

The Contemporary Experience of Youth

Troubles of Youth

Friday, 10 October 2008

Lecture Outline

- Age, Period and Cohort Effects
- What is different about the experience of contemporary youth?
- Youth as a Underclass
- Epistemological fallacy?

Age, Period and Cohort Effects

- Age effect
 - Youth experience is the result of constant and specific processes experienced at that age
 - If problems increase, it is due to increased numbers of people at that age
- Period Effect
 - Youth experience changes due to macro societal change felt across society
 - Youth problems may change, but because of particular structural position of youth: causes can be discerned elsewhere
- Cohort Effects
 - Particular age group, at a particular point in history, are subject to specific social influences / phenomena
 - A combination of age and period effects

Example of Age Effects

- Geoffrey Pearson 'Hooligan: a History of respectable fears'
- Social Construction of youth as a problematic social category is a constant
- Each successive group over time experience broadly similar demonisation
- Cross-sectional data will miss age effects

Example of Period Effects

- Decline of traditional heavy industry in the West over the 1970s -> 1990s
- The rise of youth unemployment in this period due to changing socio-economic structures
- The experience of one age group will be observed in other age groups
- Within age group trends will miss period effects

Example of Cohort Effects

- 1960s: social revolution occurring across the West
- Decline in tradition sources of status and identification (church, family, the police etc.)
- As a result, the next generation experience new forms of socialisation, parenting and community structures
- Observable differences in comparison to previous groups of young people, and in comparison to other age groups now

Researching Cohort Effects

- Requirements:
 - Data collected over time
 - Identifies changing patterns, trends etc.
 - Data collected across age groups
 - Comparison of different experiences
 - Data collected from same people over time
 - Identifies whether cohort differences are caused by cohort effect

So, what is different?

- Transitional paths
 - Traditional transitions to adulthood relatively straightforward
 - Leaving Home
 - Getting a job
 - Sexual activity
 - Becoming parents
 - All occurring within a relatively short period of time
 - Community, work and leisure all closely related

Contemporary Transitions

- Extended and Diffuse Transition period
 - Consumerism
 - “End of childhood”?
 - Work no longer the fundamental and exclusive concern: work, study, leisure ‘balance’
 - Demography and family structures
 - growth of non-traditional forms
 - “Boomerang” generation



Consumerism



- Childhood has become the locus of consumerist pressure
 - “pester power”
 - High brand recognition in young children
 - Experienced most by children from disadvantaged children
 - Identity formation achieved in relation to brands , aspirational values: less so community and family oriented social capital

Disappearance of Childhood?

- A range of emotional and developmental milestones passed at an early stages
 - earlier average age of first sexual experience
 - 1950's: 20 for men; 21 for women
 - 1990s: 16 for men and women
 - World of work entered prior to the end of compulsory education
 - low paid, part-time, few rights, low status



Key Transition: Education to Employment

- 1970s: rapid deindustrialization and economic restructuring
 - growth of service sector
 - widespread adult population meant that the new workers found themselves in direct competition with experienced workers, and the teenage work sector
 - service jobs prioritizing personal, social skills over traditional productive skills

Changing Family Structures

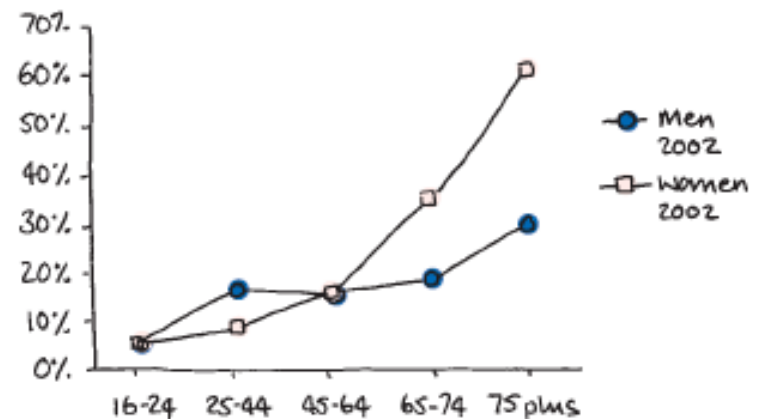
- Rapid growth in solo-living amongst 25-44 year olds
- Particularly among men
- Better integration? Debatable
- Some evidence that men and women experience solo living differently

fig.1 Households by size

| GREAT BRITAIN | Percentage | | | | |
|------------------------------------|------------|------|------|------|------|
| | 1971 | 1981 | 1991 | 2001 | 2004 |
| One person | 18 | 22 | 27 | 29 | 29 |
| Two person | 32 | 32 | 34 | 35 | 35 |
| Three person | 19 | 17 | 16 | 16 | 16 |
| Four person | 17 | 18 | 16 | 14 | 14 |
| Five person | 8 | 7 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| Six people or more | 6 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| All households (= 100%) (millions) | 18.6 | 20.2 | 22.4 | 23.8 | 24.1 |
| Average households size | 2.9 | 2.7 | 2.5 | 2.4 | 2.4 |

Source: Social Trends 35 – Census, Labour Force Survey, ONS 2005

fig.4 Percentage living alone: by sex and age



Source: ST35 - General Household Survey, ONS 2005

Impact of Changing Transitions

- Class inequality experienced in new ways
 - personalisation: the development of personal skills vital in the new jobs market strongly patterned by class
 - consumerism experienced differently
 - collective efficacy of communities: disadvantaged communities have weak informal social control mechanisms

Youth: The new underclass?

- 3 “early warning signs”
 - high rates of crime, illegitimacy and unemployment
- Charles Murray and cultural underclass theory
 - **individual** economic rationality: choice of criminal lifestyles and voluntary idleness
- Structural Underclass theory: John Westergaard
 - changing economic and political circumstances has produced an ‘outcast class’

Making Sense of the Changes

- Strong social patterning of experiences and changes
- “Individuation”
 - competitive culture: Thatcher’s children?
 - emphasis on “individual effort, merit and personal responsibility for failure”
 - eg. responsabilization (Garland)
 - links to suicide
 - Anomie?
 - declining norms of work, family life, community