups to imagine their social belonging and exercise their participation as democratic citizens” (p. 336).

Despite some public handwringing about the political apathy of today’s youth, there is ample evidence that many young people are seeking ways to be actively

engaged in the civic, social, and political lives of their local and global communities (Abu El-Haj 2009a; Cammarota 2008; Flores-Gonzalez et al. 2006; Guajardo and Guajardo 2008; Kwon 2006). Too often, however, schools have put citizenship education on the back burner. This is a critical time to refocus on citizenship education as central to the mission of public schools. However, in doing so, we must be prepared to redefine these efforts in ways that account for the complex and multifaceted ways that young people are constructing a sense of belonging within and across the borders of nation-states. Participation and critical engagement, rather than a sense of national identification, may in the end prove a stronger base for developing engaged and active young citizens working for a more just and peaceful future for nations across the globe.

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Cross-References

- ▶ [Citizenship: Inclusion and Exclusion](#)
- ▶ [Indigenous Youth, Nationhood, and the Politics of Belonging](#)
- ▶ [Participating as Young Citizens in Diverse Communities](#)

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Part VI

Social Justice

Hernán Cuervo and Ana Miranda

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Abstract

This chapter brings together the disciplines of youth studies and social justice with the aim to open up a space within which it is possible to draw on different theoretical traditions and work from different places. It draws on political and social theory to outline the development of the relationship between social justice and youth in the last few decades. From a political theory approach, it states a critique of universal and neutral theories of social justice based on liberal democratic traditions that have had a tendency to construct universal and impartial criteria to identify social wrongdoings and injustices. From a sociological perspective, it analyzes current and recent debates about social transformations and their capacities to create new vulnerabilities for young people.

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The chapter argues for a relational approach that renders visible the social, economic, and cultural context of young people's lives. This approach also opens up the idea of the pluralization of social justice in the field of youth studies to include claims of redistribution as well as recognition and participation and to challenge the western-centric construction of theoretical and empirical youth work. A broader and more inclusive account of cultures and ideas can only benefit those interested in understanding and addressing social inequalities.

Introduction

The increasing social stratification and youth unemployment in western advanced capitalist societies, the experiences of youth living in rural poverty throughout the world, and young people marginalized in the "mega" cities of Latin America make it timely to reflect on social justice in a handbook of childhood and youth studies. Indeed, rapid and far-reaching social, economic, political, and cultural changes around the globe make current times of significant interest to researchers concerned with social justice and youth. As Furlong (2011, p. 57) points out, one of the "key concerns for researchers interested in youth studies are issues about social justice" and the "need on to push the limits of what counts as knowledge."

We argue for the need to open up spaces of understanding and cooperation between western and non-western, north and south researchers and ideas as well as the connection between disciplines such as sociology and political philosophy. A broader and more inclusive account of cultures and ideas can only benefit those interested in understanding and addressing social inequalities. This chapter and those in this section aim to contribute to these objectives by opening up the fields of inquiry and pluralizing social justice concerns within youth studies.

Different studies in the field of sociology of youth have argued that the concept of youth is not universal and impartial but has to be understood within specific contexts of interpretation and enactment (Mørch 1996; Wyn and White 1997). Wyn and White's (1997) classic study, *Rethinking Youth*, critiqued biomedical approaches that position youth as a period of development and transition between the stages of childhood and adulthood, aligned with age-based, physical and mental developments. They argue that these universal assumptions about youth reflect the dominant values of particular prescribed policy patterns of transition that are viewed as normative and natural. Any variation is seen as a "deviation" thereby categorizing the individual or social group as "at risk." Nonetheless, despite the consolidation of sociology of youth as a vibrant field in the social sciences, there are still entrenched views that have a tendency to stigmatize young people through categorical constructions such as NEET (not in employment, education, and training) or a "lost generation" (Cuervo and Wyn 2014).

In a similar vein, in their critique of universal theories of social justice, political theorists, such as Miller (2013) and Young (1990), have pointed to the investment by liberal institutions in establishing universal and objective criteria for identifying injustices in society. They take aim at an impartial point of view as the basis of our

moral and political reasoning, arguing that it eliminates the particularities of different perspectives including personal knowledge, experience, and emotion. The result has been the removal of distinctions of all but the dominant group.

In bringing the two concepts of youth and social justice together, we argue that social justice and youth are best understood through a relational approach that makes visible their social, economic, cultural, and political contexts. This approach takes into account a range of subjectivities as well as the social and spatial circumstances that play important roles in defining young people's opportunities and challenges in life. The chapters in this section reveal the research depth in contemporary youth studies in relation to social justice. They contribute to the debate around theoretical and empirical work that has been carried out by authors who are researching young people in very different places, underpinning the need for the use of social science perspectives that recognize diversity and change.

This chapter introduces a series of theoretical and empirical debates in reference to research on children, youth, and social justice. We draw on political and social theory to outline the development of the relationship between social justice and youth in the last few decades. This includes a succinct analysis of what political and social philosophers, like Iris Marion Young and Nancy Fraser, can offer to the field of youth studies. In arguing for a plural framework of social justice that goes beyond class to include other structural categories such as gender, race, and place, these considerations set the stage for the chapters that follow. We end with précis of the chapters, which argue, in their own ways, for an opening up of the field of youth studies to a greater recognition of difference and greater accounting for the contexts in which young people live. We provide an introduction to the argument made by the authors of the chapters in this section, to contribute to the understanding of the sociohistoric circumstances of youth, its power in providing an ideal opportunity to examine social change (Furlong and Cartmel 2007), and placing a positive, rather than stigmatizing, view about young people and their contribution to a more just world.

Social Justice and Youth Through a Class-Based Lens

During the period of post-World War II to the late 1980s, the dominant understanding of social justice emphasized structural issues, whereby social class and economic resources were seen as the key determinants of benefits and status in society and of life chances for children and youth. Roberts (2009) argues that social theorists interested in youth, education, and culture, like Bernstein (1975), Bowles and Gintis (1976), and Willis (1977), pointed to the inequalities inherent in the education system, where schooling prepared students for their future positions in the class structure. Youth sociologists, Furlong and Cartmel (2007), show that the distribution of life opportunities and experiences for young people in this period could be explained by individuals' location within the social structures of class. As stated in one of the chapters of this section (see Shildrick), researchers working on the cultural traditions of youth research at the Birmingham University's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in the 1970s, working on the cultural

traditions of youth research, also saw class as key to understanding the values, experiences, and expectations of youth, by linking cultural resistance to class dynamics (Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hebdige 1979). While such a succinct description of very complex theoretical works by social thinkers does not do justice their ideas, the relevance for this discussion lies in the primacy of social stratification and reproduction dominated by class issues to the analysis of social justice and young people's lives (Furlong and Cartmel 2007; Fraser 1997, 2008b).

In the last few decades, significant transformations in western advanced capitalist societies have generated radical social changes, including the fragmentation of traditional structures, the restructuring of labor markets with its increasing demand of more educated youth, changing patterns in family relations and leisure, and the persistent dismantling of the welfare state (Cuervo and Wyn 2011; Furlong and Cartmel 2007). These changes have strengthened doubts about the validity of class as the primary explanatory tool for understanding young people's experiences and trajectories (France 2007; White and Wyn 2013). As well as recognizing the changing dynamics of social class, youth sociologists have used the concepts of reflexivity and agency as theoretical tools to open up new debates about youth transitions and its impact in processes of social stratification (Biggart et al. 2002; Bendit 2008). Reflecting developments occurring in the social sciences, empirical studies in the field of youth studies have revealed the transformation of postmodernism and the uncertainty and insecurity that have impacted particularly on young generations (Leccardi 2005; Shildrick and MacDonald 2006). This debate is still relevant today, as many of the chapters acknowledge; for example, Shildrick summarizes the challenges to youth analyses anchored in class by the CCCS and by those later known as "post-subcultural studies" (see Bennett 2000; Miles 2000). What is at stake in these debates in terms of social justice and youth is the shift from a concept of justice based on class analysis and claims for redistribution of resources to concepts of social justice that acknowledge the diversity of individual and social group identities, including the intersection of different power relations (e.g., race and gender) as explanatory structures of social inequality and disadvantage (see Crenshaw 1989 for an analysis of the concept of intersectionality). Furlong and Cartmel (2007), entering this debate, argue that perhaps the case is not that class has become a weak predictor of youth experiences but that we need to find new ways of examining issues of social inequality and reproduction. It is worth quoting at length their view in this debate:

While structures appear to have fragmented, changed their form and become increasingly obscure, we suggest that life chances and experiences can still largely be predicted using knowledge of individuals' locations within social structures: despite arguments to the contrary, class and gender divisions remain central to an understanding of life experiences. At the same time, we recognize that traditional ways of conceptualizing class are not well suited to the analysis and understanding of the distribution of life chances in late modernity. (Furlong and Cartmel 2007, p. 2)

These issues are central to Shildrick's chapter. We move now to present an overview of some ideas of social justice that are useful to theorize the shift explained above in social justice and youth studies.

Theorizing Social Justice

In the last few decades, a fundamental shift occurred within both the analysis of social justice and the field of youth studies, from redistribution to recognition. Claims for the recognition of group difference that gained prominence within several currents of political and social theory, such as liberalism, communitarianism, post-structuralism, post-Marxism, feminism, post-colonialism, and queer studies (e.g., Cooper 2004; Fraser 1997; Honneth 2003; Phillips 1997; Taylor 1994; Young 1990), have moved the focus from a redistribution of material resources to recognition as the central problem of justice.

Phillips (1997, p. 143) characterizes this shift as a “displacement,” where “the cultural [is] displacing the material; identity politics [is] displacing class. . . Difference, in particular, seems to have displaced inequality as the central concern of political and social theory.” Claims about social justice based on recognition emphasize the need for the recognition of different cultures and values, which form the core of their dignity, self-esteem, and self-respect. Similarly, Charles Taylor (1994, pp. 25–26) has argued that “our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others,” where misrecognition of a person’s culture, values, and identity has the potential to “inflict harm” and “can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.”

Iris Marion Young and Nancy Fraser have been two of the leading political and social philosophers contributing to this shift from social justice based on socioeconomic cleavages to a politics of recognition. We do not have the scope to expand on the debates that have accompanied this shift, but they can be followed in Fraser (2008a), which includes other political and social theorists such as Richard Rorty, Judith Butler, Anne Phillips, Elizabeth Anderson, and Rainer Forst. Although there is also no scope to explore the prolific work of these two theorists over two decades, we briefly identify some of their main ideas and arguments, which are helpful for understanding social division and inequalities in contemporary youth and childhood studies.

Both Young and Fraser have argued for a relational approach to social justice that deals with the everyday practices of individuals and social groups and their relationship with social institutions. This is in contrast to analytical approaches that argue for universal and neutral views of what counts as socially just. Young (1990) and Fraser (1997) have been at the forefront of a social justice analysis that moves from class-based inequalities to include social inequalities based on gender, ethnicity, race, nationality, and sexual orientation. They have contributed to the emergence of a robust focus on cultural injustices without abandoning claims for economic justice. Contrary to many egalitarian theorists, like Rawls (1972) and Dworkin (1981), Fraser and Young identify injustices in people’s lived experiences through a much more plural and relational understanding of the overlaps and intersections of different social categories (Brighouse 2004). In her seminal work, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Young (1990) develops a nuanced critique of distributive justice and analysis of justice predominantly based on class issues.

According to Young (1990), when social justice is reduced to how wealth, jobs, and resources are distributed, the analysis tends to neglect the institutional context and social structure that usually determines the patterns of distribution. It is important to note that Young does not reject the distributive dimension of social justice. What she wants us to consider is the wider context that involves “actions, decisions about actions, and provision of the means to develop and exercise capacities” rather than viewing individuals as merely “possessors and consumers of goods” (1990, p. 16).

Fraser, like Young, also believes that defining justice through a mere distribution of resources leads to one-sided claims about injustice (see Brighouse 2004, p. 154). However, Fraser (1997, p. 16) identifies a tension between a politics of redistribution and a politics of recognition which leads to the “redistribution-recognition dilemma.” To put it simply, this dilemma occurs because recognition claims often take the form of drawing attention to the specificity of some group and the affirmation of its values. On the other hand, redistribution claims call for abolishing economic arrangements that underpin group specificity. In other words, where a politics of recognition promotes group differentiation, a politics of redistribution might undermine it. Thus, central to Fraser’s argument is the idea that social justice still “requires *both* redistribution and recognition” (1997, p. 12, emphasis in original). Fraser believes that they are in practice intertwined and “reinforce each other dialectically,” resulting “in a vicious circle of cultural and economic subordination.”

Pluralizing Social Justice and Youth Studies

Young and Fraser’s analyses challenge researchers interested in social justice and youth to rethink how social inequalities and disadvantages are reproduced and linked beyond the structural categories of class. They are a reminder of the profound social and economic changes taking place in western societies in the late 1980s and early 1990s, where debates about inequality and justice began to encompass wider and more complex themes. Significant social changes have impacted on public and private spheres of life, creating a shift towards a pluralization of possibilities of recognition of previously “denied” identities and a greater social uncertainty and vulnerability in a globalized world (Sennett 1998).

The world of work has been one of the most impacted and transformed spheres in the social world. For a great part of the twentieth century, employment has been a cornerstone of social organization in society (Castel 1995). Indeed, social theorists have highlighted the impact of the economic and production changes to traditionally regulated norms of social life. In postindustrial capitalism, old social divisions of class and gender began to intersect with new vulnerabilities (Fitoussi and Rosanvallón 1996; France 2007). The transformation in the modes of production in postindustrial capitalism, the expansion of processes of individualization, and the rise of insecurities and vulnerabilities as a response to the de-traditionalization of social institutions which gave relevance to collective identities created a context in which notions such as agency and identity became key to the study of youth and social change (Beck 1992; Giddens 1991).

Debates about individualization, de-traditionalization, and insecurity had an important impact on the field of youth studies. By the 1990s, conceptualizations of youth as transitions (towards social and financial independence) began to be part of the consensus in studies about young people, thus replacing structural interpretations that place the emphasis in reproduction of social class. Youth studies showed, particularly in western countries, that transitions to adulthood became extended and nonlinear (Dwyer and Wyn 2001; Roberts 1997) and that new forms of vulnerabilities could be found among young people's lives, generating increasing problems of social exclusion for certain social groups of youth (López and Walther 2003). Similarly, youth studies produced outside North America, Western Europe, and Australia also reveal the increasing individualization of risk and vulnerability for young people. The introduction of neoliberal policies in so-called underdeveloped countries, particularly in Latin America and Asia, opened up debate about how traditional inequalities, anchored in class and gender, were increasingly combined with new inequalities associated to the erosion of social structures (Miranda 2007; Perez Islas 2008; Saraví 2004).

The Relevance of Class

Against this backdrop, the field of youth studies incorporated new ways of understanding social injustices, inequalities, and divisions, which pluralized the debate about social justice by incorporating the notions of identity, recognition, and participation (Balardini 2000; Miranda et al. 2012; Molgat and Vézina 2008). The chapters in this section acknowledge and contribute to this debate, as well as reflecting the fruitfulness of bringing a social justice lens to the field of youth studies. Tracy Shildrick's chapter is a reminder of these debates around the role of social class on youth identities. Amidst the background of the impact of the global financial crisis (GFC) and focusing on Great Britain, Shildrick briefly traces the development of the role of social class in youth studies and the debate between subcultural and post-subcultural researchers to later address the impact of social and economic changes on how and where young people will fit into new class structures. Drawing on Standing (2010) and Savage and colleagues (2013), Shildrick raises an important point around the usefulness of the concept of class: perhaps it is not so much that class as a predictor of life chances has lost its power but that traditional characterizations of the category have been transformed by the rapid social changes witnessed in late modernity and accelerated by the 2008 global financial crisis (GFC), generating "fuzzy boundaries which separate class groupings" and, possibly, a new social class such as Standing's "precariat."

In many ways, Shildrick's chapter is an answer to Furlong's (2011) cry: "We need to place a priority on re-framing social class in ways that make sense in the 21st century, and even to question the orthodoxy of embedding class in employment relationship." In response, she argues that as the current generation of youth is likely to end worse off than their parents, it is intergenerational rather than intragenerational inequalities that should also drive youth research analysis. The

studies of Andres and Wyn (2010) in Canada and Australia, respectively; Saraví (2004) and Jacinto and Freytes (2007) in Argentina; McDowell in Great Britain (2003; 2006); and Weis (2004) in the United States all accord with Shildrick in confirming the relevance of class in analysis of social justice and inequalities. McDowell (2003, 2006) also agrees with the focus on intergenerational inequality, with the current generation of young people, particularly men, being perhaps the first generation in a century to be worse off than their parents. Weis affirms that class still remains a conceptual organizer of the social, material, and cultural world of young people.

Traditional distributive claims of economic redistribution, associated to class issues, raised by Rawls (1972) and other egalitarian theorists (Arneson 1989; Cohen 1989; Dworkin 1981) in the 1970s and 1980s seem to still be relevant. As Rawls argued in his famous second principle, inequalities are acceptable as long as they benefit the least advantaged. Standing claims (2010) that if capitalist systems are not able to provide job security for workers, particularly for those most vulnerable like youth workers, then there is a space for considering a more expansive welfare system. Unfortunately, as Shildrick points out, austerity plans in Great Britain and other European countries have made redistribution of income and wealth less likely to materialize (see Callinicos 2012). Shildrick also highlights the point that social injustices encompass both economic and cultural domains. Furlong (2011, p. 56) agrees that perhaps it is not that “social class has become a weak predictor of educational experiences, rather new forms of differentiation have emerged, which make it more difficult to observe class-based stratification.” Thus, Young’s and Fraser’s approach to justice contributes to understanding how the production of inequalities is cut across by new forms of social differentiation.

Expanding Youth and Social Justice Research

Nancy Fraser’s ideas are extended in the chapter by Amanda Keddie, as she incorporates the different dimensions of social justice to shed light on the educational inequalities experienced by Indigenous girls in Australia. In a Rawlsian sense, Keddie is concerned with how the basic structure of society through one of its major social institutions, schooling, can address social inequalities for the least advantaged in society. But Keddie, like Young and Fraser, goes beyond distributive claims of material goods to engage with a plural framework of social justice. They acknowledge that the trouble with the predominance of the distributive dimension so common in educational debate about the most vulnerable in society is that it reifies the conception of material “goods” to be distributed, neglecting issues of power and autonomy and ignoring social and institutional contexts that establish distributive patterns. A one-dimensional approach to social justice, through the distributive dimension, blocks the path to structural and institutional change by focusing on persons as passive recipients of goods (Forst 2007).

More explicitly, Keddie draws on Fraser’s (2008b) work to analyze how schools can contribute to remedy political, economic, and cultural injustices. She illustrates

this point by referencing the story of Emma, an Indigenous young woman, to point out processes of cultural marginalization, economic deprivation, and political exclusion for Indigenous women. Further, like Fraser (2008b) and Young (1990, 2000, 2006), Keddie incorporates the dimension of participation by those who are experiencing injustice into her social justice analysis. The dimension of participation asks the question of whose voice is heard and who gets a chance to participate in the decision-making process about justice. As argued by Young (1990, p. 251), for any person to be empowered, they must “have the institutionalized means to participate effectively in the decisions that affect her or his action and the conditions of that action.”

Theories that presuppose universality independent of any given social context have little capacity to measure social institutions and relationships. Like other educationalists interested in social justice issues, such as Gewirtz (1998, 2006) and Griffiths (1998), Keddie’s chapter shows that abstract conceptualizations of social justice are of little use in discovering and analyzing unequal social relations. Social justice analyses in the field of youth studies need to be contextualized, drawing on narratives that are not just an abstract concept or policy rhetoric but are lived or embodied by young people.

Keddie’s chapter points out other significant issues that have relevance to the fields of childhood and youth studies. She argues that it is timely for educational and public debates around Indigenous issues in Australia to highlight the disadvantages faced by Indigenous women beyond the general problems affecting Indigenous communities:

The realities of family and community responsibilities, domestic violence and poverty that many Indigenous girls and young women face along with the broader racialised and gendered maligning and silencing they endure that is endemic in our communities, clearly curtail not only their educational success but also their post-school opportunities and their quality of life and wellbeing.

In the field of youth studies, the experiences and views of Indigenous young people are scarce. While researchers in the fields of education and anthropology have produced a significant volume of work related to social justice issues and Indigenous youth (see for example the chapter by Hayes and Skattebol in this section), some youth researchers argue that there is a paucity of research in the study of effective Indigenous youth programs, particularly in rural and remote areas, and that much of the knowledge from successful work needs to be better systematized and published (Lopes et al. 2013). Indeed, in general terms, important work by youth researchers, like Rob White (2002) and Glenn Dawes’s (2011) studies of Indigenous youth and social justice have focused on their interaction with the court system and in relation to criminal justice. Keddie’s work is a reminder of this research gap and the potential that social justice in youth studies can offer to rethink new ways of tackling social inequalities and divisions.

The chapter by Debra Hayes and Jennifer Skattebol is another important contribution to the research on social justice in education for Indigenous children and youth. Their chapter, like Keddie’s, adopts a plural notion of social justice by taking

into account the way that social institutions (i.e., schools) distribute material and nonmaterial opportunities to different social groups and the ways in which power and autonomy play out in formal and informal educational settings. Through the use of the metaphor of belonging, Hayes and Skattebol exquisitely and subtly examine three important issues related to childhood and youth and social justice in education. Firstly, they render visible how non-Indigenous researchers and Indigenous participants negotiate the boundaries of what is possible in research to create a socially just research environment that reflects the needs and goals of both groups (see Smith 1999, 2005). Secondly, Hayes and Skattebol show how significant relationships play a critical role in the participation or nonparticipation of young people in formal and informal educational processes. That is, against the grain of youth-as-transition studies, they reveal the importance that family and friends can have on children and young people's choices and decisions about their education. Finally, they challenge traditional assumptions by social institutions, and its members, of low educational aspirations of disadvantaged social groups (in their case, Indigenous people). Like the work by Zipin and colleagues (2012, 2013) in Australia and Rodriguez (2013) and Rios-Aguilar and colleagues (2011) in the United States, Hayes and Skattebol invite us to shift our analysis away from deficit views of Indigenous students' culture, knowledge, and aspirations towards ways in which schools (and for that matter other social institutions) can be "more flexible and accommodating of students' different lifeworlds." In sum, through the metaphor of belonging, they convincingly argue that for the children and youth of marginalized families to achieve success at school, there is a need "not only (of) having a right to education, but a right to belong at school."

Virginia Morrow's and Gonzalo Saraví's chapters are reminders of another important research gap in youth studies that concerns social justice issues. The work of political and social theorists around social justice and youth issues often is based on a western-centric framework or focus that has very little to say about the realities of young people living in non-western countries. Within the sociology of youth, Pam Nilan (2011, p. 20) has pointed out that there has been "limited dialogue between the global 'North' and the 'South'" and where there is a need to construct "interpretive frameworks that can apply across the many different settings and circumstances in which young people live, study, work and make decisions." Nilan's argument refers particularly to the lack of relevance of concepts such as choice biographies and individualizations in non-western societies where family and community relationships and responsibilities still have relevance in defining youth. In a similar vein, Connell (2007, pp. vii–viii) has criticized social theory that is presented with the aim of universal applicability while it generally "embeds the viewpoints, perspectives and problems of metropolitan society while presenting itself as universal knowledge."

Addressing this gap, Morrow discusses studies on the experiences of girls in rural communities in Andhra Pradesh, India, and Ethiopia to challenge urban-centric conceptualizations and western policy frameworks of youth transitions. Morrow presents an interesting reflection on the role of place as a catalyst for various aspects relating to the reproduction of social inequality. Youth researchers like Ansell (2004), Jeffrey and Dyson (2008), Jeffrey and McDowell (2004), and

Punch (2007) have also revealed the complexities of rural youth transitions in situations of poverty and inequality. Throughout the chapter Morrow demonstrates how the boundaries of childhood, youth, and adulthood are blurred, disputing western-centric analysis of children and young people by making visible different youth's experiences for the rural poor. She makes clear that from an early age, children from poor rural areas of subsistence production engage with agricultural and domestic labor, in many instances, to the detriment of their educational participation. Given this material reality, her argument establishes that in rural communities the notion of transition understood as independence of the family household is not suitable as a demarcation of adulthood, since in those communities that condition is associated with increased collaboration and accountability in the family group. Echoing Keddie's conclusions, Morrow argues that a plural framework is required that includes a cultural recognition of the individuals and the communities studied. While some researchers in western societies have pointed out the urban-centric bias of youth studies and policy (Cuervo and Wyn 2012; Hopkins 2010; Shildrick et al. 2009) and the increasing relevance of family in youth's lives (Jones 2005; Pusey 2007; Wyn et al. 2011), more work needs to be done to bridge this gap.

The notion of place as an element that shapes the processes of social inequality is also present in the Gonzalo Saraví's chapter in this book. His work is part of a long tradition of Latin-American studies examining process of marginalization in highly populated urban centers (Quijano 1971) and, more recently, on strong processes of urbanization and privatization of the public space (Bayón 2012; Cravino 2008). Saraví places space at the center of discussion of the construction of social injustices. Examining the use of public spaces by youth in one of the most important and populated cities in Latin America, Mexico City, he argues that in the megacities of the twenty-first century, unequal access to transport, employment, consumption, and communication tends to reinforce inequalities of origin. He shows how the neighborhood, the school, and shopping malls, as spaces of consumption, are three central spaces in which social inequalities are perpetuated. He argues that "The experience of the city is a key mediation of the social experience of inequality." This urban inequality reflects the reproduction of class relations and restricts the autonomy and agency of youth at different levels in different social groups. Similarly to that observed by Morrow regarding rural communities, Saraví shows how the configuration of space in the megacities contributes to the stigmatization of poverty and creates homogeneous spaces and experiences of socialization for youth.

Saraví's analysis resonates with Edward Soja's (2010) construction of a theory of *spatial justice*, in which space and an equitable distribution of material goods, services, and access become a basic human right. Soja, like Saraví, uses space, as a lens to identify and highlight contemporary struggles and inequalities, to reveal how different social actors use space and to identify the factors that determine the possibility of accessing different spaces and places. Saraví's chapter also resonates with Young and Fraser's advocacy for cultural recognition, expanding the questions about social justice and equality from the "why equality?" and "equality of what?" (see Sen 1992) to "equality for whom?". However, in Saraví's chapter, as in Keddie's, Hayes

and Skattebol's, and Morrow's, all dimensions of social justice are present and urgent. The possibility of construction of democratic spaces is not only based on proper distribution of resources but also on the recognition of the needs and aspirations of different social groups and their ability to express them in their own voice.

Conclusion and Future Directions

In bringing together the areas of youth studies and social justice, we open up a space within which it is possible to draw on different theoretical traditions and work from different places. It responds to Connell's (2007, p. 207) call to "'multiply' rather than 'slim' the sources of our thinking" by "theorizing that is mixed up with specific situations." We believe that a broad and integrative encounter can generate a space for the development of interpretative frameworks about social inequalities in contemporary youth studies.

From a theoretical point of view this chapter and those within this section affirm our critique of universal and neutral theories of social justice based on liberal democratic traditions that have had a tendency to construct universal and impartial criteria to identify social wrongdoings and injustices. Drawing on a sociological perspective, we have presented current and recent debate about social transformations and their capacities to create new vulnerabilities for young people. In drawing on the concepts of youth and social justice, in all their complexity, we argue for a relational approach that renders visible the social, economic, and cultural context of young people. This approach also opens up the idea of the pluralization of social justice in the field of youth studies to include claims of redistribution as well as recognition and participation, to challenge the western-centric construction of theoretical and empirical youth work.

We recognize that in the field of sociology of youth, there has been a strong focus on the conceptualization of youth as a social process. Many youth researchers, including Jones (2005), Lesko (2001), and Wyn and White (1997), have argued that youth is constituted through its link to the activities and spaces offered by different social institutions. Nonetheless, views of youth as a category (e.g., NEET or "lost generation"), where the youth are judged by their actions rather than the opportunities available to them and have a tendency to stigmatize young people, are still entrenched in the public and policy realm. The chapters in this section render visible the opportunities and challenges confronted by young people, thus contributing to a view of social justice and youth that is not impartial, universal, or neutral. A plural view of social justice that takes into account the dimensions of redistribution, recognition, and participation is vital if we are really interested in addressing social divisions and inequalities. The pluralization of theoretical and empirical work in youth studies is critical to the democratization of understandings of young people's lives. At a time of increasing social polarization, persistent social divisions, and broadening inter- and intragenerational inequality, it is critical to embrace context-based and plural understanding of youth's lives that can deliver justice to them.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Education and the Politics of Belonging: Attachments and Actions](#)
- ▶ [Indigenous Girls, Social Justice, and Schooling: Addressing Issues of Disadvantage](#)
- ▶ [Social Justice and Youth Transitions: Understanding Young People's Lives in Rural Andhra Pradesh, India, and Ethiopia](#)
- ▶ [Space and Place in Studies of Childhood and Youth](#)
- ▶ [Stay or Go? Reading Identity Through Young People's Lives in Rural Places](#)
- ▶ [Time and Space in Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [Young People and Social Class in the United Kingdom](#)
- ▶ [Youth Experience of Urban Inequality: Space, Class, and Gender in Mexico](#)

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Indigenous Girls, Social Justice, and Schooling: Addressing Issues of Disadvantage

32

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Abstract

Indigenous women and girls in Australia remain highly disadvantaged economically, culturally, and politically. The ways in which schools can better address this disadvantage are the focus of this chapter. The chapter builds on existing research in the area of Indigenous schooling and social justice to add important theoretical and practical insight into supporting Indigenous girls – an equity group whose marginalization (while highly salient) tends to be lost amid broader concerns about Indigeneity. With reference to “Emma’s” story as exemplifying some of the key constraints to the educational attainment of Indigenous girls, the chapter explores how schools might begin to remedy this disadvantage through their engagement with a politics of (1) economic redistribution, (2) cultural recognition, and (3) political representation.

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Introduction

'Emma' is 28 years old and identifies as Indigenous Australian. She grew up in a large urban centre and was, in her words, 'in and out of different foster homes for about 12 years straight'. She attended many different schools and "ended up dropping out in Grade Ten". Emma's schooling years were troubled. She described herself as being disengaged and disinterested and continuously reprimanded for her rebellion. In her view her troubles largely stemmed from teachers not "understanding [her] learning ability" or respecting her cultural identity and heritage. She described herself as having low self-esteem and being treated "like a dumb person" at school despite her outstanding achievements as an athlete and artist.

At the age of 18, Emma moved to a northern regional part of Queensland to stay with extended family. Here she met her partner with whom she had four daughters (now aged between four and nine years). In 2006 she "fled" this violent and abusive relationship and the "isolation" she felt in this context to show her children "a better lifestyle" back in her hometown. Following a short period of aimlessness where – as she describes, she "didn't know what to do next" – Emma began this better lifestyle through education. She gained her Senior Certificate at the age of 26 at a small nontraditional Indigenous school specifically set up to support disadvantaged girls and women like herself. At this school, she not only engaged in academic learning but also cultural learning where she discovered aspects of her Indigenous history and identity that she "didn't realise and didn't know" – from the atrocities of the Stolen Generations and the experiences of Indigenous activists to the ancient cultural protocols associated with traditional dancing, painting, and spiritual mores and rules. Emma referred to this cultural learning as making her "strong" and "proud" – as helping her to "know her culture" and her "roots". Her dream is to "make [her] ancestors proud" through activism that champions greater respect for her culture and people.

Emma's story seems to encapsulate many of the issues of disadvantage that continue to confront and create barriers to the educational achievement of Indigenous girls (see Keddle 2011, 2012). In Australia, and more broadly, there has been an enormous amount of attention directed towards the poor educational performance of Indigenous students. Low levels of literacy and numeracy attainment and poor rates of school attendance, retention, and tertiary participation are key areas of concern as is the tendency for mainstream schooling to be culturally exclusive and alienating for Indigenous students. Amid these concerns, there has been some focus on the gendered dimensions of Indigenous underperformance in relation to boys – with a particular focus on issues of disengagement (see, e.g., the *Clontarf Foundation Program* [<http://www.clontarffootball.com>], which uses football as an engagement activity to promote school participation and research that challenges Indigenous boys' take-up of hegemonic masculinity, such as Martino 2003). However, there has been very little focus on these dimensions in relation to Indigenous girls. To be sure, key areas of concern such as literacy attainment and poor school attendance apply to both girls and boys, and it is crucial not to detract from an ongoing focus on these areas and the productive approaches that can address them such as bilingual language programs, culturally responsive curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, and improved school/community relations (see Griffiths 2011; Makuwira 2007; Klenowski 2009). However, there are specific

issues of disadvantage particular to Indigenous girls that tend to be lost amid these broader concerns. These issues are invariably associated with family and community influences and obligations and early family and carer responsibilities. Although, of course, such influences and obligations are often positive and a source of support, they create obvious barriers to educational participation and achievement especially when they intersect with conditions of poverty and domestic or family violence (see Doyle and Hill 2012; Keddie 2011).

Emma's story provides an insight into these issues – certainly her troubled schooling experience of disengagement and rebellion, her feelings of marginalization, and her poor academic performance and early school leaving are common to many Indigenous students. Her subsequent experiences of early family responsibilities, domestic violence, and poverty, however, reflect the distinctly gendered dimensions of Indigenous female disadvantage that in most cases would prevent school completion and severely undermine employment opportunities.

These issues, and their capacities to begin to be remedied through particular schooling approaches, are the focus of this chapter. The disadvantage experienced by Indigenous women and girls like Emma is understood as reflecting three key areas of injustice – economic, cultural, and political (Fraser 2008). That is, Indigenous women and girls tend to suffer high levels of (1) economic deprivation (through, e.g., their dependency on social welfare and the type and level of employment they are likely to attain), (2) cultural marginalization (through, e.g., patterns of sexist and racist abuse, denigration, and violence), and (3) political exclusion (through, e.g., their lack of representation or silencing within the public/political sphere) (Fraser 2008). These injustices are reflective of the complex and deeply gendered legacies of traditional cultures and colonization. They illuminate the double bind of racism and sexism Indigenous girls and women face that are not only evident in relation to poor education and employment opportunities but also in realities such as low life expectancy, poor health, drug and alcohol misuse, family breakdown, and unacceptably high rates of incarceration and exposure to domestic/family physical and sexual abuse (see Doyle and Hill 2012).

Emma's story is suggestive of the significance that education represents in beginning to transform these negative realities. While Emma's school is nontraditional (a small Indigenous-focused secondary school in suburban Queensland specifically set up to support disadvantaged girls), there is much that can be learned from this education site in relation to enhancing the school and life experiences of Indigenous girls. It is, however, important not to overstate the role schools can play in supporting students like Emma. Addressing Indigenous disadvantage necessitates ongoing economic, cultural, and political change at a much broader level than schools. Such disadvantage is highly complex – complicated by a range of intersecting identity, cultural, and contextual factors (which are invariably washed out within broader public/education discourse; see Altman 2009). Notwithstanding, as this chapter will illustrate, there are many ways in which schools can address the multidimensionality of Indigenous female

disadvantage – through their engagement with a politics of economic redistribution, cultural recognition, and political representation (Fraser 2008). Engaging in a politics of economic redistribution entails schools providing disadvantaged students with the necessary material and human resources to promote their greater participation and achievement – at Emma’s school, for example, this support was apparent in the existence of a crèche for her (and other students’) children and extensive practical support for workplace introduction and training. Engaging in a politics of cultural recognition entails schools challenging the negative constructions of culture and identity that malign, trivialize, and undermine the well-being of particular (marginalized) student groups – at Emma’s school this involved the explicit recognition and valuing of Indigenous culture especially female traditions such as “women’s business.” Finally, engaging in a politics of political representation necessitates that schools provide forums where marginalized voices are positioned with autonomy and self-determination – at Emma’s school this involved students leading discussion within “women’s business” forums and initiating political activism. It also involved explicit efforts to recruit Indigenous staff and include their input in relation to the direction and running of the school (see Keddie 2012).

These three areas of redress importantly work towards making possible the key Indigenous equity priorities of self-determination and cultural integrity – which are explicit in Indigenous-focused social justice policy at a global, national, and state level (see the UN *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, 2007). Research in Australia that is focused on supporting Indigenous students’ self-determination and cultural integrity is extensive especially on the issues of Indigenous disadvantage mentioned earlier – e.g., school engagement, achievement, and retention and the development of culturally inclusive and supportive teaching (see Fanshawe 1999; Russell 1999; Malin 1998; Nakata 2007, 2010; Queensland Department of Education and Training 2011). This chapter builds on this body of research. In particular, its focus on gender justice adds important theoretical and practical insight into supporting Indigenous girls. The chapter makes reference to Emma’s story as exemplifying some of the key constraints to the educational attainment of Indigenous girls and women. In presenting one story, the chapter’s intention is not to subsume the diversity and complexity of Indigenous girls’ and women’s disadvantage under one umbrella or theoretical frame – it is acknowledged, for instance, that Emma’s story is distinctly urbanized and will not reflect many of the concerns, issues, and barriers confronting Indigenous girls and women in rural or remote contexts. Moreover, it is acknowledged that the ways in which Emma’s school seeks to support its Indigenous female student cohort may not work as well in other school settings (e.g., in remote or rural areas). It is with these limitations in mind that the following draws on Emma’s story to explore how schools might better address Indigenous girls’ and women’s disadvantage through their engagement with a politics of (1) economic redistribution, (2) cultural recognition, and (3) political representation (Fraser 2008).

Schooling and Indigenous Girls: Engaging a Politics of Redistribution

When I come here I was like – the bus was coming 'round [to the school] picking my sister up and I was going “whose them mob?,” you know, (and she said) “that’s my school.” And I’d be like, “Oh, true?” And, like, I noticed [her] friends were going to the school and they had babies, and I was saying “What? Can they take their babies to school?” And she said: “Yeah, they’ve got a crèche there” and I said “What!?! Are you serious? How old do you have to be?” And she ended up bringing me here and I just fell in love with it straight away. I was like “this is just perfect,” you know? (Emma)

Many Indigenous girls and young women are attempting to balance and negotiate education commitments with family and community obligations and/or their sole parenting responsibilities in circumstances that are characterized by high levels of poverty and social conflict. Most are expected to meet home- or kinship-based responsibilities such as caring for younger siblings or parents and other family members who are unwell (see Doyle and Hill 2012). Many, like Emma, are from troubled family backgrounds of foster care and familial violence, others are victims of sexual and/or substance abuse, and some are homeless or living in very undesirable conditions. These realities (while also confronting non-Indigenous girls and women) disproportionately impact on Indigenous females and clearly constrain their capacities to attend and achieve at school. In many cases, familial and community obligations lead to Indigenous girls/young women foregoing education and career opportunities (Doyle and Hill 2012). Such obligations are, however, of utmost importance to them not least because they reflect cultural significance and the key priority of “relationality” borne out in the Indigenous imperative of maintaining strong and reciprocal community, kinship, and family networks (Moreton-Robinson 2000; see also Huggins 1998).

Mainstream schooling tends not to cater well for this imperative and the conditions many Indigenous girls and young women find themselves in. A more personalized and “holistic” view to helping Indigenous girls to overcome these barriers is required – one that recognizes the interrelationships between education, health, social and economic well-being, and the significance of support in all these areas for Indigenous educational success (see Malin and Maidment 2003; Doyle and Hill 2012). The key here is education programs and sites that integrate and/or work with broader support services. At Emma’s school this involved the establishment of a crèche for students’ children but also sometimes their preschool-aged siblings so that the girls could attend their classes. It also involved catering to a range of ages (e.g., the current student cohort is between 12 and 28 years). For Emma, these two factors were key enablers in her completion of her Senior Certificate.

At this school importantly (as suggested earlier), there was also extensive practical support for workplace introduction and training beyond what might be expected (e.g., CV writing or job interview skills) such as providing travel for work experience, appropriate clothing, and money for lunch; monitoring and counseling during the experience; and even providing a chaperone for those students who had

never traveled beyond their local community. Other forms of practical support instrumental in ensuring student attendance and attainment at this school were providing transport or train/bus funds for the girls' daily home-to-school journey and meals before and during school time. A crucial part of this holistic approach, and of perhaps most significance in supporting the students' capacities to attend and participate in school learning, was the school's liaison with appropriate government and community agencies and services beyond the school in relation to welfare assistance and accommodation and housing provision as well as medical, including health and well-being, services (Keddie 2011, 2012).

There are many programs across Australia offered to Indigenous girls that address these areas of economic or material disadvantage. While such programs tend not to be whole school endeavors like at Emma's school (i.e., they tend to be out-of-school initiatives or programs that are connected to mainstream schools), they do provide assistance particularly in relation to childcare/parenting and vocational support. There are several "young mums" programs, for example, the *Rumbalara Parenting Program* in Victoria, that adopt a holistic approach to supporting Indigenous girls and young women. While focusing primarily on developing parenting skills, they also provide access to a range of social and welfare support services that foster these young mothers' engagement in further education, training, and employment (see Doyle and Hill 2012). Other programs are more specifically vocationally focused in terms of providing learning support to reengage Indigenous girls in education (such as numeracy and literacy support) and practical assistance with workplace/job readiness and increasing the life goals and aspirations of Indigenous girls – like the *Koori Girls Youth Program* in Victoria; the *Deadly Sista Girlz Program* in Western Australia, New South Wales, and Victoria; and the *Joodoogeb-be-gerring Werlemen* (setting girls on a straight path) *Program* in Western Australia. Importantly, many of these programs, like *Rumbalara's* holistic approach, provide access to transport for attendance, childcare, meals, and safe accommodation (see Doyle and Hill 2012).

Such programs adopt politics of redistribution in their provision of the material and human resources that are requisite to Indigenous girls' and women's educational participation, achievement, and retention. This provision attends to the specific economic needs of Indigenous females – associated, in particular, with their family and community obligations and their welfare and well-being requirements. The politics of redistribution informing this provision is crucial in beginning to ameliorate gender-specific economic deprivations through broadening Indigenous girls' and women's post-school vocational options.

Schooling and Indigenous Girls: Engaging a Politics of Recognition

...when we were in high school, like in history class – I hated history, like I hated sitting in there listening to the teacher talk about Captain Cook taking our land, you know? And I just hated it, I was like (groan) "I'm sick of doing history and all this." And like, the teacher's

like “well, it’s the truth.” And I’d be like “well, I don’t care, I don’t want to sit here and listen to this when I know the truth; you stole this land.” You know? . . . whereas here, if a student walks in we’ll just welcome them straight up . . . it’s just like a big family and we’ll just positively, you know, recognise everything with our culture . . . there’s a lot of people that don’t know about our culture . . . they don’t know how to respect, you know? (Emma)

Fortunately, there has been significant reform to schooling practice in Australia since Emma’s high school years to the extent that the Captain Cook version of history as the “truth” of Australia’s “discovery” would now be taught in classrooms through critical lenses that debunk notions of terra nullius and recognize alternative Indigenous truths of White invasion. Certainly, current curriculum in Australia mandates this critical lens and has done for some time. Indeed, an explicit emphasis on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures within specific curriculum areas and the integration of cultural inclusivity across the curriculum have become important priorities for Australian schooling (see ACARA 2011; Queensland Department of Education and Training 2011). It remains, however, that many teachers feel ill equipped in teaching about and integrating Indigenous histories and cultures within their classrooms. While they may not exercise blatant Anglocentrism along the lines of Emma’s representation of her teacher in the mid-1990s, they do not (in the main) broach these areas beyond a very superficial engagement. Thus Indigenous histories and culture are invariably not accorded the respect or status in schools that they deserve (see Nakata 2007).

In this regard, schools’ engagement in a politics of Indigenous cultural recognition tends to be limited – for example, many schools celebrate cultural “Days” such as NAIDOC (National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee) or “Sorry” Day (a yearly commemoration of the Australian government’s formal apology to the Stolen Generations made in 2008 to the Indigenous people of Australia for the government sanctioned removal of Indigenous children from their parents [from 1909 to 1969] to live with White [i.e., Anglo-Australian] families or be cared for in White institutions with the implicit intention of breeding out the Indigenous population). They might also recognize famous Indigenous people like Cathy Freeman or Neville Bonner and engage students in learning about dreamtime stories or creating “Aboriginal” art. Such activities are important in terms of their explicit valuing of Indigenous culture and in their challenging of, and potential to transform, some of the maligning and trivializing of Indigeneity endemic in dominant colonial narratives. However, they can reinforce cultural stereotypes in ways that presume there is an authentic Indigenous culture that is knowable and delineable to this group of people. Such stereotyping can be highly problematic in constructing Indigenous culture in binary opposition to non-Indigenous or Western (read White/Anglo) culture. This binarising whether celebrating Indigeneity or simply attempting to distinguish it from Western culture can further marginalize this identity group (see McConaghy 2000; Nakata 2007, 2010).

Engaging productively with a politics of Indigenous cultural recognition is a difficult undertaking. Although it does necessitate a positive valuing of Indigenous histories, cultures, and identities, it also requires a recognition of their complexity,

multiplicity, and fluidity – and an engagement with context and the actual ways in which Indigenous people experience their lives, worlds, and identities (Carrim and Soudien 1999). At Emma’s school opportunities for such engagement were evident. While, the school partook in such activities as the celebration of special Indigenous Days and people with the aim of promoting cultural pride, its recognition and valuing of Indigenous culture went beyond the superficial. Indeed, this recognition and valuing were embedded throughout the school and immersed in its climate. This was perhaps most apparent in the prioritizing of relationality (mentioned earlier – i.e., maintaining strong community, kinship, and family networks) which is suggested in Emma’s description of the school as a “big,” “welcoming” family. As noted in the previous section, this prioritizing was clear in the material and human resource support offered to the girls given their family and community obligations.

Relationality also framed much of the cultural learning at the school particularly the regular forums of storytelling involving some of the local Indigenous women Elders, opportunities provided for the girls to explore their identities through writing and artwork, and support for the girls to reconnect with their Indigenous ancestry through family history research (see Keddie 2012). These forums importantly reflected some of the important gender customs within traditional Indigenous cultures; they also were spaces where the girls and young women could address some of the gender-specific oppressions in their lives that concerned them. For example, much of the storytelling was conducted in women-only spaces akin to the Indigenous tradition of “women’s business” – a tradition that respects the separate spheres and roles between Indigenous men and women and engenders strong and powerful networks of female support, cooperation, and unity (Huggins 1998). Discussion in these spaces involved the Elders and the girls sharing stories of the past and present including the exploration of contentious matters such as the Stolen Generations, Aboriginal incarceration, alcohol and drug dependency, and domestic/family violence as well as positive stories of hope and resilience especially in relation to the strength gained through their friendship and kinship relations.

In these forums and through the more formalized family history research led by the school’s Indigenous English teacher, the girls were also supported to track their ancestry (see Keddie 2011, 2012). Such cultural learning was seen at this school to be particularly significant given that, consistent with Emma’s opening comments, it was recognized that many of the girls were unaware of their Indigenous history and culture and their place within it – not least because, like Emma, their experiences growing up in foster care had tended to omit or erase such learning from their lives. For Emma this learning was “exciting” because, in her words, it helped her to “know her culture” and her “roots” and “really brought [her] identity out.” She explained that “getting back to [her] originality” made her “strong” and “proud” and enabled her to challenge being “put down” as an Indigenous woman (see Keddie 2012, 2013). While necessarily unearthing “traumatic” knowledges (McConaghy 2003), this learning is important because it fosters critical consciousness about, and action in relation to, [Indigenous] struggles (Tuhivai-Smith 2012; Moreton-Robinson 2000).

These approaches reflect a politics of cultural recognition – a politics of legitimizing and valuing that is requisite to fostering the girls’ and young women’s pride in their Indigeneity and femininity. Central to this politics is a disruption of the dominant colonial and patriarchal discourses that malign and trivialize Indigenous female cultures and lead to abhorrent practices such as racist and gendered/sexualized abuse/violence. Such disruption opens up spaces for alternative stories of Indigenous femininity (e.g., of connection, strength, and pride) to flourish. The explicit recognition of Indigenous women’s culture and traditions within (and generating) contexts of relationality are particularly important here. Forums such as women’s business, writing, and art can productively engage with a politics of recognition that acknowledges the complexity and fluidity of Indigenous girls’ and women’s histories, cultures, and identities.

Schooling and Indigenous Girls: Engaging a Politics of Representation

I believe that . . . we can make a change – and I believe we can, like, especially women, today, because we’re just getting stronger and stronger – I reckon it’ll just change the whole evolution; I don’t know, but I hope that one day that everyone will just respect everyone and just realise that, you know, like, it’s not that bad. I mean we were looked at like the bad people once upon a time – aw, we still are today, you know? (Emma)

In these remarks there is a sense of autonomy and self-determination – a presence, rather than absence. Emma expresses hope that she and other Indigenous women can “make a change” – through their strength they can “change the whole evolution.” This belief is reflected in Emma’s opening comments and her dream to become an activist who champions greater respect for her culture and people. Creating spaces within education that nurture such hope and strength has been an important emphasis of Indigenous schooling in Australia and is consistent with the priority placed on self-determination more broadly (e.g., in equity policy such as *The Coolangatta Statement*). The continued marginalizing and silencing of Indigenous voices within (particularly) mainstream (i.e., Western) education systems, as they are in the wider social world, remain the major concern here. These systems have primarily focused on assimilating (rather than including and integrating) Indigenous voices and perspectives into non-Indigenous cultures and societies (see Luke 2009; Spring 2003).

Fostering Indigenous representation and autonomy within schools is well recognized as central to improving Indigenous educational outcomes. This has taken many forms but most significantly has involved efforts to position Indigenous students with greater self-determination within the classroom and school (through, for example, self-directed learning and leadership roles) as well as efforts to recruit more Indigenous staff in schools (to create greater cultural awareness and positive Indigenous role modeling) and generate greater Indigenous community involvement in education (see Queensland Department of Education and Training 2011).

There is evidence to suggest that school environments led and run by and for Indigenous communities and their students are the best approach to addressing these focus areas (see Malin and Maidment 2003). To be sure, supporting Indigenous people to manage and implement their own education systems has been an important global equity and schooling policy mandate for some years (see Morgan et al. 1999; UNICEF 2007). These alternative environments, along the lines of Emma's school (where many of the school's board members and staff are Indigenous and are central to the decision-making and day-to-day running of the school), have been successful in raising the school attendance, achievement, and retention of Indigenous students. These environments explicitly connect with and privilege Indigenous voices which can, as suggested in Emma's comments at the beginning of this section, mobilize a sense of autonomy and self-determination to change things for the better (Keddie 2013).

Notwithstanding these positive aspects of Indigenous-led schooling, what is important here is that *all* schools endeavor to create inclusive and democratic learning environments for Indigenous students and staff as well as the broader Indigenous community. This is imperative to schools' productive engagement with a politics of representation whether they are "mainstream" or "alternative." The cultural learning experiences at Emma's school detailed in the previous section – for example, the women's business forums – are an illustration of this productive engagement for Indigenous girls. For Emma, women's business offered her a sense of autonomy and strength as it was the "first time" she had had the opportunity to "tell" her story of "where [she] came from and where [she is] now." Another cultural learning experience at Emma's school took the form of a commercially produced community-funded poetry, prose, and art book. This book was designed and developed by the senior girls and featured personal accounts of the extreme disadvantage in the girls' lives. It was an explicit attempt by the school to provide a meaningful forum where the girls were accorded a voice and a sense of autonomy and self-determination (see Keddie 2012). Importantly, these sorts of experiences enabled a focus on the gendered dimensions of the girls' voicelessness as Indigenous and female.

A crucial aspect of this school's productive engagement with a politics of representation, as mentioned earlier, was its deliberate recruitment of Indigenous staff (as board members, teachers, and youth workers). While it is important not to endorse the premise that only Indigenous people can speak about, and act on behalf of, Indigenous experience (see McConaghy 2000), the Indigenous and gender identities of these staff (many of whom were female) were significant positive factors in representing the educational needs of the girls as their cultural/identity locations offered insight into the issues of disadvantage confronting the girls (Keddie 2012).

A politics of representation along these lines is reflected in many of the programs for Indigenous schoolgirls mentioned earlier. Certainly, they are all in some way led or driven by Indigenous communities and seek to represent the needs of Indigenous girls from their perspectives towards their greater autonomy and self-determination. For example, the *Koori Girls Youth Program* in Victoria was founded by an

Indigenous female Elder and holds forums for Indigenous girls to discuss challenging issues; the *Deadly Sista Girlz Program* in Western Australia, New South Wales, and Victoria facilitates similar forums for girls led by young female Aboriginal role models which explore topics such as sexual health, relationships, drugs and alcohol, and domestic violence; and the *Girls @ The Centre Program*, an Alice Springs initiative, provides “Girl Coaches” to facilitate personal and vocational development (see Doyle and Hill 2012).

Such programs adopt a politics of representation in according a voice for Indigenous girls and young women. Self-directed learning and leadership activities and positive Indigenous female role modeling that represents Indigenous girls’ and young women’s concerns and priorities support their self-determination and autonomy. These avenues of political representation are crucial in beginning to ameliorate the prevailing marginalizing and silencing of their voices within broader social discourse towards improving Indigenous girls’ and young women’s educational outcomes.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Emma’s story highlights the distinctly gendered dimensions of Indigenous disadvantage that undermine the schooling performance of Indigenous girls and young women. Such disadvantage is highly salient for many Indigenous females and it is a travesty that it continues to be silenced within broader educational and public equity concerns about Indigeneity. The realities of family and community responsibilities, domestic violence, and poverty that many Indigenous girls and young women face along with the broader racialized and gendered maligning and silencing they endure that is endemic in our communities clearly curtail not only their educational success but also their post-school opportunities and their quality of life and well-being. While schools are not *the* panacea for these social ills, they can, nevertheless, better address this disadvantage through adopting a politics of economic redistribution, cultural recognition, and political representation.

The multidimensionality of Indigenous girls’ and women’s disadvantage requires that schools target all three areas. Although presented in this chapter as distinctly separate dimensions, matters of economic, cultural, and political marginalization clearly intersect for these girls/young women in ways that compound and amplify their disadvantage. Family and community obligations and matters such as domestic/family violence, for example, reflect cultural/gendered expectations and oppressions but they also produce or are associated with economic deprivation and political voicelessness. Thus, their amelioration requires a multidimensional approach. For example, while circumstances of domestic violence might begin to be addressed through greater (cultural) recognition (i.e., valuing and respect) of Indigenous femininity and through Indigenous girls’ and women’s greater (political) autonomy and self-determination, such a focus will be limited unless girls and women are provided with appropriate human, material, and social resources/services (economic). Moreover, of course, given that gender is a relation between

males and females, such an approach will be limited if matters associated with Indigenous masculinity (in relation to poverty, culture, and politics) are not considered and addressed.

The injustices of colonization, racism, and sexism confronting Indigenous girls and women are highly complex and varied. However, it is this chapter's contention that schools can support their redress through measures that attend to (1) the specific economic needs of Indigenous females, associated with the provision of appropriate human and material resources; (2) specific cultural needs, associated with legitimizing and valuing Indigenous femininities; and (3) specific political needs, associated with according Indigenous women and girls a voice. Measures that explicitly target the gendered dimensions of Indigenous disadvantage like those detailed in this chapter will be crucial in ensuring Indigenous girls' and women's greater educational participation, achievement, and retention and their success and well-being beyond school.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Gender Identity, Intergenerational Dynamics, and Educational Aspirations: Young Women's Hopes for the Future](#)
- ▶ [Indigenous Youth, Nationhood, and the Politics of Belonging](#)
- ▶ [The Gendering and Sexualization of Young Women Through Sex Educational Practices and Discourses in Southern Africa](#)
- ▶ [The Promises of Empowered Girls](#)
- ▶ [Theorizing Subjectivity and Feminine Embodiment: Feminist Approaches and Debates](#)

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Social Justice and Youth Transitions: Understanding Young People's Lives in Rural Andhra Pradesh, India, and Ethiopia

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Abstract

This chapter draws on research with young people in Andhra Pradesh, India, and Ethiopia, to explore the role of place in the reproduction of social inequalities. The chapter has two aims: first, to shift the focus away from urban-centric assumptions that tend to dominate the study of youth transitions and, second, to contest traditional conceptualizations of youth transition found in much global policy discourse. The chapter emphasizes the ways in which boundaries between childhood, youth, and adulthood are blurred, by exploring young people's past and present experiences of agricultural work and their anticipated futures. Using a longitudinal approach drawing on two case studies, the chapter explores questions raised by the structural poverty that young people in rural areas have experienced. It emphasizes the importance of understanding the interdependence of family members in relation to roles and responsibilities within the household and in subsistence farming. The chapter concludes that the raising of young people's aspirations may not only lead to expectations that qualifications

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acquired through formal schooling will lift them out of poverty but may also encourage a devaluing of farming as a viable livelihood. Yet, there are no mechanisms for young people to get jobs in fragile economic situations. This raises questions about equity and social justice.

Introduction

In recent decades, as enrollment in formal schooling has increased, global policies have begun to focus on youth transitions (Lloyd 2005; World Bank 2006; Scholvinck and Zelenev 2007; UNICEF 2010). Skills development programs have been rolled out in many countries, mostly based on human capital models that assume that young people lack qualifications and credentials to make them attractive to employers in formal labor markets. (There are exceptions – in some Latin American countries, e.g., Argentina and Brazil; from the year 2000 onward, World Bank educational policies based on human capital concepts were rejected and policies have attempted to eradicate child labor, from a rights-based perspective.) Theoretically, human capital models assume that young people follow linear trajectories from school to work and that adulthood involves autonomy and independence but, in so doing, overlook multiple factors that affect young people, such as social class, gender, and poverty status, factors that are underpinned by political economic structures and forms of inequality. Seventy percent of the world's poor live in rural areas, the majority work in subsistence farming (UN 2010), and a large proportion of the population in developing countries is aged under 18 (PRB 2012). Given the fluctuating state of rural economies, access to labor markets in the sense imagined in global policy debates may not be feasible. As argued elsewhere (Jeffrey 2010a; Morrow 2013a), assumptions that the transition from school to work marks the transition to independent adulthood are simplistic. In most cultures, there is a concept of adulthood (usually related to marriage), but there is rarely a moment when the shift from youth to adulthood occurs, and family members are to a significant extent interdependent, as tasks are shared along age and gender lines, especially in rural areas, where children's (paid and unpaid) work is still expected as part of the family unit. Sons in particular have a powerful sense of filial duty to care for their parents. Large numbers of children combine school and work, and the two fields of activity are not easily separated. Children's formal schooling may be negatively affected by working. At the same time, children may choose to work, when schooling is of poor quality, and poverty makes their work a necessity for survival in labor-intensive activities like subsistence and market farming. The models of youth and childhood envisioned in neoliberal policies may not fit with what is expected of young people in contexts of rural poverty, where powerful norms affect young people's roles and there is a strong sense of intergenerational mutuality.

Cuervo and Wyn (2012) note that definitions of rurality are contested (p. 10). "Rural" can be defined bureaucratically, based on population size or proximity to towns, and "rural" tends to be characterized in deficit terms, as lacking in urban qualities. This links to tendencies to dichotomize urban and rural, with a failure to

understand the relationships between the two, and links to stereotypical conceptualizations of rural as conservative, stagnant, and backward and occasionally idyllic, as opposed to towns/urban areas as progressive and creative. Further, rural and urban increasingly overlap as young people migrate to seek better quality educational provision and/or work opportunities, and there may be a flow between the two. Cuervo and Wyn (2012) follow Halfacree's (1993) approach to understanding rural places in terms of social representations of space, thus highlighting "the social diversity of rural places and different landscapes.... emphasising that rural communities are culturally, economically, environmentally and demographically diverse" (Cuervo and Wyn 2012, p. 11).

In developing countries, there is a diversity of rural youth (see Abebe (2007) on rural Ethiopia; Ansell (2004) in Lesotho and Zimbabwe; Jeffrey (2010b) on rural and urban Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, India; Dyson (2008, 2010) on young people in Uttarakhand, India; Katz (2004) on Sudan; Punch (2002) on rural Bolivia; Ogando and Pells (2014) on Ethiopia and Vietnam). Common themes that emerge from studies of rural youth (cited above) are high levels of poverty, the hard physical labor involved in working the land, and material realities of young people's lives including economic shocks like adverse weather, crop failure, loss of livestock, lack of opportunities, and migration for betterment. Conversely, studies find that young people express a strong sense of belonging to place and family enterprises, satisfaction when harvests go well, and camaraderie when working in groups (see Cuervo and Wyn 2012; Punch 2001). (However, similar discourses exist relating to "urban" childhoods and youth.) At any rate, it is important to understand the effects of the physical environment and spatial contexts for young people's daily lives and acknowledge the diversity of experiences and challenges they face.

This chapter contributes to the research literature on social justice and rural youth in developing countries, focusing on experiences of young people growing up in rural Ethiopia and Andhra Pradesh, India (henceforth, Andhra Pradesh). As noted, rural youth in developing countries are not a homogenous entity, and the chapter necessarily focuses on poverty. The chapter brings a plural social justice lens to include other dimensions of justice such as recognition of diversity and the importance of context, as well as participation of different social groups (see Cuervo and Wyn 2012). The chapter focuses on two young women in rural areas and how their aspirations clash with the sociohistorical realities of their communities and personal environments. The chapter also demonstrates how the lines between childhood, youth, and adulthood are blurred, as there are strong norms/expectations of intergenerational mutuality, whereby children assume domestic responsibilities and other productive tasks and family members are interdependent.

Young Lives

This chapter draws particularly from the Young Lives study (www.younglives.org.uk). Young Lives is a longitudinal study investigating childhood poverty in four countries – Ethiopia, Peru, Andhra Pradesh, and Vietnam – over 15 years

(2002–2017). The study aims to improve the understanding of the causes and consequences of childhood poverty and the role of policies in improving children's life chances. It collects data from two cohorts of children in each country: 2,000 children born in 2000–2001 (the younger cohort) and 1,000 children born in 1994–1995 (the older cohort). The sample is not representative, but pro-poor in that poor rural and urban sites were intentionally over-sampled. A survey is carried out every 3 years (2002, 2006, 2009, 2013, 2016) with the full sample of children and their caregivers and is complemented by qualitative research (semi-structured interviews and creative methods) (2007, 2008, 2010, 2014) with a nested sample of children, their caregivers, and other key figures in the community (see Crivello et al. 2013 for a description of methods, approach to analysis, research ethics). Overall, Young Lives findings point to rurality as a source of inequality for various aspects of children's outcomes and experiences, including higher levels of stunting (Pells 2011), poorer educational outcomes (Cueto et al. 2014), and risk of early marriage for girls in Ethiopia (Camfield and Tafere 2011). Here we explore young people's experiences in rural Ethiopia and rural Andhra Pradesh.

Youth Aspirations in Rural Ethiopia

With 85 % of the population of Ethiopia living in rural settings, the government of Ethiopia has expanded the number of schools in these areas and has implemented numerous rural development policies to ensure sustainable agricultural development (Tafere 2014). Education policy aims to produce “educated farmers and other workers who utilize new agricultural technologies” (MOE 2005, p. 6). Within the Young Lives sample, enrollment rates of children in primary school have risen sharply, from 66 % at the age of 8 (in 2002) to 97 % at age 12 (in 2006) and 90 % at age 15 (in 2009), reflecting current trends where schools are available. However, enrollment does not mean that children actually attend school nor that the quality of schooling they experience is good. Tafere (2014) suggests that the majority of parents have been very responsive to the government's endeavor and are eager to send their children to school, but when necessary, children are involved in agricultural tasks, and work tends to trump attendance at school. In analysis of data from 2009, aspirations were still very high. Nonetheless, at the age of 12, about 70 % of the children said they wanted to go to university, slightly more in urban areas. In interviews, children say that only by attaining formal education will they be able to move out of poverty, and uncertainty in agriculture pushes young people to envisage a future life as professionals, in cities, not in farming (Tafere 2014).

Here, a case illustrates the intersections of gender, rurality, and social justice. Sefinesh is from Tach-Meret (all names are pseudonyms), an agricultural community located on the outskirts of a town in Amhara region. The community has changed rapidly in the 5 years the Young Lives qualitative researchers have been visiting. A new road has been built connecting the community with the regional capital; an electrification project supplies the school, a church, and some households; a new health post offers better services; and a new preschool has opened.

For young women in rural Ethiopia, a key preoccupation is early marriage, which they see either as a way to escape rural poverty (Ogando and Pells 2014) or something to be avoided until much later. Sefinesh is an only child and lives with her grandparents. Her mother worked as a housemaid in Addis Ababa. When first interviewed at aged 12 in 2007, Sefinesh mentioned her domestic responsibilities, including cooking, cleaning, collecting dung for fuel, fetching water before school, and herding animals in shared system with other families in the area. She liked learning at school, and she also liked fetching water with her cousins, because they could play on the way to the pump. She described preparing coffee for her grandparents. Because her grandfather was weak and blind, the family had nobody to do the farm work, so Sefinesh was always busy. Each time she was interviewed, she emphasized how important it is to go to school. By 2011, Sefinesh proudly described how she had successfully rejected a marriage proposal, which meant that she could continue in school. She was ambitious, saying she wanted to be a doctor, but was also satisfied with her life in Tach-Meret, where agricultural livelihoods had improved over recent years because the government had provided seeds and apple trees and introduced a reforestation program. However, her aunt's husband had died, and he had been helping on the farm, and now the families were sharing the land with another man, which meant they were effectively sharecropping. Her sister had a baby, and Sefinesh said: "it may be good to have a baby boy because he can help us in herding the cattle and in farming the land when he grows up; but it is not good that she dropped out of school. . . ." Sefinesh thinks of herself as an adult now but explains that she does not want to get married until she is 30, "when I have enough money." While school is important, she says that "work is the most important, because I can't live if I don't work." She describes herself and her family as "hard workers" and explained she missed school for at least 10 days a year:

because there is much work in the potato farm during March and May. At these months, a lot of students miss classes. Besides, during the months of December and January when there is a lot of work on the farm, many students do not go to school..... We go to school only when it is not a working day on the farm.

She also explains that she no longer herds cattle because of the risk of sexual assault. In Ethiopia, young women (and their parents) often describe their fears that they will be attacked by young men when out alone and that the family honor and reputation will be compromised as a result (see Boyden et al. 2012; Camfield and Tafere 2011):

I was herding last year, but not this year because I refused, I am too old to look after the cattle. So the cattle were sold, now there are only too calves and sheep which stay at their place. . . . I was afraid of some risks. . . . I go to fetch water with many other girls; so it is no problem and it is nearby. . . we all go together to fetch fuel wood too.

Sefinesh says she wants to live in big cities: "for example, Addis Ababa . . . the capital city of Ethiopia, I want to live there and have [the] best life." However, she realizes she will have to study hard, because she has "not yet scored the best grade to be a doctor." Sefinesh had high aspirations that involve moving away when she envisaged the future but yet still seemed rooted to the land and seem to be content

with life in Tach-Meret. Tafere (2014, p. 13) notes that children's aspirations are mirrored by caregivers:

Very few rural parents want their children to inherit their poor farming life with its attendant poverty. For example, in the Round 3 survey, when they were asked about the type of occupations they wanted for their children, only 0.52 % of the parents wanted to be 'farmers' like them. Almost all wanted their children to be professionals (e.g. doctors, engineers, teachers, etc.) requiring a high level of education.

However, it is not clear whether poverty is the motivating factor here, or rurality, because there is a complex interplay between the two. Chuta and Crivello (2013) also note the limited opportunities in rural Ethiopia areas for the professional jobs that young people aspire to. They point out that:

transitions to adulthood include processes relating to young people's evolving identities, moral development and sense of social worth. Policy, programmes and practices therefore need to support transitions in this wider sense, in ways that are sensitive to context and to local expectations for young men and women, including existing gender and generational differences, and respectful of difference. (Chuta and Crivello 2013, p. 22)

Gendered expectations structure young people's experiences, and young women's lives are shaped by family expectations that they play an important role in the domestic economy. Aspirations are high, and farming is not valued as a future activity.

Blurring the Borders of Childhood and Youth in Rural India

Similar processes can be observed in rural Andhra Pradesh, though older cohort children have experienced some primary schooling and some secondary schooling; however, many have left school, and rates are higher in rural areas and for girls – within the Young Lives sample, 26 % of girls were no longer in school (Morrow 2013a). There are also concerns (from parents and children) about whether formal education can deliver what it promises and an understanding that young people need to be skilled in agricultural work as a viable (if undesirable) alternative (Morrow and Vennam 2012). Furthermore, the key marker of adulthood in most rural communities in Andhra Pradesh for young people is marriage. The spheres of school, work, and future marriage are interconnected, and experience of each affects the other.

The section draws on a case from Poompuhar, a very poor rural community in the southern part of the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh. The community has changed rapidly in the period of time the Young Lives has been visiting. Government efforts to change the material reality of Poompuhar have focused on creating employment through public work. The introduction of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), which pays people for 100 days' work on government projects from 2006 onward, meant that wages have risen and in 2010, there was plenty of employment, building a railway track and irrigation canals. NREGS is intended to prevent seasonal migration to cities, which has been common in rural Andhra Pradesh, unsettling the rural–urban dichotomy. In 2007, children were involved in cotton pollination work from the age of about

6 years, but interventions by the teacher, *sarpanch* (village headman), and police have meant that children's work had declined. A new secondary school has been built, and staffing had improved in the primary school.

When first interviewed, age 12, in 2007, Bhavana was not at school. She had stopped school after the second grade (age 7). In 2010, she reflected: "I used to think it would have been better if I had been to school," but now "it is better if we learn to work in the fields." In 2007, Bhavana's time was spent working – in domestic work and agricultural work. The family migrated to Mumbai for 6 months each year, where Bhavana's uncle found them work, and Bhavana was responsible for cooking, while family members worked in construction. By 2010, aged 16, she was working in road building in Mumbai with her brother and sister-in-law as well as undertaking seasonal agricultural work in Poompuhar, harvesting groundnut, transplanting and harvesting paddy, and, on NREGS work in a village 4 km from Poompuhar, carrying bricks, stones, cement, and water. She said the family's financial situation "... is improving with becoming older.... we are going to work. We give money to our mother – we won't take even a rupee. . . We went to Mumbai and gave Rs. 20,000 to my mother. . . my mother bought a TV and fan . . ." She enjoys harvesting groundnuts because "we go with people, happily– it would be better if we talk and do the work." She works because her household is "in a very difficult condition. . . I have to go wherever the work is available . . . I am not lucky like [other girls of my age] . . . I have to do a lot of work."

Bhavana explained how it is important for girls to "work well": "One must earn a good name among people.... 'she works very well'. They should feel like that. . . if we do the work well, they call us for the work. . . it would be better if you get such a name. . . we lose respect . . . if we don't work well." Her mother told her that if she learns to work well, her future in-laws will look after her well (see also Dyson 2008). When asked to compare her life to other girls in her community (who don't work), Bhavana said:

Some people work like donkeys. . . but they think about people who don't work. They feel those people are doing well without much work. Whereas we are to [have to] work. We feel like that.

For girls like Bhavana, then, the boundaries between childhood and adulthood are blurred, and notions of transition from school to work do not apply. With hardly any experience of school, their childhoods are mostly spent working. However, this work is not without importance, because working well earns goodwill and respect, supports the wider family, and is crucial for their future lives when they marry and move to live with their in-laws.

Transitions to What and Where

In situations of rural poverty, then, there appears to be a moral economy of intricate connections between material and social values within the context of kinship and the fostering of "intergenerational mutuality." This does not coincide with dominant

approaches to “youth” that emphasize the transition to (independent) adulthood (see Morrow 2013a). As the cases described above suggest, young women’s pathways are structured by powerful norms. While formal schooling has raised expectations and they feel they should aspire to be “professionals” (like Sefinesh), it has also partly modified their desires (e.g., delayed marriage and motherhood); and deeper analysis reveals a complex picture of rural young people’s lives, in which interdependence of generations begins with children contributing to household livelihoods at young ages. Notions of transition from school to work do not apply – these young women are already part of society, productive and responsible, within their households. As Jeffrey (2010a, p. 498) notes: “adulthood is imagined in terms of interdependence rather than autonomy, and people are considered to become less rather than more independent as they mature” (p. 498). Like many young people in their communities, Sefinesh and Bhavana described undertaking numerous work-related tasks as children. Yet in global policy discourses, working during childhood is seen as detrimental to children’s outcomes: “many adolescents and young children . . . are engaged in adult activities such as labour, marriage, primary caregiving. . . assuming these roles, in effect, robs them of their childhood and adolescence” (UNICEF 2010, p. 10). As argued elsewhere (Morrow 2013a), young people learn numerous skills through the work they undertake in childhood, but these skills are not valued. The idea that formal qualifications are needed to prepare children for work is out of kilter with the lived realities of youth in rural areas. Both girls described above worked from a relatively early age, so work was not new to them, though the work has changed in intensity as they have taken on more responsibilities and become acutely aware of their families’ financial situations. Working was not a “marker” of adulthood, and independence and autonomy may not be the ultimate goals of adulthood in such contexts. Further, there are broader societal “transitions” relating to shifting social, educational, and rural development policies that affect them (beyond the obvious influence of formal schooling). The sociopolitical contexts in which young people find themselves are dynamic, and economic transitions may bring opportunities but also social risks. In Ethiopia, in particular, norms relating to age of marriage for girls are in rapid flux (Boyden et al. 2012).

Young people in situations of poverty in developing countries are on varying trajectories. Young people like Bhavana would be considered “left behind,” “robbed” of their childhoods. Sefinesh expresses powerful ambitions but also simultaneously seems to imagine her future life on the land. In each case, their visions of the future have been modified as they have grown older. The low value placed on agricultural work (particularly acute in Andhra Pradesh) and the reification of formal schooling may have profound consequences for young people. When interviewed at the age of 12, they started out with high expectations, but the economic contexts of their families, as well as the available opportunities for work in their localities, mean that their expectations have shifted.

Young people and parents balance the need for survival in the present against anticipated benefits of schooling (Morrow 2013b). Formal schooling has not only increased young people’s expectations; it has also partly modified their desires and values, as exemplified by Sefinesh’s pride in delaying marriage. However, it is not

clear yet whether skilled employment will be available after formal education. Thus, young people and parents perceive the need to acquire practical skills while they are still young. In Ethiopia and Andhra Pradesh, girls still need domestic skills for marriage. Young people are caught in tension between aspirations of global models of childhood and youth imagined in neoliberal policies that emphasize the responsibility of individuals to lift themselves out of poverty, on the one hand, and local norms and socioeconomic environments on the other. Thus, the emphasis on increasing school enrollment and acquisition of qualifications needs to be balanced with attention not only to young people's relationships with their families and communities but also to the appropriateness of formal education and skills training in the context of opportunities for work and specific labor markets.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Global social policies and sociological analyses need to take into account the heterogeneity of young people's experiences in their historical, spatial, and economic circumstances. Care needs to be taken to avoid inadvertently privileging certain trajectories over others. A social justice approach that respects the diversity of young people's contexts could be useful in thinking about how social policies can be "more responsive to the diversity of needs in different social and physical locations" (Cuervo and Wyn 2012, p. 10; Cuervo 2013; Morrow and Pells 2012).

A focus on the importance of context and the way young people actively engage with the places in which they live and the relationships they have to places, spaces, and other people (instead of focusing on "transitions to work" as a way of understanding young people's lives) enables consideration of place, time, and identity to explain the effects of social change. There is a contradiction between young people in the here and now, working and contributing to their families via agricultural and other domestic tasks, which they talk about with some pride, highlighting the interdependence of family members, with dislike of farming as an anticipated future – but at the same time, an acceptance that this will be their likely "fate" (see also Robson et al. 2007). Place alone does not explain the social realities of young people, but a focus on place and the way it affects relationships enable an emphasis on the diversity of contexts, and the rapidity of social change, that intersect with other social categories like gender or "class," and we need to give it appropriate visibility within youth research.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Current Debates in Social Justice and Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [Space and Place in Studies of Childhood and Youth](#)
- ▶ [Stay or Go? Reading Identity Through Young People's Lives in Rural Places](#)
- ▶ [The Politics of Non-belonging in the Developing World](#)
- ▶ [Time and Space in Youth Studies](#)

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Abstract

There has been debate in the UK about potential changes in the class structure and the changing shape of economic inequality. Furthermore, particular emphasis has been directed toward the relative decline – or otherwise – of social class as a key determinant of lifestyles, biographies, and experiences. Within the field of youth studies, researchers have debated back and forth the relative importance of social class as a structuring force in young people’s lives, with some researchers emphasizing the importance of class and others pointing to its declining significance. This chapter briefly reviews some of this history before moving on to consider the ways in which current patterns of economic inequality, and the impacts of the recent global economic recession, have impacted on young lives. In particular, the chapter explores questions around how far young people in the present context may be experiencing particularly harsh impacts from the recession, raising the question of whether this current generation may be at risk of becoming a new “lost generation.” It grapples with possibilities for

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social mobility for the current generation of young people in the UK and in doing so raises questions about intergenerational fairness. This analysis provides challenges for how youth theorists explain and understand young lives, asking questions about where young people might “fit” in respect to the changing class structure and questioning whether young people might form part of a new and growing precariat class in the UK.

Introduction

This chapter reviews the place of social class in the field of youth studies. Historically social class has had a pretty central place in the field although its relative importance for young lives has been hotly debated and its popularity has ebbed and flowed over time. Broadly, it is often asserted that the field of youth studies is characterized by two traditions of research: the cultural studies tradition and the youth transitions tradition. Within the cultural tradition of youth research, social class was central in the seminal work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Hall and Jefferson 1976). More recently, post-subcultural studies, as they are popularly known, have been less interested in social class and instead were more inclined to stress the fragmented and choice-based aspects of youthful identities. Youth transitions studies have always been more firmly wedded to the importance of class and tend to concur that social class remains an important and largely unwavering predictor of social destinations and life chances (MacDonald and Marsh 2005; Webster 2004).

More recently researchers in the field have moved beyond these often quite polarized positions and started to engage critically with the effects of the recent economic recession on the current generation of young people. This is an important task as evidence is emerging which shows very clearly that young people have been particularly badly impacted by the recent economic downturn. The Institute for Fiscal Studies report that the “face of poverty has become substantially younger during recent decades” (Cribb et al. 2013, p. 116). Moreover, some have dubbed the current generation the “bad luck” (ILO 2011) generation destined to face declining life chances and with increasing uncertainty in finding work. Of particular concern here is the potential long-term “scarring” effects of youth unemployment, “whereby the bad luck of the generation entering the labour market in the years of the Great Recession brings not only current discomfort but also longer term consequences” (ILO 2011, p. 5). This chapter engages with some of these issues and raises questions about intergenerational fairness. Finally the chapter reflects on how youth theorists might best explain and understand the place of social class in young lives, asking questions about where young people might “fit” in respect to the changing class structure and wondering whether young people might form part of a new and growing precariat class in the UK. While the chapter is particularly focused on the UK, many of the issues will be pertinent for young people elsewhere.

Youth Studies and Social Class

The field of youth studies is often understood as comprising two traditions of youth research: the youth cultural studies tradition and the youth transitions tradition. These are sometimes referred to as the structural and cultural traditions of youth research, and both of which have a long and somewhat differing relationship to social class. It is not the intention of this chapter to rehearse these older debates in great detail as many good accounts of these often lively debates exist elsewhere (Blackman 2005; Hesmondhalgh 2005; Shildrick and MacDonald 2006; Bennett 2011), but a brief review is helpful in order to set the context for the discussion which follows.

Within youth cultural studies, it was the important work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) which placed social class at the heart of youth cultural analysis (Hall and Jefferson 1976). It was partly in opposition to the then prevailing views that youth could be understood as a phase in the life course – and thus a phase deemed to be largely classless – that the CCCS developed their subcultural theory which had social class at its core. The theory was, however, quickly subjected to widespread criticism. Among the many weaknesses identified within the theory, the CCCS were accused of offering little, if any, empirical evidence to support their views (Roberts 1983; Hollands 1990; MacDonald 1991). Moreover, while social class formed the axis upon which their theory revolved and the CCCS offered detailed theoretical accounts of a class society drawing on theorists such as Marx and Althusser, they never succeeded in showing empirically how these class formations applied to the young people who were the focus of their analysis.

Sustained critique of the work of the CCCS led to the emergence of what rapidly became known as “post-subcultural studies.” Here researchers were less interested in social class and preferred to emphasize the less structurally determined nature of youth cultural experience. As Bennett (2008, p. 427) summarizes:

While there is no denying that structural constraints play a considerable role in shaping a person’s everyday life experience, theorists began to question how far one can assume that the individual is unavoidably a ‘product’ of their class, gender, race and so on. . . . Similarly, theorists began to consider the capacity of individuals to negotiate structural conditions and circumstances – to find an identity and construct a lifestyle that transcends the parameters of such structural experience.

As Bennett implies, even the most committed “post-subculturalist” was never really fully wedded to the notion that “class was dead” (Pakulski and Waters 1996), but rather these theorists engaged more closely with the idea that youth cultural arenas might provide more open – less structurally determined – spaces in which young people might be able to transcend the confines of their backgrounds. That youth cultural identities might be constructed via young people’s own volition and that young people could potentially discard any class cultural baggage and associated disadvantages through engagement with music and dance cultures were, at

least for some, theoretically refreshing. The studies were certainly theoretically courageous and brave (Redhead 1993; Bennett 2000; Muggleton 2000). Yet, post-subculturalists too were quickly condemned for their notable silences about the place of social class in the lives of their research participants. In rebuffing the post-subcultural theorists, some researchers were swift to argue that social class still mattered for youth cultures (Hollands 1990; MacDonald and Shildrick 2007; Shildrick and MacDonald 2006). Thus, while innovative and popular post-subcultural studies never completely overshadowed the view retained by many youth researchers, youth cultural identities remained strongly influenced by social class and perhaps most obviously so, for those in lower socioeconomic positions.

While youth cultural studies have debated back and forth the relative importance of social class, the second tradition of youth research, youth transitions studies, which are interested in transitions into the labor market, as well as sometimes broader family and housing transitions and less often, leisure, drug, and criminal transitions (Webster et al. 2004), has generally remained firmly committed to the importance of social class as a factor structuring young people's transitions. Moreover, within the transitions field, there is some agreement that while young people's transitions to adulthood are certainly more protracted and complex than they were in the past, for the most part "opportunities for identity are not the same for all" (Ball et al. 2000, p. 150) and, furthermore, transitions are understood by most to be strongly influenced by social class background. Moreover, it is difficult to argue with the view that:

Youth unemployment, and the poorer futures it results in, are not distributed equally across society. Youth unemployment is interlinked with and exacerbates a range of other inequalities that young people face from birth to entering the labour market. For many it will be the final nail in the coffin for their hopes of social mobility. For instance, the evidence suggests that young people are more likely to spend time out of employment, education or training (and be scarred for life as a result) if they are from a less well-off background, come from particular ethnic groups, are disabled, have learning difficulties or special educational needs, have caring responsibilities or grew up in care. (ACEVO 2012, p. 15)

The Teesside transitions studies and other research in the UK has shown very clearly how young people from economically marginalized backgrounds can become trapped in poverty and insecurity: in a cycle of low-pay, no-pay churning (Webster et al. 2004; MacDonald and Marsh 2005; Shildrick et al. 2012). Webster et al. (2004) conclude from their studies of young marginalized people in Teesside that:

It is difficult to envisage how – through personal effort alone – these individuals might escape the conditions in which they live. Despite their harbouring of very conventional attitudes and desires for the future, it seems that 'poverty jobs' will be, at best, the final destination of our sample and economic marginality a long-term future.

Historically these two traditions of youth research have dominated the field, but with the onset of the economic recession, some newer themes have come to the fore and it is some of these issues which the remainder of this chapter will explore.

Austerity, Global Recession, and a Potential “Lost Generation”?

As youth researchers attempt to get to grips with the contemporary, rapidly changing landscape of youth experience, there are signs that the field is beginning to shift beyond these older and often rather polarized perspectives, with newer perspectives on social class emerging as part of that. As Gledens et al. (2011) have argued, “there remains space for a more extensive and sustained dialogue between these two main traditions as part of the development of youth studies in the 21st century” and Furlong et al. rightly assert that it is becoming “more difficult to maintain a theoretical distinction between structural and cultural analysis” and furthermore that the “two approaches are showing signs of convergence” (2011, p. 355). While it could be argued that there has been an overemphasis on working class or more economically marginal young people in the youth studies field (particularly in studies of youth transitions), the recent economic recession, coupled with huge austerity cuts in the UK, has led to renewed interest in the transitions of more “ordinary” as well as more advantaged young people. Tying nicely to a recent resurgence of interest in the concept of “social generation” (Wyn and Woodman 2006), it is increasingly suggested that young people – as a generation – appear to be on the receiving end of the most pernicious effects of the global recession. In respect to the situation in the UK, it has been suggested that:

Youth unemployment is now one of the greatest challenges facing the country. Nearly 1½ million young people are currently not in education, employment or training – over 1 in 5 of all young people. A quarter of a million have been unemployed for over a year. (ACEVO 2012, p. 4)

Across Europe youth unemployment is a major and growing problem where the economic crisis has “hit young Europeans with unprecedented levels of unemployment and the risk of social exclusion” (EU 2012, p. 9). There have always been groups of young disadvantaged workers, but as Maguire notes, at times of recession young people tend to suffer disproportionately, a factor attributed to their relative lack of skills and experience (Maguire 2013). These shifts have led some in the youth field to begin to theorize youth as a disadvantaged generation as a whole and in comparison to earlier generations (i.e., their parents) rather than focusing only on the disadvantage of those from poorer backgrounds. Hence *intergenerational* inequalities rather than simply *intragenerational* inequalities are starting to come to the fore (MacDonald 2011; Roberts 2012). This has led to renewed speculation and concern for the possibility of a new “lost generation” (O’Higgins 2001). The idea that whole generations can be impacted by particular historical sets of circumstances is not new, and such calls have surfaced repeatedly through the years, from concerns about generations impacted by the effects of wars or other historical upheavals and events. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore these debates in any depth but in respect to the particular situation of the current generation of young people, there are a number of emerging questions around intergenerational inequality which are pertinent.

Questions around intergenerational fairness are increasingly pressing as many in the current younger generation look likely to end up significantly less well-off than

their parents. This has led to the increasingly popular view that young people are at risk of becoming a “lost generation” or as Howker and Malik (2010) argue the “jilted” generation. Ken Roberts argues (2012, p. 479):

The post-war baby boomers led a long generation in which successive cohorts achieved, and came to expect, continuous improvement in living standards. ...current cohorts of young people in all Western countries will become the vanguard of a successor generation, distinguished by a different youth life stage and also by different characteristic experience of adulthood and, eventually, a different politics than the generation’s predecessor.

Today’s young people are not only facing an unforgiving labor market (largely but not only as a consequence of the global recession) but are also facing a scaling back of public services and the retrenchment of the welfare state. Cushions and privileges enjoyed by their parents’ generation are no longer secure or are being dismantled altogether. Roberts goes on to point out that “the new generation’s situation arose initially within the working class and has now spread upwards” (Ibid). Furthermore, as Reay and colleagues point out from their research on education in middle-class families, particularly for those reliant on state school education, their offspring now rarely enjoy upward social mobility, and instead many are more likely to be facing the risk of downward social mobility (2013). Thus the once near certainties of middle-class family life are increasingly threatened and destabilized, as middle-class families all too often find themselves on “uncertain ground” characterized by “anxiety and insecurity” (Reay et al. 2013, v11).

While UK graduates have expanded in number (and altered at least a little in their socioeconomic makeup), the economy has not been equally accommodating in providing equivalent numbers of graduate-level jobs. Research from the Centre for Economic and Business Research estimated that 44.1 % of graduates from 2012–2013 in the UK were predicted to be unemployed or underemployed 6 months after leaving university, with 36.4 % of graduates who are working employed in roles for which a degree is not necessary (Harbrun and Carfe 2013). The research shows that:

Although university education can generate substantial returns on investment for some graduates; this is by no means the case for every student passing through the system. The current era of stagnant growth for the UK economy, with concomitant high unemployment, has led to reduced prospects for many of those leaving full-time education post-university. (Ibid:14)

As MacDonald has argued, “UK graduate unemployment has shown steep increases since the 2008 recession” (2011, p. 8), producing an “*over supply* of well qualified workers relative to demand for them from employers” (p. 9). These trends are embedded into a wider context which has seen young people across all class backgrounds struggle to get a hold on the labor market. Young people, as ever, are at the mercy of the opportunities – or the lack of them – which await them in the labor market. The pernicious effects of the recession coupled with particular policy changes (such as increasing the numbers of graduates in the UK) have all contributed to an increasingly difficult and hostile climate for young people, including those who in years gone by would have constituted the more advantaged labor market entrants.

Youth Studies and Social Class: Youth Disadvantage and a New Youth Precariat?

A key challenge for youth studies going forward is to explain the shifting landscapes and patterns inherent in young people's cultures, transitions, and life paths as well as to consider how young people might fit into evolving class groupings and classifications. Recently Savage and colleagues have analyzed the largest UK survey on social class ever undertaken and have developed a class schema which is able to take account of "social and cultural boundaries" (2013, p. 243) albeit largely based on statistical data. Savage and colleagues' Great British Class Survey was able to combine "measures of social, economic and cultural capital" to identify seven new social classes which they argue allow for both social polarization and fragmentation at middle levels (Ibid). They argue that while:

A large 'rump' of the established middle (or 'service') class, and the traditional working class exists, there are five other classed which fit less easily into this conventional sociological framing, and which reveal the extent of social polarization and class fragmentation in modern Britain. (Savage et al. 2013, p. 221)

For Savage et al. (2013), their new class groupings are segmented by age with the "emergent service class" being particularly "youthful" (2013, p. 240). Below this group they identify a "precariat" facing particularly deprived, disadvantaged, and insecure positions. Borrowing the term coined by Guy Standing (2010) to describe an increasingly insecure and precarious segment of the labor force, they argue the precariat is the "economically poorest class" (243). Standing's depiction of the precariat is much broader than Savage and colleagues but both raise important questions about how young people might "fit" in new and emerging categories underpinned by inequality and insecurity. As MacDonald (2011) argues:

An important argument emerging recently in youth studies scholarship is that we are witnessing the formation of a "new social generation" across Western industrialised economies, whose life worlds and prospects - as a consequence of long-run social, cultural but mainly economic change - are now defined by insecurity. Compared with the generation of the post-war baby-boomers, the current generation of young people faces tougher conditions and restricted prospects across several spheres. Limited opportunities to make successful transitions through education and into rewarding, standard employment and to establish independent living away from the parental home are just two examples.

But despite these shifts and changes and the seemingly increasingly fuzzy boundaries which separate class groupings, social mobility remains relatively limited in the UK and it remains the case that "social origins are strong predictors of social destinations" (Chan and Boliver 2013, p. 662). Mobility from the lower social groupings upward has remained stubbornly elusive, and in previous decades where upward mobility has seemed to accelerate, these have been the result of changes in the structure of the labor market rather than a loosening of class distinctions (Roberts 2001). To give just one example, the lack of opportunity for working-class young people to enter the professions has long been a concern of governments of all stripes in the UK. In launching its *Social Mobility Strategy* in 2011,

the UK government pointed out that “only a quarter of boys from working-class backgrounds get middle-class (professional or managerial) jobs and that just one in nine of those with parents from low income backgrounds reach the top income band” (HMSO 2011, p. 5). Furthermore there is no question that “professional occupations are dominated by the privately educated” (Ibid, p. 9). Tightening labor market conditions are only likely to exacerbate this historical class legacy as those who possess resources work harder to maintain their positions. It will be the task of new generations of youth researchers to uncover the exact nature of these processes and how they may or may not differ from what has gone before. Nonetheless, it is highly probable that as insecurity spreads, competition for jobs will inevitably increase. As Ken Roberts asserts:

As those from more affluent backgrounds see their middle class positions threatened, parents may be angered by the low salaries that their well-qualified children are being offered, the shortage of long-term career jobs and the debts that the young are incurring and frustrated that they, the elders, lack the resources to remedy or compensate for young people’s difficulties. (Roberts 2012, p. 491)

In the UK the battle for unpaid internships provides a good example. Research for YouGov by Ramanuj and Thompson has shown that 10 % of young people in the upper to lower middle-class groupings have undertaken unpaid internships, while only 3 % of those from skilled manual, shopworker or unemployed backgrounds have done the same. Furthermore, the research showed that the vast majority of people believe that internships offer unfair advantages to economically better-off young people (Ramanju and Thompson 2011), and there is some evidence that parents are paying for internships in order to try and secure vital work experience for their children. As Tholen and colleagues have shown in respect to elites, young people from privileged backgrounds have many opportunities to “familiarise themselves with elite employers and create useful networks. In addition students frequently arrange exclusive internships to seek future opportunities...these networks and connections are inherent to the elite educational experience” (Tholen et al. 2013, p. 142). In tightening labor market conditions and in a context where the previously more secure face insecurity, one might prophesize that these strategies will become more rather than less prevalent and more rather than less important for labor market advantage and success.

Conclusions and Future Directions

Whether a new social class, such as Standing’s precariat (2010), is emerging is yet to be proven, as is the question of young people’s place within either that class grouping or within a differently configured social class structure. What is becoming clear in the UK is that patterns of inequality are widening, with the rich becoming richer and the poor becoming poorer (IFS 2013). Reay et al. suggest that “processes of individualisation, marketization and the dismantling of the welfare state in Britain, have accelerated alongside society becoming more unequal” (2013, p. vii).

For youth researchers, a key challenge over the coming period will be to try and engage properly and effectively with questions of intragenerational as well as intergenerational inequality. Without question young people are facing difficult generational conditions and this requires investigation and appropriate policy responses, but researchers need to carefully map and explain how current inequalities intersect with, and overlay, such generational disadvantage. At the same time, it will also be important to consider social continuities as well as social changes. As Furlong suggests:

Whilst researchers have been somewhat eager to highlight changes and apply new theoretical perspectives to the experiences of young people, fewer commentators have balanced and appreciation of change with a recognition of continuity. In many respects the lives of young people today have things in common with earlier generations: inequalities such as class and gender exert a powerful influence over their lives and many do continue to experience smooth and highly structured transitions. (2009:1)

In a context of tightening opportunity, it is difficult to think that social class will not continue to have a central place in ongoing and emerging debates about inequality.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Critical Moments? The Importance of Timing in Young People's Narratives of Transition](#)
- ▶ [Entering the Precariat: Young People's Precarious Transitions in Japan](#)
- ▶ [Ordinary Working Lives and the "Missing Middle" of Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [Unemployment, Insecurity, and Poor Work: Young Adults in the New Economy](#)
- ▶ [Young People and Employability](#)
- ▶ [Young People's Transitions to Employment: Making Choices, Negotiating Constraints](#)

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Abstract

Social fragmentation of urban life is a growing process in most Latin American cities. In spite of the strong link between urban studies and youth studies, the relationship between processes of socio-spatial fragmentation and the youth experience of the city remains under-explored. This chapter examines the relationship between space, class, and gender inequalities and how they interrelate to shape young people's urban experience and sociability. The expansion of residential segregation, gated communities, new public spaces, insecurity, and fears, among other contemporary urban features, has a strong impact in young people's urban life, which is mediated by class and gender conditions. Drawing on qualitative fieldwork, interviews, and focus groups with privileged and disadvantaged youth in Mexico City, the analysis focuses on two main issues: on the one hand, the processes of "unequal inclusion" and "reciprocal exclusion" in the city and, on the other hand, the patterns of urban interaction based on mutual stigmatization and lack of social recognition.

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Introduction

Social and spatial fragmentation is a growing process in most Latin American cities. In spite of the social progress achieved over the last decades (ECLAC 2012), urban structure and urban life in the region are shaped by persistent inequality. The urban experience of young people is not an exception; spatial inequalities and geographies of exclusion characterize their use of public spaces, their mobility in the city, and their patterns of urban sociability (see also ► Chap. 42, “Space and Place in Studies of Childhood and Youth” in this collection). This process of spatial injustice affects the everyday experiences of youths creating new spaces of unequal inclusion; it also affects their socialization and subjectivization processes building a sociocultural gap between social classes since early in life.

The relationship between social and spatial inequalities or, in other words, between social justice and spatial justice is complex and reciprocal (Iveson 2011). On the one hand, spatial injustice is rooted in broader processes of social injustice (Marcuse 2009). But on the other hand, spatial inequalities have their own dynamics and effects on social inequality (Soja 2010). Therefore, the unequal distribution of resources and rights in urban settings, residential segregation, restrictions to urban mobility, and the expansion of territorial stigmas and insecurity are the cause and the effect of social exclusion and unequal inclusions.

The experience of the city is tied to this reciprocal relationship between social and spatial inequalities. Space is not a fixed or absolute category; it is embedded in social relationships and meanings (Cassiers and Kesteloot 2012). In urban contexts, the experience of place is built in interaction with age, class, gender, and ethnicity, among other categories of social inequality (Ahmet 2013; Bayón 2012). Young and adults, poor and privileged, men and women, and indigenous and nonindigenous have their own urban geographies delineated by the intersectionality of these categories.

The experience of the city is a central dimension in youth life. The construction of subjectivity and the process of socialization suffer a radical displacement during this life stage from the intimate circle of the family to the external world, becoming increasingly affected by their experiences of mobility and sociability with “others” in public spaces or institutional settings without parental control. As Skelton (2013, p. 469) has recently observed “young urbanites are of an age where personal physical mobility to take advantage of all the resources, recreation and sociality offered by an urban landscape is an important part of ‘growing up’ and identity formation.” Independence from the family means a greater influence of peer groups without the surveillance of adults, the interaction with friends and strangers, as well as the use of public spaces, transports, and services (Gough 2008). These aspects make a significant contribution to the construction of new identities, social norms, sensibilities, and cultural repertoires.

Latin America is the region with the highest level of social inequality in the world, and Mexico is a paradigmatic case: almost half of its population lives

in poverty (48.5 %); the Gini index of income inequality is 0.48, well above the OECD average of 0.33; and the average income of the richest 10 % of the population is 27 times higher than that of the poorest 10 % (this ratio is 9 to 1 in the OECD countries) (OECD 2011). These socioeconomic disparities are expressed in the morphology of the cities, but also embodied in the urban social life of citizens. Mexico City is an urban setting of deep contrasts: exclusive residential areas, luxury restaurants and shopping centers, private areas, and clubs for the elites coexist with large deprived peripheries, a growing informal sector, and public spaces of low quality. The spatial segregation, territorial stigmas, insecurity, and fear are some of the main features of contemporary urban life. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the complex relationship between space, class, and gender inequalities and how they interrelate to shape young people's urban experience. Drawing on qualitative fieldwork, interviews, and focus groups with privileged and disadvantaged youth from two contrasting areas of Mexico City (see Saraví, 2015), the analysis focuses on two main issues: on the one hand, the processes of "unequal inclusion" and "reciprocal exclusion" in the city and, on the other hand, the patterns of urban social interaction based on fear, mutual stigmatization, and lack of social recognition.

Cities Within the City: The Geographies of Unequal Inclusion

Young people from privileged and disadvantaged sectors share the same city, but they live in different spaces. Socio-spatial practices define the geography of their own cities, constructing spaces of exclusion and belonging. But at the same time, young people must face inherited forms of spatial injustice with opportunities and restrictions on their urban practices and daily interactions. The result is the making of cities within a city, with different qualities of citizenship.

The socio-spatial practices of young people have at least three main landmarks: the neighborhood, the school, and centers of consumption and entertainment. All of them are key "places" during this stage of life. But they are also central hubs of social networks: children and youngsters develop new social relations and spatial practices from these starting nodes, which in turn shape the socio-spatial fabric of their own cities.

The experience of the neighborhood has been affected by two aspects of a more general process of residential segregation: the expansion of poor and distant peripheries and the rapid growth of gated communities among the upper-middle classes. Both aspects have increased the social contrasts in children and young people everyday urban social life. For poor young people, the neighborhood continues to be a central place of socialization, a source of social norms, and a locus of identity formation. Street corners, open public spaces, and some local and small convenience stores are common places for meeting up with friends, drinking alcohol, or simply spending free time. Although young males are the main protagonists in local public spaces, the neighborhood has also become increasingly important for women's social life. The independent and autonomous mobility of

young women outside the private space of the home is often seriously limited and constrained by adults and males family members. In this context, exacerbated by the expansion of the new peripheries, their freedom of movement is limited to visits of relatives, friends, or small local stores inside the neighborhood. Therefore, the neighborhood represents, for most poor women, the dominant public space in their daily lives (Bayón 2012).

Most of the current inhabitants of the outskirts of Mexico City are the second or third generation of residents (Duhau and Giglia 2008). The patterns of socialization and the precariousness of the urban infrastructure of these poor neighborhoods have become their main references of urban “normality” (Bayón 2012). This urban experience is reinforced by the school trajectories. Children and youngsters usually attend local schools in the same or similar neighborhoods. During secondary education, the school journey could be longer and the use of public transport begins to be a daily experience. Nonetheless, the overlapping of the residential space and the schooling space persists, and both provide a similar urban experience.

As young people gain autonomy to move through the city without the surveillance of parents, places of entertainment and consumption begin to be included in their urban maps. Pubs, arcade games, *sounds* (informal discotheques), *tianguis*, and popular shopping centers are among the main places of this type for the lower social classes. As a consequence of a continuous expansion of the peripheries, new “peripheral urban centers” have emerged in the margins of the city: some local districts have developed and concentrated commercial activities becoming places for consumption and entertainment for young people from nearby neighborhoods. But the traditional “historic downtown” of the city continues to be an important recreational space. Areas of intense informal economic activity, open public areas and parks, and some other specific places in the city’s downtown area (streets, squares, subway stations, etc.) are occupied by different groups of youth as a node of encounter and socialization. The periphery and the downtown are still connected, which implies an intense use of the city and traveling long distances.

In contrast, the neighborhood has lost its meaning and centrality in the life of children and youth from privileged sectors. As in most Latin American megacities, they rarely use the street or any other public space of the immediate neighborhood. One of the main consequences of a rapid and explosive growth of gated communities has been the privatization of public spaces, which have been enclosed within the walls of private neighborhoods. This has been the case in the most exclusive neighborhoods of the local elites, but it has expanded to other middle-class residential areas. In the case of Mexico, most of these exclusive condominiums are also located in isolated areas, without easy access by public transport, and with a design for the exclusive use of cars, which is an extra restriction for using public spaces. Esteban, for instance, lives in a wealthy area in the north of the city and recognizes that “It’s not easy to get out of there, it is so complicated, because it is in the forest, my house is literally in the forest. . . of course, there is a road, but it is a small one, only for cars.” The neighborhood as a space of peer socialization

and identity formation has been replaced by full-day schools and extracurricular activities during childhood or by universities, clubs, and shopping centers during adolescence (Cosco and Moore 2002; Gough and Franch 2005). For the better-off, the experience of the city has been detached from the local neighborhood.

In effect, the school has a central role in the life of privileged youth, becoming a *total experience* (Saraví 2013). Most of their socialization during childhood, adolescence, and youth takes place in the school; it is there where social relationships, the structure of everyday life, and identities are constructed. They are socially homogenous private schools; their location is much less dependent on territoriality and at the same time disembedded from the local neighborhood. The scale of urban segregation in Mexico diminished in the last decades, and therefore schools, like the gated communities, could be surrounded by poor neighborhoods, further discouraging the use of outdoor spaces. Young people and adults see the open public spaces of the neighborhood as a threat. The daily commute to school may be shorter or longer, but it is invariably performed in private transport.

Spaces of consumption and entertainment tend to be semipublic or private, following the same logic of the gated communities. Shopping centers, private clubs, exclusive restaurants, and pubs are also protected by walls, gates, and security guards, as well as other symbolic barriers. New mega urban developments, such as corporative and commercial centers, but also gated communities, have closed and privatized their own public spaces (Pradilla 2005). The urban map of young people from the upper-middle classes is a network of places disembedded from the city, connected by highways and cars, and isolated from the social fabric of the city (Rodgers 2004). Some of these urban nodes are concentrated in specific areas, becoming a citadel or a luxury city within the city (Marcuse 1997).

From an early age, disadvantaged and privileged young people build their frameworks of “urban normality” based on their own experiences in contrasting urban settings. Outside of their respective urban worlds, the city becomes unknown, and they feel themselves out of place; they do not know how to act or interact with others.

The urban experience of disadvantaged young people takes place in an extended and open city. Since early in life, they spend many of their daily hours traveling long distances across the city from one place to another in public transport. Their experience of youth is much more embedded in the social fabric of the city. The processes of socialization and the construction of subjectivity are more attached to the dynamic of public spaces. But this is a city homogeneously occupied by popular sectors and abandoned by upper-middle classes. The expansion of the peripheries and the increasing distances and time that daily mobility requires have strong impacts on different dimensions of everyday life. Jaqueline, for instance, lives in a poor municipality of the eastern outskirts of the city and when she began high school: “Given the problems with transport, I had to leave home at 5:30 in the morning. . . it was so early, and even at that time it took me more than an hour and a half; I had to travel alone, and it was still dark and. . . of course, I was scared. . . in the end, I dropped out.” The peripheries have many disadvantages for children and youngsters: they limit their educational possibilities,

restrict their urban life to the periphery and their practices of consumption to the informal economy, reduce social contacts and favor social isolation, lessen the possibility of shared social experiences, and reduce their employment opportunities. Gender inequalities strengthen the effects of spatial injustice, since the daily experiences of young women are much more limited to the social and physical space of the home, the family, and the neighborhood increasing gender asymmetries and hierarchies.

On the other hand, the urban experience of privileged young people takes place in a closed and exclusive city. The experience of “youth” is much more disembedded from public space and public life. Peer socialization and identity formation are processes developed in private or semipublic spaces, socially homogeneous and disconnected from the social urban fabric. In fact they lack the common skills for urban life and social interaction with strangers. Walking down the streets, shopping in a public market, or traveling in public transport are for most of these privileged youth unknown experiences. Camila is 23 years old and is currently studying in an expensive private university, and she says: “We don’t know how to travel by bus, in public transport; I have used the subway only once in my life, with my dad, but I don’t know how to travel without a car.” None of the 19 disadvantaged young people that were interviewed had a car; but, 17 out of the 20 privileged youth owned a personal car and 14 of them had never used a public transport. The automobile becomes a key resource for urban mobility but also a key contribution to social immobility and isolation.

The Youth Experience of Fear and Urban Insecurity

In recent years levels of urban violence and crime increased dramatically in most of the Latin American cities (Portes and Roberts 2005; Caldeira 2001). Public insecurity and the spread of fear among the inhabitants are one of the most outstanding features of large urban centers in the region. Both have multiple effects on new styles of urban life, shaping every aspect of the daily experience of young people. On the one hand, they are particularly vulnerable to engage in illegal and criminal activities and tend to become subjects feared, stigmatized, and criminalized by the public. On the other hand, young people are also the most exposed to victimization. However, there are clear differences of class and gender in the way violence, insecurity, and fear shape their experience of the city (Gough and Franch 2005).

For privileged youth insecurity has meant a radical transformation of urban life. These changes have affected their patterns of urban mobility and the use of public spaces but also the norms and practices of urban sociability. Martin is a 20-year-old student from a wealthy family living in an exclusive neighborhood of Mexico City; he says: “Since the wave of kidnappings started. . . our parents began to bring us up in a different way. Everything changed, the culture changed: ‘do not go out to the street, it is dangerous, do not open the door for strangers, do not talk to anyone’, and so on. I would love to walk around here, but I don’t feel safe.”

On the one hand, children and youth are socialized in fear; they grew up in an era in which crime and violence associated with urban life favor greater control and supervision by parents and adults of their day-to-day socio-spatial practices (Pain 2001). On the other hand, the socialization and subjectivization in an atmosphere dominated by the feeling of insecurity and vulnerability has resulted in a “spatial habitus” characterized by the identification of prohibited areas, fear of the city, and the rejection of strangers.

As Ursin (2012, p. 472) has recently observed, “lessons in separation and prejudice start early: well-to-do parents prohibit children from playing in the streets, keeping them inside the courtyards, while young people are sent to shopping centers and other semi-public areas.” Their lives take place mostly in closed condominiums, private schools, and other walled spaces of controlled and supervised access. “You are restricting yourself” Valentina says, “You start to reduce your area of mobility and the people you interact with.” Most of these young people do not know how to use public transport and lack the abilities for moving alone in the city, which is felt by teenagers as a significant limitation for their autonomy. For these young people, having a car and being old enough to drive are a crucial step in terms of personal freedom, reducing dependence on “parent taxi” or private drivers (Skelton 2013). Traditional gender expectations put more pressure on young men, for whom dependence on parents, time constraints, and the recognition of fear have greater impact on their identity and socialization as males. They are often more affected given the stereotypes associated with masculinity that demand from them greater independence. The withdrawal from public spaces, growing car dependency, and socialization in socially homogeneous closed spaces have a perverse effect, increasing social isolation, mistrust, and stigmatization of “others,” as well as the perception of the city as a dangerous space.

Being assaulted and kidnapped are permanent threats in the imaginary of privileged young people; these fears are also fed by closed experiences. The likelihood of victimization could be relatively low, but its impact on everyday urban life and socio-spatial practices is very high. In general terms, the consequences of insecurity and fear in the upper classes are less gendered than in young people from disadvantaged sectors, affecting girls and boys in a similar way.

Most of the studies on urban insecurity and fear focus on upper-middle classes, but they are not the only affected. Popular sectors and poor neighborhoods have also adopted some informal practices of securitization such as the closing of streets, the fortification of housing and small stores, and restrictions on urban mobility (Prévôt-Schapira and Cattaneo 2008). These strategies and their potential for seclusion and isolation, however, are always limited and precarious. The presence of young people from popular sectors in public spaces is inexorable, and therefore, they are more exposed to crime and insecurity. Among them fear is an attribute of urban socialization, but they also have multiple concrete experiences of insecurity and violence in daily life. When asked about the effect of insecurity in her life, Abril answered “of course, I’m afraid, you always feel that fear. . . because I have been robbed with fire arms three times on the bus; when I leave the school to go home around 8:00 at night it’s the worst. . .” For them the main concern is not kidnapping

but the fact that they are subject to assaults in public transport on the outskirts of the city, crime and violence in their own neighborhoods, sexual attacks in public spaces, fights with other groups and gangs of young people, and abuses from the police, among other risks associated with urban life. The level of victimization and the contrasts of gender are greater than in privileged sectors.

Women are more vulnerable and subject to specific forms of urban crime, such as sexual assaults. As a consequence of insecurity, they suffer greater restrictions for independent spatial and temporal mobility. Distant peripheries along with urban insecurity narrow labor and educational opportunities, reduce the spaces of autonomy and social interaction, and increase male and adult surveillance on young women. The growing rates of urban crime and violence in poor neighborhoods increase the vulnerability and social isolation of young women. Paola lives in a dangerous neighborhood in the eastern periphery of the city; she says: “At night I cannot leave my home, my parents don’t let me go out due to the violence in my neighborhood. It is too unsafe out there; you cannot go out at night because you could be robbed or even raped.” Insecurity also assumes specific forms for poor young men: casual robberies in the streets, peer violence, and the involvement in criminal and illegal activities linked to their neighborhoods are the main risks (Saraví 2004). The stigmatization and criminalization of poor young men is another common disadvantage that exposes them to discrimination and socio-spatial exclusion as well as police abuse and violence.

In Mexico City, as in many other cities in the region, the effect of insecurity and fear goes far beyond “visible” strategies of residential fortification and privatization of public spaces. They create new geographies of exclusion, undermining the bases of social cohesion (Pain 2001; Low 2005). Age, gender, and class mediate these effects and introduce some nuances, but in all cases urban insecurity and fear reduce the opportunities of shared social experiences, increase socio-spatial inequalities, and impoverish citizen socialization of young people.

Stigmas and Recognition in Youth Urban Sociability

Socio-spatial segregation and public insecurity have strong effects on urban sociability, but also has a cultural dimension (Bayón and Saraví 2013). The approaching or distancing practices toward others, the socially accepted norms of interaction, attitudes of intimacy, or the rejection of some social relationships are aspects based on symbolic boundaries and cultural repertoires (Lamont and Molnar 2002; Swidler 1986). Territorial stigmas and class stigmas are powerful tools of urban sociability. Although they are different and have their own implications, in practice they overlap each other: class stigmas are territorialized and territorial stigmas are classed.

Stigmas have a direct effect on youth urban experience; they can promote exclusion, closure, and socio-spatial isolation. Social relationships reflect the social distances among classes, but they also produce and reproduce the structure of social distances (Bottero 2007). Exclusion takes place through several practices of

discrimination against “others,” social closure through the construction of spaces of belonging “between us” or “those like me,” and social isolation through different practices of avoidance or hierarchical formalization of encounters with strangers.

Urban fear and insecurity in a context of deep and persistent social inequality triggered the development of territorial stigmas (Bayón and Saraví 2013). Violence, crime, and risk are features attached to deprived neighborhoods of the city, and these characteristics have been assigned to their inhabitants, particularly poor young men. Poor areas become “prohibited” or “do-not-go” areas in the urban imaginary of privileged social classes. Even open public spaces are seen as dangerous places that should be avoided. Territorial stigmas represent new barriers for privileged youth mobility in the city and increase the tendency toward social isolation and closure of upper-middle-class youth.

But territorial stigmas are also a mechanism of exclusion for disadvantaged youth. The violence and crime of marginal neighborhoods are the main contemporary source of criminalization of poor young people. As a consequence of these stigmas, poor young males have difficulties finding a job beyond the precarious and informal local labor market and suffer from abuses by the police, who are permanently suspicious of them. “They discriminate against you for everything. . . for the way you speak, the place you live, for everything. . . Just saying, ‘I’m from San Marcos,’ was enough, when they heard that, they told me ‘oh, no, we can’t give you the job. . . who knows what tricks you could pull!!!’ Or, they look at your face, your facial features, and they say ‘no, this guy could rob us.’” That was the experience of Brian looking for a job and living in a poor neighborhood. An aspect of spatial injustice evolves in a process of social injustice that promotes the ghettoization of poor neighborhoods.

Urban sociability is also conditioned by the stigmas of class. Emotional and cultural attributes are associated with social classes and become the basis of moral judgments and assessments. Class as well as territorial stigmas make their contribution to the identity formation of young people and create hierarchies of status shaping spaces of inclusion and exclusion. Both types of stigmas overlap and reinforce each other. In social interaction the identifying characteristics for deploying class designations tend to have to do with the way of life, appearance, or language. These stigmas undermine the “space of citizenship,” the “public space” based on anonymous interactions, and the recognition of “others” as equal citizens. They become social mechanisms of control and regulation of youth urban life.

Poor youth are often discriminated against in cinemas, restaurants, and shopping centers where they are rejected due to their way of dressing or physical aspect. Rafa and two friends visited a sports store located in an upper-class shopping center, and they were immediately noticed by the employees: “they looked us up and down with mistrust. . . followed us all the time, as if we were going to steal something. . . ‘what’s up, why can’t I come here to buy or see something?’ They categorized you: this fucking guy will steal something.”

The physical and symbolic barriers of semipublic spaces against the presence of “others” are based on these stigmas. But poor young people are not only excluded and rejected from particular places; the use of the city and the patterns

of mobility are also regulated and disciplined. The encounters with the police are a paradigmatic example: they embody the power of the State to reinforce a position of subordination in public spaces. As Santiago says: “Everything is your appearance is everything. . . it’s happened to me: if you are hanging out on the streets and a cop sees you *pandrosón* (badly dressed), you will be stopped for revision. But, a well-dressed guy will not have any problem or could receive more attention, a benefit.”

Young people from privileged sectors are also subject to discrimination and exclusion based on socio-spatial stigmas. The class and territorial stigmas associated with upper-middle-class youth emphasize a sense of moral inferiority, such as a devaluation of their achievements, and negative personal characteristics like frivolity, arrogance, insensitivity, or innocence. These symbolic boundaries establish a distinction with those seen and defined as less morally pure or valuable, providing legitimate support for their exclusion from specific socio-spatial contexts. Living in some residential neighborhoods, for instance, or having some physical features like blond hair, or a typical style of dressing or behaving, or some skills like speaking fluent English, constitutes the grounds for rejection and social isolation of upper-middle-class youths by their peers from lower socioeconomic background. Several experiences of discrimination and rejection in different institutional settings and public spaces were reported by better-off young people. Camila speaks about her experience in a public university, where she attended a photography course: “in our first class, the teacher asked us about our previous school, and. . . honestly, I was afraid to say the name of my school, to say ‘I studied at Lomas High School,’ because I knew the reaction, they [her classmates] were going to judge me. Indeed, I felt uncomfortable and finally I left. They did not treat me badly, but I perceived some kind of rejection. . . for instance, no one wanted me on their teams, that kind of things.” Robert also had a similar experience in a birthday party with acquaintances from a lower socioeconomic background: “when I arrived at the party, all of them started to call me ‘ey, *güero* [blond], *güero*, come on, what happened *güero*? Sure you’re a *burger*. . . [petit bourgeois]’; that’s their attitude, just because I live in Miguel Hidalgo, because I speak English, or because I am blond.” The withdrawal of privileged young people from public spaces is a consequence of residential segregation, insecurity, and fear; but it is also produced by practices of discrimination that reject them.

Territorial and class stigmas introduce an issue of social recognition that goes beyond economic inequality but increases social inequality (Fraser 2004). Symbolic boundaries in social interaction play a critical role in the production of social inequalities. As Stuber (2006, p. 288) observes “through their boundary work, individuals constitute the self, claim membership in a group, and draw a line between the pure (themselves) and the polluting (others).” This reciprocal moral and cultural devaluation is seen as a symptom of disdain and misrecognition. Inequality in social recognition, as well as redistributive injustice, is a barrier for youth participation as equal citizen in social life.

Conclusions and Future Directions

The urban experience of young people in México as in many other Latin American cities takes place in a geography of socio-spatial exclusions and unequal inclusions. As Tonkiss (2011, p. 85) points out “economic inequality and social distinction have material consequences, carving out the city as a geography of division and difference, but” the author adds “these urban spaces in turn are consequential for the reproduction of inequity, the reinforcing of social distance, the stunting of life-chances.” The experience of the city is a key mediation of the social experience of inequality.

Socio-spatial fragmentation has individual and social consequences for young people. On the one hand, the construction of subjectivity and the process of socialization are shaped by the intersectionality of space, class, and gender inequalities. Spatial injustice affects psychosocial and identity aspects of children and youth development. Parents surveillance and adult control; patterns and practices of mobility; peer relationships and spaces (and places) of identity formation; autonomy and independence; power relations of class, age, and gender; and even the familiarization with the city environment and the development of urban social skills are based upon unequal urban experiences.

On the other hand, the socio-spatial fragmentation of the city means the creation and consolidation of spaces of unequal inclusion. Different dimensions of social injustice converge in these spaces, concentrating social advantages and disadvantages. The spatial injustice produces and reproduces class and gender inequalities. Children and youth develop spatial habitus according to their respective spaces of inclusion, further fragmenting the experience of the city, diminishing the opportunities of shared social experiences, and increasing a reciprocal misrecognition. Stigmatizations, homogenous public spaces, and fear of strangers increase the social distance and undermine a full citizenship starting early in life.

These aspects offer complex challenges for democracy and social cohesion in Latin American cities. As several studies have shown, the construction of socially mixed neighborhoods is not always an effective way of building civic capital, increasing participation or promoting recognition. *Childhood* and *youth* imply different experiences based on contrasting preferences and identities, as well as on class, gender, and spatial inequalities. Diversity should be respected and even stimulated, but at the same time we need to narrow the inequality gaps that shape the youth experience. Some of the social trends shaping contemporary urban life in Latin American cities seem to promote greater social fragmentation affecting the individual and social well-being of young people. We should be able to imagine new cities for all, based on the use of public spaces, mutual recognition, and respect, and this in turn demands that we find ways to reduce the current and deep class, gender, and spatial inequality gaps in which children and youth are growing up in Latin America.

Cross-References

- ▶ “Black Neighborhoods” and “Race,” Placed Identities in Youth Transition to Adulthoods
- ▶ Current Debates in Social Justice and Youth Studies
- ▶ Social Justice and Youth Transitions: Understanding Young People’s Lives in Rural Andhra Pradesh, India, and Ethiopia
- ▶ Space and Place in Studies of Childhood and Youth
- ▶ The Politics of Non-belonging in the Developing World
- ▶ Young People and Social Class in the United Kingdom

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Abstract

This entry explores the relationship between education and belonging through the experiences of young people excluded from school. It draws on research about young people who participated in an unconventional school hosted by a youth service located in the social housing estate where they lived. Their stories challenge educators to reconceptualize what it means to belong in schools for young people from communities who are typically poorly served by education systems. During the interviews, the young people accounted for their low school attendance and engagement in ways that offered insights into the complexity of their lives and the failure of conventional schooling to accommodate their needs, such as recognizing the importance of their friendship networks. Their recollections are marked by memories of failure, exclusion, racism, invasion of privacy,

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and forced separation from friends. Despite these experiences, most acknowledged that a second chance at gaining a schooling credential provided an opportunity to stay connected to learning. Their experiences suggest that a more socially just first-chance opportunity at school might have held them by affording respite from responsibility, access to supplementary resources, and the pleasure of interactions with chosen friends and caring adults. While unconventional schools can assist students to remain connected to learning, these places do not necessarily alleviate the sense of failure experienced by young people who do not succeed in conventional schools. In this entry, some of the boundaries that separate students into those suited to school and those that are unsuited are examined. It is argued that young people who feel like they do not belong are likely to be viewed as unsuited for school.

Introduction

In Australia, young people are now required to attend school or some form of training until they are 17. However, a significant number leave school early or stay on but achieve weak outcomes (Stanwick et al. 2013). Opportunities for formal learning are flourishing through the spread of unconventional initiatives intended to meet the needs of young people who no longer engage in conventional schooling. In her analysis of the data collected in a national survey of such programs, Te Riele (2012) concluded: “It is safe to state that tens of thousands of young people in hundreds of programs across Australia are engaged in flexible and alternative learning initiatives” (p. 17). These alternative learning initiatives are generally intended to support young people’s “transition” to work or further learning through the provision of flexible arrangements. However, successful transitions are typically seen to involve passing through a series of normative steps leading to work or further learning, and increasing independence.

While a spatial metaphor of transition has dominated youth research, Cuervo and Wyn (2014) argue that “the most fundamental questions for “youth transitions” – those of the entrenched patterns in inequality in young people’s educational and labor market outcomes – have scarcely been addressed” (p. 14). They claim that the establishment of a transition metaphor as an orthodoxy in youth studies has associated problems, such as the normalization of indicators of progress. Consequently, the gradual accumulation of these indicators, such as the completion of school, is considered “natural.” Hence, when students’ progression is slowed or interrupted, it is generally assumed that there is something wrong with them. Explanations for why the progression of students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds might be slow or interrupted are often steeped in deficit assumptions about them, their families, and their backgrounds. This entry attempts to destabilize these normalizing tendencies by describing the experiences of young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and relating their experiences of belonging in education. In a broader sense, this entry illustrates how the mechanisms of

inequality by which schools produce unjust conditions change with time (Connell 2012) and how a sense of not belonging works in ways to exclude young people from learning at school.

All the young people whose stories inform this entry had been directed to attend an unconventional learning initiative housed in an inner city youth service in Sydney, Australia. Most of the young people were Indigenous, and they lived on the social housing estate where the service was located. This setting is described in more detail elsewhere (see Hayes 2013). Their stories were collected in a research project that involved close collaboration with a youth worker employed at the service where the unconventional learning initiative operated. His ongoing connection and familiarity with the former students facilitated the involvement of young people – shy of strangers – in the research. A series of sequential interviews were conducted in small groups, mainly pairs, using selected photographs to prompt the young people's memories of learning in the unconventional program. These photographs captured work in the classroom, process work on projects with community artists, outings to corporate venues, camps, and events showcasing their work to their families and local community. It was hoped that interactions between the students in the groups would help to build a collaborative picture of prior learning experiences.

It was difficult to engage young people in reflecting back on their learning experiences, yet the group dynamics enabled young people to bounce off each other, and at times young people became animated with shared affect. The images of their time in the program triggered flights of memory that ranged across emotions that were funny, thrilling, scary, shameful, sad, "tragic," and "deadly." The photos themselves sustained their interest for long periods of time and provided a platform for them to remember and narrate their experiences. They were transported back into shared pleasurable experiences and turned around by what might otherwise have been experienced as a stressful performance-based activity. The voice files capture variations in intensity in their recollections as they responded in different and sometimes shared ways to the photos. Tuning in to these flows of intensity has been analytically helpful in opening up their resilient bravado-infused accounts of injustices inflicted by the unresponsive institutional cultures of mainstream schooling.

This entry draws upon stories from Jules and Lizzie (not their real names), two young women of color, who were friends and who agreed to be interviewed together. Analysis of the interview transcripts was conducted by the research team (including the youth worker), with outside Aboriginal experts (and at times with the research participants themselves). The interpretations of a number of researchers with greater and lesser distance to the research participants and contexts have contributed to the analysis of the concept of belonging. Nevertheless, the following interpretations of the data provide "provisional and mobile understandings" (Thomson 2010, p. 11) of the young people's experiences of education and belonging, rather than unmediated truths about young people's lives.

Belonging at School

Yuval-Davis (2006) has outlined an analytical framework for the study of belonging and the politics of belonging. She offers a notion of belonging that involves webs of relationships but firstly emphasizes attachments and secondly actions. Yuval-Davis identifies three types of attachments: those associated with social locations, identifications and emotional attachments, and ethical and political values. The young people in the unconventional learning program shared multiple attachments due to their social locations: they were under 17 years of age and therefore still required to attend school, lived on a housing estate they identified with, and expressed affinities with a range of marginalized cultures, including “youth” cultures, Indigenous cultures, and music cultures. This section describes the young people’s experiences of education and belonging, beginning with how they attribute ethical and political values to their attachments and social locations. This description of their identifications and emotional attachment is followed by accounts of how they linked their actions to these attachments as they navigated schooling institutions.

Ethical and Political Values: Stigma and Privacy

In the provision of services, and in the conduct of research, it is generally assumed that if we knew more about people who are not well served in existing systems, we would be able to provide better and more responsive services. However, an important mediating condition is the manner in which such information is collected and handled. Our participants were strongly attached to communities that had significant experiences of personal trauma from institutional interventions. They were alert to how our efforts to gather information from them could re-energize the damage caused by prior mishandling of personal details, such as the repeated assertion of deficit discourses about under-resourced families and individuals. Information-collecting exercises were familiar to them, and careful consent processes allowed them to express their views on intrusive claims to young people’s personal information, which is part of their experiences of schooling. They repeatedly communicated the importance of privacy to the harmonizing behaviors that are practiced in under-resourced communities. These distinctive interaction styles buffered the effects of unwanted attention on problems and hardship and limited the humiliation that is experienced when personal boundaries are transgressed. This concern with privacy in itself offers important insights into belonging within educational institutions.

Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are generally expected to supplicate themselves by approaching schooling institutions as sources of help and support. The institutional logics of schools tend to position these young people as in need of social and emotional assistance. It is presumed that they will not receive this from their families, who are almost universally assumed to be dysfunctional. The perverse impact of such logics is that young people’s learning needs and

right to a quality education may be cast as secondary or unachievable due to the hardships they face and resource shortfalls in their families and communities. These overarching low expectations accompany pressures on young people to share family problems in order to access targeted material resources when they are needed.

Jules and Lizzie described how they felt threatened when their problems and personal experiences were widely known. They expressed concern about teachers who demonstrated that they did not understand or respect their privacy and need to contain personal and family business. They objected to the stares and “funny” behavior associated with people knowing their business and feared that this made them vulnerable to being stigmatized due to their social and economic location.

Jules first broached the question of their social and economic location when she sarcastically noted that the suburb in which she lived had “a trust issue.” This anthropomorphic perspective conveys her view that the toxicity of impoverishment, repeated betrayals, and ongoing stigma spilled between individuals and leached into place. Her “place” was an area where people who had been uprooted from their lands of origin clustered. This lifeworld characterized by a strong sense of interconnectedness is important in understanding the complexity of overcoming broken trust for young people who have a strong collective orientation. Jules felt that she and other students like her could not individually resist the damage done to people’s trust. She and Lizzie went on to emphasize that the question of trust was most acute for people their age. Their position in their family (as protectors of younger siblings and not yet independent adults) placed them in a nexus where they were restricted in their capacity to deflect the intrusions of teachers, other professionals, and peers. They dealt with the vulnerability of this position by remaining as silent as possible about family practices and any resource shortfalls they faced.

These issues are not only pertinent to schooling practices but also to research practices that hope to gain more finely tuned understandings of the processes of belonging and how this underpins disengagement from conventional schooling and potential reengagement. When interviewers hit on sensitive issues, the participants often “cooled.” They were highly attuned to and actively resisted activities that would undermine the delicate fluid lines between public and private knowledge that were necessary to harmony in under-resourced communities. In spite of these well-maintained silences, barely perceptible and inchoate contours of family life shaped the underbelly and asides of interviews. When we thought we had accumulated enough trust, we asked directly to speak to family members with the aim of understanding more about how the educational resources of the alternate program were perceived in the community. Jules and Lizzie directed us to “skip” questions about their families and to not talk to any family members. Other participants used different tactics to deflect intrusive questions.

The idea that students from disadvantaged backgrounds resist schooling so they can preserve their sense of group identity, or class belonging, has informed many accounts of schooling inequities. The ethical practices of the young people

we interviewed could be read as resistances to schooling and schooling practices designed to support students who experience resource shortfalls and complex family circumstances. However the idea of resistance, well-documented in Willis's (1977) groundbreaking study of working-class lads in the 1970s, suggests students do not understand and are not looking to accrue the resources available through schooling. While resistance to some institutional practices was evident in our study, this resistance was to intrusive practices rather than to aspiring to the benefits of education and social mobility. In contrast their concerns were to keep stable and safe other aspects of their lives rather than an attempt to rebuff mainstream resources or even values.

Identifications and Emotional Attachments: Getting Over "Shitty School"

Jules and Lizzie consistently emphasized the importance of relationships in their lives. They often used the phrase "you just have to put your head down" to emphasize the individualism of schooling journeys but accompanied these mantras with vigorous nods of agreement that emphasized the shared challenges of enacting such singularity. The benefits from their affiliation echoed Wierenga's (2009) work that emphasizes the resources made available through trusting relationships. The importance of being connected was articulated in accounts from all the students in the unconventional learning program when they talked about what got them to school and what good teaching looks like. Decisions about attendance and nonattendance were based on significant affiliations; these young people sought out their friends wherever they were. Nonattendance was contagious: if they got to school and their friends were not there, they left; if they arrived and their friends were at school, they stayed. This contagion was not about a relaxation of norms and mores or the more common phrasing of "being led astray" but instead points to a need for connectedness.

All these young people indicated they chose to attend extracurricular events if the "right" people were going and if they felt a connection to places they were going to. Being with peers who shared the challenges in their lives was critically important to their capacity to engage with school activities. They accounted for their nonparticipation in different schooling experiences in terms that emphasized their responsibilities to others, connectedness, and sense of belonging.

The presence of others who shared their values about family and understood their need to manage stigma muted the burden of the visibility that stigma produced.

For Jules and Lizzie, "good teaching" was centered on recognition of these important sustaining relationships. Many of their tensions with teachers were about the conditions of learning and teaching in the classroom. These tensions occurred when the practices they used to maintain and affirm their connectedness to each other were not valued. The most interesting example of this was the way they negotiated "distance" from each other. They acknowledged that they interrupted

and talked a lot during class. They claimed that they managed this by cutting off from each other and listening to music through headphones, but some teachers would not let them do this. They distinguished between teachers that recognized how they use music to moderate their own behavior and to manage their relationship with each other and meet other demands, such as concentrating on schoolwork.

Practices that marked and maintained their shared identity with peers enabled them to carve out spaces for relaxation where they could behave like children, escaping the care responsibilities they carry in their lives outside school and the constant need for vigilance about their own safety. Social practices of shared laughter and silliness are often interpreted as signs of immaturity, but these young people discussed their silliness in ways that demonstrated self-awareness and a desire that teachers and others would recognize the competencies and burdens they carried in their homes and in public spaces which are often racist and diminishing to people who are economically and socially disadvantaged. This is an important part of the backstory of why schooling practices need to be more flexible and accommodating of students' different lifeworlds. These recurring tensions with teachers were not simply due to the students pursuing other pleasures or attempting to undermine classroom rules. They are a product of schools' inability to recognize and accommodate the importance of peer relations to the well-being of young people in general and especially to those who experience social exclusion in some way.

The Politics of Belonging at School

The politics of belonging involves not only the maintenance and reproduction of the boundaries of the community of belonging by the hegemonic political powers but also their contestation and challenge by other political agents. (Yuval-Davis 2006, p. 205)

In communities that have not been well served by schooling, educational attainment involves struggle of a political nature. For marginalized communities, this struggle is never won once and for all. Instead, it takes on different forms under changing conditions. In Australia, Indigenous people have a history of exclusion from schooling and of it providing them with weaker educational outcomes. The practices of these institutions maintain boundaries of belonging that produce the kind of alienation that Jules and Lizzie described. Any suggestion that these boundaries are contingent, and therefore open to change, is generally dismissed or viewed as unnecessary because, it is commonly assumed, marginalized families are responsible for transmitting forms of cultural capital and concomitant aspirations that inhibit the educational attainment of their children. Research in social justice and education has long pointed out the inherent devaluing of the knowledge of marginalized cultures that underpins education based in deficit ways of thinking about educational and economic inequality (see for example Moll et al. 1992).

Bourdieu's (1986) concept of capitals has been widely used to explain differences in the educational experiences and outcomes of children from different social class

backgrounds. The contributing role of differentially valued cultural capital, including educational and employment resources, in young people's educational trajectories is undoubtedly an important consideration for the design of policy and programs which target students from marginalized backgrounds. However, the influence of families is far more central to young people's lives than suggested by the myopic focus on the transmission of cultural capital in youth studies and educational research (Wyn et al. 2011) that is underpinned by an assumption that a state of independence from family is both inevitable and desirable. This thinking uncritically takes up individualization and autonomy as an inescapable goal and end point and forecloses any consideration of interdependence and multidirectional flows of support.

There is a considerable empirically informed theoretical work that counters the totalizing accounts of the individualization thesis. Contemporary research on partnering and parenting suggests that people are not operating as autonomous, self-actualizing individually differentiated subjects under the diminishing social structures and supports that typify neoliberalism but are more inclined to operate as "energetic moral actors" working hard at valued commitments to remain embedded in webs of relationships (Williams 2004). In relation to young people, there are also studies that illustrate how young people are equally energetic in their efforts to support and enrich the family relationships, which sustain them (Ridge 2007; Skattebol et al. 2012; Wyn et al. 2011). While these energies are visible when one is looking for them, they are barely noticeable in popular discourses about childhood and youth and equally silent in discourses about schooling and what helps students succeed in school.

The notion that educational attainment is the product of individualized efforts is challenged by a significant body of qualitative research, which explores the backstage of school life (Lareau 2003). Families not only transmit the cultural capital necessary for young people to succeed in educational institutions, they also actively work to produce and generate this capital and to transform habits and orientations that act as barriers to school achievement. Families who have been unsuccessful in navigating educational institutions as well as those who have been successful make these efforts. Furthermore, there is considerable research that debunks the idea that families who have been poorly served by education systems have low aspirations for their children and do not value education (Lupton and Kintrea 2011).

Everyday life in the communities of the young people in our research was tempered by the emotional and material struggles of adults who have grown up with the trauma of forced removals and social exclusion. These struggles drain material and emotional resources across families and communities making demands on young people. In our conversations, young people described their obligations to engage in practices that maintain family safety in the face of stigma and ongoing trauma. While we gained a sense that these young people were independent before their more affluent counterparts, and more likely to be fulfilling adult roles in their communities, we were also told very clearly about community efforts to support them in education.

They felt that they had to "get over the shitty school" and get into learning and achievement. There was an element of delight and confidence conveyed in using the

phrase “shitty school” in a formal interview about school. The confidence underpinning the phrase and its legitimacy may well be generated by widespread recognition in their communities that the institutional resources available to support their learning were poor and were “shitty.”

However any recognition that the institutions were falling short of good provision was embedded in the “put your head down” or “get on with it” discourse discussed earlier. Jules and Lizzie concurred that they were “lectured” every day to engage in schooling. In exasperated tones, Lizzie explained that the people they were close to regretted not going to school:

You hear that one every single day of your life, it does your head in, so you go and say shut the F up.

When asked who was saying “go to school” and “work hard at school,” a fast running list of names poured forth: *mom; everyone; two little sisters, older people, aunties, and uncles; relatives and friends; and my sister’s friends*. The excited building of the list invoked a cacophony of voices all urging the transformation of a schooling habitus of leaving early and giving up and called for identifications as students able to thrive in the school system. This neophyte schooling habitus is one that emphasizes persistence and resilience in the face of institutional failures.

Research that elucidates cross-generational continuities and the transmission of life-affirming hopes (McLeod 2007; McLeod and Allard 2007) challenges the dominant idea that family influence is limited to linear transmissions of valued or non-valued cultural capital. This biographical work with young women on the margins of education highlights the importance of less recognized capital and orientations. McLeod (2007) captures the intensity of the shared desires of mothers and daughters to “interrupt any generational repetition” of impoverishment (p. 163) and promote orientations to hope. Similarly, Sanderson’s (2007) work also illustrates the transmission of emotional and enacted hopes that educational attainment is a route out of poverty for families that have been historically failed by education systems. This work gives insights into the delicate intimate maneuvers within families who have experienced educational failure and shows how they rework possible ways for future generations to be successful students in the context of system level failures.

While these are stories of how hope is reinvigorated, it is important to recognize the continuing weight of deficit discourses on young people and their families. Diane Reay (2004) offers vivid accounts of working-class black mothers’ advocacy attempts within schools and support for their children in the face of institutional racism. These attempts often backfired and were seen by schools as examples of “parents being out of control” – of dysfunctional families – rather than attributed to the idea that parents are engaged or invested in their children’s education, which is how such attempts by middle class parents are typically viewed (Mirza and Reay 2000). Even heroic efforts to succeed at school will founder unless the children of marginalized families are recognized as not only having a right to education, but a right to belong at school.

Conclusion and Future Directions

In this entry, Jules and Lizzie offer an insight into the experiences of young people excluded from school that was not easily obtained. It required the cooperation of familiar adults, time, and patience to build up the trust and rapport necessary for them to share their stories. While their sustaining and mutually supportive bond is a particular one, generated in a particular time and place, it does suggest how the universal institution of schooling functions in ways that maintain and reproduce communities of belonging – communities from which Jules and Lizzie were excluded. Their bond provided each of them with more than the simple pleasure of a teenage friendship; it provided a protective shield of resistance and a source of strength in the face of multiple threats to their well-being, some of which emanated from the practices of schooling.

As far as Jules and Lizzie were concerned, their experiences of conventional schooling were missed opportunities that did not provide them with spaces in which they could act their age in the company of valued friends and supportive adults. They failed to be in places where they felt cared for, where their interests were nurtured, and where they felt they belonged. The ethical arrangements that would have made Jules and Lizzie feel respected, safe, and shielded from judgmental gaze require different kinds of relationships than those they experienced at school. This entry has focused on the ethical and political values and the identifications and emotional attachments of two young marginalized girls. Their experiences do not only speak about them, they also reveal how schools might become places where they might belong. Belonging involves mutual obligations that are facilitated by reciprocal relationships. In conventional schools, these mutual obligations are operationalized through schooling practices that seek identifications and emotional attachments with all young people. The purpose of these practices is not only social in nature with the intention of making schools more pleasant places, these practices are also political in nature with the intention of making schools more inclusive and open to all young people. The diversity and complexity of young people's lives mean it is not possible to devise a "how to" list of belonging strategies. Instead, such responses require a careful reading of young people's needs informed by ethical and political values that prioritize belonging as a desirable and necessary outcome of socially just schooling. The conventional schools that Jules and Lizzie attended engaged in the politics of belonging in ways that excluded them and made them feel like outsiders. A commitment to a different kind of politics – one that seeks identifications and attachments with marginalized communities is a necessary first move in order for young people like them to feel a sense of belonging at school.

Cross-References

- ▶ [“Black Neighborhoods” and “Race,” Placed Identities in Youth Transition to Adulthoods](#)
- ▶ [Current Debates in Social Justice and Youth Studies](#)

- ▶ Gender Identity, Intergenerational Dynamics, and Educational Aspirations: Young Women's Hopes for the Future
- ▶ Indigenous Girls, Social Justice, and Schooling: Addressing Issues of Disadvantage
- ▶ Indigenous Youth, Nationhood, and the Politics of Belonging
- ▶ The Ambivalent Implications of Strong Belonging for Young People Living in Poor Neighborhoods
- ▶ The Politics of Non-belonging in the Developing World

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Part VII

Labor

Andy Furlong

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Abstract

This chapter explores the experiences of young adults in the new economy. It focuses on employment, unemployment, and precarious forms of work, highlighting the consequences of these changes for young people, both in terms of their impact on objective outcomes and in relation to subjective impacts. It argues that high unemployment and precarious forms of employment are not temporary phenomenon linked to recession but are part of a long-term trend involving the growth of low-skill jobs and part-time employment among young people: trends that may hit less-advantaged youth hardest but which also impact on those who have invested heavily in education and training. These trends have serious consequences for young people's well-being.

Introduction

Youth unemployment is back in the headlines, especially in parts of Southern Europe where one in two young people are out of work. The recession and the implementation of austerity measures have had a severe impact on young people

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who are trying to make inroads into the labor market at a time when recruitment is, at best, slow. Research clearly shows that when labor market conditions are harsh, it is young people who suffer most as they are more likely than older people to be in transition and they are less likely to have secure contracts. In most developed countries, even in times of prosperity, young people are two to three times more likely than older workers to be unemployed (O'Higgins 2001).

The aim of this chapter is to explore the experiences of young adults in the new economy. This not only inevitably involves a focus on unemployment but also offers a broader analysis of contemporary structures of opportunity including the new conditions of insecurity that are affecting young people across the developed world. Clearly those without work are most visible, and it is they who cause most concern among politicians and media commentators. However, it is not only the unemployed young people who are suffering; many more occupy a zone of precarity characterized by insecure and fragmented experiences (Furlong 2007).

When exploring the conditions affecting young adults in the contemporary labor market, there is a danger of confusing temporary circumstances that are linked to the Great Recession and its aftermath with trends that predate the recession. This confusion is understandable given that a major recession may accelerate changes that are already in place. Indeed, while recessions are temporary, they frequently represent turning points at which emergent pre-recession trends start to shape the new reality. Thus while rates of unemployment may decline, the future may be characterized by precarious conditions which impact both on living conditions and patterns of well-being.

In this chapter we describe the conditions currently facing young people in labor markets in the Global North, focusing on employment, unemployment, and precarious forms of work and anticipating future trends in opportunities. The consequences of these changes are discussed, both in terms of their impact on objective outcomes and in relation to subjective impacts. The chapter concludes with an evaluation of sociological interpretations of the possible futures that face young adults. This provides a context for other contributions to this section that highlight the ways in which resources shape choices and underpin processes of social reproduction (Snee and Devine) or which focus on discourses that underpin policy responses to conditions in the contemporary labor market, especially the tendency to explain outcomes in terms of employability (Cuzzocrea). Other contributions focus on those whose conditions are marked by precarity (Inui et al.) and of those who are neither privileged nor especially disadvantaged who are described here as the "missing middle" (Roberts).

Employment, Unemployment, and Insecurity

One of the key trends for youth labor, which long predates the recession, is the decline in the number of young people in employment and the shift from full-time to part-time working among those in jobs. Among 15–24-year-olds in the OECD countries, 37.8 % were in employment in 2011 (down from 43.3 in 2001), with

around one in four of these working part time (OECD 2014). The main cause of the fall in employment rates among young people has been the increase in participation in education, especially the growth of higher education, which was triggered by a demand for more highly educated employees in advanced industrial economies.

With young people entering the labor market later and taking longer to move from part-time or temporary jobs that they may combine with education, it is difficult to provide a meaningful snapshot of their distribution across employment sectors. What we do know is that in recent years, many of the jobs created have been at the bottom end of the labor market in routine, low-skill jobs. Hotels, restaurants, and retail outlets account for the employment of many young people: in the UK, for example, nearly four in ten young people work in hotels and restaurants (European Agency for Health and Safety at Work 2007). Moreover, in Europe and North America, the areas of employment that are predicted to see the greatest growth over the next decade are typically low-skill, low-wage jobs.

So while there has been strong growth in higher education participation, which, in many countries, is now a mass experience, competition for graduate-level jobs is intense and many graduates will not gain employment commensurate with their qualifications. To make matters worse, in many countries, there has been a contraction of jobs in the middle-skill ranges, resulting in “hollowing out” of the labor market. This hollowing out has, according to Sissons, led some commentators to talk of the labor market as being increasingly structured like an hourglass and bifurcated into good and bad jobs (2011, p. 4). This trend can also be linked to the decline in opportunities for apprentice training (triggered by the decline in industries like engineering and printing) which is visible in countries which have traditionally had strong apprenticeship models (such as Germany) as well as in countries where fewer apprenticeships have traditionally been offered. In the UK and the USA, for example, fewer than five percent of each year-cohort of 20–24-year-olds are being trained as apprentices (Christopoulou 2008).

While employment opportunities are changing, currently youth unemployment is, rightly, a major concern in a wide range of countries. Leaving aside the extremes of countries like Spain and Greece where a majority of young people are workless, in many European countries, it is commonplace for one in five young people to be unemployed. Indeed, in the north of Europe, rates in excess of 20 % are fairly typical (e.g., the UK, Sweden, France, Belgium) with Germany, Austria, and Switzerland (which all retain fairly strong apprenticeship systems) being the only countries to register unemployment rates of less than one in ten. Gender differences in unemployment rates are small: on average 0.2 % higher among females in the 28 countries of the European Union (Eurostat 2013).

While the US subprime mortgage crisis triggered a recession in many countries, levels of youth unemployment there are now slightly lower than in Europe (16 % in 2012) (OECD 2013), although some cities in the “rust belt” of the industrial north have much higher rates, with Black and Hispanic populations being particularly hard hit (the unemployment rate among Black and African American 16–24-year-olds is 29.7 % compared to 14.7 % among the white population (ILO 2013a).

Although not directly affected by recession, the global financial crisis has had some impact on the Australian economy with youth unemployment having increased to 25.5 % (The Australian 2013). As in other countries, there is a strong regional variation with youth unemployment rates in excess of 40 % in the ten top areas of disadvantage (The Australian 2013).

For countries directly affected, there are certainly strong associations between the Great Recession and the increase in youth unemployment occurring between 2008 and 2009. However, while unemployment fell from 2009 to 2011, it began to rise again in 2012 with projections forecasting further increases until 2018 (ILO 2013b). In other words, high levels of youth unemployment are likely to be part of the landscape for the foreseeable future.

While youth unemployment has frequently been used as the prime indicator of the “health” of the youth labor market, increasingly it is regarded as a blunt instrument. There are a number of reasons why unemployment rates provide only a partial picture. First, in a wide range of countries, welfare regimes have become harsher, with more restrictions on eligibility, more punitive sanctions for those deemed not to be fully engaged in the search for work, and the increased resort to compulsory training and work experience placements. Second, partly influenced by harsh welfare regimes but also reflecting changes in employment practice, it has become more common for young people to accept part-time jobs or hold a number of part-time jobs when they really want full-time employment. Third, educational participation has increased, and for some continued education is undertaken due to a perceived lack of opportunities (the “discouraged worker” effect). Fourth, with an increase in precarious forms of employment and the spread of new contractual arrangements, such as zero-hour contracts, growing numbers of young people who are in work are in insecure, vulnerable positions.

One of the alternatives to the use of unemployment rates has been the increased use of statistics relating to young people who are not in education, employment, or training, commonly referred to by the acronym NEET. The focus on NEET can be linked to political perspectives on youth unemployment which were being expressed in the UK in the 1980s and 1990s. Specifically, there was a view that those under the age of 19 should not have the “option” of being unemployed: all should be productively occupied in education or training. With eligibility to unemployment benefits withdrawn, a new term was needed to refer to those who had left education but who had not entered employment or found a place on a training program: from the late 1990s “the term NEET was firmly established as the only acceptable form of language to be used in referring to workless youth” (Furlong 2006, p. 556).

Leaving aside the ethical issue of denying workless young people the recognition as being unemployed and inferring that unemployment is a personal choice, the focus on NEET is problematic. Essentially the NEET group are fairly heterogeneous, although the largest single subgroup are those who meet the internationally established definition of unemployment (both actively seeking and available for work). Also included in the NEET group are those who are sick or disabled, those looking after children or relatives, and those taking time-out, undertaking voluntary

work or developing skills in informal settings. Essentially the category combines disadvantaged young people who lack the resources to manage transitions with more privileged young people who are able to exercise considerable control over outcomes.

Eurofound breaks down the NEET group into five distinct subgroups:

- The conventionally unemployed: the largest subgroup, which can be further subdivided into long-term and short-term unemployed
- The unavailable: includes young carers, young people with family responsibilities, and young people who are sick or disabled
- The disengaged: those young people who are not seeking jobs or education and are not constrained from doing so by other obligations or incapacities and take in discouraged workers as well as other young people who are pursuing dangerous and asocial lifestyles
- The opportunity-seekers: young people who are actively seeking work or training but are holding out for opportunities that they see as befitting their skills and status
- The voluntary NEETs: those young people who are travelling and those constructively engaged in other activities such as art, music, and self-directed learning (2012, p. 24)

Both the International Labour Office (ILO) and Eurostat now gather statistics on the numbers of young people who are NEET, although while in the UK the term was initially only applied to those under the age of 19, the ILO collects statistics on NEET rates among 15–29-year-olds while Eurostat tends to focus on 15–24-year-olds. In Europe in 2012, Eurostat estimated that 7.5 million young people, 12.9 % of the age group, were NEET with just over half of these being defined as unemployed (EUROFOUND 2012). The ILO put the OECD (2010) average at 15.8 % (ILO 2013b). Despite the criticisms leveled at the use of NEET as a category, it does capture disadvantage to the extent that those with low levels of educational attainment are three times more likely to become NEET, while immigrants are 70 % more likely to be NEET and those with health problems or disabilities 40 % more likely (EUROFOUND 2012). In Europe differences in NEET rates between males and females are low (less than 1 %).

One of the key advantages of the emphasis on the NEET group is that it draws attention to young people who are not unemployed in a traditional sense but who are encountering difficulties in making a transition to employment. However, to capture vulnerability more holistically, it is important to be able to estimate the numbers of young people who are in insecure forms of employment or who are working fewer hours than they would like. Arguing that a young person has not completed the transition to work until they have entered a form of employment that meets what they refer to a “basic criteria of decency, namely a permanency that can provide the worker with a sense of security, or a job the worker feels satisfied with,” the ILO has made significant advances by trying to capture transitions to “stable employment” (ILO 2013c). However, present development work is largely confined to Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.

Back in the 1970s and 1980s, part-time working was largely the preserve of women who were caring for families and young people who wanted or needed to earn some money to support their leisure lifestyles while at school or college. Today part-time employment is extremely common among young people, many of whom would like, and are seeking, full-time employment. Indeed, it is not uncommon for young people to juggle a number of part-time jobs in order to try and earn a decent living, and after graduation many university graduates remain in the part-time jobs that were once a means of subsidizing their studies while seeking graduate employment (Furlong and Cartmel 2009). In the UK, since 1984, the number of young people in part-time jobs increased from 630,000 to 1.8 million (Howker and Malik 2010). In the OECD countries, in the decade from 2001 to 2011, the percentage of young people working part-time increased from 21 to 29 (ILO 2013b). These average increases, however, conceal some large country-level variations: in 2011 in Australia, 43 % of young people in work were working part-time hours, the corresponding figures in the UK were 37 % and in the Netherlands 66 % (ILO 2013b). While the variation in percentages partly reflect the number of young people participating in education and working while studying, the recent increases in part-time working do not reflect a corresponding growth in educational participation but reflect patterns of job creation: of 4.9 million jobs created in the UK since 1984, 2.6 million are part time (Howker and Malik 2010).

Another issue which has led to a significant reshaping of the youth labor market relates to the growth of nonstandard employment, such as temporary agency work, freelance working, staff leasing, and zero-hour contracts. These types of employment are frequently insecure and often poorly paid. In Europe, the upward trend towards temporary working among young people has been relatively slow (0.3 % each year since 2000, but increasing to 0.6 % since 2008) but continuous, with four in ten young people in Europe in temporary employment in 2011 (ILO 2013b). In North America temporary contracts are far less common (14 % of young people were on temporary contracts in 2011) (ILO 2013b); however, employment protection legislation is relatively weak compared to Europe and employers are able to shed labor relatively easily even when they hold indefinite contracts.

In the UK, there has been a lot of recent press coverage of young workers on zero-hour contracts under which employers are not obliged to offer a set number of weekly hours to employees and are even able to offer them no hours in a given week where that suits the business. Whereas previous estimates put the number of people on zero-hour contracts at below 200,000, it is now acknowledged that over five million hold zero-hour contracts. Here Guy Standing has argued that in the UK the numbers of young people with zero-hour contracts doubled between 2004 and 2011 and last year rose by 50 % (Standing 2013). Moreover, it is clear that some major employers rely very heavily on zero-hour contracts: for example, in the UK 90 % of McDonalds employees are on zero-hour contracts, providing no guarantee of regular work.

While zero-hour contracts provide great flexibility for employers, employees are often denied the same flexibility through contracts that prohibit them from working for other employers. Of course there will be some young people who hold either

zero-hour contracts or part-time contracts who regularly work full-time hours or whose working hours are only limited by their own preferences. To calculate the number of young people who were underemployed, Bell and Blanchflower (2013) used UK labor force statistics to compare the hours people said they would like to be able to work with those they actually worked. They estimated that in the UK around 30 % of 16–24-year-olds were underemployed.

The rise in unemployment, the growth of the NEET group, and the increase in part-time, non-standard, and insecure jobs are occurring in a context where fewer young people are leaving school at the minimum age and more are graduating from colleges and universities. It is not surprising then that both well-qualified and poorly qualified young people are finding it difficult to access quality jobs. Across the Global North, research has shown that early school leaving and lack of educational qualifications increase the chances of unemployment and are associated with job insecurity and low wages (EC 2011; de Groof and Elchardus 2013). However, while education offers a degree of protection, it is clear that the increase in educational participation has led to a process of qualification inflation with graduates finding it difficult to obtain quality-skilled employment. In the UK, Byrnie (2013) has shown that only a quarter of graduates earned more than the overall average wage while a similar proportion received below-average wages. Indeed six months after graduation, at least four in ten graduates were in low-skill forms of employment, and three and a half years after graduation, one in four remained in low-skill jobs (Mosca and Wright 2011). Similarly, in the USA, recent figures show that 53.6 % of under-25-year-olds with bachelor's degrees were either unemployed or working in low-skill jobs (Mail Online 2013). In the USA, young graduates are "more likely to be employed as waiters, waitresses, bartenders and foodservice helpers than as engineers, physicists, chemists and mathematicians combined" (Mail Online 2013).

Increasing the supply of qualified labor may have little impact on the quality of life for young people in the long run if the demand for skilled workers fails to match supply. In many countries the fastest growing sectors of the economy have been low-skill jobs rather than those requiring graduate status. As a result, many of those who have invested heavily in education are failing to see tangible rewards.

The New Economy: Consequences for Youth

The changes occurring in the youth labor market are far reaching and have significant consequences for young people on both objective and subjective levels. In such circumstances young people may be wise to reflect carefully on the value of investing in extended educational participation, especially as the costs are high and the pay-offs unpredictable. Here we suggest that there is little evidence of light at the end of the tunnel and post-recession realities for many young people will probably be marked by ongoing insecurities.

The impact of employment insecurity and the consequences of new economies for youth are also addressed in other chapters in this collection. Examples are

Thomson and Holland's chapter in the section on Time and Space and Farrugia's chapter in the section on Place. In addition, each of the chapters in this section provides insights into the processes identified in this chapter.

While there may be some association between the recession and the shortage of graduate jobs, evidence from Europe and the US shows that the areas of the labor market that are predicted to see the most growth are low-skilled jobs: precisely the sort of jobs where precarious forms of working are most deeply entrenched. Projections by the US government, for example, suggest that "only three of the 30 occupations with the largest projected number of job openings by 2020 will require a bachelor's degree or higher" (Mail Online 2013). In the UK, the Trades Union Congress (2013) has shown that since 2010, 77 % of new job creation has been in low-paid industries.

Despite clear evidence showing a growth of low-skill, insecure jobs and ongoing problems with unemployment and underemployment, governments still tend to focus on the supply side of the labor market and often regard increased educational participation and the introduction of enhanced skill development programs as offering a solution. However, Southern European countries, such as Spain and Greece, which have some of the worst employment opportunities in the Global North, also have very highly educated populations. Those countries with the strongest labor markets, such as Germany and Switzerland, have relatively low levels of participation in higher education but strong systems of vocational education that are only effective because training systems articulate with rigid forms of labor market regulation. It has also been argued that the existence of separate academic and vocational streams in schools impedes social mobility (Shavit and Müller 2000).

One of the consequences of the lack of quality, secure jobs for young people is a deficit of resources to allow them to progress their lives by establishing independent households and developing full leisure lifestyles (Heath and Cleaver 2003). Young people today have a greater reliance on resource transfers from their parents, and this has made it more difficult for them to leave home before finding a stable job that will allow them to be sure of meeting new financial commitments (Jones 2009). In a wide range of countries, young people in employment have seen their wages decline, relative to older adults over the past few decades (Côté 2014).

In the USA, Côté shows that between 1973 and 2010 young males between the ages of 16 and 24 saw their wages decline by 30 % while the wages of young females declined by 10 %, hugely reducing the male wage advantage (Côté 2014). If, instead of this cut in average wages relative to those of older adults, they received a modest annual inflationary increase of 1.3 %, young men today would be earning an average of 1014 US dollars per week rather than the 443 dollars per week they currently earn. In the UK, in 1974 young people between the ages of 25 and 29 earned around 4 % less than those between 50 and 59: by 2008 the wage gap had grown to 35 % (Howker and Malik 2010).

While unpredictable income and wages that are declining in real terms make it difficult to achieve domestic transitions, Woodman (2012) has also highlighted the ways in which variable hours, often involving evening and weekend shifts, make it

difficult for young people to maintain relationships with family and friends. With peers similarly juggling unpredictable work commitments in a context where they may lack control over hours, Woodman argues that young people have difficulty synchronizing their lives with others in order to make space for leisure and quality time with their families.

In response to the difficulties faced in establishing careers, building a secure future, and finding the space to maintain relationships with peers, there is evidence that some young people are withdrawing completely from social life. In Japan and in parts of Southeast Asia, acute social withdrawal among young people is recognized as a growing problem (Saito 1988). There are obvious difficulties in estimating the number of young people involved; in Japan some argue that more than a million young people may suffer from acute social withdrawal (Saito 1988). In the UK a recent survey showed that around a third of the NEET group rarely leave their homes with similar numbers feeling depressed: four in ten said that they did not feel part of society while 36 % believed that they will never get a job (UCU 2013).

Both job insecurity and unemployment have a detrimental effect on psychological well-being, life satisfaction, and mental health (Gallie 2013). Using evidence from the European Social Survey, Gallie argues that most of the damage is caused by financial deprivation, although social isolation and the disruption of social networks also play their part. In a recent UK survey of over 2,000 16–25-year-olds, one in ten felt they were unable to cope with day-to-day life, double that number among the NEET group. Almost three in ten (27 %) reported feeling “down or depressed” always or often, rising to almost one in two (48 %) among the NEET group (Prince’s Trust 2013).

Conclusion and Future Directions

There is a wide range of contemporary sociological reflections on work in the new economy and the implications for young people who are attempting to make a life for themselves under conditions of great uncertainty. Some commentators forecast the emergence of a new economy in which an ever decreasing minority hold forms of employment that provide access to secure forms of employment that provide a reasonable standard of living. Beck (2000) uses the term “Brazilianization” to draw attention to the slide of the Global North into conditions similar to those that currently predominate in developing countries such as Brazil, where fragmented and precarious forms of employment are the norm.

Similarly, writing in 1995, Hutton (1995) described Britain as a 30/30/40 society in which 30 % of the working age population were unemployed or economically inactive, a further 30 % held insecure forms of employment, while just 40 % held jobs that could be considered secure. While Hutton argued that the numbers in secure positions were decreasing and would continue to decrease, the Great Recession has accelerated this trend so that, today, an even smaller proportion enjoy secure positions while a much greater number are in precarious positions.

Sennett (1998) has drawn attention to the ways in which these trends make it difficult for people to sustain a coherent narrative of life or to construct a stable identity in a fragmented world. For Sennett, modern capitalism has a disorientating effect and corrodes our sense of purpose. The fragmentation of career and job insecurity leads to a constant need for people to reinvent themselves in order to find a place in a world that is in a state of flux. For young people, the world of work that was familiar to their parents is rapidly disappearing and many are confused about the best course of action to take. Bauman (2000) captures this fragmentation and unpredictability with the term “liquid modernity”: like Sennett, he highlights the impossibility of creating and sustaining a stable identity against the backdrop of near constant mobility and change required to stay afloat in modern labor markets.

A classic Marxist interpretation of contemporary employment trends would point towards the ways in which the dynamics of the capitalist system result in a process of immiseration under which declining real wages and deteriorating working conditions lead to an accumulation of misery among the working classes. The evidence reviewed here certainly highlights a decline in working conditions and a reduction in standards of living among young people. Moreover, as Beck (2000) and Hutton (1995) suggest, these changes are clearly long-term trends rather than attributable to a temporary downturn linked to recession, and they are hitting young people the hardest. As Sennett (1998) argues, there is also evidence that modern conditions are taking their toll on well-being among the general youth population and leading to acute suffering among those denied work.

At the same time, contemporary sociological approaches tend not to follow traditional Marxist logic in which oppressed groups take revolutionary action once they start to appreciate the nature of their exploitation. Indeed, many would argue that young people are more likely to blame themselves for their predicament, directing their frustrations inwardly rather than outwardly towards the political and economic system (Furlong and Cartmel 2007). In other words, young people blame themselves when they fail to secure the types of work and the sorts of life that they had hoped for or expected. They may come to think that they failed to work hard enough at school or that they made poor decisions rather than attributing their predicament to the inevitable dynamics of a flawed economic system.

Indeed, on a political level, the fears that are linked to unpredictability can be regarded as helping maintain order among a vulnerable community. As Ball argues, “precarity is a fundamental condition of neo-liberal society. Our emotions are linked to the economy through our anxieties and our concomitant self-management and the state becomes the site of minimal provision and last resort” (2013, p. 134). Here Emmenegger and colleagues (2012) argue that power is also exerted through a political strategy of “dualization” under which benefits and services provided to citizens are differentiated in ways that ensure that the position of “insiders” is protected while that of “outsiders” deteriorates. In the new labor market, it is young people who are cast as outsiders and who are denied the forms of job security, employment entitlements, and welfare benefits granted to established workers.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Current Debates in Social Justice and Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [Dysfunctional Mobilities: International Education and the Chaos of Movement](#)
- ▶ [Entering the Precariat: Young People's Precarious Transitions in Japan](#)
- ▶ [Ordinary Working Lives and the "Missing Middle" of Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [Social Justice and Youth Transitions: Understanding Young People's Lives in Rural Andhra Pradesh, India, and Ethiopia](#)
- ▶ [Thinking About Childhood and Youth](#)
- ▶ [Young People and Employability](#)
- ▶ [Young People and Social Class in the United Kingdom](#)
- ▶ [Young People's Transitions to Employment: Making Choices, Negotiating Constraints](#)
- ▶ [Youth, Consumption, and Creativity on Australia's Gold Coast](#)

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Young People's Transitions to Employment: Making Choices, Negotiating Constraints

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Helene Snee and Fiona Devine

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Abstract

The factors that shape transitions into the labor market are a key concern for youth studies. This chapter outlines different ways of thinking about the choices that young people make. It discusses work on class reproduction and intergenerational transmission and compares this with theories that emphasize the role of individual choice and agency in how we make our way through the world.

The chapter is divided into three sections. Firstly, it contextualizes young people's entrance into the labor market within a wider debate in class analysis, specifically work that attempts to understand intergenerational reproduction. This includes the use of rational action theory and a focus on the mobilization of economic resources that shape possible choices, contrasted with the emphasis on the role of cultural capital and the workings of the habitus. This section also

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highlights the contribution of the concept of “opportunity structures” and the importance of understanding the labor market context.

Secondly, it outlines the concept of “choice biographies” and the idea that the structural constraints of the past, such as class, no longer influence young people’s paths in the same way as previous generations. This section touches upon the work that suggests young people now embrace the idea of choice and debates regarding the use of choice biographies in youth sociology.

The third section explores work that attempts to establish a “middle ground” between choice and constraint. It considers the work on “careership” or career decision making, which tries to avoid social determinism without seeing young people as free agents. Empirical research on young people’s pathways tells a story of class reproduction for many but also the significance of family and locality, as well as leisure, in shaping plans for employment. This section also refers to the work that recognizes that young people may feel individual responsibility for their choices, even if they are faced with structural constraints.

In reviewing these debates, the chapter draws on research into young people’s employment aspirations to highlight that the choices made are socially embedded and dependent upon access to economic, cultural, and social resources.

Introduction

The career decisions that young people make can be crucial for their future. Occupations affect income, health, status, and security and consequently are seen by many as the fundamental determinant of social class. The factors that shape young people’s entry into the labor market are a key concern for youth studies and continue to be the focus of political and public attention. A particular source of anxiety is whether social mobility is declining and if young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have fewer opportunities to “get on” and move up the occupational hierarchy. Research consistently shows long-standing patterns of inequality in transitions to employment along lines of class, ethnicity, and gender, while at the same time, policies aimed at young people’s career decision making focus on free choice and individual responsibility (Hodkinson et al. 1996, p. 139). For example, part of the UK government’s social mobility strategy in “Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers” (Cabinet Office 2011) is to raise the aspirations of working-class young people. The rationale is that by encouraging them to aim higher, they will make the choice to enter higher education and pursue professional careers. Yet evidence continues to demonstrate that the barrier young people face is not low aspirations but constraints on their choices. Following the financial crisis of 2008, the career opportunities for young people are severely limited. At the time of writing, the UK youth unemployment rate stands at 20.7 % and is over 50 % in some European countries (Eurostat 2013). The long-term consequences for the current generation of young people are of concern due to the scarring effect of forging a career in recession times (Vaitilingam 2009).

This chapter outlines different ways of thinking about the choices that young people make. The focus is on class but with recognition of the importance of intersections with gender and ethnicity. As noted by Ken Roberts (2003, 2009), the “choice versus opportunity debate” has been ongoing in work on transitions into employment since the 1960s and is part of wider discussions regarding on the relative importance of structural forces and individual agency. Work on class reproduction and intergenerational transmission considers whether young people “follow in their parents’ footsteps.” This is in contrast to theories that emphasize the role of individual choice and agency in how we make our way through the world. Other youth researchers attempt to reach a middle ground between these two positions and claim young people make active choices within systems of constraint. Ultimately, the career decisions that young people make are socially embedded and dependent upon access to economic, cultural, and social resources.

Intergenerational Reproduction

Young people’s entrance into the labor market can be located in a wider debate concerning class analysis, specifically work that attempts to understand intergenerational reproduction. Goldthorpe et al. (1980) argue that although absolute rates of social mobility in Britain have increased over time, relative rates have more or less remained constant. This means that while there has been a change in the social structure, with more people in service sector and professional jobs, the chance that someone growing up in one social class ending up in another has remained stable (here it should be noted that class is derived from employment relations). Essentially, this means it is more likely for young people to work in jobs similar to their parents. This can be explained by the relative desirability of class locations (the more advantaged will aim to maintain their position) and inequalities in the distribution of economic, cultural, and social resources. For Goldthorpe, economic resources like wealth and income are the most important. Those with more resources are able to mobilize these to continue to hold their advantaged position, and those with less are at a disadvantage. In this way, relative positions in the class structure remain unchanged. In later work, Goldthorpe (2000) considers how the macro-level trends in class stability can be interpreted by considering individuals as rational actors who weigh up the costs and benefits of particular paths. Actors have goals, but there are differences in the distribution of economic resources that would enable them to achieve them. Consequently, economic resources are mobilized to take advantage of the opportunities available while being aware of constraints. An example here would be a young person deciding whether to study for an academic degree in order to pursue a professional career. Their decision would be guided by their access to funds to pay for higher education, balanced with the likelihood of being able to enter their chosen profession. Young people from more advantaged backgrounds have greater economic resources and so are able to take greater chances. Ken Roberts (2009) argues that it is a *rational* choice for high achieving working-class students to enter quality vocational

training instead of attending university rather than a “poverty of ambition.” Such young people are more likely to attend lower-ranked institutions and receive low returns on their investment. In this way, the “choices” that people are able to make are shaped by their position in the social structure.

Roberts therefore advocates rational action theory as a way of understanding the maintenance and reproduction of social structure, but this does not capture the context in which different choices are rational for different groups of young people (Roberts 2003, p. 24). As such, he suggests the analysis of the “opportunity structures” that are available, which “are formed by the inter-relationships between family origins, education, labour market processes and employers’ recruitment practices” (Roberts 2009, p. 355). The labor market for young people has changed over time, with expansion of “the top” but also greater precarity at “the bottom.” Moreover, transitions into work are more protracted and more complicated. While the context may alter, however, the push and pull forces of opportunity structures remain the same. Unemployment and a lack of social mobility are not due to young people making the “wrong choices,” but because their choices are constrained by the opportunities available. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds experience such limits disproportionately (Roberts 2009).

Goldthorpe’s emphasis on rational behavior and economic resources can be criticized for being overly materialistic and instrumental, without considering how social actions are often be indeterminate or precarious (Devine 1998). His position can be contrasted with that of Bourdieu (1990, 1997), whose work also tells a story of social reproduction but with an emphasis on the role of *cultural* resources. Bourdieu understands class as the distribution of economic, cultural, and social capital. Cultural capital is transmitted to young people via their families and consists of knowledge, objects, and experiences with legitimate cultural value that can be exchanged for future benefits and that are associated with higher social status. This means young people who are not from the dominant class do not have the “right” sort of culture, which puts them at a disadvantage. An example here would be how working-class young people may struggle in the graduate labor market because they may not act, dress, or talk in the way that employers expect from their middle-class peers (Brown et al. 2003). Cultural capital can also be conceptualized as values held, particularly in terms of expectations and aspirations of success (Devine 2004).

Differences in the distribution of capital structure the social space. According to Bourdieu, actions are guided by the “habitus,” a system of dispositions that are acquired through growing up in a particular social position. These means that people who share similar life circumstances – in other words, possess the same capitals – have similar dispositions. Consequently, young people from a certain class background are likely to make the same kinds of career decisions, and thus class structures are reproduced. However, the dispositions that guide action are not conscious but a “feel for the game” (Bourdieu 1990). This is a different position to viewing choices as rational and based on economic costs and benefits. Instead, young people’s backgrounds and life histories shape their goals. The danger here,

however, is that a lack of cultural capital could be interpreted as a “poverty of aspiration” among the working class (Devine 2004).

So far, the discussion has concentrated on intergenerational reproduction in terms of social class. It is important to note that young people's pathways to employment are also structured by gender and ethnicity. While space does not permit a full examination of these intersections, it is important to flag a number of key points. Firstly, despite the increased participation of women in education and the labor market, transitions to employment remain gendered. Schoon (2010) highlights that young women are less likely to enter the most prestigious occupations and that job choices remain gender typical. Young women show less interest in careers in science, technology, or engineering and report less confidence in their academic abilities. For Schoon, this indicates that “gender differences in occupational choice can be understood as an example of social reproduction processes due to gendered perceptions of own capabilities” (Schoon 2010, p. 27). Secondly, ethnicity can both enable and constrain choices. For example Shah et al. (2010) suggest ethnicity may act as a resource for young people and their families. This “ethnic capital,” in the form of norms and values, resulted in high career aspirations among many of the young people of British Pakistani heritage in their study. However, gender, religion, and the structural disadvantages of a radicalized labor market influence the extent to which this capital can be mobilized.

The arguments above outline a case for young people's choices to be limited by the effects of social class, along with ethnicity and gender. An alternative position suggests that these structural constraints no longer influence young people's paths in the same way as previous generations.

Individualization and “Choice Biographies”

From the 1990s onward, social theorists have offered new perspectives on structural forces. The work of Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992) (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002) suggests that we are living in a new period of modernity in which people are disembedded from traditional forms of social structures:

... individualization means the disintegration of previously existing social forms – for example, the increasing fragility of such categories as class and social status, gender roles, family, neighbourhood etc. ... in modern societies new demands, controls and constraints are being imposed on individuals. (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, p. 2)

In this context, individuals have to shape their own paths through life. The decisions that (young) people make about their future are no longer socially subscribed but must be made (Beck 1992, p. 135). According to Giddens, “we have no choice but to choose” (Giddens 1991, p. 81). Rather than “normal” biographies that progress along predictable lines, late modern life requires people to write their own elective, reflexive, “do-it-yourself” biographies (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, p. 3). This is not to say that inequalities have disappeared but

instead are fragmented and are no longer found along the lines of traditional divisions.

Beck's work has been influential in youth studies in thinking about young people's transitions into the labor market. The concept of "choice biography" is explored by du Bois-Reymond (1998), who draws on Beck to argue that young people's pathways to adulthood are not linear progressions, but that life events are now synchronous and reversible. In her study of Dutch young people's orientations to the future, a common strategy was "I don't want to commit myself yet" and put off the transition into a longer-term career. Some were aiming to combine choices about careers and work with personal life decisions. These were "trendsetters" who were thinking about an overall *lifestyle*. Others, however, were more orientated toward normal biographies. Despite the term "choice biographies," du Bois-Reymond argues that there is a tension between freedom and coercion:

...although (western) societies provide more options to choose from, modern (young) people are forced to reflect on the available options and justify their decisions. They might also get frustrated because they realize that there are many options available; perhaps they do not feel ready to make a good choice, or perhaps they would like to make a choice but are prevented from doing so. (du Bois-Reymond 1998, p. 65)

This perceived proliferation of choices for young people leads Wyn and Woodman (2006) to suggest that there are different patterns of life for the "post-1970" generation of Australians:

The post-1970 generation is under pressure to become. In an age of uncertainty, in order to survive they need the capacity to understand the options that they have before them, the skills to make choices, and the basis for being flexible. (Wyn and Woodman 2006, p. 508)

For Wyn and Woodman, young people need to engage with the "project of building a life" and accept responsibility for their own futures. Social structures no longer provide predictable outcomes. For example, they argue that the relationship between education and employment is now more complex, with transitions as extended and unpredictable. Indeed, the authors question the merits of a transition-based approach. Individuals in this generation see making the "right" choices about education as the route to labor market rewards and take personal responsibility for this.

The concept of the "choice biography" is one that is criticized for overstating the agency of young people in making decisions, as structural constraints still play a large part in determining transitions to work (Lehmann 2004). Moreover, Roberts (2003) suggests that there is nothing new about young people taking responsibility for their choices and that agentic, individualized decision making is only possible for the most advantaged with access to the most resources. There is not only a debate about whether young people are able to make such choices but also over how concepts are used. Woodman (2009) argues that Beck is often misread by youth studies researchers and that the very concept of "choice biography" does not come from Beck's work. According to Woodman, Beck has been "constructed as a foil to criticize for overemphasizing agency and change" (Woodman 2009, p. 244). For

Woodman, the ambiguity of late modernity as highlighted by Beck means that we have to think about inequalities differently (Woodman 2009, p. 252). Class is rejected as an analytical tool, as the social is organized by a *lack* of structure. The issue is not one of increased choice for all; rather, it is those who have the least choice who have to be the most active in shaping their pathways. Woodman argues that Beck's work is a valuable resource for youth research. In a response to Woodman, Steven Roberts argues that, on the contrary, Beck *does* emphasize choice: "decisions that have to be made, with consequences that have to be faced" (Roberts 2010, p. 138). Roberts highlights the pervasive influences of class in young people's employment outcomes, for example, in channeling young people into low-status jobs without training, not through choice but through circumstance (Roberts 2010, p. 144). For Roberts, illustrating that "class still matters" is still an important task for the sociology of youth, and it should continue to concern itself with the workings of structural inequality.

Youth researchers are thus divided over the role of traditional social divisions in continuing to shape young people's choices and the degree of agency involved in this process. The next section explores work that attempts to establish a "middle ground" between choice and constraint and to take account of social change.

Finding a Middle Ground

In a study of transitions to employment via vocational education and training, Hodkinson et al. (1996) argue that young people's opportunities are both subjective and objective. Decisions are made within "horizons for action," which "incorporate externally located opportunities in the labor market as well as the dispositions of the habitus" (Hodkinson et al. 1996, p. 149). The authors find a middle position on issues of choice which tries to avoid social determinism without seeing young people as free agents and put forward an alternative model of "careership." The study draws on elements of Giddens (1991) and his work on negotiating lifestyle choices, recognizing that young people's lives are not just about work and their career decisions. Bourdieu's concept of habitus is also used to highlight that decisions need to be understood in terms of histories and context. In addition, the authors note that decisions are not isolated but part of an ongoing life course which is open ended and comprised of both turning points and routine. Furthermore, they are keen to outline how choices are made in interactions with other stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, and employers. Their work is a critique of the individualist technical rationality that permeates social policies on young people's routes to employment, and they stress that career choice is socially structured and reproduced. However, Hodkinson, Sparkes, and Hodkinson also want to recognize that young people do have some freedoms, especially as this enables thinking about the potential for individual change. As such, they use the term pragmatic rationality, arguing that the decisions of the young people in their study making the transition to work were:

... determined by the external job or educational opportunities in interaction with personal perceptions of what was possible, desirable or appropriate. Those perceptions, in turn, were derived from their culture and life histories. (Hodkinson et al. 1996, p. 123)

Hodkinson, Sparkes, and Hodkinson's concepts have been influential in further work that seeks to understand how young people negotiate their pathways after compulsory schooling and make choices about their future careers. Ball et al. (2000) draw on the concept of pragmatic rationality, which they find useful because it recognizes that decisions are embedded in wider choices about lifestyle while retaining an awareness of the influence of social context. In the early twenty first century, there are four interrelated factors which shape young people's horizons for action. These are the culture of individualism and the economics of individualization; social and economic polarization; consumerism, leisure, and identity; and the "alleged demise of class politics alongside the ascendancy of new work and market identifications" (Ball et al. 2000, p. 2). In this research, as with previous studies, the young people often reiterated they *had* choices. They blamed themselves for lack of success and felt that their future was "up to them." Yet the young people's pathways tell a story of class reproduction for many, along the lines of "new class hierarchies, inequalities and exclusions" (Ball et al. 2000, p. 145). The workings of gender and ethnicity could also be seen in the patterns of young people's trajectories. Another important finding is the significance of family and locality, as well as leisure, in shaping plans for employment. Moreover, career choices are not the only decisions that young people make, and their lives are not just about education and work.

The responsibility that young people feel for their life directions, despite continuing structural constraints, is what Furlong and Cartmel (2007) term the "epistemological fallacy of late modernity." They review how changes in the youth labor market since the 1980s have had a significant impact on young people's lives. Instability and fragmentation, along with delayed transitions to employment, mean that their routes into work are perceived as individualized. However, this is an "illusion of individuality," as social reproduction still occurs according to traditional divisions. While Furlong and Cartmel (2007) provide some support for individualization, this is on a subjective basis, as young people experience the labor market in ways that obscure how objective constraints affect their choices. In contrast, data shows "it is still possible to predict labor market outcomes fairly accurately on the basis of social class (via educational performance) and gender" (Furlong and Cartmel 2007, p. 140). It is young people's subjective experiences of transitions that are the focus of Evans's (2002) work that develops the concept of "bounded agency." In this, she also notes how social divisions are obscured by a belief in the importance of individual effort. However, the starting point for the research was the view that youth studies underestimates the degree of agency young people actually have when making choices (Evans 2002, p. 262). Here, the emphasis is on exploring socially situated agency, in which "young people do manifest agentic beliefs in relation to work... but encounter frustrations in expressing or acting on them" (Evans 2002, p. 265).

Such work, with various different emphases, seeks a middle ground between choice and constraint. In doing so, it aims to understand how decisions about work and employment are neither free choices nor predetermined outcomes. Woodman (2009) is critical of such attempts, however, which he sees as something of an orthodoxy in youth studies that limits the exploration of contemporary inequalities. Rather than continuing the frame of “structure versus agency” debate, Woodman argues that youth researchers should engage with the idea that “relations between social positions are produced and reproduced in new ways in the face of social change” (Woodman 2013, 7.6). In other words, Woodman suggests that debates concerning how much agency young people have in their decisions mean that not enough attention is paid to contemporary forms of inequality. For example, Woodman suggests the expansion of precarious work and flexible employment means that “relative control over time comes to function in a new way as a resource and source of inequality” among young people (Woodman 2012, p. 1088).

Making Choices, Negotiating Constraints

Empirical work on young people's occupational aspirations continues to ask whether working-class kids still get working-class jobs (Willis 1977) in contemporary Britain. The evidence suggests that this is, indeed, still the case (Evans 2006), while middle-class parents are able to draw on a wide range of economic, cultural, and social resources to help their children (Devine 2004). Understanding the micro processes by which young people make their way through the education system and into the labor market, and the help which they may or may not receive from their parents, helps to explain *how* class inequalities are reproduced over time and space. This approach recognizes that young people make choices about their future careers, but also that this is socially embedded and dependent on access to economic, cultural, and social resources. For example, Snee and Devine (2014) explore the decisions young people make at the end of compulsory schooling to put forward a case for examining the role of these resources in processes of social reproduction and social mobility. The study explores the choices and decisions of young people in the final year of secondary school in a metropolitan local authority. This was an “ordinary” state school that had recently improved its GCSE results to bring them in line with the national average. Qualitative interviews were conducted with year 11 pupils, and their parents in some cases, with follow-up interviews conducted with some of the young people the following year. The parents in the study all had working-class roots, although some had enjoyed work-life mobility. This meant that the young people were from mixed class backgrounds, but none were from established, professional middle-class families. The young people all spoke about the responsibility to work hard and do well to help them achieve their goals. Overall, their career choices in their first interviews were classed and gendered. The academically able young men, more likely to be from middle-class backgrounds, aspired to make money and go into business. The less academic aimed

for skilled trades or public services. Young women, on the other hand, were making decisions about professional routes into law, teaching, or health care if they were academically inclined. Vocational routes were gendered again, with aspirations to work in sports therapy, drama, or beauty. The two case studies from this project that follow illustrate contemporary constraints on young people's choices. The first concerns one young woman from a working-class background who had high aspirations. Most of the young people were pursuing their "chosen" paths a year later. Rebecca, however, had changed her mind.

Rebecca came from a traditional working-class background. Her mother was a carer, who had her first child at 15 ½, and her father a self-employed painter and decorator. She was an academically able young woman who wanted to go to university and then become a history teacher or lecturer due to her love of the subject. Her career choice was supported by her parents, who were proud of their "bright spark." Although Rebecca did well in her GCSEs, she decided not to take A Levels as there was no point; she was not going to university and was skeptical of getting into debt only to be an unemployed graduate. She was unemployed at the time of her second interview despite applying for many unskilled jobs and had decided to start a childcare course the following academic year. Rebecca's story is in stark contrast to previous work with middle-class families, who can draw on a wide range of economic, cultural, and social resources to help their children (Devine 2004). Economic pressures on her parents, disheartening experiences of the local labor market, and the worry of debt all constrained Rebecca's choices. Her family did not have the cultural capital of post-compulsory education, and their values were to *enjoy* work rather than to go as far as possible in education. Here was pride and aspiration, but also pragmatism. The family's social resources had helped them in a better economic climate, with kinship ties helping her parents into jobs. These were not useful resources to help Rebecca realize her own aspirations however. Despite some links to middle-class employment among her extended family, neither Rebecca nor her parents had the bridging social capital to others who were able to advise and guide her toward this particular career. These were not the only factors at work, however. Her mother and father were experiencing relationship problems at the time of her second interview, and we have to consider the impact this may have had on Rebecca's decisions. Rebecca's is a story of reproduction along a classed and gendered route. She made the "choice" to put her dreams of studying history to one side and enter childcare, but this was embedded in her family relationships and driven by access to economic, cultural, and social resources.

The second case study is Richard, a young man who was in the top set at school with an above average performance in maths and science in particular. His father was a professional accountant who qualified via correspondence courses and night school, and his mother a childminder. At his first interview, Richard talked about his plans to do A Levels with a view to going to university and becoming a professional mechanical engineer. His parents were supportive of his aspiration but were also encouraging him to go to a particular sixth-form college that his sister and cousins attended. This was attached to a local boys' school with an

emphasis on discipline and behavior. Richard tended to socialize with friends from his sports club rather than secondary school, and his best friend was already at the sixth-form he would attend. Richard's career plans also changed somewhat by the second interview, but not as drastically as Rebecca's and were still oriented toward a technical career. He now wanted to study product design at university and had aspirations to work as a designer for an innovative, modern company. One of the reasons for the switch was having not chosen quite the right A Levels, but he was happy in his new path. Richard had access to relatively more resources than Rebecca. Tuition fees were still a worry, but the family was in an economic position that debt was not as much of a concern. Richard even saw himself taking a gap year after university before he settled down to pay them off. The family's cultural capital was also evident in his father's professional qualifications, Richard's after-school activities, and their concern with a more traditional type of sixth-form. By attending this institution, he was moving into more middle-class social networks and consequently gaining access to different resources, as well as a more academic environment. This was not straightforward, and Richard did not enjoy the same advantages that a young person from a more established middle-class family might expect, such as the social resources that might have informed his A Level choices. He was also considering new and post-1992 universities. Nevertheless, he is able to pursue his aspirations in a way that Rebecca could not.

Conclusion and Future Directions

There are some merits in thinking through new forms of inequality, and it is wise not to become too embroiled in an endless "structure versus agency" debate. However, it is still an important question to consider how young people make choices in the face of particular constraints, including class. This would enable interventions in career decision making and improve young people's life chances. Steven Roberts (2010) notes that the complexities of understanding young people's agency can help explain why middle ground positions are adopted, as opposed to structural determinism, although this may need further theorization. How can youth researchers talk about choices while at the same time talk about class reproduction? Clearly, it is important to recognize there are inequalities in the resources that young people have access to, which profoundly affects their choice of career and transitions to employment. Some of these inequalities are enduring and seem to be passed from generation to generation. For other young people who have a "head start," there may be more possibilities for social mobility. While the context or "opportunity structures" may change, a familiar picture emerges of who can and cannot "get on." At the same time, young people are not passive in this process. What is disconcerting is that evidence suggests they feel personally responsible for their career decisions, despite the fact that, as in the past, they have to "choose and navigate within constraints (structures) that are neither of their own making nor within their control" (Roberts 2003, p. 23).

Cross-References

- ▶ [Critical Moments? The Importance of Timing in Young People's Narratives of Transition](#)
- ▶ [Entering the Precariat: Young People's Precarious Transitions in Japan](#)
- ▶ [Ordinary Working Lives and the "Missing Middle" of Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [Unemployment, Insecurity, and Poor Work: Young Adults in the New Economy](#)
- ▶ [Young People, Identity, Class, and the Family](#)
- ▶ [Young People and Social Class in the United Kingdom](#)

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Abstract

The logic of employability corresponds to the perspective according to which a worker, or an aspirant worker, is deemed responsible for making himself or herself desirable in the labor market in the eyes of an employer or potential employer in the profession or trade to which he or she aspires. Enhancing young people's ability to be employed – i.e., their “employability” – has been a focus of media and scholarly attention for the last 20 years or so. Inserted into the context of considerable changes in the labor market and higher education, a *discourse* of employability has become dominant in higher education policy and has encompassed a more specific focus on the school-to-work transition.

Young people spend longer periods of time obtaining their educations, and as a result, they are better qualified than were previous generations. However, despite their increased qualifications, young people now earn less compared to adult workers than they did 25 years ago, and in many ways they remain at the margins, as failing to obtain a proper job is also, in many ways, failing to become an independent adult. In seeking to address social exclusion by helping young

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people obtain paid employment, the policy emphasis has been on giving advice and training to help young people become more “employable.” In other words, policy has focused on the supply of youth labor and, in particular, on the perceived deficits and failings of unemployed people as potential employees. The logic of the discourse of employability is to “capture” young people inside a mainstream discourse of integration and poses as an objective to engage or reengage young people with the labor market.

Despite its diffusion, employability has primarily remained a policy concept which has perhaps not found a theoretical assessment. This chapter seeks to provide a definition of employability and critically identify the main issues related to its diffusion. This allows us to highlight the assumptions that are encompassed through its use and, more importantly, what implications it has for young people who are navigating the agitated sea of insecure employment.

Introduction

In the last 20 years or so, we have become accustomed to a situation in which it is not only difficult to enter the labor market for the first time but also common to experience discontinuous employment or underemployment for some years after entry. This situation has been exacerbated by the recent economic crisis. Under these conditions, enhancing young people’s ability to be employed – i.e., their “employability” – has been a focus of media and scholarly attention. In particular, discussions of how it is preferable to *enhance* employability – i.e., to make young people more likely or better able to find employment – have inspired a great deal of academic literature on employment and have almost dominated policy-oriented discussions, concomitant with the rise of attention to the “not in employment, education, and training” (herein NEET) category. In fact, employability and NEETs have developed together as categories in these debates because the primary function of education and training appears to be to allow young people to secure positions in the labor market. Although logically and semantically referred to the sphere of work and employment, the concept of employability is powerful in attracting the most notable changes in the domains of both work and education because it ultimately seeks to address the challenge of preparing for a changing labor market. In fact, employability rests on the assumption that given the rapidly changing labor markets, employment is no longer guaranteed to those who have completed their educations and that, more generally, full employment is no longer a state goal. A degree is not deemed to be enough, and employers may seek other evidence of employability in a business context in which skills are increasingly in demand yet their requirements change quickly. In this way, the “employment” issue has been transformed into the “employability” issue in policy and scholarly debates.

This transformation assumes the uncertain and unstable perspective according to which one might have now but might not have it tomorrow. The employability discourse intervenes to make a person ready to take opportunities immediately

when they arise. A subsequent job may or may not be located at a person's previous organization or agency and is not necessarily more difficult, complex, or rewarding in terms of either pay or recognition. Workers are supposed to develop a portfolio of skills, which implies an ability to quickly convert existing skills according to the environment and required tasks. Such skills define the condition of "employability." In this sense, the terms "portfolio career" (Handy 1994) and "boundaryless" (Arthur and Rousseau 1996), among others, have been used.

It is known that economic and social changes over the past two decades have disproportionately affected youth and contributed to make the school-to-work transition more protracted, fractured, and risky. In seeking to address social exclusion by helping young people obtain paid employment, the policy emphasis has been on giving advice and training to help young people become more "employable." In other words, policy has focused on the supply of youth labor and, in particular, on the perceived deficits and failings of unemployed people as potential employees. Young people spend longer periods of time obtaining their educations, and as a result, they are better qualified educationally than were previous generations. In this sense, today's youth are better off than previous generations. In previous generations, most young people viewed obtaining a proper job as an important aspect of being an adult. However, despite their increased qualifications, young people now earn less compared to adult workers than they did 25 years ago, and in many ways they remain at the margins.

Changing economic conditions have meant a lower social status for many young people. In youth studies, this phenomenon has come to be identified as the problem of the decline of the social markers of adulthood and is associated with the individualization process. In other words, the more precarious nature of work and the difficulty of obtaining employment signify a more problematic transition to adulthood. It is on this very node that the interests of the sociology of work and youth studies converge. The logic of the employability discourse captures young people inside a mainstream discourse of integration, the objective of which is to engage or reengage young people in the labor market.

The Rise of Employability

Employability is primarily a policy concept that has found wide-ranging application in Western countries. However, it has perhaps not found a theoretical home. This chapter seeks to provide a definition of employability and critically identify the main issues related to its diffusion. This chapter approaches employability from a sociological perspective, in this deconstructing its nature as a policy concept. This allows us to highlight the assumptions that are encompassed through its use and, more importantly, what implications it has for young people who are navigating the agitated sea of insecure employment.

The logic of employability corresponds to the perspective according to which a worker, or an aspirant worker, is deemed responsible for making him- or herself desirable in the labor market in the eyes of an employer or potential employer in the

profession or trade to which he or she aspires. More precisely, according to CBI, “employability is the possession by an individual of the qualities and competencies required to meet the changing needs of employers and customers thereby help to realize his or her aspirations and potential in work” (CBI 1999, p. 1). According to the most popular definition, the logic of employability corresponds to an “emphasis on an individual ability to gain employment, to maintain employment, to move between roles within the same organization, secure and fulfilling work” (Hillage and Pollard 1998).

Since employability is seen as a set of (personal) achievements (Yorke 2004) that makes a graduate more likely to obtain employment, it is constructed as being primarily a matter of an individual’s skills. The perspective according to which the worker or job seeker must make himself or herself marketable in the eyes of potential employers in a given labor market – i.e., that he or she must continuously have the right competencies at any particular moment, in any particular context – is also found in the logic of “lifelong learning,” which holds that when an individual’s skills become outdated, it is up to that individual to learn new ones. Therefore, the logic of employability – which supersedes that of lifelong learning – does not relate only to young people, but the heaviest weight is on their shoulders, particularly with respect to the diffusion of credentialism and unstable employment.

The term employability has been used since the early twentieth century. The first mention of its use dates back to 1909, in the work of one of the architects of the British welfare state, William Beveridge, in the text *Unemployment: A Problem of Industry*. Garsten and Jacobsson (2013) note that the term was used in the 1960s and had then a sociomedical focus. This focus is just one of the seven stages that Gazier (1998) mentions as having gone through over the past century. The others are: “dichotomic employability,” which distinguishes between those individuals who are/can be employed and those that cannot; “manpower policy employability,” in which the focus is on the gap between actual knowledge, skills, and attitudes and those required by the labor market; “flow employability,” which refers to “the objective expectation, or more or less high probability, that a person looking for a job can have of finding one” (Ledrut 1966, quoted in Gazier 1998, p. 44); “labor market performance employability,” which focuses on the measurable labor market outcomes that result from specific policy interventions; “initiative employability,” which thinks beyond the stereotype of the “salaryman” who works for the same large corporation (or state bureaucracy) from leaving school until retirement; and “interactive employability,” which seeks to balance with a development of some of the insights of the French school of flow employability regarding structural factors and implicates not only individuals but also employers and policymakers, in the employability challenge.

The use of the word employability has become recurrent. More significantly, inserted into the context of considerable changes in the labor market and higher education, a *discourse* of employability has become increasingly dominant in higher education policy and has encompassed a more specific focus on the school-to-work transition. The Bologna Process, which reached its climax in 1998, emerged from the understanding that higher education in Europe had expanded

rapidly and dramatically and that coordination and homogenization had thus become the only way to create equal opportunity. This discourse has resulted in questions about the quality of the graduate labor market and the ability of graduates to meet employers' needs. A practical example of this is the fact that European universities are now required to produce highly "employable," mobile graduates. This is quite visible in universities' institutional websites, which increasingly feature sections devoted to this issue. These sections of the website are not insignificant; rather, they are very popular.

Everywhere in Europe, universities are urged to ensure that they produce "employable" graduates, and graduates themselves are exhorted to continually develop their personal skills, qualities, and experiences to compete on the graduate labor market. This has occurred in a context in which postindustrial economies are more and more competitive and knowledge driven: enhancing the qualifications and skills of the workforce is perceived as a way to increase growth and prosperity. It is said that in the context of rapidly changing information and knowledge-intensive economy, employability is a much more demanding phenomenon than simply possessing generic skills: this is no longer enough for employers. What employers require of employees is a proactive attitude towards managing themselves in the world of work.

The phenomenon of credentialism, whereby the number of formal qualifications deemed necessary to gain employment has de facto increased, has partially shifted the research focus: instead of school-to-work transitions, we are now becoming accustomed to speaking of university-to-work transitions. On a reflection, this has created a call for attention to university graduates rather than school leavers – once a traditional area of youth research. In this direction, there has been a rise in the number of studies of how university students can achieve "more" so that they can be "more employable" than mere graduates. The same area of research on exchange students – most notably, Erasmus students – can be read in this way, in part.

Thus, the concept of "employability" has become a point of reference for European labor market policies. Globally, such concerns are seen in the ILO's work on youth employability (2005) and the *World Bank's World Development Report 2007: Development and the Next Generation* (2006). Across Europe, employability is certainly a key concept that maintains converging characteristics despite the differences in welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen 1999). According to Jacobsson (2004), these characteristics are: the strengthening of activation policy of activation and the fostering of transitions from school to work by placing emphasis on emphasizing training and work experience schemes. To avoid too different interpretations and operationalizations of the concept of employability in different contexts, the European Commission has worked out common definitions (CEC 1999). The OECD Jobs Strategy and the European Employment Strategy involves a discursive strategy that views employability as a cognitive structure, together with adaptability, activation, entrepreneurship, social inclusion, and gender mainstreaming.

These concepts were not invented by European institutions, but the EU has given them an official status. They are currently referenced in national domains, one reason of this being that countries are obliged to provide for National Action Plans,

which use the terminology provided by the European institutions. In this area, the European Union makes extensive use of soft-law instruments such as recommendations and guidelines. Youth 2020 identified EU Youth strategies, priority. The EU has launched such programs dedicated to this priority as “Youth on the Move” and “New Agenda for New Skills and Jobs.” In 2011, “Youth Opportunity Initiatives” was added. The areas in which institutions promote the employability concept are: apprenticeships, youth work, youth exchange programs (for students and, more recently, for entrepreneurs), student placement in enterprises, and more generally, opportunities to train and work abroad.

The Multifaceted Character of Employability

In summary, it is objectively difficult to anticipate the future and predict the skills that young people will need to obtain and keep employment. Some argue that youth will need transversal skills for flexibility and problem-solving and entrepreneurial skills for innovation, along with skills related to participation and civic engagement. This chapter seeks to start off an investigation of the corpus of institutional recommendations that have been made to guarantee employment for young people now and in the future and does so by discussing the concept of employability. The employability concept has shifted public attention from “granting employment” to the more subtle issue of the marketability of individual skills, which has turned into the “employability imperative.” The current section therefore goes beyond the shared meanings implied in the discourse of employability, assessing the concept and discussing some of its weaknesses. The *discourse* on employability is based on the premise that the employability concept applies to everyone. One might say that there certainly are good reasons to state that people at different ages will encounter different difficulties in gaining and maintaining their employment potential. However, even leaving aside such a general focus and thinking only of what the discourse of employability means for young people’s lives, it is apparent that several caveats must be asserted and that employability is a biased concept.

First, employability is a class-biased concept. Not all young people have the same opportunity to study for an extended period and ultimately to delay their entry in the labor market. In some countries, youth are not entitled to access any benefits until they have worked; for example, they cannot receive scholarships or unemployment benefits. For this reason, children of working-class families have an urgent need to obtain any job that is available, and they are not equipped to address the issue of outdated competencies. This is an obvious statement. However, there is also another, more subtle argument, which Furlong has recently stressed (2013), specifically, that working-class youth may resist the expectations of institutional discourses such as employability in the sense that they may be reluctant to embark on intellectual routes, perhaps because intellectual pursuits do not seem aligned with their ideals of masculinity.

Therefore, microlevels of resistance are found at several levels. In addition, Forrier and Sels (2003) empirically find that temporary workers with lower levels of

skills and qualifications are less likely to invest in their own training and are also less likely to have employers invest in training them. Moreover, different groups of graduates will benefit differently from education, not only due to class but also gender, ethnicity, and geographic location. It is overly simplistic to assume that these characteristics do not count as differences in the labor market. In addition, as a matter of an individual's life experience, not all graduates receive the same benefit from a degree, either in terms of potential to climb the career ladder or in terms of salary. Nor are skills exempt from gender connotations. In general, these are socially constructed, as Bourdieu and Passeron (1979 [1964], 1990) have famously argued. Social capital has a strong influence on recruitment and promotion processes. The emphasis on employability has been interpreted as an emphasis on a rational construction of higher education. For proponents of the employability discourse, a skilled individual is an empowered individual. However, because skills are socially constructed, employers value and reward them in different ways. As a result, employability is a *discourse* that contains inequalities. When considered along with the issue of equal opportunities, the concept of employability suggests that the labor market necessarily is a meritocratic institution, which is arguably not the case.

In the “new career literature,” there is a debate about the extent to which, in some settings, belonging to certain networks is a very powerful way to secure a career regardless of the possession of formal qualifications. It is well established that relationships count in careers, both in the conduct of work and in the allocation of opportunity and reward, whether through formal associations or “weak ties” (Granovetter 1974) or through mentors, sponsors, or friendships (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Lamont 1992). For instance, MBAs have also been studied and interpreted as new rites of passage, with special attention to professionals who are becoming established in a new, boundaryless area (Kelan and Jones 2009).

The Neoliberal Inspiration of Employability

More generally, the role of ideology in the employability discourse, and the role of the wider worldviews carried with it, has rarely been addressed (with the exception of Garsten and Jacobsson 2013; Jacobsson 2004 and a few others). While mostly used in policy discourses, employability as a discourse does contain a range of ideological assumptions. First, employability assumes the internalization of social control (Garsten and Jacobsson 2013). Second, a substantial premise of the rise of the employability concept is the shift from passive to active labor market policies, which took place during the 1990s in most Western countries. Under this approach, welfare dependency is seen as a long-term negative because it creates unemployment. There has been a shift in the discourses that draw on different explanatory frameworks of employment and different constructions of workers. To be more precise, the discourse of employability encourages individuals to take responsibility for themselves and ownership of the risks. In the construction of employability as a matter of individual attributes and responsibility, references to structured

opportunities are scarce for both the labor market and education. Even the EU policy discourse describes the employable individual as one who is equipped with appropriate skills, and this emphasis is compounded by paying much less attention to the demands of labor. In fact, there is a focus in on individual agency rather than on the wider social and economic structure.

More precisely, employability should be seen in the context of neoliberal ideology. Neoliberal ideology informs contemporary globalization and considers trade unions and welfare benefits as impediments to enterprise and the efficient operation of the market. Ideologically, education and work (as opposed to strong welfare regimes) are portrayed to limit poverty and foster social inclusion. If “supply-side” theories focus on the characteristics of the unemployed to offer reasons why they are unemployed, “demand”-focused explanations investigate how the need for workers varies (Strangleman and Warren 2008), and the employability discourse falls into the logic of what Peck and Theodore (2000) call “supply-side fundamentalism,” according to which the individual has the primary duty and responsibility to improve his or her own employability.

Unemployment is currently understood as “a necessary consequence of a market economy, and the state should not intervene for fear of exacerbating the problem” (Edgell 2006, p. 104). In this view, there is a tendency for individuals in late modern society to be set free from the traditional sources of collective identity rooted in early modern society, such as class, family, and community. The term neoliberalism is meant to refer to a set of economic (and political and social) ideas, dating from the rise of capitalism, which stresses the importance of a free market and competition. The discourse of employability may also be seen as corresponding to the revival of human capital theory, which connects investment in human capital development to education and the role of human capital in processes of productivity and growth.

Moreover, whereas the discourse of employability assumes that transitions in the work domain are *today* necessarily scattered and segmented, recent research has demonstrated that despite this common perception, even “back then” in industrialized contexts, transitions from school to work were not as smooth as we tend to believe now. This finding has been discussed in various studies of the UK: some studies are reconsiderations of old material (as in Goodwin and O’Connor 2005), while some are not (as in Vickerstaff 2003); some others criticize an interpretation of increasing flexibility based on quantitative material (Doogan 2001) but challenge the novelty of fragmentation in young people’s career paths. Overall, we may assume that similar issues can be found elsewhere in Western countries.

The implication of lack of novelty for the employability discourse related to young people is that collecting credentials is a somewhat pretentious method of solving occupational problems if career paths are inherently fragmented and insecure – just as they were before the age of “flexibility” and “individualization.” In other words, by convincing young people that they can achieve secure and stable employment by gaining more (formal) credentials, we have been somewhat deceptive and unfair because in the meantime it has been recognized that the age of full employment is long gone and that conditions of underemployment and occasional unemployment are actually “normal.” In other words, it is not through gaining more

qualifications that young people will obtain employment because jobs might not even exist; they might not be created in the first place. Thus, it is possible to disentangle the traditional causal relation between education and employment. In fact, although qualifications are used to assure employment, this is no longer the case. Partly as an effect of credentialism, qualifications are no longer a safety net because more and more young people now hold qualifications.

The tricky message that both systemic and individual problems can be solved by gaining the right qualifications is therefore naïve and dangerous to young people. One empirical study (Moreau and Leathwood 2006) finds that graduates referred to their individual skills as crucial factors hindering or facilitating achievement. This shows that the graduates had absorbed what I have elsewhere called “the graduate career propaganda” (Cuzzocrea 2009) or, in other words, that they seek to demonstrate that they are as good as the market wants them to be, that is to say, in the same capacity, to the same extent, and in the same ways. This study of young professionals shows that career booklets in the UK reproduce norms of comportment and skill, emphasizing confidence, self-presentation, communication, and the ability to accomplish tasks on a deadline. These recommendations amount to “career propaganda” related to the configuration of individual expressions of ambition in the public domain. However, very little criticism has been made on behalf of young people in relation to the predefined matching of skills/qualification on the one hand and the position (to be) occupied in the labor market on the other hand. Very little distance has been taken from this order.

Along this line, we reach the biggest weakness of the employability concept, i.e., that the assertion that individuals shape their own destinies overstates their personal power, thereby falling into voluntarism and neglecting structural limits. Employability means that it is up to the individual to search for educational opportunities “out there” in the market to ensure that he or she has the right qualification with reference to a particular labor market at any given time. Equal opportunity policies reflect an individualistic approach, but existing structures have been left intact. There is, in fact, a lack of recognition of wider social and economic inequalities. As a result, young people are likely to blame themselves for failure. The failure to obtain a position in the labor market equates to personal failure. This same discourse encourages young people to consider their personal characteristics as irrelevant, but we know that is not the case.

A critique of the discourse of “employability” (and its presumption that a large part of the problem lies with youth themselves) should instead argue that young people are not “the problem” because of lack of qualifications; in fact, they are often engaged in several activities, some of which simply go unrecognized. In this regard, employability seems to be a social/government policy concept that has somehow entered sociological analysis without being problematized or critiqued. According to the discourse of employability, graduates expect to benefit from skills and qualifications directly, as though skills and qualifications translate into benefits. This is why the discourse of employability, with its emphasis on individual responsibility and neglect of social inequalities, has potentially damaging consequences for graduates and young people in general.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Since the mid-1990s, the discourse of employability has become significant in the European labor market discourse as a policy category. Employability as a concept captures well the current ideals for the relationship among work, competences, and learning. Today, getting a job is seen as largely dependent on an individual's ability, on his or her sense of responsibility. However, what, more specifically, does the discourse on employability entail? One element is certainly the change in focus from lack of employment to lack of employability, and a shift from the labor market to individuals and their abilities. To assess the concept, we should be asking whether the employability approach has the potential to enable young people to move from welfare benefits to employment. In fact, there are doubts as to whether the employability approach can ever be successful at helping more socially excluded young people who have limited resources at their disposal.

There is also a problem of motivation because it becomes increasingly harder to talk about "employability" in the context of a lack of jobs. How do we motivate young people to acquire new skills and become more "employable" when there is no work to look for? What is the role of personal satisfaction in this process? In the employability discourse, in fact, one never talks about work as a path to self-realization and self-expression. As long as one does have a job, no matter how well it fits into one's educational path, aspirations, and ambitions, the problem is solved. At the same time, failure belongs to the young person. A critique of the discourse of employability should give more recognition to the role of labor markets and occupational structure.

To be added to this, it is young people's lack of involvement in contemporary decision-making. Too often, young people express a sense of resignation and feelings of social exclusion, especially when the economic crisis hits harder. There is a lack of confidence among many people and no belief in the competence of decision-makers. Currently, "young people are pushed into training and education that they feel they are not ready for; and young people at high risk but who are already in education, employment or training are neglected by the service" (Yates and Payne 2006, p. 331). This contrasts with part of the Europe 2020 strategy, whose aim is 'to "unleash the potential" of young people through quality education and training, successful labor market integration, and increased mobility' (MacDonald 2011, p. 439). Youth policy appears now dictated by the labor market, with young people perceived and described as incompetent and ill equipped for employment.

Following the demise of the research on full employment, the role of the state has changed and now has been redefined to support the employability of individuals. However, the question of how institutions can help individuals meet the requirements of their own local contexts remains. In other words, how can the gradual shift of responsibility towards the individual be sustained? Employability needs to be located in a dialogue between multiple stakeholders. Moreover, each of these other sets of stakeholders also has responsibility for making employability work, as McGrath puts it (2009). A contrasting view might suggest that it is the

market that creates employability, not individual capabilities. One possible solution could be to rebalance the shift in responsibility in a way that is fairer to all parties involved. So in particular, to speak to the concerns of young people, Morely (2001) suggests “employer-ability.” Moreover, to mitigate an eventual sense of failure, young people in general should be warned of and critically informed about the shortcomings of the discourse of employability.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Current Debates in Social Justice and Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [Dysfunctional Mobilities: International Education and the Chaos of Movement](#)
- ▶ [Entering the Precariat: Young People’s Precarious Transitions in Japan](#)
- ▶ [Ordinary Working Lives and the “Missing Middle” of Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [Social Justice and Youth Transitions: Understanding Young People’s Lives in Rural Andhra Pradesh, India, and Ethiopia](#)
- ▶ [Thinking About Childhood and Youth](#)
- ▶ [Young People and Social Class in the United Kingdom](#)
- ▶ [Young People’s Transitions to Employment: Making Choices, Negotiating Constraints](#)
- ▶ [Youth and Play: Identity, Politics, and Lifestyle](#)

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Abstract

Youth studies have a tendency to focus on either “spectacular”/problematic or “successful” stories of young people’s transitions to adulthood, creating an overlooked “missing middle” in youth research. Paying heed to this ordinary and unspectacular group allows us to critique accepted theoretical positions and in doing so develop a more holistic picture of the challenges facing young people today. This chapter draws attention to the need to move beyond seeing a positive employment status as an indicator of a successful transition to adulthood. Exploring the relevance of apparently ordinary working lives, issues such as low pay, decreasing employment security, diminishing awareness of and entitlements to effective representation, and a lack of opportunities for upward progression, the outlook for young people even in apparently secure employment is demonstrated to be far from unproblematic.

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Introduction

This chapter considers the way that youth studies often draw on dualistic frameworks, such as fast track and slow track, successful or unsuccessful, and linear and nonlinear, as ways of typologizing young people's transition to adulthood. Within these frames, stable employment is often considered to be an evidence of a successful school-to-work transition. Consequently, youth research tends toward a dichotomous approach focusing on either the somehow spectacular, dangerous, or excluded young people, and then the rest. The aim of this chapter, then, is to draw attention to issues beyond this dualistic understanding, including the experiences and opportunities of who might be labeled apparently as "ordinary" young people who seem to be unproblematically engaged with paid employment.

Neither NEET (not in employment, education, or training) nor especially high flying or obviously "successful," what can be learned from such experiences of this "missing middle?" Thinking through the barriers and challenges *within* employment as well as the barriers *to* employment allows us to question whether paid work can be deemed an entirely effective end point or final destination in the transition to adulthood. Paying attention to such young people's experiences reveals how the operation of power and difference manifests often overlooked forms of inequality near – but perhaps not quite at – the bottom of the social hierarchy. These kinds of nuances allow us to problematize accepted theoretical positions and develop a more holistic picture of the challenges facing young people today.

Youth Transitions and the Centrality of Employment

It is widely recognized that, following something of a fracture within the sociological study of youth in the 1980s, research about young people's lives in recent decades has developed along two separate trajectories. On the one hand, there have been "lively" ethnographic and theoretically driven studies of young people's cultural settings, expressions, and identities; on the other hand, and largely set apart, there has been the *youth transitions* approach. The demise of the youth labor market, widespread youth unemployment, and the expansion of youth training programs raised academic interest regarding how young people dealt with these structural changes and the steps they took from education to employment (Coles 1995; MacDonald et al. 2001).

At the same time, research focusing on young people's cultural forms faced intellectual interrogations for seemingly neglecting the deeper implications of structural changes around class transformation, welfare, and employment (Cohen and Ainley 2000). Rather than ethnographic observation of sub-cultural groups, the central concern of youth sociology became three interrelated transitions: (i) the school-to-work transition (i.e., from *full-time* education to *full-time* position in the labor market), (ii) the domestic transition (i.e., from family of origin to family of destination), and (iii) the housing transition (from residence with parents to living

independently). As a corollary, the questionnaire surveying of school-leaver cohorts became the dominant methodology as youth studies witnessed an observable divergence.

The developments of these two research traditions, however, are general trends, with “structural” and “cultural” analyses not necessarily being mutually exclusive. For instance, in *Learning to Labour*, Willis (1977) combined cultural ethnography with a structural analysis of young people’s economic and political conditions. Similarly, Griffin’s (1985) study of working-class girls, contemporaneous with Willis’ work and McDowell’s (2003) inquiry into modern-day masculinities, had the restructured youth transitions from school to the job market as a key component of their subject matter, but simultaneously used qualitative approaches to access the lived, real, cultural experiences of young people. Nonetheless, why and how to “bridge the gap” between the two traditions remains a current concern for youth sociologists (e.g., Furlong et al. 2011; MacDonald 2011; Roberts and MacDonald 2013), with some arguing that the transition paradigm is now outdated as a result of social change (Wynn and Woodman 2006; Woodman 2009). Meanwhile others have protested that it remains valuable because it enables us to “. . . glimpse the wider processes that generate such different outcomes for young people as they reach adulthood: processes which continue to mean that some get a lot where others end up with very little” (MacDonald et al. 2001: 5.7).

As noted above, these youth transitions are interrelated, with each having potential to determine, and be determined by, attainment of one another. A simple example of this interconnected relationship is that getting a decently paid job may provide the means to be able to set up a home of one’s own or with a partner or spouse. The connection is further strengthened by the fact that young people who enter the labor market before the age of 20 are more likely to marry earlier than those who go into higher education (HE). This suggests that an extended school-to-work transition could impact upon the domestic transition. Similarly, this is the case with those experiencing fractured transitions consisting of extended periods of unemployment, which often result in decisions to delay partnership formation or starting a family (see Jones 1987; Wallace 1987).

Through these brief examples of the interconnected nature of transitions, the centrality of employment becomes evident. Indeed, it is the transition from education to employment that has been the most primary concern for OECD policy makers for over 30 years (Keep 2012), a concern which has been heightened by the tumultuous global economic climate. Furthermore, the World Bank (2013) describes the school-to-work transition as the “critical socio-economic life changing period between approximately 15 to 24 years of age[. . .] when young individuals develop and build skills, based on their initial education and training that helps them become productive members of the society.”

At the front of concerns about young people’s transitions from school to work has been the impact of the increased complexity associated with the conditions of late modernity in industrialized countries. The changed nature of contemporary employment forms and patterns and labor markets resulting from processes of globalization and the concomitant consequences of increased deregulation,

increased outsourcing of production, and evermore technological advances have all meant that for contemporary young people linear, unproblematic transitions associated with previous generations have been replaced. Instead, young people can expect to experience a protracted and increasingly fragmented “set of movements which are less predictable and involve frequent breaks, backtracking and the blending of statuses” (Furlong et al. 2003, p. 24; Furlong and Cartmel 2007). This current situation is often juxtaposed with what is called a “golden age” of transitions, a period when upward social mobility was increasing (Goldthorpe and Jackson 2007). During this period of the post World War II years through to the end of the 1960s, many young people entered into apprenticeships, and those unable to do so found employment in various office, shop, or factory jobs with relative ease (though, see a critique of this by Goodwin and O’Connor 2005). Adult earnings were often achieved within a few years, while evening classes for those undertaking what Hordley and Lee (1970) called the “alternative route” through further education sometimes led to opportunities in more senior roles. From the late 1970s this youth labor market essentially began to collapse, with government managing employment uncertainty through the introduction of youth training schemes.

While education participation has increased over the last three decades, employment uncertainty and concerns about the complexity of transitions have remained and perhaps have even been heightened. Such uncertainty has driven concerns about how an inability to transit smoothly through education to the labor market might lead to disadvantage and social exclusion (Ecclestone 2007). Taking this concern as a starting point, youth research has tended toward dualistic explanations of how these transitions pan out. For example Gill Jones (2002) has described a youth divide, where the transitional experiences of young people tend to be on one of two trajectories, either a “fast track” or a “slow track.” A slow-track transition is based upon the reflexive confrontation of changing circumstances and an extended transition to adulthood. This process is often associated with middle-class young people and linked to their journeys through higher education and to successful labor market outcomes. The fast track, on the other half of the youth divide, is characterized by minimal or limited engagement with the education system, and speedier exits from the familial home and earlier partnership/family formation. Using a similar binary, Furlong et al. (2003) focus instead on linear and nonlinear transitions. Similar to Jones’ perspective, these descriptors pertain to differences in patterns of vulnerability. However, where Furlong and colleagues’ notion is more helpful is that it tends away from automatically assuming that a fast track from school to work, for example, is immediately problematic. Instead, a linear transition refers to those in which there are no major breaks, divergences, or reversals, regardless of whether this involves transitioning directly from school to work, or from school to further and higher education and then to employment. In contrast, nonlinear transitions involve breaks, changes of direction, and unusual sequences of events, including repeated occurrences or long-term unemployment, a high degree of “churn” between jobs, and returns to education and training after periods in employment.

Despite their subtle differences, both Jones (2002) and Furlong et al. (2003) have done much to draw attention to patterns of vulnerability and the risk factors facilitating social exclusion. Indeed, both formulations show that their respective “risky halves” tend to be populated by young people from lower social class backgrounds, those whose parents had faced long-term unemployment, those with lower levels of qualifications, and those from poorer localities. Another unifying theme, and one that is common within studies of youth transition, has been to consider permanent employment as a success measure. Given the importance of employment in facilitating the other transitions to adulthood, this seems entirely reasonable. However, in primarily focusing on the transition *to* work and its associated risks and patterns of vulnerability, researchers could potentially overlook the variability, vulnerability, and disadvantages that young people face *in work*.

While the field of youth studies has drawn a great deal of attention to, *inter alia*, the experiences of being NEET and the realities of “alternative” careers in minor criminality, some groups of young people appear yet to have taken their place on the research agenda in policy or academic studies (Roberts 2011). This includes young people who, on the surface, appear to have been successful in their transition to employment. Beneath the homogenizing employment figures, a positive employment status can be indicative of myriad employment situations and experiences.

The employment literature has tended to focus on adults much more than it has taken young people as its primary focus. Concomitantly youth literature has often rested its gaze on the experiences of unemployment or efforts at trying to secure stable work. Even when young people’s experiences of work have been of particular interest, research has tended to have not disaggregated the situations of students and non-students (e.g., Warhurst and Nickson 2007; Maguire 2010) or has focused on the employment of students specifically (Lee and Orazem 2010; Barron and Anastasiadou 2009; for further discussion see Roberts 2011).

Many young people do successfully engage with the labor market, entering in a range of levels in organizational hierarchies and across a great number of industries. The types and levels of occupation is often a concern for commentators when discussing the employment outcomes and opportunities of and for university graduates. This is no great surprise as, in the UK, for example, the number of jobs requiring a degree-level qualification has increased steadily in the last two decades as too has the number of graduates (Felstead et al. 2013). A great number of young people make their initial foray into the world of paid work starting from a range of qualifications lower than university degrees. As the number of jobs requiring higher levels qualifications grows (Felstead et al. 2013), concerns are naturally raised over the means by which lesser-qualified young people will make this important life transition. As well as those struggling to make this transition, there are a large number of young people who successfully make their transition into nonprofessional and non-salaried roles upon initial entry and engagement with the labor market, remaining more or less continuously employed and not needing support from government “welfare-to-work” style employment-assistance

programs, such as the “New Deal” or the “Work Programme” made available in the UK in recent years (Roberts 2013).

Those who do not progress to more obviously “successful” labor market positions appear worthy of greater academic and policy attention. In work and “out of trouble,” such young people are not deemed feckless or a concern in the way that young people unable to secure employment are considered both *a* risk and *at* risk nor are they necessarily of interest as their more obviously academically successful peers; they are “ordinary,” unproblematic, just getting on with their lives. It is important to note here that, rather than any value judgment or a consideration of subjective perceptions of ordinariness, “ordinary” is used as a term which indicates the potential rationale for the lack of attention given to such young people to date. It is this apparent ordinariness, the assumption that they are part of an unproblematic mainstream, which renders such young people relatively invisible. While researchers can develop a sense of how many and where such young people are located through statistical survey data, actually very little is known about their lives, their hopes and dreams, how they go about making these dreams a reality, and the challenges they face along the way. That is to say, seemingly uninteresting, their experiences are potentially lost from our view and represent something of a missing middle (Roberts 2011). This situation appears to be the total opposite compared to the 1960s and 1970s when the “missing groups” were those on the margins whose “destinations” were assumed to be known – those unable to obtain or hold down any kind of jobs, on the one hand, or those with degrees, on the other (Roberts 2013).

Many such ordinary young people might also be trapped, destined for a lifetime of low-level jobs with little skill development or potential for upward progression. Indeed, Gallie and Paugam suggest that “employment does not guarantee social integration: in the longer run, poor quality jobs are likely to make many people highly vulnerable to job loss and to eventual labour market marginalisation” (2002, p. 62). This seems to be of particular pertinence during the youth period, when experiences tend to solidify social disadvantage and shape future patterns in respect of housing and domestic transitions. Shildrick et al.’s (2010) research into the *low-pay, no-pay cycle* is an example of how this operates. Following up with some of their original sample from an earlier study (Webster et al. 2004), now into their 30s, these respondents were found to still suffer from extensive churn between low and no pay.

The Problems for “Ordinary” Young People at Work

Young people themselves – from both affluent and poorer backgrounds – designate finding a good job as being a priority for the future (Princes Trust 2011). Furthermore, it is more widely recognized that sustainable employment is essential in combating poverty (MacInnes et al. 2009). Employment, then, is important. However, a fair system of social integration counts on much more than being employed: the internal quality of jobs is also an important factor to be considered, and as such

researchers need to consider experiences of paid work rather than seeing employment status as an indicator of a successful transition outcome.

Young people transitioning into the labor market via low-level and entry-level positions face a series of challenges that will impact upon their progression to full adulthood independence, and moreover which can create and bolster conditions linked to poverty and disadvantage.

One way of capturing many of these disadvantages is to consider the extended definition of precariousness that Standing (2011) ascribes to the “precariat.” The precariat, for Standing, is an emergent new class, situated somewhere between “an army of unemployed and a detached group of socially ill misfits” (Standing 2011, p. 8) beneath them, and above them, a shrinking core of old working-class manual laborers, a professional technical class, a “salariat” – characterized by stable, full-time, well-rewarded employment – and, at the very summit, a ruling elite.

Standing explains that anyone can fall into the precariat, but “the most common image is of young people emerging from school and college to enter a precarious existence lasting years” (Standing 2011, p. 65). What these people have in common is that they fare badly in the seven forms of “labor-related security:”

Labor market security: defined as enough jobs to meet a commitment to full employment

Employment security: legal protections against arbitrary hiring and firing, etc.

Job security: opportunity to retain a niche in employment, the chance of upward mobility in status and income, and to avoid prospects of skill dilution

Work security: legal protections to ensure worker’s health and safety

Skill reproduction security: opportunity to gain skills at work and to make use of these competencies

Income security: a protected and adequate minimum wage and rights to social security, progressive taxation to supplement low wages

Representation security: rights to a collective voice and union representation and action

The next passages demonstrate how some of these forms of precariousness pertain to young people and, in many cases, especially young people in paid employment.

The Wider Constraints and Disadvantages of Precariousness

The recent global financial crisis demonstrates a significant lack of labor market security and this has disproportionately affected young people; high rates of youth unemployment across Europe attest to this, e.g., in 2012 more than half of job seekers in Greece (55 %) and Spain (53 %) remained unemployed, with even the UK, France, and Sweden reporting rates of unemployment over close to one in four.

However, an epidemic of low wages has meant that even paid employment cannot guarantee safety from poverty. In the UK, for example, more than half of all children and working-age adults in poverty now live in working households, and 4.4 million jobs pay less than £7 per hour (Aldridge et al. 2012). Low-paid work is common across the kinds of sectors that young people find themselves working in, such as hotels and restaurants, IT, finance and services, and wholesale, retail, and transport jobs. As well as being low-paid sectors, this is compounded by the institutionalization of ideas around “youth wages” which see young people earn varying proportions of adult wages regardless of whether it is for the same type of work. For example, in April 2011 the average rate of pay for young people under the age of 24 in the UK was 42 % lower than those over 25s (ONS 2012).

In part, the argument has been that young people lack the skills and experience of their older counterparts and as a result they suffer a wage penalty. This economic principle is problematized by some academics (see Lucas and Keegan 2007; Price et al. 2011), who explain that the labor market is socially constructed and that people in the period of youth stage – as a socially constructed period of the life course – are perceived and constructed as lacking in value and skills. Yet, rather than having no skills, their skills and contributions may simply be undervalued or unrecognized (Price et al. 2011). As such low pay is a significant issue, but doubly so for young people who suffer the indignity of being rebuffed or ignored by employers offering relatively well-waged opportunities (Hall and Coffey 2007).

Of further importance when researching paid work, particularly when discussing precariousness, is the distinction between part-time and casual and/or temporary work. These types of working arrangements are symptomatic of flexible employment practices that dominate today’s service economy, but they are not necessarily the same. However, Doogan (2009, p. 148) has highlighted how they are often used interchangeably, suggesting that this is a “perverse generalization” on two levels. First, it is illogical; full-time work can also be temporary work. Consequently, seeing full-time work as the only standard and stable form is not entirely correct. Second, working patterns atypical to this standard are presented as a homogenous set of experiences, where exposure to precariousness, uncertainty, and temporary employment is the norm. As a result, “the minority within the minority, the temporary worker, comes to epitomise the non-standard workforce as a whole” (2009). This runs the risk of failing to acknowledge or at least marginalizing other forms of precariousness. A lack of long-term contracts and/or absence of protection against employment termination is entirely problematic – indeed, once a person enters this kind of lower-rung job, the probability of upward mobility and gaining a decent income is permanently reduced (Autor and Houseman 2010) – but there are other less obvious ways by which precariousness affects people’s lives and life chances.

Young people are disproportionately more likely to be part-time and/or temporary workers than the general adult population, and both of these present issues of considerable significance. Since the start of the global economic crisis, the proportion of part-time workers wanting more hours available to them across the EU

27 has grown steadily, from 18.5 % in 2008 to 20.5 % in 2011 and 21.4 % in 2012, indicating that income levels are below what people want (Eurostat 2013).

This is in no small part exacerbated by the increase in the use of zero-hour contracts (Pennycook et al. 2013). This type of working arrangement, which is, again, more often found in industries in which young people are concentrated, allows employers to respond flexibly to demand and therefore guarantees employees no minimum number of weekly hours.

Wages and contract tenure are both incredibly important, but work, however, is about more than a simple equation of selling one's labor to underpin the transition to adulthood, or even ensure day-to-day survival. As Bolton and Houlihan (2009, p. 2) declare “[work] is about esteem and disrespect, status and subordination, opportunity and cost, commitment and alienation.”

With this in mind, Standing's point about job security should be more strongly considered. As noted above, young people are disproportionately located in retail, cafe, and hospitality jobs, often in roles at the sales and customer service level. Such jobs are often considered to be stepping stones to something better, the starting point for young people's engagement with the labor market. This notion is given significant credibility by the fact that students are often not taken out of such labor market analyses, allowing such activity to be correlated with later employment destinations. When properly analyzing the potential for jobs to act as stepping stones for “ordinary” or moderately qualified young people, students are better factored out. A good example is the research conducted by Shildrick et al. who revisited young people trapped in a low-pay, no-pay cycle of work, 10 years after initially interviewing them. Into their 30s, rather than being stepping stones for many of these now young adults, the low pay-no pay cycle remained, and when in work they remained in jobs of similar levels to those occupied when first interviewed. Importantly, this kind of precariousness is compounded by the limited avenues for upward progression and a lack of high-quality training in the types of jobs that young people work in. Other research has indicated that it is often the case that young people felt relatively safe – there were no obvious snakes they could see that would have them slide down out of employment (Roberts 2013). But alongside this, there were no “ladders” to provide opportunities for upward progression. While not appearing especially vulnerable, they are often trapped. Echoing Lloyd and Payne's (2012) comments about employment in the café sector, “internal labour markets are not dead. . . they are thinner and weaker than they used to be.” Consequently, many young people are likely to remain with a fatalistic view of their prospects for occupational development. One reason for this is that increasing numbers of graduates are entering the economy. As they enter the labor market, in many cases they seek jobs for which they are overqualified and accept lower wages than their qualifications would be expected to garner (Green and Zhu 2010). The influx of overqualified workers into low-skilled jobs has therefore blunted wage growth at the bottom of the earnings distribution, despite the growth in demand for workers in these jobs. In other words, there is an oversupply of labor. Of course this also has to be considered in line with the challenges emerging from an increasing student labor force, as well as graduates.

The flexibility that students offer often corresponds with employers' desires for short hours and part-time contracts and is in direct conflict with the motivations of those who want full-time work and who want to progress. A more fundamental reason for this lack of progression, and even a lack of feeling integral, is the nature and quality of training that the young people are often given the opportunity to undertake. For example, the only vocational qualification many respondents had undertaken at work in Roberts' (2013) research was the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 2. While opportunities to undertake this qualification apparently indicate an expansive learning environment, Fuller and Unwin (2004) note that these kinds of qualifications are usually used as a mechanism for validating what employees already know, rather than being developmental in any real sense. Furthermore, the quality, content, and subsequent value attached to the qualification by the candidates in Roberts's (2013) research are of substantial importance. In this respect, these qualifications were almost always perceived very negatively, with many deeming the qualification a form of inconvertible cultural capital, and, worse, a stigma.

The macroeconomic situation provides a wider concern for young people in such jobs aspiring toward higher-level jobs, and, in many cases, trying to better their chances through obtaining work and educational qualifications. While the number of economically active adults with no qualifications is estimated at just 585 k by 2020, the UK economy will still likely have around seven million jobs that require no entry qualifications (Lawton 2009).

Conclusion and Future Directions

Young people today can find that their journey to adulthood is fraught with difficulties, many of which can be directly linked to the onset of poverty. The significance of studying the experience of unemployment is, correspondingly, widely and duly noted. Beyond the pursuit of paid work, however, young people's formative experiences of employment in the formal economy are something about which youth transition researchers should remain concerned. It is not just entry into paid work that is important, but also the type of work. As Morrow (1994) explained 20 years ago, some people are doubly advantaged from their socioeconomic background and the social capital that follows, and this allows them not only to be readier to access paid work, but also the better kinds of work. Young people with as positive employment status might appear to be "ordinary" and untroubled, even to be out of harm's reach. However, the kinds of jobs in which they are incumbent are not necessarily likely to act as stepping stones or to promote any form of social mobility. Potentially trapped at the bottom of the service sector economy, such work is unlikely, as Standing (2011, p. 16) notes, to assist young people in building a desirable career. Scratching beneath the surface then, in combination with low pay, decreasing employment security, and less and less awareness of and entitlements to effective representation, and a lack of opportunities for upward progression, the outlook for "ordinary" young people is not

necessarily as unproblematic as it first might seem. Experiences such as these require us to revisit our explanatory frameworks because those who comprise the “missing middle” do not map neatly onto the two-part typologies so often used in youth research to date.

Cross-References

- ▶ “Black Neighborhoods” and “Race,” Placed Identities in Youth Transition to Adulthoods
- ▶ Approaches to Understanding Youth Well-Being
- ▶ Critical Moments? The Importance of Timing in Young People’s Narratives of Transition
- ▶ Entering the Precariat: Young People’s Precarious Transitions in Japan
- ▶ Scales of Young People’s Lives
- ▶ Thinking About Childhood and Youth
- ▶ Time and Space in Youth Studies
- ▶ Unemployment, Insecurity, and Poor Work: Young Adults in the New Economy
- ▶ Young People and Employability
- ▶ Young People and Social Class in the United Kingdom
- ▶ Young People’s Transitions to Employment: Making Choices, Negotiating Constraints

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Abstract

As various styles of unstable work have spread in advanced society, more young people are suffering from precarious transitions. Standing argues that precarity is concentrated in particular groups and a new social class of precarious people, the *Precariat*, is emerging (Standing, *The Precariat; The new dangerous class*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011). Using longitudinal data from the Youth Cohort Study of Japan, we examine whether a Precariat is emerging among Japanese young people. Our first finding is that signifiers of a precarious condition are concentrated in particular young people. Three in ten have continuously remained precarious condition of non-regular employment or jobless after their leaving education until their mid-twenties. Only a few of those who started their job career with unstable one have eventually reached stable condition. The second finding is that those in a precarious condition often remain

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there with little social support. Not only is the wage gap between regular and non-regular employees wide, most of the precarious group do not rely on social security either as those without a record of regular employment are rarely eligible for unemployment insurance. The third finding is that the precarious group reported lower self-esteem and life satisfaction. It seems that precarity affects their subjectivity to a greater extent. However, there are a few differences between genders, and it is difficult to attribute the low self-esteem of females to factors purely relating to precarity. Our findings suggest that a particular group of young people who are continually kept in precarity is emerging in contemporary Japan. It is similar to Standing's *Precariat*, as far as they share common precarious conditions. However, when we focus on their subjective feelings, there are a few complexities which require further examination.

Introduction

The transformation of the labor market in Japan since the end of the 1970s has seriously affected young people's transitions from school to work. Successive neoliberal governments' flexible labor market policies coupled with an increasingly globalized economy have enormously increased the proportion of precarious jobs. Unemployment used to be seen as the typical precarious employment state, but various kinds of precarious work such as temporary, part-time, fixed-term contracts, dispatched work, and contract work have also increased rapidly in the subsequent decades. Kalleberg describes five characteristic features of contemporary precarity: a decline in attachment to employers, an increase in long-term unemployment, growth in perceived job insecurity, growth of nonstandard work arrangements, and growth of contingent work. These exemplify an increase in risk shifting from employers to employees (Kalleberg 2009).

Young people are particularly vulnerable in an uncertain labor market because they are unprotected by seniority and they do not possess strong ties to work organizations and their work environment (Mills and Blossfeld 2005). Standing argues that precariat is concentrated in particular groups and a new social class of precarious people, the Precariat (Standing 2011) is emerging. He indicates that young people are the most likely group to constitute the Precariat along with immigrants. In this chapter, based on our longitudinal study, we will describe how precarity is increasing among young people in Japan, how it is concentrated in a particular group, and why a Precariat is emerging in Japan.

Japan's youth transitions from school to work used to be considered efficient (Vogel 1979; OECD 2000); however, this has changed since the mid-1990s as precarious transitions have drastically increased (Brinton 2010). Official Japanese Government statistics indicate the rapid increase of precarity among young people. The unemployment rate of those aged from 15 to 24 which was 4 % in 1990 had reached 10 % by 2003, and the rate of nonstandard employment such as temporary, fixed-term, and dispatched for the same age group which was 20 % in 1990 rose to just under 50 % by the early 2000s

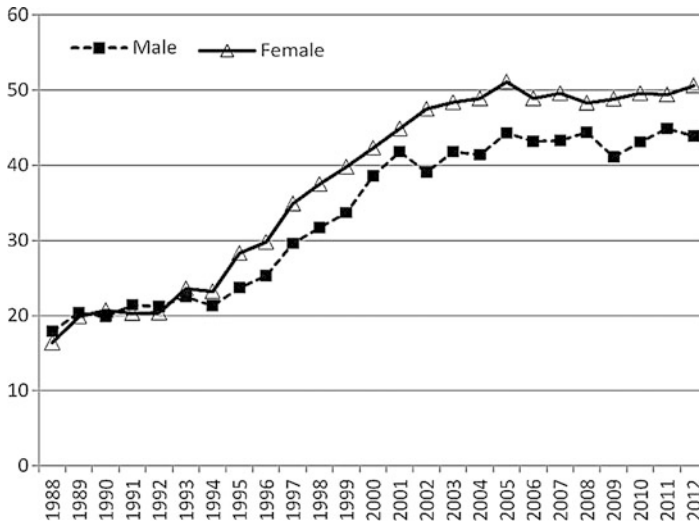


Fig. 1 Ratio of non-regular employment: age 15–24 (Statistics Bureau 2011)

(Fig. 1, Statistics Bureau 2011). Though Japan's unemployment rate is comparatively low among developed countries, the nonstandard employment rate is much higher (Inui 2009).

Despite official statistics indicating an increase in precarity, they are based only on snapshot data and therefore do not indicate how young people find themselves in precarious positions over a certain period. If precarity is concentrated within a particular group during a certain period, it would be more serious than if it was experienced by many young people widely. We examined this by analyzing longitudinal survey data, in this case the Youth Cohort Study of Japan (YCSJ). This covers 768 young people's transitions from school to work over a 5-year period, from the ages of 20 to 21 (2007) and 24 to 25 (2011). Firstly, we analyzed the time period by using optimal matching analysis to show how precarity is concentrated in a few particular groups. Secondly, we examined how the respondents are living and working and whether social security and job security systems are meeting their needs. Thirdly, we examined their subjectivity by recording how they feel and view themselves in terms of self-esteem and life satisfaction. Finally, we will discuss the emergence of the Precariat within contemporary Japanese youth and its complicated character.

The Concentration of Precarity Among Young People

In this section we will examine how precarity is concentrated in particular groups of young people. In the YCSJ data respondents' main activities are defined in six categories: (1) education – school, college, university or government training;

(2) regular employment – full time and non-fixed-term; (3) non-regular employments, temporary (*freeter*), fixed-term, part-time, or dispatched; (4) self-employed and family worker; (5) unemployed; and (6) others. To analyze this question we combined regular employment and self-employed into one variable that denotes those with a stable job, and conversely unemployed and others into another variable that denotes those without any job.

Analyzing by optimal matching method, we get eight groups.

Group 1 (Late and Stable, Fig. 2) consists of those who left education late and are mainly in a stable job (regular employment or self-employed).

They spent 62 % of their time in education and 35 % in stable employment on average.

Group 2 (Early and Stable, Fig. 3) consists of those who left education early and are mainly in stable jobs. They spent 24 % of their time in education and 73 % in stable employment on average.

Group 3 (Late and Unstable, Fig. 4) consists of those who left education late and are mainly in unstable jobs. They spent 62 % of their time in education and 24 % in unstable employment on average. They also spent 8 % of this time without a job.

Group 4 (Early and Unstable, Fig. 5) consists of those who left education early and are mainly in unstable jobs. They spent 16 % of their time in education and 66 % in unstable employment on average. They also spent 8 % of this time without a job.

Group 5 (Stable to Unstable, Fig. 6) consists of those early education leavers whose early career was stable but later became rather unstable. They spent 49 % of this time in stable employment, 17 % in unstable employment, and 14 % without a job on average.

Group 6 (Unstable to Stable, Fig. 7) consists of those early education leavers whose early job career was unstable but later became stable. They spent 44 % of this time in stable employment and 35 % in unstable employment on average.

Group 7 (Long Education, Fig. 8) consists of those who stayed in education for most of this period. They spent 87 % of this time in education on average.

Group 8 (Jobless, Fig. 9) consists of those who left education early and spent much of this time without stable employment. They spent 60 % of this time without a job and only 6 % in stable employment on average.

Roughly speaking, half of our respondents (Groups 1 and 2) maintained stable employment following their education, and another 4 % (Group 6) managed to get stable employment by the age of 24/25. A quarter (Groups 3 and 4) of respondents stayed mainly in unstable jobs after education, and another 5 % (Group 5) found themselves in unstable jobs by the age of 24/25. 5 % remained in seriously precarious positions of employment after education throughout this period (Table 1).

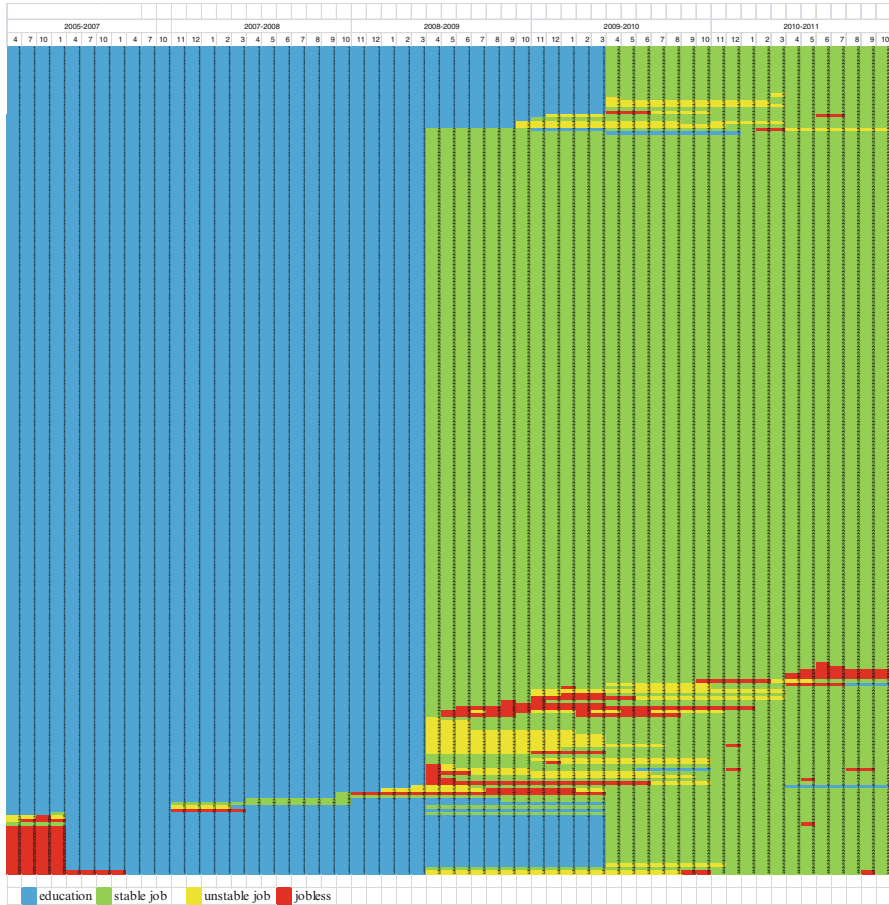


Fig. 2 Late and Stable

Precarity is concentrated in Group 3 (Late and Unstable), Group 4 (Early and Unstable), and Group 8 (Jobless), this constitutes 31 % of all respondents. The total period of “non-regular employment” for all respondents was 11,242 months, and 81 % of that was experienced by those in these three precarious groups. 70 % of “unemployed” period and 66 % of “other (Jobless)” were also experienced by them (calculated based on Table 2).

The remaining 9 % included in Group 5 (Stable to Unstable) and Group 6 (Unstable to Stable) also experienced some continuous periods of precarity. By contrast, those in Group 1 (Late and Stable) and Group 2 (Early and Stable) rarely experienced periods of unstable employment or unemployment. It seems that non-regular employment may act as a stepping stone toward getting regular employment but only for a small group of individuals, specifically for early education leavers.

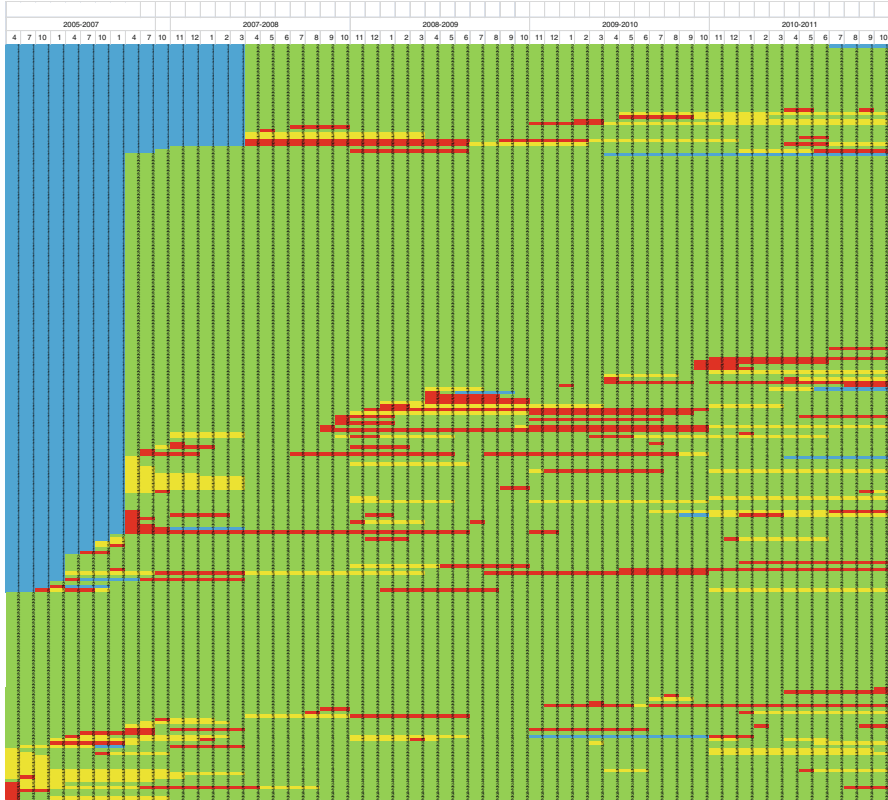


Fig. 3 Early and Stable

Working Conditions and Income Support for Young People

How do young people partaking in precarious work make their living? In this section, we will examine work conditions and income support systems for young people to clarify some of the contributing factors in creating precarious work situations.

The wages of Japanese employees are correlated largely with employment types; regular workers earn higher salaries than non-regular workers (OECD 2009, p. 99). We can confirm the difference in wage profiles by trajectory groups according to Fig. 10. Firstly, the growth of average annual earnings differs slightly even among those in regular employment. The annual earnings of Group 2 (Early and Stable) and Group 6 (Unstable to Stable) appear to slowly increase and remain on the same level in 2010 and 2011, while the annual earnings of Group 1 (Late and Stable) which almost reaches three million yen in 2011 is well beyond that. Predictably, the average annual earnings of these groups are higher than those in non-regular

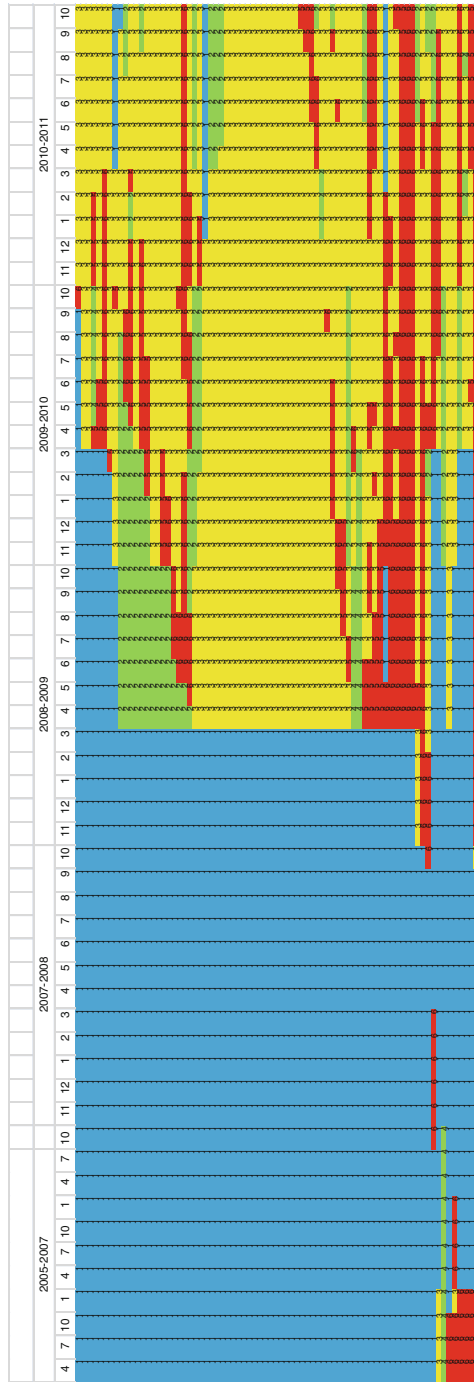


Fig. 4 Late and Unstable

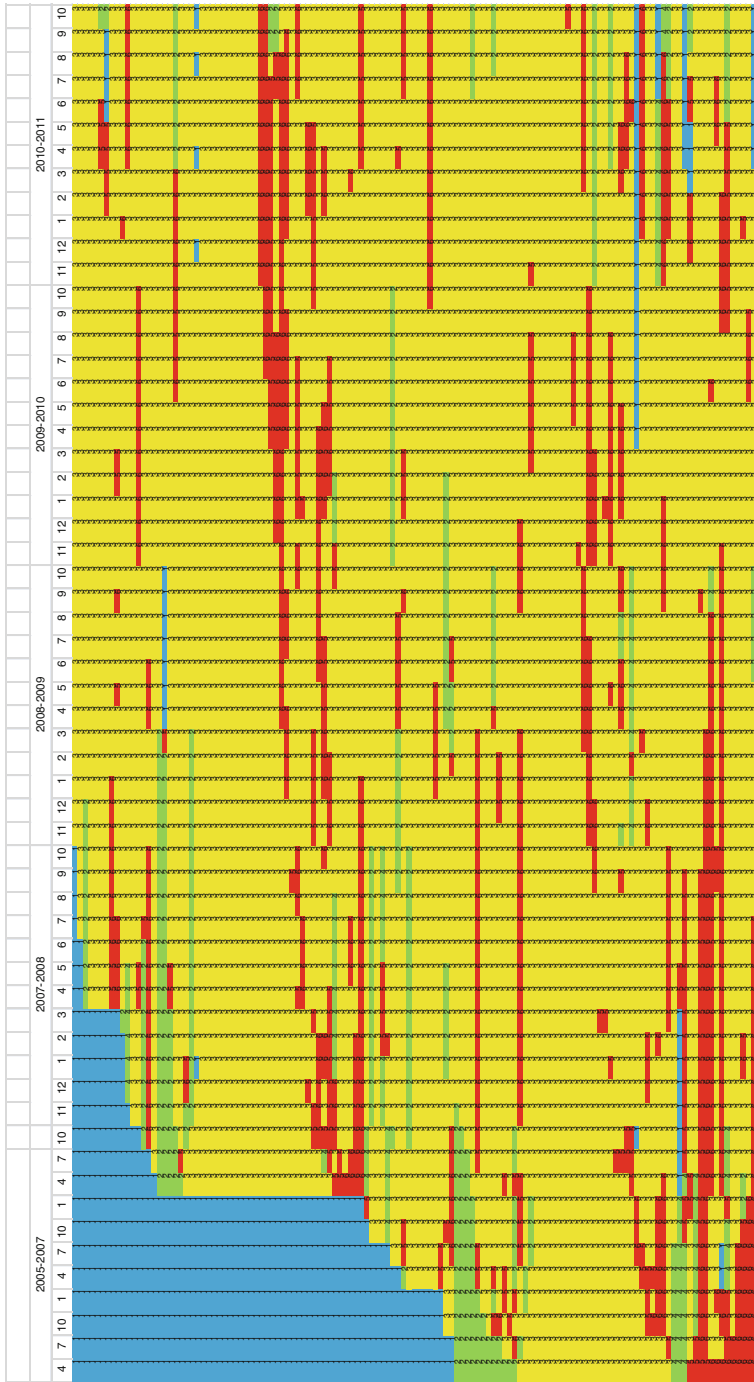


Fig. 5 Early and Unstable

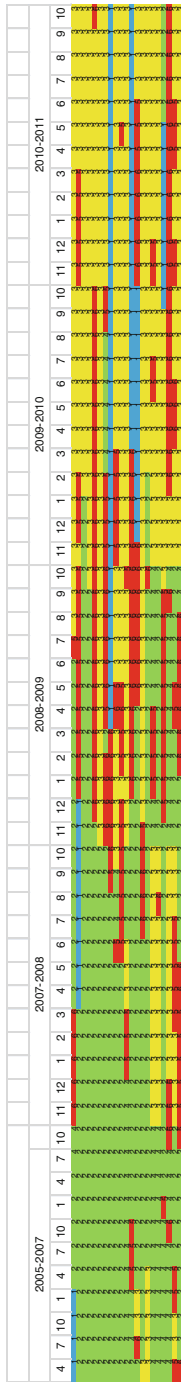


Fig. 6 Stable to Unstable

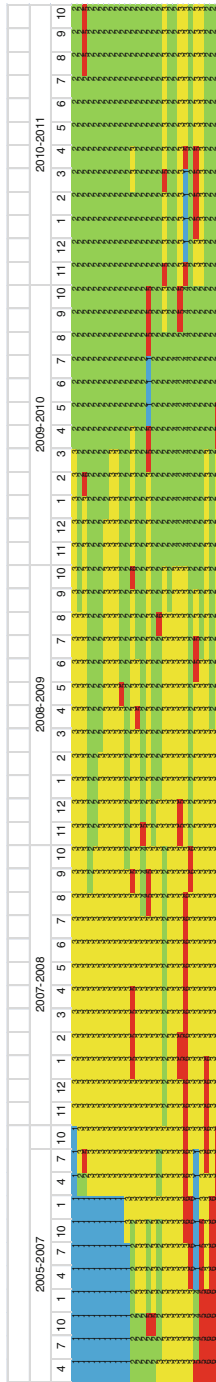


Fig. 7 Unstable to Stable



Fig. 8 Long Education

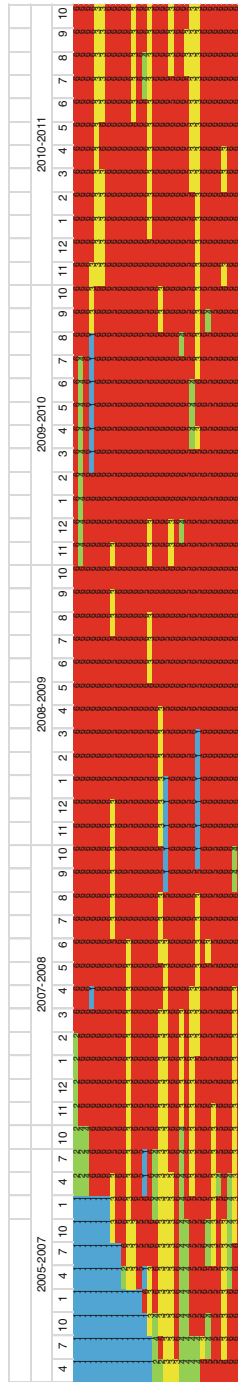


Fig. 9 Jobless

Table 1 Share of each group by gender (%) (weighted by locality)

	Total	Male	Female
1 Late and Stable	30.4	34.4	27.2
2 Early and Stable	22.8	19.8	25.2
3 Late and Unstable	8.8	6.5	10.6
4 Early and Unstable	14.0	12.1	15.6
5 Stable to Unstable	4.5	4.6	4.5
6 Unstable to Stable	3.9	1.9	5.4
7 Long Education	11.0	18.0	5.4
8 Jobless	4.5	2.8	5.9

Table 2 Share of how time was spent by activities (%)

	Education	Stable job	Unstable job	Jobless
Total	42.6	32.4	16.9	8.1
1 Late and Stable	61.7	34.7	1.5	2.0
2 Early and Stable	23.7	73.0	1.2	2.2
3 Late and Unstable	62.0	5.2	24.2	8.6
4 Early and Unstable	16.0	10.0	65.7	8.3
5 Stable to Unstable	21.0	48.6	16.9	13.5
6 Unstable to Stable	15.7	44.3	34.8	5.1
7 Long Education	86.5	4.1	2.2	7.2
8 Jobless	12.8	5.5	22.1	59.6

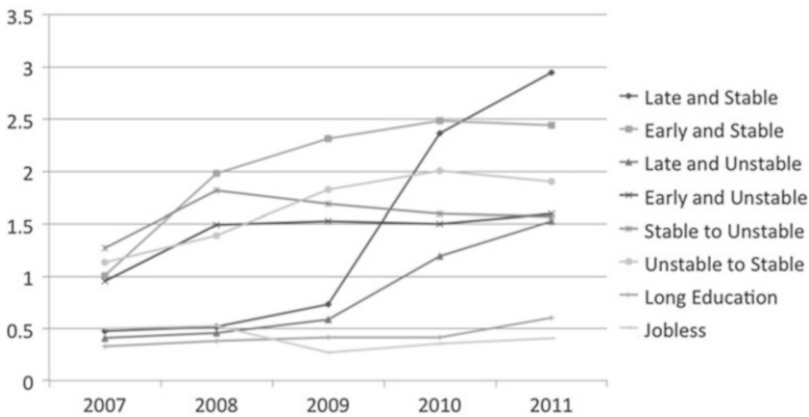


Fig. 10 Average annual earnings by trajectory groups (million JPY)

employment. Secondly, non-regular workers do not earn enough money because their earnings tend to total about 1.5 million yen. It is clear that the wage profile is flat among unstable groups except Group 3 (Late and Unstable) which contains a lot of university graduates who graduated in 2010. In contrast to the wage profile of those in regular employment which is expected to rise with seniority, a consistent

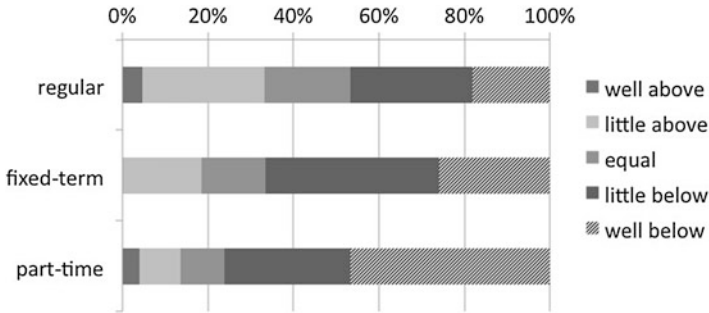


Fig. 11 Perceived deprivation of monthly earnings by employment type (%)

pattern of low-wage jobs is typical for those in non-regular employment. Finally, both Group 7 (Long Education) and Group 8 (Jobless) have almost no income because of the time they have spent out of work.

Though we make sure that every group has its own wage profile, it is not obvious which factors cause this gap. Focusing on average working hours per week by employment type in 2011, regular workers spent 47.0 h in work, while fixed-term workers spent 43.9 h. Part-time workers spent 34.6 h on average in work. However, it is too early to say that the earnings gap increases due to the difference in working hours. When we calculate mean wage per hour by employment type, the data clearly shows that regular workers receive higher hourly pay than fixed-term workers and part-time workers. The latter obtain only around 62 % of the wage of a person who is in regular employment and the former earn around 74 %. The pay gap results from the fringe benefits of regular employees with companies that provide bonuses, housing allowance, commuting allowance, etc. The disparity is likely to increase due to the prevalence of seniority pay policies also.

In addition, it should not be forgotten that young people in part-time and fixed-term contracts are generally unsatisfied with their financial conditions. According to Fig. 11, which shows self-assessment of present monthly earnings in comparison to the socially perceived income for a decent living, 75 % of part-time workers and 67 % of fixed-term workers felt deprived of a minimum standard of income.

Given the fact that a number of young people receive an inadequate income, how can they make ends meet? Next, we will examine whether income support works effectively for young people in precarious positions of employment to mitigate this.

In recent years many European countries have introduced various income support systems to protect against insecure employment and the risk of insufficient incomes. The OECD (2007) exemplifies the three cornerstones of this policy as follows: unemployment insurance which is paid to claimants on the basis of employment record or duration of insured work, unemployment assistance benefits which are eligible for the unemployed without an insurance record, and social assistance benefits which are a financial support of last resort for people receiving insufficiently low incomes.

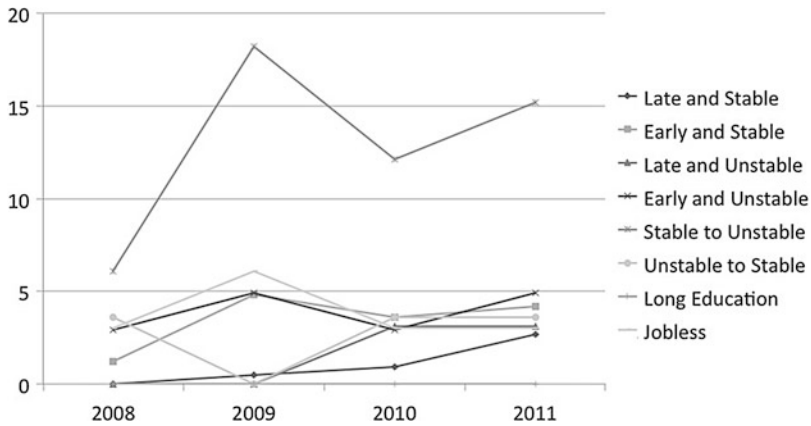


Fig. 12 Beneficiaries of unemployment allowance (%)

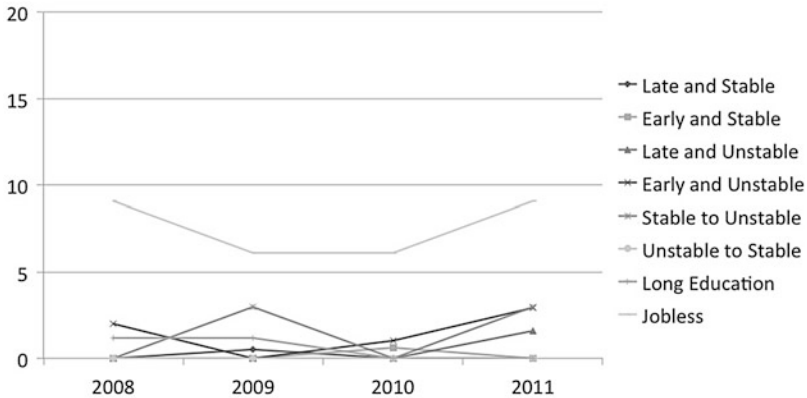


Fig. 13 Beneficiaries of social assistance (%)

According to Fig. 12, while most young workers have hardly received any unemployment allowance, about a fifth of Group 5 (Stable to Unstable) received it in 2009. The main reason for this is that Group 5 had a sufficient employment record as regular workers that entitled them to unemployment insurance benefits. On the contrary, the young unemployed who do not have this work history are not insured and thus do not receive any allowance. Despite assistance for those in vocational training being introduced in September 2009, this new allowance has not been stretched to those who are unemployed.

Young people generally receive very few benefits in Japan. Figure 13 shows that Group 8 (Jobless) is more likely to receive social assistance than any other group; however, the rate of uptake is not particularly high. The reason for this low uptake is that social assistance in Japan has strict eligibility criteria such as incapacity for

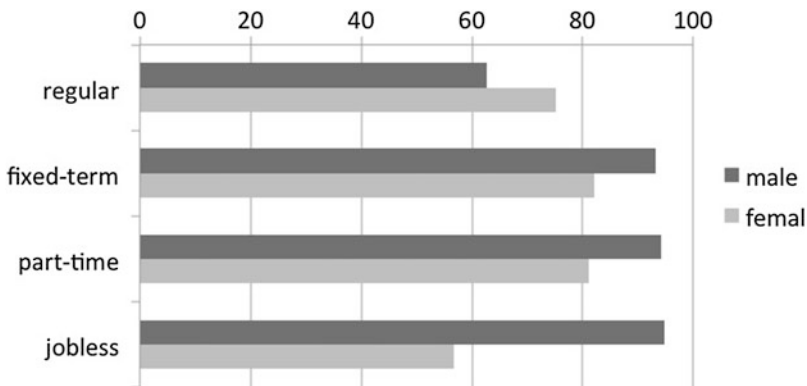


Fig. 14 Share of young people living with their parents by sex and employment type (%)

work and impossibility of support by relatives; therefore, it is hard for young people to receive benefit even if their earnings are below the poverty line.

As mentioned above, young people in precarious positions of employment are at risk of submitting to the status quo because they have often been kept out of income maintenance policies that are extremely limited. Under these circumstances families may support young people on lower incomes. In the case of men, young people who are engaged in non-regular jobs or are out of work are more likely to stay at home with their parents than regular workers (Fig. 14). The case for women is somewhat complicated due to being more likely to have entered a new household. Over half of jobless women do not live with their parents because 43 % of women out of work are married. In addition, the share of non-regular female workers living with their parents is a little lower than that of males owing to the fact that about a tenth of non-regular female workers are married. We can conclude from this that young people on low incomes can mitigate the worst excesses of financial insecurity with help from their families.

Subjectivity Among Precarious Youth: Self-Esteem and Life Satisfaction

Our next question is how young people feel about and view themselves. Does each group show particular characteristics and tendencies in terms of their subjectivities, and is there a correlation between precarity and subjectivity?

To examine self-esteem and life satisfaction, we asked five questions: “I am pleased with who I am,” “I feel that I am living my life in my own way,” “I have some advantages over other people,” “I have an ability to contribute to society,” and “How much are you satisfied with your life?” Every question could be answered with one of four levels of agreement: 1 “Strongly Disagree,” 2 “Disagree,” 3 “Agree,” and 4 “Strongly Agree.” The y-axis on the following graphs shows the average.

Fig. 15 I am pleased with who I am

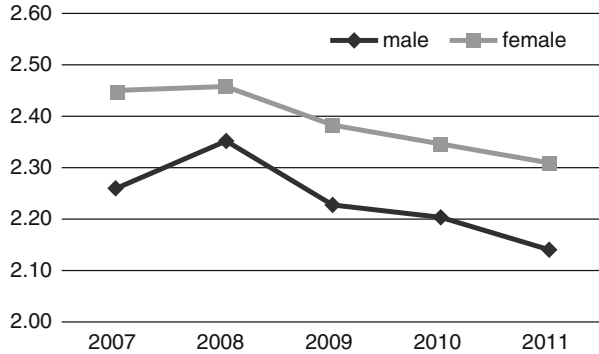
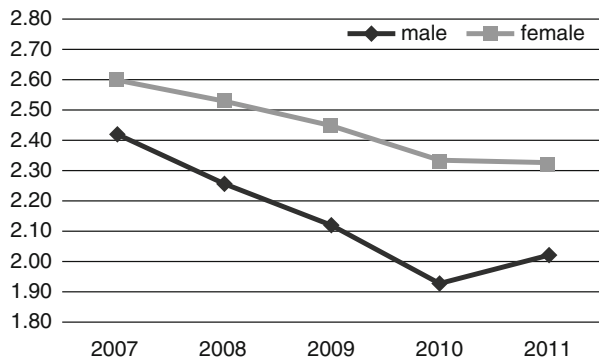


Fig. 16 How much are you satisfied with



We particularly focused on “I am pleased with who I am” and “How much are you satisfied with your life?” In this section we focused on Group 1 (Late and Stable), Group 2 (Early and Stable), Group 3 (Late and Unstable), Group 4 (Early and Unstable), and Group 8 (Jobless). Groups 1 and 2 are defined as “stable groups,” while Groups 3, 4, and 8 are defined as “precarious groups.”

Overall, self-esteem and life satisfaction seem to fall during this five-year period among both males and females. However, there are significant differences between genders and between the stable groups and unstable groups (Figs. 15 and 16).

In general, levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction among unstable groups were consistently lower than those of stable ones. Above all, unstable males had clearly lower self-esteem and life satisfaction than that of stable males over the 5-year period (Figs. 17 and 19). This however was not always the case for females. Despite females from the unstable group reporting lower self-esteem and life satisfaction than stable ones throughout the five-year period, the gap has narrowed (Figs. 18 and 20).

Males in the unstable group, Group 3 (Late and Unstable) and Group 4 (Early and Unstable), show a particular trend (Figs. 21 and 22). In regard to Group 4, levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction were originally lower than those of Group 2 (Early and Stable). Furthermore, throughout the 5-year period, levels of

Fig. 17 I am pleased with who I am (male)

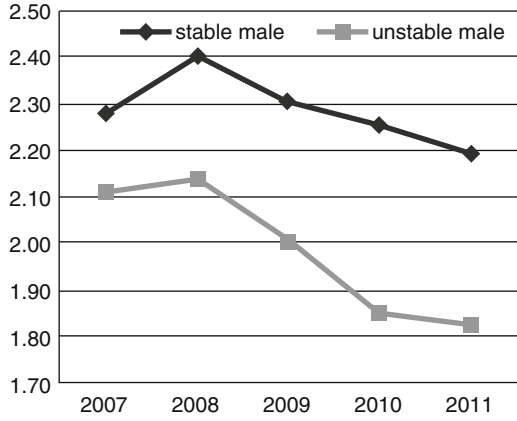


Fig. 18 I am pleased with who I am (female)

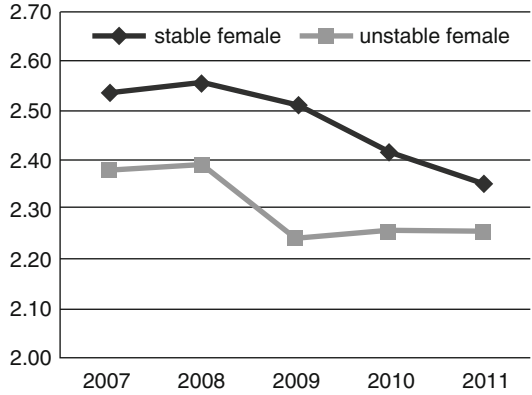


Fig. 19 How much are you satisfied with your life? (male)

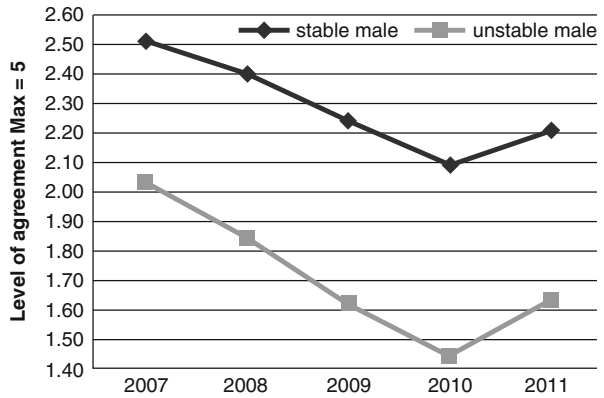


Fig. 20 How much are you satisfied with your life? (female)

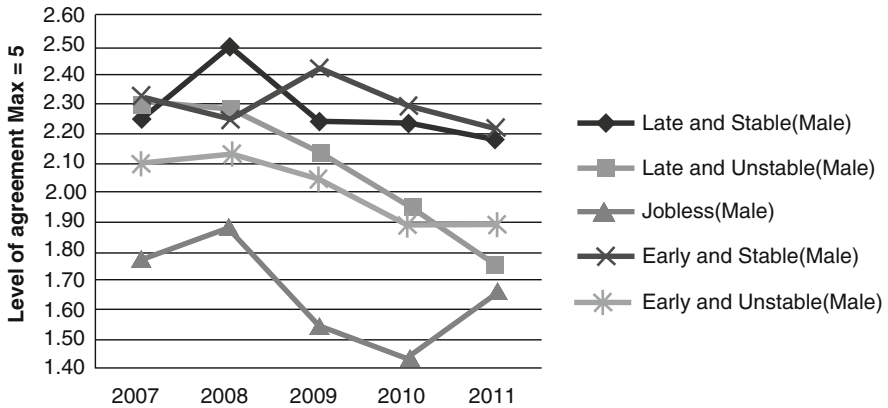
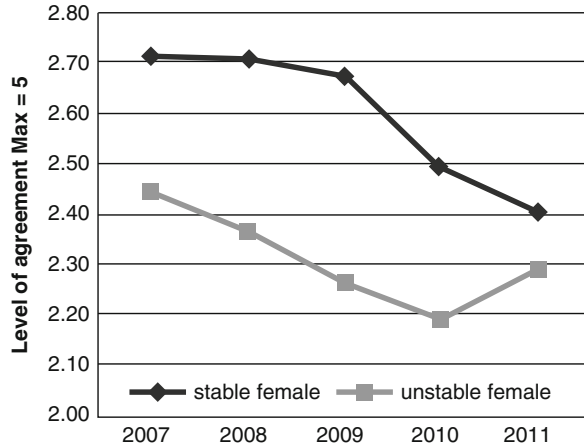


Fig. 21 I am pleased with who I am (male)

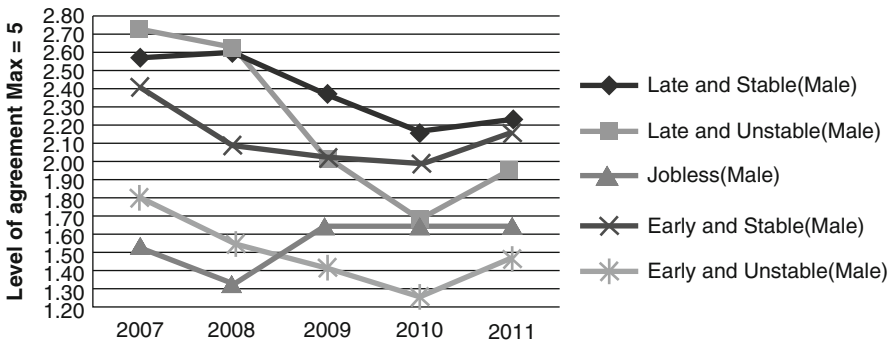


Fig. 22 How much are you satisfied with your life?

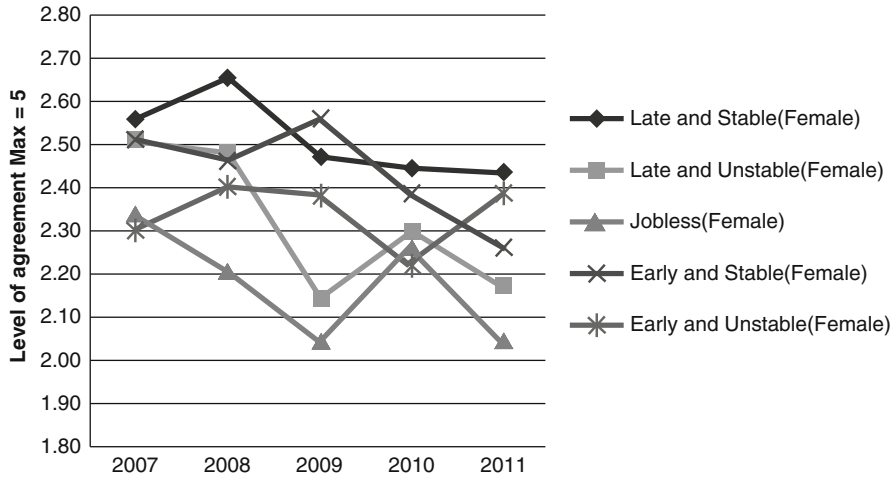


Fig. 23 I am pleased with who I am (female)

self-esteem and life satisfaction have fallen and the gap between the two groups has widened. In contrast with Group 4, Group 2 has shown more stability and by 2011 reported the highest level of positive responses or thereabouts among all of the groups.

On the other hand, Group 3 (Late and Unstable) initially had shown the same and sometimes rather higher self-esteem and life satisfaction compared to that of Group 1 (Late and Stable). However, their responses have fallen considerably over the 5-year period, while those of Group 1 have often stayed the same. Consequently, the gap between Group 1 and Group 3 has notably widened.

Contrastingly, females expressed a rather different outlook (Figs. 23 and 24). Females from Group 4 (Early and Unstable) originally had lower self-esteem and life satisfaction than those in Group 2 (Early and Stable), yet by 2011 their responses were noticeably more positive than Group 2 in relation to certain questions. In regard to females from Group 3 (Late and Unstable), we can see that responses have become negative much more considerably than in other groups (Figs. 23 and 24). In the *case* of other questions (e.g., “Do you feel you are more fortunate than other people?” Fig. 25), Group 3 consistently gave more positive responses which was not the case for their male counterparts.

In the case of the Jobless group, females have shown the most negative responses over the 5-year period except life satisfaction (Figs. 23, 24, and 25). However, this has not always been the case for males (Figs. 21 and 22). At the beginning, jobless males recorded the most negative responses among their gender, but the gap between Jobless and other unstable groups narrowed generally over the 5 years. For the last 3 years, jobless males reported better life satisfaction than Early and Unstable males. As far as the latest subjectivity, non-regular males have not always better condition than jobless males.

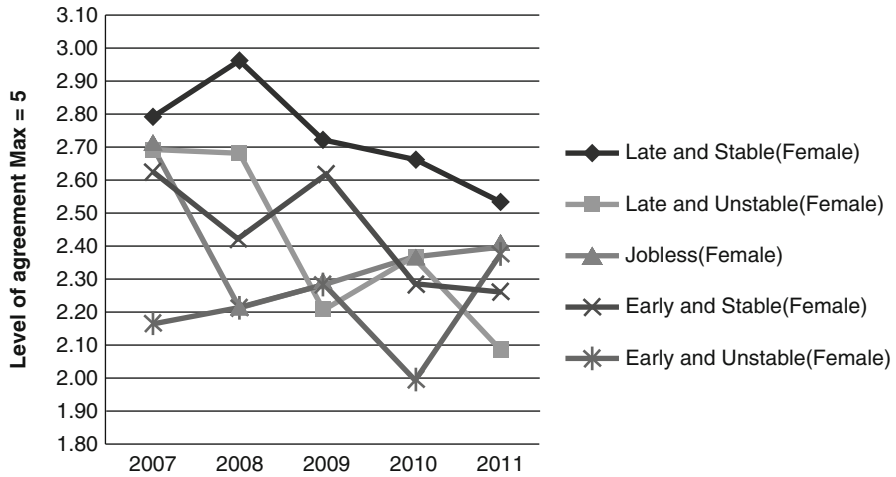


Fig. 24 How much are you satisfied with your life? (female)

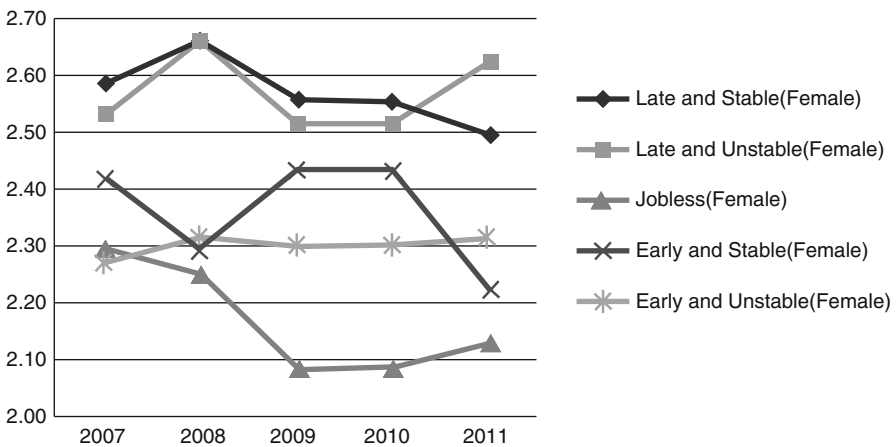


Fig. 25 I have some advantages over other people (female)

In terms of subjectivity among the precarious youth, we can note the following points. Firstly, general levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction among unstable groups were consistently lower than those of stable groups. Secondly, there is a considerable difference between genders. Overall precarious males seem to have a negative subjectivity greater than that of precarious females, and the gap between stable males and unstable males has widened over the five-year period. On the other hand in regard to the female groups which left school at the same time (Early or Late), the subjectivity of the unstable female group has not always been more negative than that of the stable female group. Correlation between subjectivity and

working status seems to be weaker for females than for males; in other words female subjectivity is presumed to be correlated by some other factors which did not arise from this analysis.

Conclusion and Future Directions

This study examined the levels of precarity among young people in Japan. Primarily we found that signifiers of a precarious condition were concentrated in one particular group, the unstable group. Two in ten of the respondents had remained in non-regular employment or jobless throughout their transitional period of 18–25, and another one in ten found themselves in the same condition after leaving university. We found that only a small proportion of those starting their working career in an unstable job eventually reached a stable condition by their mid-twenties.

The second finding was that those in precarious economic positions often remain there with little social support. Non-regular employees receive a low wage, not because their working hours are less but due to the fact their wages are insufficient. It is often the case that they cannot rely on social security either as those without a record of regular employment are rarely eligible for unemployment benefits.

The third finding was that the precarious group reported lower self-esteem and life satisfaction in general. It seems that precarity affects their subjectivity to a greater extent. However, there are a few differences between genders and it is difficult to attribute the low self-esteem of females to factors purely relating to precarity.

Our findings suggest that the barrier between regular employment and non-regular employment is high in Japan. A very small number of young people who start their working career unemployed or in nonstandard (non-regular) employment find standard (regular) employment later on. The wage rate of a nonstandard employees is considerably lower and lacks any expectation of a seniority wage increase or employment protection. Permanent workers enjoy comprehensive employment protection in Japan (individual dismissal, difficulty of dismissal), a privilege which is relatively absent for fixed-term contract workers (OECD 2013). Until the early 1990s part-time and temporary jobs were mainly taken up by housewives and students. The government and politicians did not regard the low wage rate and weak employment protection as a serious issue for these groups as they could depend on other family members for supplemental income. Yet since the mid-1990s many young people who cannot find regular employment have started their working career in non-regular employment (Brinton 2010). However, the regulation for non-regular employment has scarcely changed giving employers a strong incentive to replace regular workers with non-regular workers.

It seems therefore that a particular group of young people who are continuingly kept in precarity is emerging in contemporary Japan. It is similar to Standing's *Precariat*, as far as they share common precarious conditions. As for males they

share not only economic (objective) conditions but also subjective feelings of seriousness. This shared feeling does not mean that they share a particular identity, but the seriousness might be a base for constructing their identity which is the essential factor of the “class-for-itself” (Standing 2011, p. 7). However, for females the feelings are more complex given that our findings suggest non-regular employment does not always result in negative self-esteem among females. It might be that the pervasive gender ideology which forces men to be breadwinners depresses the subjectivity of precarious males further. It may also be the case that the social networks which non-regular females often maintain mitigate these feelings. We are yet to explain the reason for this precisely. It is of great importance therefore that we closely observe these changes and attempt to promote policies which tackle the serious conditions related to the *Precariat* in Japan.

Cross-References

- ▶ [“Black Neighborhoods” and “Race,” Placed Identities in Youth Transition to Adulthoods](#)
- ▶ [Citizenship: Inclusion and Exclusion](#)
- ▶ [Participating as Young Citizens in Diverse Communities](#)
- ▶ [Social Justice and Youth Transitions: Understanding Young People’s Lives in Rural Andhra Pradesh, India, and Ethiopia](#)
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- ▶ [Young People and Employability](#)
- ▶ [Young People’s Transitions to Employment: Making Choices, Negotiating Constraints](#)

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Part VIII

Place

David Farrugia

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Abstract

While many perspectives continue to work with universal concepts drawn from the metropolitan centers of the global north, childhood and youth are constructions that vary according to the social processes that shape young lives in different places around the world. Addressing the need for better recognition of the complex differences and interconnections that structure young lives, this introduction highlights the significance of a spatial perspective for rethinking the theories and disciplinary priorities of childhood and youth studies. The chapter covers the theoretical meaning of concepts such as space, place, and scale and draws on these concepts in order to capture the local, national, and global diversity of contemporary childhood and youth. A spatial perspective on childhood and youth highlights issues such as the different intersections of play, education, and work in different spaces and places, the significance of mobility and immobility for understanding inequality, or the way that young people’s identities are constructed through relationships to place.

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A focus on space and place also breaks down existing binaries such as urban/rural and local/global and allows experiences from the global south to influence theoretical development within the discipline. As such, a spatial perspective crosses geographical and theoretical divisions, enriching existing perspectives on children and young people and creating new theoretical agendas in studies of childhood and youth.

Introduction

While the claim that children and young people's lives are shaped by the spaces and places in which they live may seem self-evident, until recently, these concepts were marginal to research on childhood and youth. One reason for this neglect is the claims to universality implicit in the frameworks that youth researchers use. If childhood and youth are assumed to be universal processes that look the same everywhere, then it follows that the significance of space and place is negligible. However, as many of the chapters in this handbook demonstrate, there are good reasons to be skeptical of such universalizing claims, since they obscure the ways in which childhood and youth are socially constructed in different social contexts (Aries 1962; Wyn and White 1997). Hence, a spatial perspective is especially important for understanding childhood and youth in the contemporary era, and debates about the meaning and significance of issues such as globalization, for example, throw the spatial dimensions of childhood and youth into sharp relief. Part of the recent "spatial turn" within the social sciences (Thrift, 2006, p. 139), a conceptual focus on space and place is increasingly recognized as a powerful way in which to understand the biographies, identities, and day-to-day lives of contemporary children and youth (Skelton and Valentine 1998; Aitken et al. 2008; MacDonald et al. 2010; Farrugia 2013).

This chapter provides a critical introduction to the role of space and place in understanding childhood and youth. The chapter begins with a brief discussion of the way in which space and place have been historically marginalized from childhood and youth studies and the consequences that this has had for understanding young people. The chapter then moves to define the conceptual meaning of space and place for contemporary researchers: while these terms are often used in taken-for-granted ways, their evolution as concepts within disciplines such as geography and sociology demonstrates the significant challenges and complexities involved in their definition and use. The chapter then explores the significance of space and place for understanding young lives, discussing issues such as the construction of spatial dichotomies (urban/rural, local/global, global north/global south), the significance of geographical inequalities, the role of place in identity construction, and the spatial consequences of "globalization." The chapter shows the ways in which a focus on space and place can cross geographical and disciplinary divisions in the study of young lives, enriching existing perspectives on children and young people and creating new theoretical agendas in studies of childhood and youth.

Space and Place: Marginalization, Universalization, and the “Spatial Turn”

One influential set of ideas contributing to the historical marginalization of spatial perspectives in studies of childhood and youth is those which understand children and young people in terms of universal developmental processes and transitions towards adulthood. According to these perspectives, childhood and youth are defined primarily in terms of a movement from immaturity to maturity, signified by cognitive and biological developmental milestones, as well as the attainment by young people of certain socially prescribed transitions, such as the movement from school to work and from the family home to adult family formation. These perspectives have been critiqued for their disembodied and disembedded views of childhood and youth, which fail to attend to the ways in which young people’s biographies, identities, and lives vary according to factors such as socioeconomic and gendered inequalities, as well as across spaces and places (Wyn and White 1997; Aitken 2001). Rather than universal developmental stages, childhood and youth are most powerfully understood as social constructions, the meaning and experience of which varies according to where young people are socially situated (Evans and Holt 2011).

While they tend to assume that individuals are placeless and socially disembedded, it is important to recognize that developmental and transitional perspectives come from some *place* and that the socially disembedded nature of these theories in turn hides crucial assumptions drawn from their society and time of origin. In particular, studies of childhood and youth have been dominated by narratives based on the lives and experiences of children and young people in the urban metropolitan centers of the “global north,” particularly Western Europe and the United States (Nilan 2008; Cuervo and Wyn 2012). This is also the case for the sociological perspectives which have been drawn upon in order to demonstrate ways in which childhood and youth are socially constructed and can be traced back to sociology’s foundational theories (such as those of Durkheim, Tonnies, and Marx) which positioned nonurban and non-European societies as non-modern and therefore not of sociological significance (Cloke 2005). Narratives of social change that are currently influential in childhood and youth studies such as those associated with theories of late modernity and individualization (Beck 1992; Giddens 1991) position young people within a homogeneous modernity, in which young people’s identities float free of ties to place (Geldens and Bourke 2008). The marginalization of spatial perspectives from childhood and youth studies has, in this sense, been achieved by excluding the perspectives of those from other spaces and places.

Despite the omission of space and place from childhood and youth studies, as well as social science more generally (Gieryn 2000), recent years have seen an increasing attention to spatial perspectives within the social sciences and within studies of childhood and youth. Perhaps the most significant factor influencing this development has been the dramatic social changes that come under the umbrella term of “globalization,” which have drawn attention to issues such as global interconnectivity, the increasing significance of mobility, and the relationship

between global and local processes and lives (Appadurai 1996; Bauman 1998). In response to these developments, recent years have seen calls to spatialize youth research (MacDonald et al. 2010; Farrugia 2014), and the number of geographical and interdisciplinary studies of the spaces and places of children and youth has blossomed (Jeffrey and McDowell 2004; Nilan and Feixa 2006; Panelli et al. 2007; Aitken et al. 2008; Evans and Holt 2011; Skelton and Gough 2013). This “spatial turn” has made space and place into increasingly important concepts for childhood and youth studies, and it is to the meaning of these terms that this chapter now turns.

Space and Place: Meaning and Conceptualization

In the broader fields of sociology and social geography, the conceptual meanings of space and place have been extensively explored and debated in order to theorize the spatial dimensions of social life. The starting point for theoretical discussions of space is the taken-for-granted (and widely critiqued) idea of space as an empty, neutral container within which life takes place. Contemporary spatial theorists agree that this view of space is unsustainable and have moved towards social and relational understandings of space. At its most simple, for space to exist, there first need to be points between which it can be identified. In this sense, space is *produced* by relationships, rather than preexisting them, a process that Soja (1989) captures with the term “spatiality.”

The first argument to this effect came from theorists who argued that space does not merely exist but rather is produced in the capitalist production process (Urry 2000). The most significant contribution from these materialist perspectives is that of Lefebvre (1991), who discussed the “production of space” in terms of the way in which the social structures of capitalism produce spaces appropriate for the social and economic relationships required for production to take place. These arguments were subsequently taken up by geographers such as Harvey (1985, 2006) and Massey (1994) to describe ways in which regions are created and developed as business owners and workers seek environments suitable for doing business and finding work. Through the processes of production and consumption under capitalism, people and objects are brought into relation with one another, environments are built, regions emerge, and space is produced.

Subsequent contributions have moved away from the Marxist focus on production to consider the way that spaces are produced by a diverse range of social relations. Rather than objective, given, and static, these contributions have emphasized that spaces are heterogeneous, complex, and constitutive of social life. One of the most influential concepts in this regard has been Massey’s concept of “power geometry” (2005), which views spaces as emerging from complex intersections of an enormous array of identities, relationships, and mobilities (Urry 2007). No one kind of relationship has priority here: economic relations are mixed up with the construction of gender, and sexuality, as well as intergenerational relations and the socially constructed significance of age (Hopkins and Pain 2007). Spaces are dynamic and in flux as the relationships that make them upshift. The emerging

focus on the dynamism and complexity of space has led authors such as Thrift (2006) to argue for a view of spaces as intertwining, existing within one another, permeable, and in motion.

The concept of space has a complex relationship with that of place. Place brings to mind terms such as “neighborhood” and “locale,” which refer to the lived, embodied, and sensuous aspects of being in a meaningful place. Heidegger (2001), who situates “dwelling” as fundamental to human existence and shows that human activity (“building”), in bringing things together meaningfully, creates places as the dwelling of human subjectivity, has been especially influential in this regard. Malpas (1999) describes place as the “densely woven unity of life as lived” (p. 193) and shows ways in which identity and agency require embodied knowledge that is only possible through practices that create place. Thrift (2003) describes place as a way of thinking about space that emphasizes the rhythms of daily life and habitation. However, it is important not to fall into simplistic definitions of place as coherent, whole, and “micro” as opposed to the openness and complexity of “macro” space. The work of Massey is also significant here in arguing for an “extraverted” (1984) and progressive (1993) sense of place. Exploring a “global” sense of place, Massey discusses the way in which places, neighborhoods, and locales are constituted by power geometries that can be traced to economic, social, and cultural processes that span the globe. Rather than the seat of a parochial “authenticity,” the places that young people inhabit are produced by social practices that draw on a diverse range of economic and cultural resources, themselves traveling along webs of social relationships articulated across multiple locales.

Spatial theory has moved from a view of space as objective, empty, and neutral towards a view of spaces and places as produced, relational, and complex and a view of place as emerging in social practices embedded within an extraverted web of social relationships. Spaces and places there therefore mutually implicated in one another, connected by the webs of social, cultural, and economic relations that produce them. This raises questions about where to spatially locate the processes that influence young people’s lives, referred to as a problem of “scale.” Spaces and places are often referred to through the use of dichotomies such as local/global, which map onto other binaries such as concrete/abstract, micro/macro, and inside/outside. However, if places are permeable and connected to one another and the practices that create places draw upon resources from the “outside” to create the “inside,” what is the meaning of distinctions such as that between locality and “the global?” This question is made all the more significant given Ansell’s discussion of the politics of scale (2009), in which it is observed that these dichotomies often map onto social divisions: local/global has often mapped on to child/adult, a distinction which acts to position children outside macro-level social dynamics.

Geographers have acknowledged this and have explored how regions, localities, and spatial scales are constructed by social relationships in processes similar to those described above in relation to the production of space (Cox 1998). Moving from an emphasis on economies to a wider range of social and cultural relationships, Smith (1993) argues that there are multiple scales, all of which are open to contestation and are constantly in flux. These include the socially

constructed body – the home (and its association with the private sphere), the community (the fluid site of social reproduction), the “urban” and the “regional” (constructed by the social and economic processes that produce the difference between these regions), the national (a political construct with social and spatial consequences), and the global, itself a site of social and political struggle. Specifically addressing the case of childhood, Ansell (2009) notes that despite living “local” lives, children participate in processes that span the globe and argues for a conceptualization that moves beyond “scale” to focus only on the networks of relationships that cultural and economic resources flow through. Regardless of which position one adopts, spaces, places, and different spatial scales must be seen as produced, contested, connected, and in flux. In this way, children and young people’s lives can be analyzed in terms of processes that intersect and produce spaces, with identities embedded in places that span localities, nations, and, increasingly, the globe.

Space and Place in Studies of Childhood and Youth

The remainder of this chapter discusses some of the key contributions made by spatially informed analyses of childhood and youth. The first section discusses the spatial structuring of children and young people’s biographies and day-to-day lives, with a focus on play, education, and work as they are practiced in different spaces. The second focuses on the role of space and place in identity construction. While these two themes are interconnected, the first emphasizes the production of spaces of youth, while the second emphasizes the emplaced means by which children and young people are constructing identities.

Play, Education, and Work: Spaces of Childhood and Youth

Developmental models define childhood as a time of play and socialization, as well as engagement with formal, institutionalized education in preparation for a youth transition into a future adulthood defined by personal independence, work, and family formation. However, attention to the local contexts within which these practices take place creates a more spatially heterogeneous understanding of childhood. These activities are profoundly spatialized. As practices, they are influenced by macro-level social and economic structures and are therefore involved in spatial processes operating at both the global and local scales. The literature on the different spaces and places of play, education, and work, when drawn together, demonstrates the production of youth space under conditions of globalization, as well as the importance of an extraverted sense of locality for understanding the biographical trajectories of contemporary children and youth.

The importance of locality in relation to the global has been approached through attention to children in the majority world, where distinctive relationships in the family, at work, and at school mean that the distinctions between work, education,

and play tend to ignore developmental perspectives. Punch (this volume, cf. 2003) shows that the labor of children in the majority world is central to the operation of local family economies, but that the boundaries of work and play are often indistinct, as children find time for play and socialization during work activities that they often enjoy. Working in upland Asia, Punch and Sugden (2013) show that rather than being exploitative, it is through work that children accumulate the local ecological knowledge required for them and their family to continue living productively in their local areas. As agricultural activities decline in profitability, formal education becomes seen as more significant, but this prevents the reproduction of ecological knowledge and often does not match local labor market realities. A similar process is described in the work of Ansell (2004) in Lesotho and Zimbabwe, and Porter, Hampshire, Abane, Tanle, Esia-Donkoh, Amoako-Sakyi, Agblorti and Owusu (2011) in rural Ghana, where a renewed significance on participation in a globalized education market does not prepare young people for participation in existing local economies. Katz (1991) adds a global perspective to these processes through a focus on children living in a rural Sudanese village as the local economy was transitioning to the production of cash crops for the global economy. Katz shows that while this was expected to allow more children to attend school, this transition actually resulted in more labor being performed by children as their families struggled to adapt to changing economic conditions and environmental degradation.

Locality and its relationship to the global have also been shown to be central to the lives and biographies of young people growing up in urban environments in the global north, as the emerging significance of transnational networks of “global cities” (Sassen 2012) creates new spatial inequalities. Ball et al. (2000) describe young people negotiating the “new urban economies” located within these cities, including class inequalities that begin with young people’s educational opportunities and continue into their labor market opportunities. While some young people are engaged in new creative industries with a genuinely “global” reach, others maintain connection to local opportunities made available by family networks. Allen and Hollingworth (2013) document ways in which young people negotiate the increasing significance of “cosmopolitan” creative industries that are limited to specific urban centers, including the inequalities that emerge when young people are excluded from these spaces. MacDonald et al. (2005) and Thompson et al. (2013) have explored the lives of young people growing up in local urban areas which have been disadvantaged as globalization sees previously strong local industries move overseas. They show that local social networks are the most important source of capital for these young people, but their very local nature means they do not provide access to decent job opportunities, most of which exist outside their locality and are connected to transnational economic networks focused on a few “global cities.”

The literature on rural areas in the minority world shows a similar interaction between the global and the local. As rural areas in the global north have increasingly been exposed to the global market economy, the agricultural and manufacturing industries that once sustained them have declined in viability, and rural areas have been increasingly associated with disadvantage in relation to urban environments.

Rural young people often have less educational opportunities, and their local labor market opportunities are often poor (Rugg and Jones 1999; Looker and Naylor 2009). McGrath (2001) has emphasized the relationship between rural youth biographies and changes to do with globalization, and the work of Wierenga (2009) and Kenway et al. (2006) demonstrates the spatially heterogeneous biographies that emerge as local communities respond to global changes. These spatial inequalities also give mobility a new significance for rural young people. Authors such as Rugg and Jones (1999), Jones (1999), and Cuervo and Wyn (2012) have all demonstrated the importance of migration for rural young people's biographies, as the declining availability of local opportunities makes access to urban spaces increasingly important. Jamieson (2000) emphasizes the importance of local class inequalities in how these mobility patterns play out in young people's lives.

Indeed, mobilities have become a significant theme in spatial analyses of childhood and youth, leading Skelton and Gough (2013) to describe a "mobilities turn" in these fields. Researchers have focused on mobilities of all kinds, including local, national, transnational, and global movement. Mobilities research draws attention to new kinds of relationships and to ways in which movement is a way of negotiating the different areas of life that children and young people participate in. Researchers such as Holloway et al. (2012) and Brooks and Waters (2011) have explored the mobilities involved in the contemporary higher education market. In these cases, mobilities are ways for relatively privileged young people to access educational opportunities that operate as capital in the global labor market, but also have a role in shaping local class and gendered inequalities, which change in relation to the availability of globally available educational capital. On a more local level, Skelton (2013) shows that practices of "automobility" are ways in which young people explore new contexts within their local towns, even as car ownership reflects local class inequalities. Ansell and van Blerk (2007) analyze the mobility practices of children in Ghana and show how their work and education practices are structured around different kinds of local mobilities, emphasizing the importance of work as a way of becoming attached to new localities.

Overall, these examples point to the way in which spaces of childhood and youth are produced as part of processes that create the distinctions that researchers work with (such as childhood/youth/adult, work/play, urban/rural, and majority world/minority world). These differences emerge as part of the processes that produce the spaces of childhood and youth. Attention to the spaces of play, education, and work reveals that these practices – all central dimensions of childhood and youth – are embedded within local social structures, such as the relationship between labor markets, family economies, and education systems. However, these contexts are also influenced by global processes, such as the increasingly mobile nature of modern capital and the deindustrialization of many urban centers in the global north. Attending to these spatial processes and the differences that emerge from them, a number of authors have cautioned against homogeneous, nonspatial understandings of childhood and youth, lest these narratives construct some young lives as deviant or deficit in relation to a norm that universalizes the experiences of children and young people in certain spaces and places (Aitken 2001).

Space, Place, and Identity

This section reviews literature on the relationship between space, place, and the identities of children and young people. While identity construction operates through the production and negotiation of places, nevertheless, there are forms of exclusion and social control that take place in and through space. These processes are also fundamentally related to the class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and other socially constructed differences (such as those related to locality). The spaces and places of children and young people's identities therefore reflect, and are constitutive of, the social relationships which make up who they are.

Cresswell (1996) has shown the way that morally loaded social divisions are played out over space, with some people seen as "out of place" depending on who, and where, they are. In the case of children and young people, one way in which the regulation and contestation of childhood and youth occur is through negotiations over public and private space. Valentine (1996) has shown the way that public space is seen as adult space that threatens the innocence of childhood, while children are seen as interrupting adults' interactions in public. Struggles over public space are also widely documented in youth studies, with authors such as White (1990) and Crawford (2009) showing the ways in which young people's presence in public space is regulated by police activities and legislation aimed at maintaining the meaning of the public as a space for adult consumption and commercial activity. The lives of young people experiencing homelessness are also profoundly influenced by struggles over public space. While they lack a private place within which to sleep, eat, and socialize, these activities are criminalized, denying these young people a place to exist (Ruddick 1996; Harter et al. 2005). Van Blerk (2013) discusses the lives of South African street children who are moved on from the spaces they occupy as Cape Town strives for a cosmopolitan image and "global city" status. In all of these instances, children and young people are seen to be out of place in the very spaces that allow them the opportunity for day-to-day sociability.

Despite these contestations, there is an extensive literature documenting the spaces and places that young people are attached to and the significance of place for identity. Children and young people in both urban and rural environments are attached to their local places (Cahill 2000; Wiborg 2004; Gill and Howard 2009; Harris and Wyn 2009), while authors such as Fraser (2013), Holligan and Deuchar (2009), and Robinson (2000) show ways in which place and "territory" are constructed as ways of affirming group identities and the distinction between localities. However, this is a complex process that often crosses scales, regions, and places. Leyshon and Bull (2011) document young people in rural England who feel more connected and "at home" in urban areas, while Petrova (2006) documents French skinheads who draw on Pan-European myths in order to understand local social conditions such as unemployment and the changing ethnic composition of France, issues that are themselves related to global processes such as deindustrialization and migration. Nairn et al. (2003) document children and young people who identify with both "urban" and "rural" ideas within their own local places and argue for the deconstruction of these kinds of place-based distinctions in research. On the

whole, young people's place attachment and place-based identities reflect Thrift's (2006) discussion of spaces and places as permeable, in flux, and mutually interconnected.

Spaces and places are also central to the practices associated with youth culture. For example, Laegran (2002) documents the way that different local places become focal points for the practices of cultures centered on cars or on engagement with digital communications technologies. Dunkley and Panelli (2007) show ways that peer groups within a local community use and appropriate different spaces in order to socialize, which then become the "place" of these groups. Malbon (1998) documents the spaces and places of clubbing cultures, while Greener and Hollands (2006) discuss the "technoscapes" of youth culture, illustrating ways in which local dance cultures are embedded within global music cultures through the use of digital technologies. Hip-hop is a particularly fruitful example of similar global/local dynamics: as a "global" youth culture with an identifiable set of cultural signifiers, aesthetics, and musical conventions, hip-hop is nevertheless creatively appropriated within local contexts as diverse as Senegal (Niang 2006), the United Kingdom (Bennett 2000), and Aboriginal Australia (Mitchell 2003). As Massey (1998) has argued, the spaces and places of youth culture are heterogeneous, made up from cultural elements originating across localities and creatively mobilized in particular localities.

The topic of mobility has also been influential in studies of young people's identities. While McLeod (2009) has cautioned against "discourses of mobility, translocality and hybridity [which] can create a utopian sense of open possibilities, generating new kinds of romantic constructions of youth and neglecting the materiality of lives" (p. 280), a number of authors have shown ways in which mobility is constitutive of the materiality and the day-to-day reality of children and young people's identities. Studies of very marginalized children such as the work by van Blerk (2013) and Beazley (2002) show the ways in which the strategic navigation of urban spaces allows access to resources, the creation of relationships in local places, and the avoidance of danger and social control. Beazley describes the mobility practices of Indonesian street girls as articulating a "spatio-temporal geography of resistance" (p. 1679). Ruddick (1996) analyzes a similar process for homeless youth subcultures, describing ways in which young people negotiate and move between different spaces in order to construct places within which to live and socialize. Ansell and van Blerk (2007) analyze the mobilities of children who migrate through rural areas in the majority world, as well as the importance of creating places in which to belong. For these children, work, play, and "sitting around" are all social and sociable activities that create a sense of place attachment in a context of migration and mobility.

While studies of place and identity provide resources for understanding the spatial ways in which children and young people create meaningful lives, it is also important to note that these practices reflect social divisions, hierarchies, and inequalities played out over space and instantiated in the located identities of childhood and youth. MacDonald et al. (2010) show how local identities reflect differences of social class, regionalized within different spatial contexts, and

children living in Portuguese housing estates documented by De Carvalho (2013) describe their localities in terms of violence and disorder, outcomes of the entrenched disadvantage experienced in this area. Tucker and Matthews (2001) describe the exclusion of young women from “idyllic” rural places (Leyshon 2008). Cahill (2007) discusses ways in which young women respond to the changing class and ethnic composition of their local neighborhoods, feeling threatened by privileged white incomers while simultaneously desiring the definitions of “cool” they bring. This is complicated by the work of Reynolds (2013), also a contributor to this handbook. Reynolds’ work shows ways in which socially constructed “racial” distinctions are located within certain neighborhoods but also emphasizes the way in which the social networks that create these places are important sources of resources and social capital for the young people who grow up in and identify with them.

This complexity implies the need to take seriously theoretical discussions about the open, heterogeneous, and contested nature of children and young people’s spaces and places. Places are sites at which multiple and sometimes contradictory identities are constructed and negotiated, and this has become all the more significant under conditions of globalization, in which (some) children and young people may be exposed to many diverse cultural influences or may have experienced substantial mobility and migration themselves. The work of Butcher and Thomas (2006) discusses the hybrid identities of young migrants who identify both with their parents’ culture and with their local Australian culture, but experience different relationships to these ideas depending on where they are. Nevertheless, a strong attachment to their local place (in this case western Sydney) provided an anchor from which to experience these differences, as well as to construct a collective identity in relation to other Australian young people. Experiences like these have meant that studies of young people and globalization have continued to stress the hybridity and complexity of children and young people’s identities, even when these remain strongly attached to their local places (cf. Nilan and Feixa 2006; Aitken et al. 2008).

Conclusion and Future Directions

In recent years, spatial analysis of children and young people’s lives has gone from a position of marginalization to a large and vibrant field of research, and this is reflected in the chapters that follow this introduction. Beginning with the significance of place, Deborah Warr’s chapter discusses the way that young people’s identities are influenced by spatial flows of resources that problematize disadvantaged young people’s relationship to their local communities. Michael Leyshon continues the theme of place, exploring the relationship between places, identities, and memory. His chapter shows ways in which experiences in places and memories can be seen as mutually influencing and constitutive elements of young people’s identities and demonstrates the evocative embodied experiences of place for rural youth. Moving to the spatial dimensions of contemporary childhood and youth, Samantha Punch’s chapter compares the experiences and identities of childhood and youth in the minority and majority worlds. Her chapter describes similarities and differences in

transitions across social contexts and relates these to changes in the global economy, systems of education, and the local cultural specificities of different places. Johanna Waters' chapter discusses the significance of new transnational mobilities in the construction of educational identities. This chapter shows ways in which to understand young people's mobilities in terms of the social relationships that they make and remake, demonstrating the new family relationships and educational identities that are created through engagement in a spatially differentiated and globalized education system. The final two chapters, by Tracey Reynolds and Joanna Kidman, return to the significance of place for negotiating inequalities. Tracey Reynolds shows how the social relationships and resources of inner London "black neighborhoods" are both fundamental sources of support for young people but can also limit the kinds of lives that they are able to plan for themselves in a context of economic austerity. Joanna Kidman shows that images of childhood and youth are central to the colonial and "raced" dynamics of contemporary nation-building projects, but that place and community also provide resources for young people to imagine new positions within colonial contexts. These chapters reaffirm the significance of space and place in young people's lives and serve as timely reminders of the emplaced means by which childhood and youth are constructed and negotiated in the contemporary world.

Cross-References

- ▶ ["Black Neighborhoods" and "Race," Placed Identities in Youth Transition to Adulthoods](#)
- ▶ [Dysfunctional Mobilities: International Education and the Chaos of Movement](#)
- ▶ [Indigenous Youth, Nationhood, and the Politics of Belonging](#)
- ▶ [Possibilities for Learning Between Childhoods and Youth in the Minority and Majority Worlds: Youth Transitions as an Example of Cross-World Dialogue](#)
- ▶ [Rhythms and Flow. Timing and Spacing the Digitally Mediated Everyday](#)
- ▶ [Storing Our Lives of Now: The Pluritemporal Memories of Rural Youth Identity and Place](#)
- ▶ [The Ambivalent Implications of Strong Belonging for Young People Living in Poor Neighborhoods](#)
- ▶ [Time and Space in Youth Studies](#)

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Storing Our Lives of Now: The Pluritemporal Memories of Rural Youth Identity and Place

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Michael Leyshon

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Abstract

Memories are crucial to our sense of identity and emotional response to place, providing an anchor point from which we can tell different stories of our temporal encounters in the world. Through memory, we embed different spaces, pasts, and futures of ourselves in particular locales. These identities are not fixed, timeless, or geo-specific; they are the spontaneous assemblages of meaning, drawn from a multiplicity of memories, emotions, and thoughts that represent an “outpouring” of being in place. The mechanisms and processes by which meaning is articulated in these encounters are fundamental to our understandings of ourselves and places. This chapter brings together current research on rural youth and identity theory to examine critically the stories rural youth produce to define themselves in the world through three themes. First is the role of memory in creating a sense of identity. Second is how individuals create memory images that are woven through with understandings of place. Finally, it reconciles the inherent inconsistencies and flux of the selfhood project through the concept of pluritemporal memories of place.

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Introduction

Place is an intangible nexus of beliefs, values, and feelings that is at the very core of our understandings of belonging, identity, and emotion. A concern with place helps to counteract “the silencing of emotion in both social research and public life” (Anderson and Smith 2001, p. 7) with a greater appreciation of emotional geographies, defined as “the ways in which our affective experiences of self and others contextualised temporally and spatially” (Wood and Smith 2004, p. 533). By examining the ways in which emotionality is patchworked into space and time to create hybrid landscapes, this chapter investigates how various identity positions are produced and transferred into lived spatialities for young people in the countryside. In so doing, the chapter examines how self, representation, places, and emotions get appropriated into the articulation of events.

This chapter begins by reviewing young people as an object of study before detailing the emotional and/or affective in understandings of space. It then explores the methodological challenges of accessing such accounts before addressing the theoretical underpinnings of how memories of place help shape, through retrospection and reflection, an individual’s identity. The chapter focuses on a case study drawn from wider research examining young people’s sense of belonging to place (Leyshon 2008) and concludes by discussing the creation of temporary and fluid axes that connect the multiple lines of experience, defining place, memory, and emotion.

Positioning Young People: Being in the World

Geographical interest in memory has increased in the recent years; however, children and young people are virtually absent from these studies, with the exception of Leyshon (2011). Memory is often investigated in relation to memory processes, whereas my focus here is on the complexity of self and memory (Leyshon and Bull 2011), illustrating how memory is mobilized into a practice of self through both the creation of memories and the recall of affect. Memory has the potential to explore notions of childhood and self, but it is vital that the entanglements of past, present, self, others, landscape, and affect can be, in part, unraveled.

The existing literature on rural youth tends to concentrate on their identity positions or interventions into their lives. These studies problematically focus on defining rural young people not as human “beings” but as “human becomings” (Uprichard 2008) on a journey through increasing cognitive, emotional, and social capacity to the goal of adulthood. A number of geographers (Jones 2003; Leyshon 2008) have tried to destabilize this understanding through exploring the interesting, complex lives of young people as human “beings,” experiencing place and otherness through multidimensional factors, such as age, race, gender, and sexuality.

Little is known, however, about young people as social agents in the here and now, with feelings and memories that actively help them to make sense of the world moment by moment. To achieve this, an epistemological shift is required to refocus

on more than being in place, positioning young people through their memories and emotions and thereby achieving a fuller understanding of their lives. We need to recognize young people in their own right, separate but not detached from adults, and not in a state of becoming but rather an embodied emotional being in the now. Doing so will capture some of the unique individual differences and socio-spatial complexities of young people's lives.

Davidson and Bondi (2004) argue that "the emotion" is crucial to the processes that make place(s) matter but that these processes "cannot be reduced to a range of discreet internally coherent emotions which are self identical with the mind of an individual" (Anderson 2006, p. 735). Emotional responses shape and are shaped by encounters with people and the more-than-human world. Young people are always encountering their own lives, in places and in moments. These encounterings, or becomings, are produced in a flux of spatial-temporal sensory experiences interwoven with memories of past events. The construction and retrieval of memory is, however, a vastly complex set of electrochemical embodied processes, few of which are understood. It is perhaps because of the methodological challenges of capturing this complex mingling of emotional and sensory responses that memory triggers appears to be largely absent from contemporary personal accounts of landscape. Indeed, personal narratives of historically situated memories of places are often elided in favor of instantaneous sensory or "affective" accounts. In fact, memory and affect are conjoined. The affective qualities of bodies become interwoven with memories in a messy process of assemblage in which self, time, place, and emotion become appropriated into the articulation of events. The challenge is to capture the creative processes of everyday life whereby young people become embedded in the social structure of places and how they learn to be themselves, challenge and/or accept their lives. Through new contacts and experiences, both visceral and tactile, individuals produce their own identities and histories of life that are both sensed and, importantly, represented. The case studies in this chapter illustrate the way that emotional and affective encounters with the more-than-human world can become both crystallized and mobilized through photographs, verbal descriptions, and utterances and how images and words are part of the raft of representations that document the emotional resonance of affective encounters. The next section briefly highlights how emotional geographies of subjectivities were captured using auto-photography.

Method, Memory, and Place

This work stems from a decade of research by the author with young people which broadly examines how the more-than-human world is encountered, remembered, and authored. The research used close ethnographies, including participant-directed photography, both stills and video, to examine the tensions, complexities, and inconsistencies of everyday life. Such methodologies reach into spaces that are not (physically) occupied by the researcher as the participants create images which are neither exclusively public (part of art, media, or other forms of visual culture)

nor private. These personal images, in the vein of holiday snaps or aide-memoire, are subject to different aesthetic conventions and expectations. The images depict routines and repeating moments in the young people's life histories, giving insight into their lived realities of "rural" space(s). The artifacts in the images were loaded with sentiments, visualizing the intangible. The images and their associated memories can be considered as moments in a self-narrative that become "departure points" from which a young person's story can be (re)built.

The intention here is to draw out the significance of individual experience to focus on the everyday rather than the extraordinary and to recognize the way that representation and emotions are drawn together on a personal level in understandings of space and place. Bergson's research on "Duration, the Image, and Memory" is useful here for developing an approach to memory and affect. In *Time and Free Will: an Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (2012 [1889]), Bergson developed a concept of *duration* (Guerlac 2006) in which he underlines the temporality of existence. Bergson's *duration* is underwritten by a notion of "qualitative multiplicity." This multiplicity suggests that each "moment" is different in terms of its relational constitution. In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson (2005[1908], p. 66) raises the significance of memory for the individual's understandings of space, place, and identity, suggesting that without memory we have nothing but "simple signs of the real." For Bergson, the multiple stimuli of the now are meaningless without the interpretive framework of past experience. This referential role of memory ties neatly with the "qualitative multiplicity" of *duration*, that the perceived "signs of the real" are made significant through the connection to a past and an anticipatory future. This is not to conflate perception and memory or to suggest that they operate on a temporal continuum. According to Bergson, memory and perception can only be understood as an interaction, an intuitive interplay between past, present, and future. Memory, therefore, is crucial to how we respond to stimuli which constitute the here and now.

Bergson suggests that there are two forms of memory, one based in the corporeal (central nervous system) and one based in representation (process of learning). The corporeal memory or *reflex memory* goes beyond simple responses to particular stimuli; they include the performances and bodily processes, which were imprinted through evolution long before our birth, such as habitual responses to certain stimuli. Bergson's second form of memory – that is based in representation – is temporally anchored (it is the remembering of particular events); however, it is not spatially anchored. It is dispersed, fluid, and unfixated, present, but only apparent when drawn upon either by conscious or unconscious thought. This reemergence of the spatially unfixated memory is what Bergson calls the *memory image*. In Bergsonian terms, *the memory image* is neither an actual thing nor merely an appearance – it bridges the gap between the real and the ideal (Guerlac 2006).

These memory images are accumulations of meaning and are glimpses of being; they are hypothetical, momentary, and unintelligible (except in conceptual terms). The memory image then is the reemergence, the re-spatializing of memories at particular times. It is constantly changing and constantly reaching out along the temporal lines of existence connecting different pasts to the now and onto imagined

futures through a process that can be referred to as *narrative memory*. Returning to Bergson's concept of representational memory (i.e., the memory of particular phenomena or episodes in their temporal context), he refers to this temporally (but not spatially) fixed memory of particular events as "the memory of imagination" or "regressive memory." They are regressive as they are dislocated from the present. This framing of dislocated memory as regressive has led Bergson to be (possibly unfairly) criticized (notably Lefebvre 2002 [1961]) for implying a linear understanding of time (Fraser 2008, p. 340). Regardless of whether Bergson intended a linear conceptualization of time, this "regressive memory" implies a programmatic process of remembering. As a consequence, the concept of a "memory image" to highlight both the temporality of memory and the processes of remembering through the narration memories can be deployed as an explanatory tool. Narrative memory focuses on the process by which the memories are drawn upon to constitute particular memory images thereby giving insight into the understandings of the self in situ. This argument therefore centers on the tensions between the memory images and the processes by which young people make sense of space, place, and identity. In essence, while these memory images are to a certain extent spontaneous, they are also used to make accounts of identities coherent and meaningful.

Stories of Remembering Rural Youth

These stories are not necessarily time-specific or indeed without time, but rather are constantly reworked in the now in an ongoing encounter of self and others that has a depth that cannot be determined. Stories are by nature temporal; they do not have to be consistent or preclude the holding of contradictory perspectives, but they do provide a glimpse of how rural youth define their sense of place and identity. A storied self, it can be argued, can only be understood through an interpretation of "contexts" and how images of intimate and personal landscapes produced by rural youth give a partial window onto their lives. Images can in and of themselves produce the illusion of everyday life as stable, resilient, cared for, and enjoyable, when rather young people's storied lives illustrate another very different narrative of otherness, vulnerability, and ultimately project a vision of escape.

The remainder of this chapter focuses upon one young person and how they produce pluritemporal memories of place. Ellen (14 years old) lived in a village in England and acutely felt a sense of otherness based on her social position – living in social housing. The village is a linear settlement on an escarpment with a population of just over 400 people. Julie (17 years old) described the village as "uninteresting, boring and there's not a lot of night life . . . there's one street light . . . it's surrounded by empty fields and forests and whatnot." Alex (15 years old) conversely reflected "it's alright . . . not bad, cos like I'm into fishing an' shooting and going up top with my uncle an' getting us some rabbits." However, for both Julie and Alex, the village is divided between a wealthy upper area and the poorer lower village. As Julie commented "I dislike the whole sort of separating the

community. But we can't do a lot about it; it's always been like that." The majority of young people live in the lower village (17 in total) and meet once a week at the village hall for a youth club.

Interpretations of how rural youth gain a glimpse of their selves have tended to draw on the role of families and social networks (Lee 2001) to the detriment of thinking through personal conceptualizations of space. Ellen's sense of self can usefully be explained by applying Bergson's theories of memory, narrative, and emotion to her experiences. Starting the analysis from the position that the space of her village is topologically complex, contingent, and temporal, within these fluid spaces, young people produce themselves through interpreting their sensual and/or representational accounts. Through this process young people build memories of places that can simultaneously position them across an array of senses and emotions from being included and excluded, vulnerable and confident, happy and sad, and bored and interested. Their memories are part of a creative process in which they learn to be themselves and challenge or accept their lives. This is a constant and iterative process of being embedded and disembedded within the social structures of place. Although village spaces are not formally regulated, they are clearly coded by adults as spaces in which young people are out of place and in which their activities are unwelcome or inappropriate. For young people to find a place in which to belong therefore becomes a constant struggle of being regulated out of place. For Ellen, she captured her sense of displacement through producing a short video diary.

Ellen's short film demonstrates how marginality, memory images, narrative, and identity are intrinsically linked. The film captures the heterogeneous nature of her life and how the divisions within the village are felt emotionally. Ellen used the video camera almost as a stills camera, the result being a series of images which move very quickly across the screen. The video is in the style of a documentary with a brief narrative introducing each section. It can be condensed into four main images – all are of the lower village where Ellen lives. The first image (Plate 1) shows Ellen sitting in front of the family television watching MTV. This is quickly



Plate 1 Watching MTV
 "It's a school holiday and we're sitting in" [Ellen and her friend Alice]

overlay with a series of images of the children's playground, including the swings, climbing frame, football goals, and slide (Plate 2). The third set of images focuses on Ellen climbing a tree (Plate 3) and finally, the remainder of the video is a panoramic view of the upper village shot over the cricket field from the road outside Ellen's parental home (Plate 4).

On initial viewing the brevity of the film suggests that Ellen's life is very dull and unfulfilling – it seems that there is so little to do here that Ellen requires only a short video. Indeed, how could she video a nonevent or show how nothing means something. But this is far too simplistic an explanation of the images; the video diary calls up Ellen's memories and sense of self beyond the assembly framed in the image. It illustrates how a young person's way of seeing makes the past a part of TV culture's curiosity shop of fragments with one image overlapped by another in quick succession. Images are problematic but by focusing on the awkward, already commodified, already positioned, already meaning-saturated, already



Plate 2 Children's playground "This is where we play games on a good day with the youth group"



Plate 3 Up a tree "It's easy to climb trees"

Plate 4 The border “This is our local cricket pitch, we’re not allowed on the square but we’ve got the top left-hand corner to play in. That’s not really enough space for us to play but we put up with it anyway”



violent practices of envisioning in making video diaries, it may be possible to escape a romanticism of popular images of the countryside. Indeed Ellen’s documentary highlights the more fertile idea of the production of new imagined spaces that enable her to talk of otherness rather than using video to enframe the other as *exhibit*.

These clips act as a metaphor for Bergson’s memory image; although they are fragments, instantaneous moments that appear dislocated, they are pluritemporal memories inherently connected to a variety of locales and moments. As these images illustrate, Ellen lives a lot of her life beyond the village; she did not include many scenes of the “countryside.” She spends “as much time as possible” (personal interview with Ellen) in town either with friends, her older sister, her parents, or at her grandmother’s house, “going to shops and doing stuff you can’t do around here” (personal interview with Ellen). However, the video also shows that Ellen does hang around the village; indeed, she likes the village and the peace and quiet it affords her. Her family is from Willow Hill, and she has many close relatives still living there. There are people there who make her feel safe, and it offers the spaces required for private communications between friends.

Yet there are also elements of the village she doesn’t like – the clear structure between “the wealthy people on the hill and us down below” and the new houses which “only rich people can afford” (personal interview with Ellen). Here we begin to witness Ellen’s sense of marginality. She does not feel marginalized by incomers per se or their conspicuous wealth (although she did comment that she was embarrassed that her parents did not own a car). It is their attitude she finds repressive, in particular, their dismissal of the rural poor as “bumpkins.”

The cumulative effects of the restrictions placed on Ellen and her friends by “those who run the village hall” leave her with little space in which to play – the children’s playground (Plate 2), a few trees near her home (Plate 3), and a corner of the cricket field (Plate 4). These memory images in the film reflect instantaneous sections in the general stream of being and highlight how different memories are

overlayed and re-spatialized in different spaces. The bodily performance of climbing trees is an illustration of the reflex memories which enable the movement through the tree – a learnt awareness of what branches can be trusted, which trees can be climbed. Equally, the cricket pitch illustrates the pluritemporal landscape of the memory image. It highlights how Ellen’s awareness of the power structures in the village butt up against the bodily reflexes of play to create competing spatialities of cognitive and reflex memory. These competing and varied memory images play out across the landscape of the village; all these sites are in the lower half of the village in public view, and Ellen feels she is under surveillance within them. While she recognizes that private space is hard to find in the countryside (especially as a number of adults know her in the lower village and because she shares a bedroom with her older sister), she also feels unable to occupy the more secluded spaces, such as the woods, in the upper half of the village. When she expressed that she felt unable to move into such spaces, she said that “it would be hard for her mum and dad, it’d make trouble for them.”

Ellen felt a border existed in her village between the council estate and the upper village and that the border was patrolled by incomers and defended against young people from the council estate. She also felt the border was insidiously encroaching on her household. For instance, the neighboring home, formerly an estate house, had been sold to people working in Bristol. Thus, while the village at one level provides a safe environment for her to play and climb trees, surrounded by people she knows and trusts, at another level she feels marginalized and frustrated. Her tactic for coping with this sense of marginality is to spend “as much time as possible” in the nearby town (personal interview with Ellen). The town provides her with a sustainable memory of her identity located between home and elsewhere through creating a hybrid landscapes. Each with a multiplicity of temporal meanings, and different meanings which can re-emerge, become re-spatialized in the variety of the contexts which constitute the now. Ellen is living with inconsistency, the overlaying of space with the multiple meaning that memory affords. Her *pluritemporal memories* are made up of a multiplicity of *memory images* in part drawn from TV, the town, and the multiple places of Willow Hill.

Ellen’s video is about structuring absence – her absence of self-esteem within the village and the absence of her life elsewhere. For Ellen, the countryside does not afford her the opportunity to perform her identity; therefore, the sites she chose to video were all signs of survival – indexical signs showing a passage of time before she moves on, a movement she expects to achieve. Ellen believes the countryside is a good place to be if you can find space – as shown in other rural youth studies (Leyshon 2008), for example, she appreciates the countryside, and while not desperate to run away from it, she expects to leave in the future.

Although Ellen’s personal video diary is a unique journey, it only exists through the interaction of innumerable elements, which are constitutive of the place being explored. These elements of memory, practice, and performance are what define and produce places for young people. They are “an instantaneous configuration of positions” (de Certeau 1988, p. 116) that appear as a stable order of coexistent elements. These video/snapshots become “space” upon the addition of variables of

velocity and direction, and it is through this participation in the creation of space, or of the countryside/city, that Ellen experiences place. However, the embodied performances of Ellen's life are not holistically transferrable to images. This is not to suggest that these embodied performances do not have cognitive memories attached – they were learnt – but rather that her senses and synapses have become attuned so that the memory is no longer anchored as an “event” per se. Identifying memory as a component of a wider system of understanding place through both perception and recollection permits investigation of how these sentient geographies interplay with the representational geographies of cognitive memory. This enables an engagement with the liveliness of representational experience. However, such memories do not occur outside of representation. The images do not capture the wider experience but serve as a point of departure for memory. In this way, the self is produced within the lexicographic processes of memory combining affectation, emotion, and knowledge (images and language) to produce a sense of place. The self is produced fluidly within an internal narrative dialogue made between relations of signs and symbols and the emplacement of those signs and symbols within memoried relational systems of knowing. This occurs in a continuous and iterative process of sensing, identifying, interpreting, (re)presenting, and making meaning. Place is fundamental to this process as it provides a position from which the self can speak to itself as well as others, not only by situating self-knowledge within the self but also situating the self in a corporeal and physical geographical space. Hence, we talk from within ourselves, to outside ourselves and others, within a relational understanding of space. The story Ellen narrates to herself and others is always being made and represents an identity project that is paradoxically the avoidance of being fixed – to either an identity or to a place – but rather a sense of striving for a sense of belonging and resilience to change.

Conclusion and Future Directions

This chapter concludes by returning to the writings of Bergson. The aim here has been to determine the extent to which an understanding of images and memory can provide a useful framework for capturing everyday spatial encounters. In attempting to address the question, the chapter has done two things: first, it has unpacked Bergson's theory of memory to examine the role that memory plays in the construction of the *self* in situ, and second, it has demonstrated the “work” that place does for young people in their construction, articulation, and maintenance of identity, how the interplay between the remembered as the “here and now” is overlaid with the there and then. This understanding hinges on the idea that the relationship between identity and place is dependent upon the accumulation and co-constitution of memories and visceral experiences, in the production of memory images that include complex social and tactile interactions and emotional stimuli, both with and within places.

The memory image is a spontaneous reemergence of reflex and cognitive memories and is an active process continuously reaching out along various lines

of experience. In this way, “memory is ‘on’ and working all the time, in our bodies, our subconscious, through our emotions” (Jones 2003, p. 27). Memories enable individuals to configure their place in the world moment by moment. Yet memories are not simply drawn from the past into a present, they are creatively brought into new conscious realms of being. What Ellen’s case studies demonstrate is that memory can be considered as an actor in the defining of identity. What different memory images provide are assemblages of memory objects which can be used, shaped, and interacted with to create a logical and coherent sense of self through an evolving and fluid encounter with the world. These memory images are to a certain extent spontaneous, in essence “found”; however, the way that they are put together is an articulation of their meaning. In this sense, that of the assembly of found memories to give emergent meaning can be best described as pluritemporal memories of place – a life of being in the world rather than one of becoming.

Young people choose how memories are used, altered, and rejected in a process of construction that is not an ordered replication of “how things happened.” As DeSilvey (2007, p. 408) writes: “the act of connection and assembly works by a logic not of sequential reconstruction, but of association” in the production of a story of the self. Through her storied self, the fragments of rurality which constitute Ellen’s life are apparent: she locates part of her identity in urban space, which is positively affirmed, and partly in rural space, which is negatively recognized as a space in which she is prevented from performing aspects of her identity and is subject to the repressive social regimes at play in the village. Yet she identifies positively with many aspects of rural life. This is evidence for how messy individual’s connections to pluritemporal memories of place can become. However, her accounts, and the ways in which she connects the images of her tour, exemplify her ability to utilize a poetics of narrative to attempt to reconcile the tensions present in her life. In her account, Ellen creates a storied self which erodes the lumpy inconsistencies of her emotional response to the world while simultaneously connecting her to rural and urban spaces. Identity therefore is not pure phenomenology but rather a form of reflexive hermeneutical phenomenology in which young people tenaciously attempt to contain the dynamics of temporal life by producing a framework for themselves from which to navigate through the complexities of their existence. This fluid interpretation of memory offers the potential to interpret and bring meaning to periods of radical transformation, from childhood to adulthood, in the lives of young people.

Cross-References

- ▶ [“Black Neighborhoods” and “Race,” Placed Identities in Youth Transition to Adulthoods](#)
- ▶ [Rhythms and Flow. Timing and Spacing the Digitally Mediated Everyday](#)
- ▶ [Space and Place in Studies of Childhood and Youth](#)

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Abstract

Reconciliation narratives in post-conflict and post-settler societies and within divided populations underpin much of the official discourse about national identity. Within these narratives, belonging and civic harmony are heavily emphasized. Indigenous young peoples, however, do not necessarily identify with the notions of belonging, home, civic harmony, and nationhood that are embedded in settler or Crown discourses and often feel excluded or marginalized by these official memory regimes. Previous research shows that politicized constructs of belonging and cultural alienation are developed by marginalized young people in response to these tensions which have a powerful impact on their perceptions in later years of life. In light of this evidence, this chapter explores the way that divergent interpretations of national identity are navigated by indigenous young people in New Zealand. Indigenous Māori youth are positioned in this chapter as active historical agents who have produced their own historical memories

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and practices of belonging and national identity that sit outside official discourses. These cultural memory repertoires speak directly to the conflicts of the past and their ongoing impact on what it means to be young and Māori in contemporary New Zealand. In response, indigenous Māori youth create parallel stories drawn from both official (Crown) sources and tribal histories, which act as politicized counter-narratives that suggest a range of possible histories and ways of belonging.

Introduction

In conflicted democracies, indigenous young people's narratives of belonging tend to be complex, multilayered, and, at times, seemingly contradictory. The story arc does not always run neatly from social disunity or injustice to harmony, resolution, and reconciliation. Often, the remembrance of discord and historical injustice sits alongside official chronicles of apparently happy endings. Yet the memory politics of post-settler nations depend heavily on widespread acceptance of the stories about the cultural encounters of the past, an agreed-upon record of the memories that different ethnic and cultural groups have of their relationships with each other over time. These accounts of cultural contact, often heavily edited, are eventually woven into the nation's founding stories, culminating in tales of home, place, civic identity, reconciled cultural relationships, and belonging.

In post-settler states, however, where indigenous groups have been dispossessed of land, resources, and political and social autonomy, the driving themes of conquest and occupation form a powerful subtext for official memories of the past. These official histories sit uncomfortably alongside indigenous narratives that recall the past in radically different ways and which position native peoples as more active agents in the nation's history than state-sanctioned records might suggest (Carretero and Kriger 2011). It is in these intersections between "approved" state histories and tribal narratives that ideas about nationhood converge with a series of racialized discourses about youth and childhood that have come to characterize social policy in New Zealand since the mid-twentieth century. Many indigenous youth, however, have responded to these interconnected historical and governmentalized discourses by establishing a range of alternative native identities that sit in opposition to nationalist and bureaucratic rhetoric (Kidman 2012; Epstein 2009; Carretero and Kriger 2011). This chapter explores the contradictions inherent in discourses of nationhood, indigeneity, and youth, focusing on indigenous Maori youth and the politics of belonging in New Zealand. The discussion concludes with an exploration of the ways that indigenous youth "speak back" to national histories and the social policy discourses that racialize and diminish them.

Land and Place

If places matter, they matter in different ways to different people. But in post-settler states, place identities that are anchored in contested geographical spaces have the

potential to unsettle and disrupt cultural scripts about belonging and national unity. In his discussion about the colonial encounters between Aboriginal peoples and settlers in Australia, Trigger (2003) argues that indigenous readings of the land and associated land use practices were enacted at the same time as European settlers sought to engage intellectually with the land by bringing it within a meaningful aesthetic. He contends that the ensuing contest between these “mental maps” has never been resolved and continues to be played out in the present. In New Zealand, too, cultural affinities with land and place are profoundly entwined with both tribal and anglo identity narratives, and these narratives are often in conflict as both Pakeha (i.e., New Zealanders of European descent) and Maori groups lay claim to competing identity/land discourses (Bell 2009).

Ideas about land, place, and belonging also frame the cultural imagining of indigenous young people in post-settler states in particular ways. In nations where tribal groups have witnessed the loss of their lands over successive generations, many indigenous youth carry with them powerful collective memories of tribal dispossession and these memories influence identity formation in the present (Kidman 2012). Accordingly, indigenous young people’s notions of cultural belonging are often overlaid either by direct experience or by clan memories of detribalization and social dislocation. Indeed, these competing collective memories underpin much of the cross-cultural dialogue about contemporary nationhood that takes place in former colonies where cultural divisions are part of everyday life for many young people. Collective memories may well be the raw material of nation-building projects, but in post-settler countries, they are often disputed cultural memories at odds with “official” accounts. In New Zealand, land narratives figure heavily in officially sanctioned colonial histories. Within these accounts, the land is portrayed variously as a backdrop for early cultural encounters – the “first time” meetings that shape the “what-happened-next” of history – and as the basis of disputes over systems of land tenure and ownership. The land is also the site of “place-making” activities for various groups of people who engage deeply with the physical environment and have invested a range of socio-spatial identities and memories within it (Panelli et al. 2008). For many Pakeha New Zealanders, the landscape is central to early pioneering narratives; for example, it features heavily in stories about the taming of the wilderness by “intrepid” white settlers as well as in tales about the awe-inspiring and dangerous beauty of the wilderness that underscores the geographical imagining of New Zealand as a modern nation (Le Heron 2004).

By contrast, Maori tribal identity narratives emphasize the importance of tribal histories and collective tribal memories that speak to and are framed by land and place. Within indigenous geographies, land, people, and place are inextricably linked in ways that sit outside white/anglo mapping discourses (Panelli 2008). For example, members of indigenous tribal communities with multigenerational links to place view the land, as Tamasari (1998) contends, as a “hinge” between the self and the ancestral world. But in post-settler states, the land is also a domain across which power relationships between peoples have been inscribed and enacted, sometimes harmoniously and sometimes with violence and bloodshed.

Thus, in nations where competing cultural affinities and claims to land prevail, the structuring of a sense of place and belonging is never neutral and is subject to constant negotiation and renegotiation over time.

In places where the loss of ancestral tribal lands and ways of life through colonial invasion, land confiscation, and legislative expediency continue to have an impact in the present, tribal memories, histories, and stories can mobilize a range of indigenous understandings about belonging, land, and place that are framed by a powerful sense of loss. Indeed, even those who have experienced tribal de-territorialization either firsthand or as a cross-generational memory continue to draw meaning from tribal “spaces” (Andrews et al. 2012). These recollections are not simply a reflection on the importance of tradition or a nostalgic yearning for an imagined past; as will be discussed later, they are an important component of contemporary identity-making for Maori young people in New Zealand (Kidman 2012).

Accordingly, collective tribal memories and narratives about land, place, and history shape the way that indigenous childhoods and adolescence are experienced as a set of intersecting spatial and cultural relationships in the present, whether these experiences are rural or urban, provincial or suburban, and tribal or, in cases where the tribal land base has been taken or whittled away, diasporic and migratory. It should be noted here that land and place also play an important role in the making of nonindigenous childhood identities but indigenous young peoples’ tribal geographies cut across these wider social narratives about nationhood and citizenship in ways that are often deemed especially troubling for official narratives that rely on widespread public acceptance that cultural relationships are either harmonious or have been reconciled. Within these “sanctioned” stories, however, the lived worlds of indigenous young people frequently disappear and are replaced by an idealized view of tribal youth and their role in national histories. This romanticizing of indigeneity and youth can be seen at work in the official repositories of national memory, particularly in the childhood collections of national museums, as is discussed below.

Indigeneity, Youth, Media, and the Archive

Frantz Fanon once wrote that “what is often called the black soul is a white man’s artefact” (Fanon 1952/2008, p. xviii), and in the context of nation-building narratives, constructions of indigeneity and childhood are often a product of “white” imaginings of ethnicity and youth. In their discussion about representations of children and young people in the media, Olson and Rampaul (2013) argue that alongside images of childhood innocence, “whiteness was also implicitly idealized in early representations of childhood and images of a white childhood came to be considered universal and desirable” (Olson and Rampaul 2013, p. 24). They contend that “non-white children have, therefore, traditionally been subject to stereotypical and caricatured representations or have simply been excluded from cultural productions of media images, being replaced instead by images of white childhood” (p. 24). A similar process is at work in Australia where non-white, non-anglo young people are largely excluded from Australian public imagery

relating to youth and childhood (Saltmarsh 2011). The near complete erasure of indigenous Australians from media reports and public debates about Australian youth reinforces a form of “compulsory whiteness” (Saltmarsh 2011, p. 32) that is at work within the social imaginary whereby white or anglo youth identities are represented in terms of active social participation and citizenship while indigenous and migrant young people are portrayed as passive bystanders.

In New Zealand too, media representations of Maori regularly reify “race” as the basis of Maori identity in ways that construct indigenous people as “the perennial Black Other” (Wall 1997, p.44). These kinds of racialized discourses also influence the way that conceptualizations of youth and childhood have figured in the New Zealand historical imagination. For example, early collections of childhood artifacts in New Zealand’s major museums, including Te Papa, New Zealand’s national museum, focused on childhood artifacts such as the elaborate clothes and christening gowns that were commonly found in white middle-class homes and schools (Townsend 2012). Museums frequently depend on these kinds of nostalgic and romanticized images of idyllic anglo childhoods that emphasize both innocence and privilege and this has been the case in New Zealand although in recent years some attempt has been made to redress the imbalance (Townsend 2012). In light of this, while representations of young Maori are not entirely absent from present-day national museum collections and childhood archives, nor are they particularly visible. This emphasis on anglicized youth and childhood, however, has the effect of reinforcing “whiteness” in the way that the nation’s young people are “remembered” in the museum and the archive. Accordingly, the production and consumption of these selective and heavily anglicized representations becomes a form of nostalgic *misremembering* of youth whereby middle-class Pakeha children become a proxy for *all* children. Moreover, when these kinds of memory regimes are seen in combination with contemporary representations of youth in social policy discourse, it is not simply a matter of privileging “whiteness” in discourses relating to children and young people; rather, indigeneity comes to be actively aligned with moral apathy and cultural deficiency, as is discussed below.

“Transgressive” Youth, Social Policy, and the Politics of Resentment

Though Maori young people are marginalized, idealized, or anglicized in archival collections, they are a central focus of contemporary social policy debates and government surveillance. In liberal democracies such as New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Australia, young people are frequently imagined in political discourse as “workers-in-becoming.” This is a Neoliberalism construction of youth and childhood that underpins a form of child and youth-focused liberalism which endorses the view that increased government investment in young people is a means of securing the future well-being of workers, citizens, and families (Elizabeth and Lerner 2009).

In New Zealand, however, neoliberal child and youth-focused ideologies are enacted in unique ways as a direct result of the ethnic and racial politics of the nation.

These politics have emerged from heightened government recognition during the 1970s of historical injustices that were visited on Maori tribal communities in the making of the modern New Zealand nation; an explanatory note about the political background of New Zealand is needed here. Culminating in 1975, after a period of intense Maori protest and political opposition to the successive government mismanagement and abuse of Maori land rights, Maori anger threatened to spill into wider civil unrest. In order to circumvent the possibility of a further deterioration of cultural relations, perhaps even bringing the country to the brink of civil war, a Tribunal, known as the Waitangi Tribunal, was established to deal with Maori grievances against the Crown (Celermajer and Kidman 2012). In 1988, the Waitangi Tribunal was given the authority to investigate historical injustices dating back to 1840, the year representatives of the British Crown entered into an agreement with many Maori tribal leaders known as the Treaty of Waitangi. The Treaty of Waitangi laid out the terms of the relationship between British and Maori and is considered to be the founding document of the New Zealand nation. Within a few years of signing the Treaty, however, the Crown turned its back on these responsibilities and breached the terms of the agreement many times over the years with devastating economic and cultural consequences for Maori tribal communities.

The Waitangi Tribunal was established as a way of dealing with these historical breaches of the Treaty. It is empowered to investigate Maori claims of Crown wrongdoing and make recommendations to the government for redress. As part of the reconciliation process, the Crown makes a formal apology to the Maori community that has mounted a successful claim and this is accompanied by some form of economic reparation. In fact, while some Treaty settlements number in the millions of dollars, the quantum of reparations is insignificant compared with the economic losses sustained over time by Maori tribal communities and does not compensate for the loss of life and tribal autonomy or the permanent loss of economically productive tribal lands.

Treaty settlements are enormously important to Maori communities, not least because the wrongs of the past are formally recognized and political apologies for these injustices are enshrined in legislation. From the Crown's perspective, there is a belief that justice has been restored and that common memories of the past can be negotiated and new cultural relationships can be forged in the future. For tribal communities, Treaty settlements open up the possibility of "alternative imagined communities" (Seuffert 2005, p.485) with the potential to transform the nation. For many tribes, this includes the dream that a redistribution of power might ultimately reshape cultural relations in a post-Treaty settlement society. This is the very stuff of nation-building, but in the New Zealand context, political apologies to Maori tribal communities and subsequent Treaty settlements have not, in fact, captured the wider public imagination to any great extent nor have they been built into modern nation-building narratives (Celermajer and Kidman 2012). Indeed, these settlements have been controversial amongst some members of the New Zealand public who do not understand or who are unsympathetic to the purpose of the Tribunal and the basis of the damaged historical relationships between Maori and the Crown, nor acknowledge the importance of cultural redress (Gagné 2008).

Public antagonism surrounding aspects of the Treaty settlement process and varying levels of hostility towards Maori aspirations for self-determination (Barber 2008) have directly influenced the way that public debates about youth and indigeneity are structured in New Zealand. Firstly, emerging from the tensions within and around the reconciliation process, resentment has become an organizing trope in the political relationships between many groups of Maori and Pakeha (Johansson 2004; Barber 2008). Zembylas (2010) argues that the structures of resentment are deeply embedded in historical and political practices rather than in individual or psychological matters. He contends that in divided nations, the politics of resentment, or the means by which one group asserts its identity by negating the other, is how conflicting sides legitimize their positions. In the New Zealand context, neoliberal discourses about youth are underpinned by a deep resentment, evident in public debates, about indigeneity and Maori young people. Public resentment about Maori youth is further fueled by media representations that regularly depict them as dangerous or violent criminals (Coxhead 2005), as political troublemakers (Nairn et al. 2006), or as members of a generation lost to the economy through unemployment, drugs, or alcohol abuse.

Alongside public acrimony and as a direct result of the economic management and structural reform agenda of successive governments over the past 30 years, young Maori have also come to be represented in policy discourse as subordinate and highly racialized entities. This positioning of children and young people in contemporary social policy has its immediate origins in the restructuring of the New Zealand economy in the 1980s and 1990s. During this period, the highly regulated, primarily agrarian economy shifted towards one based on neoclassical, market-based economic philosophies that were geared towards competing in global free markets. Other nations in Europe and the Americas also adopted these economic philosophies, but New Zealand's experience of economic restructuring was unique because liberalization was carried out more comprehensively, more rapidly, and as Goldfinch (1998) argues, with "a degree of theoretical purity that was probably unparalleled anywhere in the world until, arguably, the liberalization of eastern Europe" (Goldfinch 1998, p. 177). Indeed, according to the World Bank, New Zealand has come to be known as the most business-friendly nation in the world although it is also acknowledged as a particularly difficult place to be a worker (Andrews 2005).

The impact of these reforms was wide ranging. There was a dramatic increase in unemployment levels across the country, while at the same time, many social welfare programs were reduced in scope or entirely eliminated. Young people in New Zealand were particularly badly affected as jobs dried up and, correspondingly, levels of anxiety, hopelessness, and depression soared leading to a swift upsurge in youth suicide rates (Weaver and Munro 2013). In fact, New Zealand has the highest youth suicide rate in the world and indigenous young people are overrepresented in these bleak statistics (Clark et al. 2011).

Already struggling, Maori communities were hard hit by the economic reforms with rising unemployment levels and widening health and income disparities between the nation's rich and poor. It was also during this period that Maori

(and also Pacific) peoples were identified in social policy documents as being proportionally “overrepresented” amongst low-income groups who receive welfare benefits (Elizabeth and Larner 2009). Children in these families became a focus of attention and the concept of a particularly “Maori” form of child poverty began to emerge in policy papers and media reports. As such, children and young people growing up in these families were increasingly described as being “at risk.” Policy-makers of the era explained this as a consequence of being located within families where there was no adult in paid employment.

These policy narratives have, however, evolved considerably since the 1980s and 1990s to the point where ethnicity, youth, and economic apathy are often conflated. Elizabeth and Larner (2009), for example, contend that in New Zealand the child is racialized through its “location within Maori and Pacific families, many of which are headed by single mothers who have a weak relationship with the labour market” (Elizabeth and Larner, p. 144). The “disadvantaged” child or young person, depicted in policy rhetoric as being part of a family structure that does not “pull its weight” in economic terms, is usually represented as being of either Maori or Pacific descent. Social and economic disadvantage is therefore primarily associated with ethnicity, an idea that has subsequently been linked in the public imagination with laziness and moral inertia. A strong undercurrent of public anger is directed towards young people from these families that is derived from a resentful belief that “hard-working,” tax-paying Pakeha citizens, who are also struggling financially, are expected to support them (Barnett 2006). In this respect, public indignation about the children of social welfare recipients who have already been racialized in policy discourse, combined with varying levels of hostility towards Treaty claims and indigenous politics, positions low-income Maori youth as a “transgressive” moral and economic threat to a normatively “white” economy and society.

Counter-Narratives, Double Memories, and Belonging: Indigenous Youth Speak Back

If Maori young people are all too visible in policy discourse and political rhetoric about “dangerous” and “wayward” or “disengaged” and “lazy” youth, they disappear almost entirely from the sites of national memory: the archive, the museum, and nation-making tales of historical events. Thus, they are marginalized within the official record on one hand, while on the other hand they are a highly visible target for public resentment and moral rebuke. Unsurprisingly then, young Maori, like other young people from marginalized communities, tend to take a highly critical stance towards nationalist accounts of historical events and rarely identify either personally or collectively with national histories that depict them as a conquered, vanquished, or weakened “race” (Epstein 2009).

How, then, do indigenous young people respond to negative representations of indigeneity and youth? Kennelly and Dillabough (2008) contend that the lived social and political status of young people cuts across larger cultural narratives of

democracy and citizenship. In post-settler states, however, racialized discourses of youth and childhood also intersect with wider cultural narratives that specifically exclude or marginalize young people on the basis of their indigeneity. In these environments, many indigenous young people respond by appropriating and generating a range of possible histories based on an awareness of natives as historical agents (Carretero and Kriger 2011). They do this by actively and consciously engaging with indigenous and/or tribal narratives which then become a form of counter-narrative or parallel story that speaks to a set of cultural and historical memories that differ, sometimes substantially, from official accounts and which reinforce tribal youth identities. These counter-narratives are not simply a means of reappropriating marginalized cultural space; they are also an enactment of indigenous agency in the face of the nation-building project. But they also serve another purpose insofar as they can be deployed by young people who are searching for ways of belonging within the context of a conflicted democracy or post-settler state.

The search for belonging as an indigenous young person in a post-settler nation becomes a political act when, in order to retrieve a sense of belonging, young people find ways not only of coming to terms with the past but also navigating between competing versions of the past. In their study of American young people's collective memories, Schuman and Scott (1989) found that historical events need not be personally experienced in order for young people to invest political meaning in them. They contend that adolescence and early adulthood is the time when generational and collective memories are most likely to be seen in political terms. These findings have important implications for the way we think about indigenous young people's selective engagement and disengagement with national histories. Onuoha (2012) suggests that memories of the past "pose a major obstacle to reconciling divided populations, constructing a durable peace and embarking on a viable nation-building project" (Onuoha 2012, p. 1). He further contends that the articulation of group identity within the nation-building project is linked to the things that people can connect their memories with. Thus, in post-settler states, if unresolved cultural relationships and an ongoing sense of loss relating to ancestral lands and ways of life are central to indigenous memory regimes, then national histories that focus on apparently reconciled cultural relationships are highly problematic for indigenous young people. Indeed, these historical losses become part of their collective memory and shape tribal youth identities in the present. Accordingly, indigenous youth narratives about belonging, nation, and place become highly politicized (Kidman 2012). At the same time, as indigenous young people construct these politicized memories about the past, however, official discourses about indigeneity and sanctioned forms of youth and childhood come into play in ways that position native youth in terms of transgressive and racialized identities.

Young people in New Zealand, however, link their ideas about national identity with cultural origins and experience rather than the political status of citizenship. This is particularly the case for Maori young people whose families have migrated to urban areas and are no longer in daily contact with tribal life or their tribal communities (Andrews et al. 2012). Indeed, even those who live at a considerable distance from tribal homelands draw meaning and a profound sense of belonging from their

identification with their tribal communities (Andrews et al. 2012; Webber 2012). Alongside this, Maori youth are constantly “Othered” in political, social, and nationalist discourses, and most are also familiar with being the target of everyday racism (Fitzpatrick 2013; Webber 2012). Thus, it is through the assertion of these tribal identities that many young people respond to the public and cultural stigmatization of Maori youth. In this respect, expressions of tribal identity and tribal “citizenship” by indigenous young people activate a particular kind of relationship with the nation-state that allows them to “speak back” to the orthodoxies of national memory regimes as well as the inequalities evident in social policy discourse and public debate. This acts as a signal that memory, belonging, and identity can be derived from tribal repositories of memory as opposed to the national archive and that these memories can unsettle the apparent unity of national narratives and identities.

These constructions of belonging differ from a simple desire for emotional attachment; rather, belonging becomes politicized when the boundaries of a community of belonging (such as a tribal or cultural community) are contested by outsiders (such as the Crown) and the work of creating and maintaining an “us” and a “them” is carefully monitored (Yuval-Davis 2006). Spatialized belonging and place attachment, however, are conflated with a sense of belonging to a particular community or group of people, and as a result, the politics of belonging are further fused with identity politics (Antonsich 2010). These ideas can be applied in the context of post-settler nations where young people’s articulations of tribal identity are framed by a politicized and re-tribalized sense of belonging that operates against (and occasionally within) official memory-making. Certainly there is a mutual patrolling of the us/them boundaries that separate these imagined communities of belonging.

The deployment of tribal cultures, identities, and practices as a means of “speaking back” to racialized political discourses about indigenous youth is well documented and is the subject of considerable debate in New Zealand (see, e.g., Rata 2010) and elsewhere (see, e.g., Geschiere and Jackson 2006). With this in mind, the anthropologist, Jeffrey Sissons, has argued that the appropriation, transformation, and reappropriation of indigeneity as an elaboration of an indigenous consciousness, or what he calls “a nationalized indigenism” (p. 74), particularly amongst indigenous people located in urban settings far away from the tribal base, have followed a similar course within all post-settler states. He contends that these cultural reappropriations are regarded in the indigenous world as “reimaginings of the future” (Sissons 2005, p. 11) rather than as a return to the past. In other words, these expressions of identity should not be seen in terms of nostalgia or idealized cultural memories; rather, they offer a means through which indigenous young people can claim a place within the context of a nation that acts to exclude and marginalize them.

Conclusion

The entwined discourses of youth and indigeneity in post-settler nations like New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and the United States point to underlying tensions and cultural discord that remains largely unresolved. However, indigenous young

people have responded to the experience of cultural marginalization and social exclusion by opening up spaces for the articulation of tribal identities and memories that provide a sense of belonging and pride in (tribal) community. In many respects, these articulations of identity become a means for reasserting cultural autonomy and self-determination in the face of tribal de-territorialization and the loss of tribal sovereignty. These small, everyday resistances do not in themselves “fix” a broken history, but they do signal the possibility that a range of histories and identity positions are available for indigenous youth in post-settler states and that many young people have become adept at mobilizing these positions both creatively and effectively.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Childhood and Youth Citizenship](#)
- ▶ [Education and the Politics of Belonging: Attachments and Actions](#)
- ▶ [Koorlankga wer wiern: Indigenous Young People and Spirituality](#)
- ▶ [Space and Place in Studies of Childhood and Youth](#)

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“Black Neighborhoods” and “Race,” Placed Identities in Youth Transition to Adulthoods

Tracey Reynolds

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Abstract

The chapter will explore the notion of the “black neighborhood,” bringing into sharp focus the way in which such urban neighborhoods provide black youths with different trajectories of transition into adulthood. To a large extent, the meanings and knowledge of their local neighborhood are informed by the particular types of cultural and social resources they are able to access, and the analysis draws on the views and experiences of black youths living in three socially deprived areas of London to investigate this. Specific consideration is given to those black youths strongly embedded within their locality; “black neighborhoods” and the way in which these networks exist here represent a social resource in actively combating racial inequality and exclusion that they experience as part of their everyday lives. However, this discussion also acknowledges that “black neighborhoods” also create a negative outcome for black youths, in particular the way in which “street culture,” “the streets” or “being on road,” negatively impacts young people’s aspirations and attitudes. The current climate of economic recession had significant implications

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for black youths “getting on” and “getting in” black neighborhoods, and this is a third dimension of black youths’ race and placed identities explored in the analysis.

Introduction

This chapter will examine the views and experiences of black youths living in three socially deprived areas of London in order to examine the way in which they recognize the term “black neighborhood” as a resource in these austere times. The analysis shows that these neighborhoods represent urban spaces through which a range of social capital resources are generated, including reciprocal ties of trust, solidarity, and civic participation. They also provide black youths with a sense of belonging and as such these neighborhoods are intrinsically valued by them. Research highlights that central to an individual’s overall sense of well-being is the extent to which they perceive a sense of belonging and bonds of trust within their communities (Ryan et al. 2008). While the literature suggests that economic hardship adversely affects adults’ well-being and their community relationships, little is still known about the impact of economic hardship on youths’ well-being and their perceptions of community and neighborhood. This issue is particularly pertinent because under the current economic downturn in Britain, youths are one of the main groups to be adversely affected resulting in high youth unemployment rates and rising numbers of young people that are not in any form of education or training. With regard to black youths, recent figures indicate that nearly 50 % of them are unemployed, and this figure is even higher among black youths living in urban neighborhoods, sometimes colloquially referred to as “black neighborhoods.”

This chapter draws from the research findings of two projects. The first project entitled “Caribbean Families, Social Capital and Young People’s Diasporic Identities” was one of a number of projects within Families and Social Capital ESRC Research Group at London South Bank University (see www.lsbu.ac.uk/families). It explored how family and kinship bonds operate in the lives of Caribbean young people and their construction of ethnic identity and belonging. The interviews focused on the areas of family and kinship relationships, friendship networks, neighborhood, and community participation and also investigated how social capital operated as an important social resource within ethnic identity formation. In-depth interviews were conducted with 30 second- and third-generation Caribbean young people (aged between 16 and 30 years old) living in Birmingham, London, Manchester, and Nottingham and with their kinship/family members in Britain and the Caribbean (Barbados, Guyana, and Jamaica). The second project “RAW” (2008) involved research and evaluation of five community-based youth programs spread across the London boroughs of Brent, Haringey, and Lambeth. The youth programs were designed to explore emotional and psychological “barriers” that prevent black young people of Caribbean/Black British heritage or parentage achieving personal and educational success. The research concentrated on exploring young people’s understandings of self and their relationships within

their family, local neighborhoods, and wider ethnic community networks. In total 20 qualitative interviews were undertaken with young people aged 16–21 years old ($n = 18$) and their parents ($n = 12$) (Reynolds and Briggs 2008).

Conceptualizing Black Youths in the "Community"

Much of the research exploring youths in urban city contexts has tended to focus on young people as active agents of social change, as well as the social resources and relationships utilized by young people to build independence and achieve their aspirations in urban spaces (Tienda and Wilson 2002; Briggs 2010). One counter-narrative has highlighted the challenges encountered by young people as a result of urban poverty and deprivation, as well as the risk-taking behavior of inner-city youths (Browning et al. 2004; Collinson 1996). An area of research that has received comparatively limited attention is the way urban spaces represent social resources for young people in the formation of their ethnic (and racial) identity. In the UK, London is a multicultural city that is comprised of urban neighborhoods and communities that are racially, ethnically, culturally, and socioeconomically heterogeneous. Some commentators have argued that such "super-diversity" (Vertovec 2007) should be celebrated. It is suggested that urban spaces reduce the barriers to social integration, encouraging "mixing" and the emergence of "cultural hybridity" among inner-city youths (Alexander 2007). In addition, second- and third-generation migrants and minority ethnic youths, living in multicultural cities in London, have greater opportunities to socially integrate and achieve social inclusion and mobility compared to their first-generation migrant parents (Platt 2005; Heath 2008; Goulbourne et al. 2010).

Yet, some authors take a much more critical stance when considering the extent to which multicultural urban spaces represent a mechanism for social integration and inclusion by migrants and minority ethnic youths (Runnymede Trust 2007). This literature suggests that the traditional problems associated with urban development – such as high rates of unemployment, welfare recipients, and "broken families" – have encouraged a form of voluntarily segregation by individuals from different social class and ethnic communities. There is the concern too that black and minority ethnic youths have become marginalized and isolated from the rest of the city (Commission for Racial Equality 2005). Black young men in particular find themselves without a place in the public space of the city because while within their own neighborhoods they are accepted and embraced by family, friends, and community members, once they leave these community spaces, they are immediately stigmatized, avoided, or directly excluded from public engagement. The danger ascribed to black youth is closely linked to their marginal position in the labor market economy. As noted above, statistically speaking black youths living in economically deprived neighborhoods suffer greater risk of unemployment, lack of education, and job training (Modood 2004; Cheung and Heath 2007; Equality and Human Rights Commission 2010). These youths also have very restricted access to places within the city, limiting their rights of citizenship. This marginalization and alienation of black youths in

urban spaces is reflected in public and media debates concerning the dangers of the “hoodie,” gang culture, and inter-/intraethnic violence between groups of young men and increasingly young women (see “The Independent” 2009). More recently this issue again came to the fore of the public and policy attention following the August 2011 riots in London and other urban cities.

Despite the relatively high levels of interracial mixing across a range of social relationships that goes in large British cities, in policy terms multiculturalism is publicly expressed as diverse ethnic groups living side by side in small enclaves or pockets of racial-/ethnic-defined geographical settlement patterns (Modood 2007). Debates recognize that tolerance of ethnic diversity rather than a genuine desire to integrate defines much of the social relationships between ethnic groups. Over the past two decades, a number of studies have implicitly and explicitly suggested that different racial-ethnic groups’ comparative failure to bridge and work across socioeconomic and ethnic divides has contributed to existing social tensions and feelings of social exclusion in Britain today (Zhou 1997; Parekh 2000; Ousley 2001).

There are therefore several dimensions at play when considering young people’s relationship to disadvantaged neighborhoods in urban spaces. Adopting a broader cultural perspective to understand this issue, Hansen’s (2008) study of black youths in Zambia highlighted the different trajectories provided for minorities and marginalized young people in these spaces. Of course Hansen’s study operated in a vastly different cultural and social environment to the one discussed in this chapter. Nonetheless the trajectory framework presented can be applied to minority and marginalized youths in differing social, cultural, and economic contexts. Hansen’s study took up the position that young people living in crowded households, with a lack of education and limited means of employment and legal income easily fall into “getting stuck.” The notion of “getting by” therefore characterized the ability of these young people to navigate their way through a range of educational courses, occasional jobs, statutory-funded community programs, and also self-employment in order to not “get stuck” in their existing living and social conditions. In contrast, “getting on” represented young people’s ability to take advantage of networks and contacts to craft options and opportunities for themselves. The young people that typically “get on” more often live in households where they have the social resources and networks to take advantage of educational and occupational opportunities to move out of these urban spaces. Similar parallels are drawn in Holland’s (2007) analysis of youth transitions in disadvantaged communities with the notion of “getting by” and “getting on.” Examining the social capital in the context of transitions in young people’s lives and within the context of family, locality, and community relationships, Holland suggests that the young adults living in disadvantaged neighborhoods and housing estates of northern England and Northern Ireland saw their localized networks as highly constraining, tying them into their community. While such networks allowed them to “get by,” it also stifled individual progression and social mobility. For some of these young people, there was a strong desire to “get out” and “move out,” and they strategically used education and employment opportunities as a means to

"escape from the bubble" of their socially disadvantaged local neighborhood. My own research of Caribbean youths and transnational families provided a counterpoint to this view. A key research finding was that the notion of "getting out" to "get on" did not reflect the everyday social realities of these young people's experiences. Instead attachment to place and the security of belonging in a "black neighborhood" were viewed as a platform from which social progress and social mobility can be built (Reynolds 2006a).

In order to analytically capture the way that diverse groups of young people negotiate routes out of poverty and youth transitions to adulthood, debates have drawn on the concept of social capital (Morrow 2000; Raffo and Reeves 2000; Kovalainen 2004; Holland et al. 2007). Social capital theory raises the distinction between bonding ties (involving relationships and networks that reinforce bonds and connections within groups) and bridging ties (involving relationships and networks between different groups). Of course the notion of bridging and bonding social capital, made popular by theorist Robert Putnam (2000), represents one of the many ways in which social capital has been constructed and theorized by various authors (see Field 2003). Nonetheless, despite the differing approaches to social capital theory, when taken together a broad understanding of the concept reflects the "values that people hold and the resources that they can access, which result in, and are the result of, collective and socially negotiated ties and relationships" (Edwards et al. 2003, p. 2). It is regarded either as a concept that deals with the dilemma of collective action and integration or as one dealing with the dilemma of social injustice and inequality (Holland et al. 2007). An interest in entrenched forms of societal inequality, including the reproduction of social class divisions in society, has been very much influenced by the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1986). His work is significant because it places culture at the heart of social stratification (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Distinguishing between different forms of capital (economic, social, cultural, and symbolic), Bourdieu highlights variations of social stratification among young people (Schaefer-McDaniel 2004). This approach also highlights the factors that influence young people's social well-being, such as belonging, protection, and social and economic security. Brann-Barrett's (2010) study of youths in disadvantaged working-class communities interprets Bourdieu's notion of "habitus" (ways of being) to identify how youths growing up in disadvantaged communities are linked by a "collective habitus" (Brann-Barrett 2010: 262). This work also suggests that any understanding of community is fundamentally underpinned by ideals of unity, related histories, and interconnectedness of its residence despite variations in socioeconomic experiences, lived experiences, and perceptions. The themes of interconnectedness, shared historical roots, and interrelatedness among social and culture and also structures and people provide the basis for constructing the term "black neighborhood."

Research evidence demonstrates both the importance of social capital for minority ethnic and migrant youths and also the ways in which "race" and ethnic inequality impact upon capital formation (Ryan et al. 2008; Weller 2010). Issues of social and racial inequalities experienced by black youths further inform understanding of how these young people utilize social capital (alongside other

forms of capital) as a resource in ethnic identity formation (Reynolds 2006b; Song and Parker 2009). Such an analysis confirms that young people are not merely passive receivers of their families' capital but also active players who, through "their positioning and work orientation," can contribute to generating such capital (Devine 2009, p. 532; see also Weller 2010). Yet despite the growing recognition in the literature of youth people's agency in social capital (Morrow 1999; Schaefer-McDaniel 2004; Weller and Bruegel 2009), what is less understood is the extent to which young people's meanings and knowledge of their local neighborhoods inform the particular types of cultural and social resources they are able to access (Green and White 2007).

Moreover, there is a relative dearth of theoretical discussion about black youths' relationship to urban spaces and the notion that "black neighborhoods" can be valued as important cultural and social resources by black youths residing there. Instead in much of the analysis, a deficit model is generally assumed, and what is primarily highlighted is the lack of available social resources and opportunities that exist for black youths within these communities. How "black neighborhoods" have been typically viewed and constructed could be partly blamed by this recurring deficit model of understanding. Some of these issues are examined in the following section, alongside some of the positive meanings and practices associated with "black neighborhoods" from the perspective of black youths that reside here.

Black Neighborhoods and Youth Belonging

Historically, as a concept the term black neighborhood emerged out of African-Caribbean migration patterns and settlement to the UK, particularly in urban neighborhoods within Greater London, West Midland, Greater Manchester, and West Yorkshire (Owen 2006). In policy terms "black neighborhoods" are generally characterized as being poorly resourced neighborhoods where there are high indices of poverty and deprivation. Factors that correlate with poverty and unemployment – such as underachieving schools, large concentrations of social housing, and high rates of mental ill health – are also portrayed as being significant characteristics of these neighborhoods. It has been suggested that bonding social capital in "black neighborhoods" entrenches black youths into these economically deprived urban spaces. This in turn restricts them from accessing resources outside of their community which may facilitate social mobility (Orr 1999). These same critics argue that in some instances black youths prefer to remain in the "comfort zone" of such neighborhoods, with poorly resourced and underachieving schools, instead of moving to the resourced schools that are often found in white middle-class locales and geographical areas, where they would have a greater chance of educational success and social mobility (see also Reynolds 2006b).

This raises the question of the extent to which the ethnic penalty suffered by black youths located in these neighborhoods is due to their unwillingness to leave their "comfort zone." In many cases the young people were faced with a dilemma. Those that had opted to "move out" expressed concerns about "fitting in," acceptance, and

belonging, while those that decided to "stay put" highlighted concerns that in times of austerity social resources aimed at improving community cohesion and well-being among its residents were further limited. It is important to point out that these youths' desire to "stay put" in their neighborhoods (even if it is sometimes detrimental to their own personal success) must be understood within the wider context of social exclusion and the way in which this has in turn encouraged a desire for ethnic and cultural belonging (Reynolds 2006a). Emerging out of, and in response to, Black Britain's historical experiences of racial discrimination, "black neighborhoods" from the 1950s onwards acted as critical sites in developing strong bonds and internal institutions to establish a politics of struggle and resistance against racial-ethnic inequality and exclusion. Community bonds in this neighborhood created public spaces for the development of day-to-day strategies and networks of survival and self-reliance. Through such urban spaces, social solidarity was formed (Goulbourne 1989). With economic austerity and the rise of youth unemployment among black youths in urban areas, there is evidence that these young people are again turning "inwards" towards their neighborhoods to build up a platform for social progress and motivate them towards success. This involves, for example, their participation in community networks that respond to the cultural- and ethnic-specific needs of their communities.

In many ways, therefore, "black neighborhoods" represented a key site of ethnic identity formation. The process of constructing ethnic identity involved a continual renegotiation of identities and drew upon a variety of social resources – transnational family networks and community, regional, and Diaspora racial connections – which they utilized in different social contexts (Goulbourne et al. 2010). Their understanding of ethnic identity was also contextual, timebound, and shifting according to time, audience, space, and place, wherein at times they highlighted or downplayed the different dimensions to their identities (including gender, social class, sexuality, and regional identities, among others) (see also Reynolds 2006b).

The importance of the neighborhood for structuring social relations is explored by Harding (2010) and his study of adolescent boys living in black neighborhoods in the US context. Harding observes that the working-class, socioeconomic-disadvantaged neighborhood serves an important form of identity that defines insiders and outsiders. While "insiders" are entitled to reciprocal support and mutual protection, "outsiders" are viewed with hostility, treated with suspicion, and subject to conflict. Certainly within my own study, the young people highlighted the significance of "black neighborhoods" for drawing racial-ethnic boundaries whereby black/Caribbean neighborhood members are regarded as being "one of us" and those outside of this (i.e., white/English) as being "one of them." This insider/outsider status also helped them to establish bonds and trust among neighborhood residents.

The bonding ties that exist within the urban space of the "black neighborhoods" also encouraged the black youths to participate in ethnic-specific community associations within their respective neighborhoods. Indeed many of the youths interviewed demonstrated high rates of "civic engagement" in these areas and actively participated in a diverse range of faith-based and community associations. These included black-led church groups, youth groups, and Saturday/supplementary

schools. They also discussed the sense of duty and obligation they felt to act as role models for younger children within the locality and “give back” to their neighborhoods (see also Reynolds 2006a).

Belonging in the Urban Landscape

There is little doubt that in these austere times unemployment is on the rise generally across all ethnic groups. Nonetheless this problem has been more astute for black and other minority youths (BME) with an especially high proportion not in any form of employment, education, or training (also known as NEETs) (Department of Education 2011). Statistics show that nearly 50 % of black people aged between 16 and 24 years old are unemployed. Additionally, mixed ethnic groups have seen the biggest increase in youth unemployment since the current recession began, rising from 21 % to 35 %. For those black/mixed youths living in neighborhoods with high indices of poverty and deprivation and with few academic or technical qualifications, it is estimated that three-quarters of youths are NEETs. These unemployment figures compare to 20 % of white young people nationally in a similar age category (IPPR 2010). Such is the scale of the problem in these socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods that some commentators now refer these youths as representing the “lost generation,” unlikely ever to secure upward social mobility and legitimate success via the conventional routes of employment, education, and training.

The youths interviewed confirmed that with the current economic downturn there is more competition for the scarcity of jobs and there are more people looking for work in a declining job sector. However, as a consequence of this, they felt there was even greater reliance on community networks to secure work experience, in either a paid or voluntary capacity.

Man-dem [men] look out for their own anyways, that’s human nature, but we’re now feeling the squeeze [economic pressure] so naturally man-dem is going to take care of their own first and foremost. [. . .] ‘Johamundo’ [black community organisation] provides legitimate opportunities for lots of peeps [people] that live round here [. . .] to earn papers [money] the legitimate way. (Cameron, age 19, interview Haringey, London, 2008.)

As the quotation by Cameron intimates, it is often during episodes of economic austerity that values associated with the “survival of the fittest” and “looking out for one’s own” hold even more prominence as people compete over fewer employment opportunities. It was felt by the youths that ethnic-specific community networks and voluntary organizations provided greater support in looking for work than the more mainstream employment agencies and they preferred to use these networks. Such was the case of Chantelle, a 21-year-old youth worker who utilized her neighborhood connections on the housing estate where she lived to gain work at the local youth center. Chantelle had previously left school with no qualifications, but her current work allowed her to attend college to study for NVQ qualifications in youth work. She has since gone onto advancing her career by studying for further courses

in youth studies and by also recently enrolling for a part-time degree in childhood and youth studies at her local university.

While the young people's accounts stress the important function the neighborhood provides to its residents faced with economic hardship, they were also very aware that austerity created heightened feelings of mistrust, insecurity, and lack of safety in the neighborhood.

This perception of a rise in crime and related antisocial behavior was commonly blamed on the cuts in public funding to local youth services. There was a sense among those interviewed that there existed limited resources and fewer opportunities for young people to participate in organized leisure activities within the neighborhood.

This reduction in neighborhood-wide activities reduced the opportunities for young people to generate social and economic capital with diverse, and cross-ethnic, networks of young people and other people across various ages and stages in the life course. To some extent some young people may be able to compensate for this loss of community networking by using social networking sites and other technology to build wider social and transnational connections (see Song and Parker 2009). However, it could be argued that if black youths are socializing less in different forms of social activities and diverse groups of people in their locality, then this further limits their opportunities to obtain work, particularly because, as noted above, many of those interviewed heavily relied on information provided by friends, family, and social connections to bring them out of the NEET trajectory.

Economic hardship also created fewer opportunities to form the kinds of bonds that help people survive during difficult times. It was noted, for example, that the provision of informal loans and gifts of food, money, and other forms of help to friends and neighbors became more limited. Yet, during austerity, these kinds of informal support increased in importance (Hossain et al. 2009). The decline in, or absence of, this kind of informal support has the potential to propel young people into harmful coping strategies that are detrimental to their well-being, such as joining gangs to foster sense of belonging.

In the RAW study, the specter of gang membership as a route to belonging among the youths was all too pervasive. The vast majority of those interviewed were NEETs, and while many did not admit to being current gang members themselves, they discussed the rationale for many youths in their neighborhoods joining gangs. A common theme in the narrative was that youths in their neighborhoods had little opportunity to find work outside of the immediate vicinity of the neighborhood and community networks, and as such, there was the sense that these youths felt they had little stake in wider British society. In essence these young people's accounts highlighted that gang membership served multiple important social and economic functions in this economic climate. It provided youths with a sense of belonging that was denied to them in wider society. Still others joined gangs and undertook illegal activities because it allowed them to contribute money to the household and family income. Also, for others gang membership was about

personal survival and safety. A small number of participants had left the parental home from a young age after experiencing social and economic conflict here and so were living on their own and had to support themselves through legal (e.g., paid work and welfare support) or illegal means (e.g., mugging and burglary).

A primary objective of “RAW” youth-centered programs was to develop understanding of the causes of urban youth poverty and marginalization. By assuming a holistic approach and focusing on a whole range of social, psychological, and material conditions that affect black youths living in “black neighborhoods,” attention was focused on encouraging program participants to develop strategies in building self-esteem and autonomy as they try to negotiate the social landscape of their urban neighborhoods.

As part of the program, the young participants were asked to consider the extent to which their neighborhoods informed their everyday-lived experiences. Similar to other studies (Clay 2009), the youths identified that “street culture,” “the streets” or “being on road,” in particular, played a significant role in shaping their daily lives and that their existed immense pressure for them to conform to the code of the “streets.” In addition many of the participants in the RAW study had difficult relationship with their schools, which confirmed a belief that institutional routes to success were unavailable to them. They spoke of a culture whereby “avoiding school,” “dropping out,” or being excluded from school represented a way in which they could retain self-respect among their peers in the neighborhoods. “Street culture” allowed them to build respect and, with luck and the right connections, could also enable them to achieve status within their locales.

The programs created the space and “safe environment” for the youths to be able to reevaluate this valorization of the “street culture” and to (re)consider their dreams and future aspirations. In the group discussions that took place in the workshop sessions, various practices and techniques were used – an example being the “truth chair” – so that the youths were able to talk freely about future aspirations in a space where they would not be judged against the normative code and values of the “streets.” For instance, in one of the sessions with the “truth chair,” Ethan aged 17 and unemployed reflected on his childhood dream to become an airline pilot when he grew up. Ethan had gone as far as visiting the career office at the Town Hall and researching the necessary qualifications and skills needed to achieve this aspiration. However, he never pursued this aspiration further because in order to realize this ambition, the next step would be for him to attend the local Further Education College to study for the required qualifications that he failed to obtain at school and that could set him onto a trajectory of higher education. Ethan believed that returning to school did not conform to the “street code” and the type of street culture he associated with his neighborhood. During this session Ethan also expressed concern about being ostracized and victimized by his friends in the neighborhood if he admitted to wanting to develop a transition pathway into adulthood that might eventually require him to “move out” of his locality. Ethan’s example demonstrates the cultural and social constraints that existed for these youths in seeking to bring about changes in their lives.

Conclusion and Future Directions

To conclude, this discussion introduces the notion of the "black neighborhood" and brings into sharp focus the way in which such urban neighborhoods provide black youths with different trajectories of transition into adulthood, which range from being viewed as "getting stuck," "getting by," or "staying put to get on." To a large extent the meanings and knowledge of their local neighborhood are informed by the particular types of cultural and social resources they are able to access. For those black young people's who view their networks as strongly embedded within their locality, "black neighborhoods" represent a social resource in actively combating racial inequality and exclusion, which they experience as part of their everyday lives. The social resources that exist here generate acceptance, belonging, and social progress. Yet, it must also be acknowledged that "black neighborhoods" also create a negative outcome for black youths. The evidence suggests that cultural and social conditions existing within these urban spaces played an important part in shaping attitudes and expectations. In particular "street culture," "the streets" or "being on road," played a significant role in shaping the young people's aspirations and attitudes towards social mobility and to varying degrees had a direct effect on their motivation to engage in crime and antisocial behavior.

The current climate of economic recession had significant implications for black youths "getting on" and "getting in" black neighborhoods. Statistically, black and "mixed" youths have some of the higher youth unemployment rates in Britain. Intersecting levels of disadvantage create the feeling among black youths living in disadvantaged "black neighborhoods" that it is virtually impossible to enter the labor market or training, especially those youths with no formal educational qualifications. Cuts to public sector funding to programs and social enterprise schemes also penalize black youths because these were traditionally their routes into employment and entrepreneurship industries within the local neighborhood. Cuts in funding to programs such as the "RAW" project also affect participants, and there is the very real fear that individuals will end up living in poverty and frustration, all of which is detrimental to their well-being.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Indigenous Youth, Nationhood, and the Politics of Belonging](#)
- ▶ [The Ambivalent Implications of Strong Belonging for Young People Living in Poor Neighborhoods](#)

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The Ambivalent Implications of Strong Belonging for Young People Living in Poor Neighborhoods

46

Deborah Warr

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Abstract

It is now a commonplace observation that globalization is widely transforming everyday lives, and this includes a practical and symbolic significance of neighborhoods. Experiences of personal and social belonging, grounded in positive attachments to local neighborhoods, have long been considered as important in promoting personal well-being and local social cooperation. Social connections with family and friends, however, are detaching from local neighborhood settings and becoming more spatially dispersed. Metaphors of movement and flow are increasingly used to evoke qualities of contemporary personal, social, and economic life. Social inclusion is conceived as being part of the flows, while problems of socio exclusion and marginalization are experienced as immobility. Paradoxically, neighborhoods are both less and more important in everyday life. They are less important because there is generally diminishing dependence on them to meet everyday needs for services, support, and companionship, yet they have heightening significance in providing access to social, economic, and symbolic resources.

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This chapter focuses on the transforming significance of place belonging for young people growing up in poor neighborhoods. If poverty is increasingly likely to involve experiences of being fixed in place, this can inculcate strong feelings of place attachment and local belonging. Within neighborhood zones of high concentrations of poverty and limited flows, young people become dependent on local networks of family and friends to meet a range of needs. It can also be difficult to establish social connections that extend outside of home neighborhoods, and problems of place stigma and racism (often associated with circumstances of poverty and marginalization) can reinforce these difficulties. Tendencies toward high dependence on local neighborhoods run counter to generalized trends in which individuals are detaching from place. The implications for young people growing up in poor neighborhoods are linked to the ways in which socioeconomic marginalization is acquiring significant spatial dimensions.

The significance of the socioeconomic contexts in which experiences of place belonging are anchored is rarely considered, yet they are critical for understanding the opportunities that are presented to young people. Drawing on theoretical and empirical work from the fields of urban sociology, social geography, and ethnographic studies exploring lived experiences of poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage, this chapter explores the ambivalent implications of place attachments and strong belonging among young people living in poor neighborhoods. Nuanced understanding of the value and constraints presented through powerful experiences of local belonging in these contexts should inform policies and approaches seeking to link young people into opportunities for wider social, economic, and cultural participation.

Introduction

It is now a commonplace observation that globalization is widely transforming everyday personal and social life. This includes the ways in which social connections with family and friends are detaching from local neighborhood settings and becoming more spatially dispersed (Cass et al. 2005; Savage et al. 2005). With increasing capacities to establish “communities of interest” grounded in shared identities or interests, experiences of “community” are less likely to involve place-based affiliations. Young people are caught up in these changes and are likely to envisage and lead more spatially mobile lives than those of their parents. These changes are facilitated by transport systems and communication technologies that enable people to traverse space in ways that were hitherto impossible, while social media has abbreviated the significance of distance in sustaining intimate and casual connections with family and friends. This spatial mobility is evident at global and local scales. In the wake of incessant processes of voluntary and involuntary migration, young people can have close family members scattered across the globe with whom they keep in touch via social media. In everyday ways, the routines of school, work, and leisure activities require many young people to travel across towns, suburbs, and cities.

Accordingly, metaphors of movement and flow are increasingly being used to evoke qualities of contemporary personal and social life (Urry 2000). Social inclusion means being part of the flows. This is not to say that actual places are no longer important because people continue to conduct everyday life in particular places (neighborhoods); however, experiences of mobility are radically reorganizing the significance and substance of place attachments. With access to transport and information systems, people can have dispersed involvement and interactions in many different places. Virtual communication and flows of people and money are dissolving distinctions between proximity and distance and fixity and fluidity. If images of flow capture the sense of movement and connection that characterizes contemporary life, then neighborhoods, as local physical and social environments, have become “zones” of flows (Lash 2002). Here the types and density of flows that are present become important for understanding the economic and social opportunities that are available.

Using provocative imagery, the sociologist Scott Lash (2002) pointed to the growing significance of “flows” when he characterized neighborhood zones according to the density of economic and information flows. Neighborhood zones are “live” or “dead,” depending on the intensity of economic flows, and “tame” or “wild,” depending on the density of information flows. Neighborhoods with high rates of employment, high levels of household income, and active local economies are characterized as “live.” “Live/wild” zones have dense economic flows and local social and ethnic heterogeneity (with diverse processes of identity formation) and high stocks of cultural capital (Lash 2002; Burrows and Ellison 2004). “Dead” zones have been ravaged by waves of disinvestment with struggling local economies, high rates of unemployment and generally low incomes, and limited household resources and have sparse economic flows. In dead/wild zones, social and ethnic heterogeneity stimulates dense information flows, including connections to global homelands and diaspora communities. In contrast to the heterogeneity of “live” zones, local social homogeneity is associated with “tame” zones where shared sense of identity, cultural orientations, and values generate tendencies toward conservatism and traditionalism. “Live/tame” zones have economically secure and traditionally orientated middle-class populations, while “dead/tame” zones have economically precarious and (in settler societies) usually white residents with tendencies to feel anxious toward the processes of social change that are perceived to be further eroding economic and social conditions (Lash 2002).

While this taxonomy is somewhat crude in dividing neighborhoods into four neat types, it is suggestive of key axes that, in postindustrial nations, are reformulating the processes through which socioeconomic inequalities are being generated and reproduced within the socially and spatially fragmenting effects of globalization. Significantly, his analysis centers on the renewed significance of place in producing and sustaining social inequalities: “social inequality, determined now by the flows, takes on a determinately spatial form” (Lash 2002, p. 28). Neighborhood zones represent access to critical flows, and the differences between them are growing wider.

Concerns that poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage are becoming increasingly spatialized is supported in a range of work where social geographers and urban sociologists show that spatial separations between the nonpoor and poor are keynotes of postindustrial neoliberal cities (Massey 1996; Wilson 1996; Graham and Marvin 2001; Dorling and Ressa 2003; Byrne 2005; Baum and Gleeson 2010). These socio-spatial separations have profound implications for young people living in poor neighborhoods where widening social, economic, and spatial inequalities in advanced industrial societies are generating devastating experiences of “urban marginality” (Wacquant 1999; Wacquant 2008). Socioeconomic-spatial inequalities are being generated at a convergence of interrelated macrostructural dynamics, including growing socioeconomic disparities, deteriorating conditions of waged labor, and the paring back of welfare states and tendencies toward the geographic concentration and stigmatization of socioeconomic disadvantage and vulnerability (Wacquant 1999, p. 1643). Sites of intensifying spatial concentrations of poverty (and affluence) influence the “structure of flows” in neighborhood zones. In poor neighborhoods, where there are sparse flows, young people can have powerful feelings of being fixed in their neighborhoods (McDonald 1999). Young people with migrant backgrounds living in poor neighborhoods may be connected in familial networks scattered around the world while experiencing a profound sense of disconnection from other parts of the cities in which they live.

In zones with high concentrations of poverty and limited flows, young people struggle to establish spatially dispersed and socioeconomically diverse networks. These circumstances foster high dependence on local environments and networks of family and friends to meet a range of needs. Strong local attachments, and wider social disconnections, are rendered in distinctive network patterns of dense involvement in local networks and limited involvement in extra-local networks (Russell 1999; Atkinson and Kintrea 2001; Cattell 2001; Atkinson and Kintrea 2004; MacDonald et al. 2005; Warr 2005). These local networks are likely to be significant sources of everyday practical support and companionship that buffer the effects of deteriorating economic and social circumstances but are largely unable to provide links into socioeconomically diverse or spatially dispersed networks (Lupton 2004; Warr 2006). Limited connectivity to wider network circuits offers tenuous access to economic and information flows, and to potential employment, social and other opportunities that may be presented. Limited contact with others outside one’s neighborhood reinforces experiences of marginalization from the flows that represent conditions of contemporary social participation. High reliance on local networks cultivates strong feelings of place attachment and local belonging.

Michel de Certeau et al. (1998) conceptualized neighborhoods as threshold spaces between private and public lives, and for young people they are bridges between their families and wider social worlds and where they begin to establish and practice their budding independence. Experiences of personal and social belonging are widely viewed as contributing to an ontological security that enables individuals and communities to flourish. However, the significance of the socioeconomic contexts in which feelings of belonging are anchored is rarely

considered. For young people living in poor neighborhoods, strong attachments to neighborhood communities, combined with limited opportunities for wider social participation, can be associated with strong, but ambivalent, experiences of place belonging. Local attachments support young people and chart the boundaries of their social worlds (MacDonald et al. 2005). Within experiences of wider social exclusion, a reassuring intimacy with local neighborhoods can discourage young people from seeking out opportunities in unfamiliar (social and spatial) places. In these situations, young people have fewer encounters that expand social horizons and sow aspirations in which they imagine living different kinds of lives (MacDonald et al. 2005).

In the “live” zones, dependence on neighborhood ties is generally attenuating, but in other zones, where there is a dearth of flows, strong place attachments serve to sustain local communities while registering situations of socioeconomic marginalization. Ethnographic work shows that even in poor neighborhoods with strong local organization, sparse extra-local ties suggest limited urban flows and limited access to key resources. In these contexts, strong local belonging represents resources for managing the everyday challenges of poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage while implicated in the circumstances through which socioeconomic-spatial marginalization is locally reproduced. Sensitive and nuanced understanding of these issues is important to inform policies and practice seeking to address situations of socioeconomic disadvantage among young people living in poor neighborhoods.

“Light” and “Strong” Place Belonging

Experiences of belonging arise through feeling “at home” and “at ease” in real and/or symbolic spaces of familiarity (Antonsich 2010). In neighborhood settings, place belonging has long been considered to be important because of the ways it fosters a sense of shared purpose and social solidarity that are foundations for local cooperation and generating social capital. In mobile societies, social change is transforming what it means to feel at home. In “live” zones, movement and flow disrupt potential for local attachments to become deeply rooted in the same ways they were when people lived in the same place over lifetimes and across generations. Heightening privatization of personal life, increased residential mobility, and declining dependence of neighborhoods in everyday routines are all diluting and reworking what it means to feel a sense of place belonging.

Despite the heightening mobility of everyday life, however, residential neighborhoods continue to be important for signaling social position and facilitating access to divergent educational, employment, consumption, and recreational opportunities. Enhanced capacities to exercise degrees of choice about the places where one wishes to live or visit have produced corresponding requirements to justify increasingly contingent relationships between people and places. This contingency consigns new kinds of significance onto the meanings of places, where feeling at home in a particular locale involves notions of “elective belonging” in which a

sense of place belonging is formulated through the ways in which the symbolic meanings of place can be inscribed with biographical significance (Savage et al. 2005). A sense of place belonging is now established by making links between interpretations of the self and the social meanings of a place. The concept of elective belonging reflects the ongoing necessity of being partly “fixed” in territorial settings through daily routines of consumption, leisure and transit, and enhanced capacities for choice and agency in fashioning self- and social identities.

Constructing reflexive relationships between self-identity and place draws on “cultural imaginations” (Savage et al. 2005, p. 208). Cultural imaginations are used to make links between the self and local and global meanings. For example, Rofe (2003) has analyzed the “translocal” orientations of residents living in gentrifying inner-urban neighborhoods in Australian cities. Respondents in these inner-urban neighborhoods described cultural imaginations that linked their neighborhoods to similar inner-urban neighborhoods in other global cities while differentiating them from nearby suburban settlements. Respondents described notions of self-identity as a global persona that is “at home” in these kinds of cosmopolitan neighborhoods. In suburban settlements, other formulations of elective belonging are emerging. The growing popularity of master planning in new suburban developments has been argued to reflect ideals for particular kinds of lifestyles and socially homogeneous neighborhood communities that offer experiences of aloof “copresence” (Walters and Rosenblatt 2008).

The potential to practice elective belonging, however, is limited when residential preferences are constrained by issues of affordability or determined through the location of social housing stock. In these circumstances, people are not free to choose their belongings (Antonsich 2010), and feeling that one belongs in some kinds of places is likely to provoke ambivalent reactions. In postindustrial cities, many poor neighborhoods are “old-economy” suburbs (Baum et al. 2005), close to industrial areas that are bearing the effects of disinvestment as industrial manufacturing moves off shore to low-wage countries. Many of these neighborhoods have subsequently attracted migrant-background populations being accommodated in social housing or seeking affordable housing. In these neighborhoods, long-term residents have witnessed many changes in the physical and social environments of their neighborhoods as they metamorphosed from “working to workless” neighborhoods (Peel 2003). In these situations, residents can have strong feelings of local belonging while also being acutely aware of having limited control over neighborhood environments. In the poor neighborhoods of settler societies, established and emerging ethnic communities offer migrant-background resident experiences of strong belonging in local community and neighborhood-based networks, at the same time incurring resentment and antipathy from displaced working-class residents. In socially and culturally heterogeneous neighborhoods (“dead/wild” zones), social and cultural diversity can be associated with local social fragmentation and ambivalent experiences of belonging and rejection.

Young people are caught up in these complex social dynamics within families, households, and neighborhoods. For young people in working-class and displaced working-class families, experiences of strong belonging can be reinforced by

generational continuity in which the social worlds of young people are similar to those of their parents and extended families (McDonald 1999; Warr 2005). In migrant-background families, generational relations can be disrupted through the ways in which young people are required to straddle cultures and reconcile potentially incompatible expectations to sustain cultural attachments and forge new connections in the countries they have settled in.

Young people growing up in poor neighborhoods can experience wider social rejection through the effects of place-based stigma. This refers to distorting stereotypes of poor neighborhoods as dangerous “badlands” and “no go” zones and the people who live there as hopeless, feckless, or threatening. These negative impressions contribute to local marginalization because they deter the wider community from seeking social contact with people living in neighborhoods afflicted by stigma. The personal effects of stigma undermine social confidence and self-esteem through the ways in which young people feel ignored, demeaned, and rejected in wider social encounters (Charlesworth 2000; Charlesworth et al. 2004; Reutter et al. 2011). Young people may be particularly sensitive to perceptions of stigma, possibly because they are likely to encounter disparaging attitudes when attending schools and other settings outside home neighborhoods (Kelaher et al. 2010).

Problems of stigma contribute to the ambivalence in young people’s experiences of local belonging because it derides and devalues the identities in which a sense of belonging is grounded. It also inhibits access to wider socioeconomic opportunities through processes of “postcode discrimination” (Ziersch and Arthurson 2005; Atkinson and Jacobs 2008). Young people experiencing socioeconomic marginalization are also stigmatized when they are described in derogatory terms, such as “chavs” or “bogans.” These figures are increasingly used in everyday references to those experiencing poverty with pejorative, and even dehumanizing, effects (Tyler 2008; Hollingworth and Williams 2009; Jones 2011; Nichols 2011). Problems of stigma involve similar processes and effects as those associated with racism (Link and Phelan 2008). Young people with migrant backgrounds and who live in poor neighborhoods are likely to struggle against the compounding effects of stigma and racism. Bruising encounters with stigmatizing and racist attitudes and behaviors in wider social spheres serve to reinforce a sense of security and belonging in the familiar environs of home neighborhoods (Warr 2005; Reynolds 2013). In these contexts, the implications of local belonging can be ambivalent and confusing for young people.

Across socioeconomic and spatial settings, the elements of place belonging are transforming and diversifying. Neighborhoods continue to represent access to highly sought after resources, including social status, the quality of schools, and other local amenities. At the same time, within the privatization of personal and family life, there is declining interest in seeking strong involvement with neighbors and in local social relations. Rather than seeking experiences of close-knit community, people are generally valuing neighborhoods for the ways in which they meet personal and household needs. These changes are not as clearly evident in poor neighborhoods where the circumstances of many residents mean they continue to

be involved in dense local networks and express strong feelings of local belonging that are grounded in everyday exchanges of practical, emotional, and social support. Fuelling these local dependencies are experiences of wider social exclusion, stigmatization, and marginalization. In these circumstances, young people can retreat into their neighborhoods and familiar circles of family and friends with effects of curtailing access to wider personal, social, and economic opportunities.

Comfort (and Discomforting) Zones

Strong place attachments and feelings of local belonging, coupled with experiences of wider social disconnection, can mean that home neighborhoods and communities are experienced as havens – “comfort zones” – for young people (Brann-Barrett 2011; Reynolds 2013). The phrase implies the equivocal implications of being too comfortable in the narrow environs of one’s home neighborhood and a disconcerting unease that is experienced in wider encounters and social settings. With limited stocks of self- and social confidence, young people retreat into the familiarity of home neighborhoods in order to avoid social disorientation and risks of being disparaged and rejected. These kinds of social retreat have been observed among disaffected young black and minority youths (Reynolds 2013) and working-class and displaced working-class young people living in poor and marginalized neighborhoods (Warr 2005).

Home neighborhoods become a refuge through the ways in which families and local networks cushion young people from the effects of poverty, racism, and stigmatization. As for most young people, the practical and social support from family, friends, and community are invaluable resources in getting by, although the capacities of families to provide support varies across household situations. This leaves some young people in the most impoverished households and circumstances extremely vulnerable. In some families young people may be urged by their families to do well at school because it is the only viable option for moving out of poverty and expanding opportunities. For others, the security of comfort zones deters young people pursuing, or even contemplating, employment opportunities outside of known networks and familiar neighborhoods (MacDonald et al. 2005). Household impoverishment and negative family and community attitudes to schooling can mean young people absorb messages that it is too hard to do well at school (Brann-Barrett 2011). Shared experiences of marginalization can nurture oppositional and even antagonistic attitudes toward other socioeconomic groups and social institutions, including schools. Aspirations to attend college or university become inconceivable or are perceived as irrelevant. An oppositional stance toward the value of education can be valorized in peer groups and local street codes with effects of generally discouraging educational aspirations among young people (Reynolds 2013). Young people swimming against the tide and pursuing social and educational opportunities can find themselves in isolated situations, struggling with the strains of sustaining endeavor over time and navigating the discontinuous social logics of community and school.

Within experiences of socioeconomic marginalization, stigma, and racism, poor neighborhoods can be highly discomfoting zones because of the ways in which they are imbued with intense negative value. Arcidiacono et al. (2007) have observed that young people struggled to reconcile their strong emotional attachments to home neighborhoods with their negative aspects. Dilapidated physical environments and social disorders, such as public drinking and drug use or displays of conflict, have powerful effects on local and outsiders. Among young people evidence of decline and decay can evoke a sense of hopelessness toward the future that is complicated by subjective feelings of place belonging (Arcidiacono et al. 2007). Feelings of attachment are experienced as feelings of belonging roped to local networks of kith and kin who are similarly immobilized and unable to join the flows. Reconciling the implications of place and feelings of belonging requires strategies of disavowal in which young people recognize, if not surrender to, their close attachments to family while struggling with the ways in which belonging implies they are implicated in unfolding scenarios (and stereotypes) of decline and despair that are associated with poor neighborhoods (Arcidiacono et al. 2007).

Troublingly, the ambivalent implications of place belonging have complex and disempowering effects in regard to the potential for local social action. In socially heterogeneous, and particularly ethnically diverse, “wild” neighborhoods, ambivalent and unresolved feelings of local attachment and wider detachment can fuel racial and other tensions among neighbors (Wacquant 2008). While the circumstances of racism and stigmatization have similar effects (albeit manifesting in different contexts and processes), it can be difficult to recognize shared experiences of marginalization. Studies have noted the ways in which the accounts of young (white) people experiencing socioeconomic marginalization can be laced with racism toward migrant-background neighbors (McDonald 1999; Alexander 2008). Among young white people living in disinvested neighborhoods, feelings of strong belonging mean that migration can be experienced as personally threatening and exacerbate anxieties about increased competition for dwindling jobs and limited resources (McDonald 1999). Among migrant-background youth, it is not surprising that experiences of local and generalized racism lead to disagreeable and rancorous white neighbors being viewed as part of the problem.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Amid processes of rapid social change, experiences of belonging are pluralizing. In increasingly mobile societies, experiences of place belonging are generally becoming more fluid than ever before, and the symbolic meanings of place are acquiring greater significance in establishing a sense of place belonging. For many residents living in poor neighborhoods can involve limited opportunities for social participation outside home neighborhoods, and interdependence in local networks fosters powerful, if equivocal, experiences of place belonging. These experiences are grounded in the importance of local resources for “getting by” and partly generated through experiences of wider socioeconomic marginalization. This infuses strong

place belonging with ambivalent personal and social implications. For young people growing up in poor neighborhoods, strong belonging is implicated in the processes through which socioeconomic disadvantage is reproduced in place-based settings and transmitted across generations.

Nuanced understanding of the benefits and constraints of local belonging is important in the fields of youth studies, to inform policies and practices targeting young people living in poor neighborhoods. Strategies to alleviate poverty and promote educational and life opportunities for young people should have dual focus on macro- and local-level dynamics. It is important to understand how macro-level dynamics are contributing to the spatialization of poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage across postindustrial cities and how this is intensifying the effects of poverty in zones of concentrated socioeconomic disadvantage. This renders poor neighborhoods vulnerable to being stigmatized and isolated and exacerbates tendencies for social and economic marginalization. Working to influence wider socioeconomic processes in order to promote equality of opportunities for all young people presents ongoing and formidable challenges, and it is important to recognize the risks and significance of intensifying socioeconomic and spatial polarization in many cities. Addressing the exclusionary practices among the wider community is also an important strategy when confronted with issues of place-based poverty. Poverty- and place-based stigma distort perceptions of poor neighborhoods among the wider community and deter engagement with such neighborhoods and the people who live there.

In critical ways, the spatialization of poverty is acknowledged in the prominence of area-based social policy initiatives since the 1990s that specifically target local settings of concentrated poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage. A significant limitation of these initiatives is subsiding interest in considering how these local circumstances are being generated through wider processes and acknowledging that solutions to problems of poverty lie largely beyond local settings (Amin 2005). While there are limitations to tackling poverty only at neighborhood levels, area-based initiatives do have important roles to play in developing strategies that address the personal and local barriers that limit young people's opportunities to become part of the urban flows that constitute contemporary social life. The challenge is to devise ways in which young people living in poor neighborhoods are supported to both "get by" and "get ahead" (Warr 2006).

Strategies targeting local circumstances can usefully address some of the personal effects of marginalization. The residents of poor neighborhoods are not helpless, but in many households long-standing situations of social exclusion have diminished self-confidence and contracted social horizons. Wierenga (2009) identifies three conditions – safety, exposure, and practice – that are important in supporting young people with limited social and economic resources and insular social worlds to move out of their "comfort zones." Families, friends, and neighbors may be important in providing encouragement, but this is likely to be insufficient if family, extended family, and friends are themselves marginalized and disconnected from resource flows. Some initiatives are recognizing the importance of expanding the social worlds of young people through excursions to other towns and bringing

visitors into local settings to meet and talk with young people (White and Green 2010). Bridging services such as “second-chance schools” are also important in attending to young people’s needs for practical support and promoting opportunities to acquire wider life experiences. In many ways, poor neighborhoods are the frontiers of important social changes and are usually the most socially diverse and multicultural parts of cities. This is creating new flows in neighborhoods and possibilities for social creativity and revitalization. To support this potential, there are imperatives to explore new modes of community belonging, particularly within the social and cultural diversity of “wild” zones, that emphasize physical proximity rather than requiring a common identity.

Within marginalized neighborhoods, young people’s hopes for the present and the future are often imagined through images of movement – having places to go, the importance of transport, and proceeding into a future (Arcidiacono et al. 2007). All too often young people growing up in situations of socioeconomic marginalization express modest aspirations. Poverty alleviation and community development strategies targeting young people must consider how to imagine and achieve goals and ambitions and connect them into critical resource flows. Economic integration is critical in promoting a sense of belonging, along with a sense that one can actively influence and shape one’s environment.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Citizenship: Inclusion and Exclusion](#)
- ▶ [Current Debates in Social Justice and Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [Education and the Politics of Belonging: Attachments and Actions](#)
- ▶ [Entering the Precariat: Young People’s Precarious Transitions in Japan](#)
- ▶ [Indigenous Youth, Nationhood, and the Politics of Belonging](#)
- ▶ [Participating as Young Citizens in Diverse Communities](#)
- ▶ [Social Justice and Youth Transitions: Understanding Young People’s Lives in Rural Andhra Pradesh, India, and Ethiopia](#)
- ▶ [Space and Place in Studies of Childhood and Youth](#)
- ▶ [Storing Our Lives of Now: The Pluritemporal Memories of Rural Youth Identity and Place](#)
- ▶ [Thinking About Childhood and Youth](#)
- ▶ [Young People and Social Class in the United Kingdom](#)
- ▶ [Youth Experience of Urban Inequality: Space, Class, and Gender in Mexico](#)

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Abstract

Bringing to the handbook a particular perspective on “space and place,” this chapter examines the *dysfunctional* and *relational* nature of “educational mobilities” and their impacts on “family.” It addresses literature on mobility for education and proffers a critique of the generally “favorable” tone of this work. The chapter considers, first, how educational mobilities have been conceptualized in the academic literature; then, it discusses the idea of “dysfunctional mobilities” by focusing on a smaller body of work that has been quietly uncovering the “downsides” of migration for education. More specifically, the chapter argues that, far from representing a positive strategy, the consequences of mobility can, in some cases, be chaotic and damaging. It concludes by arguing for the need to see young people’s mobilities in “different ways” and suggesting how educational mobilities might contribute to a broader trend in the social sciences reflecting a “mobilities paradigm.”

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Introduction

Emphasizing the importance of place and space and, particularly, relational movement for understanding young people's experiences, this chapter considers the *dysfunctional* nature of "educational mobilities" and the impacts that this dysfunctionality can have on family life. In doing so, prevailing arguments concerning the value and success of mobility for education are inevitably critiqued. "Educational mobilities" refers to the myriad ways in which individuals and families are, today and in the recent past, relocating *internationally* in pursuit of educational opportunities. Included in this definition is movement at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of schooling, for higher or further education or for "continuing education" (i.e., lifelong learning). The scope of migration for education is vast and increasingly so. In much generic discussion of educational mobilities, we tend to think only of the 4.1 million "international students" at tertiary level (OECD 2012). This figure, of course, fails to take into account younger individuals (children), whom in parts of the world (particularly Southeast Asia) form the majority of "international students" at any one time.

With children, come other family members – most notably mothers, who invariably accompany their offspring abroad. Indeed, one of the points made in this chapter concerns the familial nature of much educational mobility. This has been argued, succinctly, by Holdsworth (2013) in her book *Family and Intimate Mobilities*. Holdsworth (2013) opines that overly individualistic accounts of mobilities tend to ignore its crucial relational aspects. She also draws attention to "the opposition between the emancipatory potential of mobility and the fear of movement" (p. 6). For many younger educational migrants (as the author's own research on migrant children has shown), movement is (quite literally) terrifying (Man 1995; Waters 2003). Women and children are imprisoned by mobility, at least for a short time and until they force a change in their circumstances (Waters 2002).

The chapter will proceed as follows. First, prevailing conceptions of educational mobilities are presented and discussed, wherein mobility and education are seen as co-constitutive. This includes a significant and growing body of work on the "advantages" that mobility for education proffers, particularly (as Holdsworth 2013 has observed), to the individual (Findlay et al. 2012; Brooks and Waters 2011). Mobility for education is seen as a *positively enacted strategy*. The next section examines a much smaller literature that has uncovered the dysfunctional nature of educational mobilities, through its attention to the experiences of migrants (more often than not drawing on qualitative data). The chapter looks, first, at a growing opposition, within South Korea, to celebratory discourses around ESA (Early Study Abroad), which have grown out of a number of "best-selling" memoirs written by the mothers of young, internationally mobile, children (Abelmann and Kang 2014). It then considers some of the author's own research on "astronaut families" and "satellite kids" from East Asia in Vancouver, Canada. In a number of different ways, these transnational families and their educational strategies came apart at the seams (only, in some cases, to be rebuilt). The conclusion to the chapter urges scholars, after Holdsworth (2013), to see mobilities in a relational context.

It is argued that while mobility for education can be enriching and valuable, it can also be disruptive and disastrous. Ultimately, however, mobility and education are often constitutive of each other.

Conceptualizing Educational Mobilities

There is, now, a substantial literature upon which to draw when discussing educational mobilities. A decade or so ago, this was not the case – but over the past 10 years, geographers and sociologists have found a growing interest in movement for education. “Migration scholars” have come to view student mobility as an important subset of highly skilled migration (Findlay et al. 2012) or even a “type” of migration in its own right (Raghuram 2013). In multiple ways, international students have become more *visible* in political discourse, on university campuses and in towns and cities, and in academic debates.

Most studies of migration for education have focused on higher education and university students and touched upon issues such as transnationalism (Waters 2005, 2008), urban change (Chatterton 2010; Fincher and Shaw 2009; Smith 2009), racism/racialization (Abelmann 2009; Collins 2006), Europeanization (King and Ruiz-Gelices 2003), postcolonialism (Madge et al. 2009), and class reproduction (Brooks and Waters 2009; Findlay et al. 2012; Ong 1999; Waters 2006; Waters and Brooks 2010).

A smaller body of work has considered children’s mobilities at primary and secondary school levels, and much of this work has been especially focused on East and Southeast Asia, where migration for education tends to occur at a younger age (compared to in other parts of the world). *Kirogi* families are a popular subject of academic inquiry – this refers to educational migrations from South Korea to (usually) the USA, involving children of a young age (below 10 years) and their mothers. This is part of what has been coined the early study abroad (ESA) phenomenon. Lee and Koo (2006) define *kirogi* families as “families that are separated between two countries for the purpose of children’s education abroad” (p. 533). Some very strong beliefs underpin this undertaking: (a) that there are profound benefits to be had, for the child, from moving to an English-speaking country and into the education system there at a young age, (b) that moving children abroad for secondary-level education is too late (their “formative” years have gone), (c) and that mothers have a “duty” to travel with their child and, consequently, sacrifice their own careers/family relations/friendships “for the sake of their child’s education.” This narrative of the maternal sacrifice is rife in discourses around international education in Southeast Asia (Abelmann and Kang 2014; Huang and Yeoh 2005, 2011). There is also, of course, an unspoken assumption that family relationships will not be damaged by long-distance separation (that transnationalism is a practical, workable strategy).

Aihwa Ong (1999) captured the strength of feeling and impetus around this and related phenomena (i.e., upper-middle-class transnationalism) in her much-lauded book, *Flexible Citizenship*, which described and theorized a general tendency,

within East and Southeast Asia at the time, to seek “cultural capital” abroad and to view one’s children as (what Katz 2008, envisioned as) “sites of accumulation.” Bourdieu (1996, p. 81) has described cultural capital in the following way:

it is the imponderables of manners and deportment, the typical expressions of school slang (condensed from crystallized values), the shared turns of phrase, the particular kinds of jokes, the characteristic ways of moving, speaking, laughing, and interacting with others, and especially with like-minded individuals, that create and forever sustain the immediate complicity among school mates (which goes much deeper than a simple solidarity founded on shared interests). (p. 83)

Bourdieu (1996) (as do many other sociologists of education) believes that cultural capital is accumulated among young people especially within educational environments (schools and university).

In one particular section of the book, Ong (1999) attempts to illustrate the embodiment of cultural capital through an account of the actions of one young person:

Though everyone there [a social event in San Francisco] was fluent in English, practically all spoke Cantonese, and we could have been at an exclusive gathering in Hong Kong. I spoke to one of the younger people at the party. Like many teenage émigrés, she was actively taking lessons – piano, tennis, singing, and dancing – to be able to participate in the social activities of upper-class life [...] she and her Chinese American classmates [...] were intent on learning how to dress, walk, and generally comport themselves in ways that would make themselves “more acceptable to the Americans.” Chinese parents frequently encourage their children to display social poise and public confidence by urging them to perform before guests after dinner. Indeed, the young woman I spoke with was very well groomed and was determinedly presenting herself to each guest, as if to practice her lessons in social mixing amongst this cosmopolitan crowd. Propitious location, the trappings of wealth, and appropriate body language are the cultural forms immigrants must gain mastery over if they are to convert mere economic power into social prestige. ... (pp. 87–88)

What is clear from this, and other contemporaneous publications, is that an “international education” offers a “key” to middle- and upper-class families seeking to bolster their stock of capital. Ultimately, having an international education is assumed to ensure that children would obtain the “best” jobs a rising Asia had to offer and thereby secure the reproduction of their family’s social and economic status into the next generation.

And there is some empirical evidence to support these suppositions. The author’s own research on middle-class families from Hong Kong, seeking schooling for their children in Canada, strongly suggested the benefits of an “overseas” education. The majority of young people in her study returned to Hong Kong after graduating from a Canadian university. She undertook a number of in-depth interviews with “returnees” in Hong Kong, and they extolled the virtues of their migratory strategy (Waters 2006, 2008; Tse and Waters 2013). Having a “Canadian education,” in the Hong Kong labor market, was undoubtedly beneficial to them. One interviewee, a Canadian graduate who now worked in human resources for a multinational firm in Hong Kong, explained in very clear terms this “advantage”:

I guess that some of the managers or HR [human resources], they find that people that come back [to Hong Kong] from the outside countries are more outgoing and they have better communication skills. They are not afraid of expressing themselves. These are the good qualities that they are looking for. They don't want to hire a fresh graduate where they cannot speak English in front of the clients, even to get some information. Sometimes they [local graduates] are a bit introverted – they think of a lot of things but they won't tell you. In a Western style, it's sort of like, you have to stand up for yourself and express yourself and things like that. And also when they conduct the interview they will test your English level, so some of the Hong Kong graduates were stuck. It's not that they don't know how to answer; it's that they don't know how to express themselves because they don't have the practicing experience. Of course, some of the local grads are also very bright and they will get a job, but they may feel that the perception of them is unfair. (Canadian graduate working in Hong Kong, quoted in Waters 2008: 164–165)

What is striking from this quotation is the depiction of cultural capital. The benefits of an international education reside in issues around “style” and “expression” and, most importantly of all, unaccented fluency in English (and *not* in pedagogical concerns). This graduate points to the benefits of living in a Western environment and what cultural emersion over time actually gives you (in terms of enculturation and inculcation).

In another, more recent project on transnational education (TNE) in Hong Kong, researchers also found evidence that mobility (on the part of the student) in international education was significantly beneficial (compared to no mobility at all). In Hong Kong, TNE involves local students (Hong Kong born and raised) undertaking “nonlocal” (i.e., international) degree programs “at home,” with no overseas element (or need for travel abroad). The project examined, specifically, *British* universities delivering British degree programs in Hong Kong. What they found was that the *absence of mobility* (Hong Kong students graduating with British degrees having never been to the UK) was problematic for some young people, particularly when applying for jobs. As the following quotation from an interviewee (graduate of a UK university in Hong) illustrates, not having traveled to (and lived in) the UK carries its own problems:

One day I went . . . to meet a client. . . I introduced myself and this guy said to me: ‘your English should be better [because] you have come back from the UK’ . . . So I needed to explain. . . . I do not want people to feel that I am intentionally misleading people. I am honest and I did not go to the UK. So even now, I am still thinking of how I should deal with this kind of situation. . . . I remember when I had my job interview. In the interview there were also other applicants from HKU [University of Hong Kong], CUHK [Chinese University of Hong Kong]. We had a group interview. I would say I graduated from X [UK] university. . . . I think it is a matter of how I identify myself. I don't want to. . . mention [it] but I also don't want to be misunderstood that I claimed I had been studying in the UK, but kept quiet about it. (David Kwok, graduated with a UK degree in 2009, Hong Kong)

So in these quite different examples, then mobility is valorized, and an absence of mobility is derided. It is perhaps worth mentioning that it is not just the literature on students that has celebrated mobility (within academia), but as Ackers (2010) has discussed, mobility is often seen as a *sine qua non* for postdoctoral researchers and early-career academics too. This can be problematic (positively disruptive) when young families are involved. Although there is not the space to go into this

wider literature here, this theme of “disruption” (and the potentially damaging and ineffectual consequences of mobility for education) is taken up in the next section, where the notion of “dysfunctional mobilities” is discussed.

Dysfunctional Mobilities

With the weight of evidence pointing toward the general “success” of educational migration (success for countries and universities, as well as for the individuals engaged in it), it is thought important to reflect upon a quieter body of work which simply asks “Is it worth it?” in relation to the challenges and sacrifices attached to migration for education and in answer responds (intriguingly) “No.” It is in the interests of mobile students, host universities, and governments to proclaim the “advantages” of an international education, and there is little doubt that, for many (more privileged) individuals, going abroad to study has been beneficial (to say the least) (Waters 2006). The advantages that accrue from overseas study in terms of the development of cultural capital are well rehearsed (Ong 1999; Waters 2006, 2008) and were described in brief above.

However, international migration for education is rarely an isolated and atomized occurrence; rather, it almost invariably enlists the help of multiple other “actors” (close family members and friends) and can have repercussions far beyond the “simple” goal of acquiring foreign academic credentials. The negative (or at least unintended) repercussions are best seen in work that focuses not on the education side per se but on the family context surrounding transnational migration and the implications of migration for multiple family members (not just the child) (e.g., Huang and Yeoh 2005, 2011). Recent work by Nancy Abelmann and colleagues at the University of Illinois (Kang and Abelmann 2011; Abelmann and Kang 2014) on media and memoirs in relation to ESA in South Korea provides a fascinating example of this. They have noted “a considerable shift in the [media] discourse: from early optimism about ESA’s potential to fashion alternative human development to a consideration of considerable pre-existing resources required for ESA success” (Kang and Abelmann 2011, p. 89). In late 2000s, the “ESA memoir” flourished as a genre of writing in South Korea, wherein mothers defend themselves “against charges of elitism, narrow familism and educational failure by variously describing the mother’s work as difficult (rescuing her children from a hostile environment), minimal (merely observing her talented child), and feminine (following her natural impulse)” (Abelmann and Kang 2014, p. 11). However, perhaps most interesting about some of these accounts is the way in which children’s abject educational *failure* is recounted and how ESA in the USA is described as a hopeless, pointless, and sometimes damaging project (clearly in contradistinction to the arguments made by Ong in 1999).

In other works, writers have discussed a tendency among lower-middle-class parents in South Korea (the less fantastically wealthy!) to send their children to Singapore, rather than to the USA, for ESA. Singapore is seen as a cheaper option (reduced school fees, cheaper flights, etc.) and in many ways an easier solution

(the assumption that culture shock will be less in an Asian country, less distance to travel from home, etc.). As Kim (2010, p. 285) writes “two advantages quickly become obvious: the cheap cost of public schools and the merits of learning English and Chinese simultaneously.” However, parents became quickly disenchanted as they were hit with the harsh realities of local geographical differentiation. Most surprising to parents, it seemed, was the limited exposure children had to English while in Singapore. As Kim (2010) noted “People here [Singapore] do not really speak English in their ordinary life” (Kim 2010, p. 288). Instead, children (much to many mothers’ horror) began to converse in “Singlish” (Singapore English) – a slang spoken by many young people in Singapore’s schools. Thus, “smaller spaces for alternative orders of the linguistic market [are] opened up by the lived experiences of *jogi yuhak* [ESA] families” (Park and Bae 2009, p. 376). Some mothers (but not all) grew to value this linguistic diversity, which signified a significant deviance from the educational path they had planned for their children. Further, unanticipated differences in the school systems between South Korea and Singapore put immigrant children at a distinct disadvantage. Early streaming in Singapore meant that South Korean children (struggling with language and cultural differences) could find themselves shut out of the possibility of university very early on in the process, with (as parents saw it) damaging consequences. Consequently, for many ESA students attending schools in Singapore, the “strategy” failed, and pupils were forced to return to South Korea (finding themselves significantly behind their contemporaries).

In a collection of papers published in the early to mid-2000s, the author discusses the findings of a research project undertaken in Vancouver, Canada, which explored the experiences of mothers, a small number of fathers, and children of living in transnational families (Waters 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006). All of the families had come to Canada recently (within the last 5 or so years) from either Hong Kong or Taiwan, and their main “objective” from the move was to provide the children with a “better education.” The most usual path that this took involved the husband/father returning to East Asia to work, shortly after the family had been “settled” in Vancouver. He would visit Canada maybe three times a year, and his wife and children would adjust to life in the new country without him (Waters 2002; Pe-Pua et al. 1996). In more unusual cases, *both* parents would decide to return to Asia, leaving one or more children back in Vancouver to attend school – these are the so-called “parachute” or “satellite” kids (Waters 2003; Zhou 1998). Needless to say, this chosen strategy was rarely without its problems. A number of observations, in relation to this migration, support the thesis of “dysfunctional mobilities.” First, one of the most common problems that teachers noted with regard to satellite kids was absenteeism (i.e., failing to attend school). More minor offenses included failure to complete homework assignments and a general lack of enthusiasm/drive when it comes to learning. All of these can be seen to undermine directly the goal/objective of migration in the first place – to obtain an education for the child. Some children that were interviewed revealed various vulnerabilities and personal concerns. A brother and sister, living without an adult in a large house in the west side of Vancouver, had been targeted by burglars on two occasions. On the first, they had

called their mother back in Hong Kong, and she had insisted that they did not call the police, for fear of losing the family's "immigration status". It was generally understood, in media discourse around the phenomenon, that satellite kids were the targets of gangs and other criminal elements, largely because of their vulnerability as "lone children." One young person interviewed had attempted to commit suicide as a "cry for help" – others confessed to feeling very lonely and sad. Most children simply missed their parents. In the more usual case of the "astronaut family," where the child's mother would stay in Vancouver with them, women's vulnerable positions came to the fore. Other related arguments about the impacts of educational migrations upon East Asian youth in Vancouver can be found in Tse and Waters (2013).

Conclusion and Future Directions

This chapter addresses the importance of space and place to children and young people through foregrounding the role of mobilities in education. The extant literature on the so-called educational motilities tends to stress the benefits/advantages of movement for those individuals engaged in it. Mobility for education is generally presented as an individualistic, atomized pursuit (Holdsworth 2013) and with relatively little attention paid to the complex webs of social relations created around the process. In contrast, this chapter has signified the "downsides" of migration for education, drawing upon a smaller, emergent literature and some of the author's own primary research. The question of "Is it worth it?," when it comes to migration in search of educational opportunities, is a complicated one. First, the chapter discussed some of the literature that has shown the benefits of mobility and the ways in which it advantages internationally mobile students (*vis-à-vis* their "stationary" counterparts). It makes a compelling case – it is clear that for many individuals, mobility proffers a significant advantage, subsequently in the labor market. All kinds of cultural capital accrue from international mobility – not least, fluency in a second language (usually in English) and inculcation into the norms of Western upper-class style ("learning how to dress, walk, and generally comport themselves [appropriately]," Ong 1999, p. 88). However, it has been interesting to reflect upon a smaller but significant academic literature that has pointed out the limits to such educational strategies – the ways in which they can come undone, be undermined, and even be damaging and destructive. This alternative perspective very much depends upon adopting an understanding of migration as something that enlists multiple family members and affects more than the individual concerned.

The chapter contributes to wider debates, prominent in geography and sociology, around mobility and mobilities. There has been, it is claimed in some quarters, a "mobilities turn" or a "new mobilities paradigm" (Sheller and Urry 2006, p. 208). This "turn" calls for an understanding of relationality and connections. We need to see mobility for education in this way. Policy discussions and many academic accounts focus overwhelmingly on the individual student. Some research has suggested that international mobility for education is a crucial aspect of "modern individualism" and "biography building" (Conradson and Latham 2005). It is about

becoming an individual through migration. But mobility rarely happens in isolation, and its consequences are far-reaching. There are, as was touched upon above, consequences for society (e.g., a devaluation of domestic credentials and educational institutions or, on a more local scale, the creation of the so-called sink schools as middle-class pupils are sent further afield). Non-mobile students may be inadvertently damaged by educational mobilities. At the same time, however, we have seen how the mobile students themselves may suffer and have stressed the significance of the “maternal sacrifice” in educational migration. Educational strategies (involving displacement and mobility) may be undermined by the harsh realities of migration (on the ground) – “satellite children” not going to school, in their parents’ absence, are perhaps the best example of this. Above all, the chapter points to the significance of the *relational* aspects of mobilities and what these can contribute to a better understanding of education more broadly.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Space and Place in Studies of Childhood and Youth](#)
- ▶ [Stay or Go? Reading Identity Through Young People’s Lives in Rural Places](#)
- ▶ [Youth Experience of Urban Inequality: Space, Class, and Gender in Mexico](#)

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Possibilities for Learning Between Childhoods and Youth in the Minority and Majority Worlds: Youth Transitions as an Example of Cross-World Dialogue

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Abstract

This chapter argues that more effective dialogue between the Majority and Minority Worlds could enhance our understanding of childhoods across the globe. While recognizing the limitations and challenges of cross-world dialogue, it compares and contrasts youth transitions across Majority and Minority Worlds, drawing on empirical research from Bolivia, China, India, and Vietnam. The similarities of global youth transitions include the increased emphasis on education but the subsequent lack of employment opportunities and the fragmented transitions which young people face in a context of uncertainty. The key differences are that in the Majority World students struggle to complete secondary education rather than further education and tend to experience greater levels of mobility and migration. Cross-world dialogue points to the concept of negotiated and constrained interdependencies as a way of understanding youth transitions in Majority and Minority World contexts.

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Introduction

In a climate where funding bodies are moving toward large-scale, multidisciplinary research projects, it is timely to consider bringing together literatures from both Majority and Minority World contexts in order to develop the theories and concepts of childhood and youth studies. The two literatures have tended to develop separately rather than benefiting from learning across cultural contexts (Benwell 2009; Punch and Tisdall 2013). Direct comparisons of Majority World and Minority World childhoods are rare (Chawla 2002; Katz 2004). Even Katz's research on rural childhoods in Sudan and urban childhoods in the USA was not set up originally as a comparative study but as a retrospective comparison of the effects of processes of global economic restructuring.

This chapter contributes to the recent but limited work that pulls together literatures and empirical data from both contexts (Aitken et al. 2008; Benwell 2009; Jeffrey and Dyson 2008; Panelli et al. 2007; Punch and Tisdall 2013). It suggests that it is now timely for more work to compare and contrast Majority and Minority World childhoods or, at least, using Thomson's term, engage in "conversations between cases" (2007). The chapter begins by examining some of the limitations and challenges of cross-world dialogue before comparing and contrasting the key theme of youth transitions across both worlds. It argues that more effective cross-world dialogue could enhance our understanding of childhoods and youth across the globe, providing the dialogue is "both sensitive to difference and alive to the global structural processes" (Farrugia 2013, p. 11) which shape young people's everyday lives.

Limitations and Challenges of Cross-World Dialogue

James argues that most Majority and Minority World childhoods tend to be so different that "a comparison seems unfair and must be resisted" (2010, p. 486). We tend to assume that the differences are so great that international comparisons are inappropriate. However, in a globalizing world (Aitken et al. 2008) there are possibly more similarities than we might imagine. Nevertheless, we need to problematize the distinctions while bearing in mind that the similarities between them can offer useful insights for theoretical and conceptual thinking in childhood studies. A key barrier to cross-cultural dialogue is that within childhood studies the research divide between Majority and Minority World childhoods is relatively class based. In the Minority World while social divisions such as gender, birth order, ethnicity, and disability are explored, class is relatively under-researched (Wells 2009, p. 15). This is perhaps because it may be easier to access middle-class children as they and their parents might be more willing to let an unknown researcher into their homes, partly given their greater resources of time and space. Some studies incorporate children from mixed socioeconomic backgrounds (e.g., Morrow 2001), but there are few studies which focus centrally on working-class children's lives (Wells 2009).

In contrast, Majority World research is largely based on working-class, often marginalized, childhoods, nearly always focusing on particular categories of children, such as street children, child soldiers, child-headed households, child prostitutes, and child migrants (e.g., Hecht 1998; Montgomery 2009). Thus within the Majority World, there is still a tendency to overfocus on children's work or their marginal status as an "unchildlike child" (Aitken 2001). There are some exceptions which consider the holistic arenas of the daily lives of ordinary children (Katz 2004; Punch 2010), yet these are also economically poor children's everyday lives.

Perhaps this class distinction is partly due to many Minority World countries having much larger middle-class populations compared with the large working-class populations of the Majority World. While acknowledging the heterogeneity of lifestyles, it is a simple fact that much of the Majority World is economically poorer than most of the Minority World and that overall levels of income and standards of living are extremely unequal (see Punch et al. 2007). It is no coincidence that nearly all the economically poor countries of the Majority World were once colonies of the economically richer Minority World countries. Dependency and post-development theorists argue that unequal global development arose largely because of colonialism and continues today through neocolonialism where the Majority World remains, to some extent, reliant and dependent on richer, capitalist Minority World countries through transnational corporations, disadvantages of world trade, loans, and debts (Murray 2006). Furthermore, the impacts of globalization are uneven and diverse as not everyone benefits from international capitalism nor has the same access to new technologies and forms of communication. The "relative distance between some places and some people has become greater" (Murray 2006, p. 6), and we need to recognize that global economic restructuring shapes people's lives to different degrees.

Rizzini and Barker point out that "children from various social classes in Brazil rarely meet" (2002, p. 138), which echoes Hecht's (1998) assertion that the nurturing childhoods of the Brazilian poor are likely to have more in common with their working-class counterparts in the Minority World compared with their nurtured middle-class childhoods within their own country. Thus perhaps one of the ways to facilitate comparisons between Majority and Minority World childhoods is to draw on samples of children from similar class backgrounds. For example, when it is argued that children's lives are more organized and controlled by adults in the Minority World compared with children in the Majority World (Hartas 2008, p. 53), perhaps this is more a class distinction than a cross-world comparison.

The focus on poorer childhoods in the Majority World is also likely to be linked to the ethics involved in researching the privileged middle classes. For example, Benwell's (2009) work on children's use of outdoor space in South Africa is a rare study of middle-class childhoods of the Majority World. He has talked (although not written) about the frequent need to justify why he chose not to focus on economically poorer townships as he wanted to explore more inclusive postapartheid geographies which meant going to a part of South Africa to which many overseas researchers are not drawn. This also points to the problems of overhomogenizing the Majority and Minority Worlds. As Lund argues, "there is no such thing as the

Global South” (2008, p. 132) as there is so much diversity within and across different countries. However, the literatures of Majority and Minority World childhoods tend to be separate rather than combined (Punch and Tisdall 2013).

Children’s geographers too often dichotomise the world into the Global North and South, thereby under-exploring both the diversities of contexts within the North and South and the ‘glocalised’ interconnections between them. (Holt and Holloway 2006, p. 137)

Holt and Holloway are keen to destabilize Majority/Minority World boundaries in order to explore the commonalities between them. Certainly considering the interconnections between childhoods is useful, but it is less clear that avoiding labels for world areas necessarily encourages more fruitful cross-world dialogue. Furthermore, it has to be recognized that several countries, such as Brazil and India, do not easily fit within a Majority/Minority World binary (Panelli et al. 2007), with recent high levels of economic growth tending to exacerbate, rather than improve, social inequalities (Rizzini and Barker 2002).

Despite the potential risks of inappropriately homogenizing social groups, it is still worthwhile discussing the commonalities and differences between Majority and Minority World childhoods since:

... there is no society that does not acknowledge that children (however they are defined) are very different from adults, have different needs, and have different roles and expectations placed on them. (Montgomery 2009, p. 9)

This is not to deny the considerable inequalities and differences between childhoods, but rather to use them as critical tools to expose assumptions and provide new possibilities for learning across Majority and Minority World contexts.

Youth Transitions: Similarities Across Minority and Majority World Contexts

While recognizing the problems of labeling and categorizing, this chapter seeks to “identify the points of connection between debates emerging in majority and minority world settings” (Benwell 2009, p. 78) in relation to the key theme of youth transitions. The similarities with Minority World youth transitions include the nature of multiple and fragmented transitions which young people face in a context of uncertainty (Woodman and Wyn 2011). In recent years there has been increased debate in the complexity of youth transitions. Until 10 years ago, research on youth transitions had been confined to the Minority World (e.g., Blossfeld et al. 2005; Bynner 2005; MacDonald and Marsh 2005; Thomson et al. 2002; Worth 2009). Research began to emerge across the Majority World in Africa (Ansell 2004; Chant and Jones 2005; Hansen 2005; Jones and Chant 2009; Langevang 2008; Porter et al. 2010; van Blerk 2008), Asia (Jeffrey 2010; Jeffrey et al. 2008; Jeffrey and Dyson 2008; Morrow 2013) and Latin America (Punch 2002, 2014). Some of the studies of youth transitions in Asia question the appropriateness of the term “transitions” for the Majority World. For example, Morrow (2013) comments on the complex interrelationship between children’s

work and education in much of the Majority World, thereby wondering what young people are transiting to and from in contexts where work is an integral part of many children's lives. Similarly, Jeffrey (2010) critiques transition as it implies that young people will achieve adulthood and independence. Yet, in Africa in particular, where young people are "stuck" (Hansen 2005), youth seems to be a prolonged, perhaps permanent, social status.

The term "youth transitions" has also been debated and critiqued over recent years within the Minority World (Wyn et al. 2012). It is widely recognized that transitions are fluid, complex, diversified, and fragmented (see, e.g., Bynner 2005). While MacDonald and Marsh accept the criticisms of assuming transition suggests a linear, progressive movement toward adulthood, they strongly argue for the continued usefulness of transition as a concept and "a metaphor that does not presume a particular sort of content, direction or length at the level of individual experience" (2005, p. 36). Recently it has become acknowledged that youth transitions are more holistic than the school-to-work transition and should encompass other types of transition such as education, work, family, and housing (see Thomson et al. 2002).

As MacDonald and Marsh 2005 point out, there are now many adjectives such as "long," "uneasy," and "fractured" as well as more recently "unpredictable" and "uncertain" (Blossfeld et al. 2005; Langevang 2008) which reflect the ways in which transitions have become restructured and more complex (Woodman and Wyn 2011). Furthermore, a variety of nouns are used to reflect the nature of this complex transitional process such as trajectories (Porter et al. 2010), navigations (Langevang 2008), journeys, and pathways (Elder 1998). There are also a variety of terms to reflect that this transitional phase of the life course often revolves around "critical moments" (Thomson et al. 2002), "turning points" (Elder 1998), "vital conjectures" (Johnson-Hanks 2002), or "fateful moments" (Giddens 1991). However, these do not have to be incompatible with the broad umbrella term of "youth transitions." Many young people's pathways are often directed along a particular route because of a key moment, decision, or event. Thus it can be argued that these pivotal occasions are embedded within youth transitions and that the term "transitions" is still useful as it reflects a phase in the life course which tends to be characterized by a variety of changes. These changes or "transitions" are not fixed or linear but involve a dynamic mix of negotiations around the opportunities and constraints associated with education, work, relationships, parenthood, and housing which vary enormously for different young people and different socioeconomic contexts. As Bynner points out for young people in Europe: "There will be movement from one pathway to another and movement along them at different points and at varying rates depending on the circumstances encountered" (2005, p. 379).

To some extent it could be argued that there are similar uncertainties and fragmentations which many young people are forced to confront throughout the world (McIlwaine and Datta 2004). Across both Majority World and Minority World contexts, young people are grappling with uncertain futures while moving back and forth both between different pathways and literally between different spaces. Thus globally youth transitions are about processes of navigation, negotiation, shifts,

and change. While the social, economic, and cultural contexts may be quite different, particularly in relation to poverty (see Punch et al. 2007), it could be argued that there are interesting parallels in relation to the struggles which many young people face. Majority and Minority World youth transitions tend to encompass flexibility and fluidity yet can also be heavily curtailed and constrained.

As well as similarities regarding the fragmented and dynamic nature of youth transitions, the other key comparison is that globally there is an increased emphasis on education for young people which is not necessarily leading to better employment. Across both Majority and Minority Worlds, education is increasingly failing to provide young people with realistic employment alternatives often leading to disillusionment and frustration (Jeffrey et al. 2008). There is growing international pressure for countries in the Majority World to educate their populations, but there are many problems associated with this (Chant and Jones 2005; Morrow 2013). For example, young men in India are achieving educational success but are unable to find suitable employment matching their qualifications (Jeffrey et al. 2008). Jones and Chant (2009) also discuss the gap between the perceived and actual role of education in securing better employment prospects for young people in the Gambia and Ghana. There is mounting evidence that education is not necessarily fulfilling its intended ideals or promises in relation to increasing young people's livelihood opportunities (see also Langevang 2008; Porter et al. 2010).

Rural communities in Latin America (Punch 2004, 2010) and Asia (Punch and Sugden 2013) illustrate this process to varying degrees. In southern Bolivia, Dionicio was one of the only young people from his community to have ever completed secondary school which involved a daily cycle commute of over an hour each way to a nearby community. However, a year after leaving secondary school and doing some temporary jobs in his rural community, he migrated to work on agricultural plantations in north Argentina. His intentions of returning to Bolivia for further education soon disappeared: "When you start earning you want to have more. . . . Now it doesn't occur to me to continue studying, I now think more about working or searching for a job somewhere else where I can earn more." Despite having completed secondary education, his inability to secure better-paid employment meant that he ended up as a migrant in Argentina like many of his uneducated peers who had migrated 5–6 years previously (Punch 2010).

In parts of rural Asia where economic development is impacting upon ecological change, there appears to be an even greater drive for education coupled with a desire for young people to migrate from rural to urban areas in search of better-paid jobs. Research in rural China, Vietnam, and India suggests this leads to changing patterns of household labor as some young people's work roles decrease because their parents encourage them to focus on education and young people are keen to pursue employment outside the traditional sectors of fishing and agriculture particularly in the context of environmental decline (Punch and Sugden 2013). While these patterns of intergenerational change are slow and varied, this can lead to an increased work burden for many women and for some of the older generation which is not being compensated for by higher incomes from educated offspring.

The prioritization of education and the desire for young people to escape from traditional agricultural and fishing-based livelihoods to find work in the cities were occurring to different extents across five fieldsites, but were most marked in Shaoguan, China, where fishing is becoming increasingly unviable as a livelihood strategy due to ecological decline (Fengbo and Punch 2014). As one respondent said: “I hope my children can find a good job in the city. I do not wish them to be fishers any more.” *Fishing is toilsome and there are no fish for fishing now* (male fisher, Kengkou, Shaoguan, November 2009). The dual processes of rising educational aspirations and out-migration are intricately connected but are not necessarily leading to improved lifestyles for young people or their parents.

Similarly, in the Minority World young people are spending longer in education (Worth 2009) in order to secure better employment prospects (Mills and Blossfeld 2005). A greater number of young people are going to universities in the UK than ever before, and more are going on to postgraduate studies because of the lack of available jobs for those with undergraduate degrees (Bynner 2005). Thus education globally is raising expectations for young people while failing to provide feasible livelihoods for the increased numbers of educated youth. Social contacts are recognized in many places as being key to securing formal sector jobs, such as the importance of “know who” rather than “know how” in Ghana (Chant and Jones 2005). Similarly social networks are increasingly becoming more important for young people gaining work experience or internships in the Minority World.

Youth Transitions: Differences Across Minority and Majority World Contexts

As we have seen, the structural processes of economic Globalization and the related inequalities of capitalism explain some of the similarities which young people face globally: “The globalisation of the world economy, the fracturing of the industrial class structure, the increasing importance of the services economy and the collapse of the youth labour market have influenced the lives of all young people” (Farrugia 2013, p. 7). Importantly Farrugia continues by emphasizing that “the consequences of these processes are felt differently by young people in different places” (2013, p. 7). However, he is referring mainly to differences between rural and urban environments, whereas this chapter focuses on the distinctions between Majority and Minority World contexts.

For many young people in the Majority World, major decisions around continuing education or focusing on full-time work occur earlier (Punch 2002) than those of their counterparts in the Minority World where education is often compulsory until 16 years of age. It is common for Majority World children to have worked from an early age, combining school and work for many years (Morrow 2013; Punch 2010; Wells 2009). In addition, in many parts of the Majority World, there are ongoing problems with children and young people’s access to education as well as the quality of schooling (Ansell 2004; Porter et al. 2010; Punch 2004). In Africa, Asia, and Latin America, many young people do not have sufficient

economic resources to complete their desired education trajectory. This is mainly at secondary level, but also primary for some. Jones and Chant (2009) suggest that the Millennium Development Goals' emphasis on universal primary education has taken funding away from secondary schooling. Thus the failure of education in the Majority World can be on multiple levels in terms of access, quality, and completion as well as as a way of acquiring formal employment.

Another key feature which distinguishes the nature of Majority World youth transitions from those of the Minority World is that of high mobility and high levels of migration. There is arguably more migration of young people in the Majority World, at least, more which is independent migration at a younger age (see Hashim and Thorsen 2011). Langevang (2008) focuses on the importance of young people's ability and readiness to be mobile in order to find work in Ghana. All three of the cases she presents echo many stories in Bolivia in terms of mobility and the necessity for young people to be able to travel and move locations in order to seize both employment and relationship opportunities (Punch 2014).

Another issue which several authors have identified as more specific to Majority World contexts is that household relations of interdependence and family responsibilities tend to be stronger compared with those in the Minority World (Hashim and Thorsen 2011; Parrado 2005). Kabeer (2000) refers to the intergenerational contract which involves notions of responsibility and care between the generations, where parents care for children when they are young and in return children are expected to care for their parents in older age. This is partly because of underdeveloped welfare systems resulting in family networks being relied upon to protect individuals against economic instability and social risks (see also Mills and Blossfeld 2005). Relations of interdependence between parents and children, and between siblings, impact upon youth transitions as young people balance both household and individual needs (Morrow 2013; Punch 2002).

In rural Bolivia such family obligations are negotiable in practice particularly as they tend to be worked out with siblings, often influenced by birth order (Punch 2002, 2014). Thus the concept of "negotiated and constrained interdependencies both within and across the generations" reflects how young people are constrained by various structures and cultural expectations of family responsibilities yet also assert their agency within such limitations, and this process varies across the life course. This became particularly apparent for young Bolivian migrants during the economic crash in Argentina 2001–2002 when household roles and responsibilities had to be renegotiated. Many young migrants decided to stay in Argentina throughout the crisis in case they lost their jobs and because they could not afford to travel back to Bolivia (Punch 2014). This had implications for their families back home as many older parents relied on young people to return in the summer during the busy planting and harvesting periods. Some migrants sent remittances to their aging parents enabling them to hire laborers during this time. Three brothers in Argentina who did not go home in 2001–2002 asked their sister working as a domestic maid in a town in Bolivia to return to help their parents for that agricultural season. She had to temporarily leave her migrant domestic work and return home. However, several years later, one of her brothers secured her a job in southern Argentina where wages were higher, and she

went to live with him. Meanwhile, she and her older brothers all persuaded the youngest sibling left at home not to migrate in order to care for their older parents. Thus patterns of negotiated and constrained interdependencies between family members shifted and adjusted over the life course as young people coped with changing social and economic circumstances (such as the Argentinean financial crisis) while also establishing and negotiating their own trajectories of work and migration.

Similarly, Langevang's research (2008) illustrates both the negotiated nature and constrained nature of youth transitions in Accra, Ghana. She uses the term "managing" when discussing how young people, whose lives are full of distress and uncertainty, strive to use their skills "to improvise from available resources and to adjust one's strategies in response to the opportunities and constraints that arise with time" (2008, p. 2045). She explores the ways in which young people use their social relations and networks to cope in a fragile and turbulent environment (see also Morrow 2013). Thus both intergenerational and intragenerational relationships can be key in terms of enabling and constraining the ways in which young people navigate their youth transitions.

Conclusion and Future Directions

As we have seen, there are major differences between processes of education and work in the Majority and Minority Worlds, which vary according to the nature of local labor markets, the extent of economic and environmental change, the availability and quality of education and other infrastructure, the history and culture of migration, as well as the economy and structure of the household. Nevertheless, a key similarity is that globally youth transitions are fragmented, partial, inconsistent, and contradictory (McIlwaine and Datta 2004). Many young people face high levels of uncertainty and unpredictability, particularly in a global context where the promises of education are failing (Jeffrey et al. 2008). Education in the Majority World has often been questioned as a worthwhile investment for children's future, but recently, because of the current financial climate, it has also begun to be problematized in the Minority World. Although welfare systems are more developed and welfare benefits are more readily available in the Minority World, in the context of economic recession and government cuts, many Minority World countries are also struggling financially which is impacting on youth unemployment. Thus, education systems and youth labor markets in both Majority and Minority Worlds are in crisis (Hartas 2008, p. xix). The importance of informal social networks for securing employment in the formal sector is likely to be similar for young people across many Majority and Minority World countries. High levels of youth unemployment and prolonged periods in education mean that young people in richer countries may also be more reliant on family support as they grapple with multiple transitions in terms of housing, work, education, and family (Mills and Blossfeld 2005). Wyn et al.'s research with young people in Victoria, Australia, found that complex interdependencies characterized youth transitions which were "supported and mediated through their experiences of family life and

young people's own accounts recognize inter-dependence, mutual support and sharing common goals" (2012, p. 19).

The interdependencies involved in youth-adult interactions also emerged as important in Plows' (2012) study in a youth club in Glasgow, Scotland. She explored how the processes of negotiation and power between young people and youth workers demonstrate that "both children's and adults' agency are dependent on each other" (2012, p. 288). This example, while not specifically looking at youth transitions, indicates that negotiated and constrained interdependencies can be an appropriate way to understand intergenerational relations in the Minority World. It could be interesting to see the extent to which a concept developed in a Majority World setting might be relevant for exploring fragmented and dynamic youth transitions within the Minority World and whether it might also relate to intragenerational relations. Given some of the possible similar features of youth transitions which have been highlighted in this chapter, it is likely that the concept of negotiated and constrained interdependencies within and across the generations can also be applied to youth transitions in the Minority World.

While it may not always be appropriate to make direct comparisons between Majority and Minority World childhoods, there are certainly opportunities for learning cross-culturally (see also Holt and Holloway 2006) and for engaging in conversations between cases (Thomson 2007). As Benwell suggests: "research in majority world settings can enrich and interconnect with global debates about childhood. . . These have too often been dominated by discourses and perspectives from the minority world" (2009, p. 95). Thus, while dichotomizing the world is not helpful, comparisons of specific aspects of childhood and youth can be valuable for illuminating global processes as has been shown through an exploration of the similarities and differences of youth transitions across Majority and Minority Worlds.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Dysfunctional Mobilities: International Education and the Chaos of Movement](#)
- ▶ [Social Justice and Youth Transitions: Understanding Young People's Lives in Rural Andhra Pradesh, India, and Ethiopia](#)
- ▶ [Space and Place in Studies of Childhood and Youth](#)

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Part IX

Time and Space

Dan Woodman and Carmen Leccardi

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Abstract

Time and space are central to youth research. Transitions research investigates the movement from one status to another and often from one place to another. Cultural youth research investigates the symbolic practices of young people, practices that necessarily unfold over time and involve engagements in place and across space. This chapter introduces the most pressing temporal-spatial questions for youth research and the work in youth studies that addresses time and space. The chapter finishes by addressing the challenges for future research in

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this area. Conceptualizing time and space, and in particular the relationship between the two, will be important to youth researchers' efforts to understand the increasingly global interaction of youth cultural practices, political movements, and forms of inequality.

Introduction

Youth is widely understood as a time of transition, a movement from childhood to adulthood. Many of the most influential twentieth-century views on human subjectivity saw youth, or adolescence, as a life stage with a particularly important relationship to a person's future identity (Erikson 1968). As this transition may have significant implications for the future of both the individual and the wider society they are part of, general social anxieties about change and progress are projected onto young people (Tilleczek 2011). These anxieties are both temporal and spatial. Young people are imagined as being at risk in terms of both their youth, with the experimentation and risk-taking in public space that this is seen to entail, and their transition to adulthood, which carries the risks of failed social integration or social reproduction if this process goes wrong (Bessant and Watts 1998). It has been argued that anxieties about the pace of social change in the contemporary world translate into ever-growing anxiety about youth and hence a growing number of interventions that target young people and the risks they represent (Kelly 2006).

In this context, while attention to research questions concerning time and space has vacillated in the social sciences in general, youth researchers have maintained a consistent interest in the temporal and spatial dimensions of youth and how they link to broader public anxieties. In this chapter, we review these interests and introduce the questions that youth researchers today find most pressing. In the first part, after briefly discussing the meaning of time and space in sociological analysis, we consider the changing times and spaces that shape youth studies. Then we analytically separate youth studies research on time and space, discussing both before turning to the way that time and space are in fact interwoven. We finish the chapter by suggesting that the study of temporal-spatial elements of youth will acquire even greater significance in coming years.

Time, Space, and Sociological Analysis

Is time really a topic of sociological importance? Do we need time to produce convincing analysis of social life? Since the work of one of the founders of sociology Emile Durkheim (1912/2001), sociology has given affirmative answers to both of these questions. Sociologists have shown firstly that time in human lives is not an objective natural fact but a social (as well as religious and political) institution; secondly that consciousness of time has changed in different periods according to specific forms of social organization; and thirdly that, because of these characteristics, thinking about time highlights connections between individual and social processes,

biographies and history, culture, and structure (Adam 1990; Elias 1992; Nowotny 1994; Zerubavel 1981). Because individual and social life is constructed within and around time, examining the latter also sheds light on the former.

The social characteristics of space are equivalent to those of time. Like time, space can be shaped by oppressive institutional forces (Hubbard and Kitchin 2011), or it can be a tool for forging active and creative ways of relating to the world (Lefebvre 1991). As Massey (2005) effectively underlined, space possesses important dynamic and relational characteristics, meaning that it is misleading to view it as a fixed, static dimension. On the contrary, space – all space – is potentially indeterminate and open to change. It is shaped by relations and is capable of shaping them in turn. Thanks to the connection between space and intersubjective interaction, space and time are intertwined. By generating cultural forms, the relations that space fosters are indeed capable of creating particular experiences and institutions of time. Spaces are steeped in time, while time, for its part, constantly bears the mark of the spatial trajectories (today both in “cyberspaces” and the “offline” world) that intermingle in everyday life.

Considering space in relation to youth studies in particular, it is important to remember, in line with the analytical perspective pioneered by De Certeau (1984), that in everyday life, space (and specifically urban space) can become the privileged arena for minute but powerful “tactics” of resistance, capable of subverting the meaning assigned to places and their specific functions. In this sense, as De Certeau (1984, p. 117) writes, space can be seen as *a practiced place*. Yet there is another aspect that should be highlighted when analyzing time and space as lived dimensions (and therefore closely bound up with the bodily sphere): the relationship with politics and the governing processes of social change. Action *on* space and time indeed proves crucial both for exercising forms of personal autonomy and as the decisive arena for social change. In particular, from the perspective presented in this chapter, the cultures that young people create, thanks to their relations with time and space, appear central.

Changing Times and Spaces

One way sociologists describe contemporary societies is in terms of temporal and spatial relations in comparison to previous eras. An example is the argument that globalization has “shrunk” space by speeding up communication and travel. The sociologist Hartmut Rosa (2013, p. 283) makes this point but argues against understanding the difference between the contemporary social world and previous eras in terms of a simple binary between static and dynamic societies. For Rosa, change is an inherent part of all human social life, but it has particular significance in contemporary societies because the speed of social change is accelerating. Rosa (2013) proposes that this social acceleration is driven by three interrelated factors: the pace of technological development and obsolescence, an exponential growth in production and consumption, and an increased pace of everyday life. The hurried pace of modern life creates a feeling of being unanchored or rushed, as people are forced to adapt to new economic pressures, and compulsions to ever greater levels

of consumption. The acceleration of contemporary social life is related to what sociologists have labeled globalization, a growing density of connections and speed of movement of capital, goods, people, and culture across the world.

For young people, new economic and cultural pressures and possibilities are transforming patterns of education, labor market outcomes, and styles of life (Bynner 2005; Leccardi and Ruspini 2006). A change in the experience of youth is not only a phenomenon of the “minority world” of the countries of the “Global North,” such as in countries North America and Europe, but also unfolding in Africa, Asia, and South America (Nilan and Feixa 2006; Tranberg-Hansen et al. 2008). Young people are both experimenting with new ways of living, for example, using new communications technologies to build and maintain disperse networks, and having new ways of life imposed upon them, for example, as higher education becomes increasingly necessary while also less sufficient for employment security (Brown et al. 2011).

This growing complexity characterizing young lives, such as greater uncertainty in transitions through education and into employment, raises new questions about the way time and place impact young lives. Some argue, for example, that new uncertainties linked to the acceleration of social change, such as the rise and fall of new industries, have made it difficult to plan for all but the near term (Leccardi 2012). In parallel, the push toward the ideal of simultaneity, based on a combination of speed and efficiency, is filtering through from the business world to the entire social universe.

These new temporalities foster a “culture of immediacy,” a new “art of life” that affects both old and new generations alike but that affect young people in particular. As Bauman puts it, new values and even a reversal of values lie behind this “art of life.” While once it was unproductive uses of time, contrary to the “Protestant work ethic” that were considered wasteful, today actions are as likely to be considered wasteful or even “sinful” when the opportunity for new experiences or consumptions is forsaken (Bauman 2008, p. 44). Adults can misinterpret this as evidence that young people do not care about their future and are hedonistically pursuing pleasure in the present.

Time in Youth Studies

These broader changes set the context in which youth researchers try to understand the relevance and significance of space and time for young lives. In this section, we introduce the ways that youth researchers are attempting to understand time and temporal processes. Across the diversity of questions and approaches, three major areas of research can be used to characterize time-related research in the field of youth studies, and we cover each below. The first is studies of youth transitions.

Transitions

Youth is defined by many as a change or transition, from the biological or psychological standpoint a period of physical and mental development to adulthood and

from a sociological standpoint from childhood to adult roles. This includes the transition from education to employment, from dependence to independence, and from family of origin to family of procreation. For sociologists, “transitions” refer to trajectories, not through space but through education and employment, housing, and relationships. As such, researchers in this field will be interested in the outcomes and speed of transition of young people of different class backgrounds, ethnicities, or genders through education and into the workforce or from the family home to setting up a household with an intimate partner (Cieslik and Pollock 2002).

In the context of the social changes introduced above, as more young people move into further education, mix work and study, and start a family and move out of the family home at a later age, some researchers have suggested adding what amounts to a new stage to the life course. Some, such as proponents of “emerging adulthood” (Arnett 2004), are relatively positive about this new stage, believing that on balance social change is providing new opportunities for young people to take their time to experiment with a greater number of career and lifestyle options. This seemingly allows young people to develop a better sense of themselves and adopt lifestyles in line with their values. The emerging adulthood approach makes two related temporal claims. As well as claiming that the timing of the life course is changing, it also presents an argument that young adults in their twenties are now using their time in a way once associated with “adolescence.” In this approach, social change is seen as adding the additional stage of a psychological “moratorium” in which exploration is possible and in which young people are “allowed to move into adult responsibilities gradually, at their own pace” (Arnett 2004, p. 7).

Others are far less optimistic about these changes, seeing instead an “arrested adulthood” (Côté 2000). For Côté, while nominally there may be a greater array of lifestyle possibilities available, the social infrastructure that facilitates a successful adult identity, such as quality education, a clear transition pathway to secure employment and affordable housing, is being dismantled (Cote and Allahar 1996; Côté 2000). While these perspectives differ in whether they conceptualize young people as primarily grasping a new opportunity to experiment or being stuck in a socially imposed liminal phase for longer periods, the core temporal claim is similar, that the transition to adulthood has been extended.

Others have argued instead that it is less the case that transitions in general have been delayed than that there is more complexity and variability in these transitions. These scholars argue that young people are increasingly mixing statuses that are traditionally associated with youth or adulthood at the same time. For example, many young people in employment remain living with their parents, while others are living with an intimate partner while still students. Contemporary social conditions do not so much extend transitions as lead to a greater number of young people finding themselves only temporally occupying an adult status or recognized as adult in some spheres of their lives and not others (Blatterer 2007). So, for example, a full-time job is less likely to be ongoing, and the chances of unemployment followed by a return to study and possible return to the parental home have become more likely in many parts of the world. These transitions have

been conceptualized as reversible, “yo-yo” transitions and nonlinear transitions (Biggart and Walthers 2006; du Bois-Reymond and te Poel 2006; te Riele 2004). Others scholars have taken this argument a step further, suggesting it is not primarily that the nature of transition has changed but that the meaning of youth and adulthood is changing. So rather than an extended youth of change and experimentation leading to stable adult identity, “new youth” (Leccardi and Ruspini 2006) involves incremental steps into a “new adulthood” itself defined by precariousness and relative instability (Wyn and Woodman 2006).

Youth Cultures

The branch of youth sociology that investigates youth culture also focuses on temporal questions. An ongoing and unresolved dispute in research about youth cultural formations concerns their continuity over time and how this relates to a grouping’s cultural and political significance (Bennett 1999; Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hebdige 1979; Muggleton 2000; Shildrick and MacDonald 2006). Some scholars argue that youth cultural groupings, such as punks or metalheads, are relatively solid collectives formed around long-standing social divisions, particularly class positions. From this perspective, some groups can be seen as representing a new generation of working-class young people responding to their placement in the social structure by adopting confrontational styles, a subculture within larger class cultures (Blackman 2005; Clarke et al. 1976; Shildrick and MacDonald 2006).

Others argue that even if this was the case to some extent for the youth “subcultures” of the previous generation, the social conditions of “acceleration” we discuss above mean that contemporary youth cultures have a more ephemeral existence. From this perspectives, youth cultures, such as those formed around electronic dance music, are increasingly assembled out of young people from a variety of class and ethnic backgrounds and across genders (Muggleton 2000). These “neo-tribes” are also less exclusive and demand less of a long-term commitment. They represent a new temporality, a deeply felt sense of connection with others but only for the time being, what Maffesoli calls (1996, p. 75) a “preoccupation with the collective present.” Even the political content of youth culture may need to be reconceptualized, from ongoing groups resisting the social system to coalitions coming together for momentary experiments with new types of self-realization in everyday life (Melucci 1989).

Orientations and Biographies

Another group of studies focuses specifically on young people’s subjective temporal orientations. Researchers undertaking these studies investigate the way young people think about their biographical futures. Overlapping with the research on transitions and youth cultures discussed above, these scholars ask whether the

speed of economic and social change, including changes in timing of transitions and cultural engagements, has shifted the way young people think about the future. Some argue that new uncertainties make planning for the future more important and more common (Brooks and Everett 2008; du Bois-Reymond 1998). Others argue that planning is increasingly difficult and arguably less relevant (Brannen and Nilsen 2002). These researchers argue that conceiving of long-term biographical planning has little utility in an increasingly contingent social world, where the speed of change makes the future and past less relevant reference points for planning action. The relative predictability of the life course allowed the “modern” subject, through to the later parts of the twentieth century, to be a planner of the biography. The moderns saw the future as open, but predictable, and this allowed a sense of the future as governable and moldable, both personally and collectively through social movements. Contemporary young people live in a different world. Today the subjectivity that is valued is one of “entrepreneurial” adjustment to an ever-changing horizon of opportunities and dangers (Kelly 2006). A way to reconcile conflicting views on planning has been proposed that demonstrates a situation is emerging where planning is arguably becoming more important but concurrently for many people impossible (Leccardi 2012).

Finally, some researchers have tried to understand young people’s temporal orientations and how they are changing from a biographical perspective, investigating the interaction of different spheres of a young person’s life over time and how these are narrated by young people (Henderson et al. 2007). Taking this approach means treating a young person’s life holistically, recognizing that engagement in an area of life, such as caring for a sick relative or otherwise nurturing an intimate relationship, will demand an investment of time and energy that is likely to put pressure on the time and energy that is available to invest in other biographical fields at play in a young person’s particular social location (Henderson et al. 2007, p. 13). This allows researchers to nuance their accounts, showing how young people may actively defer thinking about some elements of their future but not others, be it deferring decision making in some spheres, such as housing, to pursue concrete decisions they have made for the future in other spheres of their lives such as education (Woodman 2011).

Space in Youth Studies

As with questions with a temporal dimension, interest in the way young people occupy spaces has been of ongoing interest to youth researchers. In particular, there is a long history within the youth culture research tradition of explorations of the way particular youth groups are attached to particular places, focusing on youth “gangs” (Cohen 1956; Foote-Whyte 1943; Thresher 1927). In this section, we look at recent work on young people’s use of space, the way that this space becomes meaningful to people as a “place” and finally in the way that contemporary researchers are focusing less on particular places than on “mobility,” foregrounding the connections and movements between places.

While youth research has long taken an interest in young people using space, recent youth research is becoming better at explicitly theorizing the complexity of social space and its meaning (Valentine et al. 1998, p. 6). Many contemporary youth researchers, particularly from human geography, have argued for understanding space and its significance for young lives as a creation of social interaction. The geographer Doreen Massey argues for thinking about social spaces as network of interrelations, from the global to the intimately tiny, in which any culture will have a particular location (Massey 2005, p. 9). Young people's lives are often understood as lived within a nested set of scales starting from the smallest scale of the individual body, followed by home, town or "community," region, nation, and the globe. Yet, the "largest scale," the globe, is not necessarily the most important spatial scale in shaping a young person's life.

The scales that are significant for understanding youth will differ in different contexts (Hopkins 2010; Massey 2005). For example, being from a particular neighborhood or particular city, a New Yorker or a *Porteño* from *Buenos Aires* may be more significant for some young people, while for others, it will be being an American or Argentinian. Young people's identities are often embedded within and across these multiple places, with some identities more important at particular times, and may even include connections to places where they have never lived. This understanding of social space as relational does not abandon the concept of scale completely but provides a messier and more complex understanding of space than the metaphor of a set of nested containers mentioned above. For example, when elements from different cultures are mixed together in particular places, the meaning of these elements changes, so that in each place, the mix between local elements and "global elements," such as "hip-hop" culture, will be different (Niang 2006; Nilan and Feixa 2006).

Place

If social space is conceptualized as the outcome of interacting social relations, power becomes an important element in any analysis of place in young people's lives. One of the major topics investigated by youth researchers is the way individuals and groups work to create and maintain territory under their control. Young people's activities in making their own territories are often looked upon negatively by broader society and sometimes academics. If young people who use the street for their leisure are part of a collective doing so, they are often labeled, and sometimes self-identify, as a gang (Blackman 2005). Youth researchers have also been at the forefront of challenging these representations (see, e.g., the section on "Place" in this handbook).

Particularly from the 1970s, one of the most influential strands of youth research within the sociological tradition has focused on reconceptualizing the same behaviors that others saw as juvenile delinquency and gang behavior (Blackman 2005; Clarke et al. 1976; Cohen 1972). This analysis of youth groups as a "subculture" within wider culture has both challenged this negative portrayal of

young people while trying to understand why young people come to represent such a threat. Winning of cultural and physical space, particularly in an environment that is breaking down other opportunities to maintain a sense of community, can be seen not as evidence of delinquency but legitimate political resistance to inequality (Clarke et al. 1976). Since this time many researchers have highlighted the creative practices that young people deploy in their everyday lives and as citizens to negotiate structural constraints and create spaces of their own (Isin and Wood 1999; Miles 2000, p. 60; Silverstone 2006). Efforts to create “territories” have multiple possible motivations, and these are not necessarily exclusive, with oppression, resistance, and creativity potentially coexisting in one place (Massey 1997; Shildrick et al. 2010, p. 4). It is through these efforts that meanings are embedded in space, turning it into places that are unique and that have significance to people (Agnew 1989).

Recognizing the complex and multiple ways that space is used and contested allows researchers to challenge simplistic “moral panics” that overexaggerate the dangers of young people’s use of space and demonize their actions (Cohen 1972). Through surveillance, policing, and increasingly urban design, such as anti-skateboard technology built into pavements and other structures that would otherwise appeal as a site for skateboard tricks, public space is often made into adult space (White 1996). Young people are often drawn to particular public space that seems less inviting, a bus shelter, for example, not only because other public spaces are “adult” spaces and hence there is nowhere else to go but also because it is unsupervised, open, and affordable (Hall et al. 1999). Not all youth are equally suspect in public space or equally subject to surveillance. In New York City, for example, young men from black or Hispanic backgrounds are much more likely to report interactions with the police (Fine et al. 2003).

At the same time, it is important not to overly romanticize young people’s use of space (Hall et al. 1999, p. 507). Young people themselves worry about the impact of their own actions and the behaviors of other young people. The spaces where young people congregate can be dangerous to some young people, and youth cultural forms can be exclusionary and oppressive (McRobbie 1991; Thornton 1996). While some have argued for seeing public space as an escape and respite from parental interference, for some young people, the private space of the bedroom can offer some respite from both parents and exclusionary public spaces (Lincoln 2004). Some researchers have argued that the more celebratory affirmations of youth “subcultures” as resistance have tended to be gender blind, failing to recognize the different social practices of young women and the gender inequalities that were being recreated within youth subcultures (McRobbie 1991).

Mobility and Hybridity

Contemporary conditions have been characterized by many researchers as defined by global flows, global networks, and mobilities driven by changing landscapes of opportunity and risk (Ong 1999; Rizvi 2012; Bauman 2008; Helve and Evans 2013).

Research on youth subcultures in the 1970s and 1980s did to some extent recognize “hybrid” youth cultures, conceptualizing youth cultures such as punk as stylistic “bricolage” combining elements of style with origins in different parts of the world such as Jamaica, Africa, and Britain. This research however tended to focus on hybrid culture in one place. Recent work on space and place in young lives has shifted from a focus on young people in place to their movements, and the flows of youth cultures, across space. This new research recognizes the way people can maintain connections to multiple cultures and places concurrently (Vertovec 2009; Rizvi 2012).

Mobility has increased for people across different social positions. At one extreme are refugee young people seeking asylum from persecution or fleeing war or starvation (Hopkins 2010). At the other are young people from privileged backgrounds traveling for study at prestigious institutions or undertaking work experience elsewhere in the world while taking a “gap” between periods of study (Ansell 2008; Simpson 2005). The “gap year” has been growing in popularity among the affluent in developed countries and has spawned an entire industry of travel companies specializing in organizing and supporting this type of mobility. A gap year enables the building of cultural capital for a globalizing world – either from visiting or working in other minority (“developed”) world contexts or as a marker of a “global perspective” and an ability to navigate risk through visiting a part of the majority world understood as more risky than the home country, such as parts of Africa or South America (Ansell 2008).

Politics and Space

As we discussed in the last section, some scholars of youth social movements argue that these movements are characterized by a new temporality (Melucci 1989). Similar arguments have been put forward about how social movements featuring young people are using space. Castells argues that new uses of space can emerge from the mixing of older forms of territorial struggles with new experimental forms of politics. In particular, he believes that the use of cyberspace for activism, drawing on digital communication technologies, is connecting people and ideas in new ways (Castells 2012). Some scholars see great potential in new mobilities of ideas and people. Rizvi, for example, sees the potential for the flows of people and ideas to set young people “free from structures” (2012, p. 194). Others are far more ambivalent. Nilan and Feixa (2006), for example, point to new possibilities to assemble diverse identities and to create nomadic youth movements across the globe, yet also point to continuing and seemingly deepening inequalities. In a similar vein, the sociologists Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2009) recognize the potential for greater exposure to the way other people live to raise expectations such that a greater number will challenge any claim that global inequality is simply fate, yet argue that it is not so much freedom as “insecurity” that is the primary youth experience that is transcending borders. For example, the experiences of insecure work and life without a welfare safety net are increasingly the experience of young people in the Global North as well as the South (Beck and

Beck-Gernsheim 2009, p. 33). These authors argue that the world facing this youth generation is one of almost compulsory contact across borders that are increasingly less efficient as boundaries in the face of global capital and flows of people and ideas. The political outcomes of these mobilities could be new struggles for freedom, such as the rise of a global “precariat” movement but also the rise of new reactionary movements defending and reimagining exclusionary borders and divisions. In the current world, both types of movements are likely to use social media.

Conclusion and Future Directions

The previous sections have discussed the state of thinking about time and space, respectively, in youth studies. The most pressing challenge, however, is to conceptualize time and space together in the analysis of youth experience. It has been variously argued that academic thought has a tendency to privileged time or space over the other, particularly by representing one as the other. Time is often represented spatially, as a straight line with points of at which events occurs, at varying distance from each other (Grosz 1995, p. 95). Alternatively, space can be turned into and deprioritized relative to time (Soja 1989). One way through which this occurs is to conceptualize space primarily on the basis of how fast it can be bridged. Another is the way differences between contemporaneous places have been represented as different “times,” sometimes for political ends, such as the understanding that some cultures, communities, or nations are ahead or behind in their development. The human geographer Doreen Massey argues, and many social researchers agree, that the best conceptualizations of space and time are to treat them relationally and, instead of reducing one to the other, to investigate how they are co-constituted in social practices (Massey 2005, p. 29).

Space is created through social practices, practices that necessarily unfold over time. Massey uses the concept of “spatialization” to denote an activity or practice rather than “space” as a dimension and argues that space is the bringing together of multiple “trajectories” or “narratives” (Massey 2005, pp. 23–24). Creating shared territories is also about creating particular experiences of time (Adam 2004). Time and space are intertwined in concerns about young people. So, for example, social anxiety about the adults young people will become is entwined with concern about young people’s use of public space. It is often not the particular actions of young people in public space that is the cause of consternation among adults. Instead, it is a lack of action that is condemned, that they are simply hanging out in public space, loitering. This lack of productive activity is not only something that may be filled by dangerous activity but a marker of a risk to the future transition to productive adulthood that requires continual investment (Hall et al. 1999). The most pressing challenges for contemporary youth studies as it continues to grapple with the place of time and space in young lives will include continuing to develop empirical projects and conceptual frameworks that address time and space concurrently.

Another challenge is understanding inequality. In the emerging global network of new types of places and new experiences of time, the working of inequality is particularly complex and will take the efforts of many youth researchers to unravel. One recent illustration of this complexity is research that highlights the way that young people in the emerging middle class can find themselves serving the working class of the Global North. For example, educated young Indonesians with high cultural capital, and seen by potential employees as embodying “Western” dispositions, are staffing the cruise-ship industry catering to working-class Australians on holidays (Artini et al. 2011).

Another factor making the spaces of young lives increasingly complex is the rise of digital technology and with it the rise of new “cyberspaces” (Boyd 2008; Buckingham 2008). Understanding the way young people use these technologies, how virtual and non-virtual space intersects, and the role of this new type of space in the web of spaces within which young people are embedded represents one of the most pressing contemporary questions for understanding contemporary youth. The rise of digital technology has not only allowed new connections between places and social systems that were previously cut off from each other but also allows new types of communications between significant others, such as family and friends. Studies have taken up the challenge of understanding spaces of youth culture in the digital age, but this work is just beginning (Buckingham 2008; Lasén 2006). Young people can use social networking sites and mobile phones to stay in contact with friends who move away. These technologies also facilitate new types of interaction for young people, including those with a disability or who are same sex attracted, whose potential uses of public space were previously highly curtailed (boyd 2008).

The rise of new digital technologies is also changing the time and space of young people’s political action. Young people have been at the center of the social movements shaking Western Asia and North Africa. As well as inspired by calls for democracy, these movements are in part driven by the failure of governments to reward young people who invested in higher education with the job opportunities promised (Castells 2012, p. 66). Uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, for example, have been fostered by a highly educated but underemployed cohort of young people demanding new employment and lifestyle opportunities.

For Castells (2012), famous for his theory of a global “network society,” these social movements are networked, but in multiple ways. They are not simply built on Twitter and Facebook. These movements use both online and offline communications, in the wake of an emotional trigger such as the immolation of the young street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia, to coalesce disparate groups into a movement. One of the major forms of offline communication, like movements in the past, is the occupation of physical urban space such as Tahrir Square in Egypt. Flipping the direction in which such flows of youth cultures are often assumed to take, the social movements that arose in parts of the Global North in recent years, such as Occupy, were inspired by youth movements in other parts of the world including Western Asia (Castells 2012, p. 66).

The entire alternate globalization movement cannot be left out when discussing the relationship between politics, space, and time (Pleyers 2010). The practices of

this movement are based on challenging dominant conceptions of space and time, starting from the hegemony of the abstract, monetized space/time that currently structures global economic interaction and much national and international politics. This challenge takes the form of protests against global capitalism and the increase of social inequalities it causes, focusing on creating democratic forms of global political community with a different territoriality and temporality. Cosmopolitanism is one aspect of this critique of the dominant conception of time (Cwerner 2000), opening up new temporal forms capable of connecting up to the past through the collective memory and to the future through radically democratic participation beyond the nation-state framework.

The activists of the alter-globalization movement assert the here-and-now possibility of living in a different space-time and “defend the autonomy of their *lived experience*” (Pleyers 2010, p. 39) by constructing spaces-times separated from the domain of market calculation. In this way, a social center, an occupied space, or an international gathering of the movement can not only become liberated spaces-times but also manifestations of “creative experimentation” (Pleyers 2010, p. 38). In other words, in collective cultural and political action as well as their own lives, despite being faced with accelerating social processes that generate new and deep-seated inequalities most young people appear capable of constructing times-spaces within which to practice forms of social and cultural engagement and to experiment with new forms of politics.

A concept increasingly deployed in youth studies, in the context of understanding the changing times and spaces of young lives including globalization and digital revolutions, is “generations” (Leccardi 2012; Wyn and Woodman 2006). The lives of young Europeans or Australians working in insecure employment in the retail service industry while they study will be very different from the lives of young Indonesians working in the cruise industry and from young women from the Philippines traveling to the Global North or affluent parts of Asia to work as maids. Yet, all are living lives shaped by new global insecurities and lives radically different to their parents. Understanding these similarities, differences, and inequalities is the challenge facing a globally oriented youth studies attuned to questions of time and space.

The chapters in this section provide an introduction to the current state of thinking in youth studies concerning time and space, taking up in greater detail and with greater nuance many of the topics discussed in this chapter. Peter Hopkins introduces the way that youth researchers in human geography think about space and place. Discussing how best to conceptualize the relations that create these spaces, he introduces the concept of scale and debates about the best way to conceptualize this term, showing the multiple approaches to the concepts of scale and border that are currently in use.

Amparo Lasen in her chapter introduces the way that time and space can be considered as actions, created in social practices, not preexisting categories. Using research on young people’s use of digital technologies, she shows how human interactions, drawing on material and immaterial cultures and technologies, create particular social spaces and social rhythms. In their chapter, Rachel Thomson and Janet Holland highlight that time does not flow in a linear and regular manner.

The experience of time, as of place, is punctuated by “events,” and this needs to be properly theorized. “Events” can only be understood in broader context of social structure and the life course.

In the final chapter in this section, Carles Feixa and Tanja Strecker introduce the concept of “chronotope” as a theoretical approach to studying time and space. Chronotope, a term taken from the literary scholar Bakhtin and widely used in philosophy and literary studies, provides a heuristic for understanding global youth cultures and for reading broader society through the narratives young people tell about their lives. Feixa and Strecker propose this term as a way to work through the challenges of thinking time and space together, and this final chapter closes out the section by showing the value of a concurrent approach to time and space for a satisfactory account of contemporary young lives.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Social Justice and Youth Transitions: Understanding Young People’s Lives in Rural Andhra Pradesh, India, and Ethiopia](#)
- ▶ [Space and Place in Studies of Childhood and Youth](#)
- ▶ [Stay or Go? Reading Identity Through Young People’s Lives in Rural Places](#)
- ▶ [Storing Our Lives of Now: The Pluritemporal Memories of Rural Youth Identity and Place](#)
- ▶ [The Ambivalent Implications of Strong Belonging for Young People Living in Poor Neighborhoods](#)
- ▶ [Young People and Mobile Phone Technology in Botswana](#)
- ▶ [Young People, Identity, Class, and the Family](#)
- ▶ [Youth Experience of Urban Inequality: Space, Class, and Gender in Mexico](#)

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Critical Moments? The Importance of Timing in Young People’s Narratives of Transition

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Rachel Thomson and Janet Holland

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Abstract

In this chapter, we explore the idea of the “critical moment” as a tool for understanding young people’s narratives of transition. The chapter draws on the 15-year UK-based empirical study “Inventing Adulthoods” which employed longitudinal qualitative methods to explore the process of growing into adulthood in five contrasting locations of the UK. The prospective design of the research enabled the researchers to capture change over time and the identity work involved in the reworking of narratives. The idea of the “critical moment” arose early in the study as a way of capturing the biographical significance of particular moments and their consequences. Drawing on a late modern theoretical model provided by Giddens’ idea of the “fateful moments” within the “reflexive project of self,” we show how we operationalized “critical moments” as a tool for identifying, mapping, and comparing narratives. This approach enabled us to capture the importance of timing in life events and their

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consequences. As time passed and narratives accrued, we progressively gained insight into the relationship between critical moments as a narrative device in individual interviews and the slower deeper processes at play in shaping biographies and life chances. In this chapter, we revisit analyses of critical moments with the benefit of hindsight, drawing some conclusions regarding the relationship between the life that is lived and the life that is told, suggesting the value of a biographical approach within the interdisciplinary field of youth studies.

Introduction

Questions of time and timing have been central preoccupations of the interdisciplinary field of life history – demanding that we move between the fine-grained timings of biography and the slower and more collective temporalities of generational formations and historical processes. In their reflecting on the landmark study of the unfolding life chances of the “children of the depression,” Glen Elder and Janet Giele (1998) identify timing as one of the four crucial factors which in combination have explanatory value in determining life chances (along with time and place, linked lives, agency, and resourcefulness). Together, these factors can explain, for example, how and why siblings who ostensibly share the same social location within a single family may forge very different destinies. Yet it is only recently that the field of youth studies has become more attuned to the importance and meaning of timing – in part as a result of an increasingly uncertain and unpredictable landscape within which young people are growing up.

Traditionally, youth studies has been concerned with mapping and conceptualizing the “transition” between a dependent childhood and an independent adulthood – noting historical change (e.g., the shift from a one-stage linear transition to a fragmented or “yo-yo” transition) (Walther and Stauber 2002) and how these processes are inflected by gender (exploring tensions between traditionally gendered and androgynous “choice” biographies) and materially based inequalities (counterposing the accelerated biographies of the disadvantaged with the extended biographies of the advantaged middle class) (Du Bois-Reymond 1998). Yet it is increasingly evident that the central conceit of youth as a transition from dependence to independence is problematic. Not only do we no longer have the kind of economic environment that made the economic independence of 16–25-year-olds a possibility, but we have also questioned assumptions that adulthood precludes dependence and childhood precludes autonomy and agency. It is no longer possible to ignore unpaid forms of labor and care nor the entanglement of young people in family and collective strategies of survival and mobility. As we move away from preconceived ideas of what a normal or expected “transition to adulthood” involves, we are drawn into a closer examination of how different groups of young people live and the factors that are consequential for processes of social inclusion and exclusion.

Transitions are commonly understood through a temporal lens with questions of history, timing, and synchronization central to the analysis of how ideas of maturity and immaturity are socially constructed. This temporal terminology is widely adopted,

underpinned by assumptions of a correct sequence and rhythm for normative youth transitions. For example, the long slow transitions of middle-class youth are characterized as “delayed,” whereas those of teenage parents or of young people leaving state or institutional care at 16 or 18 are characterized as “accelerated” (Jones 2002). Within the youth studies literature, a key strategy for understanding the interplay of choice, chance, and serendipity with material and other less tangible resources is to observe the relationship between subjective meanings as captured in young people’s narratives (the life that is told) and the events that are narrated (the life that is lived). Interview-based studies using qualitative longitudinal methods that revisit young people over time have proved to be an important tool in generating the kinds of insights necessary for this new work, with a series of landmark studies providing a nuanced way of thinking about the “invention” of adulthood in different times and places (Henderson et al. 2007; MacDonald and Marsh 2005; McLeod and Yates 2006; Thomson 2009).

In this chapter, we reflect on the experience of conducting a major qualitative longitudinal study and how we developed an analytic focus on biographical “critical moments” as a strategy for exploring and comparing narratives over time and across cases. We draw on and develop ideas first presented in Thomson et al. (2002). In the first part of the chapter, we show how we operationalized the concept of the critical moment as a tool for mapping and comparing narratives, enabling us to capture the importance of timing in life events and their consequences. As the research project developed and interviews accrued, we progressively gained insight into the relationship between critical moments as a narrative device in individual interviews and the slower deeper processes at play in shaping biographies and life chances. In the second part of the chapter, we revisit our analyses of critical moments, drawing some conclusions regarding the relationship between the life that is lived and the life that is told, pointing to the value of a longitudinal biographical approach and an attentiveness to timing on different scales within the interdisciplinary field of youth studies.

Cross-Sectional Analysis: Operationalizing Critical Moments as a Tool for Analysis

The distinction between a “life lived and a life told” is central to life history and oral history research. Some methods such as the Biographical Narrative Interpretative method (Wengraf 2001) make an explicit distinction between the two and seek to separate them within the analysis. Elsewhere the distinction is less formal yet important, with, for example, debate in oral history focusing on the relationship between what is remembered/forgotten, what is told, and what might have actually happened – exemplified by Portelli’s (1990) formulation of the *uchronic story* – a tale of something that could have happened but did not take place or not in the way remembered (see McLeod and Thomson 2009 for overview). A central theme in narrative analysis is the relationship between the form of the narrative and the content that is conveyed. Approaches that privilege the formal aspects of narrative encourage us to pay attention to structure. For example, the turning

point (the notion that every story has a complication derived from Labov's theory of narrative) has proved to be highly productive in narrative life history research (for example McAdams et al. 2001 on "turning points"). A more sociological approach has been to ask how social conditions facilitate narrative form. A good example here is Ken Plummer's (1995) work on telling sexual stories and the notion that the capacity to articulate an account is enabled by a range of historically contingent factors (the capacity to imagine, the existence of an audience able to hear the story, etc.). Plummer offers stories of child abuse as key example of accounts that were silent until the right circumstances enabled their telling.

We can also think about the ways in which that social location (class, gender, ethnicity, age) may shape narrative resources. For example, the sociologist of education Basil Bernstein (1971) distinguished the use of elaborated and restricted linguistic codes by middle-class and working-class students, respectively. Those using an elaborated code that was consistent with the linguistic style of teachers and the curriculum experienced themselves as educational insiders, while a restricted code identified pupils with forms of tacit knowledge and belonging outside the school. In narrative terms, the elaborated code may result in explicit, information-rich, and strategic accounts of the self, while a restricted code may underpin forms of narrative that demand insider knowledge to understand. A generation ago, the elaborated code may have been the passport for social mobility, while in contemporary times, the ability to move between codes depending on the demands of the setting may be the markers of more cosmopolitan kinds of privilege associated with the urban middle class (Reay et al. 2011). In Anthony Giddens' 1991 book "Modernity and Self-Identity," Anthony Giddens (1991) draws heavily on a narrative approach, arguing that these narratives are not simply a reflection of the social but are the result of everyday practices and routines through which agency and structure intermesh in the making of the social self. The capacity to narrate one's life in a strategic manner thus reflects many kinds of intangible resources associated with parenting style, community relations, and education. In an increasingly detraditionalized economy, these kinds of "reflexivity" may operate as a key resource in the securing of privilege and defense against downward social mobility (Skeggs 2002; Lawler 2008).

In 2001, with colleagues, we embarked on what would become a 15-year study of 100 young people's transitions to adulthood in which life story interviews were used repeatedly over time (Henderson et al. 2007). The study was loosely framed by Anthony Giddens' conceptual tool of the reflexive project of self and the idea that in late modernity, we make ourselves up through processes of self-narration. Along the way, we experience "fateful moments," crises when the stories we tell about ourselves have to be reworked. In Giddens' terms, fateful moments are

times when events come together in such a way that an individual stands at a crossroads in their existence or where a person learns of information with fateful consequences. (1991, p. 113)

transition points which have major implications not just for the circumstances of an individual's future conduct but for self-identity. For consequential decisions once taken, will reshape the reflexive project of identity through the lifestyle consequences which ensue. (1991, p. 143)

Our plan was to explore this process in practice. Step one involved finding a way of comparing young people's accounts of self. Rather than approaching our analysis thematically (e.g., comparing what people said about education or romance), we chose to structure the analytic process through form, comparing what appeared to be the turning points or "critical moments" in each account. This itself was not a straightforward matter as we discovered tensions between what young people might present as a critical moment and what we as researchers might identify as important. We also struggled to identify singular moments, with some interviews appearing to be dense with turning points and what might appear to be "moments" extended into processes. Nevertheless, we were able to identify a range of "critical moments" from this first round of interviews which we could group thematically into the inductively formed categories of family, death and illness, education, rites of passage, trouble, leisure and consumption, moving, and relationships in Fig. 1.

Having sorted critical moments into thematic clusters, we mapped them against Giddens' paradigm of choice/fate that he sees as underlying the mediation of privilege in late modernity. To be fatalistic is to accept one's position within the social landscape and to express agency is to seek to exercise choice. Not surprisingly, we tended to find that young people reporting critical moments relating to ill health (both their own but more often others) were more likely to be poor and to describe these situations in fatalistic terms. Middle-class young people were more likely to report critical moments that expressed their assumptions of agency and freedom. So, for example, a critical moment in the transition to adulthood for a

Step 1 : mapping critical moments

Biographical moments

- **family related situations:** being kicked out of home, parents splitting up, parental unemployment;
- **illness and bereavement:** a parent's death, suicide, death of a baby, diagnosis of chronic illness;
- **moving** (house, school, town, country);
- **education events:** both formal (exams, changing schools) and informal (bullying, relationship with teachers);
- **'trouble':** creating young people as problematic (teenage pregnancy, drug taking, illegal activities);
- **leisure and consumption:** learning to drive, clubbing;
- **rites of passage:** 'coming out' as lesbian, gay; discovering (or rediscovering) religion; and
- **relationship:** friendships, couple relationships, sexual experiences.

Structuring processes



Fig. 1 Step 1: mapping critical moments

working-class young woman might be linked to parental illness and the taking on of family responsibility while her middle-class counterpart might report the impact of passing her driving test and being able to socialize independently. What was distinctive and valuable about this approach was that it enabled us to identify what was “biographically salient” to young people. This contrasted with previous work in youth studies that tended to work within institutional or policy categories such as education, work, or leisure and with policy-driven approaches that paid little attention to individual experiences. By centering the young person, we were able to generate a holistic and biographical account of youth transitions that had synergies with the personalization of support services for young people that was a feature of youth policy in the UK at the turn of the millennium.

The second step in this process was to flesh out the comparative mapping of “one-off” critical moments with case studies of young people, exploring the identity work involved. We did this by developing three case studies where there was biographical parity – meaning that the three young people each reported critical moments involving some kind of expulsion or exclusion from school, yet who were able to draw on very different sets of resources. These included

Lorna, a middle class white girl living in the suburbs who following an incident at a party had fallen out with her friends and dropped out of school, opting to go to a further education college and to avoid any association with her former peer group.

Robin, a self defined middle class ‘bad boy’ living in a rural setting, who was caught with drugs at school but after a short exclusion managed to get back into school and ‘back on track’.

Hamad, a working class Asian boy, also excluded from mainstream school following his involvement in a street robbery, and embracing the identity of ‘gangsta’.

Our case studies sought both to capture the integrity of young people’s narratives while also exploring the insights that might be generated by placing cases in conversation with each other. In this case, we become aware of the significance of reputation and the extent to which young people were able to exercise control over how they were seen by others. Hamad was clear that his fate as a bad boy was sealed, that he had taken up the role at school and was trapped in it by the expectations of others and the rewards that he received. Robin presented himself as in control of his reputation – able to talk his way back into school, to present himself as a convincingly reformed character supported by convincing and persuasive parents. Lorna’s strategy for survival involved removing herself from the reputational field controlled by her erstwhile friends. While our approach was generative, the primacy given to the individual case and their account of events and their agency obscured awareness of how their biography might be implicated with those of others (e.g., parents). Even in the first round of interviews, the qualitative nature of our material exposed the limitations of the abstracted explanatory model of “fateful moments” offered by the work of Anthony Giddens and his conceptualization of the self-narrating individual. While it was useful to aggregate data on critical moments and to map these in relation to theoretical notions of choice and fate, there was no straightforward way of evaluating whether critical moments were fateful in individual terms. We conclude the paper with the following:

while we are unable to resolve the methodological riddle between a life that is lived and a life that is told, our longitudinal research design will enable us to comment on the medium term impact of critical moments on real-world transitions as well as the reworking of these experiences into subsequent narratives of self. (Giddens 1991, p. 351)

Critical Moments in Perspective: The Challenge of Cumulative Accounts

The Inventing Adulthoods study then went on to collect multiple accounts from our participants over a period of years. As self-narratives were revised in the light of new experiences and demands, accounts of events that had fulfilled the criteria for a fateful moment were not so clearly fateful with the passing of time. As interviews grew into longitudinal case studies, it became possible to interrogate both the value and the limitations of Giddens' analytical framework for understanding the relationship between individual biography and wider social processes (Henderson et al. 2012).

We began the process in a second published article that interrogated the relationship between longitudinal studies and the reflexive self (Plumridge and Thomson 2003) and subsequently developed this analysis in a paper called "Gaining a perspective on choice and fate: critical moments revisited" (Holland and Thomson 2009), where we extended two of the case studies (Lorna and Robin) originally explored in the 2002 paper.

One of the key issues explored was how our analytic focus on "fatefulness" including the criteria of risk analysis distracted us from alternative readings of the data. For example, when we returned to see Robin over the years, we found that despite his facility with narrating his moral redemption, he continued to be heavily invested in a bad boy identity and became increasingly involved in a drug subculture. With the benefit of hindsight, we could see that although Robin's critical moment at the age of 16 may have fulfilled the criteria of being "fateful" in Giddens' terms, it was not a turning point in his "life as lived." Rather it forms part of what became a pattern of confession, self-inspection, and experimentation in his "life as told." Giddens' model of the fateful moment does not provide an explanation of why particular identities are possible and endure, while others are not. To explain the trajectories of the young people in our study, we have needed to explore the wider framework within which certain identities are liveable (Butler 2004), including the structures of opportunity within which they operate and limitations on their options and choice (Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Nilsen and Brannen 2002; Thomson et al. 2004). The "critical moments" that are a central part in young people's narratives of self but are just part of the story, and we have shifted our focus over time from the critical moments to the young people's responses, the resilience and resourcefulness they show in the face of such moments, and the ways the moments themselves are revisited, worked, and reworked in the ongoing biographical narrative (McLeod and Thomson 2009).

The second key issue explored in our revisiting of our original work on critical moments was an appreciation of how the accumulation of biographical accounts not only helps us to see the consequences of events but also complicates the picture by revealing the significance of antecedents and the wider biographical context of family culture and other lives that are linked to the life that is narrated. For example, in our original analysis of Lorna's critical moment, we were aware of the significance of her father's role, as his actions in reporting what happened to the police precipitated her exclusion from her peer group and her decision to go to college rather than remaining in the elite peer group in the sixth form of school. This was a risky path to take since her school would have provided a more direct route to educational success, not necessarily assured by the sixth-form college. Lorna was proud and defiant in the face of rejection by her peers, however, explaining

I beat everyone else in this school. . . everyone saw me getting on with my life and that made me feel important, that made me feel like I don't need any of you lot.

Unlike the majority of her peers who had progressed from school sixth form to university, by her third interview, Lorna was working as an office temp, having completed a vocational qualification at college. She was highly conscious of how her trajectory differed from many of her peers and expressed anxiety about the relative merits of the higher education versus the work-based route to professional work status. Where we originally interpreted Lorna's confiding in her father as indicating a lack of awareness of the risks involved, might we read this decision in retrospect as a sign of the degree to which he was important in her life and influenced her values? She wanted to get his response to the event. And although rejected by her friends, might her departure from school for the sixth-form college reflect her parents' views of education and particularly those of her father? He had done very well with little education and would clearly support any route that Lorna chose to take. Lorna's solidarity with her parents could be one source of her ambivalent feelings of belonging and valuing of employment over education.

Longitudinal data can expose the biographical significance of that which is not explicitly stated or narrated but which nevertheless emerges over time. While each interview constitutes a narrative which can be analyzed in its own terms, together they give rise to a meta-narrative and a meta-analysis, the meaning of which is contingent and iterative, with new stories being told from the same material with the benefit of a shifting present. It also illustrates some of the ways that hindsight and a retrospective analytic perspective takes over from the prospective orientation as a data set matures.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Kierkegaard's insight that lives are lived forwards, yet understood backwards lies at the heart of narrative, ethnographic, and dynamic approaches to qualitative social research (McLeod and Thomson 2009). In this chapter, we have traced how our research team journeyed toward this understanding, sketching the parts played by

theoretical agendas, research design, and critical reflection. We have shown why we were interested in finding analytic techniques with the potential for mapping biographical narratives, suggesting that formal rhetorical devices can provide a mechanism for comparison and a means through which to connect the social and the biographical. We have also shown the limits of applying a theoretical model such as Giddens' fateful moment to empirical material, a limitation that is amplified with the accumulation of multiple accounts over time. Our experience has cautioned us against moving too quickly between evidence of the life as told and interpretations of the life as lived. The critical moment that is found in a single biographical narrative represents a provisional identity claim, which can tell us a great deal about the individual and their circumstances. Yet if one-off life stories are our only form of data, we are limited in what we can see. With the accumulation of accounts, we capture contradiction, dissonance, and repetition. Silences are more discernable, and consequences and antecedents begin to be revealed. Longitudinal approaches can liberate us from the limits of single interview data, providing another route into the life as lived. Ironically, it may be that the "events" that we identified as critical moments with Lorna and Robin in their first interviews in the *Inventing Adulthood* study may in fact be understood retrospectively as capturing the key biographical themes of their lives. Yet it has required the passage of time for these themes to unfurl, and with more time and data, the picture would inevitably become richer. As a field, youth studies is now attending to the complex ways in which time is experienced by young people and families. It is clear from young people's narratives that lived time is punctuated by "events," yet these events gain meaning retrospectively. Although they may not be objectively "critical" in the moment they occur, through narrative and experience, they are made and remade to be so.

The work of Giddens gives us a starting point for theorizing these turning points but has a number of limitations as explored in this chapter. The conceptual tool of the fateful moment proved to be a double-edged sword for our own work. On one hand, it provided a link to the wider theoretical construct of the "reflexive project of self" and to generative debates about the neoliberal subject in the remaking of privilege and inequality. But it also closed the conceptual space between the story told and the life as lived, encouraging us to accept professions of agency at face value. Our attempts at operationalizing the fateful moment stalled in the face of complex and contradictory data, and we struggled to fit unfolding case studies within its exacting yet descriptive criteria. From where we write today, as custodians of a rich data set of longitudinal biographical accounts, we are intrigued by the possibility of rethinking the critical moments we find in narratives as clues and rehearsals, sometimes realized and sometimes not, which are suggestive of a plethora of "unlived lives" (other possible directions that lives may have taken) which may have fallen away yet which still haunt the imagination and may yet find expression (Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame 1997; Portelli 1990). Working with a mature longitudinal data set has led us toward the rich methodological and theoretical resource of oral/life history and biographical sociology. This is a retrospective analytic project, distinct from, yet complementary to the prospective project that we began with at the outset of the study.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Dysfunctional Mobilities: International Education and the Chaos of Movement](#)
- ▶ [Juvenile Chronotopes: Space, Time, and Youth](#)
- ▶ [Rhythms and Flow. Timing and Spacing the Digitally Mediated Everyday](#)
- ▶ [Storing Our Lives of Now: The Pluritemporal Memories of Rural Youth Identity and Place](#)
- ▶ [Time and Space in Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [Young People, Identity, Class, and the Family](#)

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Abstract

Youth lives are inscribed in specific times and spaces. Both in social history and in life stories, times and spaces are not separated but connected: this connectivity is called “chronotope.” The academic use of the concept derives from the work of the Russian literature critic Mikhail Bakhtin. The notion was borrowed from physics and mathematics (Einstein’s Theory of Relativity) and referred to the inseparability of time and space (time as a fourth dimension of space). The chronotope is a double-sided concept: on one side, it can be seen as the time of space (the historical dimension of geography); on the other side, it can be seen as the space of time (the geographical dimension of history). There are three ways in which the chronotope can be used for the study of youth cultures: (a) as a methodological approach consisting in “reading the society through life stories,” in (local) youth contexts; (b) as a theoretical approach to analyze (national) youth cultures, in supra-local contexts; and (c) as a strategic way to understand the contemporary processes of de-territorialization and the emergence of post-national

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(global) youth networks. The emergence of youth as a social subject is expressed in a process of redefining the city in space and time and is based on the appearance of a number of specific time-space planets for young people in the urban galaxy. The life stories of several generations of young people can be “read” precisely as a process of “conquest” of urban spaces, which is expressed in a struggle for autonomy in everyday life.

Introduction

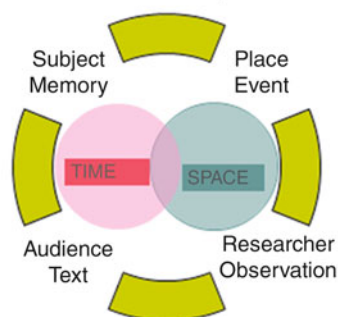
Every entry in the sphere of means is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope. (Bakhtin 1981, p. 258)

Youth lives are inscribed in specific spaces and times: not only youth histories (the individual and collective events placed in social itineraries) but also youth stories (the subjective narratives placed in social memories). Both in social history and in life stories, spaces and times are not separated but connected: a single event evokes a single locality (for instance, May of 1968 evokes Paris *rive gauche*), and a single memory evokes a single place (for instance, the first kiss in one specific pub). In youth studies, most of the techniques for collecting data reveal the impossibility to separate these two dimensions of experience. In the calendar time-use questionnaires, when we ask a young boy or girl when and how long they do something, it is also important to ask them where and with whom. And in the mental map drawings, the cartographies of specific places are talking to us about specific moments – happy or traumatic – in life. This connectivity of time and space is called “chronotope.”

The academic use of the concept “chronotope” derives from the work of the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin. In his article “Forms of time and the chronotope in the novel” (Bakhtin 1981), Bakhtin defines chronotope as “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature.” The notion was borrowed from physics and mathematics (Einstein’s Theory of Relativity). It refers to the inseparability of time (*chronos*) and space (*topos*), whereat time is understood as a fourth dimension of space. For the social sciences, the chronotope is a double-sided concept: on the one side, it can be seen as the time of space (the historical dimension of geography or social memory); on the other side, it can be seen as the space of time (the geographical dimension of history). For Bakhtin, chronotope is the organizing principle for fundamental narrative events in the novel. He distinguishes five types of chronotopes: the *road*, a place for encounters; the *castle*, a place for history; the *salon*, a place for dialogues; the *town*, a place (street, square) for cyclical everyday life; and the *threshold*, a place for crisis and passage. In essence, the chronotope is a kind of street-corner time and place, a liminal stage in which the different social actors in question (youth individuals and groups, in this case) can meet and interact with each other and with other actors, playing performative roles that express collective memories (generational, social, cultural), narrating to themselves and to others their own identities and otherness, trying to resolve through this narrative activity the eternal “identity crisis” of youth. In the words of Bakhtin, “the spatial

Fig. 1 The gates of the chronotope

The gates of the chronotope



and temporal paths of the most varied people – representative of all social classes, estates, religions, nationalities, ages – intersect at a spatial and temporal point” (1981, p. 243). Through the chronotope events can be effectively represented in narration:

The chronotope makes narrative events concrete, makes them take flesh, causes blood to flow in their veins (...) It is the chronotope that provides the ground essential for the representativity of events. And this is so thanks precisely to the special increase of density and concreteness of time markers – the time of human life, the time of history - that occurs within well-delineated spatial areas. (Bakhtin 1981, p. 250)

For Bakhtin, the chronotope is not a fact but a point of view, interpretive knowledge that needs and breeds subjective creativity. He described the chronotopical imagination as follows: “those things that are static in space cannot be statically described, but must rather be incorporated into the temporal sequence of represented events and into the story’s own representation field (...) the relationships contained within chronotope... are dialogical” (Bakhtin 1981, pp. 251–252). The chronotope is expressed through different levels of dialogue: between the subject and its memory, between the interviewer and the interviewee, and between the narrator and the audience. For our purposes, it is the gates (Fig. 1) that connects (local) events, (social) memory, (researcher) imagination, and the subjects of study – young people.

Chronotopes of Youth Cultures

Who describes distant cities undertakes a journey in space, who describes its own city undertakes a journey in time. (Benjamin 1980, p. 10)

In a broad sense, the term “youth cultures” describes young people’s social experiences, expressed collectively through the construction of differentiating lifestyles. Youth cultures are constituted mainly in the dimension of youth leisure time or in the interstitial spaces of institutional life. In a more narrow sense, the term

can refer to youth micro-societies, with significant degrees of independence from the adult institutions that provide space and time. How can we use the concept of chronotope to study youth cultures? There are at least three possible ways: (a) methodologically reading the society through life stories in (local) youth contexts, trying to connect the times of biography and of narration to the spaces of staying in and of moving off; (b) theoretically analyzing (national) youth cultures in supra-local contexts, trying to connect the times of fusion, diffusion, and fission – of emergence, popularization, and fragmentation – of single subcultures to specific social trends in economy, society, politics, and ideology; and (c) strategically understanding the contemporary processes of de-territorialization and the emergence of post-national (global) youth networks, trying to connect contemporary “extended present” juvenile time experiences to the cosmopolitan and virtual space of flows of the information society (Cfr. Castells 1996; Leccardi 2009).

To read the space-time experiences of youth, not only as a symbolic perception but also as social practice, evokes generational memory, emphasizing the outcome of constant interaction between the objective and the subjective. In encouraging readings of culture that do not focus on the factual element of life stories, the space-time approach serves to analyze the historical variability of youth cultures and their integration into broader institutional frameworks (Feixa 2000). The emergence of youth as a social subject is expressed in the process of redefining the city in space and time and acknowledges the appearance in the urban galaxy of a number of specific time-space planets for young people. The life stories of several generations of young people can therefore be read as a sequential process of territorialization of urban spaces, which expresses the struggle for autonomy in everyday life. When young people tell their life stories, space is usually organized as a series of concentric circles that are based on the subject and its surroundings. This includes physical space (housing, domestic space, neighborhood, local and supra-space) and social space (family, kinship network, networks of neighbors and friends, networks of institutional relations). This concentric spatial dimension creates a number of polarities: private space versus public space, civil space versus state space, and institutional space versus recreational space. Each concentric level has certain conventions and rules. For example, each level comprises specific codes of conduct acceptable only in such spaces: Certain body contact is normal in private spaces but unacceptable in public spaces, and body performances are normal in public spaces but inappropriate in private spaces. In online social networks, however, there is no clear border between public, semipublic, and private space-times, a clear rule (*netiquette*) for an appropriate behavior in each of the virtual *walls*.

The intensity of social relations is shaped by the space in which each young person conducts his or her daily life. This includes intimate areas of affective and discretionary practice, as well as open and coercive spaces, where activities take place regularly and in a hierarchical fashion. Yet sometimes the intimate space of the family can become a place of control, and public places of entertainment can become private places. The second axis is time, organized in the temporal dimensions of daily, weekly, calendar, biographical, generational, and historical time. The time dimension also structures various binary oppositions: productive time

(academic or occupational functioning) is opposed to festive time, collective time to individual time, or quiet time (such as music in the room) versus noise time (at a concert or dance club). There is also a contrast between repetitive time (exercise, school and work rhythms, patterns of consumption) and time for rupture (the party, transgression, travel, free-running) and so on. The organization of the day, the routes of the weekend, planning travel, crucial moments in the life cycle, and generational events are not left to chance but are culturally elaborated by formalized rituals, reflecting the symbolic memory work of narrating a biography. Moreover, the history of youth culture can be seen as a history of creating chronotopes, real and symbolic struggles for the conquest of specific space-time universes, and a history of appropriations of significant places and times for each youth generation and for each life story.

Types of Chronotopes

The juvenile chronotopes can be grouped into three main categories: (a) private and/or intimate spaces/times for personal identity (*body chronotopes*), (b) semi-public and/or clandestine spaces/times for group identity (*corner chronotopes*), and (c) public and/or political spaces/times for social identity (*agora chronotopes*). The first are related to highly personal spheres, where the interactions between mind, body, and face-to-face relationships are constructing a subjective identity. The second are related to some liminal spheres, where it is possible to be together with other members of the peer group, building intersubjective identities. The third refer to external areas, where young people are under public surveillance and display, participating in the public arena for political and commercial purposes.

Body Chronotopes: The Room

Certainly some of the girls' culture has its setting in the bedroom. It is a place for narcissistic daydreams, and for experimenting with clothing, cosmetics, and new dances. (Wulff 1988, p. 165)

The private room has become for teenagers a central space for living and expressing their identity. When Virginia Woolf (1929) wrote *A Room of One's Own*, she was thinking mainly of women's necessity to have a private space, where to spend free time and start the construction of a personal identity, autonomous and independent of their parents, husbands, and superiors. Claiming an own room was not answering so much to material but to symbolical necessities, in the context of lack of power in public life. The images of the personal photo album, the books of the private library, and the words in the private diary were the languages through which an intimate museum was organized. Woolf's essay would be recovered in the 1960s by some young people in the context of a growing expectation of access to spaces that are not shared with parents. Historically, the young were characterized by not disposing of private space. In the rural society, they used to share the room

(and often the bed) with siblings, servants, and even animals, under the strict authority of the head of the household. The early phases of the urbanization process did not entail improvements: young people's daily life took place entirely in public spaces (streets, taverns, cafés). The rise of industrial society, and with it the invention of adolescence, confined the bourgeois youth in educational institutions (schools, youth associations) and the working class youth in different shared spaces (factories, streets, prisons). Although some literary movements (particularly the romanticism) started to conceive a new adolescent subject arising out of a private space (a space of the "I"), very few young people had their own room, and even fewer were able to enjoy it without parents' interferences. The room was almost always shared with siblings and the life took place outside home.

Another writer with a similar name to the famous novelist, the Swedish anthropologist Helena Wulff, referred to the "bedroom culture" as a distinctive factor in female youth microcultures. Traditionally, youth has tended to be seen as a masculine territory connected to sociability in the public space (street, leisure market). The invisibility of girls in youth cultures resulted, in part, from their confinement in private spaces due to a major family and sexual control. Garber and McRobbie (1983) suggested that, however, other spaces existed, where girls could have developed an autonomous sociability, mainly youth associations and the own room. There they developed their fantasies, wrote their diary, read magazines, and attended to their body. In her study of a youth microculture in an English neighborhood, Wulff (1988) reflects up to which point the same boys who are so visible in the most spectacular subcultures have also a sphere of privacy, equivalent to the feminine, which they shape according to their needs.

In the 1960s, with various liberation movements converging in the counterculture, the claiming of an own room became a symbol of an emerging social subject: the teenager. From the beginning youth culture prioritized conquering space for autonomy from the parents' generation, both in terms of public space (from strolling down main street to being in a pub, from the ballroom to the disco, from the disco to the macrodisco) and of private space (from the shared room to the single room, from the bedroom governed by the parents to the room with one's own decor, from the patriarchal house to the intergenerational household). First of all, the young started to appropriate their rooms emotionally, decorating them with posters of their preferred actors or groups (James Dean, Marlon Brando, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones), with personal items like photographs, books, and new youth magazines (comics, music magazines) and with dressings and ornamental material, creating a personal fashion. In the room one could invite friends, write letters to lovers or friends, keep a diary, listen to music, and even organize a party (when the parents were away for a weekend and it was possible to take over the whole house, even if it was provisionally). However, the parents continued to be in charge of the room, controlling what was kept and done in it. They also controlled the juvenile economy (even if the young had own incomes, their parents administered them). The symbol of this period is the personal diary, a locked space enclosing dreams, plans, and reflections, where the past, present, and future can converge without any need for explanations, reservations, or shame. Although this

process most affected middle class youth, working class youth also discovered the narcissistic effect of having a space to consume what the teenage market started to offer them.

Since the end of the 1960s, the young started to appropriate definitively their rooms (expelling their parents). Not only did more young people have access to a private bedroom due to the decreasing number of siblings per household but also did the time spent in the room and with its decoration increase, visualizing hence its appropriation. The posters changed and turned politicized (from Hollywood stars to Mao, Marx, and Che Guevara, who was going to turn into the emblem of youth revolts). The radio transistor was supported by the first cassette tape decks and record player (the pickup), which started to substitute the jukebox as a public space of the music scene. The musical volume increased, and the parents had no longer enough power to reduce it; neither could they impose what was to be heard. The decoration became more eye catching in its inclination toward kitsch, pop, hippy, or psychedelic. The clothes radicalized and the mothers lost the power to determine their offspring's esthetic taste. Romance novels or formational books gave way to a new type of existential literature (Kerouac, Hesse, Marcuse, Reich), and counter-cultural magazines (the first fanzines) appeared. In the 1970s, refluxing the wake of the May 1968 general strike and student protests in France and similar unrest elsewhere, the assertion of the need for a personal bedroom receded behind the fight for an alternative privacy: student flats, attics, and communes, shared by young from both sexes, turned into the new utopia, so that the own room ceased to have such an importance.

Since the 1980s, two parallel processes have taken place: firstly, the rise of the leisure market and spaces specialized in adolescent consumption and, secondly, the extension of this autonomous space to preadolescence and late childhood. Children and youth possessed gradually more economic resources (transferred by their families), and the public space of the city became increasingly less accessible for them (including the disappearance of street play, moral panic campaigns, prohibition or postponement of access to leisure places for minors, and so on). This group rediscovered bedroom cultures, which had characterized the young adults from previous generations. They concentrated their leisure consumption in those spaces: games, comics, music or sport magazines, hi-fi systems, photographs, etc. The idols portrayed in the posters were no longer political leaders or "committed" artists but represented once more trendy musicians (Michael Jackson, Madonna) and stars from movies and series (DiCaprio, Hasselhoff) and complemented by athletes (Michael Jordan, David Beckham) and soon by game characters (Lara Croft).

Shortly after, the digital culture has emerged, changing the chronotope of the own room (Fig. 2): the parent-controlled family phone, situated in the living room or the hall, has been substituted by a personal cell phone that can be used in the room; the written communication by letter has turned into a digital communication via instant messaging. Recently, adolescents have access to virtual communities that go far beyond their own room; play video games that include sports, song contests, and other group activities which were beforehand impossible in the private room; and watch movies and videos at any time. However, leisure time is also under



Fig. 2 Teenage bedrooms (Photo by Carles Feixa. Barcelona, 2003)

a new pressure, as young people are expected to prepare for diverse future scenarios in parallel, gaining additional qualifications in their spare time. The generational conflict is weakened, but new cleavages (successively more subtle) that separate parents and children appear. They share for a longer time the same spaces among other reasons because they cannot afford it (if we consider the delayed family emancipation, young are condemned to live more time with their parents than with their future families) and search for personal spaces that can compensate them: night culture, travel, and their own room.

Corner Chronotopes: The Gang

The gang is an interstitial group originally formed spontaneously and then integrated through conflict. (Thrasher 1963 [1926], p. 46)

The second example is one of the social groups that have become models for the contemporary experience of youth cultures: the street gang. Chicago at the beginning of the twentieth century was a typical case of a melting pot, the explosive mixture of ethnicities, cultures, and conflicts that symbolize America in expansion. The city had become a revealing symptom of the “big transformation” that was taking place in the USA, within the frame of an accelerated urban growth originated by the industrial development and by the huge migration inflow of people from rural areas and poor European countries (Ireland, Italy, Poland, etc.) into the cities. Subjects that had not been considered scientifically (like social marginalization,

delinquency, prostitution, and Bohemian life) became the core of attention of the emerging school of “human ecology” of the University of Chicago, which had the aim of analyzing the specific behaviors that appeared in the new urban ecosystem.

The phenomenon of gangs soon attracted the interest of Chicago School authors, the first to tackle the subject with scientific criteria. The school’s foundational approach is that street gangs were a response to the “anomy” (absence of values) present in certain “moral regions” of the big city, marked by social disorganization and the disappearance of the traditional systems of informal control. Therefore, youth diversion was not seen as a result of individual pathology but the foreseeable consequence of a concrete social context that needed to be analyzed. In 1926, Frederick Thrasher published the most ambitious research in this sense: *The Gang, A Study of 1313 gangs in Chicago*. After 7 years of research in the Chicago slums, the author had localized 1313 gangs – a figure that would become famous – whose compositions and characteristics he attempted to compare. In fact, his huge study approached a great variety of youth groups, including gambling groups, mafias, criminal adult gangs, family groups, syndicates, college fraternities, and boy scouts; research criteria were somewhat at random – data from the 1313 gangs were unequal and heterogeneous. In spite of everything, this was the first attempt to systematize knowledge about gangs with empirical observation. According to Thrasher, gangs did not appear haphazardly but were linked to a certain habitat: the so-called interstitial areas, filter zones between two sectors of the city (for instance, between a commercial center and the working areas). This idea had been suggested by Park and was further developed by Shaw and McKay (1927) in relationship to delinquency. Thrasher is also the author of the first analytical definition of street gang, quoted at the beginning of this section; its value resides in overcoming the connotations of deviance and pathology predominant in the criminologist science of that time, instead highlighting elements of internal solidarity, the ties to a territory, and the constitution of a distinctive cultural “tradition,” as the axes making the gang up.

William Foote Whyte’s *Street Corner Society* (1943) meant an important change of perspective away from an arguably inappropriate longing to quantify the meaning of gangs. Instead of analyzing, like his predecessors did, the numerous different gangs in a city, he focused on two gangs in the Italian quarter in Boston. The historical context had changed: in the Great Depression that had followed the economic crash in 1929 that provoked a massive wave of unemployment among the young population, gangs not only integrated adolescents but also young men of over 18. Whyte’s study is based on intense participant observation. The deep ties he established with Doc, the leader of “the street-corner boys,” allowed him to partake in the gang’s daily life and to get to know from the inside their way of living and of seeing the world. There was a tight tie among the members of the gang through a strong feeling of loyalty to the group, based on mutual help. They had developed deep affective and identity ties with the group since their childhood, and the group was often considered as family. The streets where they had grown up were like a home to them, they identified with nicknames, and their identity depended on their position within the group. Doc had earned his leadership by beating the previous leader in combat, but his steering was

not based on strength, but rather on his ability to keep the group together on the basis of mutual friendship, loyalty, and daily activities. Although a few of the members did individually traffic in illegal circuits, Whyte maintained that the nature of the group was not primarily delinquent. In this sense, the author criticized the shortsighted attitude of social workers who use the label “diversion” for the boys’ trials to create subcultures in order to regulate part of their spare time, to produce values and behaviors, and to secure a stable leadership (Fig. 3).

In the last decade, there has been an evolution of gangs toward more complex forms of socialization (Brotherton and Barrios 2004; Hagedorn 2007). These “global gangs” are no longer strictly territorial, nor do they have a compact structure: they are nomadic identity clusters that mix elements from their respective countries of origin, from their host countries, and from many other transnational styles that circulate through the Net. These hybrid identities correspond to the youth cultures of the global age (Nilan and Feixa 2006). Examples are some “Latino gangs” like the Latin Kings and Queens, whose life stories often reveal hybrid identities mixing five diasporic time-space dimensions: their “motherland” in 1950s Chicago (the classical ethnic male street-corner gangs), their “rebirth” in the 1980s New York reform period (the new more mixed intergendered and intercity tribes), their second birth in Latin America in the 1990s (the international diffusion through criminal deportation and hip-hop music marketing), their third birth in Europe after 2000s (following the transnational migration processes), and their “virtual” presence in the Internet (building a nationhood in the network interstices) (Feixa and Romani 2014).



Fig. 3 Street-corner gang (Photo by Montse Iniesta & Carles Feixa. Mexico City, 1991)

Agora Chronotopes: The Camp

The camp was configured like a small city. It was like a small world inside a world. So spontaneous, and yet so well organized. (Vanesa, 30 years old, student, Madrid)

The third and last example of a juvenile chronotope is the protest camps that emerged in Egypt, Spain, the USA, and in other countries since 2011, related to a new era of social protest. In Spain, these camps (Fig. 4) were related to the so-called *15 M* or *Indignados* movement. On May 15, 2011, just before the local elections, during which the effects of the financial crisis were debated for the first time, diverse social movements organized a demonstration in Madrid, which was much larger than expected thanks to the Twitter viral effect. Although several of these groups included members from different age groups, young participants gained a special visibility throughout the demonstrations. At the end of the march, a group of about a hundred people decided to occupy *Puerta del Sol*, the emblematic center of the Spanish capital, where they spent the night in an improvised camp. The violent eviction attempted by the police the following night, provoked the exact opposite of what had been intended: hundred campers turned into a few thousand and public support skyrocketed. The movement was called *Los Indignados*, a reference to the book by the French human rights activist Stéphane Hessel (2011).

The camp originated on the Net and from the Net it moved to the square, to return again to the Net (#acampadasol, #acampadabcn, etc.). The day after the occupation of *Puerta del Sol* in Madrid, a group of young people in Barcelona started a camp at *Plaça de Catalunya*. The mobilization was connected to memories of local resistance, both more recent and historical (Anarchist Barcelona). Moreover, the *Indignados* did not only emphasize historical time, they related to the past through memory and to the future – even the long-term future – through a collective plan (on the basis of the refusal of the neoliberal model). The atmosphere in the camp was relaxed and festive. Most of the campers could not be classified as “antisistema” (similar to “anti-capitalist”) or “perroflautas” (flute-carrying young dropouts with dogs, similar to “hippies”), labels used by certain politicians and newspapers. Rather, they were mostly young people from the middle classes



Fig. 4 “Indignados” camp (Photos by Carles Feixa. Barcelona and Madrid, 2011)

allied with actors from other sectors, including retirees. Many of the campers had probably participated as children in the *esplais*, leisure education organizations similar to the boy scouts, where they had learned how to build campsites. The square was organized in commissions and assemblies, and there was even an information service with an orientation map. Participants had invented a code of gestures to show agreement (holding hands up and twinkling their fingers) and disagreement (crossing their hands).

A few days later, the police violently evicted the participants under the pretext of having to clean the *plaça* before the Champions' League Final. The eviction lasted just a couple of hours. The SMS warning about what was going on at the square and the images of police violence published instantly and distributed on the Net from many Facebook and Twitter accounts brought large numbers of supporters to the *plaça*. Pedestrians, family members, friends, and sympathizers of the 15 M Movement joined the cause of "reoccupying" *Plaça de Catalunya* and repelling the violent police attacks. The police surrounded the activists and used rubber bullets to open a path through the crowd, but this only increased support for the movement.

The 15 M Movement placed Spain once again on the world revolutionary map. Although the triggers are local (Spain, together with Greece and Portugal, is one of the European countries worst hit by the crisis, with youth unemployment rates growing), the antecedents and the effects are global. Thanks to the Net, the 15 M globalization is lived in real time: without the examples of Tahrir or Syntagma, nobody may have thought of occupying *Puerta del Sol*, *Plaça de Catalunya*, or any of the many other squares that were occupied during the third week of May 2011; and without the relay to Wall Street, the 15 M Movement would have faded away. The camps do not exist anymore, but the activism has been transferred to the neighborhoods: it has been decentralized and smoothed the way for other initiatives and movements.

Conclusion and Future Directions

The concept of chronotope has come a long way being first conceived in natural sciences and later on adopted in literature analysis and now in youth research. In this entry we have described this development and have analyzed three main examples: body, corner, and agora chronotopes. The dialogic character of the chronotope has enabled us to connect the social memory and project (the time of space) with local events (the emergence of protest camps) and young people and their cultures. We have seen how young people successively appropriated private (their own room), public (the agora), and interstitial spaces that relate to the time dimension in several ways. Historically, we can state how changing times have led to new spaces and different time-space uses as adolescence was invented and obligatory education was gradually prolonged, followed in more recent times by technical inventions that enabled a digital culture, blurring to some extent the established differentiation between public and private spaces. From a lifetime perspective, we can describe how youth extended in the life course and how new forms of intergenerational cohabitation accompany postponed family emancipations.

Moreover, we can focus on the official juvenile chronotope, determined by schedules and spaces in the educational system, and time/space expectations that go beyond the schooldays. In a concentric movement, we can consider how the dominant discourses on youth have changed over time: initially, youth started to exist as a moratorium, a protected sphere for personal development and experimentation where mistakes were acceptable and reversible. (Male) young people were (temporarily) excluded from society and confined in adult-controlled spaces, which they soon started to shape, successively gaining control over their present and future. In parallel, the main discourses changed from protection to responsibility, expecting young people to prepare for their future, expanding educational time in the course of life, and invading the newly gained leisure times/spaces. Although a certain representation of youth as a time/space for experimentation and pleasures persists, the official chronotope has changed, requiring young people to invest in their future and blaming them in case of failure for not having used their opportunities when it was time. As mistakes turn irreversible and crisis and unemployment shadow their world, young people no longer see the Promised Land – the future their efforts were supposed to guarantee.

The conquest of public urban and digital spaces enables young people to express their struggle in new chronotopes, like the camp, which we can then read as a reaction to the loss of their official chronotope. These reactions depend in turn on other aspects, as not all young people participate equally in all chronotopes, so that, although gangs and camps may coincide – at least temporary – in time and space, their image is unmistakably different, as are their time/space uses and orientations. Gender, class, “race,” and other social divisions just as their intersections have to be born in mind when analyzing youth chronotopes.

And when examining youth research itself, the chronotopes can become useful again, as we can see how different groups were only considered from the perspective of a certain chronotope, e.g. confining girls as well in the research in their own rooms by focusing on certain topics like anorexia, abuse of medicaments or low self-esteem when studying girls.

Chronotopes are a powerful tool in analyzing youth in their local and global context, considering changes over time and reflecting on youth research itself from a meta-level. Times have changed and so did spaces, and even though we cannot predict where the new fluidness may lead us, keeping track of time and space is a promising way to read our society.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Bodies: Corporeality and Embodiment in Childhood and Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [Participating as Young Citizens in Diverse Communities](#)
- ▶ [Rhythms and Flow. Timing and Spacing the Digitally Mediated Everyday](#)
- ▶ [Space and Place in Studies of Childhood and Youth](#)
- ▶ [Time and Space in Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [Youth, Relationality, and Space: Conceptual Resources for Youth Studies from Critical Human Geography](#)

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Abstract

Time and space are better understood as verbs, conveying action, instead of nouns. They are not just frames to understand youth experiences, as youth experiences, practices, and relationships produce particular times and spaces. These experiences, practices, and relationships involving people and their material environment reconfigure everyday rhythms and biographical times, as well as different places and spaces, from domestic environments to urban public places. Objects and bodies, with their trajectories and their senses, constitute and specify spaces, producing particular rhythms and assemblages of continuities and discontinuities, in a dynamic and changing process, where controversies and conflicts can emerge when the features, movements, and intentions of this plurality of bodies and objects clash. This chapter discusses two examples of time and space dynamics of young people's everyday, drawing on research on digital uses and practices in Spain and other European countries. Time has many dimensions. An important element that is often overlooked in academic study of childhood and youth is rhythm. A rhythmic analysis of young people's everyday

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lives can highlight the similarities and differences with results of research on young people's temporalities in the 1990s regarding to the emergence of a new digital material environment. Topics explored are some examples of rhythmic behavior, such as rhythmic crowds in leisure and politic activities, and their role in the shaping of public spaces; the complex articulations between the public, privacy, and intimacy; and the forms of synchronization and desynchronization regarding times and rhythms given by the obligations, habits, and expectations set by the family, institutions, and peer groups.

Introduction

Time and space are better understood as verbs instead of nouns. They are not just frames to understand youth experiences, as youth experiences, practices, and relationships produce particular times and spaces. These experiences, practices, and relationships involving people and their material environment reconfigure everyday and biographical temporalities, as well as different places and spaces, from domestic environments to urban public places. Objects and bodies, with their trajectories and their senses, constitute and specify spaces, producing particular rhythms and assemblages of continuities and discontinuities, in a dynamic, changing, and sometimes controversial process. This chapter discusses some particular rhythms shaping current time and space dynamics of young people's everyday, drawing on examples of research on digital uses and practices. The description of the two examples chosen includes some comparisons with the results of research about young people temporalities carried out in the 1990s in different European countries (Lasén 2000, 2001; Leccardi and Rampazzi 1993; Galland 1991; Cavalli and Galland 1993; Melucci 1996). A rhythmic analysis of young people's everydayness highlights the similitude and differences between two generations of youths separated by more than 20 years and the emergence of a new digital material environment.

The rhythm of the everyday (Lefebvre 2004) is made by the alternation of different situations and activities shared with different groups of people, some of them institutionally framed. These activities, institutions, and collectives act as social *Zeitgebers* or synchronizers, which contribute to rhythm the everyday life of young people. The term *Zeitgeber* refers to the external or environmental agents or events that entrains or synchronizes the rhythms of an organism. These particular times linked to work, school, family, and leisure are increasingly mediated by digital technologies of communication and connectivity, which remediate the way people attune to each other and to their activities, as well as they give particular times, acting as synchronizers. In this chapter two main examples of youth ordinary rhythms rooted in mediated localities, urban and domestic, are explored: first, flash mobs as an example of rhythmic crowd, enacted in leisure and politic activities, which contribute to shape public spaces, and second, the complex articulations between public, privacy, and intimacy due to ICT uses and practices, which remediate synchronization and desynchronization regarding times and rhythms given by the obligations, habits, and expectations set by the family, institutions,

and peer groups. Remediation (Bolter and Grusin 2000) means that contemporary digital technologies mediate practices and uses that were already mediated by previous technologies and media. These old media practices and meanings are refashioned in the current practices.

Flash Mobs as Rhythmic Crowds

Rhythmic behaviors are part of what Alfred Schütz calls “mutual tuning in relationships” (Schütz 1964), such as dancing together, walking together, music playing, and love making, which are ways of experiencing the self and the other as a “we.” They are produced when the repetition of rhythmic groups (music, gestures, words) is linked to physical movement. The ability of this movement to be the source of satisfaction and excitement increases with the harmony between movement and rhythmic perception of the collective. Resonance, that is, the sharing of a vibration, both physical and affective, and mutual synchronization elicit a feeling of togetherness, facilitating the creation of a sense of sharing a common present.

Rhythmic behaviors are not necessarily intentional. Similar to sociability, they entail reciprocal actions with an end in themselves. Sociability in mutual tuning in relationships and experiences, before allowing people to leave their routines, it seems to be crucial to understand many youth practices: from everyday leisure activities involving dancing, clubbing, listening to music, or online gaming to the participation in collective actions such as forms of collective vernacular ephemeral creativity like flash mobs and videoed choreographies uploaded to the web or political gatherings and protests (Lasén et al. 2010). The usual rhythmic experiences of young people’s everyday temporalities, associated with music, sport, play, and collective actions, are becoming increasingly mediated and facilitated by the use of ICTs. If acting inside a crowd augments and extends the bodily abilities of the participants, digital mediations are also ways of augmenting and extending not only these individual bodies but the rhythmic crowds as well, beyond the here and now of the face-to-face gathering and performance through their digital presence on online platforms and mobile media.

According to Elias Canetti (1962) in “rhythmic crowds,” the cohesion is mainly assured by the imitation and repetition of the same gestures and movements and by the empathy and affective transmission facilitated by this kind of common body created by these physical movements. These are ephemeral crowds, decentralized and nonhierarchical, in difference to the crowds organized and subordinated by an institution or a particular leader. The participants share an ambience that they contribute to sustaining through a reciprocal affective and physical resonance between them. The rhythmic crowds walk and dance are motivated by a shared thrill. They are ephemeral and spontaneous and act in excitement.

Flash mobs and flash-mob dances (Gore 2010) or videoed choreographies can be considered a case of contemporary rhythmic crowds particularly appreciated by young people. As part of contemporary urban youth culture, flash mobs are “a public gathering of complete strangers, organized via the Internet or mobile

phones that perform a pointless act and then disperse again” (Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Current English, 2009), which have been happening all over the world since the first one in New York in 2003 (Nicholson 2005). They are virtual collectives that are actualized and embodied sporadically to perform some eccentric and synchronous action. By their repeated occurrence in different cities, some of them have acquired a certain degree of institutionalization, becoming a sort of contemporary urban rituals of global cities, such as pillow fights organized every year in European cities such as Madrid, London, or Paris and US cities, akin to other kind of urban public performances, such as the Zombie parades, organized public gatherings of people dressed up in zombie costumes and make up, which are relatively common in large North American cities, seem to have now started to occur throughout the world (Martínez de Albéniz and Villota 2012).

With the widespread use of digital cameras embedded in mobile devices and their convergence with social media, rhythmic crowd performance recordings are uploaded and shared online. Therefore, their ephemeral character is nuanced by the digital presence and the resonance of the event through viewings, posts, and comments. Visual accounts of these flash-mob gatherings are easily found online. Dance flash mobs or lip dubs form an emerging global genre of amateur videos, produced by different collective initiatives (fan tributes, political protests, family rituals, etc.), where several people gather in a public place to dance a choreographed routine, sing, and sometimes play musical instruments as well. The interest in sharing these visual accounts with others is doubled by the reflexivity of the participation in these performances, where we become “spectators of ourselves” as one organizer of a zombie walk in the Basque Country explains (Iratxe Jaio quoted in Martínez de Albéniz and Villota 2012).

All these are multimedia collaborations articulating online and offline contacts and activities, an “online/offline choreography” (Molnár 2014). Usually the calls to participate are made through social network sites as well as the exchange of information and in some case online tutorials as well, that is, short video clips where some of the participants show how to perform the choreography. Sometimes the participants gather for rehearsal before the final performance, which will be filmed, uploaded, posted, shared, viewed, heard, and commented online. These public performances mobilize participants’ different abilities and skills. They reveal potentialities of spaces: new meanings, possibilities, and uses, beyond current uses and norms, as in the example of the lip-dub choreography of the Lady Gaga’s song “Alejandro” performed in the Plaza de Oriente in Madrid in September 2010, a place used to host a very different kind of performances, religious, political, and institutional, but which provides an excellent setting for this kind of public choreographies due to its location in the center of the city and its shape, a large area without much pedestrian traffic. The innovative character of these uses of public urban spaces is revealed by the challenge it presented to local officials. According to a personal communication of one of the organizers of the “Alejandro” flash mob, when they contacted the local authorities to get information about how to get public permissions, these authorities were left confused on how to

proceed as flash mobs did not fit in any of the existing categories of events needing permission (political protest, commercial activities, film shooting).

Flash mobs perform other defining feature of rhythms and rhythmic behavior: the importance of the form of the action itself over any particular message or discourse. This can be one of the main motivations to participate in such actions. In the words of *Correvedile* (this nickname means “run-go-and-tell-him/her” and can be translated as “go-between” or “gofer”), one of the members of the group “Madrid Mobs,” which has been launching these initiatives for 5 years,

Politics in the sense of ‘make polis’, maybe that is in our intentions: make streets alive, try to do something different in them, something collective. . . The political side of flash-mobs is not evident. That’s the interest of it. It’s not about discourse, but something playful, subtler. We are interested in the shock, the crash, the dissonance. Going out of reality. The action creates a kind of second reality, a parallel reality on the top of the everyday one during a couple of minutes. For me flash-mobs are little interferences in the reality program in which we take part every minute of our life. (. . .) It’s hard to explain, but suddenly something happens, together, coordinated, a kind of form in a particular and very brief time, and then it breaks up with the same elegance. That seems to me as a sculpture of a new order. . . Many people just have fun. They want to participate in something unconventional, to act foolish. All that is evident in the pillow fights. It’s perfect. To get into the action, on stage, though there is not stage, going to the other side of the mirror.

These digitally mediated playful practices contribute to shaping the public sphere and the urban experience, highlighting the networked character of contemporary urban localities and the shared agency with mobile devices (Lasén 2010), as the devices and their applications afford some practices and activities and prevent others. Thus, there is a cultural, social, and personal shaping of digital technologies, while, reciprocally, individuals and interpersonal relationships are shaped by technological presence, uses, and practices. This shared agency not only includes the individual user and the particular device, but other people and groups involved in the interaction, the conditions of commercialization and use defined by the providers and platform owners, as well as institutional regulations. Mobile uses and practices are the result of negotiations and sometimes clashes between technical features, commercial conditions, and people’s intentions, aims, habits, and obligations, where non-intentional and nonconscious aspects are involved as well. In this case this shared agency contributes to shape the mood of a particular place, the way we act as strangers, how public presence is modulated, how our sonic presence can be augmented, what is appropriate, and the expectations about what can happen when we are in a public.

The different forms of mediated rhythmic crowds share the following aspects (Lasén and Martínez de Albéniz 2011): the modes of calling the potential participants through blogs, social network sites, e-mails, mobile messages, and other digital applications; their intermittent aspect, as well as the intermittent character of people’s participation; the claims about the use of urban public space and the practices regarding such space; the importance of the presence in the public space as a motivation to participate; the stress on the here and now; unexpectedness and serendipity; the organizers’ lack of certitude regarding the number of people who will attend the event and about how the event will take place; the playfulness and

the aesthetic; the affective communication between the participants and the stress on sociability; the importance of personal experience and body actions; and the technologically mediated shared reflexivity, that is, recording, filming, and uploading the performances, as well as the stories about the gathering, in text, images, and sounds, that will be discussed and debated in social network sites, blogs, and participative media such as YouTube (Schepers 2008).

Thus these public performances help young people to mark out space and time, territorializing anonymous spaces of public passage like streets, squares, or railway stations, challenging the ordinarily expected behaviors, functions, and meanings of such places. They highlight the networked character of contemporary urban spaces, as this territorialization is not only achieved during the fleeting moment of the performances but in the digitally mediated connections and resonances before and after the event. Moreover, by interrupting individual and collective routines, they disrupt schedules and programs, slowing down the speedy, as in the genre of “freezing mobs” in usually busy spaces such railway stations, and speeding up the slow (Gore 2010). As Gore suggests flash mobbing forces a cognitive shift, dislocating and intensifying experience, transforming city spaces following what De Certeau’s (1984) calls “pedestrian speech act” or “walking rhetoric,” as a “spatial acting-out of the place,” a process of appropriation and realization of the urban space; for flash mobs this would be a collective and rhythmic production through rhythmic behavior and contributing to the rhythm of urban life. This is done thanks to a precise timing, a punctual start, and a precise ending (Nicholson 2005) that turns a plurality of individuals in an urban public space into a rhythmic crowd. Some authors have called it a “mobile just in time community” (Kluitenberg 2006, p. 9; Schepers 2008, pp. 28–29). They can be considered an online/offline “sonorous community” as well, due to the experience of sound and increased sonic presence of those who are attuned to it:

Oral communities that maintained their connections through sound, the sound of their voices, their music and the sonorous characteristics of people who live and communicate by participating within particular rhythms, tones, timbres, and volume levels of noise as a community. These soundings are nonrepresentational and nonconceptual, but still communicate to maintain the community, many times existing outside of literacy because they are immersed in the sound of their community – the voices of gossip and language, music and noise. (Tumas-Serna 2004)

Flash mobs can be considered an addition to the list of examples of rhythmic crowds set by Canetti in his seminal book, joining past forms of youth leisure crowds which are still performed, from raves and clubbing to football fans (Lasén 2000, pp. 17–44). They create ephemeral performance and sound spaces within the city through shared choreographies and listening, mobilizing several mediations (digital devices, social network and sharing sites, choreographies, etc.). These mediations are often remediations (Bolter and Grusin 2000) linking new and old media, as well as resuming and resituating past meanings and practices. For instance, they remediate past urban pranksterism as a form of political protest, like the anti-Vietnam war playful performances of the Yippies’ urban guerrilla tactics, and avant-garde and counterculture movements’ forms and meanings

highlighting the force of the uncanny and the absurd embodied in daily objects and urban settings, from Dada and Surrealism to the Situationism (Molnár 2014). They engage the city as forms of acting and performing in public, using public spaces, making the public and making oneself public, producing particular rhythms resulting from the interaction of “a place, a time and an expenditure of energy” (Lefebvre 2004, p. 15).

Everyday Flows: From the Oscillation Between Parallel Worlds to Entangled Rhythms

Rhythms are enacted arrangements made of repetition and variation, which shape flows: flows of sounds in music, flows of words in poetry, and flows of tasks, activities, and interactions in everyday life. The discontinuous periodicity of the rhythmic arrangement and its order by fluctuation helps to make room for what is not scheduled: the noise, the surprise, and the unexpected. Rhythmic arrangements belong to *kairos*, the qualitative dimension of the opportune moment, which allows us to take advantage of opportunities. Rhythmical periodicity facilitates a certain grade of anticipation, increasing the probabilities of recognizing when an opportunity emerges. *Kairos* is a time figure that characterizes young people’s temporalities due to their eagerness to enjoy the present and their need to be attentive to possible opportunities, regarding employment, education, and social relationships as well, in a changing and uncertain world.

Rhythms are not only a combination of durations that can be measured but of intensities. In our case different affects, emotions, moods emerging from particular times and spaces, like the particular mood acquired by urban places when flash mobs are performed, or the changing affects of connected domestic places explored below.

Contemporary digital practices and uses blur the boundaries between social spaces and times, like private and public, which used to give a relatively clear rhythm of our everyday life. Clear differences between people’s presence at work, school, family, and leisure times and their synchronization demands used to mark the rhythm of young people’s everyday life in a rhythmic experience of a multiple and discontinuous time marked by the “multiple membership of each individual” (Melucci 1996). Research carried out in the 1990s found three main levels of synchronization in young people’s daily life: clock and scheduled time of institutions such as school, workplace, and household; sociability time of different peer groups and activities; and a kind of intimate self-synchronization when being on their own, resting or doing nothing (Lasén 2000, p. 80). Young people searched for a balance between the obliged synchronization and the desired attunement, between autonomy and heteronomy, while keeping open and attentive to the *kairos*, the opportunities of enjoying surprises and unexpectedness. Contemporary research explores the increasingly conflicting synchronization demands in young people’s daily life related to precarious employment (Woodman 2012). Moreover, that ordinary rhythmic arrangement shaped by the oscillation of our presence between different zones of experience or “parallel worlds” is being challenged today by

digital connections blurring the differences between presence and absence (Licoppe 2004), by the context collapse generated by social media where we interact with different people and groups in the same space (Wesch 2009), where the inscriptions we have created (texts, pictures, videos) stay and are shared beyond our knowledge and control, and by the imagined seamlessness afforded by digital connections (Cumiskey and Hjorth 2013).

Digitally mediated communications and connections weave together different spaces: the physical space where one is using the digital device and the virtual space of the conversation or other online activity. We have simultaneously remote and copresent interactions. The ubiquity and pervasiveness of mobile media and digital mediations contribute to the multiplication of hybrids of public and private (Sheller and Urry 2003) as they induce changes in the contextual norms of appropriateness and distribution of information. They are “indiscrete” technologies (Cooper 2001, p. 24), not because they facilitate forms of social indiscretion but because they have the capacity to blur distinctions between ostensibly discrete domains and categories, such as public and private, remote and distant, and work and leisure. Thus, everyday rhythms based in the articulation of “successive sincerities” (Maffesoli 1996) according to different times, places, and collectives are being modified by these digital practices increasing simultaneity, visibility, and synchronicity.

Formal and informal norms, as well as ordinary expectations about what is appropriate in a given situation or relationship, show how different contexts, situations, and realms of everyday life entail different privacies whose demarcations, meanings, and contents are thus highly contextual (Nissenbaum 2004; Thompson 2011). These evolve in relation with the materiality of social life, as the contemporary forms of mobile intimacy “in which the geographic and physical space is overlaid with an electronic position and relational presence, which is emotional and social” (Hjorth and Lim 2012, p. 478). ICT uses are sometimes considered an intrusion of the private world into the public sphere, like private calls made in public places, and also a resource for achieving privacy, like for teenagers at home whose use of computers and mobile phones can be a way of escaping the monitoring of parents. These digital practices afford a “private meeting place” located in the household, though family members are there, depicted as playing the role of unaddressed recipients or unofficial participants (Caronia and Caron 2004). Though for children and teenagers, this use of digital technology has to be negotiated as they used to be subject to parental rules directly related to time such as the time limits of Internet use and the ban of using mobiles, computers, and videogames in particular times and places like during family meals. The fear of Internet risks has led many parents, following a frequent recommendation in parental guides and experts’ advice, to ban the computer in the bedroom, placing it in a shared room, where they can watch digital connections and interactions. In the past, the TV set, the Hi-Fi, and the Walkman also contributed to transform the domestic space, creating personal territories within this space. The remediation of contemporary digital devices resumes with past performances, discourses, values, interactions, and situations: youngsters do what youngsters used to do (chatting up, gossiping, meeting up, coordinating tasks, bullying, etc.) but with new participants

(smartphones, computers, social media, applications), and in this digitally reconfigured environment, these similar activities, relationships, and interactions are emerging in different ways, through different enactments, times, and places, and creating new meanings and subjects. Thus, the current “connected room of one’s own” (Zafra 2010) would be a remediation of the youngsters’ bedroom as a chronotope, “stronghold and laboratory of emerging youth culture” (Feixa 2005). Digital technologies and digital practices are part of contemporary room cultures, “a term that refers to both: the material artifacts contained in teens’ bedrooms and the activities teenagers engage with when they are in their rooms” (Steele and Brown 1995). These bedroom processes of identity formation and autonomy negotiation were already at play in the past, afforded by other technologies and media (Steele and Brown 1995). Yet, now these practices are open to forms of networked publics (boyd 2010) formed through connected privacies, as ways of “going through life in pajamas,” pushing domestic boundaries in new ways of public and shared intimacy.

Thus, the connected bedroom not only allow young people to de-synchronize from family rhythms and household schedules recreating a relatively autonomous zone at home, as it was already the case with previous generations, but this de-synchronization is doubled with an attunement to networked public spaces, inhabited by friends, acquaintances, strangers, and parents and family as well. Thus, the presence of the household members in digital social networks makes this synchronization/desynchronization and monitoring dynamics more complex. “This seems to be a permanent negotiation of the boundary between what is considered to be public and what is private, between personal and social identity, between safety and risky actions” (Cabello 2013, p. 75). Thus, this learning to be autonomous within the home is being challenged by another case of remediation, as digital connections remediate the fears of risky behaviors embodied by mass media consumption and models in the past. The worries about strangers’ intrusion in teenagers’ intimacy and privacy can lead to a reduction of privacy and intimacy at home. The concern about sons and daughters’ accessibility and transparency to potential offenders leads to the establishment of an obligation of transparency for children toward their parents. This is a pedagogy of transparency that makes difficult the acknowledgment of privacy within the family. The obligation and expectation of transparency, as a mark of trust and intimacy, are also found in other close relationships, such as partnerships or couples (Lasen and Casado 2012).

Youth digital practices produce a particular *kairos*, the opportunity and right time for activities. As Green (2002, p. 287) suggests, ICTs are space- and time-adjusting technologies affecting “duration, interval, and sequencing, as well as issues of presence, absence and availability.” The always availability afforded by digital devices affects the sequencing of life tasks, deadlines organized around work and home activities, and the cycles of work, leisure, and family life. It allows youngsters to believe that they will not miss any opportunity that they could handle and to take advantage of the unexpected thanks to their permanent connectivity. The modulation of presence and the seamless communication of young people with close ones afford always-open conversations, producing a growing expectation of

accessibility, responsiveness, accountability, and synchronicity (Laursen 2013). The possibility of maintaining a continuous connectivity with its promise of not missing any opportunity coexists with the worry about the continuity of accessibility, concerning unwanted demands, the annoyance of being interrupted, and the fear of being watched and controlled by adults. Thus, time organization includes mutually negotiated rhythms of contact, availability, and accessibility. Services like voice mail or messaging can transform the mobile phone into an asynchronous communication tool. But new apps for smartphones, such as free instant mobile messaging *WhatsApp* that allows one to view the last time a user was logged on, are used to increase synchronicity reinforcing social expectations of a prompt answer. Mobile technologies of connectivity like the mobile phones produce tensions in bringing together what is present and what is not. Discipline based on the time organization and on the strict planning of different activities is replaced by continuous accessibility. The conception and experience of a rhythmic time open to last minute changes and to continuous arrangements between different activities, at work or at leisure situations, is not originated by digital mediations, as it already characterized youth temporalities decades ago (Lasén 2000). But digital practices and uses facilitate their diffusion, increasing the rhythmic entanglement of ordinary life.

Conclusions and Future Directions

Rhythms divide the flow and duration of the everyday thanks to the alternation of different moments and intervals. Flows of sociability mediated by digital devices produce obligations and expectations of continuous accessibility. The search for harmonious rhythmic attunement, able to accommodate multiple situations, expectations, and wishes, is complicated by obligations of permanent accessibility, by the collapse of different roles and belongings, and by the forced synchronicity of what used to be “successive sincerities” (Maffesoli 1996). Thus, this increased sociability and connectivity with multiple groups and individuals leaves few spaces in the everyday for moments of self-attunement spent alone, doing nothing.

In the research carried out in the 1990s, the youngsters’ notion of a good everyday rhythm was related to avoid the main time disciplines and routines, as well as being able to find time to alternate all the groups and activities, including the oscillation between being attuned and synchronized to others and being attuned to oneself. Similar activities and attitudes can be found through the digital remediation of young people’s lives, as the attention and longing for surprises and the unexpected which can be found in contemporary online/offline performances such as flash mobs. Maybe that is one of the reasons young people find their ephemeral enactment of being offbeat afforded by a clear and punctual just-in-timing, such as the flash mob, so appealing. But the blurring of boundaries between different times and the growing obligations and expectations about accessibility and seamless communication make living offbeat difficult. As personal presence is modulated and entangled in multiple and simultaneous flows of mediated sociability, being part of sonorous communities of language, sounds, and gossip, it even becomes hard to grasp what being offbeat could be.

Flash mobs and the entangled flows of ordinary practices and interactions are just two examples of timing and spacing regarding young people. Future research directions requires taking into account digital mediations and the online/offline choreographies in the production of times and spaces. In order to avoid the trap of the radically new trope that usually goes with discussion on youth and technologies, it could be good advice to situate current studies in relation to past enquiries about young people and to be attentive to the remediations, not only regarding how new media relate to past media and devices but how they mesh with previous practices and meanings.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Critical Moments? The Importance of Timing in Young People's Narratives of Transition](#)
- ▶ [Juvenile Chronotopes: Space, Time, and Youth](#)
- ▶ [Time and Space in Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [Young People and Mobile Phone Technology in Botswana](#)
- ▶ [Youth, Relationality, and Space: Conceptual Resources for Youth Studies from Critical Human Geography](#)

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Abstract

This chapter explores what the concept of scale that is often employed by human geographers could contribute to childhood and youth studies. Different metaphors for understanding the concept of scale and scalar relations are explored emphasizing the importance of seeing scale as socially produced and constructed. Three case studies are then discussed in detail, each of which demonstrates the potential utility of scale in advancing researchers' understandings of the complexities of young people's lives. These case studies include reflection upon the experiences of street children and AIDS-affected children in Southern Africa, young East

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German's negotiations of globalization and antiwar activism, and young Scottish Sikh and Muslim men's engagements with global events and national issues through their embodied local lives. The conclusion proposes that attention to scale and scalar relations could usefully open up research to the possibility of up- or downscaling analysis in order to consider the potential relevance of other scales of analysis to younger people's lives, including both the influence of these scales and the ways in which young people creatively manage and respond to such scalar relations.

Introduction

Although there is recognition within youth studies that young people's lives are influenced by processes of globalization and mobility, there is still a tendency to imagine their lives, and particularly those of younger children, in relatively "local" ways. This is understandable given that social relations significant in the lives of children and young people tend to be positioned close by; family, friends, school, and sites of leisure tend to be located nearby in the "local" area. The local focus of the space-times engaged with by younger people often expands as they grow up. As young people find work, move into their own or shared accommodation, or establish their own families and/or personal relationships, their spatial range inevitably becomes extended and arguably moves beyond a "local" frame of reference. In this chapter, I borrow the concept of scale from human geography to explore – through three sets of examples – how this may be helpful to childhood and youth studies. Overall, I contend that more attention could usefully be given the ways that the local and embodied experiences of children and young people are interrelated with national and global issues and vice versa.

What Is "Scale?"

The different spatial contexts that young people engage with in an everyday basis are important factors in shaping their identities and perspectives as young people. Such places are understandably subjective and relational to other places and can also be made and promoted. They are also likely to be permeable and shaped by a broad range of factors, including local influences, national policy, as well as global forces. The places used, inhabited, and occupied by young people matter and often have an important influence in shaping their personal identities. The key point of this chapter is to explore what an appreciation of such issues contributes to help us understand young people's lives.

These different spatial contexts may include personal and embodied experiences (such as belonging to a particular youth subculture and hanging out in specific streets or public spaces as a result of this) and engagements with particular communities or urban environments (such as conflicts between groups of young people from neighboring areas) through to national or global contexts (which may

include how young people are represented through, and engage with, global media). All of these different spatial contexts are interrelated to each other, and there are ongoing processes and relations that shape each context, which in turn shape others. For example, global media coverage of young people may influence national policy about youth while also shaping how local residents (negatively) view young people and where they spend their time. A useful way to help think through these different spatial contexts, and the influence of them on each other, is to think about scales of young people's lives.

Scale is a concept employed regularly by human geographers to help them understand economic and political relations, in particular, but also the social relations that interconnect with these. There are a range of ways of understanding and approaching scale, and the concept itself has been widely debated in the literature (e.g., Herod and Wright 2002; Smith 1993; Marston 2000, 2004). At its most basic, "...one way in which scale has frequently been thought of is in terms of the bounding of areal units, with the 'urban scale' or the 'regional scale' or the 'national scale' or the 'global scale' being seen to encircle all those within a particular territorial expanse" (Herod and Wright 2002, p. 6).

One metaphor for this approach to scale is to imagine a ladder with the bottom step or "scale" being "the body" and the top step being "the global" with those in between following a neat hierarchy through scales such as the home, neighborhood, city, region, and nation. In this case, one would need to climb up to the national or global scale as these are located above, and are distinct from, the other scales. A second metaphor would be to imagine a set of concentric circles with the innermost circle being the individual body located within a range of other circles with the outermost circle being the global "scale." Here, rather than the global necessarily being above all other scales, we would need to move outward to engage with larger scales with the global scale encircling all other scales. A similar metaphor to the concentric circles that is often used refers to Russian matryoshka dolls and how they are nested within each other. In this metaphor, each doll is distinct and separate, but it is only when they are all put together that the whole piece is complete. While this differs from the strict hierarchy of the ladder, the global scale (the outside doll) remains the biggest and most all-encompassing scale. As Herod and Wright (2002) emphasize, the metaphor we choose to employ has significant implications on how we understand scale relations between different places and how we see this shaping, and being shaped by, children and young people.

Another way to conceptualize scale relations is using the metaphor of a network; Herod (2003) suggests that we may therefore imagine scale as a set of earthworm burrows or tree roots which are interconnected and intertwined in a whole host of complex and overlapping ways. This makes it more difficult to say where one scale ends and another begins, and therefore, scales are not necessarily territorially bounded entities. The network metaphor therefore produces "a very different sense of scale and the scaled relationships within which people and places are bound, a sense in which specific places are seen as simultaneously global and local (and regional and national) without being wholly one or the other"

(Herod and Wright 2002, p. 8). Thinking about scale can also be differentiated in terms of thinking about scale as size, as level, and as relation (Howitt 2002). Size refers to spatial extent (so the global is larger than the local). Scale as level refers to the level at which processes operate (so particularly processes may operate at the urban, regional, or national scale), and scale as relation refers to the relationships between scales.

These different approaches to scale offer us different ways of imagining the world, yet, at the same time, it is crucial to recognize that scale is socially constructed and produced. As Marston (2004, p. 172) notes, “scale is made; and [is] not an ontologically given category,” or put differently scale is not “a pre-existing category waiting to be applied, but a way of framing conceptions of reality” (Marston 2004, p. 172). It is therefore important to consider how scales are produced and the material consequences of this production. She notes that the production of scale is often “contradictory and contested” and can easily be broken down as new factors, processes, and observations come to light. Finally then, “our goal with respect to scale should be to understand how particular scales become constituted and transformed in response to social-spatial dynamics” (Marston 2000, p. 221). I now consider how different understandings of scale can be applied to understandings of children’s and young people’s lives in different contexts in order to demonstrate the potential utility of this concept for understanding time-space in childhood and youth studies.

Street Youth and AIDS-Affected Children in Southern Africa: Institutions, Migration, and Public Space

In this first example, I focus on research with street youth in South Africa and AIDS-affected children in Lesotho and Malawi to explore the complex ways that different scales – including institutions and the city – shape young people’s lives, experiences of public spaces, and children’s services. In South Africa, street youth have maintained both a visible and mobile presence since the 1980s. These young people are often found in marginal locations in the city such as “rubbish sites, rooftops, drains, toilets and transport hubs” where they can eat, sleep, and wash (van Blerk 2013, p. 558). Mobility plays an important role enabling them to escape from troublesome family situations and gangs. Focusing upon Cape Town, van Blerk (2013) observed two somewhat contradictory and conflicting agendas, one which aimed to reintegrate Cape Town into a network of global cities and the second which aimed to promote pro-poor strategies to address social and spatial injustices. As a result of the establishment of City Improvement Districts (CIDs) in 1999, the early 2000s saw many street youth forcefully removed from the city and pushed into the commercial centers of the suburbs with some being forced into more suburban and other commercial districts due to the increasing numbers of CIDs. Involving the creation of special zones that are managed by public-private partnerships with property owners, CIDs receive additional privately funded public services with many CIDs using their funding to “clean up” the local area which

often involves the displacement of those who are seen as undesirable. One of the key motivations for the removal of street children was South Africa's 2010 World Cup bid and the international attention that this would generate for the city. The dispersal of street youth to more remote urban locations results in them being more open to abuse (this is particularly the case for girls), creates "a false impression that the 'problem of street youth'" has been "solved" (Van Blerk 2013, p. 570), and restricts their access to services, further excluding and marginalizing them. Here then, we see competing scales working to shape the experiences of street children as Cape Town seeks to enter the global arena and promote itself as a global city. In response to this, urban policy focused on "cleaning up" the city which resulted in the forceful exclusion of young people's bodies from public spaces in the city center, thereby shaping the spaces in the city where these young people can occupy.

Just as understandings of scale might help childhood and youth researchers to appreciate the complexities of the factors shaping children's and young people's everyday lives (as the above example testifies), they can also be applied to how we think about the different services provided for children and young people. Ansell (2009b) provides an insightful application of scalar thinking through her analysis of 40 semi-structured interviews about AIDS interventions in schools in Lesotho with officials in government, international NGOs, donor agencies, UN agencies, local NGOs, and churches. Lesotho has the third highest HIV prevalence in the world, with 23.3 % of 15–49-year-olds infected. Her work challenges the hierarchical ordering of scales:

While in theory international staff are more senior and therefore more influential (and rewarded with much higher salaries), they are often few in number and national staff may have responsibility in the relevant area. Furthermore, national staff also have local knowledge and connections that give them leverage. The international is thus not necessarily the more powerful of this pairing. (Ansell 2009b, p. 681)

Furthermore, international staff are also likely to be based (and originate from) outside the country in which they work distancing them even further from children's experiences in local schools. People occupying such positions also move jobs quite frequently – which may involve a change in the scalar focus of their role – and so it is not appropriate to simply see staff as working at one particular scale. In addition to this, while government might be seen to be operating at the national scale, Ansell (2009b) found differentiation between those working in the capital and those in more remote districts. Furthermore, relationships between NGOs and local organizations are often mediated by government, and so there are often complex interplays between operations at different scales:

Most (although not all) of the 'international' scale donors and NGOs involved with AIDS and education exist 'on the ground' in Lesotho, and all negotiations are played out in concrete (or sometimes virtual) space, sometimes many times over for an intervention that involves multiple parties in shaping, funding and implementation. (Ansell 2009b, p. 683)

Ansell's (2009b) work encourages us to think more critically about the scaling of the services provided to children, including the roles and remits of the professionals working in different organizations and the ways in which these often work in

complex ways across different scales. She usefully concludes that “it may be useful to imagine a metaphor in which a multiplicity of intersecting Russian dolls constitute part of the framework on which a web or a network hangs, opening up some unexpected channels and closing down others” (Ansell 2009b, p. 683).

In related work, van Blerk and Ansell (2006) highlight the ways that children growing up in Malawi and Lesotho do not always live contained “local” lives. They explore the migration experiences of children in these contexts in order to demonstrate the social implications that AIDS has for children as very few remain unaffected by it. Some children have to cope with the death of one or both parents or close relatives, other are involved in caring for those who are sick, and others still have to share what they have with cousins who are now orphans. Many children may have to move as a result of changes in their household composition or, for example, when widows remarry. Here then, children’s lives are not simply circumscribed by the “local” scale as they may negotiate migrations that involve traversing particular urban or regional scales.

Young East German’s Engagements with Globalization and the Iraq War: The Body, the City, and the Global

Horschelmann and Schafer (2005, 2007) have conducted important research about young East German’s experiences of, and engagements with, globalizing processes as their society transformed from state socialism to capitalism. In particular, their work demonstrates how young people engage with global and local issues through their use of urban space and how “everyday practices of identity formation” (2005, p. 220) are negotiated and managed by young people. Their research, which was conducted in early 2003, was largely ethnographic and involved interviews with 101 young people. In addition to this, they also used a range of ethnographic methods – including mental maps (which were drawn by the participants to represent the key places that they engaged with in their everyday lives), dairies, and photographs – depending on the interests of the young people involved.

Their work emphasizes the ways that young East Germans do not experience globalization in a uniform way as their engagements with such processes vary according to their age and social status. Some of the groups that the researchers worked with were single-gender groups. In one of the groups of girls, all of the participants were from a 1980s high-rise area and constructed their lives in relatively local ways through their mental maps and through group discussion. They constructed immigrants as a threat and as something they wanted to avoid and withdraw from. This therefore led them to have a restricted use of the city center as a result of concerns about having to interact with immigrants. These girls “experience global culture primarily through education, media consumption and local shopping, rather than as a part of their daily use of urban space” (Horschelmann and Schafer 2005, p. 231). The mental maps of a second group of girls – who are more middle class – paint a rather different picture. These maps show connections to places outside of the city as well as engagement with cultural activities in the city

“whether it is through visiting the cinema, learning Capoeira dance and Spanish, or meeting at the Bagel-café and going shopping in the city centre” (p. 233). Contrary to the first group, these young women regularly visit the city center and expressed none of the concerns raised by the other group:

By examining the photographs of the girls' private spaces together with those of their social activities, it becomes clear that they experience and create both personal and public places in their everyday life as a mixture of local and global influences, where the borders between local and global are fluid and difficult to determine precisely. (Horschelmann and Schafer 2005, p. 235)

The media – and in particular television and radio – provided a key medium for young East Germans to connect and engage with global issues. Computer access was more restricted (and often limited by parents and financial restrictions), but some young people were able to use computers at local youth clubs, school, or internet cafes. Many of the young people were interested in traveling abroad and learning languages (with the better educated students being more specific about where they wanted to travel to). There was a sense that global issues were incorporated into the personal identities and everyday lives of young people.

In an additional example taken from this research but focusing specifically upon young people's responses to the war in Iraq (2003), Horschelmann (2008, p. 594) demonstrates how the geographically distant was brought into the center of young people's everyday lives; the media, the city, the home, and the gendered body became key sites through which young people “encountered, negotiated, embraced, or challenged” international political policies and strategies relating to the Iraq war. The media, the city, the home, and the body were all implicated in young people's responses to the Iraq war. This provides an interesting example of the ways in which multiple scales are interrelated and interconnected and how these simultaneously shape, and are shaped by, young people's everyday lives and actions.

The Media

The media was engaged with through television news bulletins, special reports, and newspaper articles. Young people watched the news more regularly as the invasion of Iraq took place. This gave them information about the war but also the language and terminology to use about the war that enabled them to discuss their views on political leaders such as George Bush Jr. and Saddam Hussein. Many of the young people raised serious concerns about what they considered to be the undemocratic actions of political leaders. They were empathetic toward the victims of war while also critiquing the sensationalism that they felt fed through some media coverage. The young people also discussed and debated issues surrounding the war with family members, friends, and youth workers with some school teachers offering time in class to discuss matters of relevance to the war (although these discussions did not always receive positive feedback from the young people).

The City

Ten of the young people who participated in this study mentioned taking parting in organized protests against the war, often in larger friendship groups. For the young people, “the city . . . became primarily a place for embodied, material engagements with international politics, motivated by symbolic connections with the east German past” (Horschelmann 2008, p. 599). Various locations in the city therefore became sites of collective memory, connecting young people with others who had participated in previous protests as well as with other antiwar protesters of different age groups and backgrounds. Such protests also involved young people in resistances to Germany’s Nazi past and therefore not only international- but national-scale challenges to war.

The Home

Home can be seen as a key site in bringing together the multiple influences of scalar relations. This was most noticeable through the photographs – displaying antiwar posters, images, and objects – that the young people shared of their bedrooms providing direct evidence not only of their political engagement but of the ways in which multiple scales shape their everyday lives in complex ways:

The home is the primary site for media consumption’ as well as for conversations with parents, siblings, other relatives, and sometimes friends. It is a nodal point for numerous lines of connection and in many ways acts as a medium through which they are refracted and particularised. The micro-scale of the home thus becomes simultaneously a key site through which the macro-scale is realised and experienced in everyday life. (Horschelmann 2008, p. 602)

The Body

Young people’s aged identities and bodies offered important senses of connection to others. “Rather than seeing Iraq as removed from their own lifeworlds, participants from other groups also showed much awareness of its potential wider effects, assuming that it would eventually impact Germany and on their own life-plans” (Horschelmann 2008, p. 605). Some young people were also fearful about potential terrorist attacks which led some of them to voice concerns about immigration issues in Germany (which was rather contradictory to their sense of empathy for the victims of war).

Young Sikh and Muslim Men’s Engagements with Scottishness and Religious Networks: The Body, Mobilities, and the Nation

As a final example, I draw upon my own research about the intersections between race, religion, youth, and masculinities for young men from religious minority groups in Scotland to explore how using scale offers insights into their embodied, local, and national responses to global issues. My earlier work with young Muslim

men in Scotland was conducted shortly after 9/11, and this “global” event had very severe and direct consequences for these young men’s negotiations of their everyday local lives, their senses of personhood, and their embodied practices. Given that the events of 9/11 increased the likelihood of the young men experiencing racism and Islamophobia, many became very conscious of how they presented themselves and were interpreted by others to the extent that “markers of ‘Muslimness’ . . . heightened in significance as a result . . . In particular, dress choice, beards and skin colour are recognised by the young men as markers that identify people as Muslim, and therefore as a threat” (Hopkins 2004, p. 261). Here then, we see an event and set of issues scaled at global and transnational (including 9/11 but also other events such as 7/7 attacks on London’s public transport network and the “war on terror” in general), shaping young people’s local and embodied experiences.

At the same time, the national context that these young Muslim men were growing up in provided an important backdrop for these negotiations of globally framed and locally experienced issues. Important points about the distinctiveness of the Scottish context relate not only to the relatively small size of the ethnic and religious minority population compared to England but also the political preoccupation with the religious divide between Catholics and Protestants which has worked to displace issues of racism that are central to English political affairs (Hopkins and Smith 2008). In this context, young Muslim men showed their political awareness of right-wing racist political groups such as the British National Party (BNP) and their tactics of attempting to increase their support through using the events of 9/11 to promote Islamophobia. One tactic the young men employed for managing this was to claim a strong sense of belonging and attachment to the Scottish nation through various claims to national belonging (including being born, brought up, and educated in Scotland and speaking with a Scottish accent). There is therefore a struggle for scale as claims of attachment to, and belonging within, the nation are subject to contestation from different social and political groups (Hopkins 2007).

In a more recent study that built on this early work, I conducted research with 40 young Sikh men from Glasgow and Edinburgh in Scotland in schools, universities, and gurdwaras (the place of worship for Sikhs). This research explored their everyday lives and senses of personal identities (Hopkins 2014). Many of these young men talked about regular experiences of racist exclusion yet were consistently positive about their affiliations to Scotland and their identities as Scottish Sikhs (indeed, many sent me photographs of themselves in kilts and were very positive about the recent creation of a Sikh tartan). However, given the very small size of the Sikh population in Scotland, many of the participants were one of the only Sikhs on their university course or in their year at school. As such, the young men often relied on distant relations with other Sikh youth from other cities as a mechanism for learning about their religion and for socializing with fellow Sikhs. These young men therefore regularly traveled far (often to Sikh communities in South Shields or Birmingham in England) to participate in events and activities with other Sikh groups and would maintain contact via e-mail and

Facebook between visits. In this set of examples then, we see the multiple scales simultaneously shaping, and being shaped by, the everyday practices of the young people involved in the research.

Conclusions and Future Directions

This chapter has explored what the concept of scale might contribute to childhood and youth studies. Studies of younger people tend to focus on microgeographies such as the school playground, family home, or the shopping mall with some scholars drawing attention to questions of relevance to regional, national, or global scales. However, more attention could usefully be drawn to the interplay between these different scales and the impact they have on each other. As Ansell (2009a, p. 201) notes,

Children, then, encounter near and distant places in multiple conscious and unconscious ways. While their intense interactions may be with proximate spaces, the world they encounter is produced through diverse interactions and they constantly engage with things that connect with distant places – books, school curricula, fruit or clothes produced elsewhere. (Ansell 2009a, p. 201)

Supported by international case study examples from the Global North and South, the key argument of this chapter is that appreciation of the multiple scales (including the proximate and the distant) shaping, and being shaped by, children and young people has the potential to advance understandings of the complex social, cultural, political, and economic factors affecting young people's negotiations of space-time and their experiences of their transitions to adulthood. As such, using scale to help us understand the social worlds of children and young people may provide access to broader debates about social and political relations in the lives of our research participants. It is important to note that scale, "like the spatial differences it implies, is produced and constructed. Scale can therefore be understood to be a framing device as well as a process" (Hopkins 2007, p. 1121).

In what ways then is scale useful for childhood and youth studies and for advancing understandings of the space-times of children and young people? Applying scale to studies of childhood and youth can open up researchers to complex and multiple factors shaping the lives of their participants. Researchers whose work focuses on specific scales may therefore be provided with access to significant aspects of younger people's social worlds by upscaling and/or downscaling their focus to consider the possible relevance of other scales of analysis. For example, researchers focusing on educational institutions or public space may also consider the significance of the body or the importance of home, or the role of the region or the place of the nation, for the young people they work with. Indeed, it could be argued that focusing upon only one scale is rather limited as inevitably, younger people's lives shape, and are shaped by, multiple scalar processes. Furthermore, such an approach may also assist in opening up (dis)connections between the different scales of younger people's lives as social and political issues relating to one or more scales shape people's engagements with another. This is shown in the examples above as young people's embodied practices or engagements with home

are shaped by broader global and political issues and responded to by young people through their embodied presentation and negotiations of home (see also Hopkins 2010; Horschelmann and van Blerk 2012).

Using scale to help appreciate the complexities of younger people's lives also opens up space to consider the broader economic and political factors that impinge on young people's lives. While research about young people – and in particular research about transitions to adulthood – is often very attentive to these broader processes (e.g., MacDonald et al. 2005), work with younger children often only focuses on those scales located close by (Ansell 2009a). Applying scale to such work could potentially open up childhood and youth researchers to consider a broad range of national and/or global issues and the role of these in the life of their participants. This may include a whole host of economic, political, and social processes that are often seen to be distant from children's lives such as neoliberalism, geopolitics, or global political issues and events. At the same time, this could help to contribute to work that is increasingly challenging the idea that young people are disengaged from politics and political issues (e.g., Sloam 2012). This could open up possibilities for considering the ways in which the time-spaces of children and young people are shaped by broader global, supranational, and national issues as well as the ways in which young people creatively respond to, and manage, the role of such matters in their everyday lives.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Childhood and Youth Citizenship](#)
- ▶ [Citizenship: Inclusion and Exclusion](#)
- ▶ [Space and Place in Studies of Childhood and Youth](#)
- ▶ [Time and Space in Youth Studies](#)

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Part X

Play

Andy Bennett

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Abstract

This overview chapter provides an in-depth survey and analysis of key themes in the existing literature on youth cultural practice in relation to three key areas: style, space, and digital media. The chapter takes as its point of departure the notion that each of the aforementioned area connotes significant platforms from which youth can engage in forms of play through which they articulate ideological, political, and aesthetic positions. Play is thus conceptualized here as a means through which youth engage in forms of struggle and negotiation in the construction of youth cultural practices through which they create meaning in their everyday lives. The chapter concludes by offering brief contextualizing summaries of the remaining four chapters featured in this section of the handbook.

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Introduction

As the foregoing chapters in this handbook attest, youth has long been an object of inquiry in academic research. Indeed, such is the depth and breadth of the youth research legacy that it is now one of the most closely mapped and analytically interrogated sociocultural terrains of contemporary everyday life. In the context of youth research, the cultural practices of youth have been one of the overarching ways in which academic researchers have sought to *understand* youth as a sociocultural category. Beginning in the 1970s, cultural perspectives on youth began to find their way into different disciplinary approaches to studying youth – sociology, cultural and media studies, education, and criminology to name but only a few of the disciplines that reflected this “cultural turn” (Chaney 1994) in their (re)conceptualization of youth.

Through adopting a cultural perspective on youth, those invested in youth research increasingly began to focus on the life worlds of young people not merely as something given, that is to say, imposed from above through a controlling matrix of socioeconomic factors, but as reflexively constructed by active and effectively empowered social subjects. This has been matched by a significant methodological shift in the way that the cultural practices of youth are studied, evaluated, and represented. As will presently be discussed in more detail, many early studies of youth culture were often text-based readings of youth in which the actors themselves, to use Cohen’s words, merely “flitted across the screen” (1987, p. iii). Although highly influential in terms of underpinning a cultural turn in youth studies, there was little recourse to those at the center of the inquiry, that is, the young actors themselves. However, this approach slowly gave way to another turn in youth cultural studies, one orientated towards the empirical (Bennett 2002). Indeed, the last 20 years has seen the emergence of a particularly rich field of ethnographically informed studies of youth culture in which specific detail to the highly nuanced, often locally specific, aspects of youth cultural practices has been paramount.

This section of the handbook focuses on the cultural practice of youth using the conceptual lens of “play.” The four chapters featured in the section focus on different aspects of youth cultural practice in stylistic, politico-spatial, and media-based contexts. Through their empirical foci, the chapters collectively span three continents. Before considering in more depth the contribution of each chapter to our understanding of contemporary youth cultural practice as different forms of play, this introductory overview will consider a range of ways in which the cultural dimensions of youth have been studied and represented in the academic literature. In doing so, it provides a context in which the chapters that follow can be read and understood as building on discussion and debate as this has emerged in the broader field of youth studies and the specific disciplines it has drawn on, notably in relation to this particular selection of chapters, sociology, media and cultural studies, and education studies.

Before embarking on this task, it should be acknowledged that many of the examples drawn on in the following overview focus on Western examples of youth cultural practice. This is indicative of the fact that until relatively recently, this field of the research was dominated by Western academics focusing on examples of

youth culture in the developed world. In recent years, however, there have been shifts in this pattern as theorists from non-Western contexts, notably in Asia and the Middle East, have begun to examine issues such as youth, sexualities and media (Yue 2012); youth, fandom, and music (Jung 2014); and youth, underground culture, and hip-hop (Khabeer 2007; Khan 2009). Additionally, the final chapter in this section offers an insight into mobile telephony practices among youth in Botswana. As such developments in youth research illustrate, the balance is thus beginning to shift from an exclusive, or near exclusive, focus on youth in developed, Westernized nations to one that is more representative of youth in a global context.

Youth Culture, Subculture, and Post-Subculture

The first sustained attempt to examine youth as *culturally* empowered and articulated emerged during the early to mid-1970s through the subcultural theory of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), based at Birmingham University in the UK. The concept of subculture had earlier been used by American sociologists in an attempt to re-theorize deviance as a normalized, collective response to issues such as poverty and social exclusion (a body of work typically referred to as the Chicago School) (see, e.g., Matza and Sykes 1961; Becker 1963). The CCCS, however, significantly modified subculture, taking its central tenets and applying a cultural Marxist perspective and using this in a textual reading of style-based working-class youth cultures in post-Second World War Britain (see Hall and Jefferson 1976). According to the CCCS interpretation, such youth cultures, or subcultures, were sartorial extensions of a class struggle that had been ongoing in Britain for over a century.

At the core of subcultural theory was a semiotic analysis of how an affluent working-class youth (a product of near-full employment in Britain during the 1950s and 1960s) appropriated the mass-produced fashions and popular music produced for the burgeoning “youth market” (Chambers 1985) and reinscribed such consumer items as symbols of resistance to oppression as this weighed down on them from above. Hebdige’s (1979) *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* became a key text in this respect through its reading and interpretation of punk rock, then at its height in the UK. Thus, argued Hebdige, although on the surface punk appeared to playfully poke fun at the establishment, its stylistic assemblage actually symbolized a highly sophisticated and visually dramatic form of critical engagement with the social-economic decline of Britain during the late 1970s and its impact on the life chances and opportunities of youth. For Hebdige, punk:

...appropriated the rhetoric of crisis which ...filled the airwaves throughout the [late 1970s] ...translat[ing] it into tangible (and visible) terms ... In the gloomy, apocalyptic ambience of the late 1970s ... it was fitting that the punks should present themselves as “de-generates”; as signs of the highly publicized decay which was perfectly represented the atrophied condition of Great Britain. The various stylistic ensembles adopted by the punks were undoubtedly expressive of genuine aggression, frustration and anxiety. (1979, p. 87)

Although making a highly influential contribution to the way in which the stylistic appropriations of youth were understood, the work of the CCCS was not without its critics. For example, McRobbie (1981 [1990]) highlighted the male-centric nature of subcultural theory and the way that the politics of style conceptualized through the CCCS work appeared to airbrush out of existence the female members of subcultures, and their contributions to subcultural style. Another salient criticism of the CCCS was its failure to engage with youth beyond the metropolitan context. As Clarke (1981 [1990]) suggested, the CCCS subcultural theory offered little insight regarding youth cultures in the provinces and, indeed, youth cultures beyond the UK. Cohen (1987) and Harris (1992) both pointed to the CCCS's lack of empirical engagement with youth culture. The absence of accounts from young people themselves, it was argued, served to produce a highly circuitous argument in which the CCCS simply explained away the actions of youth using theoretical abstraction. Indeed, at some level it could be argued that it became a mission of subcultural theory to uncover and account for the structurally informed meanings of subcultural style that, or so it was claimed, the young subculturalists themselves had only a vague understanding of (Hebdige 1979).

As a consequence of such criticisms, in the early 1990s the theoretical consensus around subculture began to break down. Indeed, Redhead (1993) suggested that by the late 1980s there was tangible evidence that the stylistic unity that had previously been visible among subcultures was beginning to dissipate with youth styles becoming more eclectic and individualistic. Redhead also argued that new pressures on youth, as a consequence of deindustrialization and the onset of risk and uncertainty (Beck 1992), meant that it was no longer exclusively working-class youth who were at the center of youth cultural activity. The emergence of rave and the illegal warehouse parties in British cities during the mid-late 1980s, suggested Redhead, signaled a new era of hedonistic escapism for youth from many different walks of life. Earlier in the decade, dramatic inner-city riots across the UK had seen youth looting city center shops and obtaining items of fashion, electrical goods, and other consumer objects. Cashmore (1984) controversially suggested that this spectacle brought home the extent to which the need to consume had become central to youth, to the extent that when they were divested of the economic capital necessary to do so, youth reverted to other means of acquiring the goods and services to which they had become accustomed.

Such alternative ways of examining and appraising the cultural practices of youth gave rise to a significant paradigm shift in youth cultural research. At the center of this was a new generation of theorists and researchers whose work came to be known as "post-subcultural" theory. In a book that has often been regarded as a postmodern critique of subcultural theory, Muggleton (2000) takes the basic tenets of Redhead's (1993) observation regarding the breakup of coherent style-based youth (sub)cultures and develops this into a theoretical framework drawing on a Weberian analysis of fashion as a more individual and individualized project of the self. Aligned with this, argues Muggleton, is the demise of "fully formed" knowledges of stylistic meanings. As such meanings fade increasingly further back into history, suggests Muggleton, consumers are left to browse through a "supermarket of style" (Polhemus 1997)

picking and choosing from a vast array of stylistic goods and accessories to which they ascribe their own meanings. In this way, stylistic elements are combined and recombined in ways that cohere with the aesthetic tastes of individual consumers rather than with previous collective understandings of particular youth styles.

A recurring criticism of this alternative approach to understanding youth style is that it reduces youth cultural practice to a form of dandyism, devoid of any inherent meaning beyond a series of surface gestures and a meaningless play of objects, images, and texts (see, e.g., Blackman 2005). However, as several theorists have suggested, the recasting of youth style and its appropriation in this way does not simply equate to a loss of “political” meaning. On the contrary, it is argued, in an age where there is a continuous circulation of goods, youth are still able to inscribe meanings in ways that codify objects of consumption as purposive resources in the creation of identities – both individual and collective – and the necessary boundary work to maintain distinctions necessary to forms of belonging. Miles (2000), for example, illustrates how even as young people become less outwardly bound by stylistic uniformity they are still able to make aesthetic distinctions between different items of fashion and associated consumer objects. Similarly, Thornton (1995) adapts the term subcultural capital from the work of Bourdieu (1984) in looking at the ways that youth cultural groups continue to create cultural categories and notions of “us and them” based around perceptions of the meanings ingrained in and articulated through particular patterns of conspicuous consumption.

The emergence of post-subcultural theory has also led to other, more deep-seated, questions about the place and significance of conspicuous consumption for youth and the overall value of subculture – or indeed counterculture (see Bennett 2014) – as a reliable form of theoretical categorization at any point since the emergence of the post-Second World War youth market. Indeed, Bennett (1999) argues that what have in the past been crudely referred to as youth subcultures and countercultures have in effect clouded a process of increasing reflexivity among youth – and indeed other social groups – enabled by the ability to consume and to experiment with identity. In raising this argument, Bennett draws on the concept of lifestyle. Originally associated with the work of Simmel, lifestyle was revived and reworked by Chaney (1996) to account for the ways in which the consumption practices of late-modern individuals are inherently linked to new, reflexive forms of social identity. According to Chaney, individuals *collect* objects, images, and texts and reinscribe them with their own meanings – such forms of reinscription cohering between distinctive groups of individuals in what Chaney refers to as lifestyle sites and strategies. Here Chaney makes an important distinction between “lifestyles” and “ways of life,” the latter bespeaking ways of understanding the self which are grounded in traditional discourses of neighborhood and community. For Chaney, a critical impact of consumerism and mediatization has been to weaken the hold of such traditional forms of authority on the way that individuals understand themselves and thus construct and articulate their identities to themselves and others (see also Chaney 2002).

The cultural practices of youth are clearly bound up with, and are indeed in themselves reflective of, such shifts in the cultural terrains of contemporary societies. Indeed, both Bennett (1999) and Chaney (2004) suggest that what are referred to as

subcultures and countercultures are in effect crude attempts to categorize into narrow boxes fields of play and experimentation among youth that say far more about the increasing fragmentation and pluralization of everyday life than about the re-entrenchment of traditional knowledge and discourses. This point is picked up on again below in Skott-Myhre's chapter which illustrates the increasing diversity and local specificity of subversive youth cultural practices in contemporary society.

Youth, Space, and Place

Another important aspect of the cultural turn in youth research has been an increasing emphasis on the spatial aspects of youth cultural practice (see also the sections in this handbook by Woodman and Leccardi on space and by Farrugia on place). An appreciation of the connection between youth space has been established for a number of decades, but prior to the cultural turn, this was largely represented in terms of concepts such as turf, territory, neighborhood, and community (see, e.g., Whyte 1955; Hall and Jefferson 1976). In the UK, Cohen (1972) advanced these ideas to argue how the stylistic assemblages of post-war youth cultures constituted what he referred to as a "magical recovery" of the traditional working-class communities that had been displaced by post-war redevelopment and relocation to new housing estates. In a more pessimistic vein, Corrigan (1976) suggested that the presence of youth on the streets of cities and provincial towns apparently "doing nothing" was symbolic of youth's alienation and disenfranchisement in an era of post-industrialization and socioeconomic dislocation.

The increasingly diverse ways in which youth culture is understood and positioned as a cultural form in the developed world, and increasingly the developing world, are in turn leading to a more fine-grained and pluralistic approach to studying youth's appropriation, both physical and symbolic, of urban and rural space. In his highly instructive work on skateboarding, Borden (2000) notes how the physical construction of the city, with its many thoroughfares, fissures, and surfaces, becomes a perfect place for skaters to practice and refine their art. This interpretation of youth's appropriation of the city chimes to some degree with Chatterton and Hollands' recasting of urban spaces as "playscapes." In this sense, Chatterton and Hollands are focused primarily on the nighttime urban economy and organized leisure for youth. Thus, they observe: "city-centre urban playscapes can be understood as a mixture of mainstream, residual and alternative nightlife spaces" (2002, p. 99). Chatterton and Hollands' work is important in terms of offering a rich taxonomy of the contemporary club, pub, and bar landscape of the contemporary city and how, through various forms of mainstream, residual and alternative provision caters for diverse tastes and lifestyle preferences among youth. An important addition to this work is that of Taylor (2012) who investigates the queer club cultures of Brisbane and Berlin.

It follows, however, that youth's spatialization of the city may not be restricted to such recognized flows of leisure and consumption but may take on different

dimensions in which new emotional and aesthetic cartographies of space and place come into being. This was very much in evidence during the 1980s with the emergence of electronic dance music and the associated trend towards using abandoned warehouses and other former industrial spaces in order to stage large-scale unofficial dance parties (Rietveld 1997). Indeed, such unofficial “club culture” activity also spilled over into city neighborhoods where domestic houses were often spontaneously transformed into venues for free dance parties (see Bennett 2000).

The city and its environs have also provided other resources for youth, including those who, due to economic hardship and physical and/or emotional abuse suffered in the family home as well as a litany of other reasons associated with the pathologies inherent in postindustrial transformations, have become homeless (see Ruddick 1998). An insightful example of this, and one that gels with an increasing environmental awareness among youth, is “The Land is Ours” (TLIO) campaign. As Monbiot explains, key to TLIO is the reclaiming of derelict urban sites and making them habitable again through the restoring of existing buildings and construction of new ones using environmentally sustainable materials:

In May 1996, five hundred Land is Ours activists occupied thirteen acres of derelict land on the banks of the River Thames in Wandsworth, highlighting the appalling misuse of urban land, the lack of provision of affordable housing and the deterioration of the urban environment. The site was destined for the ninth major superstore within a radius of a mile and a half. They cleared the site of rubble and rubbish, built a village entirely from recycled materials and planted gardens. (1998, pp. 175–176)

A similar initiative is seen in the Exodus collective (see McKay 1996), which occupied disused farm buildings near the town of Luton in the UK and embarked on restoration work: “Initially threatened with expulsion by the Department of Transport, which owned the buildings, Exodus was subsequently granted tenancy of the farm after department representatives visited the site and noted the scale and quality of the restoration work carried out,” (Bennett 2001, pp. 133–134).

Youth’s appropriation of rural spaces has also been a focus for youth researchers in more recent decades. Again, such appropriation is to some extent tied to a disillusionment and/or exclusion of young people from urban lifestyles due to rising levels of unemployment and the high cost of living associated with city accommodation. The retreatism of youth from urban spaces has established trends that go back to the 1960s when hippies and other followers of the counter-culture established communes and other types of rural community in resistance to what they saw as the technocratic domination of mainstream urban societies (see Webster 1976; Bennett 2001). This trend has continued in more recent times in the form of the free party movement and travelers who have appropriated greenfield sites in the UK and other parts of Europe. Focusing on this trend, Hetherington observes how such forms of appropriation observe understandings of the land that predate modernity, notably the concept of “earth mysteries.” According to Hetherington:

Earth mysteries practitioners adopt a more holistic approach that refers back to ancient folk ways of understanding and interpreting the landscape: dowsing, ley line hunting, recovering folklore and customs associated with particular sites. The earth mysteries tradition challenges the modes of understanding offered by modern science and seeks to find in the landscape forgotten practices of knowing and understanding. (1998, p. 335)

As the foregoing discussion illustrates, there is now extensive discussion and debate about the various ways in which contemporary youth cultural practice is bound up with the symbolic and physical appropriation of space and how, through this process, space comes a critical element in the ways we understand and represent issues of play, politics, identity, and lifestyle as these pertain to youth.

Youth and Digital Media

... we can no longer take it for granted that membership of a youth culture involves issues of stylistic unity, collective knowledge of a particular club scene, or even face-to-face interaction. On the contrary, youth cultures may be seen increasingly as cultures of “shared ideas”, whose interactions take place not in physical spaces such as the street, club or festival field but in the virtual spaces facilitated by the internet. (Bennett 2004, p. 163)

The digital and post-digital eras have also had a profound influence on the way that youth culture has been addressed as a topic of academic research. The emergence of the Internet prompted various scholars to suggest that society would undergo a fundamental shift, with the emergence of new, virtual communities, that is to say, clusters of trans-locally and globally dispersed individuals whose interactions were conducted purely via the Internet (see, e.g., Rheingold 1994; Baym 1995). Such a view, however, did not persist, and, over time, new research has begun to suggest that although the Internet did indeed provide a means through which individuals could transcend the physical limitations of locality, face-to-face relationships remain an important dimension of social relations (Tuszynski 2006).

In relation to youth and youth culture, this latter analytical position has gathered central importance as researchers have sought to understand and account for the significance of the Internet in everyday life. In the fields of subcultural and post-subcultural research, various studies have sought to illustrate the value of the Internet as a technological device that does not remove the presence of face-to-face interaction but rather allows youth cultural groups – such as goths, punks, and straight edgers – to connect with others who subscribe to the same musical, stylistic, and aesthetic tastes in different localities, regions, and countries (see, e.g., Hodgkinson 2003; Williams 2006). In a similar fashion, other researchers have demonstrated how the extended communication possibilities offered by the Internet for youth cultures have provided the platform for new trans-local scenes (Peterson and Bennett 2004) of music production, performance, and consumption to emerge as promoters, managers, and bands are increasingly organizing international tours entirely through the use of the Internet (see Kahn-Harris 2004; Bennett 2013). The Internet has also allowed for a more democratic process to occur in the cultural production of music scenes. For example, Hodgkinson (2004) argues that post-rock,

a genre of music combining electronic and ambient elements, only began to crystallize as a genre through the Internet where fans developed a vocabulary to define and discuss the musical properties of post-rock. A further interesting example of this is seen in K-pop where, as Jung (2014) observes, fans across Southeast Asia were critically important in the co-production of this genre and its commercial success through the promotion of particular K-Pop artists via fansites, blogs, and other online forums.

The dialogic connections that the Internet articulates between online and offline identities have also highlighted important ways that youth reflect on themselves as reflexive social agents in their interactions with others. For example, in a study of Internet users, including youth, in Trinidad, Miller and Slater observed that:

Trinidadians . . . seemed highly aware, whenever they were online, that they were meeting the rest of the world as Trinis. They might be aware of this in either a nationalistic, patriotic sense (they were Trinidadians encountering other countries) or through a broader sense of the cultural specificity of their tastes, ways of doing things and communicating things. (2000, p. 86)

In a more recent study, Robards and Bennett (2011) consider how the descriptions that young people give of themselves online suggest a neo-tribal (Maffesoli 1996) approach to social relations in which various groups are engaged with on a day-to-day basis giving rise to a pluralistic play of identities. In this sense, the Internet becomes a useful means of understanding the highly complex networks of social relationships through which youth in contemporary society structure their everyday lives.

A further development in digital technology that is argued to have had far-reaching effects on youth is the mobile phone. Among youth, a key attraction of the mobile phone is its multifunctionality; in addition to phone and text functions, many “smartphone” devices can also be used to take photographs, store and play MP3 files as well as serve as digital notebooks and/or diaries, direction finders, and so on. Consequently, mobile phones have become sought after among young people who view them as highly prized objects and in many cases fashion items that become pivotal resources in patterns of conspicuous consumption (Katz and Sugiyama 2006; Axelsson 2010).

The mobile phone has also been regarded in some quarters as a device that offers young people a degree of freedom and autonomy (Ito 2005, p. 131). At the same time, however, other researchers have suggested that the mobile phone can, and frequently does, have decidedly pathological effects on young people, providing a means for them to withdraw from the social world and meaningful face-to-face social interaction with others around them. Ito (2005) typifies this take on the negative impact of the mobile phone on youth, claiming that in Japan many young people’s seeming addiction to mobile phone devices is rendering them incapable of acquiring basic, everyday social skills.

Despite the varying interpretations of the mobile phone and its effects on youth, it is clear that, like the Internet, the mobile phone has become a key form of digital technology for young people and one of the ways in which they feel “connected.” Moreover, to date much of the research conducted on mobile telephony has engaged with the ways that it impacts on the cultural practices of young people in

the developed world. It seems clear that, in order to develop a more comprehensive picture of the mobile phone's implications for youth, a broader investigation is required of how the mobile phone has been received and is being utilized by young people in a global context.

Conclusion and Future Directions

The various forms of youth cultural practice described above could all be described as encompassing an element of play. In the context of this section of the handbook, “play” is taken to extend beyond the leisure connotations typically associated with this term. Rather, play is taken to extend across a range of cultural practices through which young people draw on the various resources – musical, stylistic, technological, spatial, and so on – around them in order to make their lives meaningful. In this sense, play is regarded as core to the identity, politics, and lifestyles of youth. It is a means through which young people are able to continually engage with and negotiate a place for themselves in everyday life. As Chaney (2002) has suggested, everyday life is a complex terrain of overlapping, interlocking, and competing cultural practices (see also Bennett 2005). The cultural worlds that young people construct for themselves within this terrain are built through engaging in ongoing strategies of play. Indeed, many of the more visible features of this – including those cultural forms that we refer to as “youth cultures” – are a product of such strategies and the everyday struggles that characterize them.

The four chapters featured in this section of the handbook build on and extend the themes and issues explored in the foregoing overview. In the first section of the overview, the development of subcultural theory and its impact on conceptualizations of youth cultural practice were considered. Hans Skott-Myhre's chapter draws on the rich legacy of subcultural and post-subcultural theory in its examination of current examples of spectacular youth and how these are linked historically, ideologically, and aesthetically to the countercultural movement of the 1960s and the subversive practices of genres such as punk and hardcore (in their past and present forms). As Skott-Myhre argues, in a world now dominated by neoliberal politics and also characterized by a disturbing shift back to fundamentalist positions in relation to race, nationalism, and religion, youth continues to forge strategies of resistance drawing on popular culture resources and reinscribing these with subversive meanings. Two key examples used in Skott-Myhre's chapter are the Russian, all-female punk band Pussy Riot and Femen, a radical feminist protest group established in Ukraine and now based in Paris (and with an increasing spread of other Femen groups in other cities around the world).

A further theme explored in the overview section above was the relationship between youth, space, and place. In her chapter, Shanene Ditton further explores this relationship with a particular focus on how young people engage in activities that challenge the commodification of urban space. More specifically, Ditton is concerned with how young people assume ideological positions that resist policies made by the local state that transform urban spaces in ways which threaten to

exclude and/or alienate significant sections of the local population. As an example of this, Ditton focuses on the Sold Coast, a group comprising of young people in their 20s and early 30s on Australia's Gold Coast. As Ditton illustrates, through connecting with local arts and cultural initiatives and organizing public fora, the Sold Coast group formulates critical dialogue relating to the socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental sustainability of the Gold Coast region.

The final theme addressed in the overview section was the Impact of digital media on young people. The remaining two chapters in this section of the handbook each extend this discussion in different ways. Catherine Beavis's chapter focuses on the role played by computer games in education. Early literature on young people and computer games painted a largely negative and pathological picture of their impact on youth and its social and psychological development (see, e.g., Funk and Buchman 1996; Griffiths and Hunt 1998). In more recent years, however, there has been a greater acceptance of the role and place of computer games in young people's lives and a greater understanding of both the positive and negative effects that this can have. Focusing in particular on the incorporation of computer games into classroom learning, Beavis suggests that despite the current optimism regarding the use of computer games with an educational content, much is still unclear about the extent to which this shift in pedagogy actually enhances young people's experience of learning. Critical here, argues Beavis, is gaining a deeper level of academic knowledge and understanding regarding how people use computer games both inside and outside of school contexts and the relationship of this to their experience of using computer games in the classroom.

In the final chapter in this section, William Lesitaokana presents a study of young people and mobile phones in Botswana. Taking as his starting point the fact that much of the current literature on youth and mobile phones focuses on examples in the developed world, Lesitaokana makes the salient point that this approach has resulted in significant gaps in our knowledge about young people and mobile telephony in a global context. Drawing on the results of an ethnographic study conducted in Botswana in 2013, Lesitaokana considers how mobile phone technology has been appropriated and adapted by young Botswana people as both a communication technology and an item of fashion. As Lesitaokana points out, despite the considerable financial outlay required to purchase and use a mobile phone in Botswana, patterns and frequency of use by local youth are similar to those observed among youth in developed nations. However, while some conventions of use, for example, texting among friends, are also broadly similar to those seen in other places, other aspects of mobile phone use in Botswana are locally nuanced. This is seen, for example, in the use of mobile phones to keep in touch with other members of extended families, many of whom live in rural areas of the county, and in young Botswana males' gifting of mobile phones to their girlfriends and partners as a means of exerting control and influence over them. Lesitaokana concludes the chapter by suggesting that further research needs to be conducted in developing countries in order to create a more comprehensive picture of how global media technologies such as mobile phones are impacting on youth cultural practices in different parts of the world.

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Serious Play: Young People's Deployment of Culturally Subversive Sign Within Postmodern Capitalism

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Hans Skott-Myhre

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Abstract

The question of capitalist domination that functions through an overcoding of the social has significant implications for what constitutes forms of political resistance. Under a system whose rule is sustained through a constant proliferation of ever-expanding categories of code, any form of political resistance or revolt premised either in representation or the communication of nominalized truth is easily assimilated and recoded within the money form. Any rational appeal to the structural components of civil society will similarly be recoded. The question then becomes within such a regime of rule premised in transcendent code, what are the most effective modes of revolution and resistance? Perhaps one alternate form of political engagement might well be defined as what will be termed here, serious play. Play, in this context, is a behavior that has the ability to subvert and transform the platforms that capitalism uses to both obscure its actual function and to spread the codes of the economy. To do this,

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playful behavior needs to be able to metacommunicate about the economy's/capitalism's communication system code. This chapter explores the vernacular of serious play through the actions and rhetoric of radical youth groups in the late 1960s and in contemporary movements today.

Introduction

As *paidia* (children's play) and as *agon* (conflict) play was associated with the freedom and exuberance of innocent exploration and with serious competition and the exercise of power. (Edwards 2013, p. 18)

Perhaps one of the most evocative and yet opaque revolutionary becomings noted by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) is that of becoming child. The becoming child, they propose, is the force that facilitates creativity in all bodies across the social spectrum. Even those bodies that appear to be fully engaged in subjection to the codes of the dominant society are to a greater or lesser degree subverted and seduced by the appeal of the force of unfettered infant desire. Indeed, they suggest that adulthood is a betrayal of the becoming child, associated more with death than life. To be an adult, for them, is to abdicate the force of difference in play within complexities of material actuality, to the servitude of endless repetitions of acts and representations.

Of course, the desire, of the unfettered infant can be warped into terrible forms by the demands of dominant codes of power. However, desire can also open the door to radical difference and the open coding of play. Indeed, as Deleuze reminds us,

People always think of a majoritarian future (when I am grown up, when I have power). Whereas the problem is that of a minoritarian becoming, not pretending, not playing or imitating the child . . . but becoming [that] in order to invent new forces or new weapons. (Deleuze and Parnet 1987, p. 5)

In a powerful way then, the refusal to transition fully into adulthood constitutes a radically subversive political act. It could well be argued that this is specifically true under regimes of capitalist rule because of the complicated relationship capitalism has with the coding and control of childhood, youth, and adulthood (see “► Chaps. 37, Unemployment, Insecurity, and Poor Work: Young Adults in the New Economy”, “► 38, Young People's Transitions to Employment: Making Choices, Negotiating Constraints”, and “► 40, Ordinary Working Lives and the “Missing Middle” of Youth Studies”, in this volume). As Baudrillard (1981) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987) point out, capitalism in its current incarnation is a system composed entirely of code.

The question of capitalist regimes of domination through overcoding the social has significant implications for what constitutes forms of political resistance. Under a system whose rule is sustained through a constant proliferation of ever-expanding categories of code, any form of political resistance or revolt premised either in representation or the communication of nominalized truth is easily assimilated and recoded within the money form. Any rational appeal to the structural components of civil society will similarly be recoded. The question then becomes within such a

regime of rule premised in transcendent code, what are the most effective modes of revolution and resistance? One possibility, centered in the activities of young people, might well be what we are terming serious play.

Play as Politics

To account for play as political action, it is important to note a shift in the political field with the rise of late stage or postmodern capitalism towards the middle of the twentieth century. As Hardt and Negri (2005) and arguably Deleuze and Guattari (1987) have indicated, these changes accelerate and advance in the latter half of the 1960s and specifically the year 1968. Concomitantly, this is also the time of a profound shift in the tactics of resistance deployed by young people against the rise of global corporate rule, which impacts negatively on their lived experience, socially and economically and culturally, as well as their anticipated future well-being into the contemporary period (Burman 2008; Allahar and Cote 2006).

The global uprisings of the late 1960s usher in an ethos of revolt no longer focused simply on the appropriation of either the means of production or the mechanisms of rule (Negri 1996). Instead, a new form of cultural politics begins to emerge that engages the production of what Hardt and Negri (2009) have termed the common. The common as a political project is founded in the deployment of the creative capacities of bodies struggling together to develop forms of self-rule without the overlay of transcendent structures or ideals.

If the emergence of subcultures and countercultures in this same period can be read politically, it might well be argued that it is as an aspect of this kind of revolt (Gelder 2007; Hall and Jefferson 1993; Skott-Myhre 2009). The withdrawal from the habits and beliefs of the dominant culture and the intentional production of alternative, counter-, or "sub-" cultures has indeed been read as political (Hebdige 1979). However, the initial reading of subcultural politics as an expression of class interests reflected the earlier politics of revolt under the earlier mode of industrial capitalism (Bennett 1999; Skott-Myhre 2009). Under the current regime of postmodern or global capitalism, the question of class shifts significantly as both the working class and the middle class are decimated through a significant shift from industrial production to what Negri (1996) has termed immaterial labor. This is not to say that there are not significant numbers of people still laboring in factories, but the current global crisis in employment is being driven by the spread of technologies that allow for the replacement of labor with computerized production (Negri 1996).

As post-subculture theory has proposed, under the regimes of postmodern capitalism, the media, and the extensive spread of virtual mechanisms of communication and social networking, the development of subcultures extends well beyond the class-conscious politics of classical Marxist analysis. As Muggleton (2000) proposes, subcultures have developed within the media environment through a focus on style and fashion rather than overt modes of political resistance.

This does not mean, however, that the subcultures developed since 1968 are not political and do not operate as significant players in the developing modes of revolt

and resistance to global capital (Blackman 2005). It means, instead, that we need to account for the ways in which subcultures, in their play with the signifiers of style and fashion within the global media environment, have the capacity to violate and undermine the extensive system of economic code that sustains the rule of the current mode of capitalism. In short we need to account for the power of play within the developing common of young people. Play, in this sense, is the transitional vehicle for the becoming child of revolutionary politics.

To account for the force of play in the field of revolutionary tactics, it is necessary to rewrite the political as a contestation between the system of rule constituted, as we delineated above, by a transcendent recoding of civil society and the actualities of the struggle to survive by networks of living beings. This requires that a new politics be founded on the terrain of the virtual, both as transcendent code and as the immanent capacity of life itself. The aim of such revolutionary activity is not to be found in the seizure of the evacuated structures of civil society. There is no percentage in seizing the reigns of government, taking control of the universities, or even attempting to wrest the means of production away from capitalist control. Instead, the struggle must be to subvert the very system of code that composes society, as we now know it.

This alternate form of political engagement might well be defined as what we have termed here serious play. Play in this context is behavior that has the ability to subvert and transform the platforms that capitalism uses to both obscure its actual function and to spread the codes of the economy. To do this, playful behavior needs to be able to metacommunicate about the economy's or capitalism's communication system code.

Breaking Codes Through Play

Gregory Bateson (1956), in his work on play, proposes that for play to function, the players need to be able to engage in metalinguistic and metacommunicative exchanges. It is essential that they be able to recognize signs as signs and not mistake them for representations of actual conditions. It is precisely the failure of this function that allows capitalism to subvert lived experience to the domination of abstract code. Put in another term, those subjected to capitalism fail to recognize that their subjection to the money code is premised in their willingness to act as though the system of value was actual rather than symbolic. The mechanisms, both psychological and physiological, deployed to this end by the media and the mediating facades of civil society are complex and beyond the scope of this writing, but suffice it to say that the production of indeterminate anxiety, fear, and insecurity goes a long way towards interfering with the ability of a subject to process levels of metacommunication. If the game being played elicits a powerful affective response in the players, the shift into simulacrum as actuality can negate any ability to recognize signs as signs.

Bateson tells us that play is a sequence of interactions in which signals and actions mimic, but are not the same as, the actions and signals they denote. Play, in

this sense, is a statement containing an implied negative statement. Play is only possible if the parties involved are capable of metacommunicating at some level. Monkeys who are pretending to fight use all of the actions and signals of fighting but manage to metacommunicate that this is play, not fighting. Bateson notes that similarly, threats look a lot like play, in that they act as though there is actuality of danger, but are actually metacommunicating a future event that does not exist in the present. So, play is composed of messages or signals that are either not true or not meant and what they signal is nonexistent. Just as a dreamer is not always sure she/he is dreaming, within play we must be reminded that this is play.

Play as revolutionary politics within the overcoding regimes of global capitalist rule might be delineated then, as requiring the capacity to undercut the claims of such code to represent any form of actuality. To do this, political action would comprise transgressions of code that would point to the absurd and contradictory aspects of code when confronted with free creative living force. Such force would come from the margins of the social founded in the contradictions of capitalist coding, i.e., their failure to deliver in concrete terms the life promised under a healthy economy.

Counter Culture as Serious Play

This deployment of play, as an element of the political that opens cracks and fissures in the smooth field of capitalist code, is fully engaged in the development of youth subcultures from punks to skinheads and more contemporary genres such as hardcore and straightedge (Skott-Myhre 2009). However, it is with the rise of the counterculture in the late 1960s that we get the first glimpses of play as overtly political activity in the way we have described above. The actions and writings of the Youth International Party (Yippies) (Rubin 1971) and the White Panther Party (later named the Rainbow People's Party) (Sinclair 1972) among other groups such as the Merry Pranksters (Perry and Babbs 1990), the Diggers (Watermeyer 2008), and the Hog Farm (Gravy 1974) constituted an affirmation of becoming child as a form of revolutionary cultural politics.

Following in the spirit of early anarchists such as Emma Goldman who apocryphally is reputed to have said "If I can't dance I don't want to be part of your revolution," these groups dedicated themselves to a total assault on what they believed to be the stale and life-denying exploitation of human potential by capitalism. Rejecting traditional representative democratic politics as well as the tactics and theories of traditional Marxism, the counterculture movements of the 1960s positioned themselves, as both Foucault (1984) and Goldman (2012) suggested, against any form of politics that demanded a denial of living force. As Negri (2013) put it more recently,

One does not revolt in order to seize power, but to maintain the openness of the process of counter-powers, and to defy the apparatuses of capture that the capitalist machine never ceases to invent. (p. 30)

However, the counterculture of the late 1960s in the United States was far less sober in both their tone and analysis than the post-Marxists of today. As Jerry Rubin put it, the goal was to make it “be more fun to be in the revolution than out of it” (Rubin and Cleaver 1970, p. 37). The categorical rejection of adulthood was a primary platform of their politics.

Parents get what they deserve. They are the victims of children’s liberation. If they acted like kids too, we would turn them on—we are not vindictive—but most parents are dictators passing on dead lifeless traditions . . . we refuse to grow up so we know what it is like to be kids. Our kids are our equals—we are taking acid and flipping out with our kids. (Rubin and Cleaver 1970, p. 160)

It is important to note, as we have discussed above, that the politics of becoming child are rooted here, in the failure of the existing social form available to these young people entering adulthood in the late 1960s. The “dead lifeless traditions” of capitalist culture no longer functioned smoothly in producing subjectivities available to the “apparatus of capture” noted by Negri. In its place, there was a valorization of the living force of children. Rubin is not suggesting that one should become like a child. Instead, it is the encounter with childhood that produces new possibilities of self-knowledge that no longer produces a binary between physical maturity and childhood. There is a breakdown in the boundaries between children and adults, such that new alliances can be formed with unforeseen political consequences.

This led to the kinds of acts that became iconic of that period of generational revolt, including the attempt to levitate the pentagon by Abbie Hoffman and the Yippies, the use of public sex acts in the face of national guard troops with fixed bayonets at the same event, the disruption of the stock exchange by Hoffman and the Yippies throwing dollar bills from the visitor’s gallery onto the trading floor, and the wearing of American flags as shirts and revolutionary war uniforms as costumes when testifying before the House on Un-American Activities Committee. As Rubin (1970) stated, “Our tactic was exaggeration. Everything was ‘the biggest’, ‘the most massive.’ Our goal was to create crises which would grab everybody’s attention and force people to change their lives overnight” (p. 37).

This notion of the political redefined outside the structures of the state, the party, the proletariat, the citizenry, or any other form of civil structure and reconceived as action with political consequences is both important to the discussion here of serious play and also significantly prescient in terms of contemporary movements of resistance and revolt.

It might well be argued that it is unfortunate that much of what transpired during the late 1960s has been under-theorized in this regard. The use of music, fashion, altered consciousness, open sexuality, alternate forms of economy, and collective action is often portrayed as the excesses of spoiled middle-class children, rather than the possibility of an alternative mode of living presciently proposed as the beginning of the end for the middle class and industrial capitalism. It is this that Negri (1996) refers to as the unfinished revolution now being taken up in our contemporary period.

The counterculture of the 1960s revolted against the logic of capitalism as a seamless system of code by engaging in acts that opened the absurdity of the code to view or juxtaposed it with acts that celebrated life itself. Such acts as throwing money into the stock exchange, of concretely producing the theatrical and carnivalesque within the faux sobriety of the HUAC hearings, the placing of vulnerable LSD intoxicated naked bodies making love in front of armed soldiers, the challenge to the relationship between national symbols such as the flag and the right of a citizen to appropriate such a symbol to their own fashion use, and the constant assertion of creative play against the deadly repetitive rhythm of the industrial war machine constitute serious play as it has been delineated above.

Serious Play in Postmodern Conditions

This form of youthful politics as serious play has reasserted itself, as Negri (1996) tells us what unfinished revolutions tend to do, in a number of actions, from pagan celebratory encampments to the theater and anarchic elements of the occupy movements. Perhaps, however, it is within the ruins of the old socialist regimes in Russia and the Soviet Union that it has been most visible. The particular combination of music, sexuality, fashion, theater, and the scrambling of code which we have identified as the hallmarks of serious play in the late 1960s also characterizes the recent actions by the performance artists known as Pussy Riot from Russia and the feminist group Femen which originated in Ukraine.

However, it would be important, in our analysis of the continuities of tactics and commonalities of struggle, to also note the profound advancements of postmodern capitalism as the field upon which the battle has been struck. If the young people of the late 1960s were reacting to the death throes of industrial capitalism, young people today are responding to the resurgence of neoliberal postmodern capitalism as, possibly, the world's most comprehensive system of rule (Negri 2013).

In the late 1960s when the Yippies threw money onto the trading floor of the stock exchange, Hoffman (1969) tells us they did not even know what a media event was. As a result, although the news of the event went global, there was no media present and no attempt at DIY alternative media distribution. The media simply did not exist for better and for ill as it does today. Similarly, when Yippies and the White Panther Party advocated for public sex acts with John Sinclair (1972) declaring the fundamental importance of "fucking in the streets" (p. 68), the pornography industry was a marginal aspect of most people's lives. When music of the MC5 was being performed, it stood little chance of being commodified and in fact the one attempt at an album had little success. Finally, the movements of the late 1960s counterculture were male dominated and feminism was in its infancy as a cultural force.

When the groups Pussy Riot and Femen enter the political arena in the twenty-first century, all of this began to change. Indeed, as will be argued, the acts of these groups and the countercultures of the late 1960s hold significant similarities, but the metacommunication of their play refers to new codes premised in the now global spread of capitalist simulacra in the areas of revolt specifically mounted by the

counterculture, music, fashion, sexuality, and theater. As has been noted, the revolt is now premised in a contestation between the absolute transcendent system of postmodern capitalism (Negri 2013) and the reappropriation of creative play to the ends of actually living beings. As Baym (2007) states in his work on postmodern play in his analysis of the Colbert Report, we now live in a “media environment . . . where politics and popular culture, information and entertainment, laughter and argument, the real and the surreal have become deeply inseparable” (p. 362).

It is into this world that four young women, associated with the group Pussy Riot, put on brightly colored bakalavas and enter a Russian Cathedral to perform a protest song. The song is done in a punk musical style and has overtly political lyrics that attack both the leadership of Russia and the church. In another action, this same group in combination with other young women and men hold a videotaped orgy in the Natural Science Museum.

Another group of young women from the group Femen sneak into the Notre Dame cathedral hidden among tourists, before baring their breasts and placing flower wreaths (traditional Ukrainian vinoks) on their head. They then climbed on the base of three new bells shouting “No more Pope” while clanging the bells with wooden sticks. Their chests and backs were emblazoned with the messages “No homophobes” and “Bye-bye Benedict.”

These actions taken of themselves seem quite similar to the actions of the countercultural groups of the 1960s. However, they are thoroughly contemporary extensions of that movement. Indeed, the metacommunicative scrambling of codes through playful actions taken in dead earnestness in the 1960s takes on a whole new dimension of carnivalesque mimicry that engages the movement of the becoming child as serious play.

In the case of Pussy Riot, the play of signifiers mimics punk but is not punk. It is an artistic appropriation of the ethos and energy of the punk form but pastiched to a new end. In the same way that a videotaped orgy in a museum mimics pornography but is precisely not pornographic (see “► Chap. 11, *Young People, Pleasure, and the Normalization of Pornography: Sexual Health and Well-Being in a Time of Proliferation?*”, this volume). The performance in the cathedral evokes outrage from both those defending the sanctity of the church and those demanding the right of Pussy Riot to perform. The transformation of the church from a holy place of worship to a political performance space opens the possibility of rupturing the opaque surface that sustains the illusion of a functioning civil society, that is, the presentation of the church as a church and government as government, rather than empty signifiers deployed as place markers for global capitalist empire. The costumes that the women wore in the cathedral, of bright colored tights, skirts, and balaclavas, are like children costumed as super heroes and terrorists simultaneously fracturing and confusing the coded distinction of who is good and who is evil. In all of these functions, Pussy Riot meets the definition of play as defined by Bateson (1956) as “These actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions for which they stand would denote” (p. 217). Pussy Riot also, however, meets the full criterion for play as the transgressive that takes account of and subverts “particular social determinates of meaning” (Edwards, p. 28).

Femen also operates in a similar way to subvert the dominant coding of rule. As an organization with a far more explicit political platform that challenges patriarchy and the oppression of women, Femen appears to be more traditionally political, that is, until we encounter their tactics and self-descriptions. In their tactics, they use the presentation of their bare breasts in combination with the wearing of the traditional flower wreath of virginal girls. This juxtaposition opens a complexity of tropes and problematic signifiers under capitalist rule from child pornography to the objectification of women, to the ability of adult males to brutalize female children, and so on. The fact that they use their bodies as placards and billboards, inscribing them with slogans, mimics the objectification and commercialization of the female body, but then turns it against itself. In this Femen violates and perverts the rules of entertainment by literally subjecting their naked bodies to the direct force of the police and right-wing opponents who have kidnapped, severely beaten, and threatened to burn them alive (Femen.org).

In this they portray themselves as “new amazons,” “soldiers,” who tell the “naked truth” (Femen.org). There is a moment where Jerry Rubin (1970) says of the counterculture, “We played out our fantasies like children. We were kids playing ‘grown up games.’ You can be whatever you want to be when you are a kid. We were cowboys and Indians, pirates, kings, gypsies and Greeks. It was a panorama of history” (p. 55). Femen also plays grown-up games and with the same serious intent of the 1960s that is sometimes misread as frivolous. Indeed, they propose a clash between the system of rule and their own naked living flesh. Like a revolutionary feminist superhero, they hope that their actions will evoke the desire among those witnessing their courage to revolt and to riot (femen.org).

The actions of counterculture groups such as those discussed here have elicited powerful disciplinary responses from governments, churches, and fascist paramilitary organizations. This was true in the 1960s with the intense attention of the FBI, the ministries of evangelical Christians, and the reactionary attacks by groups such as the American Nazi party and the Hells Angels. In today's climate, it is the neo-Nazis and anti-immigration right-wing parties, the conservative wings of Muslim and Christian religious leaders, as well as the courts on behalf of governments where these groups operate. Families in both historical periods have also kidnapped and even killed their children for participating in the counterculture. Such groups seem to understand the threat posed by the transgressive subversive elements of play to the various levels of rule within the dominant culture.

In the end, the play of actual living bodies in play combines the ability to open what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call a password out of the traps of dominant cultural definitions and nominalizations. The password is composed of opening the spaces where language fails to encompass the thing it is attempting to describe. Deleuze and Guattari propose experimenting in that space with the possibility that meanings can be open-ended becomings where we can collectively forge new worlds. Countercultures play in just such spaces where language combines with action to create an affirmation of possibility against constraint, fatalism, and foreclosure. This is the revolutionary possibility of serious play and the force of the becoming child.

Conclusion and Future Directions

This chapter has focused on the ways in which the realm of play and the living force of childhood might be deployed in ways that challenge the current dominant regime of global capitalism. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) contention that the becoming child holds the capacity to open lines of creative living force against the socially coded slow death of adulthood in any historical period, we have argued that, in our particular epoch, the force of life embodied in the absolute desire of the child has particular relevance.

Using Bateson's theories of the metacommunicative function of play as a dissembling of structured codes, we have argued that capitalism as a system comprised of code might well be challenged through what we have termed serious play. This kind of play, we have asserted, is exemplified in the political tactics of countercultural groups from the late 1960s and groups such as Femen and Pussy Riot in our contemporary period. Their theatrical and playful performances violate and subvert the highly abstract and coded (dare we say mythological) constructs of democratic governance in the face of global rule.

In opening this line of inquiry, we hope to spark serious scholarly investigations into the political youth movements associated with the "freak" edges of the revolutionary politics of the 1960s as well as the media invested contemporary performances of revolt and resistance in our current historical period. The importance of the development of a new form of politics that takes into account the highly coded abstract system of global capitalism is central to the success of any political challenge that is interested in developing new modes of life. The valorization of the becoming child as a living creative force through play founds the ground out of which a new set of social relations might well arise.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Ordinary Working Lives and the "Missing Middle" of Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [Unemployment, Insecurity, and Poor Work: Young Adults in the New Economy](#)
- ▶ [Young People, Pleasure, and the Normalization of Pornography: Sexual Health and Well-Being in a Time of Proliferation?](#)
- ▶ [Young People's Transitions to Employment: Making Choices, Negotiating Constraints](#)

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Abstract

Almost a decade since the advent of mobile telephony countrywide, Botswana has recorded a significant growth in mobile phone subscription. In all the villages, towns, and cities across Botswana, many adolescents, adults, and elderly people own and use a mobile phone. In its 2012 annual report, the Botswana Communications and Regulatory Authority (BOCRA) documented that mobile phone subscription across Botswana's three network operators, BTC beMobile, Mascom, and Orange, had increased dramatically from 332,264 in 2002 to 2,953,116 subscribers among a population of around 2.1 million (Botswana Telecommunications Authority. Annual report. Gaborone; 2012). Elsewhere it was suggested that high mobile phone adoption in Botswana is a

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result of both the local networks' and the Botswana government's commitment to diffuse network signals to many places countrywide (Lesitaokana 2014). For instance, the local networks have continued to extend mobile phone signals and mobile-enabled services countrywide, while the Botswana government has committed itself to networking the villages that have been underserved by the local networks. Subsequently, young people in Botswana adopt mobile phones, as the devices promise them extensive connectedness with their family, relatives, and friends, and also use them to access public and social services. Nonetheless, as part of young people's interactive relationship with mobile phones, the devices also influence cultural practices and inappropriate behaviors among youth. Given this situation, we are presented with an ideal opportunity to study both the socioeconomic importance and the cultural implications of the mobile phone in the Botswana context, especially since such issues have been underreported in the sociological literature.

Introduction

There is no doubt that the high rate of mobile phone subscription all over the world has prompted much interest among many scholars. To date, there is a considerable amount of youth and mobile phone research that has been carried out in many countries. Primarily, researchers considered the currency of mobile phone adoption in various regions, as well as the technological, social, and economic functions of the device in the lives of young people (Davie et al. 2004; Haddon 2008; Leung and Wei 2000). On another level, studies have also focused on exploring the cultures resulting from the interaction between youth and mobile phones (Green 2003; Humphreys 2005; Katz and Sugiyama 2006; Ling and Haddon 2003; Miyaki 2006). Although the mobile phone is useful to connect users with the world around them, it has also been found to alter the social norms of interaction in society. For Goggin (2006), the issue at play here is the potency of the mobile phone as a mobile, portable, and customizable device:

They [mobile phones] fit into new ways of being oneself (or constructing identity and belonging to a group); new ways of organizing and conducting one's life; new ways of keeping in touch with friends, romantic intimates, and family; new ways of conducting business; new ways of accessing services or education. (p. 2)

The general consensus in the related works of various scholars is that the mobile phone can both reflect and affect the traditional, social, and cultural lifestyles of young people (Duncan 2013; Humphreys 2005; Kato 2006). Therefore, this chapter aims to evaluate the resulting cultures from the intersection of Botswana youth and mobile phones. The focus of this chapter is to discuss the extent to which these mobile phone cultures have altered the traditional principles embedded within the *Setswana* culture and adversely affected the social norms in the Botswana society. *Setswana* is the traditional way of life of Botswana citizens.

Contextualizing Mobile Phone Cultures

Although digital communication technologies, including mobile phones, are celebrated for their significance to facilitate e-governance, education, e-commerce, and economic efficiency (Brewer et al. 2005), the devices are also found to have a bearing on aspects of consumption and taste, especially among youth. For example, in a study conducted by Katz and Sugiyama (2006) among college and university students in both the USA and Japan, it was found that because mobile phones come in different shapes, colors, and brands, young people regard the devices as fashion accessories. Similar situations have been reported in the UK, where young people were found to adopt specific mobile phone brands that were able to be customized and personalized to fit their taste in fashion (Green 2003). Davie et al. (2004) mention that the importance of mobile phone brands and logos within young people's lives is reflected in their consumer lifestyles. This is because, during mobile phone use, young people can observe certain commonalities and differences among themselves, and as a result, they may choose to exclude or include other users in their social groups (Smoreda and Thomas 2001). In addition to the fashion dimension associated with mobile phones, other researchers have argued that young people use mobile phones to articulate their personal identities (Satchell and Graham 2010; Skog 2001). After studying young people in the UK, Green (2003) asserts that during mobile phone adoption and use, "the most enthusiastic of the young people [a]re highly aware of the aesthetic qualities of the device and the way it contributes to their 'presentation of self'" (p. 206). According to Green (2003), new technology and the changes in urban spaces have prompted changes in the ways young people formulate a sense of self and identity in relation to the consumption of goods. In a related study conducted in Italy, Fortunati (2005) also reported that during travel in public spaces such as trains, some people (including young adults) have developed propensities of talking on mobile phones with others outside the mass transit spaces. During mobile phone conversations, they usually raise topics through which they can also reveal their social characters, such as occupations and status. In doing so, they boast about their personal identities so that other people traveling with them on mass transit spaces would highly esteem them.

Young people have also been found to use mobile phones as statements of social class and belonging in specific social networks. For instance, Finnish youth were investigated using mobile phones to create and maintain social networks (Oksman and Rautiainen 2003). In doing so, they connected with their peers in social networks through text messages and voice calls as they strengthen their network bonds. Similarly, college students in New Zealand were found to use mobile phone text messages as a means of maintaining strong shared bonds in their social networks (Broege 2009) (See also the chapter by Lasén in this collection, titled ► Chap. 52, "Rhythms and Flow. Timing and Spacing the Digitally Mediated Everyday" and the chapter by Cross, titled ► Chap. 8, "Protecting and Promoting Young People's Social and Emotional Health in Online and Offline Contexts"). The mobile phone has also been found useful in intimate relationships, as partners

use it to strengthen their affection (Batson-Savage 2008). Correspondingly, Oksman and Rautiainen (2003) observed the role of the mobile phone in this regard and argued that the device defined the users' social spaces and united circles of friends and also helped users to explore new relationships. Through caller IDs and directory contact lists in the mobile phone, young people can maintain selective relationships in social groups. During mobile phone consumption, young people have also been reported to exhibit specific attitudes and behaviors. As Ling (2004) noted, mobile phone use is changing young people's social interactions with others. Basing on the findings of a study conducted in Sweden, Axelsson (2010) suggests that young people are more likely than other age groups to use the mobile phone in a manner that is disturbing to others. She cites incidents such as continuous texting, ringtone activation, and checking messages during classes. While students inconspicuously send and receive text messages in classroom situations, they annoy others around them. According to Kasesniemi and Rautiainen (2002), the use of mobile phones in this manner is compounded by the small size of the mobile phone, as the device allows students to hide it during class, occasionally taking it out of a pocket to check messages after receiving a short messaging service (SMS) alert.

While the above studies offer a number of important insights, the data presented are drawn from first-world contexts. Given the increasingly universality of mobile phone use, including among youth, however, there is a need to broaden the scope of the research (Goggin 2013) to enlarge our research perspectives of youth's interaction with mobile phones, from the Global North to less well-researched countries of the Global South.

Background to Study

The material used in this chapter is based primarily on an ethnographic study conducted on youth in the cities of Francistown and Gaborone in Botswana over a 7-month period to explore their interactive relationship with mobile phones. Reword-As part of this study, the following three principal methods of qualitative research were employed: focus group discussions, nonparticipant observation, and semi-structured follow-up interviews. The participants were selected through stratified random sampling, and the study was conducted at local colleges (for the student participants) and workplaces (non-student participants). Although excerpts from interviews with some of the participants in this study have been included in this chapter, their names have been changed as part of the agreements made with them not to reveal their true identity, thus also adhering to an ethical code of practice.

The Cultural Contexts of Youth in Botswana

Botswana youth offers an interesting case for study because they are raised in a distinct way of life characterized by the traditional values and principles that are entrenched in the *Setswana* culture. Within the *Setswana* way of life, some of the

generally accepted traditional values and attitudes include *setho* (being humane to other persons), *lotlo* (respect and obedience to adults), and *maitseo* (good manners) (Mogapi 1992). Through these values, young people in Botswana are encouraged to display good behavior whenever they interact with everyone known or unknown to them in their communities. As part of their upbringing, many young people in Botswana are raised in extended families, where they are given guidance about womanhood (for females) and manhood (for males) by their parents, aunts, uncles, and grandparents as socially prescribed in the *Setswana* tradition. Also, since they live with their cousins, they have a large amount of connection with them. Expectations are that while they grow up, social connections with these relatives should be maintained. Botswana youth are also expected to conduct themselves in an orderly way and show courtesy to other people from all walks of life. Furtherance to social connections, young people in Botswana are usually encouraged to participate in and attend get-togethers that are often held in their societies such as weddings, funerals, customary events, and festivals. Also, as they transit into adulthood, they are expected to take care of their parents and grandparents in return. Importantly, embracing the *Setswana* values and principles guarantees young people strong affection and decent connections with their parents, relatives, and the people in their communities. In the *Setswana* culture, if a young person does not display good manners, they are said to misrepresent their family and the society they belong to (Makgeng 2000). Taken as a set, these values indoctrinate how young people should socially interact with other people in society.

Mobile Phone Adoption and Use by Youth in Botswana

Mobile phones are important devices that offer young people in Botswana opportunities to coordinate their lives and connect and interact with their family, relatives, and friends, both locally and internationally. The participants in the research noted that they adopted mobile phones once they perceived the usefulness of the devices to connect them with other users through voice calls and text messages. In terms of acquiring a mobile phone, basically there are three ways: some receive the device as a gift from their parents and intimate partners; others purchase the devices for themselves; and others receive them from their workplaces. Interestingly, what became obvious for all participants in the study was that ownership of the mobile phone started either during their first year at college or university or immediately after completing high school. For each young person in Botswana, the acquisition of a mobile phone and the type of brand that one owns is dependent upon their income. For instance, many college and university students managed to buy themselves mobile phones after receiving their first stipend from their academic sponsors. A majority of those who own and use smartphones come from well-off families or receive them from their workplaces. Other participants in the study were seen with counterfeit or used smartphones, which they conceded that they bought from the local shops, which sell products imported from overseas countries.

As some participants in the study pointed out, although they preferred authentic smartphones, their lack of secure employment and reliable income prompted them to rely on used and counterfeit smartphones.

Specifically, the use of the mobile phone to connect young people in Botswana with other users is significant in two ways. Firstly, as this research was conducted in urban places, many of the participants revealed that after completing secondary school, they migrated from their home villages to towns to attend colleges and seek employment, thus leaving their family, relatives, and friends behind. Occasionally, they would contact these people to reconnect with them through the mobile phone. For instance, Refilwe, a 22-year-old mother who studied at the Gaborone Institute of Professional Studies (GIPS) revealed the significance of using the mobile phone in this way:

I come from Maun, where my one-year-old daughter lives with my mother. Since Maun is about 900 kilometres from Gaborone where I stay, it has been difficult for me to travel there every week. Nonetheless, I have bought my mother a mobile phone so that from time to time I may call her to check on my daughter. Especially as my mother does not have a fulltime paid job and doesn't have money to buy airtime she usually sends me text messages to update me about my baby.

Secondly, when young people arrive in the towns, they also make new connections with their classmates and colleagues who form part of their social support in their new places of habitation, and the mobile phone becomes the most important device for social interaction with these people. Consider the following remarks by one of the participants:

To me the mobile phone is a must have device. It connects me to the world. I store the contacts of many people that I connect with in it. My family, relatives, colleagues and friends are accessible through it, whenever I need to talk to anyone of them at anytime I just dial their contact number. That's why I keep it with me at all times. (Neo, 24)

For Refilwe, Neo, and other young people in Botswana, one specific driver for the uptake of mobile phones is to consolidate family ties between themselves and their relatives and maintain personal connection between themselves and their associates. This indicates that in the context of youth in Botswana, the mobile phone is significantly relevant for use to re-ensconce the social obligations of taking care of loved ones (family and relatives), as well as the traditional *Setswana* principles of connecting with other people in the communities from time to time.

In addition, smartphones, which are also accessible among young people in Botswana, offer advanced multimedia functions that include digital photography, accessibility to the Internet, and online social networking on Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. These functions are significantly useful to connect young people with their peers in Botswana and in the diaspora. The young people who participated in this study cited that they used Facebook on their smartphones to exchange information about college and university life with their friends and relatives in other towns. This also included exchanging photographs that they often took with their smartphones while attending social functions such as parties and bridal and baby showers. As a result, the use of smartphones in Botswana has transformed the

generation of youth into a networked society. Considering that Botswana, like other developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa, has a serious digital divide (Duncombe and Heeks 2002; Mutula 2005), the practical uses of smartphones has helped to bridge this gap. For instance, whereas the availability of the Internet in Botswana used to be confined to some offices in the workplaces and computer rooms in colleges, today, mobile Internet is accessible on mobile phones in all the places where mobile network signal is provided.

Youth's Dependency Towards Mobile Phones

Both the high rate of adoption and use of the mobile phone in Botswana indicate that the device is a must-have among youth. Inevitably, while some young people, especially nonusers, are interested in acquiring a mobile phone device, the users' attachment toward mobile phones has escalated so much that their personal relationships with the device remains interminable. When asked to relate their relationship with the mobile phone, some of the young people who were interviewed as part of this study expressed the following observations:

It's my best companion. I can't leave home without it. (Ame, 24)

I can't imagine life without a mobile phone. (Mpho, 19)

To me, it's a must have device. It connects me to world. (Dan, 21).

Nevertheless, young people's penchant for acquiring a mobile phone in Botswana is marred by socioeconomic problems. For example, whereas mobile phones have been widely recognized elsewhere due to their use for safety and security (Ling 2004), in Botswana there are prevalent incidents of criminal attacks in which perpetrators target mobile phone users and forcibly seize their mobile phones. All of the young people who participated in the research mentioned that at some point in time, they had lost their mobile phones in this manner. Although users who own the coveted smartphones used to be the most targeted, nowadays even those who own simple and cheaper phones are attacked and their mobile phones forcibly taken from them. Surprisingly, during these incidents, when perpetrators discover that a user owns a cheap and simple mobile phone, they often punish and beat them for wasting their time. In a related incident, one university student described how she and her friend were attacked by a group of four teenage boys in daylight while on the way to the University of Botswana:

We tried running away from them but they caught up with us, they threatened us with knives and asked us to hand them our mobile phones. Since we were scared, straight away we gave them our phones. I felt disgruntled, especially because the mobile phone that they took from me was the most expensive device I ever owned. (Rati, 22)

As well as the attacks, there are also reports of young people in Botswana covertly stealing mobile phones from other users and reselling them later. Undoubtedly, both the criminal attacks and the stealing of other people's property, including mobile phones, are intolerable behaviors in the *Setswana* lifestyle. However, specific to

Setswana context, the young people who practice these felonious activities are framed as misrepresenting and falsifying the dignity of their families and to some extent that of the society in which they have been raised. For instance, it is widely common that once a young person loses a mobile phone through criminal activities they would express the following expletives to perpetrators: *lo gotsitse batsadi ba lona dilo ke lona* (you take after your parents you poor creatures), *ya abe e le magotswana a kae one a* (which tribe do these petty thieves belong to), and *magotswana a go swa* (you will die you thieves). As the translations of these cuss words illustrate, in many instances, they are intended to blaspheme the perpetrators, their parents, and the tribe from which they come. Expectations are that at hearing these expletives, the perpetrators would feel scorned at realizing that they are intimating reproaches that demean their families, relatives, and tribes and then in response, desist from engaging in criminal activities.

It is highly likely that once a young person in Botswana loses a mobile phone, that is, either it is stolen or damaged, he or she will quickly replace it. Other young people also pointed out that they often replaced their old mobile phones with a new and advanced brand once or twice each year. Conceivably, the routine of acquiring a replacement phone is costly for many young people in Botswana. Nevertheless, the contemplation of staying for a short period of time without a mobile phone forces youth to shift priorities. As Park (2005) notes, users' addiction to mobile phones remains insistent despite the socioeconomic problems that the device renders on them, such as cost of the device and cost of its service during use. Inexorably, the purchase of a replacement mobile phone is often given first priority over other pressing needs, which include buying groceries and supporting other members of their families.

Smart Phones as Symbols of Personal Identity and Modernity

Many young people in Botswana are very enthusiastic about the aesthetic value of the mobile phone. While ownership of the mobile phone is confirmation that personal communication and connectedness with other people is feasible (Green and Haddon 2009; Kamran 2010; Leung and Wei 2000; Lin and Tong 2008), in Botswana, some adolescents also use the mobile phone to depict their personal characters. The participants who owned smartphones explained to me that in addition to using the devices to access the Internet, online mobile services, and for social networking, as noted above, they also use the devices to gratify their sense of identity among their peers. As part of this, smartphone users normally show off their handsets to other people, as they know that their mobile phones are expensive and much coveted by their peers. The participants in the study articulated this during a focus group discussion as illustrated in the following excerpt:

Wil: What types of mobile phones do you own and why particularly those brands?

Dan: I have two phones, one a Nokia 1110 and the other a Blackberry Z10.

Kaone: I own a Blackberry too, but mine is Blackberry Bold.

Sammy: I own two devices, a *Sedilame* and Blackberry

Wil: *Sedilame*, which is that?

Sammy: A basic, cheaper Nokia with torch.

Wil: Is Blackberry a special phone?

Kaone: Yah, it is the in-thing to own a Blackberry. All my friends use it.

Dan: Everybody likes it, wherever I go people covet it. It has just been recently released.

Abby: Mine is HTC One, a friend bought it for me while in China. It is the latest smartphone device. It has a good camera phone, quality sound and powerful processor. I always want people to see it whenever I travel.

Primarily, the goal of adopting and using expensive smartphones in Botswana is to expressly affirm their status as part of a networked society. As for experienced users, it is widely common that whenever an upgrade of a mobile phone handset is released, they are keen to trade off their old devices for the newly released model with a view to gratifying their sense of being up-to-date. Once a young person adopts a smartphone, even if it is a counterfeit or a used device, the next and most common predilection is to strategically use it in public places where their peers can easily recognize them. This is because, through conspicuous use of smartphones by individuals, others will uphold their personal status as contemporary. However, displaying the mobile phone in public influences crime as the device attracts criminals who are always on the lookout for opportunities to steal mobile phones, especially expensive devices.

Inappropriate Uses of Mobile Phones

The two discernible inappropriate uses of the mobile phone among young people in Botswana include obtrusive texting and social networking in household settings, and making and receiving voice calls while attending sacred gatherings such as funerals and family meetings. Recent studies indicate that the mobile phone has afforded young people in various countries the freedom to communicate with their peers through texting (Kamran 2010; Karim et al. 2009; Lin and Tong 2008; Skog 2001). As Broege (2009) notes, this is because compared to other services on mobile phones, it costs less to send and receive text messages. In Botswana, texting is also very common among young people. Through texting, they connect with their families and relatives as a way of receiving social support in the many life challenges that they face. In addition, they frequently exchange text messages and engage on social networks with their peers to communicate birthday wishes and to share experiences in their lives. As part of this, they enrich their friendship relations.

Nonetheless, texting is also an intrusive and addictive activity among young people in Botswana. This is because texting disrupts the propriety of established settings in many ways, such as the household and special gathering when a user is in the company of other people. While texting, young people remain antisocial in household settings. Sometimes they miss important instructions from their parents and relatives since when engaged in texting activities, their minds are absorbed in conversations with other youth in other places. Furthermore, large amounts of texting, especially at night when the costs for using mobile phones (including

texting) are normally low, can deprive young people of sleep. This contributes badly to their performance at college (for students) and in the workplace (for non-students) since they will be sleepy during the day.

The other disturbing practice among young people in Botswana is the use of mobile phones while attending funerals. In *Setswana* custom, whenever there is a funeral, hundreds and sometimes thousands of people are expected to attend, and these usually include family, relatives, acquaintances, neighbors, and a large population from the village where the deceased is to be buried. It is believed that if many people attend a funeral, it is a good sign that the deceased has received a blessed and good sending-off and the family of the deceased is duly comforted. It is also expressed in *Setswana* custom that a large funeral attendance suggests that the deceased was loved and he or she also loved many people (Durham 1999). Consequently, to encourage many people to attend, most funerals would take place during weekends, especially on Saturdays, at least a week after the death occurred. As funerals are considered sacred throughout Botswana, all attendees are expected to exercise proper conduct by remaining quiet and only listening to the person who facilitates the proceedings (Durham and Klaitz 2002). In doing so, attendees are being respectful to the deceased and the deceased's family (Denbow and Thebe 2006; Durham and Klaitz 2002; Sebate 1996). Nevertheless, since the advent of mobile phones, the sacredness of funerals is gradually fading, as some people, including youth, would be seen talking on their mobile phone devices during the proceedings. Observations during the study revealed that due to their dependency on mobile phones, and the duration of funeral sessions, as each normally lasts for approximately 4 hours, many young people were not always able to exercise restraint by waiting until the end of the proceedings. This is because according to some young people who participated in this study, they find it difficult to ignore an incoming call. One of the participants who took part in this study declared:

Whenever I attend funerals or important meetings, I switch my phone to silent and vibrate mode. But I make sure I take all the calls which I consider important. It depends on who the caller is, but sometimes if it's someone I know, I will just cut the call and then call back later. (Lebo, 23)

Although expectations are that young people should switch their mobile phones to silent mode to avoid the loud ringing that would usually disrupt the sanctity of such gatherings, many deliberately chose not to do so, while others pointed out that they often forget. Usually, the youth who use mobile phones at funerals in Botswana are scorned for being discourteous to mourners and also condemned for not practicing the principles of *botho* and *mait seno* (good manners) as expected in the *Setswana* way of life.

Conclusion and Future Directions

This chapter offers a nuanced picture of young people in Botswana and their consumption of mobile phones. Specifically, this chapter has demonstrated that the mobile phone is suitable for use by young people to coordinate aspects of their

daily routines as part of their contemporary lifestyles and to reconstitute their social interactions with family, relatives, and associates as part of the *Setswana* tradition that they have been raised in. Smartphones are useful among youth for bridging the digital divide that has been widely reported in sub-Saharan Africa. Nonetheless, despite its significant uses, the mobile phone has also had implications on the lives of young people in Botswana. This chapter illustrated that there are incidents of inappropriate use and cultural behaviors such as theft of mobile phone handsets, dependency on texting and social networks on the devices, and the inappropriate use of mobile phones in funerals, which have eroded the social norms and cultural principles in the *Setswana* way of life. Some young people in Botswana regard expensive smartphones as symbols of personal identity and modernity, and these factors impact highly on their socioeconomic lives, such that they make it a priority to own a device as they seek to be included within the networked society.

Generally, this chapter demonstrates that in each society, mobile phones have the potential to alter the social norms and cultural principles of youth. In addition, while access to mobile phones continues to increase globally, the interactive relationship between the device and youth differs from one sociocultural context to the other. Largely, these differences are subject to the socioeconomic status and cultural background of youth being studied. Therefore, in focusing on the example of Botswana, this study underscores that researchers studying youth's intersection with mobile phones in developing countries should take into account the specifics of the socioeconomic challenges and traditional lifestyles of youth being studied.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Protecting and Promoting Young People's Social and Emotional Health in Online and Offline Contexts](#)
- ▶ [Rhythms and Flow. Timing and Spacing the Digitally Mediated Everyday](#)

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Abstract

The capacity of video games to engage and challenge players through increasingly complex and demanding stages and the range of cognitive, linguistic, and sociocultural practices generated by games and game play have led to increased interest in the use and study of video games in schools. Views of digital games as “hard fun” or “serious play” have important implications for education, problematizing assumptions about what students can and might be asked to do, about teaching and learning, and about the ways in which curriculum is resourced and organized. To fully capitalize on games’ potential to enrich learning, the nature of play, the kinds of play entailed in playing games of varying genres, the experience of game play in and out of school, and the relationship between them all need to be carefully considered and explored.

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Introduction

The capacity of video games to engage and challenge players through increasingly complex and demanding stages, their success in teaching players how to play, the mix of qualities or affordances that are inherent to the form and its design, and the range of cognitive, linguistic, and sociocultural practices generated by games and game play have led to increased interest in the use of video games in schools to engage students, connect with out-of-school experiences of the digital world, support learning in curriculum areas, and provide opportunities for action, creativity, and agency.

Connections between games, play, and learning have long been recognized in education, with these interconnections particularly valued in early primary years. With the exception of subjects like drama, however, in traditional curriculum and school organization, play-based learning approaches and pedagogies diminish rapidly as students approach the middle and senior years. The advent of video or computer games has sparked interest in the possibilities of linking the qualities and affordances of games and their potential for fostering complex understandings, “hard fun,” and sustained and committed engagement with formal curriculum and pedagogy throughout the school.

Games are played on a wide variety of platforms, on- and off-line, and take a number of forms – mobile phones, tablets, Wiis, consoles, and the like, with “digital games” becoming the superordinate term. Claims made for the ways in which games and game play promote learning range from their capacity to engage and hence motivate players; their capacity to foster collaborative problem solving, cooperation, and the generation of affinity groups; their capacity to inculcate attitudes of resilience and persistence through experimentation, trial and error, and awareness of the interrelatedness of the game as semiotic domain; through to their capacity to present high-level cognitive demands and hence promote deep learning.

Playing games essentially entails interaction between the game, the player, and the machine, with progress depending on action of some kind. Play is intimately bound up with matters of identity and performance. What is meant by play, the kinds of play entailed in playing games of varying genres, relationships between playing games in and out of school, and the kinds of learning involved in formal school and post-school contexts differ considerably and need to be carefully explored. Play is socially shaped and socially situated, with purposes, pleasures, and investment inevitably affected by institutional contexts and agendas.

Games, play, and identity are closely linked. From a very young age, children call on the resources around them, including popular culture from old and new media to fashion play of multiple kinds and to experiment with representations of self and identity. Haas Dyson’s (1997) study of 7–9-year-olds in an urban classroom showed how these children drew on popular culture to try out powerful and agential identities, appropriating strong figures, particularly superheroes, in their writing, relationships, and play. The *Digital Beginnings* research into the use of popular culture, media, and new technologies by UK children up to the age of 6

(Marsh et al. 2005) found young children “are immersed in practices related to popular culture, media and new technologies from birth,” with “popular culture, media and new technologies playing an important, but not overwhelming, role in their leisure activities” (p. 5). Parents, furthermore, were “very positive about the role of media in their children’s social, emotional, linguistic and cognitive development” (p. 5). Playground studies of children’s rhymes, skipping games, and the like, such as those of Opie and Opie (1959) in pre-digital times or, more recently, Willett et al. study of children, media, and playground cultures (Willett et al. 2013), show the interweaving of “references from TV shows, pop songs, films, comics and radio dramas into the language, music and performative repertoires of their play” (p. 3), with an easy incorporation of digital culture and technologies, and the characters and scenarios of computer games into this mix in the twenty-first century (Burn 2013).

Even for very young children, digital culture and digital games provide rich contexts and resources for play, with crossovers between on- and off-line sites, preoccupations, and relationships. Studies by Marsh (2010) and others explore the ways in which children as young as 5–7 years old use virtual worlds and computer games such as *Club Penguin* as opportunities for exploration and play and experimentation with representations of self and identity. Dezuanni et al. (2015) discuss 8- and 9-year-old girls’ *Minecraft* play. Drawing on Butler’s (1990) concepts of performativity and recognition, they trace the ways in which the girls “use spoken language, creative digital production and *Minecraft* play to bring themselves into being and establish social viability within classroom affinity groups” (p. 4) through talk and digital production in the social spaces of the classroom and within the game’s multiplayer online world. In doing so, they also explore the role of affinity groups in “provid[ing] the audience for self representation, digital curatorship, and displays of knowledge and expertise” (p. 19). Studies such as these also bring to prominence the anarchic or wild dimensions of online play, including the need to negotiate the mix of consumer culture and ideologies, “risky” behaviors, contestation, and competitiveness often apparent as children play.

The present state of research into game-based learning shows a mixed picture of the uses of games in that domain and the ways in which, and the degree to which, the appropriation of digital games and technologies contributes to student learning and understanding (Young et al. 2012; Perrotta et al. 2013). In part, this reflects the very different contexts and purposes for game play within and outside schools, and the recognition, or lack of it, of the consequences of the circumstances in which games are played, and attendant agendas and purposes. In addition to the design, genre, and organization of specific games, central issues here include understandings about what constitutes both play and games and the ways these are conceptualized; what counts as “fun” and what forms of fun, games, and play are called upon; connections between fun, engagement, motivation, and learning; and the social nature of play, the capacity of games to generate affinity groups, the role of the teacher, and connections between game play, purposes, and context – that is, recognition of the situated nature of game play.

Play and Learning: Rhetorics of Play

Games, play, and learning are closely interlinked (Vygotsky 1962; 1978/1997; Sutton-Smith 1997). Play is multilayered, with close connections between identity, performance, and play. While play can be defined in a number of ways, it needs always to be “seen as an activity which is complex, multi-faceted and context-dependent” (Marsh 2010, p. 24). The nature of play, the purposes of play, the different forms of play, and the definitions of play vary widely, but play seems central to human experience and the construction of meaning. “Even in its simplest forms,” writes Huizinga,

play is much more than a mere physiological phenomenon or a psychological reflex.... It is a significant function – that is to say, there is some sense to it. In play there is something ‘at play’ which transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to action. All play means something. (Huizinga 1955, p. 446)

Perhaps consistent with the concept itself, the term “play” encompasses a range of meanings and associations so diverse as to be almost contradictory. Play includes both competitive and noncompetitive forms; is undertaken alone or in the company of others; requires adherence to formal rules or relishes the utter absence of rules; is structured and purposeful or may have no observable consequence or outcome at all; is spontaneous or voluntary and/or governed by a prior set of agreements with others; may be physical or internal, fixed or fluid, and deep or superficial; involves imagination, creativity, and make-believe; and may or may not be located within a formal structure of games. Play is pleasurable and may be either/or or both/and serious and light-hearted, far removed from self, and/or closely linked to self and identity. Play is that “third area in which we are ourselves” (Winnicott 1971, in Willett and Robinson 2009) which “children inhabit between their inner and outer realities” (Willett and Robinson 2009, p. 1).

Forms of play have been categorized in various ways, with some forms having particular relevance for young people’s engagement with digital games and for the kinds of pleasures, challenges, and sociality they experience in their leisure time game play, and, consequently, for the hopes and possibilities games are seen to hold out for learning within the formal structures of school. Sutton-Smith (1997) groups activities including play forms and play experiences into nine categories: mind or subjective play, solitary play, playful behaviors, informal social play, vicarious audience play, performance play, celebrations and festivals, contests, and risky or deep play.

Caillois (1958/2001) classifies play into four categories: “agon” (competitive play), “alea” (chance-based play), “mimicry” (simulation or make-believe), and “ilinx” (vertigo or physically based play) (Salen and Zimmerman 2004, p. 311). Play may or may not be connected with games. In their discussion of play as it relates to games and game play, particularly digital games, Salen and Zimmerman define play as “free movement within a more rigid structure.” Distinctions are drawn between “game play,” “ludic activity,” and “being playful” (p. 304). Digital games are described “as systems of experience and pleasure, as systems

of meaning and narrative play; and as systems of simulation and social play . . . [where] the play of a game only occurs as players experience the rules of the game in motion” (p. 302).

Digital games and game play do not exist as stand-alone entities but rather need to be recognized as existing within “a lived culture of gaming” (de Castell and Jenson 2003, p. 651). Game play takes place within the everyday reality of players’ communities, locations, and lives (Stevens et al. 2008). Rhetoric around the “promise” and “potential” of games for education needs to recognize the networked, situated nature of games and game play and the role of context, relationships, purposes, and intention activated through game play.

Just as distinctions between the kinds of activity that constitute play are important in exploring the possibilities of digital games for education, so too it is useful to be aware of the ideological underpinnings that characterize debate and discussion about play. Sutton-Smith (1997) draws attention to the differing theoretical framings and associations underlying claims about the purposes and achievements of play in his work on the rhetorics of play. In this context, the term is used to delineate:

not so much the substance of play or of its science or of its theories, but rather the ways in which the underlying ideological values attributed to these matters are both subsumed by the theorists and presented rhetorically to the rest of us. . . . [T]he rhetorics of play express the way play is placed in context within broader value systems. (p. 8)

The rhetorics Sutton-Smith describes include the rhetoric of play as progress, the rhetoric of play as fate, the rhetoric of play as power, the rhetoric of play as identity, the rhetoric of play as the imaginary, the rhetoric of the self, and the rhetoric of play as frivolous. Such rhetorics are variously activated by advocates of game-based learning, often within the context of larger progressive discourses of pedagogy and schooling, and connected to constructions of children and young people as agential and tech-savvy digital natives. As Burn (2013) wryly notes, however, calling on Sutton-Smith, while educators are quick to embrace pro-social forms – those perceived as contributing to social, emotional, and cognitive development – they have more difficulty with the less tractable elements of play, “phantasmagoria” – the “‘irrational, wild, dark or deep play’ which adult Western culture seeks to constrain, repress and rationalize. . . but which surface in play such as the pretend play scenarios” (p. 122).

Hard Fun and Serious Play

Important concepts and frames of reference for the use of games in school include the notion of hard fun (Papert 2002), serious play (de Castell and Jenson 2003), and of games as highly effective learning environments that embody and exemplify key learning principles (Gee 2003; Newman 2008). Constructing play as hard fun reinstates links between learning, challenge, and satisfaction and is consistent with the ways in which players speak about games: “This kid called [designing

games] fun because it was hard rather than in spite of being hard” (Papert 2002, n.p.). Learning, Gee argues, “is or should be both frustrating and life enhancing. The key is finding ways to make hard things life enhancing so that people keep going and don’t fall back on learning and thinking only what is simple and easy” (Gee. 2003. p. 6).

For Gee (2003), “good” games exemplify just these qualities and embody good learning principles. Education, he argues, can learn from video games. Key principles include the following:

The active, critical environment principle (all aspects of the learning environment [including the ways in which the semiotic domain is designed and presented] are set up to encourage active and critical, not passive learning;

The achievement principle (for learners of all levels of skill there are intrinsic rewards from the beginning, customized to each learner’s level, effort and growing mastery and signaling the learner’s ongoing achievements; and

the regime of competence principle (the learner gets ample opportunity to operate within but at the outer edge of, his or her resources, so that at those points things are felt as challenging but not ‘undoable’. (pp. 208–209)

While education has much to learn from observing the ways in which games and game play embody principles such as these, whether “serious” or “educational” games or the use of commercial games for educational purposes can replicate such qualities is another matter.

De Castell and Jenson (2003) argue for serious play in a rejection of “instrumentalist means-to-ends deployments of games for learning” (p. 659). Rather,

We see play and learning as mutually constitutive and their conjunction therefore as transformative of both. Game play, at its best and most powerful, is engaged seriously, with effort, commitment, and determination; and this, like any serious engagement in learning, affords pleasure, excitement, immersion and playfulness.

In their view, most “educational” uses of games fail to achieve this:

Our working assumption is that students/young people can find intense pleasure in the pursuit of ‘real’ knowledge for ‘real’ purposes, but that existing ‘educational games’ trivialize students’ goals, abilities and forms of engagement, and leave little room for their participation in authentic knowledge-generation. (p. 659)

Approaching play and learning from a different perspective, arguments are made that the nature of play itself materially shapes forms of understanding and knowledge. “Ludic epistemology” (de Castell 2011) explores intersections between knowledge and play and argues that the embodied nature of play and the active role the player takes in designing and making games change not just the way (content) knowledge is perceived and understood but also the nature of that knowledge itself.

Concerns such as those voiced by de Castell and Jenson (2003) are echoed by many game-based learning theorists and practitioners. If the use of games to support learning in education is to achieve its promise, it is essential that the games developed or chosen do provide opportunities for deep and complex learning

and are worth playing and that the context in which they are played and the purposes for which they are played to some extent at least replicate out-of-school experiences where such matters as community, expertise, the presentation of self, and constructions of identity and relationships are important elements of play. The role of the teacher is crucial in creating contexts in which students can learn from games, including opportunities for students to reflect and abstract, and in building links between classroom purposes, the game, and the game play (Egenfelt-Nielsen 2006; Francis 2006; Beavis et al. 2014).

Identity, Performance, Play

How to ensure that the powerful learning and the deep investments of self evident in much leisure time play with commercial games might occur within the confines of the school is notoriously problematic. One frame of reference that has proved generative here is that of (game) play as performance and the notion of performativity (Newman 2008; Chee 2011). Such perspectives foreground the intimate relationship between player and game, players' investment in the game, and the broader social universe within which game play sits, both in and out of school. Newman (2008) argues:

The act of playing a videogame cannot be adequately analyzed or appreciated without a deep understanding of the ways in which this performative practice is enmeshed within and informed by the cultures and communities of games contributing to the collective knowledge of videogames culture. (p. 14)

Chee (2011, 2012) connects this to key principles of learning as inquiry and the notion of *learning as becoming*, in his work on game-based learning and games design. Seeing performance as “constitutive,” as “epistemic” and “critical,” and as “deeply reflexive” and characterized by “self-consciousness,” Chee argues:

Performance entails living, experiencing and acting in the here and now. Through performance, players with human experience as a lived and always dynamic process, and they develop participatory and embodied ways of knowing and being. Experience is made available for contemplation, thereby providing to think, and think differently.... through performance, human actors develop new ways of seeing and understanding the world, and understanding themselves in relation to that world. In short, they develop a part of their identity. The construction of an expansive yet coherent world view, coupled with the agency to act is central to learning that is empowering, and this is what we seek to achieve through our learning design. (2011, p. 109)

He proposes a “Performance, Play, Dialogue” model of games design and game-based learning accordingly. Such links between play, performance, worldviews, and identities provide common ground between the possibilities offered by digital games and game-based learning within schools and out-of-school games leisure time game play and digital culture. Chee's games *Statecraft X* and *Alkemia* powerfully exemplify these principles in practice, addressing citizenship and chemistry curriculum, respectively (Chee 2011, 2012).

Games in the Classroom: The Unruly Nature of Games

For all the cautionary notes outlined above – problematic intersections and assumptions about in- and out-of-school worlds; varying constructions of school subjects, learning, students, and classroom contexts; the recognition of difference; and the still emergent nature of the field – there is nonetheless considerable and ongoing interest in the possibilities of games and game play for education and contemporary schooling.

Bourgonjon et al. (2010) identify six elements within arguments for games as embodying “new educational approaches” and “operational translations of contemporary learning theories” (p. 1145). Games, according to game-based learning proponents “situate learning in meaningful contexts, empower students to become self-regulated; present them with ill-structured problems; integrate several knowledge domains; promote inquiry-based and discovery learning” and “promote a positive attitude towards learning and school... because of their intrinsically motivating character” (p. 1145).

The wildness of games, their undomesticated and unruly nature, has from the outset presented challenges to classroom uses of games, at the same time as being part and parcel of their richness and possibility (Beavis 2013). One of the earliest studies of commercial games in the classroom, the TEEM-BECTA study of computer games in the UK in 2001, explored the use of commercially produced computer games within the framework provided by the British National Curriculum for TEEM (McFarlane et al. 2002; Sandford et al. 2006). The study took place in seven UK primary and secondary schools and utilized a range of commercial, off-the-shelf games in various genres including *Age of Empires II*, *City Trader*, *Sim City*, *The Sims*, and *Championship Manager 00/01*. Key points emerging from the study included the crucial role of the teacher in structuring and framing activities, the value of working with individual elements or sections of the game rather than the game as whole, and the capacities of simulation games to present complex scenarios and promote high levels of collaboration and discussion, with all games having the capacity to develop thinking skills. The research found that there were many valuable aspects to be gained from designing curriculum around these games but that there were considerable logistical difficulties and complexities too. The greatest obstacle to utilizing commercial games in the classroom, the report concluded, was:

the mismatch between the skills and knowledge developed in games, and those recognized explicitly in the school system. Throughout the teacher evaluation reports there are comments following an often long list of highly desirable skill sets developed through playing the game, to the effect that there is no time for these games in school as they do not match curriculum requirements. It seems that the final obstacle to games use in schools is a mismatch between games content and curriculum content, and the lack of opportunity to gain recognition for skill development. This problem is present in primary schools, but is significantly more acute in secondary. (McFarlane et al. 2002, p. 16)

Subsequent studies generally reflect this pattern (Francis 2006; Bourgonjon et al. 2010; Young et al. 2012; Perrotta et al. 2013), some with more optimism

about the possibilities for more closely tailoring games to formal requirements of the curriculum, depending on the theoretical lens brought to bear and on specific games. In the first year of a 3-year study of 10 primary and secondary Australian schools using digital games to promote literacy and learning (Beavis, Dezuanni, O'Mara, Rowan, Prestridge, Zagami and Chee 2011–2014), both teachers and students highly valued the games' capacity to foster core skills and dispositions and learning and metacognitive dimensions given skillful pedagogy from the teacher – problem solving, collaboration, distributed knowledge, risk taking, and the like. Games were also seen to foster engagement and the development of new and traditional literacies. Teachers and students varied in their perceptions of the degree to which games could match closely with classroom parameters and specific curriculum areas (Beavis et al. 2014), but completed and ongoing case studies (e.g., Beavis 2015) of individual teachers, games, and classrooms show a high level of success in aligning digital games with specific curriculum areas.

While popular commercial games continue to be used in the classroom to support learning in curriculum areas (Klopfer et al. 2009) or as part of the study of text, form, and narrative within subjects such as English, drama, or media (e.g., Berger and McDougall 2013; Anderson et al. 2009; Beavis et al. 2012), there is increasing interest in the design and use of purpose-built games – “serious games,” “games for learning,” and the like – to more closely target the parameters of formal curriculum and fit within the institutional constraints of school.

The adoption of instructional design principles and approaches and the commodification of games, in many instances, mean that play takes on particular qualities, with play assumed to take place and harnessed as means to an end. Play continues to be an essential element of game-based learning, in as much as there is no game without play, but the degree to which play within classroom contexts is “playful” varies considerably. The tension between pleasurable immersion in play over an extended period, as characterized by out-of-school play, and the adaption of games and their affordances to serve educational purposes and fit within school timetables, curriculum, and assessment regimes are managed with some difficulty, particularly in the upper levels of the school. While the warrant for the use of games in the classroom is primarily couched in terms of “deep learning” and “engagement,” measures of success tend to focus on outcomes in terms of academic achievement rather than on experience, orientations, understandings, and pleasure. Such qualities are quick to be observed anecdotally but do not lend themselves readily to formal evaluation and are less highly valued within outcomes-driven and centrally mandated curriculum and assessment requirements.

Paradoxically, measures of the “success” of educational games and the use of games in the classroom framed in terms of academic achievement tend to be ambivalent about the degree to which games “improve” academic outcomes and understandings as measured by test performances (Young et al. 2012; Perrotta et al. 2013). In their overview and analysis of over 300 articles dealing with videogames and academic achievement, Young et al. described the evidence for

the value of games to improve learning measured by these parameters as “inconclusive,” with the exception of languages and physical education. Young et al. contrast in-school and out-of-school uses of games. Outside school, games “are often multiplayer, cooperative and competitive; they engage players in several hours of extended play, allow rich ‘hint and cheat’ websites to develop around player affinity groups, and are played from weeks to years.” In studies of classroom usage, however, Young et al. found “most schools trade off extended immersion for curriculum coverage, individual play and short exposures, goals that are not well aligned with engaging videogame play” (p. 80). Such practices and findings seem to reflect misplaced understandings about both learning and what games might achieve, in the context of high-stakes testing. By contrast, “deep understanding takes time, reflection and active engagement, which are strengths of videogames, but active engagement comes at the cost of efficiency and curriculum coverage” (p. 81).

The 2013 FutureLab review of game-based learning (Perrotta et al. 2013) similarly found ambivalence in reported studies about games’ impact on academic performance but more optimistically identified learnings other than, or in addition to, improvement on test scores. The research studies they examined

...consistently found that videogames can impact positively on problem solving skills, broader knowledge acquisition, motivation and engagement. All five studies that specifically focused on problem solving skills found some degree of improvement, and the majority of studies examining the impact of videogames on student motivation and engagement found positive results. (p. ii)

Meta-analyses of relevant studies found that attitudes towards learning were more positive in subjects where interactive games, rather than traditional approaches, had been used. However, “despite promising results, the current literature does not evidence adequately the presumed link between motivation, attitudes to learning and learning outcomes” (p. ii).

Conclusion and Future Directions

Close links between play and learning have long been recognized. Play-based learning has traditionally had an important place in early years pedagogy and curriculum in school. The rapid development and take-up of digital games and game play among young people, coupled with the affordances of games and their capacity to present complex challenges and provide “hard fun,” have led to increasing interest in harnessing the capacities of games and game play in school. Games and game play are socially situated and purposeful, with contexts for play powerfully shaping ways in which games are played, levels of investment, identity, and sociality. Observations and experience of out-of-school games and game play suggest they embody key learning principles and foster powerful literacy and learning orientations and practices. When games are brought into schools, key considerations include the recognition of in-school and out-of-school features contributing to the success of

games and the role of the teacher in providing space for conceptualization and reflection on what has been learnt with or through game play. Games and game play in schools are commonly seen to promote pro-social learning skills and qualities such as risk taking, collaboration, and problem solving but less readily lend themselves to close matches with formal assessment requirements in curriculum areas.

While there is widespread optimism about the possibilities and use of digital games and game play to promote learning in schools, care needs to be taken to recognize that features associated with out-of-school game play may not necessarily be replicated unproblematically in the classroom. The kinds of learning and collaboration games can foster, the insights and understandings prompted by progression through games, and the range of traditional and multimodal literacies and literacy practices entailed in games and game play has much to offer, but does not occur automatically, as transfer and “booster” rhetorics sometimes suggest. Care needs to be taken to avoid the utilitarian abrogation of play to serve formal educational and assessment purposes in ways that ignore difference – difference between in- and out-of-school contexts and purposes for play; differences between games including the ways they are designed, their genres, features, and affordances; difference and student diversity with respect to interest, opportunities, and experience; and the fluid and evanescent nature of play.

For the potential of games to support learning to be fully realized, more research is needed into the ways games are actually used in schools that recognizes the everyday conditions in which most students and teachers find themselves (Selwyn 2011; Erstad and Sefton-Green 2013) but also maps ways in which teachers and students work productively with games and identifies key principles, approaches, and possibilities. The claims made for games and learning through play are many. Studies are needed that in detailed ways recognize and value the diversity of skills and qualities fostered by game play and consider the implications of this for relationships between curriculum and assessment and formal assessment systems. In tandem, research is needed to understand more about the ways in which the use of games sits within or challenges existing constructions of disciplinary knowledge and curriculum and the consequences of this for teachers’ self-concepts and identity. And at the center are students themselves, games, and play. If play is indeed to reenter the curriculum through the medium of games, we need to know more about the ways in which young people play and experience games outside the school and what this means and how it changes, when games are brought in to serve formal educational purposes in the regulated context of the school.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Bodies: Corporeality and Embodiment in Childhood and Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [Performative Pedagogy: Poststructural Theory as a Tool to Engage in Identity Work Within a Youth-Led HIV Prevention Program](#)
- ▶ [Protecting and Promoting Young People’s Social and Emotional Health in Online and Offline Contexts](#)

- ▶ [Serious Play: Young People's Deployment of Culturally Subversive Sign Within Postmodern Capitalism](#)
- ▶ [Thinking About Childhood and Youth](#)
- ▶ [Young People and Mobile Phone Technology in Botswana](#)
- ▶ [Young People's Transitions to Employment: Making Choices, Negotiating Constraints](#)
- ▶ [Youth and Play: Identity, Politics, and Lifestyle](#)
- ▶ [Youth, Consumption, and Creativity on Australia's Gold Coast](#)

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Abstract

This chapter will examine how patterns of consumption and creative practice on the Gold Coast engender social inclusion, citizenship, and participation in a commodified city. Drawing on relevant theory alongside empirical research, this chapter will trace youth's consumption on the Gold Coast, focusing on cultural spaces where community participation and social inclusion are fostered. By highlighting cultural youth spaces in contradistinction with grand narratives of consumption, this chapter aims to shed light on youth cultures that challenge and disrupt everyday culture. In doing so, it aims to profile youth on the Gold Coast as active participants in the city, reinforcing cultural landscapes of youth. Far from being "flawed consumers" as in (Bauman (1998). *Globalization: The Human Consequences*. Cambridge: Polity Press) sense of the term, this chapter concludes with an introduction to a group of young, active citizen-consumers

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who creatively and reflexively negotiate pragmatic responses to “wicked problems” in a site-specific context: Australia’s Gold Coast.

Introduction

Young people consume and produce places. Places act as critical sites for young people’s consumption, and they also function as products of youth’s agency and complicity (see the section on Place in this collection). While globalized technologies appear to be providing youth with escape routes to alternative worlds of consumption, places continue to shape and constrain youth subjectivities. Any discussion of place must therefore be an analysis of the cultural politics of place, since place is constituted through negotiations of past, present, and future places. Young people are, by implication, involved in the cultural politics of place, but they can also be agents of change. Youth interact with and consume places’ cultural offerings, and youth are also shaped by the broader representations of places. At the same time, places propel young artists and cultural producers to creatively respond to oppressive spaces for consumption. This tension between creative capacity and constraining representation is perhaps nowhere more evident than in local economies built on the selling of place.

Tourism economies rely on the reproduction of compelling narratives of place. As places become increasingly commodified destinations, packaged stories are reproduced and promoted through policy and media to local, state, and international markets. Propelled by place competition, cities, towns, and regions adopt homogenous urban branding and place promotion strategies that reinforce popular narratives. Cultural industries then work to reproduce these places by heavily circulating hegemonic representations. Throughout this process, mythological and semi-fictional narratives come to stand as authentic markers of places and the people who associate with them. Spaces for consumption, then, reflect the selling points of places; these selling points correspond to tourists’ needs, rather than catering for the young people who live in places. This self-perpetuating cycle of consumption is difficult to penetrate because those who are invested in the tourism economy heavily guard it. Governments and local businesses understand that they must recreate these narratives in order to continue to attract their target market. Yet many young artists and cultural producers recognize the problems inherent in the reproduction of place in this way, and they actively seek to change this. While young people are in many ways constrained by place, they can also be seen as working between the margins of spaces for consumption with the explicit intention of making cultural change. That is, young artists and cultural producers are complicit in their consumption of place, and yet also agentic in their creation of place.

Consumption, Complicity, and the Cultural Producer

One of the reasons that consumption has developed into such a prolific arena for academic discourse is that it is located right in the forecourt of social change. It is the very expression

of cultural change at the *individual* level. In addition, it is the arena in which socio-economic and cultural change impinges on the *everyday* experience of the individual. (Original emphasis, Miles 1998, p. 151)

If the defining factor of late-modern postindustrial society is a tendency toward individualization (Bauman 2001), where the individual assumes responsibility to construct their “reflexive projects of self” (Giddens 1991), then consumption offers unity (Miles 1998, 2010). As Miles notes, a “postmodern” approach (see Featherstone 1991) “skates over the power relationships that are evident in the construction of identities through consumption” (1998, p. 151). “This new ‘self-culture’ effectively involves the individual making his or her life what she wants it to be as part of a broader lifestyle orientation” (Miles 2010, p. 14).

We [sic] are dominated by our own lives which become our personal projects: such an orientation that shapes the nature of our social interaction and thereby encourages a culture of other-directed homogeneity. (Miles 2010, p. 14)

Following Bauman, Miles notes that the consumer society is in fact part of everyday culture: “(i)n consumer society, ‘normal’ is the ability to consume” (Miles 2014, p. 80).

Wilska argues that in contrast to adults’ traditional desire for material things, “hedonism, visibility, and open-mindedness have . . . been regarded as typical of the consumption of young people” (2003, p. 441). Further, Wilska points out that consumption trends regarding the whole population are moving toward “eternal youthfulness or at least the pursuit of it” (2003, p. 441). Collins and Hitchings describe two popular academic discourses about youth consumption: “the (un) happy hedonist” and the “citizen-consumer” (2012, p. 194). While the former survives through the immediate (anxious) acquisition of market-led novelty (think “retail therapy”) (Wilska 2003), the latter concerns youth who articulate their “willingness to step up to the role of citizen” (Collins and Hitchings 2012, p. 195). The citizen-consumer, then, is a useful descriptive for young people who subscribe to ethical consumption.

Miles discusses Bauman’s notion of the “flawed consumer” as one who cannot participate in the consumer society as a result of poverty, as someone who is “. . . characterised above all by a sense of boredom, a complaint for which the world of the consumer has no patience” (Miles 2014, p. 80). Miles is quick to clarify that poverty in this instance does not merely refer to economic wealth but does also translate to “psychological” and “social” forms of poverty (2014, p. 80). According to Hamilton, self-esteem has also in this sense become commodified: “‘poverty’ means being excluded from whatever passes as ‘normal’ life and not being able to partake in a ‘happy life’” (Miles 2014, p. 80). Miles refers to the 2011 London riots as an example of how young people, as the poor members of consumer society, were not in fact resisting consumer capitalism but were more concerned with how they were “. . . excluded from the opportunities that consumer capitalism provides” (Miles 2014, p. 81). In this way, Miles describes these “flawed protesters” as reproducing the consumer society, constrained by their consumption, rather than actually creating real cultural change (Miles 2014,

p. 81). While this conclusion is appropriate in this case, the notion of the “flawed consumer” is not applicable to all instances of youth activism and resistance. Art and cultural production is one area where young people exert agency by disrupting everyday culture.

Bennett (2010) states that the study of culture is of integral importance to youth studies. Singh discusses the importance of artists in providing an outlet for resistance: “From the ancient Greek comedy *Lysistrata* to the tragic film *Harvey Milk*, art has provided a window to oppression. . . Cultural expressions and representations reflect on and address past and present oppressive practices” (Singh 2010, p. 13). It is argued in the following that young artists and cultural producers, that is, those young people who actively produce and contribute to culture, are fundamental to cultural change on the Gold Coast. Young artists and cultural producers create texts that seek to challenge and disrupt everyday culture, and in doing so, they create their own version of place.

The Commodification of Place

There is a large body of literature emphasizing the importance of local place for young people (Abbott-Chapman and Robertson 2001; Harris and Wyn 2009; Nayak 2003; O’Connor 2005; Pilkington 2002). Harris and Wyn point out that “. . .young people are ‘embedded’ in their residential location” and “. . .young people’s opportunities are still very much shaped by the resources offered by their local environments: families, schools and neighbourhoods” (2009, p. 328). Harris and Wyn (2009) discuss the disjunction between the literature that emphasizes young people’s political apathy and the research that acknowledges young people’s participation in the local. Harris and Wyn (2009) note that in contrast to the political apathy argument, young people are in fact concerned about local problems because they have personal connections to locally embedded issues. In a sense then, young people consume local places, and they are produced through local places. It is important to interrogate spaces of consumption offered to young people in relation to place. But first it is essential to understand the commodification of place.

In his provocative book *Spaces for Consumption*, Miles opens with the question: “is the soul of the contemporary city being sold to the consumerist paymaster and, if so, what does this mean for the long-term sustainability of our cities?” (2010, p. 1) Miles describes “our” cities as “dream worlds,” citing Horkheimer and Adorno (1973) and their interest in city boosterism. “Consumption is significant because it provides a bridge between the communal and the individual, and the city represents the most visible and revealing expression of this process” (Miles 2010, p. 4). Contemporary cities have come to represent certain values; indeed the fetishization of cities has led to the privileging of urban space over rural and regional space.

In his classic essay *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, Simmel describes the psychological implications associated with individual life in the metropolis and

what he terms “blasé culture” (1950[1903]). Simmel acknowledges the economic power of cities: “the metropolis has always been the seat of the money economy” (1950[1903], p. 411). In a similar vein, Miles argues that individuals are now united in their “complicit consumption” (2010). Here, Miles uses the term “complicit consumer” to describe the structural conditions of consumption.

The foundations of the post-industrial society are perhaps best understood as being constructed through a model in which the dreams of the individual are filtrated through the market and in doing so become by default the dreams of both the people whilst playing out those dreams through the spaces of consumption they occupy. (Miles 2010, p. 34)

It is important to interrogate how these dream spaces have come to exist, and, indeed, how they are reproduced.

Recent surges in place competition are propelled by notions of the creative city, which in turn, recreate neoliberal agendas and reaffirm the consumption of the city (see Peck 2005). As Hall rightly states “places are now commodities to be produced and to be consumed” (1997, p. 65). As Bradley, Hall, and Harrison note, “the transformation, enhancement and promotion of urban image have emerged as central planks of the entrepreneurial governance of western cities” (2002, p. 61). “Places are indeed products, whose identities and values must be produced” (Kotler et al. 1993, p. 11). Places are invariably produced through processes of place promotion (e.g. Ashworth and Voogd 1988; Gold and Ward 1994; Hall and Hubbard 1998; Philo and Kearns 1993). Potts, Dedekorkut-Howes, and Bosman note that “there is a blurring between the nature of identity as a construct of experience and branding as a social construct of a city’s image” (2013, p. 11). Leslie points to the root of the cause: “in an era of neoliberalism and heightened inter-urban competition, metropolitan areas are engaged in a frenzied attempt to differentiate themselves, and to sell themselves as centers of culture” (2005, p. 403).

Leeman and Modan argue that the commodification of space is indicative of late modernity. They argue that “material manifestations of language interact with other design elements in the built environment to construct commodified urban places – cities for sale” (2010, p. 183). Leeman and Modan further point out the importance of experiences to the selling of place:

In the symbolic economy cultural symbols play a significant role in the selling of products and services, and entrepreneurs invest in projects that rely on cultural symbols to attract consumers. Further, culture, products and services are bundled together and marketed as “experiences.” (Leeman and Modan 2010, p. 185)

These experiences are by no means devoid of meaning. In fact, they are part of the reproduction of value. In her influential book *World City*, Massey states that “cities are central to neoliberal globalisation” (Massey 2007, p. 8). Massey reminds us that cities are seats of power extending far beyond the geographical boundaries of the city, pointing to consumption of the city as inextricably bound to neoliberalism. Taking a closer look at the local embeddedness of neoliberalism, Brenner and Theodore discuss “actually existing neoliberalism” “as catalysts and expressions of an ongoing creative destruction of political-economic space” (2002, p. 349). Miles warns us here that:

The possibility that consumption may play a role in opening up opportunities in the city, as well as closing them down, has deeply profound implications for how we understand the neoliberal city. (2012, p. 227)

In this way, it is useful to think of the city as both a site for the reproduction of various ideas of neoliberalism and a catalyst for responses to neoliberal ideologies, which constitutes actually embedded neoliberalism. It is suggested here that the idea of the commodified city is a useful hinge for such discussions. Levine et al. explain that cities now often need “a compelling narrative to sell” (2005, p. 401). While the engagement with fabricated narratives of place is both exciting and liberating on a theoretical level, the affective ramifications seem to outweigh the literary celebrations for young people. These narratives play out in people’s everyday lives, as they relate to, interact with, and attach themselves to commodified places in myriad forms. It is useful here to analyze how the commodification of place plays out in young people’s lives in locally embedded contexts.

Playscapes of Consumption

Australia’s Gold Coast is a commodified place, a city built on rapid development and “hyper-neoliberalism” (Bosman and Dredge 2011). The Gold Coast is Australia’s largest non-capital city with half a million people spread out along 57 km of coastline in South East Queensland. To the south lies the border of New South Wales, and to the north lies the Gold Coast’s big sister city, Brisbane, an hour away by car. As Moorhouse notes, the Gold Coast was Australia’s “first city built as a pleasure-dome and, along with Canberra, is Australia’s only conceptual single-purpose city” (2011, p. 29). On the Gold Coast, it is virtually impossible to distinguish between what is sold and what is experienced. Pastel gloss pages of beaches become backdrops to actual events; bodies are plasticized to replicate dolls; life stories are manicured. While people’s experiences are indeed real, they are also imagined. Iconic images of bathing-capped youth splashing in the sea with bikini-clad ladies are etched into the nation’s psyche.

Wise and Breen note that on the Gold Coast “play is big business” (2004, p. 167). The Gold Coast is produced through playful encounters; frivolity, buffoonery, novelty, kitsch, and hanky-panky are all trademarks of the city and its people. Disneyfied shopping malls and “amusement” parks draw the tourist’s gaze, restaurants display indulgent menus, and business masquerades are leisure. Wise and Breen note that this is because the Gold Coast was always designed to be “somewhere that others came to enjoy, and leave” (2004, p. 167). The Gold Coast is a city that does not take itself seriously: it is a city that articulates fun.

In Wise and Breen’s terms, the Gold Coast is “a dehistoricised place” (2004, p. 163), where “spaces for consumption” are preferred over markers of heritage and where “new beginnings” are ideologically imposed in contradistinction to “origins” (see Zukin 2010). This is because the Gold Coast’s mandate has “been to give visitors respite from their own historically located and determined lives . . . its project has been to be outside history” (Wise and Breen 2004, p. 164). For instance, there is little

emphasis on Aboriginal heritage in its current incarnation despite the place having a rich cultural pre-colonial history. A more tangible example of new beginnings is evident in the architectural landscape; old buildings disappear with little community consultation, and skyscrapers routinely replace them. Tanya, a young graphic designer, talks about the impermanence of the city: "The thing that frustrates me most [. . .] is that everything that we have – like, in our lifetimes, that has been iconic on the Gold Coast – keep[s] getting bulldozed" (20 October 2010).

Just as Las Vegas has been described as a "city of literal superficiality" (Bégout 2003, p. 20), so, too, has Australia's Gold Coast. As one young filmmaker, Samuel, notes:

I think what's different about the Gold Coast is that, you know, like 40 years ago, or maybe 50 years ago now, the Gold Coast wasn't anywhere. Like it just wasn't a place you know, and like in 10 years they went oh shit we've got beaches. Fuck, Sydney's got beaches. Oh shit, our beaches are kind of similar. And all of a sudden we were a place. And it was purely focused and developed as a town to bring people into it and to sell them shit. (Sam, 20 October 2011)

Samuel describes the Gold Coast as a place where the primary objective has always been to sell people "shit." He articulates his understanding of the Gold Coast as a scam – this is in line with the Gold Coast's reputation as a breeding ground for con artists and gamblers.

The Gold Coast is and, arguably, always has been a "story city," "a narrative site – a place that causes, invites or impels people to tell stories about and around it" (Moorhouse 2011, p. 28). Moorhouse claims that the Gold Coast is the only city in Australia ". . . that has captured the collective imagination of writers, filmmakers and the Australian oral culture of told jokes and anecdotes. . . ." (2011, p. 28). As Ward and O'Regan note, in recent times the Gold Coast has also become a satellite for the film industry, a "footloose" film location with "fly-in-fly-out" productions to match the transience of the city (2009, p. 220).

In every sense of the word, the Gold Coast is the opposite of "work," which is why the Gold Coast and its people are not taken seriously in national discourses. Labor, drudgery, obligation, routine, and duty are the responsibility of other places. Maintaining its position as the larrikin, the Gold Coast has circumvented responsibility altogether. Other cities know the Gold Coast plays the fool, and consequently they do not expect much of it or its people – other than a "good time." Griffin describes Gold Coast identity as embedded in a game of "discursive invention (or perhaps reinvention)" (Griffin 1998, p. 290). As one might imagine, the reality for many Gold Coast residents is somewhat more mundane and domestic. Regardless, media discourses about youth tell another story.

Youth Cultural Producers as Change Agents

In local, state, and national media, young people are promoted as deviant, and this is driven by larger narratives of the Gold Coast as harboring a deadly underbelly of crime. Hailed as the "Crime Capital of Australia" by national media (Smail 2011),

the Gold Coast's underbelly is embellished in local and international imaginations, smeared with scandal and sleaze. Nationally and regionally, sensationalized media reports depicting glitz, glamor, sleaze, and crime largely contribute to the negative preconceptions of the Gold Coast. Baker, Bennett, and Wise note, "the region's newspapers share a preoccupation with crime reporting, with the regional tabloid, *The Gold Coast Bulletin*, using 'big' crime to portray the city as having a dark underbelly on par with big cities like Melbourne" (Baker et al. 2012, p. 104). Griffin's claim over 15 years ago that "we are witnessing the emergence of a new paradigm of urban planning and symbol-making on the Gold Coast" that might negate "the construction of the Gold Coast as a "bad city"" is yet to materialize (1998, p. 290). Discussing this tension between representation and lived experience, Dean, a drum teacher and drummer in a local band, says:

[...] I always felt like a lot of the Gold Coast's identity came from people that were outside the Gold Coast—like tourism. And like from being in Logan, like everyone would come down in their cars, with like some stupid exhaust, and like, and bloody wreck their tyres all weekend, spewing up on the road, and then that was like, Gold Coast is full of bogans. If you want to go hang out with bogans, go to the Gold Coast. And like, and no one, like no one would ever talk about Burleigh, Palm Beach, Mermaid. They're always talking about Surfers Paradise. (Dean, 20 October 2010)

Here, Dean articulates his own position as a young cultural producer on the Gold Coast. Dean clearly expresses his rejection of the Gold Coast's grand narratives through a kind of belonging to place, a keen desire to passionately resist the Gold Coast's cultural stigma. His comments are also defined by his relation to place as an artist. As Breen notes "(a)rt on the Gold Coast is apprehended as unexpected – not usual – alien to what the city sells about itself. Therefore, reactions to it oscillate between various expressions from disdain to surprise; most are patronising" (Breen 2004, p. 17).

On the Gold Coast, "moral panics" (see Cohen 2002) about youth are shaped significantly by signature local youth events such as "Schoolies." Baker, Bennett, and Wise acknowledge the "stereotype of youth" as inextricably linked to "Schoolies Week," where displays of violence and substance abuse are prevalent among school leavers during their final-year vacation (2012, p. 109). For 2 weeks of each year, graduated students flock to the touristic heart of the Gold Coast, which inevitably morphs into a chemical playground.

In contradistinction to these media discourses, research has shown that Gold Coast youth reject their stereotype. According to Lloyd et al. (2005), Gold Coast youth live structured existences similar in many ways to other Australian youth. Lloyd et al.'s study concluded that "despite the images perpetuated by the media and tourism operators, life on the Gold Coast does not, for young people, live up to its mythical status" (2005, pp. 25–26). It is argued here that far from being complicit consumers of the Gold Coast, many young artists and cultural producers are actively engaged in cultural change.

Young artists and cultural producers on the Gold Coast understand their agentic capacity and their role in shifting perceptions and realities about place.

As young people, they know what it feels like to be marginalized, to be stereotyped, and to be pigeonholed as one thing or another. They know that these representations do not do them justice and do not accurately portray their culture, so they actively work to create more nuanced representations of place that cater for a diversity of needs. Young, proactive citizen-consumers work to recalibrate spaces for consumption that disturb familiar, everyday culture. That is, they work to disrupt everyday culture, to shed light on inequalities and unsustainable activities. While these young people are in some ways delimited by the culture they are implicated in, and they are complicit in their consumption to an extent, they can also be seen as change makers. This is because these young artists and cultural producers seek to test the boundaries of spaces for consumption, to navigate in and around them in nontraditional ways, and necessarily to think outside of them.

Sold Coast

Sold Coast is one example of a creative project that interrogated everyday culture on the Gold Coast. This project emerged from the author's research, and it began as a conversation between artists and co-directors of the local creative precinct, Rabbit + Cocoon, the author, and Griffith University's Griffith Centre for Cultural Research. Griffith's School of Humanities and Queensland College of Art also came on board as sponsors for the first event. The project was heavily supported by local creative businesses, Relative Creative, Thrive, and Digital Cinematix, who all donated significant services and resources. The initial concept was to create a critical conversation about culture that connected the academy and the community. In this way, the aim was to interrogate everyday culture on the Gold Coast.

A committee emerged organically made up of young artists and two directors associated with Rabbit + Cocoon, as well as postgraduate students from Griffith University. The committee self-identified as young cultural activists and consisted of Gold Coast residents with interdisciplinary backgrounds in design, sociology, cultural studies, coastal management, cultural and community engagement, policymaking, filmmaking, and contemporary art. The name Sold Coast was designed to be a celebration of the fact that the Gold Coast sells itself to survive and at the same time, it indicated critical engagement with this bottom line. As Sold Coast's website states:

The Sold Coast Project is about social change. It's about rupturing common ideas of the city and drawing up new frames. It's about disturbing the Gold Coast's myths to unearth the everyday plights of people. It's about taking a good hard look at our city, our lifestyle and our future. (The Sold Coast Project 2013)

Sold Coast's first project took the form of a symposium held on 20 June 2012. The symposium was tailored to a broad audience and brought together artists, cultural producers, academics, policymakers, and community with the following pitch:

This symposium asks the question, what does the Gold Coast look like in fifty years time? In a risk society, where stability is not guaranteed, how can we work together to provide for the future generations of our city? Are there more productive ways that we can collaborate to achieve social, cultural and environmental outcomes for the betterment of our society? (The Sold Coast Project 2013)

The symposium was used as a platform to launch a multilayered discussion about the future of the Gold Coast in the next 50 years. It was received by an audience of over 120 people including 21 speakers, with the aim of elevating the current dialogue to a critical position. The four themes addressed were (1) (post)-tourism, placemaking, spacemaking, urban renewal; (2) cultural borders, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and others – inclusiveness under whose terms; (3) young people’s voices, political participation, and digital belonging; (4) local/global imaginaries, disaster management, risk, adaptation, and mitigation. The committee chose these themes because they represented significant issues that the Gold Coast faces in the next 50 years.

In order to insert the committee as “knowers” into the process, the committee felt it important to open the day by projecting their own creative biographies in 2063 to frame the symposium. Each committee member addressed the symposium with a design fiction, their fictional narrative of what their life might look like in 2063. Through this design fiction, the committee was able to canvas their hopes, dreams, and fears for the Gold Coast – utopic, dystopic, and heterotopic. Some projections were grim, some were hopeful, and all were frighteningly plausible. The full event was broadcast via a local radio station, Rabbit Radio, enabling a wide audience to tune in and participate. Most significantly, a robust Twitter discussion extended beyond the singular event into the community.

Shortly after the first event, Sold Coast was invited by City of Gold Coast to host another event. On July 28, Sold Coast staged a public provocation in response to the City of Gold Coast Draft Culture Strategy 2013–2023. Six provocateurs were invited from diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise to reflect on and interrogate the strategy. Again, over 100 community members, policymakers, and academics attended. From this, extensive media attention followed and further traction was gained via Twitter and in the community. The event opened up new channels of dialogue between artists and cultural producers, academia, council, and the community. At the time of writing, Sold Coast is on hiatus but plans to reemerge in the near future with further action in the community.

The example of Sold Coast demonstrates the agentic capacity of young artists and cultural producers in the creation of place. The Sold Coast committee in this instance cannot be considered “flawed consumers” because their work took place in between spaces for consumption in placing culture at the center of their interrogation. Because their aim was to generate critical conversation about culture, they necessarily created alternative spaces for creative consumption. In this way, they produced alternate narratives, and realities, of place.

Conclusion and Future Directions

This chapter has shown how the commodification of place can act as a regulator of youth consumption and at the same time open up new potentialities for creative consumptions outside the prism of everyday culture. In this way young people are simultaneously liberated and constrained by their consumption of the city, and their cultural identities are shaped by and in turn shape the city. Drawing on empirical research conducted on the Gold Coast as well as the example of Sold Coast, this chapter has argued that homogenous spaces for consumption offered by commodified places may also ignite in some instances courageous and creative responses from young people who reject hegemonic hyper-neoliberal ideologies and do in practice exert agency in the creation of place. Taking heed of Miles' dystopian perspective presented at the beginning of this chapter, the kind of collective action led by young cultural activists such as Sold Coast is particularly important to analyze. For this reason it is critical that youth research continues to engage young artists and cultural producers in relation to the commodification of place. If youth research is to fully grasp the complexities of young people's relation to place, it must encourage research into how the commodification of place impacts young artists and cultural producers, and in turn, how this shapes the culture of places.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Citizenship: Inclusion and Exclusion](#)
- ▶ [Enhancing Citizen Engagement at the Municipal Level: Youth's Perspectives](#)
- ▶ [Participating as Young Citizens in Diverse Communities](#)
- ▶ [Space and Place in Studies of Childhood and Youth](#)
- ▶ [Stay or Go? Reading Identity Through Young People's Lives in Rural Places](#)
- ▶ [Storing Our Lives of Now: The Pluritemporal Memories of Rural Youth Identity and Place](#)
- ▶ [Youth and Play: Identity, Politics, and Lifestyle](#)
- ▶ [Youth, Relationality, and Space: Conceptual Resources for Youth Studies from Critical Human Geography](#)

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Part XI
Spirituality

Douglas Ezzy and Anna Halafoff

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Abstract

This chapter introduces the concepts of religion and spirituality, particularly as these relate to young people. It reviews some of the major changes that are occurring in contemporary society and how these changes are reflected in the types of religions and spiritualities that young people are practicing. The processes of globalization, international migration, and the mass media provide more choice and increase uncertainty. In this context, the chapter examines some case studies to illustrate how some young people are embracing these choices and uncertainty, practicing Witchcraft as a religion and finding spiritual meaning in dance parties such as raves. In contrast, other young people find various forms of fundamentalisms attractive because they offer certainty in

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the face of unsettling and insecure times. Finally we discuss the rise of Pentecostalism in Africa and the issue of religious teaching in secular schools.

Introduction

Religion can be defined as communally shared “set of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things” (Durkheim 1976, p. 47). This definition highlights three important aspects of religion. First, religion is primarily a social activity. Religion is about doing things with others, such as lighting shabbat candles in the Jewish tradition or honoring ancestors in many Indigenous religions. Religion can be done in private, such as saying one’s evening prayers or performing a morning meditation, but even these solitary activities are understood as important because the individual is part of a broader social tradition. The evening prayers take on significance in the light of a church community and Christian practice. The morning meditation might be part of a Buddhist practice developed visiting the temple, through reading books, talking to other people in Internet forums, and occasional participation in weekend meditation retreats.

Second, religion includes both beliefs and practices. Some forms of Protestant Christianity are particularly concerned with whether a person believes or not. They see this as the focus of whether a person is religious or not. However, for many religions belief is a secondary concern (McGuire 2008; Vásquez 2011; Harvey 2013). Actions and practices are more important than beliefs. Do you keep the shabbat? Do you honor the ancestors? Do you attend mass regularly? These are the sorts of questions that Jews, Indigenous peoples, and Catholics are likely to ask. Religious practice is equally, if not more, important than belief.

Third, religion is oriented to the sacred. The sacred refers to those actions and objects that are set apart through religious ritual and taboos (Shilling and Mellor 2011). Profane objects belong to everyday life. Profane objects are ordinary and typically do not have special rules about who or how they can be handled. On the other hand, sacred objects, spaces, individuals, and practices are set apart and have special rules associated with them. This distinction does not always apply to religious practices. Some scholars have argued that for many religions there is no distinction between the sacred and the profane and that all of life is religious (Arnal and McCutcheon 2012).

Some early definitions of religion defined religion in terms of “belief in God.” However, the problem with this definition is that many religions do not include a deity or supreme being in their mythology. Many forms of Buddhism, for example, do not involve belief in a deity. While beliefs are important, scholars are increasingly emphasizing the importance of practices, of what people do, as central to religion (McGuire 2008). Beliefs are often defined by religious leaders and are to be found in authoritative texts. The focus on beliefs takes the focus away from the lived practices of religion, of what people actually do. McGuire (2008) notes that a focus on belief is gendered. For example, this may mean that rituals or blessings in the home or those associated with child-rearing which are important to women may not be considered religious.

Wouter Hanegraaff (1999) distinguishes between religion, a religion, and spirituality. *Religion* for Hanegraaff (1999, p. 147) is defined as: “any symbolic system which influences human action by providing possibilities for ritually maintaining contact between the everyday world and a more general meta-empirical framework of meaning.” In other words, religion is a set of practices and beliefs that provide a system of meaning, Christianity, for example. *A religion* is defined as religion that is institutionalized, which means that it includes a social organization, a church community such as the Quakers. *Spirituality* refers to the “individual manipulation” of religious meaning systems (Hanegraaff 1999, p. 147). Many Christians do not attend church regularly and may combine Christian beliefs and practices with various other religious traditions such as Hindu yoga practices to create their own individualized form of spirituality.

The place of religion in society is changing in the twenty-first century. In many western countries traditional forms of institutionalized religion, such as that found in mainstream churches, are becoming less important. In contrast, spiritualities, such as various New Age practices, are becoming more important. Various forms of fundamentalist and emotionally expressive forms of religion are also growing in significance. This can be understood as a response to the uncertainty and range of choices that characterizes contemporary societies. The concept of “spiritualities” is used to describe the way that people experiment and mix together what the various religious traditions have to offer. Each individual searches the spiritual supermarket (Roof 1999) finding what feels right for them. In contrast, fundamentalist forms of religion resist uncertainty and choice, claiming that they offer the one true way of doing things and the one correct way of understanding the world (Bruce 2008). Fundamentalist forms of religion provide certainty in a time of change when the range of choices can seem overwhelming.

Both fundamentalisms and New Age spirituality can be seen as religious responses to the uncertainties generated by globalization, migration, new information technology, war, economic disruption, and environmental changes of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Some scholars of religion in the twentieth century thought that religion would eventually disappear. This was called the secularization thesis. Scholars assumed that as societies modernized and became more influenced by science and rational thinking, religion would disappear. While it is true that in Western Europe the influence of religion is declining, religion is clearly not disappearing and remains an important part of society (Davie 2001). Around the rest of the world, religious traditions and practices have remained an important part of societies as they have become more industrialized and democratic.

McGuire further points out that the concept of secularization has its beginning in the reformation which slowly began to remove the sacred from the sphere of everyday life, which incidentally is also closely linked with childhood and family life: “our modern image of a sacred-profane dichotomy does not really apply to the sense of sacred time and space in medieval religion (McGuire 2008, p. 31). In medieval times, rather than the sacred being separate from the profane, it arose

“from within profane space and everyday mundane activities.” For example, during childbirth candles that had been blessed in the church might be lit. Blessings were incorporated into everyday acts such as lighting the fire and putting children to bed, taking care of a sick child, and many other tasks associated with parenting of children. In other words, the contemporary separation of “religion” as a part of life separate from work, childhood, economics, and other aspects of life is unusual in the broad sweep of religious practice and history.

Religious mythology and ritual enables us “to live more intensely” within the world (Armstrong 2005, p. 3). Most people who practice religion find it provides them with a sense of their place in the world, gives them self-confidence, and provides a guide for building healthy and supportive relationships with other people and the world around them (Ezzy 2014). Some religions primarily concern themselves with what happens in an afterlife, some offer forms of retreat or escapism, and a very small minority encourage acts that are dangerous to others. However, for the vast majority of people who are religious, they practice their religion because rituals and myths provide ways of making sense of the puzzle of living well in this life.

One of the central themes of contemporary social theory is the idea that life in the twenty-first century has lost its foundations. As Mari Ruti (2006, p. 73) puts it: “there is something about the assaultive fragmenting and numbing quality of life in post-industrial Western societies that devastates human interiority in a manner that leaves us psychically crippled – that ‘cheats’ us of soul.” Ruti is not using “soul” in a religious sense to refer to some otherworldly essence. Rather, she is using it to refer to those aspects of life in this world, and this life, that give people a sense of purpose, meaning, identity, and confidence. One of the main reasons that young people remain interested in religion and spirituality is because they provide a life with soul in the sense that Ruti is using the term “soul.” Religion is not the only way of finding a life with soul; psychoanalytic practice is another, as, for example, Ruti (2006) describes in her book *Reinventing the Soul*. However, for many people religious and spiritual practices remain good ways to live well, to live a life with soul.

Religion remains an important part of the lives of many young people. In the USA, in 2003, religious identification among people aged between 13 and 17 years old was as follows: Protestant 52 %, Catholic 23 %, no religion 16 %, Mormon 2.5 %, and Jewish 1.5 % (Smith and Denton 2005, p. 31). There were a variety of other religious with less than one per cent including: Muslim 0.5 %, Buddhist 0.3 % and Pagan or Wiccan 0.3 %. It is interesting that there were as many Pagans and Wiccans in the USA as there were Buddhists. Of those who identified as religious, more than half (59 %) said that they attend religious services at least a few times a month (Smith and Denton 2005, p. 31). In contrast, in Australia the numbers were different for 13–24 year olds: No religion 48 %, Protestant 25 %, Catholic 21 %, Buddhist 2.4 %, Muslim 1.5 % (Mason et al. 2007, p. 71). There were a variety of other religions with less than 1 % including: Mormons 0.3 % and Pagans 0.3 %. Only 24 % of young people in Australia attend religious services at once a month, or more often.

While there are some differences in what is being counted, it is broadly correct to say that Australia is a much more secular society than the USA. Young people in Australia are much less likely to identify as religious and much less likely to go to religious services. Only about one out of every four Australian young people go to religious services regularly. In contrast, in the USA every second person goes to religious services regularly. In both countries nearly 1 in every 300 young people identifies as a Pagan or Witch. Paganism and Witchcraft are discussed below. They are an example of the new more individualistic form of religion that is increasingly common and popular among western young people.

Spirituality: Raves

Contemporary lives are increasingly “disembedded” (Giddens 1991) from traditional institutions. This applies equally to work, to family, and to religion. Work careers are increasingly fragmented and varied. Families are becoming more diverse, with the nuclear family of a mother, father, and two children becoming just one of a variety of family types including blended families, families with same sex parents, and single-parent families. People’s lives are increasingly disembedded from traditional institutions. Disembedding of people’s lives involves: “The lifting out of social relationships from local contexts and their recombination across indefinite time/space distances” (Giddens 1991, p. 242). People around the globe are more likely to be working in globalized firms, and families are geographically dispersed, as are religious communities. In this social context, meaningful religious experiences are less and less likely to be found in the context of the local church or temple. It is easy to understand why the local church or temple used to be the center of people’s religious experience. Through much of the twentieth century, people’s lives were embedded in their local community. Work, family, and religion were primarily associated with local geographical communities. This is changing, and changes in religious experience are part of these broader changes.

Identities are increasingly reflexively created (Giddens 1991). For much of the twentieth century, a person would be given their identity. There would be little choice about which school they attended, who they would marry, which religion they participated in, or their occupational career. People typically married someone who grew up in the same locality and was from the same religious and ethnic background. They would work in occupations similar to those of their parents. When young people made key life choices, there was typically a very limited range of options from which to choose. For more and more people, life is not like this anymore. Rather, one’s identity has to be created and recreated as young people have to choose between an increasingly wider set of options.

In terms of religious identity and practices, more and more young people are choosing a religion or spirituality that suits them, rather than simply following in the footsteps of their parents. Where religion was previously accepted as part of an unquestioned worldview, young people have to now reflexively think through, and choose, their religion or spirituality, even if it ends up being the same as that of

their parents. Further, the choice of a religion is no longer, and once and for all, a fixed choice, rather it is something that needs to be continually renegotiated over the life course. These changes reflect more general cultural and social processes that are shaping all of society (Giddens 1991).

One person who attended a rave is reported to have said: “After every rave, I walk out having seen my soul and its place in eternity” (Hutson 2000, p. 38). The rave is for them a very important religious experience. Where would they indicate this “religion” on a census form? Reflexive and individualistic forms of religion and spirituality are much harder to categorize in simple census tick boxes. A good example of this issue is that of the “Jedi” census movement. In some countries a very large number of people indicated that “Jedi” was their religion. While some people suggest that the Jedi census movement is mainly motivated by humor, it may be that many people say their religion is “Jedi” on the census as a way of indicating that their religion or spirituality does not fit the traditional categories. “In Australia more than 70,000 people (0.37 %) declared themselves members of the Jedi order in the 2001 census” (AAP 2002). Similarly “In England and Wales 390,127 people (almost 0.8 %) stated their religion as Jedi on their 2001 Census forms, surpassing Sikhism, Judaism, and Buddhism, and making it the fourth largest reported religion in the country” (Office for National Statistics 2003). Unfortunately many government statistics departments have not recognized this movement, with the Australian Bureau of Statistics refusing to count Jedi religion in the 2006 Census and the Irish Central Statistics Office refusing to publish the numbers (Breaking News 2012). While some people who indicate “Jedi” as their religion on census forms may be being humorous, the large number of people involved may indicate just how inadequate the categories provided on the census are for categorizing religious and spiritual experience for many people and particularly young people. Many young people have significant spiritual experiences in a variety of contexts, and the census categories are increasingly less useful as a way of measuring these experiences.

Raves are large dance parties held in warehouses or remote outdoor sites (St John 2012), mostly attended by young people, although people from all ages are present. People dance all night to very loud techno-trance music. Some take various drugs, such as ecstasy, but many do not take any drugs. Participants typically do not drink much alcohol. Participating in these events provides some young people with significant spiritual experiences that some see as their equivalent of religion. In order to understand the spirituality associated with raves, it is necessary to step back and consider the disembedded and reflexive nature of young people’s lives.

As Christian minister, Rev. Garry Deverell (2013) provides a detailed account of his experience of attending a large rave party in Melbourne Australia. He describes the “liturgy” of the event, which included wearing appropriate “vestments” (clothes), and the “liturgy of the word” in which he listened to various “confessions and homilies.” He draws parallels between the dancing at a rave and the dancing of King David described in the Biblical book of Second Samuel. He concludes: “Dancing, I suggest to you tonight, is therefore a potent symbol of the gospel covenant as we experience it in our worship” (Deverell 2013).

In contrast, other commentators such as St John (2012) and Tramacchi (2000) argue that raves and related dance music genres are technologies for self-transformation deployed in the pursuit of spiritual authenticity that is not at all Christian. Key to this spirituality is a sense of the “vibe” that refers to an experience of oneness that ravers encounter during their dancing: “through movement, proximity to and, at times, the touching of others, and (crucially) a positive identification with both the music and the other clubbers in the crowd, those within the clubbing and especially the dancing crowd can slip between consciousness of self and consciousness of being part of something much larger” (Malbon, cited in Siokou 2002, p. 13). While there are various religious-like beliefs linked to dancing at raves, it is the emotional aspects that are central: “such an experience is primarily kinesthetic, intercorporeal and social” (St John 2012, p. 74).

Some commentators think that raves are an attempt by young people to avoid and escape from the pressures of contemporary life (Reynolds 1997). McRobbie (1993) suggests, for example, that “It is as though young ravers simply cannot bear the burden of the responsibility they are being expected to carry” (McRobbie 1993, p. 419). The pressure to plan and negotiate the huge range of choices and respond to the increasingly risky and threatening experience of contemporary life is overwhelming. Reynolds (1997, p. 108) suggests that “Most of the ‘mystical’ implications read into rave culture, by the likes of Fraser Clark or Spiral Tribe, are simply elaborate rationalizations/spiritualizations of ‘getting off your face.’”

The difference between these two views of raves is captured in the exchange between “krispy” and “Chriss” on a raver’s forum:

Krispy wrote:

Spirituality has fuck all to do with the rave scene. It’s just people getting off their heads, and thinking they’re having a spiritual experience . . .

Chriss replies:

If you can make it to a rave scene where the party is about plur not money, then you might notice that rave is sort of our culture’s way of dealing with religion. No longer do we need some higher force to feel a belonging to, we have each other to share our beliefs (plur and the vibe), and to connect to on a spiritual level :). Whether the raver kidz take e or go straight, they can still experience the vibe together . . .

peace, chriss (Ware 1996)

PLUR is an abbreviation for: P(eace), L(ove), U(nity), and R(espect) (Tramacchi 2000) that was developed as an early creed-like set of ideas and practices that ravers subscribed to.

One of the central tensions in the context of these parties is the effects of commercialization (St John 2012). A focus on making money is often associated with different patterns of drug use, particularly a predominance of speed and related substances, which are often associated with greater levels of aggression and violence.

An organized movement in which regular ritual performances of raves or doofs are associated with a doctrine of PLUR and the pursuit of the vibe begins to take on distinctly religious characteristics. This is more than an emotional experience of joy and beauty, which of itself is insufficient to create a spirituality.

However, the rave is not a religion that fits the categories of traditional religion. This is partly because emotional experiences and the practice of dancing are primary. Beliefs and doctrine are secondary. The fact that they are intermittent, somewhat dispersed, and with no firm membership boundaries also makes it problematic to categorize. How many times does a person have to attend a rave, or what do they need to believe in to qualify for “raving” to count as their religion and spirituality? The question almost doesn’t make sense. The religious and spiritual experiences of young people do not fit the older categories. They are much more individualistic, constantly negotiated, and reflexively interpreted.

Whether a person experiences a rave as a spiritual event or as a moment of hedonistic escapism is a product of the social construction of the event. Many people do go to these events with the primary aim of escapism and the hedonistic indulging in pleasure. These people may be unlikely to have a spiritual experience while at a rave. On the other hand, many people attend these events with friends who talk about the rave as a spiritual experience. They adhere to the doctrine of PLUR, or something similar. In this context, it may be more likely that they will have a spiritual experience. Garry Deverell (2013) interprets his spiritual experience at a rave within the Christian tradition. Chriss interprets it within the doctrine of PLUR. In both contexts participating in the event takes on a spiritual significance. Most ravers are extremely eclectic in the religious traditions that they experiment with. However, this is just what you would expect in a detraditionalized society.

Here’s Garry Deverell’s conclusion:

By about 3 am I was running out of puff . . . By four, I was completely whacked and ready to leave. So I said my farewells and I did so, while my new friends continued their ecstasy-enhanced worship. As I left the rhythms behind and set out on the long walk back to Clifton Hill, the chill morning air brought me back to myself. The sense of being intoxicated subsided. And I found myself asking a question, of myself or God, I do not know. Was this Dance I’d encountered just an escape from the pain of life, an escape into the drug-assisted nothingness of an egoless communal; or was it, rather, the arrival of a more divine Self, a Self which puts to death, for a moment, the ego’s self-obsession, so that we are enabled, if only for a moment, to catch a glimpse of what Love might make of us? (Deverell 2013)

Fundamentalism

Americans, including American young people, are “becoming increasingly divided along a conservative-to-liberal spectrum” (Wuthnow 2010, p. 160). This division is both political and religious. Wuthnow (2010, p. 160) analyzes the results of two surveys, demonstrating that “more young Americans identified themselves as *very conservative* or as *very liberal* in 1999 than had done so in 1984.” This polarization is associated with the growth of both individualistic forms of spirituality such as raving and Witchcraft and fundamentalist forms of religious practice and belief, such as fundamentalist Christianity. More young people are experimenting with alternative forms of spirituality, and, at the same time, more young people are also

joining fundamentalist and Pentecostal forms of religion. The traditional forms of religion in the middle ground are in decline.

The term fundamentalism originally developed in the early 1900s when a series of pamphlets were published titled “The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth” (Bruce 2008). These pamphlets were written by leading evangelical Christians in response to the perceived threats of liberal ideas deriving from the influence of Charles Darwin’s evolutionary theory and liberal theology in Europe. However, more recently the term has been used in new ways. If it originally referred to a form of theology or a focus on scripture, it has more recently been “applied to extreme forms of nationalism, certain socioreligious (especially Islamist) movements and other forms of extremist ideological expression” (Nagata 2001, p. 481). This section will focus on religious fundamentalism and its significance for young people.

Religious fundamentalism is a distinctly modern form of religion. It arises largely in response to social changes caused by modernity (Bruce 2008). Fundamentalists are typically focused on changing society in the present, and in responding to contemporary social issues, such as the growing acceptance of homosexuality, or changing attitudes toward sex more generally. Hoover and Kaneva (2009) argue that contemporary fundamentalisms are integrally related to the rise of the mass media. For example, “Both Christian Fundamentalism in the USA and the Islamic ‘fundamentalism’ behind the Iranian revolution used modern media of communication to great effect” (Hoover and Kaneva 2009, p. 3).

Fundamentalisms take many forms. Some are consistent with many traditional values. Other forms of fundamentalist may be more challenging to traditional values. For example, in the fundamentalist Church of the Latter Day Saints, also known as the Mormons, some still seek to practice polygamy. Fundamentalist Mormons who practice polygamy see polygamy as what is required and expected of true believers. However, the practice of polygamy creates a problem for young males, because a polygamous community will have many young men who are unable to find marriage partners. These “surplus” young males are often excommunicated from the community, while young women are rarely excommunicated: “Males who cannot gain favored stewardships and wives either agree to work for the alpha males as ‘servants on Mt Zion’ or they must be disenfranchised through excommunication” (Bennion 2011, p. 103).

Flory and Miller (2008) describe the more “mainstream” religious fundamentalist movement in the USA as characterized by resisting: “By Resisters we refer to those individuals and groups that focus on the recovery of ‘reason’ and are trying to *resist*, or roll back the clock on, postmodern culture, and who want to re-establish the place of the written text and reason as the dominant source for Post-Boomer religious belief and practices” (Flory and Miller 2008, p. 97). Three things characterize “resister” religious cultures. First, they emphasize the rational and cognitive aspects of Christian belief. Second, they oppose the choice and individualism that characterize late modern, or postmodern, culture. Third, they have a broader political agenda in which they seek to return Christianity to its central place in shaping mainstream culture and morality.

At the core of religious fundamentalism is a desire to resist and avoid the uncertainty and choice of late modern or postmodern times, brought on by globalization, immigration, and other social changes. Describing the pastor of the Fundamentalist Christian School in the USA that he attended as a researcher for a year and a half, Peshkin (1988, p. 10) observes: "There is little that is gray in Pastor Muller's outlook: uncertainty does not plague him. The true believer's sharp, dichotomous distinctions are to his task and in his manner." Fundamentalists in the USA resist the introduction of sex education, want evolutionary biology discussed as a theory equal to creationism, and defend the need for time for prayer in schools. Peshkin sees the fundamentalist push for increasing control of young people's education as part of a three pronged strategy, alongside religious and political campaigns.

At the Christian fundamentalist school he studied, Peshkin found that when asked how they thought the school differed from public schools, the students "immediately think of the strict dress code and the standards of conduct embodied in their pledge" (Peshkin 1988, p. 114). They have to be prompted to recall the religious content of their curriculum because "references to God and the Bible are so commonplace that they do not stand out in the students' minds" (Peshkin 1988, p. 114). For example, in English, the students study the Christian Bible to learn about English. Peshkin observes that many of the students at the fundamentalist school are "encapsulated" in social networks that are consistent with the doctrine and practice endorsed by the school. In this way the students are protected from the diversity and choice that are increasingly present in their worlds. Although most of the students are aware of that, what they consider to be "the truth" is not shared or grasped by many other people in the world (Peshkin 1988). Interestingly, in the USA, young people with fundamentalist beliefs and attachment to conservative Protestant religion tend to have worse educational outcomes than other students (Darnell and Sherkat 1997).

Witchcraft

Earlier in the chapter, it was noted that in both the USA and Australia, 0.3 % of young people describe their religion as Paganism or Witchcraft. When young people become Witches or Pagans, they are typically engaging in the type of individualistic religious practices described as "spiritual." Many Wiccans and Pagans do not call themselves religious, preferring to describe what they do as spirituality (Berger and Ezzy 2007). Most commonly a young person watches a television show such as *Buffy* or *Charmed*, or stumbles on Witchcraft while searching on the Internet. They then buy books from their local bookstore, where books on Witchcraft are typically freely available in most western countries. They might join an Internet forum where Witchcraft is discussed and then decide to perform some rituals on their own that they have learned from books or discovered on the Internet. Most young Witches and Pagans come to their religion on their own and practice on their own (Berger and Ezzy 2007). The religion is eclectic and inclusive, emphasizing choice and individual authenticity.

Pagan is a general umbrella term, similar to Christian. Witchcraft is a specific type of Paganism, just as Catholicism is a specific type of Christianity. Other forms of contemporary Paganisms include Druidry, Goddess Spirituality, and Heathenry (Harvey 1997). Pagans tend to celebrate this life as sacred and engage in rituals that honor the earth and the changing seasons. For example, some of the main festivals celebrated by many Pagans occur on the solstices (the shortest and longest days of the year) and the equinoxes (where day and night are equal in length). Pagans also typically treat men and women equally. They worship both Gods and Goddesses, drawing on Pagan mythologies such as those of ancient Greece, Egypt, and Ireland. These characteristics of Paganism link to environmentalism and feminism and make it attractive to many young people who are dissatisfied with the patriarchal and otherworldly focus on many traditional religions (Berger and Ezzy 2007).

Witchcraft and other Paganisms are also attractive to some because they provide rituals that help young people make sense of some of the challenges they experience. Many young Witches cast spells to improve their self-esteem and to help them cope with difficult life transitions such as leaving home, relationship breakups, and illness (Berger and Ezzy 2007). In this sense Witchcraft encourages the sort of reflexive engagement with life that Giddens (1991) describes as characteristic of late modernity. Witches do not resist the changes and uncertainty of late modern times. Rather, the spirituality of Witchcraft provides resources for engaging constructively with change and uncertainty.

Kathleen McPhillips (2003) describes a feminist Witchcraft group in Australia in which a group of women had been meeting to celebrate the changing of the seasons and to explore and better understand the spirituality of being women. There were dissatisfied with the male focus of the traditional churches of which they had been a part. In Witchcraft they found a religious tradition that affirmed them as women and helped them find a life with soul: “Not only have images and notions of a feminine divine – often imagined in the form of Goddess – allowed our spirits and souls to flourish, many of our rituals take place in our gardens, or close by in the bush” (McPhillips 2003, p. 77).

McPhillips describes in detail a first menstruation, or “first moon,” ritual the women devised for one of their daughters. The aim was to celebrate menstruation, to escape, or at least to provide alternatives, to the taboo and shame that many women feel associated with menstruation: “The moon ritual aimed to provide a means by which women’s bodies could be encountered as holy and sacred” (McPhillips 2003, p. 81). The ritual was deeply significant for both the women and for the young girl who participated in it.

Witchcraft is just one of a variety of religious practices and spiritualities which are popular among some young people. Religion has typically been associated with activities such as prayers to Durga or Jesus at a Hindu temple or Christian church, and these remain important for many young people. However, where traditional churches remain important for young Christians, they are more likely to take on a fundamentalist or Pentecostal character.

Religion in Western Schools

Western societies such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK, and the USA have become increasingly religiously diverse in recent decades, mainly as a consequence of globalization and immigration. While these countries are similar, each has developed different approaches to providing education about religions and beliefs in schools, largely influenced by the relationship between religion and state in each country. Each nation has also encountered significant obstacles in adjusting to challenges and opportunities presented by religious diversity in its education system and there continue to be significant regional differences within each nation as to how best to cater to the changing nature of their classrooms and communities. The Australia case is provided as a detailed example of the sorts of issues that are raised.

While Australia was a largely Christian nation in the 1950s, it was on the edge of significant cultural and religious transformation. Diverse religious groups, including Baha'is, Buddhists, and Sikhs, were permitted to deliver religious instruction programs in the Australian state of Victoria's government schools, alongside Christian and Jewish providers, in the late 1990s in response to increasing religious diversity. The 2006 Education and Training Reform Act distinguished "special religious instruction" from "general religious education" and finally included the provision for teaching general religious education within the core curriculum by qualified teachers. However, to this date there has been no allocation of financial resources by the Victorian State Government to provide general religious education curricula, or to train teachers to deliver general religious education programs, other than in years 11 and 12. The 2006 Act defined special religious instruction as "[i]nstruction provided by churches and other religious groups and based on distinctive religious tenets and beliefs" and general religious education as "[e]ducation about major forms of religious thought and expression characteristic of Australian society and other societies in the world" and stated that, except for provision of special religious instruction, "education in Government schools must be secular and not promote any particular religious practice, denomination or sect" (State Government of Victoria 2006, p. 26).

Scholars have raised concerns that the exclusive nature of Victoria's special religious instruction programs, coupled with an emphasis on instruction into a particular religious tradition, is problematic in an increasingly religiously diverse society (Bouma and Halafoff 2009, 2011). These scholars argue that exclusive and divisive discourses, promoting Christian values over and above the values of other faith traditions, can undermine processes of social inclusion as they may lead young people from minority faith communities to feel alienated from mainstream society. These discourses can also potentially legitimize racial and religious vilification in host communities, as was disturbingly witnessed during the 2005 riots at Cronulla beach in Sydney (Halafoff 2006). Conversely, counterterrorism experts have argued that improving understanding about diverse religions in schools and affirming Australia as a multifaith, rather than an exclusively Judeo-Christian, society can counter prejudices and assist in creating an environment where young people with diverse religious backgrounds feel welcome and are therefore less likely to feel excluded from mainstream society (Halafoff and Wright-Neville 2009, pp. 924–927).

A number of recent international and Australian studies have also acknowledged the positive role that religions and beliefs education can play in promoting social inclusion and countering extremism and recommended that religions and beliefs education to be included in the curriculum from the first years of schooling (Erebus 2006; OSCE 2007; Lentini et al. 2009). Indeed, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights published the Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools, in 2007 (OSCE 2007). These guidelines emphasize the importance of young people learning about religious diversity and the value of different religious traditions in pluralistic societies. However, many countries around the world, including Australia, are yet to implement these guidelines in their educational curricula.

These mounting issues, and a growing awareness of international best practice models of religions and beliefs education, emerging from the UK, Europe, and Canada, have led to several calls to reform special religious instruction and to introduce religions and beliefs education programs in Australia. Optimistically, religions and beliefs education can be taught within the new national curriculum in learning areas of History and Civics and Citizenship and in general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities such as intercultural understanding and ethical behavior to increase awareness of diverse religious and nonreligious worldviews and to provide a critical education about the role of religion in society (Halafoff 2012). However, the contentious issue of special religious instruction in government schools remains to be adequately addressed, despite increasing pressure from academics, parents, teachers, and religious and nonreligious community leaders.

Pentecostal Youth in Africa

Despite the attractions of fundamentalist and Pentecostal Christianity in the west, Christianity is still in decline in "the west." However, Christianity is growing, as is Islam, in many other countries around the world. This is particularly the case for Pentecostal forms of Christianity which are growing rapidly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Some estimates suggest that there are 500 million Pentecostals worldwide (Anderson 2004). Anderson observes (2004, p. 281) that "Taken as a whole, Pentecostalism was the fastest growing section of Christianity in the twentieth century and one of the most remarkable occurrences in church history." The case of African Pentecostalism is briefly discussed to illustrate this trend.

Two of the most striking issues confronting young people in Africa are the epidemic of HIV/AIDS and the traumas and dislocation caused by war, poverty, and food shortages. Sommers (2003) describes how African Pentecostalism is growing in Dar es Salaam in Tanzania because the churches there provide dislocated urban youth a whole new life: "in addition to the spiritual benefits, joining a Pentecostal congregation can give a young person a generally supportive community and opportunities for gaining access to employment training and work networks involving successful Pentecostal businesspeople" (Sommers 2003, p. 37).

Although the regime of Pentecostal practices can be very strict, the rewards of participating in the urban Pentecostal churches include being able to take money and gifts back to refugee camps or the rural places of their upbringing. In this social context, it is not surprising that Pentecostalism is growing.

In contrast, Parsitau (2009) describes the challenges facing young members of the Deliverance Church in Kenya. The church's response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic is to require abstinence from sex outside of marriage and HIV testing prior to marriage. These injunctions are often not followed by young people, and as a consequence, the church's response does not adequately address the complex issues of sexuality and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. "Such teachings confine HIV/AIDS to issues of sex, obscure the complexity of sexuality, and ignore social, economic, and political situations that fuel the spread of the virus" (Parsitau 2009, p. 45). While the Pentecostal church in Africa is having many positive effects through helping young people to find employment and supportive communities, the attitudes to sexual practices, and condom use in particular, are problematic in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Conclusions and Future Directions

Religion and spirituality remain an important part of the lives of many young people. While fewer young people in Australia and Europe regularly attend religious services, other alternative forms of spirituality such as raves and Paganism are growing. Many young people in the USA, Africa, Asia, and Latin America continue to regularly attend religious services. Pentecostal Christianity has grown in popularity, in these countries. Religion remains an important part of many young people's lives because religious practices and beliefs continue to offer constructive ways of responding to the challenge of living well in this life. Researchers are increasingly taking account of this revival in the importance of religion as its significance is appreciated.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Belief, Not Religion: Youth Negotiations of Religious Identity in Canada](#)
- ▶ [Koorlankga wer wiern: Indigenous Young People and Spirituality](#)
- ▶ [Young People and Religion and Spirituality in Europe: A Complex Picture](#)
- ▶ [Youth and Religion in East and Southeast Asia](#)

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Belief, Not Religion: Youth Negotiations of Religious Identity in Canada

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Pamela Dickey Young and Heather Shipley

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Abstract

The role of religious beliefs and practices among youth has been an increasing area of research in the last decade. Youth is generally seen as a time of exploring religious identity and beginning to make one's own decisions in relation to religious practices. Further, some issues specific to youth and religion arise such as questions about whether youth have sufficient maturity to make medical decisions for religious reasons, or how religion is or is not integrated into schooling. This chapter will explore some of the recent trends regarding North American youth religion, providing a picture of the state of the field as well as complicating perceptions of youth religion by including data from the Religion, Gender and Sexuality Among Youth in Canada project.

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As individuals appropriate and construct their own religiosities, youth's reflections on varied forms of religion become astonishing in their breadth. Religion is not singular or monolithic, and yet public debate and representation often essentialize religious identities. Scholars have also become increasingly interested in the religiosity of young people and the ways in which young people negotiate their religious identities in relation to media portrayals and education debates. This scholarly interest has been mirrored by interest in the development of policies related to religion, gender, sexuality, and youth in Canada. This chapter will integrate youth voices regarding the negotiation of their religious identities and will reference these identity reflections in relation to representation of religious interests regarding the sex education and controversy witnessed in Ontario.

Introduction

The role of religious beliefs and practices among youth has been an increasing area of research in the last decade. Youth is generally seen as a time of exploring religious identity and beginning to make one's own decisions in relation to religious practices. Further, some issues specific to youth and religion arise such as questions about whether youth have sufficient maturity to make medical decisions for religious reasons, or how religion is or is not integrated into schooling. This chapter will explore some of the recent trends regarding North American youth religion, providing a brief picture of the state of the field as well as nuancing perceptions of youth religion by including data from the Religion, Gender and Sexuality Among Youth in Canada (RGSY) project.

Religion is not singular or monolithic, and yet public debate and representation often essentialize religious identities. Youth religion is every bit as varied and complex as adult religion, but sometimes youth appropriate religion in ways different from their adult counterparts. Scholars have also become increasingly interested in the religiosity of young people and the ways in which young people negotiate their religious identities in relation to media portrayals and education debates. This scholarly interest has been mirrored by interest in the development of policies related to religion and youth in Canada and, such policy interests also often include gender and sexuality as well because youth is a time of developing sexual and gender identity. This chapter will highlight youth voices regarding the negotiation of their religious identities and will reference these identity reflections in relation to the representation of religious interests regarding the sex education curriculum and controversy witnessed (and still debated) in Ontario.

This chapter will present a brief overview of some of the recent studies that have been done on youth and religion in North America, including a focus on recent research conducted from the Religion, Gender and Sexuality Among Youth in Canada project. The ongoing Canadian project demonstrates what has been learned about youth religiosity, in particular around religious identity negotiation, translating religious teachings into values and practices and understanding what

religion means to the survey respondents. By way of illustration, the chapter will incorporate an analysis of a recent debate in Ontario regarding a proposed sex education curriculum, where religious identity and assumptions about the role of religion in “policing” youth and youth sexuality were narrowly constructed and repeatedly referred to within the media coverage of the debate. The RGSY data directly challenge the restrictive assumptions that are at play in these public debates regarding religious identity and youth.

Religion and Youth: An Overview

One of the issues in the study of religion and youth concerns the ages of those who are being studied. Teenage/high school religiosity is quite different from the religion/spirituality of those in the 18–25-year age range. Using data on 12–18-year-olds from the National Survey of Youth and Religion (in the United States), Christian Smith and Denton (2005) discovered that most teenagers follow the religiosity of their parents and practice that religion in a way that reflects their parents’ practices. They are not drawn to the idea of being “spiritual but not religious” (260). Parents are the prime influence on teenage religiousness. Further, these teenagers had not really concerned themselves with constructing their own religious identities. The work of Mark Regnerus (2007) also confirms that American adolescents are not really religious experimenters. Regnerus found that although most teenagers take on the religion of their parents, they do not, generally speaking, really have strong feelings about religion.

In contrast, when Cherry et al. (2001) studied religion on four American university campuses, students were much more likely to describe themselves as “spiritual but not religious” and to be much more critical of organized religion, even while many continued to participate in organized religious activities. These students often viewed themselves as on a quest for a spirituality appropriate to themselves and did not simply accept that religion was something given to them. Rather, their religiosity or spirituality was composite and self-assembled, not monolithic and singular, what Cherry et al. call “bricolating” (276). Further, the students in this study saw their spirituality/religiosity strongly linked to acts of service in the world. In general, the students found themselves free to be religious or not, generally as a matter of personal choice, although heavily influenced by their own backgrounds. And they also understood that their way of being religious was not the only possible religious path.

Likewise, Donna Freitas (2008) discovered that, with the exception of the students she interviewed from evangelical Christian colleges, students much more strongly identified with the label “spiritual” than with the label “religious.” She found that while their sense of what “spiritual” meant was often vague and not fully developed, students were searching for meaning and a sense of relating to something beyond themselves, sometimes seen as divine. Religion, especially organized religion, was much less a factor in directing the lives and identities of university students than Freitas imagined when she began her study.

In nonreligiously affiliated universities “[t]he dominant feelings toward organized religion were anger and apathy” (Freitas 2008, 36).

Peter Beyer’s research (Beyer and Ramji 2013) research has found that the ways in which Canadian-raised children from post-1970s immigrant families experience and understand their religious identities are part of a changing demographic of religious affiliation across Canada. Beyer’s research demonstrates that almost all second-generation young adults take personal responsibility for their religion and express a desire to understand the reasons for their beliefs and practices; they are engaged in the process of being religious. Youth demonstrate personal choice and expression in adapting their parents’ religious teachings and practices within Canadian society and reflect on their experiences as second-generation immigrants and Canadians within a multicultural society.

Religion, Gender, and Sexuality Among Youth in Canada (RGSY)

This section will present results from the Religion, Gender and Sexuality Among Youth in Canada (RGSY), an ongoing research project consisting of three parts. The first is a Web-based survey open to all youth between the ages of 18–25 living in Canada. This survey went live on SurveyMonkey in July 2012 and closed July 2013. In the fall of 2013, interviews began with a selection of the survey respondents and a still smaller selection was asked to complete video diaries.

The survey closed with over 500 responses in total, the remainder of this chapter will focus on the results from the 484 English language responses.

This project was inspired by Andrew Kam-Tuck Yip et al.’s UK project, *Religion, Youth and Sexuality: A Multi-Faith Exploration* (2009–2011) which was funded by the *Religion and Society Programme* (2007–2013). The Canadian project was developed in collaboration with the UK team, stemming from a shared interest in conducting a unique survey of religion, Religion, Gender and Sexuality Among Youth. The goals of the RGSY project include developing a framework for connecting everyday religion and everyday sexuality, through an exploration of the intersections of lived religion in the experiences of youth in Canada. The project works toward fleshing out the categories of religion and sexuality, linking them with youth identity and practices, and builds on scholarship such as that done by Meredith McGuire (2008), Jeffrey Weeks (2011), Janet Jakobsen, and Ann Pellegrini (2003), among others.

The RGSY project has four primary aims:

- To explore the constructions and management strategies undertaken by young adults (aged 18–25) concerning their religious and sexual identities, values, and choices
- To examine the significant social, cultural, and political factors that inform the abovementioned processes
- To study how these young adults manage their religious, sexual, and gender identities

- To generate rich qualitative and quantitative data that will contribute new knowledge to academic and policy debates on religion, youth, sexuality, and gender

Because the Canadian and UK context differs, there were some modifications to the targeted demographic for the Canadian research. Whereas the *Religion, Youth and Sexuality* study was aimed at youth from six specific religious groups (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism), the RGSY project is aimed more broadly at the whole youth population of Canada. This includes youth who might not consider themselves religious, but who wanted to express their thoughts and experiences on the intersections of religion, gender, and sexuality.

Youth Religious Identification in RGSY

Survey respondents define themselves religiously as follows:

- Buddhism 1.9 % ($n = 8$)
- Christianity 61.2 % ($n = 252$)
- Hinduism 1 % ($n = 4$)
- Islam 4.4 % ($n = 18$)
- Judaism 3.4 % ($n = 14$)
- Nonreligious 20.1 % ($n = 83$)
- Sikhism 0.2 % ($n = 1$)
- Spiritual but not religious 14.1 % ($n = 58$)
- Others 9.2 % (includes theist, agnostic, Wiccan, a combination of religions, etc.) ($n = 38$)
- (41.5 % state they are involved in their religious community)

Christianity is the clearly chosen majority among youth in this survey; however the increasing “others” categories (spiritual but not religious, nonreligious, and others) combine to create the second largest grouping of related religious identification (the three together total 43.4 %). Respondents to the pilot survey indicated that the survey did not include enough nuance in the religion categories. Many of those respondents commented that they did not identify with an organized religious group, hence the addition of “nonreligious” and “spiritual but not religious” as categories to the final survey.

65.6 % of survey respondents identify as somewhat to very liberal, while 16.5 % identify as being somewhat to very conservative (17.8 % identify as in the middle of the scale). This is to be expected, given the topic of the survey and the self-chosen nature of participation. In terms of regular religious practice, 1.7 % engage in public religious gatherings on a daily basis, while 22.2 % never engage in public religious gatherings. However, when asked about private religious practice, 28.1 % engage in private religious practice on a daily basis (though 32 % never engage in private

religious practice). That many participants engage in private daily religious practice, however they understand that, seems to indicate a sense of religious identity grounded in the personal sphere even though they may not be engaging in traditional institutional practice.

Religiosity and Youth in Canada

As indicated in the data outlined above, survey respondents present their religious identity, and indeed religiosity, in many ways as a fluid and nuanced aspect of their identity. When asked about the most important aspects of living as a person of “your” religious affiliation, there were some fairly common responses. For theists, God and a relationship to God through faith and prayer figured prominently. For Christians, following Jesus was very important. Respondents across the religious/spiritual spectrum list a number of attributes or virtues for which they sought and saw religious support: love, kindness, compassion, honesty, and patience. Many respondents also wrote about accepting themselves and others and used such words as equality, open-mindedness, and being nonjudgmental. Another common response highlighted work for justice and social action as religiously important.

Most respondents (64.1 %; $n = 410$) had a religious upbringing of some sort, and 56.3 % ($n = 410$) of respondents remained in the religious tradition of their parents. Whatever the tradition, 58 % ($n = 410$) of respondents made their own active decisions about what religious/spiritual path to follow. 46.2 % of respondents indicated that religion is a force for good (26.2 % unsure, 25.1 % indicated it was not, and 2.4 % answered n/a; $n = 411$). Over 50 % of respondents (56.7 %) did not think their religion is the only true religion (20.2 % did think their religion is the only true religion, 6.8 % uncertain, and 16.3 % answered n/a to this question; $n = 411$). Here, clearly, respondents were open to the possibility that their chosen religious path is not the only salutary religious path. When asked if they made decisions with their religion in mind, the responses were quite varied; for some religion was crucial and for others, not a factor at all (43.3 % of respondents made decisions with religion in mind; 11.4 % were uncertain; 33.6 % did not use religion as a guide to decision-making, and 11.7 % answered n/a to this question; $n = 411$).

Many respondents (46.9 %; $n = 322$) think that religious people are stigmatized in Canada, and respondents made a wide range of comments about how religion is negatively stereotyped in Canada. Often these comments reference media and/or schooling as places where it was difficult to admit one’s religiosity.

As noted above, 20.1 % of respondents are “nonreligious,” 14.1 % “spiritual but not religious,” and an additional 9.2 % in the “others” category, some of these others being “atheist,” “agnostic,” or some similar answer, while others named a religious tradition such as Wiccan or indigenous religion. Thus, there is a large contingent of respondents who do not self-identify in a conventionally religious category, but who still are interested enough in religion to respond to a survey about the topic. The category “no religion” is a growing category in Canada as evidenced

by the recent release of data from the 2011 National Household Survey (Statistics Canada 2013) where 23.9 % of Canadians name themselves as of “no religion.”

A number of those who indicated they were “spiritual but not religious” spoke of mindfulness or meditation as part of their spiritual practice. One respondent talked about the “energy that surrounds us” and connects us all and responses that talked about appreciation of and care for the earth were common. Also commonly cited as important were such traits as honesty, compassion, and respectfulness to others.

The final question on the survey was open-ended: What does your religion mean to you? Responses ran the gamut of my religion means “everything” to my religion means “nothing.” Although, of course, not all respondents answered the question (there were 262 responses), most of those who did found their chosen religious path to be meaningful and useful. Some of the answers to this question were in traditional religious language, referencing a relationship with Jesus or God or following the five pillars of Islam. Most, however, were more generalized – that religion provided a sense of identity, community, or cultural history, or that it shaped their ideas and values, or it provided the impetus for their attitude to the world (e.g., love). Almost all responded to this question thoughtfully and in detail.

Here are four representative responses:

I am a follower of Jesus and this is the most important aspect of my life, around which everything is defined.

Religion for me is very important, but as I read once before, I would rather be friends with people who act “Godly” than people who just pray to God. I think that my faith is more important to me than my religion.

Religion is not a particularly powerful force in my life. I feel it was a gateway to access a spiritual side of myself I previously did not experience. I feel this was very valuable, but I find a greater sense of power and connection by not engaging directly with my “religion.” I feel religion is restrictive and often damaging, to both individuals and societies, but its ability to gather people and establish communities of support is extremely powerful. It is the fact that most religions are based on the fact that only that religion is the correct thing to believe that is the problem, when really people should be forming their own beliefs, based on their experience and the experiences of those around them.

I see religion as extremely interesting. It is very relevant for navigating the history and structure of culture (religious AND secular). There is much about the “religion” that I grew up with that I find deeply troubling, as a force of negativity and violence. However, I am not ready to abandon religion, because in examining and reflecting on it I can learn much about how people have nurtured conflict (with each other and the environment etc.), as well as explore ways to incorporate or seek the spiritual realm. I believe that the culture I live in, even where it connects with religion, is highly imbalanced in respecting the spiritual as well as the rational. While I do not adhere to particular institutionalized form or religion at present, I loosely hold to the tradition that I was raised in (Christianity), challenging aspects that I believe to be negative (hateful), and incorporating concepts and practices from other traditions that I feel a positive spiritual.

Except for the most traditional responses where there was no perceived difference between the response and what might be seen as a tradition's conventional way of talking about itself, the respondents generally used this space to grapple with how they had adapted their religious or spiritual ideas to suit their current lives.

While many respondents describe a very personal relationship with their religious beliefs, with their deities, and with their practice, a number of very interesting responses stem from the nonreligious or SBNR survey respondents:

Anyone has the right to believe whatever they will. I expect nothing of people other than to respect my lack of belief in the supernatural, including gods, ghosts, psychics, and other products of faith-based thought.

Being atheist is an important part of my identity. I adhere strongly to the belief that there is no higher being/power.

Nothing really. I just take the philosophical aspect to it, and leave the myth at the door.

I don't really have a religion, but my personal beliefs mean a lot to me.

The Portrayal of Religion in Media: An Example from Ontario

In April 2010, a new sex education curriculum for the province of Ontario was announced. This curriculum was the result of broad consultation with stakeholder groups and had received the support of then Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty. Within 3 days of the initial approval by McGuinty (CBC 2010a), however, the new curriculum was put on hold. McGuinty, reversing his initial position, stated that Ontario is a diverse province and that this provincial diversity (represented by parents) needed to be considered before implementing a new curriculum (CBC News 2010b). In the days between McGuinty's original support and then postponement, a media whirlwind occurred regarding the content of the curriculum, the opposition to the curriculum, and (still debated 3 years later) what is or is not suitable to teach within a sex education curriculum pre-high school. High school in Canada begins roughly around age 14, most of the concern about the new sex education curriculum was about what was being introduced for students under that age.

The media coverage of the debate about the sex education curriculum repeatedly referenced that the opposition was stemming from religious groups, including, specifically, opposition to modifications that were proposed regarding the teachings on "invisible differences" in grade 3 which included teaching on gender identity and sexual orientation as examples of invisible differences (CBC News 2010c; McParland 2010; Hammer and Howlett 2010a, b). What was not made clear in the coverage, however, was that the groups the media cited regularly or referred to as opponents in fact consisted of a relatively small group of religious individuals and organizations, some of whom previously had joined together to oppose other policies, such as same-sex marriage legislation (Rayside 2010).

The headlines and media coverage portrayed this small group as “representative” of diverse religious identities across the province, which further led to a largely mistaken assumption that they represented a multiculturally diverse group (CBC News 2010c). Although the coverage does not name culturally or religiously “diverse” groups, in Canada, where multicultural policy, experiences, and debates about the accommodation of minorities has become a core topic of controversy, there is an assumption that such objections would be, in part, made by culturally diverse groups (Ryan 2010; Ibbitson 2011). When some parents interviewed by CBC reporters were quoted as saying they were disappointed that McGuinty had “bowed” to the pressure, the result was seen in responses such as the one following by Sherri-Anne Medema: “It goes beyond religious beliefs. It goes beyond what culture the people are from, and [McGuinty] should stick to his guns and say, ‘OK, we’re going to continue on’” (CBC News 2010c).

A media study conducted in the aftermath of the 3 days of controversy demonstrates that the coverage of the debates narrowly focuses on a few religious groups in Ontario (Shipley 2014). Overwhelmingly in national and regional coverage, media cited Charles McVety of Canada Christian College (a small evangelical college located in Toronto, Ontario, founded in the 1950s) as the dominant voice of opposition to the new curriculum (50 % of articles reference McVety). Although McGuinty states that the “diversity” of the province needs to be considered, and while some media outlets broadly stated that “religious groups” were opposed (CBC News 2010c; McParland 2010; Hammer and Howlett 2010b, c), the coverage of the opposition during those few days does not represent a spectrum of religious diversity, but rather, concentrates on certain conservative Christian objections. McVety is cited as challenging the curriculum twice as often as the official opposition, the Progressive Conservative party led by Tim Hudak. And McVety’s statements (specifically about the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity in grade 3, but additionally about the inclusion of sexual acts at later ages) range from misleading to inflammatory; he was rebuked in 2010 by the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council for making false claims about gays and lesbians (Regg Cohn 2013).

All education curricula are subject to review on a 2-year cycle; however the Ontario sex education curriculum has not been updated since 1998 and is currently the oldest sex education curriculum nationwide. And although Kathleen Wynne, the current premier of Ontario, said in January 2013 she would reintroduce the sex education curriculum (Babbage 2013), amidst a fair amount of urging from the executive director of the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association, as of June 2013 nothing has yet changed regarding the modified curriculum. An online poll by the Environics Research Group (2013) saw 93 % of parents surveyed as supporting the updated curriculum.

This particular example demonstrates a number of the problematic assumptions the RGSY project aims at dispelling. It is clear from the respondents that religious and sexual identities are negotiated in complex and nuanced ways and that youth’s understanding and expression of these identities is informed from multiple sources, including parents, friends, the Internet, and so on. Youth opinions about sexuality

cannot be simply inferred from the religious group to which an individual belongs, nor do youth hold uncritically the “official” opinion of those religious groups about sexuality. When “religion” is represented narrowly, as demonstrated by the coverage of the sex education curriculum, media repeat and reaffirm inaccuracies about religious identity and also foster the notion that religion and sexual diversity are inherently in conflict. This notion is demonstrated, through RGSY data and other research on the subject, not to be true. Joyce Smith (2008) reflects on the way journalists cover religion, positing that journalists continue to cover religion in narrow ways for a variety of reasons: it is how they have historically covered religion, these are the religious representatives willing to be quoted, etc. Although there might be a set pattern to the way religion has historically been covered, it is possible to break that cycle in contemporary coverage. However, finding a multiplicity of religious voices on any given subject is not so easy. Mark Jordan (2009) has argued that it is time for affirming and welcoming religious groups and people to make their voices heard; this could offer one space for a multidimensional picture of religiosity.

On June 10, 2013, Ontario Today (a CBC call-in show) Petty (2013) hosted a discussion about the sex education curriculum in Ontario, prefaced by announcing the 10-year anniversary of the first same-sex marriage in Ontario. The responses of the callers overwhelmingly criticized the government’s inability to implement a new curriculum, stating that youth needed to learn about these subjects, and they preferred it to be in a classroom setting. Although this is anecdotal, it mirrors the numbers coming out of the Environics poll (2013) on the same subject. If this is the popular opinion expressed by parents in the province, whose voices are the government responding to when they say provincial diversity (represented by parents) was not considered in the original proposal?

The portrayal in this snapshot of the sex education curriculum debate of religion, religious identity, and religion’s role in “policing” youth and youth education is at odds with the experience of religious identity and identity negotiation among Canadian youth. And yet these essentialized representations of religion, particularly here regarding the role “religion” takes in directing the learning and conduct of youth, are uncritically repeated in public and media debate. By providing space for youth voices to represent their own religiosity and their religious experiences, in relation to other identity categories and in response to education and media, hopefully a more nuanced picture of religiosity and youth will emerge.

Conclusion and Future Directions

The two dominant religious choices in the RGSY survey were Christianity and some version of nonreligious. Even most of those youth who claimed Christianity engaged in a process of critical reflection where their own version of the tradition was updated to include their beliefs about and experience of contemporary sexuality. Religious identity is not generally drawn from religious authorities, but much more vaguely from a sense of what the tradition is, at heart, about.

While adults often seem to see sexuality as a stumbling block for religion, or vice versa, the youths who took part in the survey were much more able to let religion and sexuality be mutual influences on one another. These young people simply accept a variety of sexual and religious identities and, regardless of how they themselves choose to act religiously or sexually, they know there are others who make other choices, and they do not generally condemn those choices.

This survey has found that youth is a time of sexual and religious experimentation – not unthoughtful hormone-fuelled action, but thoughtful desire to live lives of integrity, to appropriate from religion what they find to be good and useful, and to set aside what they find to be outdated or unhelpful to their current lives.

The findings of the survey contrast sharply with the way that the sex education debate in Ontario took place. Youth voices were almost silent in the public debate. It seems apparent that if youth had been asked what they wanted, their responses would have been more measured than the alarmist responses that the media kept repeating.

As in the findings from other studies in North America, the youth in the RGSY study are not necessarily invested in the official positions of their self-identified religious tradition. Those who are members of religious groups see the possibility that religious traditions can and should change with the times. They hold strong positions about equality and justice and look to their religious groups to uphold those values, not to stand in their way in attaining them.

It is clear from the research conducted on youth religiosity in North America that there is a wide and dynamic field of youth understanding regarding their religious identity, their parents' religious identities, and the ways in which they integrate religiosity in their day-to-day life. Future directions for studying youth religion in North America would be to continue the development of multifaceted and multipronged research programs. There have been to date a limited number of studies on youth religion in North America, considering the size and breadth of the population. Many of the studies have had a narrow focus (limited sampling demographic) which has meant that the results provide an interesting, but narrow, picture. Examining religious identity across intersectional lines provides a more fleshed out picture of the ways religious identity interacts with other categories of identity for youth (be it ethnic, sexual, gendered, or cultural identities).

Cross-References

- ▶ [Citizenship: Inclusion and Exclusion](#)
- ▶ [Critical Moments? The Importance of Timing in Young People's Narratives of Transition](#)
- ▶ [Current Debates in Social Justice and Youth Studies](#)
- ▶ [Participating as Young Citizens in Diverse Communities](#)
- ▶ [Spirituality, Religion, and Youth: An Introduction](#)

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Abstract

The colonial enterprise has been instrumental in attempting to silence and destroy Indigenous expressions of spirituality. At the same time there has been much reliance upon Indigenous forms of knowing, Indigenous men and women of high degree, and the labor and guidance of young people. Today Indigenous spiritualities have been greatly impacted on by Christianity, western epistemology, and modern expressions of spirit. However, many Indigenous young people have been shaped by a renaissance of culture, language, and expressions of identity. There is also evidence that Indigenous young people are having an influence on the spiritual lives and practices of others through their involvement in the church, the school, cultural revival, language regeneration, sport, and the arts.

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This chapter will focus upon spirituality and the lives of Indigenous young people. It will include a background discussion of historical influences on tradition and culture. This will include an examination of the connection between spirituality, traditional Indigenous ontology, Christianity, and modern social and cultural forms. The chapter will also show that these two broad traditions have shaped the experience of spirituality for young people. In turn it will also explore how modern expressions and reconfigurations of Indigenous young people's spirituality are also influencing and shaping the worlds of others.

Introduction

This chapter will focus upon spirituality and the lives of Indigenous young people. It will include a background discussion of historical influences on tradition and culture. In particular this will involve an examination of the connection between spirituality, traditional Indigenous ontology, Christianity, and modern social and cultural forms. Often it is assumed that both Christianity and modernity have weakened or destroyed spirituality for Indigenous young people. However, these two broad traditions have also shaped the experience of spirituality for young people. Likewise modern expressions and reconfigurations of Indigenous young people's spirituality are also influencing and shaping the worlds of others.

The approach taken within the chapter is to ground discussions in the particularities of a number of specific places. It is written in the southwest of Australia. This allows it to help us understand through the lens of one group of First Nation people, *Noongar* (people who have cultural, language, and ontological affiliations with the southwest of Western Australia). In addition, the chapter will draw upon illustrative examples from other parts of the world including the Kimberley, Pilbara, and desert regions of Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the USA, and Africa.

Spirituality in Indigenous Traditions

As noted in the earlier chapter of Ezzy and Halafoff, there is no single, unified, or universal way of thinking about spirituality. There are at least three related sets of traditions that could shape our way of understanding Indigenous young people and spirituality: (1) its rich etymological and philosophical roots in Europe, (2) missionary understanding of spirit based on more fundamentalist interpretations of Christian doctrine, and (3) Indigenous cosmology and ideas about the spirit world. It is important to understand all three as together they mediate the way that Indigenous young people come to experience spirituality.

The etymology of spirituality is shaped by the Latin *spiritus* and the Old French word *esprit*. Both of these ideas invoke the notion of the act of breathing to bring vital force to humans. In this usage one's spirit is that part of a human that is essential and elemental, that which allows one to become and remain animated or alive (Hoad 1993). Later the spiritual came to variously signify non-corporeal and

nonmaterial elements of a person, the consciousness or personality, that which remains of individuals afterlife, manifestation of the spirit of a deceased person (as in a ghost), demons or deities that cannot be seen, and, in the case of Christianity, an experience of deep encounter with God made possible by the Holy Spirit. Social scientists after Durkheim have come to see it as the act of searching for the sacred, or the practice of making certain elements of life and meaning stand out from the everyday, ordinary, or profane (Keonig 2007, p. 545). More recently spirituality has come to be associated with the internal experience of individuals, those things that come from the innermost thoughts, psychologies, and existential drives of each of us.

According to McDonald (2001), the term “spirituality” has strong roots in dualistic utopian religions, particularly Roman Catholicism and Persian/Greek dualism. As a consequence the “spirit” is seen as a universal category, linked to the inward workings of individual souls and independent of the specifics of culture, politics, ontology, and geography. In this way the idea of spirituality requires that it be understood as something portable, something innate, and something independent of locality and place.

In contrast, in many Indigenous ontological traditions, there appears to be less of a demarcation between the sacred and profane. Instead, the sacred is blended into the everyday worlds of people, much less tied to the internal workings of the psyche and much more associated with the juridical acts of obligation and respect for the transmission of certain rules and ethics across generations (McEwan et al. 2009). Spirit is also more likely to be associated with the particularities of one’s homeland or place. Spiritual agents (e.g., the *Waugal* or creation snake in *Noongar* cosmology) are located in specific places and associated with familial connection. In many Indigenous cosmologies, one’s spirit emerges from the earth, entering either a mother or father to take on a human life force. When people pass away, their spirit returns to the country with which they were associated to live as custodians of law, traditions, language, and the health and well-being of their family. Here one’s “spiritual experience” is connected to a set of interrelationships between country, family, and knowledge systems across time.

For many Indigenous groups, the connection between people, country, and “old” knowledge is paramount. As Nancy Worth’s chapter in this collection points out, the connection between identity, relationship, and space is not unusual. In this case this connection is deep. Largely this reflects the fact there exists an irrepressible link between people, family, and country. Indeed to think about the spirituality of young people without reference to country is akin to talking about the future of a child without reference to its mother (Bird Rose et al. 2002). This is because in Indigenous ontology country is the place where present living family, ancestors, and as yet unborn children dwell. This means that as a member of one’s family, country demands care. In turn, country offers care. To visit country, travel through it, hunt on it, make fire on it, and sing to it are much like visiting an older relative. In both acts one maintains relationships, obligations and “keeps alive” one’s family. In this way, keeping country healthy (by visiting it, dancing on it, and warming its soul by fire) also involves the act of keeping community healthy (Collard 2007).

Bird Rose puts this beautifully when she says:

In Aboriginal English, the word “country” is both a common noun and a proper noun. People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, and grieve for country and long for country. People say that country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, and feels sorry or happy. Country is a living entity with a yesterday, a today and tomorrow, with consciousness, action, and a will toward life. (Bird Rose et al. 2002, p. 14)

Often Indigenous people are divided by birth into different groups. These “skin groups” are social markers allowing people to cross-language groups, state borders, and regions while understanding one’s group and knowing how to relate to others. Within this general system, some groups are considered “straight skins,” thus able to marry or be close. These grouping systems indicate generational and sexual divisions so that a parent and their children belong to a different group as does a husband and wife. It means that people have large sets of obligations to many brothers and sisters, uncles, aunties, nephews, and nieces. Importantly this system allows outsiders and those new to a community to be instantly placed within the social system and be recognized and assigned particular responsibilities and enjoy support, certain rights, and obligations (see Folds 2001).

Living people are not alone in being included in these skin groups. Animals, birds, fauna, rocks, and certain features of country are also included, allowing certain places, animals, and plants to have lives, act as repositories of stories and law, and have the ability to reproduce, see, hear, and respond to the presence of people. Likewise dead ancestors also maintain their skin affiliations, protecting their family and country, carrying out justice, speaking and being spoken to, and watching and reacting to the movement of family and strangers (Povinelli 1994).

Particularly important here is the obligations that come with age to nurture those who “come along after” (Myers 1991, p. 211). McCoy (2008, p. 22) describes this process as supporting what *Kukatja* (a southern Kimberley Aboriginal group) call *Kanyirninpa*. *Kanyirninpa*, or “holding” young people, is expressed in a range of interconnected ways. It includes the obligation to nurture, teach, and “grow up” young people. Indeed in this setting, one’s status is tied to the extent to which one takes responsibility and offers protection for those they “hold.” In this way the business of *Kanyirninpa* involves an act of exercising “respect” toward others, creating conditions to reinforce social bonds and social obligations (McCoy 2008, p. 28).

The third element in Indigenous cosmology central to spiritual experience is the transmission of knowledge systems through narrative or stories. In the southwest regions of Australia, this system goes by the name of *katitjin*. In central and western parts of Australia, the terms *tjukurpa* and *altjira* are used. This idea represents the thread or vehicle through which the interconnections between country and family can be made. To paraphrase Stanner (2009, pp. 23–24), *katitjin* (he used the term “the Dreaming”) is not simply accounts of the past, a history of what has been. Rather it is everywhere “all the instants of being, whether completed or to come.” At one and the same time, *katitjin* holds the mysteries of life as well as the means of teaching the rules one needs to observe.

The Influence of Christianity

Over the past four centuries, Indigenous systems globally have had to contend with massive forces of religious and spiritual influence of Christian missionaries. Some Indigenous communities completely dismissed Christianity. Others adopted elements of beliefs and practices, often fusing parts of old traditions with Christian iconography, language, and stories.

In part these different responses reflect different forms of empire making and missionary practice. Some offered care and charity to Indigenous children and those who became refugees from their country. Some provided western education. Others offered or forced religious conversion, disrupting the traditions and languages of the past. Many supported the removal of children from their families. Some provided support for the maintenance of culture, language, belief, and practice (see McDonald 2001).

As a consequence, there has also been a strong incorporation of Christian ideas, practices, and accounts into existing Indigenous framing of spirituality. One example from Alice Springs involves the fusing of traditions that help prepare people for death (cited in McDonald 2001). Here Indigenous people accessing palliative care services are drawing upon both Aboriginal and Christian support services. Traditional healers will be invited to come to people's bedsides. They conduct healings to reduce blockages and relieve stress. Others may bring bush medicine. Often, Christian pastors are invited to come and pray, sing Christian hymns, and leave gifts. In New South Wales, the Catholic Church's Aboriginal Catholic Ministry has adopted Indigenous healing traditions, allowing women to "retreat" to a bush setting to use Indigenous forms of healing (Asplet 2001). Indigenous and Roman Catholic woman Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr (2001) combines both traditions through reflective/prayer services she called Dadirri, a form of "inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness."

Christianity has also had considerable influence on the spiritual lives of many Indigenous people through their conversion and adoption of Christian beliefs and practices. Initially this took place in conjunction with earlier Catholic and Protestant missions. More recently the rise of charismatic and fundamentalist churches has had a large impact in remote Australia (McDonald 2001).

The result has been that old conceptions of the spirit world as positive, protective, and healing have been silenced. This has been replaced by the notion that Indigenous spirits are evil and demonic forces threaten health and well-being. In this context, old values, world views, and ways of seeing are being "disremembered," and intergenerational transmission of Indigenous spiritualities are being silenced (McDonald 2001).

However, the project of "casting out" spiritual forces from Indigenous Christians is rarely totally realized. Perhaps this has got to do with the force and influence of Indigenous culture, particularly the part played by spirits in positive and protective activity. Perhaps it also has to do with the depth of emphasis within many of the charismatic churches upon more mystic elements of Christianity such as the agency of the "Holy Spirit," the act of being filled with the spirit and the practice of

speaking in tongues. As McDonald (2001) says, despite the demands of fundamentalist doctrines for people to reject their old ways, many people have not eliminated all traditional spiritual values.

The Influence of Modernity

Many have concluded that Indigenous young people have largely “lost their culture and spirituality” through exposure to generations of Christian and western influence. At first glance this may appear the case. However in the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2006 census, 24 % of Indigenous Australians reported they had no religious affiliation compared with 21 % of the non-Indigenous population. Only 1 % reported affiliation with an Australian Aboriginal traditional religion, with this being highest in very remote areas (6 %) than in all other areas (less than 1 %). In contrast 73 % of the Indigenous population reported an affiliation with a Christian denomination. On the face of it, one may assume that Indigenous people have replaced Indigenous traditions with Christianity.

However, it is important to be cautious and look further. In 2011 young people were much less likely to follow a religion than they were in 1976 (29 % having no religion in 2011 compared to 12 % in 1976) (ABS 2013). This is consistent with the global pattern of young people rejecting the authority and relevance of the church. This does not mean that they reject the idea of spiritual experience. Indeed, as is discussed by Ezzy and Halafoff earlier in this collection, young people are more inclined to describe themselves as spiritual rather than religious.

There is also mounting evidence that Indigenous young people are very actively involved in “culture.” ABS data from 2008 demonstrate very high levels of involvement in Indigenous ceremony with 24 % of 15 years or older attending an Indigenous ceremony in the 12 months prior. Almost half (47 %) had been to an Indigenous funeral. Those in remote areas were three times as likely to attend a ceremony compared to those in non-remote areas (ABS 2011). In the 2008 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 65 % of children and young people claim to have been to one or more selected cultural events (fishing and hunting, ceremonies, and NAIDOC events) in the past year. Almost all young people (98 %) said that they would like to participate in cultural events and cultural activities. Of these 22 % did so at least once a month, 29 % did so several times a year, and 16 % did so once a year (ABS 2011).

According to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS), language and culture have great influence. In 2008 19 % of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over and 13 % of children (3–14 years) spoke an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language. In 2008 72 % of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over reported recognizing a particular area as their homelands or traditional country. In 2008, almost one-third (31 %) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children spent at least 1 day a week with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leader or elder (ABS 2011).

Since the 1970s there has been a global renaissance in Indigenous language and culture. So strong has been this renaissance that significant numbers of young people are now able to learn about culture, language, and spirituality in formal school settings. For example, *Māori*-language education systems have been established throughout New Zealand. This allows *whānau* (families) to choose from *Māori* medium bilingual classrooms and *Māori* immersion options for their children's education (McCaffery 2010). The old traditions of establishing *wānanga* (houses of learning) had been revived in universities; *kōhanga reo* (preschools) and *kura kaupapa Māori* (schools) used the *Māori* language to educate younger learners. In 2006 the national census recorded 131,613 *Māori* as being able to hold a conversation in the language (McCaffery 2010).

Much of this work reflects work carried out by *Māori* educationalists (see Macfarlane and Macfarlane (2012) for a review of the *Kaupapa Māori* Teams) and shaped by *Māori* conceptual ideas and practices deeply steeped in spiritual traditions. For example, Macfarlane and Macfarlane (2012) describe the centrality of *whanaungatanga* as “the process of engagement through and by which relationships, connections, obligations and responsibilities between people are strengthened.” A little like the Western Desert idea of *Kanyirninpa*, *whanaungatanga* is an intergenerational support process that is fundamental to all relationships with and between *Māori*.

In these learning environments, young people are exercising their *Māori being*, an expression of one's spirit drawn from the implicit understanding that *Māori* have a particular way of interpreting “from the inside out, not from the outside in” (Kawakami et al. 2007; Smith 2000). Here it is not only the content of education that is important, and it is also the manner in which it is transmitted, “that is the ethos, integrity and spirituality that make those teachings so special” (Rewi 2011, Macfarlane 2007, Ware et al. 2010, pp. 6–7).

Another element in Indigenous renaissance of spirituality is the global movement to return to traditional lands. Here young people are travelling with other generations to reacquaint themselves with their country, family (both living and dwelling as spirits), and stories/knowledge. This access to traditional lands has been made possible through the establishment of Indigenous organizations, negotiation of native title and heritage, tourism enterprises, partnerships with mining companies, and setting up land and sea management regimes on *boodjar* (*Noongar*), *ngurra* (Western Desert groups), *nunavut* (*Inuktitut* from North America), and *whenua* (*Māori* from New Zealand) (Ganesharajah 2009, p. 15).

For example, in Australia more than 680 Indigenous rangers are employed in around 95 ranger teams (Commonwealth of Australia 2013). This work includes managing threatened wildlife; monitoring feral animals, weeds, and marine debris; and looking after significant cultural sites. Indigenous rangers have become an important way of transmitting cultural and spiritual knowledge, recording places of significance, song, dance, and the stories of elders. This has become an important means through which young people can take up paid work, mentor younger groups (through junior ranger projects), and visit traditional country with more senior people (see Altman and Kerins 2012).

In Canada since 1996, Indigenous young people living in remote and isolated communities have been able to work in conjunction with adult rangers, experiencing traditional culture, lifestyle, and, by definition, spirituality. According to Schwab (2006), key elements of the work include training in traditional practices seen as primary in the formation of Indigenous spirituality (such as the skills to live off the land, ice fishing, caribou hunting, traditional sports, arts, and ecological values).

Other groups, such as the *Yiriman* Project on Western Australia, have emerged to allow young people to work in conjunction with older generations. This project supports “back to country” trips where young people can combine old systems of knowledge acquisition with western education and training with country as the “school” or learning environment. This helps keep old stories alive (through song, dance, language, and visits to ceremonial sites) while allowing young people’s new stories to emerge (through the use of new technologies including digital cameras, video, sound devices, and GPS equipment) (cited in Taylor 2010, p. 86).

This involves deep spiritual and cultural immersion. As Preaud (cited in Palmer 2012, p. 44) describes, on *Yiriman* trips young people are reacquainted with their country, immersing themselves in cultural and spirituality.

During a trip, whether on foot or in a car, elders point out salient or meaningful features of the landscape which are all fragments of the living body of country. This hill which is really a Dog, this tree under which we camped last time, this old windmill where your uncle used to work. All these fragments are part of a multiple history that gradually builds the young people as country themselves . . . Thus *Yiriman* opens up new horizons . . . in which stories build upon one another into a living memory. (Preaud 2009, p. 9)

The Influence of Indigenous Young People

Nowhere were Indigenous young people more important than in the establishment and development of various missions. As well as being the reason for the existence of this work, they often built the churches and dormitories, carried out much of the work duties, and often made possible economic enterprises that helped sustain the work. For example, at New Norcia in Western Australia, Bishop Salvado admitted (cited in Stormon 1977) that the early mission would not have survived were it not for the work and efforts of many *Noongar*.

The contributions of Indigenous young people in culture and the arts have been enormous. For over a century, Aboriginal imagery and the artistic work of Aboriginal people have been appropriated consistently as a “marker of Australian identity” and have generated an enormous output of visual art, film and television, music, and other performing arts (Langton 1997, p. 106). According to Fink and Perkins (1997, p. 60), “Aboriginal art is now Sotheby’s second highest growth market.” Similar trends occur within the cultural domain of music making (Johnson 1997, pp. 148–149).

In their humorous and detailed documentary on Australian Rules Football carnivals, *Warlpiri* elders describe “footy” as the new ceremony (Campbell et al. 2007). This work sets out how football games are being carried out all over

regional and remote Australia, often tied to other cultural events but being organized, played, and managed in distinctly Indigenous ways. Through the process of playing and attending football matches, senior and middle-aged people are able to rally young people around story, movement, language, and skin alliance.

It is also the case that Indigenous players and Indigenous modes of operating are having a significant impact on one of Australia's most secular religions, Australian Rules Football. In many country leagues in South Australia, Western Australia, and the Northern Territory, Indigenous players make up the majority. At the national league level, 79 out of 640 listed players are from Indigenous backgrounds. This represents 8 % of all players, a massive contribution given that Indigenous people only make up just over 2.3 % of the population (AFL Player Association 2013). Tatz (1998, p. 9) makes the point that "today's (and tomorrow's) football is inconceivable without the presence of Aborigines." Another commentator, Martin Flanagan (cited in Tatz 1998, p. 26), has said that "the more complex the game of Australian football becomes, the more precious and valuable ... are Aboriginal footballers" (see Hawke 1994 and Gorman 2005). This is particularly so with the growing convention of beginning various codes of football with a war dance, haka, or pregame ritual of confrontation and welcomes onto country.

Indigenous young people are also having an impact on the spiritual lives of others through their use of new technologies. This is consistent with Cross and Barne's discussion earlier in the collection. Partly this reflects the important rise of the use of digital technology and the recent uptake of new forms of creative expression, music, art, and performance by young people. As Kral (2010) notes, new technologies are opening up Indigenous young people's social and cultural networks through the use of social networking platforms like Facebook and iCampfire. One important response by Indigenous young people has been to use this technology to mediate between old knowledge and their new world and create new (but nonetheless Aboriginal) forms of cultural production (Kral 2010). In this new and virtual space, many Indigenous young people are entering

young adulthood as bilingual, bicultural beings, drawing on the language and culture transmitted by their elders, but also transforming it. They are choosing to participate in these projects because the cultural production roles are in the domains of knowledge that matter to them – culture, arts, country, and new technologies – all within a framework of social relatedness.

Slater's (2010) description of this process of digital production in *Aurukun* offers a sense of how young people have begun to move from passive consumer of global culture to active producer of distinctly (but nonetheless reconfigured) Indigenous forms of spirituality. Film, as a way of "framing" culture, is being used as a weapon to combat the many old stereotypes. Perceptions of Aboriginal dysfunction are being countered by young people's use of film (Martin 2006, p. 13). Making films has allowed young people, like those living in *Aurukun*, to more fully take part in the important work of generating their vision(s) and becoming active citizens.

In the Pilbara region of Western Australia, young people are being encouraged to experiment with the use of new technologies to help preserve and maintain ancient

heritage. Through their involvement in the Yijala Yala and iCampfire projects, young people are creating fabulous digital content that is being used to help manage, protect, conserve, and transmit national heritage values of a place that has possibly the largest number of ancient rock art in the world. There is an estimated one to two million petroglyphs on the Burrup Archipelago, an area approximately 27 km long and 5 km wide. Many assume that the heritage of the area is best preserved by having skilled technicians and researchers “capture” the history of senior people before they pass away by recording oral history, carrying out archaeological surveys of sites, and commissioning anthropological work. One local *Ngarluma* man Tyson Mowarin calls this the “sleeping archive” approach to heritage conservation. He points out that this contrasts with how local Indigenous groups *Ngarluma* and *Yindjibarndi* carry out “heritage” work. Like McCoy (2008), he notes that heritage is protected when young people are “carried” by their elders through a process where they sing and dance the stories (see Campbell and Palmer *in press*). In this case new and interesting digital technologies are being drawn into the ancient relationships of spiritual practice, not only stimulating young people’s involvement but also acting as a “fourth partner” in the mentoring relationship between young people, elders, and the spirit world (Myers et al. 2012).

In Webster County, Kentucky, a group of local citizens (including non-Indigenous people) used an arts and culture process to help them work through a range of significant changes in their community. They drew upon a North American First Nation tradition of recognizing the seven generations of their community. Using visual mapping exercises, different generations wrote for the preceding generation (parent, grandparent, great grandparent), their own generation, and for future generations (children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren). They were able to take on a spirit of intergenerational gift giving through artful expression, articulating how they “dealt with the land, significant moments, and what their own dreams were.” Here ritual making (taken from old spiritual traditions) helped people express their relationship to one other and draw together their relationship to past, present, and future. In this way, they replicated a “rite of passage” with young people (cited in Hustedde and King 2002, p. 344).

In another example from Central Australia, Indigenous young people acted as guides and mediators for outsiders. This occurred through their involvement in the design and hosting of a language maintenance website project, a digital music recording project, film work, and an internationally touring stage production as part of the larger *Ngapartji Ngapartji* project. Here *Anangu* young people played a central role in helping non-Indigenous Australians learn language, come to understand the history of their country, and have a deep spiritual and cultural experience of the *Pitjantjatjara* world (Palmer 2011).

Indigenous use of medicinal products and Indigenous healing practices has also attracted considerable interest across the globe. Naturopathic remedies, herbalism, wild harvest production, and healing practices have all taken much from Indigenous spiritual traditions. This is particularly so in Africa where young people’s role in hunting, collection, and selling traditional remedies is perhaps at its most influential. A study carried out in 1997 estimated that 27 million South Africans

use Indigenous medicines made available (mostly in Zulu-speaking regions) at *amayeza* and *muti* stores (Mander 1997). Much of the use of these remedies involve warding off evil spirits and bring luck. Many are used to protect babies by repelling evil spirits. The study found that the range of remedies being used has increased as the “indigenisation of manufacture” has grown and as cross-cultural borrowing practices have intensified post apartheid (Cocks and Møller 2002).

For those seeking new age renewal, Indigenous expressions of spirituality represent great inspiration. Here Indigenous notions of the sacred and Indigenous people have been seen as the guides for the rediscovery of otherwise hidden talents, to retreat for moments of spiritual regeneration, to rediscover lost innocence, to cultivate new skills and develop deeper psychological insight, and, above all else, to find their way again (Short 1991, pp. 10–11). According to Lattas (1997, p. 229), Indigenous people are often constituted as much more supremely spiritual beings, those who have been able to most successfully assimilate to their natural environment and who are generous with their gift of spirituality.

This kind of yearning for things Indigenous and spiritual are increasingly being played out in cinematic representations of nation making. In their analysis of three recent films (*Rabbit Proof Fence*, *Beneath Clouds*, and *Australian Rules*), Palmer and Gillard (2004) argue that one of the consistent features of the treatment of Indigenous young people in films is that, in subtle and often uncanny ways, they get to perform an important function in shaping the formation of local, national, and international identities. Through characters such as *Nullah* (*Australia the movie*); Molly, Daisy, and Gracie (*Rabbit Proof Fence*); Willie (*Bran Nue Dae*); and Pete (*Satellite Boy*), Indigenous young people are acting as spiritual guides in modern-day nation making.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Perhaps no other groups of young people have been traumatized and dispirited as those from Indigenous backgrounds. Many come from families that have experienced firsthand what it is like to have institutions, bureaucrats, teachers, welfare officials, and missionaries try and dismember spiritual traditions and practice. Outside forces have joined to try and dispose land, law, economy, family, and spiritual practice, often across many generations.

However, it would be unhelpful to assume that this project of spiritual colonization is always totally realized. Indeed there is good evidence that in some settings in Australia, Canada, the USA, New Zealand, and Africa, Indigenous young people are reenergizing their connection to distinct Indigenous forms of spirituality. Usually this involves considerable fusion, bringing Christian forms and global and emerging culture together with local traditions, thus influencing the lives of Indigenous young people and others through the church, education, sport, land management, the arts, film, music, and healing practices.

When using examples from around the world of both traditional and contemporary expressions of Indigenous spirituality, we begin to understand that globalization has made possible exchange of diverse forms of spirituality and the celebration, perhaps even reformation, of old local and regional expressions of spirituality.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Indigenous Girls, Social Justice, and Schooling: Addressing Issues of Disadvantage](#)
- ▶ [Indigenous Youth, Nationhood, and the Politics of Belonging](#)

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Young People and Religion and Spirituality in Europe: A Complex Picture

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Abstract

The European context in religion has often been characterized as one of inexorable secularization, particularly among young people (Bruce 2002). However, as Davie and others have pointed out, religious belief remains high in Europe, even where communal religious practice does not. Davie has

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characterized this as “believing without belonging” (2002). Recently, Day has picked up on a concurrent trend she names “believing in belonging” (2013) which highlights the way some Europeans find a sense of belonging in an ethnic and/or regional religious identity without necessarily practicing communally. Meanwhile, the political context of a growing Europe increasingly embracing outlying nations (such as Romania or Turkey) and opening up the right to work across national boundaries, along with migration from Africa and Asia, has led to growing religious diversity even in nations with historically largely mono-religious identities (e.g., the Republic of Ireland or Sweden). In particular, inter-European migration has led to populations who regularly move back and forth for work and study bringing religious beliefs and practices with them but also returning with outside influences.

This chapter examines some of these phenomena as they apply to young people in Europe. The chapter paints a broad overview of religious trends across Europe and focuses on several case studies in order to give a sense of the complexity of youth and religion in Europe. The first considers the case of young Polish migrants to the UK, the second, the ways in which Christianity and alternative spiritualities influence young people whose families are historically Christian in Britain, and the third, the case of Germany and especially atheism, religious migration, and a possible emerging de-secularization among young people in East Germany.

Introduction

The European context in religion has often been characterized as one of inexorable secularization (Bruce 2002), particularly among young people (Voas 2009). Young people have historically had lower religious participation levels than their elders, and there is little evidence to indicate that most youth will become more religious later in life (Voas and Crockett 2005). Indeed, Kay and Francis (1996) argue that religious attitudes are fairly well established by the time young people leave secondary education. However, Davie has observed that religious belief remains high in Europe, even where communal religious practice does not (1994, 2000, 2002), and Collins-Mayo et al. have pointed to the persistence of individualized practice among young people (2010). Further, as Day has argued, Britons often find a sense of belonging in a relational, moral, and/or ethnic religious identity without necessarily practicing communally – what she calls “believing in belonging” (2011). At the same time, it is wise to be a little cautious about the high percentage of young people who claim to have “no religion.” As Cheruvallil-Contractor et al. point out, “fluid or multiple identities” and “spiritual” identities may all be part of nonreligious identities (2013).

Meanwhile, the political context of a growing Europe gradually embracing outlying nations and opening up the right to work across national boundaries,

along with increasing migration from around the world, has led to ever-growing religious diversity, even in nations with historically largely mono-religious identities (e.g., the Republic of Ireland or Sweden). Vertovec (2007), for example, points to a dramatic increase in the range of countries of origin in migration to Britain and notes that patterns of settlement have changed, in part, because of a government policy on disbursement of refugees. Movements of people cause religious change (see Levitt 2007; Leonard 2005), and this is certainly true in Europe. Migrants bring with them their own religious notions and practices, but these are often affected by the religious situation in the new location. Inter-European migration has led to populations who regularly move back and forth for work and study bringing religious beliefs and practices with them but also returning with outside influences.

It is also true that regional differences often remain striking in the European context. It continues to be the case that young people from the European south show higher Christian identification rates than those in the north (see below). Nevertheless, at national or regional levels, intriguing local geographical differences can often be seen. In Scotland, for example, the north/south geographical difference is reversed. Here, social differences appear to be important: young people in the rural and often isolated north have higher religious identification and participation rates than those in the more urban, more pluralized south (see Scottish Executive 2005; Brierley 2003).

Europe is far too large and complex for this chapter to be exhaustive; hence, this chapter begins by painting a broad overview of religious affiliation and belief among young people in Europe by presenting quantitative data from the European Values Study. The chapter then looks at three case studies in order to give a sense of the complexity of youth and religion in Europe and to unpack the data presented from the EVS. The first deals with the case of intra-European youth migration, looking at the case of young Polish migrants to England. This case study shows one example of what happens when young people go from a largely mono-religious country with high levels of affiliation (Poland) to a country with low religious participation and affiliation, but high religious plurality (the UK). The second case study considers some ways in which young people in Britain whose family background is Christian, but who do not attend church, are influenced by multiple religious and spiritual beliefs and practices. This case study unpacks the complicated ways in which young people engage with and belief in spirituality and the supernatural. The final case study includes studies from two regions of one country with very different recent political and religious histories, that of East and West Germany. Put another way, the first case study tells a story about the movement of people, which is very important for understanding religion in Europe, particularly for young economic migrants. The second tells a story about non-religion and spirituality, both of which are on the increase in Europe. The final case study shows how the previous century's political makeup of Europe and earlier migrations still influence the picture of European religiosity today for the most recent generation of young people.

Religion/Spirituality in Numbers in Europe

The following quantitative analysis is based on the data of four waves of the European Values Study (1981–1984, 1990–1993, 1999–2001, and 2008–2010). Young people here are defined as between the age of 16 and 24. This section presents data only on Christian affiliation and belief as this still represents the dominant religion across Europe. The chosen states are classified by major religious affiliation and region (see also Pickel 2011, p. 158). From the West of Europe, data from Catholic states (France, Italy, and Ireland), Protestant states (Denmark, Sweden), and what can be characterized as mixed states (West Germany, Great Britain, Netherlands) are examined. From Eastern Europe, data is examined from Roman Catholic states (Poland, Slovenia), Orthodox Catholic states (Russia, Ukraine, Romania) and mixed states (East Germany, Latvia).

In most countries in 2008, the majority of young respondents claimed that they belonged to a Christian denomination. Only in East Germany (22.6 %), France (27.9 %), the Netherlands (43 %), and Russia (48.6 %) did a significant portion of young people claim to have no religious affiliation. A dramatic decline regarding religious affiliation over time has occurred across Europe, with the notable exceptions of Latvia and the Orthodox states in Eastern Europe. The highest decrease between 1981 and 2008 took place in Great Britain (minus 56.2 %) followed by Sweden (minus 37.5 %), France (minus 34.4 %), Italy (minus 23.1 %), and Denmark (minus 15.6 %). By contrast, in the Orthodox states of Russia, Ukraine, and Romania, an increase in religious affiliation or identity is evident. Romania, especially, shows a very high rate of young people belonging to a religious denomination (in 2008 97.1 %). A similar situation is clear regarding church attendance: over time and in most states, fewer young people attend religious services at least once a month. The only country in which the majority of young people attend religious services at least once a month is Poland (61.4 %). However, even here there is a decrease of 24.2 % since 1990.

In most European countries, the majority of young people declare that religion is not important in their life. In the 2008 wave, only in Italy, Poland, Ukraine, and Romania do the majority of adolescent respondents state that religion is very or quite important to them. It is most important in Romania, where over three quarters of the young people surveyed state that religion plays an important role in their life, and least important in Latvia and East Germany, where only about 13 % find religion important. The most dramatic decline is in Poland and Ireland (about minus 26 %).

Despite all this decline and apparent disinterest in religion, in most countries, the majority of young people believe in God. In 2008, there were only a few countries where less than half of the young population believe in God (Great Britain 43.7 %; France 32.6 %; Sweden 30.9 %, and East Germany 19 %). However, in 9 out of the 15 chosen countries, the belief in God is in decline.

Interestingly, and in contrast to the question on whether young people consider religion important in their lives, most young people in Europe consider themselves to be religious. But the data also reveal that more and more young people describe

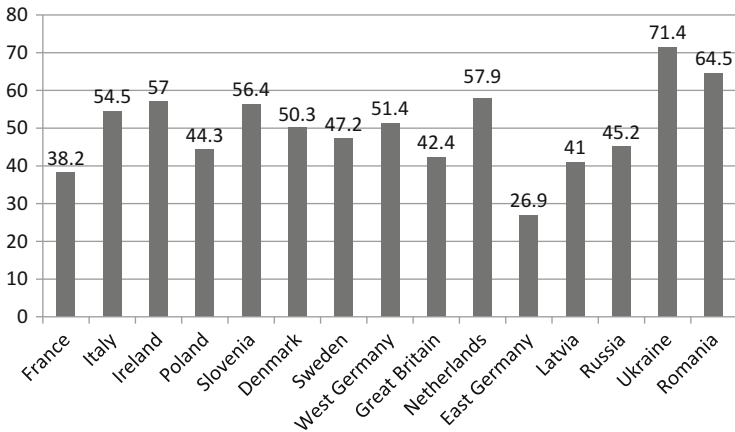


Fig. 1 Young people’s spirituality in Europe (2008) (Source: European Values Study 2008 (own calculations, weighted results))

themselves as not religious or atheist. In fact, although atheists are still a small minority in every country, these identities are on the rise in most of the surveyed countries.

How spiritual do young people view themselves? The EVS asks, “Whether or not you think of yourself as a religious person, how spiritual would you say you are? That is, how strongly are you interested in the sacred or supernatural?” Figure 1 shows the amount of young people who consider themselves as very or somewhat spiritual. As expected, the amount of young people who identify as spiritual is highest in Ukraine (71.4 %) and Romania (64.5 %) and lowest in East Germany (26.9 %) and France (38.2 %). In the other countries, the results show that the amount of spiritual young people hovers around the 50 % mark.

In general then, it is clear that in many ways traditional Christianity is in decline among most young Europeans. However, as shown, there are significant regional and denominational differences. More interesting for this chapter, perhaps, are the seeming inconsistencies revealed by the data. Why, for example, do the majority of young people claim to be “religious” and yet also claim that religion is not important to their lives? What is the significance of the results regarding “spirituality?” This chapter explores some of the ways that young people are wrestling with these categories and questions in differing contexts in the following case studies.

The Case of Young Polish Migrants to England

Since the accession of Poland into the EU in 2004, there has been a large wave of Polish young people moving to Great Britain (Drinkwater et al. 2009). Dunlop took a close look at what this migration has meant for the religiosity of Polish young people by conducting a study of Polish young people, aged 18–25, who had

migrated to live in England. In a past study of the religious attitudes and practices of student-aged people in Central Europe (2008), Dunlop found that in the midst of rapid social change in this region, young people were beginning to resist the pull of the traditional Christian churches there. She discovered that young people found their personal values of self-expression, freedom, fun, and relationships were at odds with the restrictive nature of practicing religion and that they perceived church to be about a loss of individualism. The many lifestyle rules within Polish Catholicism were causing young people to begin to question whether their national identification with and practice of religion within the Catholic Church should have any personal meaning. However, there remained a widespread sense of national identity bound up with Catholicism and a strong societal obligation to practice it.

Dunlop pursued these themes through a study of young people from Poland who had left their context of religion as obligation to go and live in England, which, Davie has argued, has a context of religion as consumption (2007). Conducted in Plymouth, England, in the autumn of 2009, twelve Polish migrants aged 18–30 spent a week taking photographs of what was sacred to them. The definition of “sacred” was intentionally left vague and open to the young people’s own interpretations, but if pressed, it was defined as that which is “nonnegotiable.” One-to-one interviews were then held with participants to discuss their photographs. Additionally, participants met together for focus group sessions using images from the Internet and creating collages that reflected on past, present, and the future. The project concluded with an exhibition of participant photographs in the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Plymouth.

The findings of the study revealed the culture shock that is often associated with moving to a new country, including some discomfort with the plurality of beliefs in the UK. For example, one young Polish man observed, “I was thinking that there are lots of pictures of Buddha in lots of places – charity shops, public school, and other places I’ve seen it as well. It seems like British people, English people, have lost their personality and are picking everything from everywhere.” Others expressed surprise at the lack of religious practice among people their age in England. One young person said, “people in England celebrate Christian holidays, but don’t believe in God.” Another young man explained how he expected to identify himself as Catholic Polish in opposition to Anglican English, but upon arrival found that religion did not seem to feature as an identity marker for many of the English people he met, leaving him bewildered about what his own religious identity meant.

The move to England meant that the young Polish participants in Dunlop’s study now had to choose whether and how to practice religion. Indeed, the data showed that there were four responses to moving to the new context: (1) no longer believing or practicing religion, (2) believing but not practicing religion in England, (3) believing and exploring Christianity within other Christian denominations, and (4) believing and choosing to continue to practice Christianity within the Catholic Church (Dunlop and Ward 2012).

For the young people who felt that societal pressure to practice religion in Poland had caused them behave hypocritically because they did not believe, coming to England was a welcome relief. As one young woman said, “now when I think about God and all that, I just can’t bring myself to believe in it again. It just seems so unrealistic. . .” These young people quickly embraced the secularized culture of the majority of young people in England. However, the transition left some young people bewildered and religiously disoriented. One young woman said, “I know that I am not as close to God – I don’t feel I am as connected as I used to be. And I miss that. I really do . . . Because what does it mean to be a religious person? Does it mean you lose all your values when you go away, when you go from one place to another? You should still have your faith, shouldn’t you? But somehow I’ve lost it. And it’s a shame.” Young people with this view, including the speaker here, practiced their faith on visits home to Poland, but did nothing religious in England.

For other young people, the transition to the religious context in England invigorated their beliefs and practices. Because religion was no longer assumed, the young people found that in choosing religion they found a deeper sense of belief. For example, one young woman said,

The first difference that is striking I think, is that churches in Poland are taken for granted. It’s not really about the church, Jesus Christ, about being good, making a good way of life for others. It’s just a tradition. It’s like a foundational pattern and people stick to this pattern because this is the way society does things. So we just adapt ourselves as a society. Whereas here, [in England] I found that people believe and then they go to the church. They really believe. They go because they see a deeper purpose in going.

For many of the young people in this category, the choice to continue to practice meant they regularly attended mass, for others it meant trying out new (non-Catholic) Christian groups and discovering a whole range of expressions of the Christian faith.

The findings of this study show that the young migrants’ religious responses to the new context are complex. Certainly, it is evident that the need to make choices for themselves about religious belief and practice changed the nature of those beliefs and practices. There seemed to be a greater connection between personal religious belief and practice, whether this entailed dropping religious practice altogether or practicing because it flowed out of a deepened and more considered faith. The process of migration to a new context forced young informants to consider what is meant by terms such as “the sacred,” “religion,” and being “religious,” a finding which is consistent with other research on young migrants to the UK (for e.g., Loul et al. 2014).

The Case of Unaffiliated Young People in the UK

In two qualitative studies of young people conducted from 2007 to 2011, Olson, Vincett, Hopkins, and Pain first investigated the religiosity of young Christians in Scotland (aged 16–27) and then that of young people in areas of deprivation in

Scotland and the north of England (aged 13–25). The studies used mixed methods, from ethnographic fieldwork, focus groups, and interviews to participant action research groups (see Olson and Vincett 2013). The discussion which follows draws upon data on young people whose family background was Christian, but who did not attend church themselves. The majority of these young people continued to identify as Christian. The reasons for this identity were varied and often overlapped. A Christian identity might be familial or relational, national (often in contradistinction to other – migrant – religious identities within a young person's neighborhood), or it might be indicative of a mainly individualized and privatized set of beliefs and practices. As young people's Christianity was largely disconnected from church authority, Olson and colleagues were not surprised to find that it was often eclectic, drawing upon a range of sources and influences. However, one unexpected finding was that many young people who identified as having no religion not only retained belief in God but also actively thought about, searched for, and/or were committed to frequent religious and/or spiritual practices. It is in these last two ways that the importance of both the supernatural and the influence of alternative spiritualities became evident.

In both studies, it was clear that many young people are reluctant to identify with negatively perceived "religion," which is seen as outmoded, hierarchical, repressive, leading to sectarian and interreligious violence, and as having little relevance to everyday life. This suspicion persisted even among those who identify as Christian and, often, among those who actively practiced or attended church (see Vincett et al. 2012). This finding perhaps goes some way to elucidating some of the apparent inconsistencies in the European Values Study quoted earlier in this chapter. Although many young people were not sure exactly what was meant by "spirituality" in conversation, it was clear that they held beliefs and drew upon sources which can be classed as alternative spirituality (i.e., from Wicca and other contemporary paganisms or from the supernatural or occult more broadly). Sources included books of fiction, TV programs and films, and popular or alternative music. Talking about particular TV programs or films often elicited evidence of beliefs and practices from young people who at first claimed to have no religion and no religious or spiritual beliefs, an important finding in terms of method in the study of religion with young people.

The difference between the way young people spoke about "religion," which was negatively perceived and experienced, and the positive way in which they spoke about "alternative" beliefs and practices was plain. Among Christians and non-Christians alike, belief in ghosts, especially of close family members, was high. A practice of prayer, meditation, or just "sitting" (Sam) at the gravesides of dead friends or family members was also common and valued. As Brooke explained, "I think there's this afterlife and there's – see, if there's a special place that [a person] always liked, like a beach or a park, they could go and like rest there." Sitting with dead friends or family members either at their gravesides or with a sense that they were present in a room or special place fulfilled a social obligation to "show respect" (Connor) but also allowed a continuation of relationship and a renewed sense of being able to cope with the very real stresses in young

people's lives. That many deceased relatives were revisioned as guardian angels rooted the phenomenon in religious or spiritual language. In Sian's case, the practice of sitting in a graveyard also fostered a sense of history of and connection to the local community.

Jack began his interview by claiming to have no religion and no religious beliefs and then enthusiastically talked about his view that the world is peopled by "spirits," including spirits of the natural world: "I believe in spirits and stuff like that. . . . Everyone has a spirit. . . . *Do you think there are spirits in the trees and plants and things like that?* Everything is alive. Everything has an aura. Everything has a . . . *Is that kind of similar to saying that everything has a spirit?* Yeah." In Jack's case, his belief in spirits turned out to be only one aspect of a well-developed set of spiritual beliefs. However, the idea that everything might have a spirit sometimes also came out in conversations about reincarnation. Natasha, for example, did not believe in God or ghosts, but believed in reincarnation and discussed the possibility that a human could be reborn as an animal or even "a leaf."

April, who had negative experiences of the Catholic Church, was drawn to media about the occult, particularly recent books and films about vampires, ghosts, and witches. As she said, "I love stuff like that. I love reading about the supernatural." Although she did not believe that vampires and witches would be like they were portrayed in books and film, she believed in ghosts and angels, and she was increasingly curious about alternative spiritualities such as contemporary paganism.

In Olson and Vincett's (2013) data then, these beliefs and practices did not lead young people to join religious, alternative spirituality or occult groups. The importance of both Christianity and alternative spiritualities here was in the provision of sources of belief (and in reinforcing belief) and in inspiration in personal practice. Similarly, it is important to note the ways in which both Christian and alternative beliefs contribute to the worldview of young people, including the way they can people the world with "other-than" or "more-than" human beings. As has been noted, for some scholars, many of these young people might be categorized as part of a "secular social supernatural" (Day 2011) or a "secular sacred" (Knott 2013); however, young people continued to hold beliefs and use language associated with Christianity or alternative spiritualities (e.g., the word "pray"), which makes such categorization difficult. It is also important that the some of the reasons that young people did not identify as "religious" had to do with difficulty with the term, social pressure, not feeling that they were "good enough," or an acute and painful sense of abandonment by God because of events in their lives.

The Case of Young People in East and West Germany

In Germany, as detailed above, a decline of religiosity during the last decades can be observed. However, there is a deep divide between the religious portraits of West and East Germany even 25 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of West and East. In West Germany, the number of young people

aged 18–20 who identified as having no religion grew from 4 % in 1980 to 17 % in 2008 and for those aged 21–25 from 7 % in 1980 to 21 % in 2008. In East Germany, the rise was from 75 % in 1991 to 87 % in 2008 in the younger group and from 71 % to 86 % in the older group (Pickel 2010, p. 263). Similarly, the situations in the religiously diverse West and the formerly socialist secularized East with dominating atheistic and scientific worldviews constitute a sharp contrast. This case study will draw out some of the detail of this contrast, based upon recent research led by Sammet (2008–2012) which looked qualitatively (especially using focus groups and interviews) at the religious and nonreligious worldviews of people in precarious situations in both West and East Germany (especially those experiencing deprivation and social exclusion), both young people and adults.

In West Germany, there is a bi-confessional tradition with two main denominations: the Protestant and Catholic Church, both with strong organizations and specific privileges. The rates of church membership are still comparatively high; however, after confirmation at the age of 14, religious indifference as well as young people's distance from organized religion grows. With regard to West Germany, the majority of young people can be described as "belonging without believing." Besides this majority there are young people who are engaged in groups in the context of local churches (e.g., Bible study groups, social justice groups, parish choirs or orchestras, etc.), who are interested in spirituality or who are members of charismatic churches, but such young people are in the minority and decreasing (Pickel 2010).

West Germany has, however, experienced religious pluralization due to migration during recent decades. Migration from the south and southeast of Europe, especially from Turkey and Greece, has meant that the number of young people with Muslim or Catholic Orthodox backgrounds is increasing (Pickel 2010, p. 278). Second- and third-generation Germans with Turkish family backgrounds and Muslim belief are more religious than other young Germans. As they are perceived as being different from the German majority regarding religion as well as ethnicity, religion becomes an identity marker for some of these young people (Gärtner and Ergi 2012). This Muslim identity can be expressed by habits in everyday life, as they are accustomed in their families, but also by young women choosing to wear the hijab and more rigid gender norms. As with Dunlop's study of young Polish migrants to the UK, young Muslims of migrant families must negotiate with different religious and secular contexts, sometimes following the religious and cultural traditions of their families and at other times following the cultural norms of other young Germans. Although religion continues in this case to be a strong constituting element of identity, practice and belief are more fluid and context dependent.

Where West Germany is both religiously plural and young people mix the religious and secular, East Germany has often been characterized as the most secularized region in the world. In the 1950s, during the first years of the socialist German Democratic Republic, harsh conflicts took place between State and Church, especially relating to young people. The socialist rite of passage of "Jugendweihe," in which 14-year-olds were given adult social status, was established as a rival to, and finally an almost complete replacement of, Protestant Confirmation (see Pollack 1993, p. 249), and socialist school education conveyed a scientific worldview as a

substitute for religion and “superstition.” This secular heritage still dominates the worldviews of young people in East Germany (Sammet 2012).

In Sammet’s study, one young woman, when asked about the significance of religion in her life, answered:

None at all. . . . Well for me it’s just. . . um as a child maybe I thought it was great. . . there is a Santa Claus etcetera, then it is okay. But as an adult, um what I don’t see doesn’t exist for me. God doesn’t exist, someone created him once upon a time. . . . Where does he come from?.. I’m just, I’m too realistic there.

This young woman denied any influence of religion and distinguished between a childish and an adult worldview. According to her, believing in God is identical with believing in Santa Claus (i.e., a childish, “unrealistic” thing to do). Similarly, as a child she was able to talk to her dead grandmother, which helped her to overcome her loss, but as an adult she is characterized by a pragmatic view of the world.

However, using results from the German General Social Survey (ALLBUS), Wohlrab-Sahr (2009, p. 152ff) sees an increasing openness – albeit on a still low level – of East German youth toward topics related to religion or spirituality in the decade after the German reunification. Wohlrab-Sahr cites higher interest in magic, spiritualism, and occultism and a striking increase in attitudes to belief in life after death (though not necessarily in God), where 34 % of the youngest group believed in an afterlife in 2002, in contrast to only 15 % in 1991.

This new openness regarding beliefs associated with religion or spirituality among young people in East Germany is illustrated by the case of a young East German woman in Sammet’s research. In her interview, she recalled in detail her childhood from a “broken home,” which led to her living on the streets as a teenager for several years where she was a victim of some extremely violent experiences. This young woman is interested in religious issues (e.g., in Indigenous religions), she reads books about religion and spirituality, as well as reading the Bible. Various elements are combined eclectically in her beliefs and her religious practices. For this young woman, religion functions as a way to interpret crisis-laden experiences. When this young participant refers to God, she is explicitly not talking and praying to the Christian God, but rather, to the “good god,” who takes care of her and her children. As was the case for many of Olson et al’s informants, this young woman distances herself from traditional Christianity, but religious and spiritual ideas and practices help her to interpret her life experiences and deal with the contingencies and insecurities of her life.

Conclusion

The religious and spiritual portrait of European young people is complex. Rather than an uncomplicated picture of secularization, this chapter has argued that secular and sacred discourses, practices, and beliefs comingle in the lives of the majority of young people in Europe. The religious, spiritual, and secular are intertwined

through the particular histories, geographies, and sociologies of countries, regions, and localities and cannot easily be separated or interpreted without reference to each other. In the case studies cited above, religion and spirituality are mostly left to the individual and are very often privatized, sometimes because of social pressures. As the EVS data indicates, traditional ways of being religious are in decline in most corners of Europe – with the notable exception of parts of Eastern Europe. It is easy to make this the major story concerning religion and spirituality in Europe for young people, but that would be to ignore the significant minorities of religious or spiritual young people, including migrant and/or non-Christian communities. It would also leave unexamined what it means to be “nonreligious,” which, as has been shown, often includes (privatized) religious belief and practice for individuals. This does not mean that the religious and spiritual lives of young people are “fuzzy” or insignificant. Young people in many European contexts take a different approach to religion; they are suspicious of inconsistencies within and social injustices committed by faith institutions, valorize self-actualization of religious identity and belief, and prioritize the acting out and embodiment of faith or belief in the everyday and, in particular, through close relationships. Many young people evidence a fascination with the supernatural or the occult, which is fed by popular and alternative cultures, with the qualification that this fascination is most often expressed through everyday relationships (e.g., a continued relationship with a deceased relative). Indeed, religious and spiritual beliefs and practices continue to function in a deeply meaningful way, often allowing young people to make sense of and cope with challenging life events (such as migration, death, violence) as well as fostering relationships with the human and other-than or more-than human.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Belief, Not Religion: Youth Negotiations of Religious Identity in Canada](#)
- ▶ [“Black Neighborhoods” and “Race,” Placed Identities in Youth Transition to Adulthoods](#)
- ▶ [Citizenship: Inclusion and Exclusion](#)
- ▶ [Spirituality, Religion, and Youth: An Introduction](#)
- ▶ [Young People, Identity, Class, and the Family](#)
- ▶ [Youth, Relationality, and Space: Conceptual Resources for Youth Studies from Critical Human Geography](#)

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Abstract

This chapter attempts to map out the different trends concerning youth and religion in East and Southeast Asia today. By drawing from case studies from various parts of the region, five trends have been identified: conversion, intensification, identity construction, social engagement, and political participation. Invoking the coexistence thesis, these trends demonstrate that there is no one narrative or linear direction concerning the fortunes of religion among young people in the region. In the latter section, the chapter draws from these case studies to identify the social conditions that account for the flourishing of religion among these youth. These are all tied to social change brought about by economic growth and its challenges in the region. As an intervention in the literature, the chapter hopes to stimulate interest in conducting large-scale and comparative studies on youth and religion in East and Southeast Asia.

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Introduction

The seventeen countries of East and Southeast Asia present exciting cases for the study of youth and religion today. Out of its over two billion inhabitants, a quarter are within the age of 10–24 years old (PRB 2013). The religious lives of these young people, however, have not been studied comprehensively. Buttressed by seminal empirical studies, this chapter attempts to map out the different trends concerning youth and religion in the region. Stated differently, this chapter asks: In what form does religiosity take shape among young people in East and Southeast Asia today? By asking this question, the chapter hopes too to stimulate interest in pursuing not only idiographic case studies but also comparative projects to comprehensively understand social change in the region. There are at least two compelling reasons for this question.

These young people, first and foremost, are experiencing unprecedented social change that will shape their worldview, not the least of which is religious (Anagnost et al. 2013). Such trends as demographic transition, democratization, and economic transformation are fostering new social conditions in which these young people are growing up. Indeed, the region continues to see economic growth led by the global economies of China, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan. But because of declining fertility, these societies are significantly aging. Alongside, there are the emerging economies of Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines whose respective populations are considerably young, but are increasingly poised to take advantage of the demographic momentum. Paralleling economic growth and globalization in the region is the move towards democratization, although not all states have accepted this fully. Collectively then, the region's young people are growing up in an environment increasingly different from that of their parents'.

Second, in the midst of its rapid modernization, the region is home to a variety of religious traditions, movements, and organizations, which, taken as a whole, seems to challenge the assumptions of the secularization thesis. In East Asia, the predominant religious affiliations are Buddhism (19.02 %), Chinese Universalism (26.76 %), and Agnosticism (29.67 %) (ARDA 2013). In Southeast Asia, these are Christianity (24.27 %), Islam (40.45 %), and Buddhism (29.4 %) (Todd 2007). As the rest of this chapter will show, the region's youth are being exposed to a wide array of dynamic beliefs, practices, and experiences – within and across religions. Heightening this exposure are the processes of globalization, migration, and technological advancement. One can therefore speak of a thriving religious market in East and Southeast Asia.

All these conditions lead back to the question on the religious lives of young people in the region today. If religious socialization is about the maintenance of a chain of memory, the social character of religious belief, practice, and identity is necessarily contingent on social change (Hervieu-Leger 2000). Sociologically speaking, religious change is inseparable from social change. This, arguably, is tied to intergenerational transmission of religious beliefs and practices (Dillon 2007). In other words, developments in the area of youth and religion deserve closer attention if social change in the region were to be assessed more comprehensively.

Identifying Trends

One, however, would be hard-pressed to find a straightforward answer to the question posed above. Consolidated efforts and large-scale studies to document and characterize the trends and fortunes of religion in East and Southeast Asia as a whole are simply sparse. Recent ones that cover religion in the region do so in relation to what may be mainly considered pressing issues of governance such as religious freedom (Bailey and Autry 2013) and church-state relations (Bautista and Lim 2012). Other anthropological studies have also queried material religion in the region (Bautista 2012). But none of these deal with young people.

This is in contrast to extensive studies on the religious lives of youth in the USA (Smith and Denton 2005), the UK (Collins-Mayo et al. 2010), and Australia (Mason et al. 2007). That these studies are common in the West is perhaps not coincidental. In these societies, secularization in terms of decline in affiliation and practice has compelled observers to query whether religion is merely evolving or completely fading away. The emerging interest in the sociology of belief (Day 2011) and contemporary spirituality (Heelas and Woodhead 2005) attests to this. Some studies have also been carried out with pastoral motivations (Kinnaman 2011). In many parts of Asia, on the other hand, the attention given to young people is in view of the development issues they are faced with such as health care, human rights, and political participation (Gale and Fahey 2005).

There are nevertheless some studies that can help in assessing the condition of youth and religion in East and Southeast Asia. As the succeeding sections will show, the influence of religion in the lives of many young people seems to persist. In the wake of 9/11, however, the religious condition that often captures the attention of observers especially in Southeast Asia is revivalism or radicalism, which typically refers to militancy, active proselytization, and political control. The problem, of course, with this generalized depiction is that apart from unnecessarily emphasizing religious conflict, it tends to conceal the richness of religious experience among young people in East and Southeast Asia today. When Muslim youth, for example, are described, the emphasis is often on their radicalization and the social conditions that lead them in this direction (Bayat and Herrera 2010).

This chapter makes an intervention in the literature by mapping out the different trends and trajectories of the religious lives of young people in the region today. Instead of arguing for a linear progression that neatly captures religious change among youth, this chapter instead proposes what has elsewhere been called the coexistence thesis (Woodhead and Heelas 2000). In other words, the changes taking place across and within religions are diverse, and they are all taking place at the same time depending on social and historical conditions.

In the context of young people and religion in East and Southeast Asia, at least five discernible trends will be offered: *conversion*, *intensification*, *identity construction*, *social engagement*, and *political participation*. To be sure, these are neither exhaustive nor necessarily exclusive from each other. In fact, collectively, these trends all point to the ongoing reappropriation of religion in the lives of young people in East and Southeast Asia today. These trends will be individually spelt out

in the ensuing subsections. Towards the end, the chapter will also discuss the various social conditions that could explain the diversity of religious expressions among young people.

As there are no transnational surveys of youth and religion in the region, this chapter draws instead from various case studies in identifying these trends. The studies, however, are limited in empirical scope so the countries covered are necessarily selective. Also, the definition of youth varies from country to country, although the range broadly covers early adolescence to late 20s. As a result of these limitations, the chapter does not attempt to paint a definitive picture. The chapter nevertheless hopes to demonstrate the richness of the religious lives of young people in the region today. In so doing, it also hopes to stimulate interest to carry out novel and comparative research in the area.

Conversion

In China, South Korea, and Singapore, observers have documented that many young people are undergoing conversion especially to Christianity and Buddhism. The perceived strict control of religion by the state in these societies does not seem to deter the conversion of its young people. In China alone, estimates show that there are already 70 million Christians, up from 2.2 million in 1982 (Lu 2013). Indeed, apart from the officially sanctioned churches in China, Christianity seems to take on various forms from Pentecostal groups in the rural to house churches and elite business circles in the urban (Cao 2013). Singapore, whose state has been characterized as co-opting religious organizations for its secular agenda, has seen the emergence of prominent Evangelical megachurches and reformist forms of Buddhism (Kuah-Pearce 2009; J. K. C. Tong 2011). Out of its five million residents, 18.2 % profess to be Christian and 33.9 % Buddhist (Pew Research Center 2012). In South Korea, Christianity has also become prominent especially in the twentieth century. 29.4 % of its population claim to be Christian (Pew Research Center 2012). Although Evangelical Christianity has been riddled with controversies, which could have affected its numerical stagnation, it remains to be publicly influential (Lee 2010). The Catholic Church in South Korea has seen some growth too from 4.6 % in 1985 to 10.9 % in 2005 (Cho 2011).

The phenomenon of conversion has been approached from different angles. But the common thread among these studies is that the conversions are taking place among youth and from nonreligious backgrounds or traditional Chinese religions. In Singapore, Chew (2008) offers a detailed depiction of adolescent switching through a survey carried out among secondary school students. Chew (2008, p. 383) prefers to use “switching” instead of “conversion” which, she argues, is a “heavily loaded term” involving a deep religious experience her study could not cover. Apparently, most switching has taken place from traditional Chinese religion, which is a syncretic form of Buddhist and Taoist practices. Conversions have taken place in favor of Christianity, Freethinking, or Soka Buddhism (see below) – alternatives perceived to be modern and rational in Singapore (Tong 2007).

Whereas Chew is hesitant to probe the religious aspect of conversion, Cho (2011) attempts to analyze the experience through narratives of his youth informants in South Korea. Highlighting the importance of friendships and personal crisis in fostering conversion, these youth mostly come from nonreligious backgrounds with considerably critical outlook of religion. Their positive experience with Christian friends has piqued their interest to join them at church, for example.

Drawing from ethnographic work in China, Ji (2006) argues that the interest of many young people in religion becomes possible as they are exposed to noninstitutional modes of religious socialization. Popular comic renditions of religious texts and Christmas festivals, for example, have stirred the interest among the youth Ji has followed. What this suggests is that the strict control of religion in places like China has in fact engendered interest in the novelty of religious encounters, which could also explain the conversion pattern among Chinese students studying abroad (Wang and Yang 2006). Supporting these observations is Yang's (2010) recent work that traces the historical religious participation of young people in China.

Intensification

Conversion patterns are interesting to note not just because they point to active choices by individuals even in societies where religions are highly regulated. They also show the fortunes of religious traditions and organizations. The data above show that such religions as Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity are thriving in East and Southeast Asia. But conversion rates reveal, too, that some religious traditions suffer the casualty of losing their members. It has been noted above, for example, that traditional Chinese religion (also called Shenism) is perceived to be regressive and irrational especially by highly educated young people. As Kua-Pearce (2009, p. 54) puts it, the young Chinese in Singapore, for example, "perceive Shenism as synonymous with an elaborate meaningless ritual system." Defaulting into Freethinking or converting out is then an almost inevitable option.

But it may not be entirely hopeless for these traditions. The ethnographic work of Chew (2009) in Singapore shows that there are Chinese youth finding renewed interest in the Daoist religious practices of their parents and in temples. While statistically speaking the adherents of Daoism in Singapore have declined from 38.2 % in 1980 to 10.8 % in 2000, ethnographic data show that there are young people who have chosen to remain in the ritual practices of their ancestors, some of whom have even chosen to be religious leaders themselves. This phenomenon demonstrates intensification as a religious trend, which can be defined as the increase in the religiosity of adherents within a religious community (Woodhead and Heelas 2000). Intensification can be in terms of heightened commitment to beliefs, participation, or practice.

Indeed, the youth (17–29 years old) Chew (2009) has followed are different in that it is the elderly who typically attend Daoist temples. Nevertheless, they have remained active even in running the activities of their respective temples.

For them, their religious participation offers what can be considered both a purpose in life and a way of life. Their purpose lies in finding and fostering a sense of community among friends and relatives around the rituals they have. But it is also a way of life in that the beliefs and rituals allow them to have a sense of control over their daily needs in such areas as studies, health, and finances. The performance of rituals such as burning incense and chanting at home and in temples is important in giving them this sense of certainty. In other words, they are finding rationality in what others may have already rendered irrational (Kuah-Pearce 2009). As young and highly educated individuals, the future of Daoism or traditional Chinese religion necessarily depends on how they can make it more relevant to a fast-changing society.

If intensification is the process by which nominal religionists become more active or committed, then it can also be argued that within Christianity, even if it may be flourishing as a whole, are churches or religious groups that can foster heightened religiosity. Megachurches in Singapore, for example, whose Sunday attendance can easily exceed 10,000, may be fulfilling this very role especially among young people. Indeed, 36.2 % of over 19,000 members of City Harvest Church, one of the most prominent megachurches in Singapore, are students (CHC 2013). And according to the landmark survey of Chong and Hui (2013), at least 18.2 % of the members of megachurches have converted to Christianity at another church. The top reason stated by megachurch respondents for attending church is that it gives them a “deeper experience of God,” a possible indicator of intensification (Chong and Hui 2013, p. 66).

Identity Construction

The studies above have so far focused on conversion and intensification patterns in terms of narratives and numbers. If conversion speaks of an individual taking on a new religious identity (Turner 2011) and intensification a form of deliberate commitment, then it is important to fundamentally assess how religion is first internalized and understood by young people. Indeed, Cornelio (2010) argues that religious identity should not be conceptualized just in terms of ascribed categories or religious affiliation but in terms of self-understanding, as in what people mean when they say they are Christian, for example. In the lives of young people, therefore, religion is not simply a category they are born into or deliberately choose or reject when friends invite them. Instead, religion becomes part of their identity. This can be characterized as a continuum with the totalization of one’s identity at one end and selective lifestyle construction at the other. Two cases of Muslim youth are offered here.

In Indonesia, Hasan (2010) shows that the attraction of Salafism among thousands of young people who are highly educated is not simply because of religious fanaticism. Salafism has been associated with irrationality and religious militancy because of its call for jihad and the seeming readiness of its youth for martyrdom. They have in fact been involved in conflicts with Christians in

Moluccas, “displaying their determination and capacity to defend” the Muslims there (Hasan 2010, p. 61). Investigating their motivations, Hasan argues that Salafism has served as an alternative channel for these youth to find their identity and establish their place in Indonesian society whose modernization has left them alienated in poverty and unemployment. For them, wearing the prescribed outfit (jalabiyya and turban), growing a beard, and praying and reciting the Quran with the right accent are all part of internalizing a “total Muslim” identity (Hasan 2010, p. 59). Left with little options in life in Indonesian society, becoming a Salafi for these youth has given them the assurance that they are part of a community that can defend themselves while striving for what could still be an elusive future.

The pervasiveness of religion over one’s identity does not necessarily have to be total in terms of exclusivism and the prescription of specific physical appearance. Also in Indonesia, the experience of the young women Naafs (2010) has studied suggests that religion can help them interface with modernity and not reject it completely. Drawing from her ethnographic accounts, Naafs (2010) shows that young Muslim women, while evidently drawn to music videos common among them, filter the messages using their religious values. In a way that challenges the moral panic surrounding the sexualization of media, they do not subscribe, for example, to the sensual portrayals of female bodies. Instead, they find worthwhile the portrayed values of self-reliance, independence, cosmopolitanism, and technological competence. In this sense, religion helps in the construction of a modern lifestyle for these young women.

Social Engagement

Conversion, intensification, and identity construction are trends that by and large deal with the individual and the search for what can be considered personally authentic expressions of religiosity. While the cases cited above are clearly embedded in community formations, these trends are still about individual religious experience which is fundamentally embodied. The salience of emotionalism and piety is notable, for example. Having said that, the variety of religiosity among young people in East and Southeast Asia is not only about individual and congregational experiences. Another discernible trend is the social engagement of many youth groups to address the needs of the wider communities they are part of. This ethos aligns with what Flory and Miller (2010, p. 15) have described as young people’s “expressive communalism” in the USA. This, too, has been observed among Buddhist and Catholic youth.

One intriguing transformation taking place among Buddhist temples and organizations in Singapore is that they are becoming welfare centers caring for the marginalized. Kuah-Pearce (2009) considers this a distinctive of Reformist Buddhism. Apart from devoting time to meditation and to the study of scriptures (also indicative of intensification), Buddhist youth in these temples have also visited welfare homes to take care of the elderly, for example, and organize

activities for them. Social engagement, however, is not limited to the needs of the marginalized segment. The youth of Soka Gakkai, a Nichiren Buddhist organization in Singapore, have also participated in many charity activities organized by the state. But they are known, too, for their well-choreographed cultural performances in such prominent events as the National Day Parade. For many of these young people, their cultural performances are a way for them to spread a message of goodwill to fellow Singaporeans (Cornelio 2013).

The active role of the state is not to be missed in this transformation. Such is arguably the result of the state's attempt to co-opt religious organizations to provide the welfare that its meritocratic workfare system is hesitant to institutionalize (Kuah-Pearce 2008; Poh 2007). But at the same time, these activities are also carried out "to project themselves as socially relevant" especially to the state (Kuah-Pearce 2009, p. 246). Cornelio (2013) calls this alignment between the secular interests of the state and the activities of religious organizations as the nationalization of religion. Regardless, these young people are clearly drawing from Buddhist moral teachings in justifying their social engagement.

The same can be said about Catholic youth in the Philippines who are reinterpreting the relevance of their faith in terms of community engagement. For these youth, right living is more important than right believing. So even if they may not be attending mass or fully cognizant of doctrines, their Catholic faith, for them, is about doing good to other people. Many of them are then found in volunteer activities such as shelter-building projects in rural areas. This form of "Golden Rule Catholicism" reveals a strand of transformation insofar as lived religion is concerned within ostensibly conservative Catholicism in the Philippines (Cornelio 2014). Interestingly, this action-oriented ethos may also inform the interfaith efforts among religious youth in Singapore and in the Philippines (Cornelio and Salera 2012; Phua et al. 2008).

Political Participation

Religion, of course, has played an important role in supporting or contesting political regimes in the region: Christianity in the Philippines, Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia, and Buddhism in Thailand (Singh 2011). Studies, however, on the intersection of youth, religion, and politics in East and Southeast Asia have been admittedly limited. A few promising ones are foregrounded here.

Above it was mentioned that in the wake of 9/11, some discussions have in fact centered on radicalization, which may suggest irrationality and fanaticism. The youth, for example, may be presented as being co-opted into Islamism, an ideology that seeks to recast the state and society according to strict religious mores (see Bayat and Herrera 2010). In this sense, religion becomes politically charged to take over the government through the use of violence. This mode of politicization gains traction as a reaction to the failures of democracy, the economy, and public morality, as in the case of radical Islamism in post-Suharto Indonesia (Hefner 2012).

Other studies on youth and religion demonstrate that involvement in politics does not have to be in this radical manner. Drawing from her ethnographic work, Fisker-Nielsen (2012) shows why the youth of Soka have supported Komeito, a party associated with Soka Gakkai in Japan. In a way, this is not surprising since the teachings of Nichiren, which inform the Buddhist thought of Soka Gakkai, speak of the importance of placing influential people in political positions. This, however, does not mean that young people naively or are simply coerced to support Komeito. While others may have done so out of trust in the character of Komeito politicians (who are also Soka members), many others have actively canvassed for the party for its welfare and immigration policies. Clearly then, their Buddhist values have influenced their political choice.

Sociological Explanations

Admittedly, the picture depicted by the trends above is one of a thriving religious milieu. Indeed, from the point of view of the Religious Economies Model (Stark and Finke 2000), the presence of various religious activities and movements allows for young people to explore their own identity and the communities they can be part of. This in turn enhances the vibrancy of the overall religious terrain in East and Southeast Asia. This is not to deny, however, that a countertrend may be taking place in terms of noticeable decline in religious practice. Among young adults (18–35 years old) in South Korea, for example, the percentage of individuals who consider religion important in their lives has gone down (Cho 2011). Similarly, for many Filipino Catholic youth (13–39 years old), participating in sacraments seems to have become less important according to a representative survey (Episcopal Commission on Youth 2003). In Malaysia, there seems to be a geographic dimension to religiosity, too. Muslim youth (16–35 years old) in rural areas demonstrate stronger commitments to Islamic creeds, for example, than do their urban peers (Krauss et al. 2006).

Whether these trends automatically point to secularization in terms of the overall loss of religiosity among individuals is another question that needs probing. It could be that deinstitutionalization, for example, leads to the privatization of religious beliefs and practice (Woodhead and Heelas 2000). Whatever the answer might be, the fact remains that there are various trends that demonstrate the richness of the religious expressions of young people in the region.

This then begs the question concerning the social contexts allowing for the religious market to flourish. One of the weaknesses of the Religious Economies Model is that it assumes that religions will thrive as long as the supply meets the demand it considers relatively stable (Stark and Finke 2000). Indeed, the importance of regular fellowship, commitment to religious practice, and rational explanation of doctrines seem to explain the sustained vibrancy of Christian and Buddhist organizations in Singapore and South Korea, for example (Cho 2011; Tong 2007). These are clearly institutional efforts addressing the diverse religious needs of individuals.

Analytical attention, however, should be on particular conditions that account for certain religious expressions (and not others) to flourish, and these could be socially and historically contingent. Arguably, these conditions, as suggested at the onset, are readily discernible in the fast-changing societies of East and Southeast Asia. Like the trends enumerated above, these conditions are not exhaustive and are also drawn from the cases studies cited.

One salient theme from these cases is that many young people are feeling alienated in their own societies and, as a result, are finding certainty and a sense of community in religion. The case of youth being attracted to Salafism demonstrates that many of them have become disillusioned with the failures of modernization, exclusionary growth, and corruption in Indonesia (Hasan 2010). Similarly, rapid social change has left many young people looking for some moral certitude that religion can offer. The youth of Soka Singapore find it disturbing, for example, that the affluence and meritocracy in their society have led many to become self-serving (Cornelio 2013). Interestingly, this disillusionment with “materialism and money-seeking” in China is the same observation that Wang and Yang (2006, p. 185) make of Chinese students converting to Christianity in the USA.

Another social factor to consider in the diversity of religion in the region is the educational and social mobility of many of its young people. The aspirations for social mobility among young people in places like Singapore are matched by contemporary religious experience. For Tong (2007), the emergence of megachurches and Reformist Buddhism in Singapore points to the rationalization of religion in that these religious phenomena encourage independence, self-motivation, and intellectual treatment of sacred scriptures. Many highly educated young people who come from working-class backgrounds find the ethos appealing. Indeed, recent research shows that compared to mainline denominations, the members of megachurches in Singapore predominantly come from lower income households (Chong and Hui 2013). The religious innovations of Christianity and Reformist Buddhism, in other words, flourish (and are not contested) in an environment of increasing affluence. If there is any that suffers, it is the traditional forms of Chinese religion which are perceived to be regressive and irrational (Chew 2009; Tong 2008). This picture of vibrant religiosity is in remarkable contrast to the decline of religious affiliation and practice among young people in the affluent societies of the West.

Conclusion and Future Directions

This chapter has attempted to map out the different trends concerning the religious expressions of young people in East and Southeast Asia today. This is a welcome intervention since most studies on religion in the area have focused on its interface with states and with modernity. Alongside, interest in youth has been in line with development issues they are faced with. As a result, the chapter has inevitably drawn from idiographic case studies across the region.

Instead of subscribing to one narrative or linear account, the chapter has invoked the coexistence thesis to show that paralleling each other are various trajectories

demonstrating the fortunes of religiosity among young people. At least five trends have been identified: *conversion*, *intensification*, *identity construction*, *social engagement*, and *political participation*. Since the cases have been selective based on the availability of literature, there is no claim that the list is exhaustive. Nor are these trends mutually exclusive. Processes of intensification and identity construction, for example, may cover the same phenomenon.

Towards the end the chapter has tried to identify the different social conditions that have made these trends possible. One can argue that the conditions identified are necessarily tied to the social change taking place in East and South East today brought about by economic growth, for example. On one hand, many young people are turning to religion because of the alienation they are experiencing in their respective societies. It could be a consequence of exclusionary development or corruption in government, for example. For other youth, the rapid increase in the affluence of some societies has engendered moral dilemmas involving selfishness and materialism. Religion, for these youth, provides the moral guidance they need. Additionally, the social mobility of young people in the region has given them more access to education, which in turn has fostered aspirationalism. Religion has given some of these youth the virtues of self-discipline and independence to ride the wave of increasing affluence.

The chapter can be considered an important intervention in the literature since there are no large-scale or even comparative studies that attempt to comprehend the state of youth and religion in the region. Large-scale studies can pursue analyses of specific cohorts or intergenerational differences. Comparative studies can also adopt the quantitative approach to identify general trends and deviations at the local and regional levels. Complementing these projects should be ethnographic studies to foreground local experiences of being young and religious. Hopefully, this chapter has implicitly raised the need for these studies.

But to carry out these studies is not going to be easy. Any attempt to do so will have to contend with the religious diversity within and across the different countries of East and Southeast Asia. This is not to mention the significance of Freethinking or Agnosticism as a religious identifier, which needs to be interrogated as well.

Also, whether quantitative or qualitative, future studies have to be cognizant that even within religions, there are different expressions that may suggest one trend or another. Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism are all being reappropriated in different ways by young people in different parts of the region.

Finally, as the region is undergoing significant social change, this is the most opportune time to commence a longitudinal study (by cohort or age group) in the hope of answering some critical questions: How sustainable is the vibrancy of religion in the lives of young people today? And which trends, if any, will prevail?

Cross-References

- ▶ [Belief, Not Religion: Youth Negotiations of Religious Identity in Canada](#)
- ▶ [Spirituality, Religion, and Youth: An Introduction](#)
- ▶ [Young People and Religion and Spirituality in Europe: A Complex Picture](#)

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Erratum to Chapter 12: Who's Learning or Whose Learning? Critical Perspectives on the Idea of Youth-Led Policy-Making Related to Gender-Based Violence in a South African Classroom

Claudia Mitchell

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