

# PART ONE

## THEORY AND PRACTICE

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The lives of young people today are subject to complex challenges, as witnessed by the multifaceted theoretical frameworks that seek to explain their personal and social worlds. In Part One of this book, two authors address the ways in which knowledge of the 'youth question' has changed and developed in recent times. Alan France (Chapter 2) explores the changing conceptions of young people through an examination of the ways in which different disciplines have sought to define and explore how we understand 'youth' and the 'youth problem'. Taking a historical perspective he provides illuminating insights into how these ideas from the past have influenced current thinking about youth. Undoubtedly, this knowledge has grown and diversified radically over the past decade and France encourages practitioners to draw on interdisciplinary knowledge to enhance understanding and work with young people. A key development in research over the past ten years has been to better understand the worlds of young people as they themselves define and experience it. Jean Hine (Chapter 3) examines some of these developments, questioning the limitations of 'evidence based policy' and arguing for more research grounded in the 'real lives' of young people. Such knowledge challenges many adult assumptions about the behaviour and experiences of young people.

Challenges to young people's lives emerge from numerous changes in the social and economic structure of wider society. The impact of globalisation, a theme introduced by Jo Aubrey (Chapter 4), is arguably greater for young people than for adults. It has broadened our understanding of the world around us through technological advances, and this brings with it a need to explore the exploitative elements of globalisation with young people.

At the heart of any profession is a commitment to professional ethics and values, and Sarah Banks (Chapter 5) draws on her extensive knowledge of the subject to establish the ethical standards and value positions that could/should underpin youth work in multi-agency environments and changing practice contexts. As Banks observes, such contexts offer the opportunity for practitioners to learn from other professional groups and to challenge established ways of doing things.

Inequality, exclusion, oppression and discrimination continue and persist through a range of social structures. These entrenched issues require attention to a key principle: anti-oppressive

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practice. Jagdish Chouhan (Chapter 6) offers a critical review of what constitutes anti-oppressive practice through an exploration of its key theoretical frameworks. In examining the personal, cultural and structural dimensions of oppression, Chouhan calls for a redefinition and adoption of empowering practices that encourage critical dialogue. Issues of inclusion and exclusion are further discussed by Derrick Armstrong (Chapter 7) as he undertakes a timely critical review of the role of education in modernity and post-modernity. He challenges contemporary conceptualisations of education policy and practice and calls for democratic education that supports young people in the critical questioning of social and political interests. For Thilo Boeck (Chapter 8) progressive youth work depends on participatory work that provides opportunities for widening young people's horizons and opportunities. Reviewing developments in social capital theory and its application to policy and practice, Boeck explores how young people's social networks can enhance or limit their opportunities to navigate risk. He calls for practitioners to distance themselves from seeing young people in terms of 'deficits' and enable them to escape the 'victim blame' culture. Instead, using a positive framework, practitioners can support the development of enhanced social capital to work with the needs and priorities of young people. Similar arguments are put forward by Daniel Perkins (Chapter 9) who critically reviews the adoption and promotion of community youth development in the USA. This approach works with young people in the promotion of their personal and environmental 'assets', emphasising the importance of capacity building of individuals and learning environments to foster positive development and engage young people with their communities.

Finally, the theme of understanding and acting upon the 'real worlds' of young people is revisited by Jennie Fleming and Nicky Hudson (Chapter 10). The authors conclude this section of the book by outlining the value of involving young people in all aspects of research. They provide a practical guide to participative research that will enable practitioners and researchers to actively engage young people as partners in the research process. The benefits go beyond their understanding of their peers: young people can develop skills, knowledge and self-esteem through the process.

## 2

# CHANGING CONCEPTIONS OF YOUTH IN LATE MODERNITY

*Alan France*

### Key arguments

- **Understandings of youth, particularly the problematic behaviour of youth, have changed over time as the discourses and disciplines dominant in social science have changed.**
- **The dominant orthodoxy of this research maintained a perspective of deterministic youth who are a homogenous group, ignoring notions of diversity and difference.**
- **Newer research has challenged this through an exploration of subjectivity and identity and attention to ‘difference’.**
- **In much social science the dichotomy of ‘agency verses structure’ has been rejected recognising that social life and choice is far more complex.**
- **Young people’s voices are important and exploring influences, such as culture, history, and tradition as well as the emerging contemporary context and processes of social change all provide a more holistic understanding of their lives.**

### Introduction

Throughout history young people have been of fundamental interest to social scientists. Disciplines such as psychology, sociology, criminology, educational studies and

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**Table 2.1** Conceptions of youth over time

Time period	Social science influence	Influences and concerns	Impact
Early modernism eighteenth/ nineteenth century	Psychology and Positivist Criminology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Enlightenment movement</li> <li>– Victorian Bourgeois Society</li> <li>– Anxieties over youth delinquency/ immoral behaviour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Discovers ‘adolescence’ as natural stage</li> <li>– Constructs storm and stress as explanation of youth problem</li> </ul>
Early twentieth century inter- war years	Positivist Sociology and Environmental Criminology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Concerns over impact of urbanisation and youth delinquency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Introduces influence of environment on behaviour</li> <li>– Youth culture as separate from adult culture</li> </ul>
Post-war – 1960s	Functionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Concerns over impact of the war on integration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Constructs youth as a social institution</li> <li>– Age grading defined as natural order</li> <li>– Youth culture as alternative process of integration</li> </ul>
1960s–1970s	Marxism and cultural studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Lack of class analysis to understanding social change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Introduces notion of resistance to youth cultural studies</li> <li>– The importance of consumption to youth identities</li> </ul>
Late modernity 1980s – present day	Feminism/post structuralism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Failure of previous theories to understand diversity of youth</li> <li>– Impact of social change and growth of consumption</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The importance of young people’s voice</li> <li>– Youth as agents</li> <li>– The central role of new technology and consumption</li> </ul>

more recently, cultural studies have all had something to say about the activities of young people. This interest by social scientists has, in the majority of cases been focused on trying to understand and explain the ‘youth problem’. As a result our understanding of youth and their activities has been historically structured by social science in particular ways (see Table 2.1).

These conceptions of youth are not theoretically neutral; they are influenced by the dominant ideas of the times in which they are conceived. Social scientists do not exist or operate in a political or social vacuum nor should we believe that theories are ‘value free’ and that social scientists are not influenced by the world around them. The first part of this chapter will chart the historical development of youth theories showing

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how different disciplines have constructed the meanings of youth. This discussion will highlight the key assumptions and influences that have shaped these meanings. The second part will turn attention to more recent developments in social science outlining the emergence of the 'new orthodoxy' and the influence of post-structuralism, drawing out major changes that have taken place in how social science is conceptualised and its impact on understandings of youth. The final section of this chapter will raise a number of core questions about this approach highlighting the lack of attention given to wider political and economic processes and the failure to recognise the embedded structural nature of the youth experience.

### **Modernism and the emergence of 'adolescence'**

Modernity has been an economic and political project that not only re-structured and re-configured the ordering of society but also challenged traditional ways of thinking and understanding the social world (Giddens 1991). Modernity has its roots in the early seventeenth century and can be associated with:

- The introduction and expansion of industrialism and new ways of organising and producing goods and services.
- The establishment of capitalism as a form of ordering economic and social relationships.
- The rise of the modern state that expands its responsibilities and takes a central role in maintaining social order.

It is also the period of enlightenment when the belief in the political and 'rational' subject dominated. Science was given a central role in this process being seen as a major force in helping mankind master their environments. It is within this context that early theories of youth emerge in the new discipline of psychology. This new modernist orthodoxy formalised and justified youth as a universal stage of development in the life cycle and is defined as the stage of adolescence. This constructs the phase as a stage driven by internal influences (Springhall 1986). G. Stanley Hall (1904) is a critical contributor to this position; he was greatly concerned by the youth problems of delinquency and workless youth that seemed to exist in Victorian society. He saw adolescence as a 'second birth' and the early stages of man's higher nature. Adolescence was, to him, a natural stage of transition being influenced by biological and psychological processes. The 'youth problem' was then seen as a result of difficulties arising from the period of physical and mental transformation when the young move towards adulthood. This was defined as the stage of 'storm and stress' when the young were vulnerable to 'problematic behaviour' (Springhall 1986). Youth was then seen as '...a prisoner of its own nature' (Hendrick 1990: 103) and therefore not always in control of its actions. Hall's ideas were greatly influenced by the values of Victorian England and

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especially the post-Darwin movement that believed genes and genetics shaped the 'natural order'. An earlier version of this justified slavery, imperialism and colonial expansion (Griffin 1993) and was also used to explain differences between genders showing men to be superior to women (Dyhouse 1981). The adolescent 'problem' was then constructed as one of biology and psychology. Similar ideas dominated early developments in criminology where psychology was also greatly influential, especially the new emerging medical fields of psychiatry and mental health (Garland 2002). In this context juvenile delinquency was seen as a consequence of biology or a dysfunction of cognitive processes. For example early criminologists proposed that criminality was a result of the 'pathological family' (Hollin 2002) suggesting genetic causes that are either located in individuals (i.e. the criminal gene) or are inherited from family (genetic dysfunction passed on from generations). Certain traits such as low intelligence, impulsivity and aggressiveness are claimed to be transmitted through genes.

The explanations of Hall and some of the early geneticists within criminology would not be given much credence today within social science, yet their influence cannot be underestimated. While the specifics may be rejected the ideas remain. Youth transitions, and especially 'problematic' transitions have become seen as a 'natural' phenomenon within theories of the life cycle. These have become strongly associated with developmentalism and scientific definitions that see the 'problem of youth' as a dysfunction of the body and mind. Evidence that supports these linkages between physical changes or genetic influence on behaviour remains illusive, yet the ideas developed in this nineteenth century social science remain a powerful influence in how youth is perceived and explained throughout modernity (France 2007).

### The sociology of youth in modernism

Sociological approaches to our understanding of youth also had roots in concerns about the 'youth problem'. The Chicago School in America is recognised as the first major sociological analysis of youth and was concerned with causes of delinquency not through individual psychology but through the processes of social interaction with the urban environment of city life. The Chicago School left a major legacy in terms of theory by introducing the notion of 'culture' to the study of youth. For example, Shaw and Mackey (1942) introduced the idea of *cultural transmission* where criminal values in certain communities could be transferred across generations. While Sutherland (1939) constructed the notion of *differential association* where crime is not seen as being caused by personality but by association. It is the nature of the interaction where learning about motivations, techniques and moral justifications takes place.

From the 1940s onwards these ideas are developed further by functionalist writers such as Parsons. Functionalism has a major influence on the social sciences and shapes much of the thinking over questions of integration and how societies

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maintain social order. Parsons (1964) was greatly concerned about the problem of youth re-integration and how they were adapting to social changes taking place after the Second World War. They believed youth to be a 'social institution' that helped society function. Age grading was seen to maintain social continuity and acted to distribute roles, and make connections to other structural components of the system. It is here where individuals find self-identification and recognition of their place in society. The 'youth problem' was seen as a reaction to the tensions that were arising as society changed. As a result young people were seen to be creating their own *youth subcultures* as a mechanism of dealing with feelings of anomie (Parsons 1964). Yet while much of the theorising by subcultural theorists concentrated on a social set of explanations it takes an 'oversocialised' and deterministic view of the delinquent seeing youth behaviour as a dysfunction of systems (France 2007). Young people are seen as passive and responding to the forces around them almost unquestioningly. There is no recognition that young people are social actors in these processes or that their behaviour can be defined differently in different contexts. This then becomes a form of sociological positivism (Muncie 2004).

### Radical youth studies: politics of resistance

Most of the early studies of youth are American with the distinctive approach of British youth studies not taking root until the 1960s. This explanation of youth is more radical as it was influenced by the developments and social theorising taking place in British society. It is a historical moment when the political consensus of 'welfare capitalism' that emerged after the war was showing tensions. Arguments that class was 'dead' were being challenged as evidence of a growing 'embourgeoisement' between classes remained unsubstantiated (Goldthorpe et al. 1968). This is also a time of substantial change when youth become a site of major concern to politicians and social scientists. Throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s there was a growing awareness about the emergence of the 'teenager' and in particular of youth groups such as 'mods' and 'rockers' that challenged the status quo. Concerns are also raised over the growth of new radical political youth activities such as the peace movement, 'ban the bomb' marches and the rise of new feminism, that were challenging to the orthodoxy of modern society.

As both a reaction and a reflection of these events three major developments in social science take place. Firstly, a crisis exists in British criminology in that theorising fails to evolve. Much of criminology remains focused on the positivist ideas of measurement and improving the administration of criminal justice (Griffin 1993). In response a group of criminologists make a significant break from the mainstream orthodoxy creating a 'new deviancy theory' that radicalises how deviance is to be theorised. This sees the growth of labelling theory and class analysis in criminology. A second development comes through the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary

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Culture (CCC). They see the analysis of the youth question as a political project (Griffin 1993) and are interested in how young people 'used' subcultures as a response to their economic and social conditions. Much of this early work focused on the politics of resistance and how young people are 'resisting' social changes taking place in their lives (see Hall and Jefferson 1975). A final development was in educational research. Through ethnography this approach was embedded within class analysis and questions of resistance. Hargreaves (1972) for example saw the creation of an 'anti-social' culture as a cause of educational failure while Willis (1977) in his classic study of *Learning to Labour* saw the 'counter-school culture' not as a consequence of educational failure but a 'cause' that socially reproduces their position in the labour market.

By the early 1980s youth research had become a major force in the social sciences, but significant concerns were also being raised about its limited focus on understanding young people's lives. The radical approaches in the 1960s and 1970s did little to challenge the commonsense assumptions of determinism. While they remained silent on biological determinism they did reinforce a social determinism that saw transition as a 'normal' part of being young albeit a social one. They could also be criticised for 'over-reading' the activities of the young without listening to what they had to say (McGuigan 1992). Similarly, while they rejected the 'storm and stress' model of psychology they continued to theorise young people's lives as 'a social problem'. For example, the work of CCC concentrated on trying to explain young people's subcultural activities as a form of resistance or what Cohen and Ainley (2000) called the 'storm and dress' model of explaining youth behaviour. Much of this early work also concentrated on the more spectacular and public forms of activities. CCC concentrated on those subcultural groups that dominated media interest such as 'mods' and 'rockers' giving no attention to 'ordinary kids' or their 'ordinary lives' (Brown 1987). This also tended to romanticise behaviour that for other groups was problematic.

One final yet significant limitation was that most of it focused on the activities of young white working class men or what Griffin (1993) calls the 'malestream' approach to youth research. Feminist writers were quite rightly critical of this approach but this was not just about the lack of attention to the lives of young women, but also a failure to recognise racial and cultural differences. The dominant orthodoxy of these more radical approaches to the study of youth and their activities therefore created a perspective of youth as homogenous, ignoring notions of diversity and difference (France 2007).

### The 'new' orthodoxy in youth theorising

By the time we reach the 1990s strong arguments are being put forward for the expansion and development of youth research that addresses these limitations discussed above (Griffin 1993). Simultaneously, major structural and cultural changes are



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taking place in late modernity that indicate youth is changing (France 2007). This gives rise to new developments and interests within social science. At the heart of these are attempts to shift the focus from 'youth as a problem' to that of 'the problems of youth' and much contemporary research starts to give a stronger focus to exploring the impact of social change on young people's lives. Questions of subjectivity and identity and the importance of difference dominate much youth research analysis. This new approach also widens the methodological focus of youth research. Mainstream social science still remains dominated by quantitative and 'neo-positivist' approaches, yet new approaches, influenced by feminism and educational studies, emerged that advocated the importance of listening to the voices of the young. These developments have significant influence in re-conceptualising youth into a 'new' orthodoxy creating new ideas and forms of analysis of the youth.

### *Subjectivity and identity*

Theories of youth had been dominated by perspectives that saw youth identities being either biologically or socially determined. The 'new orthodoxy' suggests that the notion of identity construction is a subjective process that cannot be 'read off' as predictive (Bennett 2005). Recent theorising recognises that old dichotomous models of social identity (biology verse social) are unable to understand the complexity of social life or the diversity of influences that shape the social processes of identity construction. As a result identity is seen as a negotiated process where individuals have 'agency' or control. These developments have also been influenced by theories that suggest that in late modernity life is becoming more individualised. Life is seen as more uncertain and therefore needs to become a 'biographical project', where individuals have to plan and navigate their own career and lifestyle directions (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Kemshall, Chapter 13). For example, in late modernity school to work transitions have collapsed. They have been replaced with more diverse, extended and broken transitions, which see the youth phase extended in age (France 2007). In this context young people have to make more individualised choices and are unable to rely upon traditional ways of transition. This growing individualisation is also seen in the cultural activities of the young. Youth culture is seen as being more creative and innovative and less collective in its nature (Bennett 2005). Technology, such as computers, MP3 players, DVDs and mobile phones and other forms of consumption, is creating opportunities for the young to construct new cultural identities that cut across old class based divisions (Bennett 2005). Young people take commodities and technology and use them to help shape their own identities through forms of symbolic exchange (Willis 1990). Identities can be in flux and changing dependent upon social context. New technology is allowing young people to be more creative and help them form new identities.

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*The importance of 'difference'*

In late modernity the 'new' orthodoxy has also been interested in questions of 'difference'. This had its roots in the feminist movement of the 1980s and in particular the work of Angela McRobbie. Writing about the girl magazine *Jackie* she demonstrated how girls not only resisted dominant notions of femininity, but also appropriated it by giving it new meanings and significance (McRobbie 1980). Other examples show similar processes taking place in areas such as shopping (McRobbie 1994), advertising (Nava and Nava 1992) and the Internet (Davies 2004). More recently the cultural phenomenon of 'girl power' is seen as an indication of girls having more autonomy. Its 'arrival' was credited with the Spice Girls and it is being seen as the 'new feminism' where girls are seen as being '...feisty, ambitious, motivated and independent' (Aapola et al. 2005: 26).

Debates about differences in gender have also been influenced by the 'masculinity turn' (Collier 1998) where the notion of learning about how to be a boy is important. Schooling is seen as a critical site where young boys learn about being a man (Frosh et al. 2002). Boys are seen to negotiate and construct themselves either in line with dominant discourses ('hegemonic' masculinity) or in opposition to them. Being masculine and heterosexual requires young men to distance themselves from women, femininity and gay males, because they have to maintain the superiority of heterosexuality to continue the process of control and domination (Frosh et al. 2002). Much of this debate has focused on the 'crisis in masculinity' suggesting that in late modernity social changes in labour market transitions, educational achievement, and social integration, are causing young men major problems (France 2007).

Issues of racial identities in social science research have also been seen as important in debates about difference. While there has been a growing political concern over questions of social integration, educational achievement and crime amongst ethnic groups of young people, youth research has shown how the 'mixing' of different ethnic cultures in late modernity is creating 'new ethnicities' (Back 1996). While their lives may be full of racism and disadvantage, many young people from black and Asian backgrounds are able to be creative and innovate within and through their own culture. Again it is in the area of consumption and new media where these opportunities are seen to emerge. New technologies in the music industry for example are creating ways of expanding and sharing varied and diverse ethnic cultures. The global world is a world of diverse cultural practices that can be transported, via new communication mediums, between the first and third world (Gilroy 1987, Aubrey Chapter 4). Identity formation is therefore a process of negotiation, where 'new ethnicities' are actively produced, consumed and transformed by young people themselves through different cultural practices such as dress, styles, listening to music, and watching television. Ethnic youth are then recognised as both

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producers and consumers of their own culture, which is shaped by the interplay between local and global forces (Back 1996).

### **The political economy of consumption and the commodification of youth in late modernity**

The 'new' orthodoxy in youth studies and the strong 'cultural turn' instigated by post structural social science has had a major impact on our conceptualisation of youth. Not only has it broadened our knowledge base but also brought new ideas and theories that have highlighted the 'agency' of the young, their creativity, and their innovation. But such an approach is not without its problems. While it advocates 'agency as autonomy' it gives little recognition to the importance of other processes. Limited attention is given to wider shaping processes such as the political economy of consumption or to the embedded nature of structural factors. While the innovativeness of some aspects of youth activities is difficult to deny we cannot divorce these processes from production or capitalist relationships (Frith 2004). For example, the sphere of consumption may have become more important in young people's lives but it cannot be separated from production. Consumption is a fundamental aspect of capitalist social relations, in which not only is labour replenished, but also gives rise to a whole host of new consumption pursuits, which have involved the further commodification of social life.

One such example can be found in the notion of 'girl power'. What can be missing from this analysis is recognition of the powerful influence and control of the cultural industries. It constructs girl power as non-political and can encourage girls to think about 'being a girl' in cultural rather than political ways (Taft 2001). In this way girls are dis-empowered, as it does not challenge the powerful political structures that shape the everyday lives of girls. It also portrays girlhood as a white middle class way of life where personal responsibility and individualism are valued above collective action, seeing citizenship through consumption (Aapola et al. 2005). Girl power is big business providing access into a teenage market that has over £1.3 billion of spending power (Mintel 2003). The cultural industries are not interested in empowering girls but in capturing their spending power. Tying girls into brand loyalties and creating skilled consumers is important to the industry and while we might want to recognise that girls are astute consumers and producers of their own culture the industry is also highly-skilled at marketing and producing desires (Russell and Tyler 2002). Modern day notions of youth are being commodified as a way of marketing consumption and selling new diverse products.

Similar processes are evident around other cultural activities of the young. For example, youth night-time leisure activities have also become highly commodified. Hollands and Chatterton (2003), in their study of night-life in the northeast of England, show the influence of the brewing industry in shaping the night-time activity of the young.

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New bars, nightclubs, themed nights and the introduction of music venues alongside the rebranding of alcoholic drinks has led to a restructuring of urban leisure. This is not driven and shaped by the new cultural activities of the young but by an industry keen to make large profits out of young people's leisure and cultural pursuits (Hollands and Chatterton 2003).

### Agency vs structure

As we saw above the 'new' orthodoxy has provided analysis of youth that not only recognises but also prioritises the importance of agency. Notions of 'individualisation' and 'choice' have dominated analysis of youth in late modernity, yet questions of structure and especially class structure cannot be discounted. As history has shown British society is dynamic in reproducing, even in times of major social and political change, class divisions (Byrne 2005). These tend to be entrenched in geographical regions where local circumstances shape life chances (MacDonald and Marsh 2005). Evidence in the area of school to work transitions, education achievement, post sixteen education take up, and the usage of new digital media all show that class remains an important factor in shaping young people's present and future trajectories (France 2007). Similar patterns exist between genders in that working class girls are less likely to enter higher education than their middle class counterparts (Walkerline et al. 2001).

Yet in much social science the dichotomy of 'agency verses structure' has been rejected recognising that social life and choice is far more complex. One attempt to address how young people's choices seemingly are being more individualised yet also remain highly structured has turned to the notion of 'structured individualism' (Furlong and Cartmel 1997). In selecting career pathways and routes young people will draw upon their own resources. The types available are linked to their class position, and are seen to limit how they might be able to take up opportunities compared to their middle class counterparts (Ball 2003). The notion of 'choice' and 'opportunity' creates a sense of false reality for the young, in that they believe they are able to take control of their own lives yet in reality it remains limited. This 'epistemological fallacy' creates a feeling for young people that they have influence over their lives and are able to negotiate pathways as though they have real opportunities (Furlong and Cartmel 1997).

Others within the social sciences have tried to 'bridge this gap' by drawing more upon the notions of 'culture'. Bourdieu (1991), for example, argues that a person's economic, social and cultural capital shapes tastes, lifestyles, accents, cuisine and social networks. Class is then defined through a set of social relationships and the deployment of such resources. Important in this is a person's 'habitus'. This is constructed over time and reflects historical knowledge and understanding and local tradition about 'how things are done'. It acts as a framework of reference for young people

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and helps inform them of how they need to operate in their own worlds. Recent theorising in youth studies has drawn upon these ideas to help understand the processes of identity construction and to help understand the complexity of the relationship between 'structure' and 'agency'. Much still remains unknown about these processes and problems remain (Devine and Savage 2005) for example, class tends to be regulated to a set of social practices that marginalise the economic context and the influence of capital production in shaping social life (Crompton and Scott 2005). This being said these developments within youth studies have restated the importance of questions of structure into any analysis of young people's life chances. Individualism as 'autonomy' or as a 'free floating' processes acting outside of structural contexts cannot be accepted. Notions of production and class have to be included in analysis of young people's lives.

## Conclusion

Understandings of youth, particularly the problematic behaviour of youth, have changed over time as the discourses and disciplines dominant in social science have changed. Such change continues, and the study of youth has radically altered since the mid-1990s providing new insights and understandings of youth as a stage in the life course. This is a positive move that has provided new opportunities to capture and understand the complex lives that young people are living in late modernity. The rejection of theories that locate the questions (and solutions) in either disciplinary 'silos' or dichotomous models of analysis opens up new ways of thinking about how different factors influence how young people live their lives and also become adult citizens. The return of class to this discussion within social science is also important for the study of youth. It reengages debates of structure and readdresses the imbalance of individualisation that has been a recent dominant force in social science thinking. But the good news is that this is not a return to traditional debates of class analysis. It is recognised that individuals are social actors and make a contribution to their own lives and that their voices are important in helping us understand these processes. Exploring influences, such as culture, history, and tradition as well as the emerging contemporary context and processes of social change, is a step in the right direction to getting a better more holistic understanding of young people's lives.

## Reflective questions for practice

- **Reflect on the young people you work with. To what extent are their 'choices' shaped or influenced by wider structural forces or social processes? Can you identify these?**

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- In reading research articles for your studies, can you identify what disciplines underpin the research?
- In what ways does the research represent young people? Does this representation take account of their subjective interpretation of their social lives?
- In what ways does this research help you to understand 'difference' in young people's lives?

**Further reading**

**France, A. (2007) *Understanding Youth in Late Modernity*, Buckingham: Open University Press.** This book shows how the ideas of past political action, in conjunction with the diverse paradigms of social science disciplines, have shaped modern conceptions of the youth question.

**Kehily, M.J. (ed.) (2007) *Understanding Youth: Perspectives, Identities and Practices*, London: Sage.** Drawing on recent research and the insights of young people the book provides a clear and comprehensive overview of youth in late modernity.