

A new youth? Young people, generations and family life

C. Leccardi and E. Ruspini (Eds), 2006

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Research and analysis in the field sometimes termed 'youth studies' is criss-crossed by a number of tensions that are articulated, if not reconciled, in this important book. One tension that has preoccupied the research community over recent years has its origins in the wider theoretical debates about individualization and risk under conditions of late modernity. In youth research, positions are taken within a continuum that extends from those who emphasize the continuities of deep-seated structural factors in shaping young people's life chances, to those that emphasize the discontinuities that arise from conditions of uncertainty and risk in the changing social landscape. In the introductory sections of the book, reference is made to the call from Ken Roberts, now one of the elder statesmen of youth research, to bring the theoretical debates about opportunity and risk more in line with the evidence. Yet each of these positions has been reinforced through evidence of different kinds. Evidence of 'predictable' social regularities is yielded by methodological approaches designed to identify such regularities through aggregation and averages; evidence of variability and unpredictability is yielded by approaches that aim to differentiate within and between subgroups. Furlong, in his foreword, hopes that reconciliation between apparently contradictory perspectives can facilitate a reconceptualization of youth. While this volume cannot be said to achieve that reconciliation and reconceptualization, it does provide a stepping-stone on the way, and underlines the need for methodological diversity if the prospect of better conceptualizations of youth in the twenty-first century is to be advanced.

The book originated in an International Conference on Family Forms and the Young Generation in Europe held in the University of Milan, Bicocca, 2001. Conference papers from 2001 have been selected, revised and supplemented by commissioned contributions to create an international collection that expands and deepens our understanding of family dynamics and intergenerational transmission in the situation of youth in contemporary societies. The significance of family is overlooked or underplayed in much youth research. The same applies to questions of intergenerational relationships. This neglect may be the result of another long-standing tension—between transition studies and youth cultural studies—which has tended to define the field in particular ways and divert attention away from the most crucial sociological questions. Youth research has now been forced to move in a number of different directions and to explore the use of fresh frameworks, terminologies and methods, as this volume illustrates. To address the question posed in its title 'A new youth?' the editors have organized the book in three parts. Part 1 focuses on new perspectives and challenges, with discussion of the forces that have shaped youth in the last decades. Part 2 considers young people and relations between the generations. Part 3 concludes the volume with cases that explore the social processes of exclusion in the transitional years.

One-dimensional treatments of youth transitions have been displaced by more holistic analyses over recent years. This book continues that trend by attending to changes in living arrangements, education and the organization of labour markets, cultural and political

changes and the 'temporal experiences' of young people. To open the debate in part 1, Leccardi poses the question 'How do young people come to terms with the loss of an idea of the future?' in considering how social uncertainty has become part of the biographical construction of youth. The debate widens further with comparative perspectives on the so-called 'yo-yo transitions' of young adulthood. Biggart and Walker explore the 'destandardization' and 'complexification' of the social processes accompanying young people through adult life and the growing dependence of young adults on the family of origin, showing how the risks associated with working life and badly paid casualized jobs impact significantly on the role of family networks and welfare systems. Mørch and Andersen extend the analysis by connecting individualization in biography with the ways in which this is 'made possible and is being formed by societal organization' (p. 79). This excellent chapter goes on to argue that traditional, modern and late-modern forms of societal organization co-exist while new modes of social integration develop.

How young people are positioned and framed in public perceptions and in the dominant research agendas plays a part in defining 'the new youth'. In a chapter of particular interest to educationalists, Holm, Daspit and Kelaher Young explore how young people are framed in the US with reference to schooling, sexuality, violence, consumerism and popular culture. How young people position themselves in these and other domains is likely to vary between different societies and settings, and is of considerable importance in seeking to understand 'the new youth' as Helve's contribution demonstrates.

This volume rises most strongly above the reworking of long-standing issues to address crucial new questions in part 2. This contains the most distinctively novel contributions of the volume, with intergenerational and gender relations foregrounded in much of the analysis. The section is introduced by Hillcoat-Nalletanby and Dharmalingam from New Zealand, in a chapter which explores solidarity and support across three generations in relationships between children, parents and grandparents. Overlapping perspectives are introduced on how the senses of belonging and embeddedness which the 'family tree' is able to provide are manifested on different levels. Paradoxically, the growth of objective inequality between the generations is shown to facilitate rather than hinder the relationships between young and older generation—young people accept and expect family protection without necessarily seeing self-identity threatened. Santoro follows with evidence of convergence in the rather linear representations of transitions held by both parents and children in the case of Italian young people living with their mothers, a convergence that has both positive and negative consequences. A different slant on family cultural models is also provided by Manuela du Bois-Reymond and Yolande te Poel who bring intergenerational and gender viewpoints to the situation of young men and women who are already parents and those postponing parenthood, showing how relationships between care work and paid work and the negotiations between young men and women around these matters become highly significant in their lives. Gerhard completes the set with insights into how young German women's visions of feminism have developed in ways that are distanced from the versions espoused by their mothers.

Part 3, 'Transitions to adulthood and social exclusion', explores the distribution of resources and opportunities between generations, working these together with the themes of young people's citizenship. Roberts shows how young people in post-communist eastern

Europe have been affected by the changes in their countries' economies, the creation of multi-party political systems and broader changes in gender roles, while Sumbadze and Tarkhan-Mouravi provide an intergenerational analysis of values and lifestyles of young people in Georgia. The last three chapters reveal how particular social groups become 'socially excluded' in European societies. Research into the situation of lone young mothers in Italy (Ruspini) shows how inequality factors converge for those in 'anomalous' positions. For young unemployed people with multiple problems in the UK, structural disadvantages complicate their situation further (Parry) while Monro's unique study on trans-gender young people leads into an argument for a social system more tolerant of gender diversity.

Overall, the book will be a rich resource for those seeking to make sense of new evidence in the search for better understandings of the contemporary situation of youth in the expanded Europe and beyond. Better understanding would be promoted still further if research in the field of youth were better connected at an inter-disciplinary level. I recently reviewed another Ashgate book, *Unemployed youth and social exclusion in Europe*, edited by Weil, Wildermeersch and Jansen (2005). The overlap between the two volumes in the questions being addressed is considerable, yet the bodies of literature and research on which the authors build have surprising gaps, omissions and 'blind spots'. This is symptomatic of deeper disconnections in youth research that will have to be overcome if the reconceptualization of youth to which most aspire is to be achieved.

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Liberty and learning: Milton Friedman's voucher idea at fifty

Robert C Enlow and Lenore T. Ealy, 2006

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Half a century ago, in a volume addressed mainly to economists, Milton Friedman dissected *The role of Government in education* (Friedman, 1955). He distinguished three major roles that Government in the US was performing: legislating compulsory schooling, financing schooling and administering schools. Friedman's argument was that these were different tasks, and the rationale for Government involvement was different in each case. At that time Friedman accepted that there were dangers of market failure in education so there might be a role for Government in maintaining standards and in providing finance for children from less affluent families but he saw no reason at all for the public sector to have a near monopoly in running schools. Hence the idea of vouchers was born. Schools should be private institutions in a competitive market, with a minimum amount of quality regulation, and families with children of school age should receive vouchers, which could be