

References

- Abbott, P. and Wallace, C. (1989) 'The family', in P. Brown and R. Sparks (eds), *Beyond Thatcherism: Social Policy, Politics and Society*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Batchelor, J., Dimmock, B. and Smith, D. (1994) *Understanding Stepfamilies: What Can Be Learned from Callers to the Stepfamily Telephone Counselling Service?*, London: Stepfamily Publications.
- Bridgewood, A. and Savage, D. (1993) *General Household Survey, 1991*, Series GHS no. 22, London: HMSO.
- Buck, N., Gershuny, D., Rose, D. and Scott, J. (1994) *Changing Households: the British Household Panel Survey 1990-1992*, London: ESRC.
- Danish IMC (1992) *Children and Young People Growing Up in Denmark: Growing Up in the 1990s*, Inter-Ministerial Committee on Children in Denmark, Denmark: The Ministry of Social Affairs.
- Ditch, J., Barnes, H., Bradshaw, J., Commaille, J. and Eardley, T. (1996) *A Synthesis of National Family Policies 1994*, York: European Observatory on National Family Policies, University of York.
- Farmer, E. and Parker, R. (1991) *Trials and Tribulations: Returning Children from Local Authority Care to their Families*, London: HMSO.
- Gittins, D. (1985) *The Family in Question*, London: Macmillan.
- Griffin, C. (1993) *Representations of Youth: the Study of Youth and Adolescence in Britain and America*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hareven, T. (1993) 'Family and generational relations in the later years: a historical perspective', in L. Burton (ed.), *Families and Caring*, New York: Baywood.
- Haskey, J. (1991) 'Estimated numbers and demographic characteristics of one-parent families in Great Britain', *Population Trends*, no. 65: 35-47.
- Hylton, C. (1995) *Coping with Change: Family Transitions in Multi-Cultural Communities*, London: Stepfamily Publications.
- Kiernan, K. (1992) 'The impact of family disruption in childhood on transitions in young adult life', *Population Studies*, 46 (3): 51-82.
- Kiernan, K. (1995) 'Transitions to parenthood: young mothers, young fathers - associated factors and later life experiences', research paper, London School of Economics.
- Laslett, P. (1977) *Family Life and Illicit Love in Earlier Generations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, P. (1969) *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Boston: Beacon Press.
- Schofield, R. and Wrigley, E. (1981) *The Population History of England, 1541-1871: A Reconstruction*, London: Edward Arnold.
- Secombe, W. (1993) *Weathering the Storm: Working Class Families from the Industrial Revolution to the Fertility Decline*, London: Verso.
- Simpson, B., McCarthy, P. and Walker, J. (1995) *Being There: Fathers after Divorce*, London: Relate Centre for Family Studies.
- Stone, L. (1995) *Uncertain Unions and Broken Lives*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Villeneuve-Gokalp (1995) 'De la famille d'origine à la famille recomposée', in M. Meulders-Klein and I. Thery (eds), *Les Récompositions familiales aujourd'hui*, Paris: Nathan.
- Weeks, J. (1981) *Sex, Politics and Society*, London: Longman.

22

Young Disabled People

Sally French and John Swain

We intend to examine the realisation of identity by young disabled people, not just as adults, but as disabled adults. This we will do by focusing on factors which shape their identity and considering ways in which disabled people can become more assertive and take more control of their lives.

Young disabled people grow up in a disabling environment where they face numerous physical and social barriers on a daily basis. These may include inability to take part in leisure pursuits, hostile attitudes or avoidance from other children, patronising behaviour from adults and exclusion from mainstream school. The formative people in their early lives are not usually disabled themselves and may unwittingly pass on stereotyped ideas about disability which affect adversely the young person's self-image and self-confidence. Such ideas may include the inability of disabled people to work, to become parents, or to have satisfying sexual relationships.

It is not surprising that young disabled people internalise the views of the wider society for, as Morris points out:

Most of the people we have dealings with, including our most intimate relationships, are not like us. It is therefore very difficult for us to recognise and challenge the values and judgements that are applied to us and our lives. Our ideas about disability and about ourselves are generally formed by those who are not disabled. (1991: 37)

Some factors shaping the identity of young disabled people

The media

The media and charity advertising have played a large part in promoting inaccurate and unhelpful stereotypes of disabled people who are frequently depicted as evil, pathetic or heroic or, more often than not, are simply absent. Rieser explains:

In nearly every programme that we see, every book that we read, every paper that we pick up, every comic that we saw as children we are absent except when we are used in what we call a stereotyped way, not as we are, but as society has grown to think disabled people should be treated and portrayed. (1995: 5)

The way that disability is depicted in the media can have a large impact on how young disabled people view themselves. One image almost guaranteed to lower their self-esteem is the way in which disabled people are frequently 'saved' or 'redeemed' by non-disabled people (Pointon, 1995: 17).

Education

The lives of young disabled people have been, and to some extent still are, characterised by exclusion and segregation which, in its turn, has had a impact on the way they view themselves. Nowhere has this been more extreme than in the system of special education. The rights and wrongs of disabled children attending special or mainstream schools has raged throughout this century. Disabled people have, in recent times, expressed their own opinions on the education they have received, with many finding the experience bleak, oppressive and woefully inadequate in both academic and social terms (French, 1996). Davies recalls the misery of being torn from his family, together with the pleasure of seeing his school friends again:

The journey from Liverpool to London, where I would change trains for Kent took somewhere in the region of seven hours. The whole day was extended agony which was only relieved when I met one of my school friends. (1993: 36)

Most of the young people interviewed by Straughair and Fawcitt (1992) felt that special schools disadvantaged them in terms of their personal development and their ability to interact with non-disabled people. Those who had experienced both systems all preferred to be in mainstream schools.

There is, however, little agreement overall among disabled people on the type of schooling they prefer. This is probably because special and mainstream schools are very variable and the experience itself is extremely diverse, providing, for example, the means to an education and the chance to make friends and to develop socially. Wade and Moore (1993) found that a substantial number of disabled children in mainstream schools viewed themselves negatively and felt inadequate beside their non-disabled peers.

Some disabled people feel very positive about certain aspects of their special school experience, mainly in terms of the opportunity it gave them to develop alongside similarly disabled children and the freedom from day-to-day barriers it provided. Sullivan explains:

It was a liberating experience. It taught me how to like myself, to take pride in myself, and most of all to be sensitive to the needs of others. (1992: 173-4)

It would seem that special and mainstream school both have the potential to affect positively or negatively the identity of young disabled people.

Attitudes and behaviour of others

Many young disabled people find themselves forced by their parents, teachers, professionals and society generally to behave in a certain way which Sutherland (1981) termed *the disabled role*. The disabled role requires young disabled people to strive for 'independence' and 'normality' (at whatever cost to themselves), to 'accept' their situation and to deny that they are disabled.

Striving for physical independence is rarely in the best interests of young disabled people. Morris (1989) found that many of the women with spinal cord injuries she interviewed chose to rely on personal assistance so that they could concentrate on other things, such as community work or political activity. Disabled people define independence, not in physical terms, but in terms of control.

Closely associated with the concept of independence is that of normality. The pressures placed upon young disabled people to appear 'normal' can give rise to enormous inefficiency and stress, yet many disabled people are well into adulthood before they realise what is happening or before they find the courage to abandon such attempts. The pressure to be 'normal' is often at the expense of the disabled person's needs and rights. Morris (1991) believes that the assumption that disabled people want to be 'normal', rather than just as they are, is one of the most oppressive experiences to which they are subjected.

If disabled people dare to challenge the stereotypes people have of them, or refuse to play the disabled role, they are likely to be confronted with unpleasant reactions. To protect themselves from this, disabled people learn from their earliest childhood to deny or minimise their impairments and the difficulties they encounter. Denial of impairment and disability can also be practised by the young disabled person's family. A young woman Straughair and Fawcitt interviewed recalled:

We would go into town together and if I was wearing my wrist splints and we met any of my mother's friends she would tell them I had fallen over and sprained my wrist. (1992: 32)

To deny that a person is disabled deprives him or her of the help and support which is needed and rejects a central aspect of the disabled person's identity.

Young disabled people have been socialised from an early age into believing that the rights of non-disabled people do not apply to them. Most disabled people spend a great deal of time and energy both playing the role and attempting to reverse their conditioning. The growing cultural identity of disabled people, and the disability movement, have put forward new and radical interpretations of disability which offer disabled people affirmation and support as they redefine their situation.

Supporting the voices of young disabled people

The control that young disabled people have in their lives needs to be understood within the social and historical context both of childhood and of disability. The dominant ideology, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, has emphasised the rights of the 'consumer', 'client' or 'service user' to have choice. The market orientation and minimalist intervention of state policies put the onus on individuals in terms of rights and, of course, responsibilities to compete for their share of scarce resources and services. It is in this context that such terms as 'self-advocacy' and 'empowerment' have gained easy currency.

This trend towards taking account of the wishes and feelings of clients can, to an extent at least, be found in recent developments in services for children (Davie and Galloway, 1996). The principle of listening to children is embodied, for instance, in the Children Act 1989. Developments are piecemeal, however, and there is little evidence, for instance, of equivalent trends in education:

Children have few rights at school. They have no right to see their personal files until they are 16 and even then few schools seem to make the facility available so they have little opportunity to challenge what others have said about them. (Whitney, 1993: 40)

Young people under 18 are generally excluded from formal participation in educational decision-making, and this is compounded for young disabled people by the dominance of individual models of disability. Oliver suggests that young disabled people:

see themselves as pitiful because they are socialised into accepting disability as a tragedy personal to them. This occurs because teachers like other professionals also hold to this view of disability, curriculum materials portray disabled people (if they appear at all) as pathetic victims or arch villains. (1990: 92)

The individual model of voice in decision-making has been easily incorporated into and reinforced by the individual models of disability which are readily apparent in the terminology of 'assessing needs' and 'individual programmes'. In the broader social and historical context, the voice of the individual young disabled person may be recognised but it competes against all the barriers he or she faces in being both young and disabled.

The past 20 years or so, however, have also seen the growth of the collective voice of disabled people in this country and internationally. In organisational terms the disability movement has been established through the growth of many small organisations throughout the world, run and controlled by disabled people themselves. Umbrella organisations have been founded in more recent years, including the *British Council of Organisations of Disabled People* and *Disabled People's International*, both in 1981.

In ideological terms, the movement has developed and promoted a social model, in which disability is understood as a social rather than an individual

condition. Disabled people have shifted the focus to the barriers faced in a society geared by and for non-disabled people. These barriers pervade every aspect of the physical and social environment: attitudes, institutions, language and culture, organisation and delivery of services, and the power relations and structures of which society is constituted. In terms of activity, the movement is diverse, but in recent times the focus has been on securing anti-discrimination legislation in Britain.

An important element in the struggle of disabled people for equality and social justice is the recent emergence of the disability arts which can be viewed as part of the disability movement. Disability arts have the power to communicate the distinctive history, skills, customs, lifestyles, experiences, and concerns of disabled people, which many believe constitute a distinctive 'disability culture'.

The contrast of individual and collective voices is particularly apparent in ideas and practices relating to the integration of young disabled people in mainstream schools. A say for an individual young disabled person would, in theory, involve inclusion in placement decisions and in determining the necessary support and facilities for integration. Indeed, the principle of involving the child, wherever possible, in such decisions is apparent in the *Code of Practice* (Department for Education, 1994). A say for the collective voice of disabled people, however, would involve the recognition of disability culture, the inclusion of the representative voice of disabled people in formal educational decision-making and the promotion of a social model of disability as integral to the processes, relationships and content of education.

The context for supporting the voice of young disabled people, then, is one of considerable barriers but is also, in the wake of the burgeoning disability movement, a context for developing strategies and possibilities. There have been many developments in this direction, often under the umbrella terms of 'empowerment' and 'partnership'. Williams conveys the 'new foundation for professional practice' as follows:

It removes power from them and hands it over to the client, and locates their base of power with their clients rather than with their professional body. (1993: 12)

The shift of power can be seen, at least in principle, in 'alternative approaches' (Greasley, 1995) to individual planning with people with learning difficulties. These approaches place greater emphasis on the principles of self-advocacy and a greater role being played by the person in planning his or her own future. There are also a number of examples of pupil involvement in the system of learning and school organisation. Sweeney (1995), for instance, uses drama in an empowering approach drawing on non-verbal communication and the development of self-expression through empathy.

The notion of empowerment is, however, deeply problematic. A damning critique comes from Gomm:

Those people who say they are in the business of empowering rarely seem to be giving up their own power; they are usually giving up someone else's and they may actually be increasing their own. (1993: 137)

In the above examples of supporting the voice of young disabled people, empowerment is seen largely as an individual rather than a collective process. Oliver (1993) argues that, for disabled people, it is more realistic to see empowerment as a collective process.

Examples of strategies to support the collective voice of young disabled people are, however, difficult to find. 'Moving On' was a series of courses and follow-up days in the early 1990s for young people with learning difficulties and with physical impairments run by Skills for People, Newcastle upon Tyne. The courses have been planned, presented and evaluated by young people themselves in teams drawn from schools and colleges in the area. The overall aim has been to help young people to speak up for themselves. Topics covered have included 'rights and responsibilities', 'making choices' and 'listening'.

The recorded evaluations of the planning teams emphasise the importance of collective identity and voice:

Planning it ourselves is important. It is our own and the teachers do not plan it for us.

We made our own rules. We sorted out our own problems . . . instead of getting someone to do it for us like in school.

This has provided the context for personal empowerment:

I know now that we all have our opinions and decisions that we have to make. That is why speaking up for yourself is important.

There was one time when I would not have been able to go into the office and ask for my money, but I do now.

Conclusion

Ultimately it has to be asked whether would-be supporters of the voice of young disabled people, notwithstanding their good intentions, prepare them for life as disabled adults who are conscious of their identity as disabled people, and for the struggle for full participative citizenship in our society. Though it is questionable whether the collective voice of disabled people is supported by individualised strategies, it would seem that individual young disabled people are empowered by experiences of contributing to, and articulating their own views within, a collective voice.

Disability is now recognised by disabled people as a civil rights issue, and the stigma attached to disability, which has served as such a powerful disincentive to 'coming out', has been eroded. Young disabled people are, therefore, growing

up in a society where conventional ideas about what constitutes disability are being challenged. The disability movement has made great progress in recent years in putting across their ideas about disability and bringing about change. This has been helped by a greater emphasis in society generally on civil rights and citizenship. Young disabled people do, however, remain relatively unexposed to the social model of disability. It is a challenge to the disability movement to reach young disabled people and ensure that they develop a strong and positive identity.

Note

The authors wish to thank Trish Webb of Skills for People.

References

- Davie, R. and Galloway, D. (eds) (1996) *Listening to Children in Education*, London: David Fulton.
- Davies, C. (1993) *Life Times: a Mutual Biography of Disabled People*, Farnham: Understanding Disability Educational Trust.
- Department for Education (1994) *Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs*, London: DfE.
- French, S. (1996) 'Out of sight, out of mind: the experiences and effect of a "special" residential school', in J. Morris (ed.), *Encounters with Strangers*, London: Women's Press.
- Gomm R. (1993) 'issues of power in health and welfare', in J. Walmsley, J. Reynolds, P. Shakespeare and R. Woolfe (eds), *Health, Welfare and Practice: Reflecting on Roles and Relationships*, London: Sage and Open University Press.
- Greasley P. (1995) 'individual planning with adults who have learning difficulties: key issues - key sources', *Disability and Society*, 10 (3): 353-63.
- Morris, J. (1989) *Able Lives*, London: Women's Press.
- Morris, J. (1991) *Pride against Prejudice*, London: Women's Press.
- Oliver, M. (1990) *The Politics of Disablement*, London: Macmillan.
- Oliver, M. (1993) *Disability, Citizenship and Empowerment*, Workbook 2 of course K665 *The Disabling Society*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Pointon, A. (1995) 'How it is on film and television', in R. Rieser (ed.), *Invisible Children*, Report of the Joint Conference on Children, Images and Disability, London: Save the Children and Integration Alliance.
- Rieser, R. (1995) 'The history of disabling imagery', in R. Rieser (ed.), *Invisible Children*, Report of the Joint Conference on Children, Images and Disability, London: Save the Children and Integration Alliance.
- Straughair, S. and Fawcitt, S. (1992) *The Road towards Independence: the Experiences of Young People with Arthritis in the 1990s*, London: Arthritis Care.
- Sullivan, S. (1992) 'My school experience', in R. Rieser and M. Mason (eds), *Disability Equality in the Classroom: a Human Rights Issue*, 2nd edn, London: Disability Equality in Education.

- Vance, C. (ed.) (1984) *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Vance, C. (1989) 'Social construction theory: problems in the history of sexuality', in D. Attman (ed.), *Which Homosexuality? Essays from the International Scientific Conference on Lesbian and Gay Studies*, London and Amsterdam: Gay Men's Press and Uitgeverij Andekker Schorer.
- Weeks, J. (1977) *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics In Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*, London: Quartet.
- Weeks, J. (1981) *Sex, Politics and Society: the Regulation of Sexuality since 1800*, London: Longman.
- Weeks, J. (1985) *Sexuality and Its Discontents: Meanings, Myths and Modern Sexualities*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Wight, D. (1993) 'Constraints or cognition? Young men and safer heterosexual sex', in P. Aggleton, P. Davies and G. Hart (eds), *AIDS: Facing the Second Decade*, London: Falmer Press.
- Wight, D. (1994) 'Assimilating safer sex: young heterosexual men's understanding of "safer sex"', in P. Aggleton, P. Davies and G. Hart (eds), *AIDS Foundations for the Future*, London: Taylor & Francis.

19

Constructing a Way of Life

Rex Stainton Rogers

I would there were no age between sixteen and three-and-twenty, or that youth would sleep out the rest; for there is nothing in the between but getting wenches with child, wronging the ancients, stealing, fighting.

Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*

Sounds familiar doesn't it? This speech, which Shakespeare puts into the mouth of 'an old shepherd' (much as a soap-opera writer today might have used a 'pensioner'), encapsulates a way of talking about youth which was already ancient as he wrote. Similar views can be traced in many other cultures and they persist in our own to this day. What the quotation brings to light for us is that youth, as a supposed time of troublesome behaviour, was not 'discovered' by social scientists or social workers – professions unknown in Shakespeare's day – but predates them. However, what is certainly true is that we have views on this portrayal of 'troublesome youth' which were unheard of in the London of James the First.

From that time to our own, our resources for thinking about our world have expanded. It isn't that people have got brighter, it isn't even a simple matter of more and wider education (though we have that). The crucial shift has been in the 'tools' we have available for understanding. This is obvious, of course, in a literal sense: think of the kinds of equipment used to make *things*. Any trip to a museum or historical theme park can make that point, as we compare an adze to a power plane or an embroidery frame to a programmable sewing machine. What is harder to illustrate are the less tangible changes that have taken place in the ways in which we make *sense of things*. Yet, clearly, the tools we now employ to construct a sense of, say, youth, make use of concepts that would have seemed in 1610 as magical as electronic technology.

To give some idea, right from the start, about how resources for thinking have expanded, we could do worse than look at what a modern audience might hear about young people. The example I have chosen is an interesting one because it concerns a reworking of another image of youth from Shakespeare, that of young lovers. Youth, as social histories have recently made very clear, already had many meanings, of which writers like Shakespeare made full use. Many – like that of a time of 'hot' sexual pairing – still entertain (and, perhaps, trouble) us today. In 1957 the 'hit' musical was *West Side Story*, a *Romeo and Juliet* tale set in modern New York. At one point in the action, gang members taunt the police with how JDs (juvenile delinquents) are portrayed:

Dear kindly Sergeant Krupke,
 You've gotta understand It's just our bringin' upke
 That gets us outta hand.
 Our mothers all are junkies,
 Our fathers all are drunks,
 Golly Moses – natcherly we're punks.
 Gee Officer Krupke, we're very upset;
 We never had the love that every child oughta get.
 We ain't no delinquents,
 We're misunderstood,
 Deep down inside us there is good!

What Stephen Sondheim's lyrics put to his audience is not just observation or jibe, but expands into a whole range of *theories* about youth. These theories, the song suggests, are not just some kind of professional property but have become part of ordinary understanding: they are, for example, the kind of material the tabloids can confidently assume readers will recognise. What is more, they are also known to, and employed by, the young people that are supposed to be explained by them.

It is these theories of social life – tools for thought – that did not exist in Shakespeare's time – which help to construct our realities as surely as the new technologies that have shaped the New York in which *West Side Story* is set. Writing, in the broad sense of the word, is not just something writers do: it relies on communication between writers and audience. That, in turn, depends on the resources both sides have to shape their perceptions and their experience. It isn't that Shakespeare (or his first audiences) lived in a world free of street gangs (far from it – his contemporary Kit Marlowe died in a tavern brawl). But what they did seem to inhabit was a world largely empty of any profound need to 'understand' them or take informed action about them. Youth, as we might now see it, had not yet been shaped by the tools that today help to construct it as a *social issue*.

You have, of course, been set up. Set up to pose questions about why things have changed. Set up also to be drawn into an argument about *knowledge as a social issue*, in particular, our knowledge of what shapes us, of development. When Shakespeare wanted to explore developmental ideas he often resorted to magic and mystery (as he did, say, through the monster Caliban in *The Tempest*). Nearly two centuries on, towards the end of the eighteenth century, a new dimension had been added to our resources for exploring what we can know of the social world: science. In seeing how this happened, we will move from the fictional (however factive) output of Shakespeare and into a new reality of 'social facts' (the kinds of things that informed Sondheim). We will do so by looking at an event which more or less coincides with the emergence of social science around the end of the eighteenth century.

In 1799, a so-called wild (feral) boy, of perhaps 11 or 12, was captured by hunters in the woods of La Bassine, southern France. He was put into the care of

a widow and escaped after eight days. Moving 'territory', he reached the Aveyron region, where he occasionally went to farms to be fed. On 8 January 1800 he entered a dyer's workshop and from there came to the attention of a local government officer Constans Saint-Estève, who committed him to an orphanage. Later that year he finished up in Paris where, as the *Sauvage de l'Aveyron* (or as we know him, the wild boy of Aveyron), he 'was to help answer the central question of the Enlightenment, what is the nature of Man [sic]' (Lane, 1977: 19).

Of course, the answers that investigators like Itard, who studied him, came up with were not definitive. Nor, by the way, were they much more clarified nearly two centuries later when a 'wild girl' of 13 – this time a victim of severe social isolation in her own home – was brought into a welfare office in Los Angeles and fell into the hands of present-day developmentalists. In my view, the story of Genie (Rymer, 1993), no less than that of the wild boy of Aveyron, tells us more about the social science mentality of those who used and abused them than it does about the human nature of the subjects of these studies. Yet, over the last two centuries, both these young people (and many like them) became cases and case studies in an argument about the roles and relative importance of the 'forces' of nature and nurture in shaping development.

Although the fine-grain theorisation of this debate has been refined over the last two centuries, its essentials have not. What French 'experts' were arguing in 1800, is still argued now: what is it that shapes us and how can we intervene upon it? The 'natural experiments' provided by wild children seem, to some, an ideal route to answers. The 'facts' seem obvious enough: 'wild children' are very odd, they don't behave like 'normal' teenagers in the most fundamental ways, and most obviously their language performance is absent or rudimentary. Sometimes, intervention can make a profound difference. But are such cases really testbeds from which to explore the well-springs of 'human nature' in general?

To take it for granted that they are, is to assume that when we look at anything young people do (say, being in the gangs Sondheim describes in *West Side Story*) we are seeing some kind of interplay between nature ('deep down inside us we are good') and nurture (something that stems from their 'bringin' upke'). Social constructionists like me regard such analyses as employing just one conceptual tool-box from a range of alternatives. We are not, in general, arguing against the idea that this particular tool-box is one which works well in the material world of objects (including the objects we call bodies). It has, for example, enabled us to discriminate between causes of diseases that are inherited (say like the Huntington's chorea which killed folk-singer Woody Guthrie) and acquired conditions like the AIDS which killed Freddie Mercury. It will also eventually provide the knowledge that will bring effective treatments for these conditions: in the material world, studying *causes* can lead to effective *interventions*. But are the Jets talking about causes in the same kind of sense when they tease Officer Krupke that they may be 'psychologically disturbed' or that 'Juvenile delinquency is purely a social disease'?

Many social scientists and social practitioners seem to subscribe to the idea that cause in the laboratory sense and cause in the social sense refer to effectively the same kind of agency. However, along with that way of thinking which is concerned with uncovering causes as a route to social engineering, there has been another tradition in thought over the last two centuries – *critique*. An important current trend in critical social analysis is social constructionism. We could sum up the distinction like this: if science begins with questions, critique begins by questioning those questions.

I admit to finding critique the more interesting of the two, but when I apply it to 'real life' issues like 'child abuse' (Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 1992) I often face the reaction: 'all very interesting but . . .'. The 'but' is often directed to practical concerns like: 'how does it help in this concrete situation I face?' I'm increasingly coming to respect that response: being a parent myself helps! But I'm also 'learning to listen' because I hear it more and more applied to mainstream social analysis as well. What I think is slowly percolating through is that just under 200 years of social science and social intervention have left us with precious little that could be called effective practical knowledge of human development.

One important reason why this is so can be expressed quite easily: *what most often concerns us about developments in human behaviour, and the developments that most concern us, are the result not of causes but of human actions (and inactions)*. Unlike the movement of planets or the growth of trees in a virgin forest, social life is neither lawful nor brought about by simple forces. Of course, I'm not trying to deny facts about bodies as such – for example, that young people get hot and dehydrated dancing or that, should a fire break out, we need enough fire doors to rush bodies of certain sizes and mobility through. But what I do argue is that an interest in 'hops' or 'raves', a taste for 'winkle-pickers' or 'Dr Martens', are not primarily markers of some strange force of development but, rather, are matters that we as a society (and particularly young people as consumers) bring into being. Furthermore, what comes to be constructed in the social world (or discarded, like last year's fashion) is seldom the result of clear and straightforward plans and, even where it is, the outcomes are seldom exactly what we expect. They cannot be, in our sort of society anyway, because we live in a set of rapidly changing systems.

As those systems change, so too do our concerns. Few social scientists, if any, predicted the fall of the Soviet Empire, the emergence of the HIV, the transformation of Ecstasy into a major social drug, or the present highlighting of child sexual abuse. Yet each has had major effects on young people. However, our social soothsayers are often very good at being 'wise after the event'! Social constructionist Kenneth Gergen (1973) argues that being 'out of date' is inevitable: our social sciences will always be historical disciplines in disguise. 'Youth culture', including the idiom in which it is expressed, is not a thing but a living and changing way of life (which is what culture means in this context). Another reason for bringing you into the world of Sondheim's Jets is to allow you

to savour just how ancient it all sounds! Today, we might feel a concern not only about how it portrays gender (we have, for example, the Jets and 'their girls', one of whom is unselfconsciously called 'Anybody's!') but about what it fails to portray, 'girl gangs' in their own right.

The ironic result of the argument we have just been through is that the most predictable social worlds and the clearest examples of 'causes' that we can find lie outside of, or on the fringes of, our social-science-informed society. We can easily enough point to communities where young people are to a fair extent model and modelled citizens. They exist as small pockets in the industrialised world (usually in tight, well-regulated and somewhat 'time-frozen' religious sects like the Amish – featured in the movie *Witness*) and existed (at least until quite recently) in surviving hunter-gatherer communities like the !Kung of the Kalahari desert (once called 'Bushmen') or the Inuits ('Eskimos') you can see in the work of the old documentary film-maker Robert Flaherty (*Nanook of the North*). In general, extremes of socialisation, from the massive social isolation experienced by Genie to the 'hot-house' families like that of John Stuart Mill (who is said to have been got into Ancient Greek at the age of three), can be dramatic in some of their effects. However, in the very large middle range our knowledge remains, at best, gross and based on past patterns which may not extrapolate into the future. It is, if you like, akin to the football pools: today's teams may have the same names as they did last season but they are not the same units; we cannot use past performance as an effective guide to predicting today's outcomes at any useful level.

Yet, as a culture, we continue to believe that there *are* patterns out there in the middle range to discover: for example, that there *are* best ways to educate within a given budget, or that there either is or is *not* a direct link between unemployment or poverty and crime. The fact that these usually turn out also to be *political* arguments does little to change the way statistics and counter-statistics are used to make the respective cases. One value of critique is that it explores why this is. The first part of the argument suggests that the kinds of government and policies (governance) that countries like the UK have increasingly adopted over the past two centuries are enmeshed with the idea of the value of pure and applied social science (scientism). One result is that we are inundated with information which is employed both to warrant policy and to implement it – in other words, to wrinkle out of the tight purses of both government and ordinary individuals (as 'donations') resources to meet these documented needs. Constructionists are not arguing for 'turning back the clock' to a time when we didn't have this sort of information, but they are arguing for looking at it *critically*. Crucial in that is recognising the socially constructed character of both our concerns about young people and the information we employ to warrant those concerns.

What constructionists claim here is that the conviction that social science can enable us to build up an objective picture of what young people are 'really' like or 'really' experience or 'really' need is misguided: there are no direct ways to know 'the truth'. There are two main threads to this challenge. The first is

conceptual. Like any other belief system, social science directs our attention, highlighting some things and leaving others in the shadows. In fact, it does more than that. The tools of social science (research, field experience) construct what we perceive of young people as surely as a *son et lumière* show uses its tools (sound and light) to conjure up an illusion of the past. The second line of argument is that of recognising that 'information' is never simply a matter of 'facts'. Information is a commodity. It is bought (as when you purchase a book, a journal, a private or a governmental report) and sold (by researchers to grant-giving bodies, or by witnesses to newspapers). What is more, the law recognises the need for this trade to be regulated. A politician or civil servant, for example, is prevented by law from selling or trading information about upcoming contracts ('insider dealing'). Less tangible 'goods', like academic reputations, are also bought for and sold as information. The message that comes from this is obvious: *caveat emptor* (let the buyer beware).

To take a few examples, such 'information' as:

- 43% of young people sometimes have unprotected sex
- 38% of young offenders need psychotherapy
- 61% of university students are living in poverty
- 70% of young people distrust politicians

are better seen not as statements of objective fact but as moral or political rhetoric. (These are, as it happens, figures I have 'plucked out of the air'.) Their function is to persuade, either to consolidate what is already the case, or to produce changes of view and changes in action. Needless to say, what is implicitly being advocated (respectively: more sex education; a less punitive approach to young offenders; more financial support for students; a sense of 'how right they are') may seem to you a worthwhile objective. The catch is that the more it does, the less easy it is to recognise the social construction of knowledge involved. Yet in each case, the link between the supposed information and the objective is tenuous. The kinds of questions that perhaps should be provoked are:

- 1 Who says? (What is their vested interest?)
- 2 Are the terms clear and unambiguous? (What is 'sometimes'? What is a 'need'? What do we mean by 'poverty'? What is a desirable level of distrust of politicians?)
- 3 Does the claim actually warrant one specific form of action? (Is sex education the best route to 'safer sex'? Does anybody need psychotherapy? How best should study be funded, if at all? Is it better to distrust politicians or change them?)

All of this paves the way to the largest critical question of all: what are young people; and do we need specific responses to them at all? My response here would be first to argue that there is no once and for all social scientific way of

defining young people. There is no age at which one objectively stops being a child or starts being completely 'adult' (Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 1992). What we have (and all we have) are local and contingent markers, set up in current law, guidance and practice, that simply have to be made to work until the next set of changes. In other words, because they have been put there and, in many cases, either exclude younger and older persons or operate in a different way for those other than 'young people,' we need specific responses for young people. And, of course, we also need responses that vary according to the complex set of laws and rules our society has within the category 'young people'.

However, if these responses are guided by purported 'facts' and so-called 'scientific theories' which are better seen as disguised politics and ethics, we may be a good deal better off if we remove the disguise and admit that what we are operating are politico-moral endeavours. Not the least likely beneficiaries of such a critical unmasking are young people themselves. Who knows, we might even start to move towards giving young people a defined position as co-players in the game? Perhaps some recent changes in law and practice are moving in that direction, but we are still a long way from a serious societal acknowledgement of young people as first and foremost people, citizens in a common endeavour and deserving of equal rights within it.

References

- Gergen, K.J. (1973) 'Social psychology as history', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 26: 309-20.
- Lane, H. (1977) *The Wild Boy of Aveyron*, St Albans: Granada.
- Rymer, R. (1993) *Genie: Escape from a Silent Childhood*, London: Michael Joseph.
- Stainton Rogers, R. and Stainton Rogers, W. (1992) *Stories of Childhood: Shifting Agendas of Child Concern*, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

13

In and Out of Work? The Changing Fortunes of Young People in Contemporary Labour Markets

Harriet Bradley and Paul Hickman

Research into the labour market position of young people has highlighted dramatic changes over the past four decades. The pathways by which young school leavers enter the labour market are now more complex and varied. There has been a big fall in the numbers of young people in full-time employment and a massive growth in the numbers staying in full-time education. Youth unemployment has become a fact of life and a focus of social concern across Europe. Moreover, the prospects for young people entering the contemporary labour market are very different from those of their parents' generation. They are more likely to enter part-time or casual work, more likely to shift from job to job for many years and they enter new types of jobs. Where young men in the 1960s and 1970s often entered apprenticeships or took jobs as unskilled manual workers, their twenty-first century counterparts are more likely to go into catering, retail or other forms of unskilled service work. Young women may continue to enter some of the caring jobs that their mothers undertook, but those with qualifications are choosing to compete with their qualified male contemporaries for professional and managerial opportunities.

Lengthened transitions: The complex route from school to work

Thus, what youth researchers call 'the transition from school to work' has been transformed. An influential study published in the 1970s set out a model of three distinct pathways to employment. These were the 'extended careers' of those entering higher education prior to competing in the professional and managerial arena; 'short-term' careers available to lower middle and upper working class youths, and 'careerless' routes involving entry to unskilled jobs (Ashton and Field, 1976). Since the 1970s this pattern of transition has altered in two important ways. First, the *lengthened* nature of youth transitions has been highlighted by many commentators (for example, Hollands, 1990; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). This is in part caused by the expansion of both higher and further education but is also due to the longer time it takes young people of all backgrounds to settle down into a steady 'career path'. For example, many students on completing undergraduate degrees will take temporary low-skilled

employment in bars, restaurants and call-centres. This is sometimes as a way to make money for travel or further study and sometimes as a way to find out a little more about the world of employment and their own capacities before launching themselves into a more 'serious' career trajectory. Second, transitions have become more precarious and more complex. Young people's individual trajectories often take the form of movements in and out of various work statuses: study, temporary employment, unemployment, training, self-employment, part-time or full-time employment, 'fiddly jobs' in the unofficial economy (MacDonald, 1994). They may undertake several of these at once. Thus, there is no longer any sense of a simple linear pathway from youth to adult employment and economic independence.

Two decades of economic change

These changing prospects for young people in the labour market have to be understood within the context of major restructuring of the UK economy. Since the 1970s the proportion of jobs in manufacturing has declined sharply. In 1971 33.4% of employment was in manufacturing. By 2001 this had fallen to 16.6%, while over the same period employment in business and miscellaneous services had risen from 10.3% of total employment to 22.9% (Warwick Institute for Employment Research, 1995). This trend is continuing, with more new jobs being generated in services.

This pattern is typical of most of the highly developed economies of the West, and is often referred to as 'post-industrialism' (Bradley, 1996). Steady employment growth in the service sector is due to a number of factors. Heightened international competition and the availability of cheaper labour in other parts of the globe has led to the relocation of much industrial production to the developing societies. The ageing of the population, a common trend across Europe, brings increased demand for personal care services. There are also noticeable lifestyle changes, linked to the increasing employment of women and to higher levels of disposable income in some households. Activities such as eating out, holidays and sporting or leisure pursuits have become more widespread. Also, many aspects of services originally covered by the public sector have been reduced or privatised, leading, for example, to the development of private training agencies, care homes and nursery provision. Consequently, there has been considerable growth in caring professions, leisure industries, hotels and catering and business services.

The application of new forms of sophisticated technology, especially that based on computers, has precipitated the need for more technically based experts. Indeed another term which has become a popular description for contemporary change is 'the knowledge-based economy' (Leadbeater, 1999). This idea has been taken up by the New Labour government and is the basis of their policy thinking on education, training and skills. It is believed that the UK

suffers from a lack of highly trained people skilled in the new technology (Bradley et al., 2000). The resultant change in the occupational structure is shown in Table 13.1.

Young people then, are entering into what has been termed the 'new economy'. Many new jobs are seen to offer less good conditions and prospects than the jobs of the post-war economy. Part-time employment has increased steadily over the past 20 years and working patterns have become more diverse and flexible (among others, see Beatson, 1995). It is estimated that 65% of all jobs in retailing and 55% in hotels and catering are part-time (that is, under 30 hours per week). Where employees have part-time contracts their employment rights are curtailed. As a result many commentators take a sceptical view of the 'new economy' believing that flexibility in the labour market results in the rise of 'McJobs', the loss of 'jobs for life' and fragmented employment histories, with people having to spend more time out of the labour market. Some see these changes as positive, offering more choice, variety and 'empowerment' to employees (Handy, 1994; Leadbeater, 1999), while others believe that they lead to stress, illness and instability, along with tightened managerial control and what Richard Sennett has called the 'corrosion of character' (Aronowitz and DiFazio, 1994; Sennett, 1998). Whichever interpretation is chosen, it is clear that young people in particular are at the sharp end of these changes and are acting as pioneers in these new economic arrangements.

Growth in the service sector, traditionally a site of 'women's work', has changed the gender profile of the workforce. A disproportionate number of these jobs will be part-time, meeting both the needs of employers and women with child care responsibilities. Some employers see women as more suitable for jobs calling for 'customer service skills' and the ability to communicate, as women are considered better at 'people skills' than male workers. Sylvia Walby (1987) has celebrated what she calls a 'gender transformation' in women's lives as they escape from the domestic fate of their mothers' generation and use qualifications to compete with men for the best opportunities. The press often present this as men 'losing out', given the increase in male unemployment; Table 13.1 indicates how some areas of the economy have been feminised over the past decades, with women now making up nearly half of the total workforce. But it is important not to overestimate the effects of feminisation on young women's lives (Bradley et al., 2000). A study of young adult workers carried out in Bristol₁ showed that women in the age-group 20-35 earned less than men, were more likely to be in part-time employment, were still inclined to sacrifice their careers to raise children, and did more of the housework.

Unemployment and the decline in youth employment

A key feature of this epoch has been the increase across Europe of unemployment, sometimes long-term in nature. From the 1970s UK unemployment rose

Table 13.1 Occupational structure 1981-2001

	Managers and administrators		Professional occupations		Associate professionals and technical occupations		Clerical and secretarial occupations		Craft and skilled manual occupations		Personal and protective service		Sales occupations		Plant and machine operatives		Other occupations		Total	
	000s	%	000s	%	000s	%	000s	%	000s	%	000s	%	000s	%	000s	%	000s	%	000s	%
Employment Levels																				
1981	2,932	12.1	1,890	7.8	1,743	7.2	4,201	17.4	4,229	17.5	1,668	6.9	1,657	6.9	3,090	12.8	2,742	11.4	2,415	100.0
1991	4,114	16	2,262	8.8	2,283	8.9	4,241	16.5	3,750	14.6	2,211	8.6	1,878	7.3	2,670	10.4	2,247	8.8	25,655	100.0
1994	4,282	17.2	2,291	9.2	2,342	9.4	3,951	15.9	3,418	13.8	2,271	9.1	1,854	7.5	2,453	9.9	1,982	8	24,843	100.0
2001	4,916	18.5	2,710	10.2	2,677	10.1	3,860	14.6	3,325	12.5	2,825	10.7	1,973	7.4	2,451	9.2	1,779	6.7	26,517	100.0
Females as % total employment by occupation																				
1981	23.6		34.2		45.4		72		10.9		62.9		60.7		23.4		50.9		40.5	
1991	32.7		39.4		50.3		77.2		11		67.7		65.1		22.3		51.6		45	
1994	34.7		41.6		51.6		78.4		12.1		68.9		65.9		22		50.8		46.3	
2001	39.4		42.9		53.1		79.7		12.7		71.1		67.2		20.9		47.0		47.9	

Source: Review of the Economy and Employment - Occupational Assessment 1995, Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick

from around half a million in the mid 1970s to over 3 million during the 1980s with the number of young people in employment declining even more sharply. Moreover, youth employment failed to recover during the economic boom of the 1980s and remained high across Europe in the 1990s as Table 13.2 shows.

Table 13.2 Unemployment rate (%) among under 25s in the EU in the 1990s

	1990	1991	1997	1998
Austria	—	—	6.7	6.6
Belgium	15.3	14.9	23.0	22.1
Denmark	11.4	11.6	8.4	7.4
Finland	9.2	16.2	25.2	23.5
France	19.3	21.5	29.1	26.6
Germany	—	5.9	10.8	9.8
Greece	21.5	22.9	30.8	29.8
Ireland	19.4	22.4	15.3	11.5
Italy	27.4	26	33.1	33.2
Luxembourg	3.8	3.2	8.1	6.9
Netherlands	8.6	8.3	9.6	7.8
Portugal	10.0	8.8	15.1	10.6
Spain	32.2	31.1	39.1	35.3
Sweden	4.4	7.6	20.6	16.7
UK	10.8	14.4	14.2	13.6

Source: Eurostat, 2000: 148.

Economic improvement in many countries has led to some decline; but although the UK economy has recently demonstrated considerable stability, unemployment among those under 24 is higher than within other age groups. In 2002 rates for the 18–24 age group were 12.2% for men and 8.8% for women.

The fall in the numbers of young people going into full-time employment has a number of explanations. At the level of individual firms, the employment prospects of young people have diminished because strategies to cope with difficult conditions in the global market have reduced the demand for young workers. During recessions employers tend to cut back the number of trainees they take on. Since a large proportion of young people enter the labour market as trainees this has a big impact. Another problem is that young people do not have the necessary experience to compete effectively against adults.

At a macro-economic level, they have been victims of the economic and occupational restructuring discussed in the previous section, with formerly full-time occupations replaced by part-time jobs and a rise of all forms of non-standard employment contracts (sub-contract, temporary, seasonal, agency-based working).

The other side of the coin has been the creation of new places in education and training for young people, which has had the effect of delaying their entry into the jobs market. The delegation of budgets through local management of schools has pressured schools to retain students in order to secure funding. The expansion of further and higher education can be seen as making a virtue out of

declining youth employment, enabling young people to build up their level of skills and qualifications in order to meet the demands for upskilling in many occupations.

There are considerable ethnic variations in staying-on rates. The Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities in Britain found that all major minority groups were more likely to stay on in full-time education, a trend particularly marked in the 16–24 age group as Table 13.3 shows.

Table 13.3 Participation in full-time education, 16–24 year olds (percentage in age group) by ethnicity

	White	Caribbean	Indian/AfricanAsian	Pakistani/Bangladeshi
Men	7	18	38	31
Women	12	18	25	19

Source: Modood et al., 1997

Youth unemployment has unsurprisingly, been highest amongst the most disadvantaged and the least qualified young people who have suffered most from the decline of unskilled manufacturing jobs. Notably, unemployment rates are significantly worse for all minority ethnic 16–24 year olds regardless of their qualifications: 36.9% for Bangladeshis, 24.9 % for Pakistanis, 23.7% for Black Caribbeans, 24.1% for Black Africans and 18.4% for Indian people, compared to 10.9% for white people (Office for National Statistics, 2002).

The least well-qualified young people have also experienced more intense competition from their better-qualified contemporaries who have 'traded down' to the bottom end of the labour market, filling jobs for which they would previously have been considered over-qualified. Whether this loss of employment opportunities has resulted in the growth of an unemployed or underemployed 'underclass' is not a debate that will be entered into here. This trend does, however, raise questions about the growth of the alternative or unofficial economy. Many officially out of work young people may find a source of income in 'fiddly jobs', criminal activity and, particularly, in Britain's thriving drugs sub-culture. Low-level self-employment is another option. There has been a rise in street selling (especially common in Europe among young legal or illegal immigrants) and in craft markets. Young people may also work the popular music festival scene, selling refreshments and New Age artefacts.

Government policy

Governments over the past decades have seen youth unemployment especially among young men, as a threat to social security and stability and have responded with a variety of policies. The Thatcher government, with its commitment to unfettered market forces, believed that young people were pricing themselves out of work by excessive wage rates which had been artificially

inflated above the market rate through trade union negotiation and legislative measures. By encouraging lower rates of pay the government believed that employers would be better able to afford to employ more young people. Consequently, between 1982 and 1988 the Young Workers Scheme and the New Workers Scheme offered subsidies to employers who took on young people at rates of pay below the average for that age group. In 1986 young people were removed from the protection of the wages councils that set minimum wages in industries where trade unions were weak.

There is evidence that subsequently the gap between youth and adult earnings has widened. In 1979, 16–17 year old men in full-time work could expect to earn 63.6 % of the wage rate of adult men. By 1995 16–17 year olds were earning 33.9% of the adult wage rate and 18–20 year olds 48.9% (Department of Employment, 1995). In 2001 the average gross weekly wage for full-time workers was £444 (£490 for men and £366 for women). A survey of young adult workers aged 20–34 carried out in the same year in Bristol, a fairly affluent city, revealed that 81% earned less than £444. Moreover nearly half of them (48%) were living on less than £12,000 per year. This reflects the mix of activities people in this age group are doing: low-paid jobs, part-time and casual work, studying and training, relying on benefits. All this suggests that young people find themselves in a precarious economic environment, which certainly makes it difficult to 'settle down and start a family'.

The rise of a low-wage youth economy however, did not bring unemployment to an end. The New Labour government took a different track, focusing on training and the acquisition of skills. They brought back the minimum wage (which many young people are now paid) and started up a series of programmes, starting with the New Deal, designed to help young people into employment. Research suggests that a smooth transition into the labour market is a strong predictor of subsequent labour market stability. The latest programme designed to help young people out of school into employment, education and training, Connexions, deals with 13–19 year olds especially those deemed to be 'failing'. It includes a system of designated personal mentors, working to produce plans tailored to individual needs, and computer tracking of individuals' progress. While it is a universal guidance service for the whole age group, it is targeted especially at those designated as 'at risk'. This is a European trend, with provision increasingly targeted at excluded groups.

An adaptable generation? young people's attitudes and aspirations

How, then, are young people themselves dealing with the problems associated with more precarious, complex and lengthened transitions? Research has shown that most, especially those from disadvantaged class and ethnic groups, still have conventional aspirations for their futures: a steady job, a house, a car and a family (McDowell, 2001; Allatt and Dixon, 2001).

Writing in the mid 1990s, Kenneth Roberts provided a definitive picture of youth employment and unemployment at the time (Roberts, 1995). Noting the trends discussed above, he also drew attention to a significant change in young people's attitudes linked to the increased participation in higher education and to the rise of individualisation, speaking of 'a widespread change . . . the raising of young people's ambitions above their actual employment opportunities' (1995: 105). As young people received more training and qualifications, they expected to find jobs at an equivalent level, but Roberts noted the dearth of 'quality jobs'. He found that young people were increasingly accepting personal individual responsibility for how they got on in life, blaming themselves if they failed to gain their objectives (1995: 116). An individualized stance to life often involves establishing goals and then planning the steps needed to take them. Since these goals were often unrealistic there was a danger of young people being disappointed and frustrated. As Wallace and Kovatcheva observe (1998), young people now tend to attribute failure to lack of training or of diligence. However, Roberts also noted the acceptance of precarious transitions:

Uncertain futures and risk-taking are also becoming just parts of life for today's youth. That is not to say that many would not prefer greater security, more rapid transitions and better jobs than are actually available. It is simply to note that these problems are now normal

(1995: 122).

Roberts's ideas are supported by the 'Winners and Losers' study¹ which was carried out in Bristol in 2000–2 by Fenton et al., (2002). The young adults in the study had work histories that revealed the precariousness of their situation. Some had held many jobs; others were persistently moving between jobs, study, unemployment and self-employment. Those who chose what the team termed 'alternative careers', for example as creative artists, in the media, in computer design or in the clubbing/DJ scene, were particularly vulnerable, and, as noted above, very few of the young adults earned high salaries. The exception was a minority of about 10%, mainly white men from middle class backgrounds, who were employed in more traditional careers (law, medicine, engineering). But despite this picture of uncertainty, the young adults in the study displayed high levels of satisfaction about their lives and extraordinary optimism about their futures. Acceptance of the value of education and training was also widespread and many young Bristolians were engaged in taking degrees and courses, often at the same time as working.

The researchers suggested that their attitudes could be characterised as 'internal flexibility'. Through their schools, the media, their home lives, they had been prepared for the climate of uncertainty and change. The difference from Roberts's account is that this was not simply a matter of grudging acceptance; many young adults positively embraced the notion of flexibility. They believed that the idea of a 'job for life' was a feature of their parents' generation, and many stated that they would find it boring to stay in one job for years. Even

those in the established professions spoke of moving between organisations in order to 'fulfil their potential' and build careers. The findings of the Bristol study indicate that young people are creatively addressing the opportunities as well the pitfalls of flexibility; they may be seen as constituting an 'adaptable generation'.

Conclusions and future prospects

What, then, can today's young people expect from their working lives? As we have seen they are entering more flexibly constructed labour markets and may expect some experience of casual, temporary and part-time jobs. They are likely to have a more fragmented work history than the previous generations, moving between different jobs and occupations, with spells of training and withdrawal from the labour market.

The majority of young people will not enter full-time work until their early 20s, having spent their immediate post-16 years in full-time education or training. Many will work part-time while they study. The minority who enter full-time work will find that in general they will experience low rates of pay.

While these are general trends across the age group, it is important to stress that the fortunes of young people will vary strongly according to gender, ethnicity and class. The trend towards greater participation of women in paid work is well established and is likely to continue as young couples find that two incomes are necessary to maintain a desired lifestyle, particularly in view of the hyper-inflation of the housing market which puts a mortgage beyond the reach of a single low-wage earner. Well-qualified females will have greater opportunities to move into management and professional occupations.

Young people who are not well qualified will have the greatest difficulty in finding full-time employment. They will make up the peripheral workforce in insecure, temporary low-paid employment or will be forced into the twilight world of the alternative economy. The 'Winners and Losers' study demonstrated that class is still the major determinant as to whether young people stay on at school or leave early. Early leavers in the study went on to experience more job changes, lower wages and less skilled work than those who stayed on (Fenton et al., 2002).

Among the most disadvantaged are those from black minority ethnic groups. Although they are as well as if not better qualified than their white counterparts, they face racial discrimination when they seek employment. Graduates take longer to find jobs and there are difficulties in achieving promotion. However, the experiences of Indian young people appear to be closer to those of white youth, suggesting a subtle interplay of class and ethnicity. Across Europe, minority ethnic young people are seen to be over-represented at the bottom of the hierarchy, being unemployed or performing unqualified and sometimes illegal work (Wallace and Kovatcheva, 1998).

The picture then is a complex one, with both negative and positive features. In some respects old hierarchies are being dismantled with young women and some minority ethnic young people, especially the women, improving their labour market positions. But class divisions remain securely entrenched (Fenton et al., 2002). Young people do appear to face more turbulent work histories and lengthened transitions in comparison to their parents, and the picture of the flexible labour market and its insecurities seems bleak. However, the Bristol respondents were facing up to flexibility with resourcefulness and good humour. This it seems is an adaptable generation, learning to take advantage of training resources to weave ways in and out of the labour market.

Notes

The author and editors are grateful to the late Paul Hickman who wrote the first version of this chapter for the first edition of this book. Some of his work is included in this chapter.

- 1 ESRC Grant no R000238215, *Winners and losers in changing labour markets*, Research team: Steve Fenton, Harriet Bradley, Jackie West, Will Guy and Ranji Devadason.

References

- Aronowitz, S. and DiFazio, W. (1994) *The Jobless Future*, Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press.
- Allatt, P. and Dixon, C. (2001) 'Learning to labour': how 17 year old A-level students manage part-time jobs, full-time study and other forms of work in times of rapid social change', *ESRC Youth Citizenship and Social Change Newsletter* 4.
- Ashton, D. and Field, D. (1976) *Young Workers*, London: Hutchinson.
- Beatson, M. (1995) 'Progress towards a flexible Labour Market', *Employment Gazette*, February.
- Bradley, H. (1996) *Fractured Identities*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Bradley, H., Erickson, M., Stephenson, C. and Williams, S. (2000) *Myths at Work*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Department of Employment (1995) *New Earnings Survey*, London: DoE.
- Eurostat (2000) *Eurostat Yearbook 2000*, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- Fenton, S., Bradley, H., West, J., Guy, W. and Devadason, R. (2002) *Winners and Losers in Changing Labour Markets*, Report to ESRC.
- Furlong, A. and Cartmel, F. (1997) *Young People and Social Change*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Handy, C. (1994) *The Empty Raincoat*, London: Hutchinson.
- Hollands, R. (1990) *The Long Transition*, London: Macmillan.
- Leadbeater, C. (1999) *Living on Thin Air*, London: Viking.
- MacDonald, R. (1994) 'Fiddly jobs, undeclared working and the something for nothing society' *Work, Employment and Society*, Vol 8(4): 507-30.