

Youth Marginality in Britain: Contemporary Studies of Austerity

Shane Blackman and Ruth Rogers (Eds.), 2017

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Research on children's and young people's geographies has proliferated in the UK in recent years. One particular area that has seen much needed increases in scholarly interest and attention has been processes and experiences of marginalisation and exclusion among children and young people, at least in part engendered in the UK since 2010 by austerity politics, welfare retrenchment, and increasing poverty and youth unemployment (Horton 2016; Kustatscher 2017; Pimlott-Wilson 2015; Pimlott-Wilson and Hall 2017; Smith 2013). The collection *Youth Marginality in Britain: Contemporary Studies of Austerity*, edited by Shane Blackman and Ruth Rogers and published by Policy Press in 2017, complements and adds to these recent scholarly developments. The book is broad in scope with 17 chapters and 22 contributors based in fields ranging from sociology and criminology to and education, as well as a few contributions from practitioners in youth, care, and social work. The contributions employ wide-ranging methodologies from ethnography and interviews to policy, media, and quantitative analysis.

Central to the book's focus are the proliferating discourses that pathologise poverty and marginality; the regulatory and governmental processes that marginalise young people; and young people's subjective experiences of marginalisation in various UK contexts. The first section, 'Youth policy, pariahs and poverty', addresses the key trends, tensions, and changes occurring in regards to youth marginality, from the varied viewpoints of critical theory, policy, media, and quantitative analysis, and the subjective experiences of marginality. The second section, 'Intersections of youth marginality: class, gender, ethnicity and education', explores the experiences and discourses of marginalisation in relation to various axes of difference, with individual chapters focusing on early motherhood, young asylum seekers, Roma young people, and care leavers, among others. The third and final section, 'Resistance and ethnography', examines young

people's responses and resistance to processes of marginalisation, discrimination, and stigma, using primarily ethnographic methods.

Despite their varying disciplinary contexts, methodologies, and research sites, many of the book's contributions, nonetheless, share some common points of intervention, and at times draw on similar scholarship for theoretical insight, such as Loïc Wacquant's (2008) research on marginality, as well as works by Émile Durkheim, Zygmunt Bauman, Robert MacDonald, and Beverley Skeggs. Several contributors address and problematise the binary discourses of young people *in* trouble and *as* trouble – or as 'at risk' or 'dangerous' – and the increasing *problematization* of youth as a life stage. Some chapters highlight and examine one or both sides of this binary within media, policy, education, or criminal justice discourses, as well as the implications of these discourses in young people's lives, and others explicitly intervene in the representation of young people as *at risk* – and therefore in need of protection – or as *troubling*, for social order or society more broadly – and consequently subject to regulation, management, or spatial containment. Marginalisation – the central premise and problematic of the book – is, further, in itself problematised and complicated by many of the contributions, as they highlight the role of government agencies, policing, and media and policy discourses not just in reacting and attending to marginalised populations, but also in leading to and producing marginalisation. The chapters in the third section of the book, furthermore, provide much-needed insight into the multiple ways in which the processes of regulation and marginalisation are contested, resisted, and reframed by young people themselves.

Robert MacDonald in the foreword to the book points out that youth *as a social category* is itself created and constructed through discourses that serve ideological purposes. These discourses – such as the aforementioned binary of youth *as* and *in* trouble – in other words, not only function to marginalise and exclude young people, but also produce youth as a category. Youth is – perhaps intentionally – never explicitly defined in the book, with the age range of research participants fluctuating somewhat from chapter to chapter, and contributors variously referring to 'young people', 'young adults', and 'youth.' When examined together, the contributions, thus, in interesting ways highlight that what 'youth' is understood to mean varies from context to context,

such that people of different ages are viewed as 'young people' or 'youth' in different policy or discursive arenas, such as immigration, policing, education, or care. More explicit attention to the ways in which processes and discourses of marginalisation also shape and condition what youth is understood to be and comprise of would, therefore, be a productive addition to the book.

This book is a welcome contribution to the rapidly growing scholarly field exploring the issues and processes of marginalisation, poverty, and exclusion in relation to children and young people – as well as to childhood and youth as concepts, categories, and life stages. It also presents the opportunity for others within the fields of childhood studies, and children's geographies, more specifically, to continue the work of attending to the economic, cultural, and political processes that intersect with the lives of children and young people in conditions of austerity, welfare retrenchment, and decreasing public services.

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