

Book review

Youth Marginality in Britain: Contemporary studies of austerity

Edited by Shane Blackman and Ruth Rogers.
Bristol: Policy Press, 2017, pp. 312, £29.99 (Pb).
ISBN: 978 1 4473 3054 7

Catherine Harris*
Sheffield Hallam University

Youth Marginality in Britain: Contemporary studies of austerity is an edited collection with contributions by academics from across the UK. The editors' key aim is 'to challenge the dominant notions of youth marginalisation and the representation of youth as 'trouble'. Studies included utilise critical analysis and participatory research methods to engage with young people and to centre their voices and stories.

Chapter One is authored by the editors (Blackman and Rogers) and outlines the context and theoretical underpinnings relating to the marginalisation faced by many young people in the UK. This chapter summarises the key challenges they face in relation to poverty and lack of opportunity, and the impact of benefit sanctions imposed in the context of austerity. The authors also highlight how prevailing negative characterisations of young people in the tabloid media have contributed to this marginalisation.

The book is split into three parts. *Part One: Youth Policy, pariahs and poverty* begins with a critical analysis of how Conservative political ideology of the 'broken society' has contributed to young people's marginality (Chapter Two, Squires and Goldsmith). They highlight the ways in which 'tough justice' measures such as sanctions accompanied by a rolling back of youth social policy have had a negative impact on young people's wellbeing. This chapter provides valuable early context for the following parts. In Chapter Three, Fahmy analyses data from the 2012 UK Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey (2012 PSE-UK) which provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges facing young adults in the UK in terms of poverty and transitions to economic independence. The comparison of data from 1990, 1999 and 2012 surveys provides a particularly useful insight into the 'alarming growth in youth deprivation of necessities' during this period, as a result of the 2008 economic crisis and increased vulnerability due to subsequent austerity policies aimed at and/or disproportionately affecting young people. Chapter Four explores youth marginality through real-life examples from a study by Brooks at a local charity in Essex. This chapter explores how austerity measures imposed by the Conservative government have increased social disadvantage for young adults. In the final chapter of Part One, Blackman and Rogers address representation of young people and reinforcement of youth marginality in the media through a textual analysis of

newspaper headlines and reality TV programmes. This chapter highlights the political and moral messages conveyed in these representations which encourage mockery of young people and portray them as a burden to society.

Part Two: Intersections of youth marginality: class, gender, ethnicity and education explores how the vulnerability of young people to marginalisation can be compounded and amplified where they intersect with other characteristics. Primarily, chapters in this section discuss the findings of a range of in-depth qualitative studies, including explorations of the experiences of young mothers, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children from Afghanistan, Roma young people in education, and care leavers. These chapters provide powerful examples of the range of intersecting factors affecting youth marginality relating to race and ethnicity, gender and social class. Compelling evidence is presented by authors with first-hand experience of working with young adults and through in-depth qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, observations, and ethnography, as well as secondary data analysis. These chapters also highlight the value of creative research methods in engaging and eliciting valuable insights from young and/or marginalised participants. For example, in Chapter Five, Kehily describes utilising photo-elicitation as part of interviews with young mothers, to facilitate discussion of the representation of pregnancy in popular culture. Case studies and verbatim quotes help to highlight real experiences and centre the voices of marginalised young people affected by issues relating to austerity measures and negative discourses relating to their age and other intersecting characteristics. The damaging impacts of stigmatisation and stereotyping are key themes running through most chapters in this Part, identified by young people (e.g., care leavers in Chapter Twelve) and practitioners (e.g., family workers and teachers working with Roma young people in schools in Chapter Nine), and supported by evidence from wider literature and policy.

In *Part Three: Resistance and ethnography*, chapters utilise ethnographic methods (Chapters Fourteen, Fifteen and Sixteen in particular) to highlight the importance of young people's experiences of austerity and poverty at a personal, familial and collective level. Contributions in this part focus on young people's strategies of resistance and risk in the face of disconnection and discrimination. For example, Chapter Fourteen focuses on the negotiation of 'free space' between young people and the police, while Chapter Fifteen seeks to re-frame negative media representations of 'binge' drinking by young people, highlighting the intentional management of levels of intoxication reported by participants ('calculated hedonism'). Again, case study examples and quotes emerging from these qualitative methods are powerful in highlighting the voice and telling the stories of the young people involved in the research. In the concluding chapter (Chapter Seventeen), Rogers and Blackman consider how the economic instability following the Brexit referendum vote (a recent development at the time of publishing) will contribute to future youth marginality. They highlight the impact of young people's feelings of betrayal and powerlessness (due to the majority of eligible young people voting to remain and those under 18 being unable to have their say), as the already disproportionate, and sometimes targeted, impacts of austerity measures on young people are set to become more pronounced as a result.

Overall, the book provides a very detailed and informative account of the range of factors contributing to youth marginality in the UK today. It also does an excellent job of challenging prevailing notions and representations of young people in media and policy. Extensive evidence is presented to support the arguments of the editors through chapters focused on studies utilising a range of methodologies, including analysis of large-scale quantitative datasets and in-depth qualitative methods (interviews, observations, case studies). Participatory, biographical and ethnographic methods appear to have been particularly successful in engaging and gaining valuable insights from young people, and analysis of secondary data is used effectively to support this

evidence. The three parts of the book create a coherent journey: Part One outlining the key issues, theory and context; Part Two providing detailed examples of the range of experiences of youth marginality and intersecting factors; and Part Three exploring young people's resistance to marginalisation. The combination of these chapters bookended by synthesising introductory and concluding chapters by the editors result in a balanced, engaging and persuasive account.

*Correspondence address: Catherine Harris, Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, Sheffield Hallam University, City Campus, Sheffield S1 1WB. Email: c.h.harris@shu.ac.uk