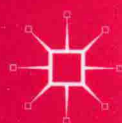


**WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE:**  
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

SERIES EDITORS:  
JEAN SPENCE & SARAH BANKS

# Sociology, Youth & Youth Work Practice

Simon Bradford

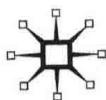


# Sociology, Youth and Youth Work Practice

---

Simon Bradford

palgrave  
macmillan



© Simon Bradford 2012

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No portion of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, Saffron House, 6–10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS.

Any person who does any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

The author has asserted his right to be identified as the author of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published 2012 by  
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN: 978–0–230–23798–8

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1  
21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12

Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne

## **Sociology, Youth and Youth Work Practice**

## *Working with Young People: Theoretical perspectives*

**Series Editors: Jean Spence and Sarah Banks**

This critical series engages with the theoretical debates that most directly impact on work with young people.

The books offer perspectives from a range of disciplines, including sociology, psychology, education, social policy and criminology, with a view to drawing out the enduring ideas and debates that frame practice. Individually the books present accessible insights into the ever-changing purpose and functions of work with young people, while highlighting the settings and policy that structure current practice.

Together they offer a unique opportunity for readers to explore and challenge the ideas that inform their understanding of young people as a distinct yet diverse social group, and the implications of this for practice.

### **Published titles**

Bradford: *Sociology, Youth and Youth Work Practice*

### **Forthcoming titles**

Spence, Issitt and Banks: *Research Perspectives in Work with Young People*

*Katalinnak, sok szeretettel.*

# Acknowledgements

---

I am grateful to the series editors Jean Spence and Sarah Banks for the invitation to write this book. They have been exemplary in keeping the book (and me) on track and in helping to see it through to completion with a degree of confidence that, frankly, has sometimes eluded me. Much of the inspiration for the book has come from courses that I have taught, with others, over a number of years at Brunel University. Writing is never an individual effort or achievement. It always entails the encouragement, support and help of others. Several people deserve particular acknowledgement. Mick Brent and Paul Allender both made substantial contributions to courses at Brunel and I have developed ideas taken from their work. Peter Seglow, Bob Gutfreund, Bernard Down, Val Hey and Fiona Cullen helped me develop my own sociological imagination over many years and I have borrowed from them. Colleagues in the Centre for Youth Work Studies at Brunel University have always been supportive and generous: Pam Alldred, Craig Johnston, Michael Whelan, Laura Hills and Laura Green in particular. Students on various undergraduate and master's courses have, often inadvertently, given invaluable criticism of my ideas and work over the years and they have helped to ground some of these. My doctoral students have been a source of inspiration and encouragement. I am grateful to the support of colleagues more widely at Brunel, past and present, and in the Schools of Health Sciences and Social Care, and Sport and Education in particular.

I am grateful to editorial staff at Palgrave Macmillan; Catherine Gray and Katie Rauwerda in particular deserve acknowledgement and Bryony Allen has been forensic in copyediting.

As ever, the most important debts are personal. To my friends and family, and in particular, Katalin, Tamás and Angela, thank you, and my sincere apologies for neglecting you at times when chapters needed completing.

Simon Bradford

# Preface

---

This book explores sociology and the sociology of youth, and their significance for professionals working with young people. It is aimed at two constituencies. Principally, it addresses students on university courses preparing them for practitioner roles (youth workers, social workers, teachers, personal advisers, drugs workers and so on) and who are working to gain an understanding and capacity to theorize and explain young people's lives and experiences. The book will also appeal to established practitioners who want to reflect on their own work in order to better understand and explain the complexity and nuances of young people's lives by drawing on the sociology of youth. The book is intended to enhance an inquisitive and critical understanding of the concept of youth.

As a social category, youth as currently understood emerged as a consequence of rapid changes in the nineteenth century, associated particularly with shifts from so-called traditional societies to industrial, urban and capitalist modernity. Modern societies should not be seen as homogeneous. They are much more plural and ambiguous than some accounts suggest, with aspects of what is understood as 'modernity' and 'tradition' existing side by side. In such societies, young people became progressively positioned in a kind of structural 'no-person's land' leading to them frequently being understood and represented in deeply problematic and pathological terms. Youth (in the West, at least) has historically been situated on the boundary between constancy and change and in that sense is a *liminal* category, symbolically powerful and dangerous. Recent events in North Africa, the Middle East and Europe, including the UK (in nation states that include variously articulated aspects of tradition and modernity that exist sometimes in tension and at others in harmony), have demonstrated young people's capacity – their *agency* – to transgress some of the boundaries within which they have been locked. This makes the task of theorizing youth complex.

In some ways, generation relations in the West and elsewhere (as power relations) seem to have altered in certain respects in recent times. Youth's cultural and social capitals, increasingly embodied in digital technologies and practices, partially displace the cultural authority of an adult elite, contribute to apparently widening social distance and in some circumstances lead to declining trust between generations. This is expressed in some young people's visceral hatred of adults who symbolize illegitimate



authority: politicians, police, teachers, social workers and others. Social policy has, too often, contributed to some young people's marginal status.

In sociology, the concept of youth has shifted to take account of the multiple experiences that constitute young people's lives against the backdrop of a world in which some aspects have changed radically while others have remained obstinately persistent. Some of these changes are associated with *global* processes that have become increasingly significant in reconfiguring how the social world is imagined and experienced (the growth of digital technology and social media, and increasing global flows of knowledge and people, for example). However, structures of opportunity invariably mirror, reproduce and exacerbate earlier patterns of inequality that are familiar across the modern world. In this broad context, sociologists have described and explained youth through accounts that focus on social relations (youth as occupying a special, often subordinate, position in relation to other social groups), social processes (youth as an emergent and transitional category and experience) and social difference (youth marked out through age, class, race, gender, sexuality and so on). These arguments reflect different underlying sociological perspectives and preoccupations. Inevitably, different approaches have been variously combined to generate novel theorizations of youth.

In the UK and in similar societies, various youth practices have developed over the last century or so (youth work or youth social work, for example). These have become professionalized and increasingly knowledge-based. This book reflects a conviction that sociology and, perhaps, sociologists have something important to say about the social world especially to those working professionally with young people. I am convinced that practitioners working with children and young people in a range of disciplines have much to learn from good sociology. Arguably, this is particularly so in circumstances where professional work with young people is contested and challenged, perhaps by recurrent disagreement about what it is for, what it seeks to achieve and why, inevitably, it is not always successful. Good sociological knowledge has the capacity to identify the, sometimes intractable, powers that shape the social world and that confront (or sometimes support) the interventions of practitioners. A critical and realistic appreciation of these factors can release practitioners from anxiety about their own capacity to intervene and change things by explaining how power 'works' in modern societies. In the context of 'deficit reduction' policies that disproportionately affect public professionals (and their clients), the organizations and services in which they work, these are vital understandings that this book seeks to cultivate.

The book considers these perspectives, positions and arguments and their relevance to youth practitioners.

The book is made up of eight chapters. Chapter 1 introduces sociology, considering its origins in the fundamental social changes that brought

about European modernity, and it points to a distinctive imagination that captures a specifically *social* world. The chapter considers contemporary understandings of youth as a social category with its own characteristics, needs and problems in the context of shifts from traditional to industrial, urban and capitalist societies.

Chapter 2, although specific to the UK, explores young people's experiences of growing up since the Second World War. The chapter's analysis could be applied to similar countries although the social policy details referred to might vary. The broad argument is that public policy frameworks (in this instance beginning with the welfare state) shape young people's worlds through the particular structures of social and economic provision (and thus opportunity or disadvantage) that are provided. Representations of youth and how youth is understood as a social category intersect with the development of policy and practice interventions. This implies an implicit reflexive relationship between youth, on the one hand, and social policy and professional practices on the other.

Chapter 3 considers the concept of identity as constituted in relations of similarity and difference, and its relevance to understanding youth. Identity matters become significant when identity itself is brought into question. In other words, identity is a consequence of the changes that configure modernity and, especially, *late* modernity in which social difference such as class, gender or race became increasingly important. The chapter considers family, community, friendship and other personal relationships as sites of identity formation and construction.

Chapter 4 continues the exploration of the concept of identity particularly from the perspective of similarity and difference. Are the factors that make young people *similar* to one another as significant as those that make them *different*? The importance of generation is considered and the chapter identifies social class, gender and sexuality and race and ethnicity as specific examples of social difference that differentiate individuals' and groups' access to social power.

In Chapter 5, youth is considered as a focus of social anxiety, the concept of *moral panic* often mapping the social processes through which youth and young people come to be seen as problematic. Youth has become a sort of screen onto which broader anxieties about social change (specifically *adult* anxieties) have been projected and through which they are symbolized, often by the popular media.

Chapter 6 explores how space and place locate and constitute youth in the contemporary world. In the chapter, *space* is considered in social, material, and virtual dimensions. *Place*, it is suggested, is an aspect of space that is invested with specific cultural meaning by those for whom it assumes significance. Particular places (a shopping mall, a youth club or a sports arena, for example) provide settings in which young people's individual

and collective biographies are imagined, lived and experienced. Chapter 6 also suggests how patterns of opportunity and inequality are invariably spatialized and how growing up in particular geographic regions, for example, shapes the nature and experience of youth.

Chapter 7 discusses globalization and citizenship and their implications for social change and social constancy. Processes of globalization *universalize* youth through constructing potential shared interests and solidarities, and simultaneously *fragment* and differentiate youth by creating patterns of inequality in relation to economic and cultural assets. Citizenship appears to be predicated on the idea of the nation state and Chapter 7 discusses two constitutive aspects of citizenship: citizenship as *entitlement* (for example social or civil entitlement) and as *practice* (as 'good citizenship'). It is relatively easy to see how these might be enacted in the context of the nation state but matters become more complex in a globalized world.

Chapter 8 argues that sociology is important for professionals engaged in work with young people and communities. In particular, it considers the production of sociological knowledge, including that by *practitioner-sociologists*, and professionals (such as youth practitioners) for whose work sociological understanding can contribute an important critical dimension.

Each of the chapters includes activities and exercises that are designed to encourage readers to explore aspects of their own experience and work with young people from a sociological perspective. Some of these draw on popular cultural sources (novels and films, for example) to exemplify and illustrate questions that are raised in the text. These activities can be completed by individuals or, even better, collectively in reading groups or class groups, and they are intended to provide opportunities to reflect critically and imaginatively in a spirit of curiosity. Further reading is suggested at the end of each chapter.

# Contents

---

<i>List of Figures and Tables</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	x
<i>Preface</i>	xi
<b>Chapter 1 Sociology Matters: Sociological Perspectives and Young People</b>	<b>1</b>
Introduction	1
A Brief History	2
Becoming (and Remaining) Part of the Social	15
Youth, Sociology and Young People	23
Summary and Conclusions	26
<b>Chapter 2 Growing Up in the Present: From 1945 to the 2000s</b>	<b>28</b>
Introduction	28
The Post-War Period and 'Political Consensus'	30
Challenges to the Settlements: Emerging Neoliberalism	36
The New Service and Knowledge Economy	41
Feminizing the Labour Force	42
Flexible Labour Markets	43
The Social Geography of the Labour Market	44
Youth Labour Markets and the Transition from School to Work	45
Between the Market and the State: Third Way Politics	47
Summary and Conclusions	53
<b>Chapter 3 Growing up in Public and Private: Youth, Transition and Identity-Making</b>	<b>55</b>
Introduction	55
Identity, Youth and Transitions	56
Youth as Transition	57
Sociology and Youth Transition	61
Private and Public Worlds	62
Summary and Conclusions	81
<b>Chapter 4 Being Similar and Different: Youth and Social Difference</b>	<b>84</b>
Introduction	84
Youth Social Difference and Inequality	85

Social Class	86
Social Class, Identity and Youth	92
Gender, Sexuality and Youth	97
Race, Ethnicity and Youth	104
Summary and Conclusions	108
<b>Chapter 5 Being Social: Complying and Transgressing</b>	<b>110</b>
Introduction	110
Youth Culture in Modernity: Youth and Subculture	110
British Youth Research	112
The Concept of Youth Subculture	114
Criticizing Subculture	118
Deviance, Youth and Transgression	129
Summary and Conclusions	134
<b>Chapter 6 Being Somewhere: Youth, Space and Place</b>	<b>137</b>
Introduction	137
Youth Space and Place	137
Youth, Identities, Virtual Space and Place	146
Summary and Conclusions	159
<b>Chapter 7 Living in a World of Change and Constancy: Globalization, Citizenship and Youth</b>	<b>161</b>
Introduction	161
Globalization	165
Globalization and citizenship	173
Globalization, Citizenship and Youth	180
Summary and Conclusions	185
<b>Chapter 8 Does sociology matter?</b>	<b>187</b>
<i>References</i>	200
<i>Index</i>	212

# List of Figures and Tables

---

## Figures

3.1	Young people and transition	59
3.2	Young people's networks of relationships	73
3.3	Young people's relationships	80
5.1	Changes in leisure processes	121
5.2	Moral panic as social process	124
7.1	The 'natural history' of social movements	179

## Tables

1.1	Durkheim's distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity	13
2.1	Political consensus	30
2.2	The challenge to consensus	37
2.3	The 'Third Way'	48
3.1	The metaphor of transition	58
3.2	Dimensions of community	70
3.3	Forms of new community	72
3.4	Types of social capital	78
5.1	Youth subcultures	116
6.1	Space and place	139
6.2	The network society	148
7.1	Processes of social change	164
7.2	Globalization	167
7.3	The globalized world: 'scapes'	172

# 1

## Sociology Matters

---

### Sociological Perspectives and Young People

#### Introduction

This book begins from the conviction that sociology has great potential in helping youth practitioners understand young people, the world they live in and the professional practices that aim to support them. Sociology involves a special and unique way of thinking about the world that the book will introduce.

Insofar as thinking leads to doing, the aim is to influence how readers approach their practice with young people and communities. Sociological thinking aims to provide resources for analysis and change and is therefore inevitably implicated in questions of politics and power. Sociological analysis points to difficult questions that are sometimes problematic for government and decision makers: questions of freedom and security, wealth and poverty, consensus and conflict, stability and change. These are matters that those in power may prefer to ignore but for practitioners with young people, they are fundamental to day-to-day practice. The intention of this book is to open such questions to the sociological imagination so that youth practitioners – as *practitioner-sociologists* – can better understand their implications.

Most introductions to sociology refer to the ways in which societies shape the beliefs, conduct and identities of their members. Society is constituted in the groups to which people belong (families, communities or classes, for example), the institutions through which the social world is organized (education, welfare systems, politics and the law, for example), and the shared cultures and practices which differentiate one society from another. Essentially, sociologists claim that there is something important and unique about *the social* that helps us to understand a range of important questions. Sociologists are interested in questions like, 'Why do people (as shoppers, football fans or young men, for example) behave as they do? Are people born or made? Are people social or individual beings or both?'

Such questions underpin sociological and broader philosophical debates that have, sometimes, run on for centuries. This book will engage with some of these questions and offer an understanding of them in the context of professional work with young people.

Chapter 1 outlines sociology and the unique perspectives that it offers. As a discipline, sociology seeks knowledge and understanding of the social world through rigorous research, reflection and theorization. Many of the areas that sociologists are interested in are ordinary and everyday and will be familiar to many youth practitioners. Examples might be: how can shop-lifting be understood in societies obsessed with shopping; does celebrity culture shape young people's aspirations and ambitions; are young men's views of what it means to be a young man in contemporary Britain shaped by biological or social factors; how and why has football become so established in some national cultures and not others; how does popular music help young people to express their sense of identity; and how are young people's emotions shaped by social processes and institutions?

## A Brief History

### *Sociology as a Modern 'Science'*

Before looking at the broad issues that sociological thinking can illuminate, this chapter briefly explores sociology's beginnings. The historical context can help us to define and understand some of the questions that sociologists are interested in looking at and the broad positions that they occupy. Sociological approaches draw on rational analytical thought. This involves identifying a problem, seeking, evaluating and interpreting evidence, and drawing conclusions. This approach underlies all scientific endeavours and derives from the philosophies of the classical world, but sociology, as the science of society, is a product of the 'modern' industrial and scientific age. It is these 'modern' origins of sociological thought that are considered here.

As science and rational thought began to offer an alternative to the dominant religious world view in late eighteenth-century Europe and America, social philosophers and scientists began to apply the tools of reason (logic and scientific method in particular) to social life itself. The optimistic aim of these 'logical positivist' social philosophers was simple. By painstakingly gathering facts, creating theories and testing them, they believed that everything was ultimately knowable and the mysteries of the universe would eventually become accessible to the scientists' investigations.

The first use of the term *sociology* is usually credited to a French philosopher, Auguste Comte (1798–1857), who argued that his new science of



sociology had the capacity to define what should count as human progress and flourishing (Comte, 2010: 802). This is quite a claim, particularly as friends, adversaries or neighbours might disagree about what progress would look like and how human flourishing should be defined.

However, for the early sociologists, the so-called *scientific method* offered the guarantee that its reflections would lead to truth. Comte held the firm conviction that society could be studied scientifically through the methods of observation, experimentation and comparison that had developed within the natural sciences such as chemistry and biology. He also identified the sociological problems of social change and social stability and was determined to discover what appeared to him to be specific laws governing social order, what he called 'social statics', and those governing social change, 'social dynamics'. For Comte, the purpose of his 'new science' of society – sociology – was to uncover underlying universal laws that determined the ebb and flow of social life. As such, he was interested in similar problems to many contemporary sociologists.

### Over to you...

#### Critical reflection

The idea of progress is quite complex and looking at the world around us it is difficult to believe that any of the early sociologists' convictions have counted for much at all. What would count as progress and whose progress would it be? What ideas of progress do you think underlie current political party positions in your own country?

What about the question of 'human flourishing'? In your view, what would a 'flourishing human being' be like and what kinds of social conditions and arrangements would be in place to encourage that? Should practitioners with young people be concerned with human flourishing and, if so, how does your work contribute?

One of the important, continuous defining features of the sociological perspective has been its combination of scientific method and moral concern. Despite claims for the 'value free' and scientific status of sociology, its origins and development have always been implicitly or explicitly connected with notions of improving the human condition.

Sociology is not only a body of abstract ideas and thought. It has to be understood in its *material* setting as well. The development of sociology was intimately bound up with the tumultuous happenings in the French and American revolutions of the late eighteenth century. The earliest sociolo-