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Youth Cultures in the Age of Global Media

Edited by David Buckingham,
Sara Bragg and Mary Jane Kehily



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Introduction: Rethinking Youth Cultures in the Age of Global Media

David Buckingham and Mary Jane Kehily

Most of the chapters in this book were originally presented during a two-year seminar series funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council. Under the title ‘Rethinking youth cultures in the age of global media’, our discussions ranged across a set of key themes, including the history of research on youth culture, the impact of globalization, youth participation, the role of digital media and the place of youth in the commercial market. By way of an introduction, we would like to explore some of the challenges that are implicitly posed by our title. Do we need to rethink youth cultures in the age of global media – and if so, why?

Youth cultures

The category of ‘youth’ has been a focus of attention for academic researchers since the psychologist G. Stanley Hall’s groundbreaking work on adolescence at the beginning of the twentieth century (Hall, 1906); while the term ‘youth culture’ was first coined by the sociologist Talcott Parsons in 1942. Despite the many differences between them, both writers saw youth as a separate and distinctive phase of human development, and as a potentially difficult period of adjustment to social norms and expectations. Succeeding generations of sociologists and psychologists have sought to define the unique characteristics of youth and youth culture, often in starkly divergent terms. In recent years, for example, psychological research has seen the development of the ‘emerging adulthood’ perspective (Arnett, 2004), while sociological research in the United Kingdom has coalesced around the notion of ‘youth transitions’ (e.g., MacDonald and Marsh, 2005).

However, at least in the English-speaking world, research on youth *culture* – or, as we would prefer, youth *cultures* in the plural – has

been massively influenced by the pioneering work of the University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). Building to some extent on the 'Chicago School' of sociology that had preceded it, the CCCS established the study of youth culture as an important dimension of the emerging academic discipline of Cultural Studies (e.g., Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979). Through ethnographic research and semiotic textual analysis of key groups such as the teds, the mods and rockers, the skinheads and the punks, this work situated young people's cultural practices – including their consumption and use of media and popular culture – within a broader account of the social and historical context of post-war Britain. The Centre's analysis of youth culture was part of its wider political project, which was centrally informed by varieties of Marxist and post-Marxist theory: youth culture was implicitly seen, in the terms of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, as a site of struggle, in which the hegemony of the dominant classes might be challenged and contested.

The CCCS researchers analysed youth subcultures as expressions of resistance, in which young people made connections between their everyday experience and the wider social inequalities inscribed in class relations (Hall and Jefferson, 1976). The CCCS analysis suggested that engaging in subcultural activity involved young people in acts of 'double articulation', firstly with the parental generation and secondly with political formations and agents of post-war social change. In the process, the CCCS provided an account of working-class youth culture that effectively challenged the pathological views of 'deviance' and 'delinquency' that dominated both public debate and a good deal of mainstream academic research. To view youth subcultures merely as manifestations of adolescent rebellion underestimates young people's collective investment in change through intergenerational conversations and creative forms of protest. By contrast, the CCCS approach sought to provide a generative way of interpreting youth subcultures as purposeful inventions, imbued with meaning.

The story of the Birmingham Centre has taken on almost mythological proportions, and in recent years its legacy has been widely questioned. Subsequent authors – not least exponents of 'post-subcultural' research (e.g., Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003) – have extensively challenged what they see as the limitations and absences of the CCCS approach. The 'Birmingham School' is now routinely dismissed for its narrow preoccupation with social class, and its neglect of gender, 'race', and sexuality. It is accused of 'over-politicizing' youth culture, and merely celebrating youthful resistance to adult authority. And it is criticized for

adopting a romantic notion of authenticity – as though youth culture arises ‘from the streets’, somehow expressing a pristine and spontaneous rebellion against the established social order. For examples of such criticisms, see Bennett (1999), Muggleton (2000); and Thornton (1995).

The paradox, as Christine Griffin points out in her contribution to this book, is that many of these same criticisms were being made by members of the ‘Birmingham School’ at the time; and if we follow this tradition from its origins in the mid-1970s into the 1980s, we can find plenty of examples of research addressing precisely these absences and concerns. Indeed, if we look back to the ‘canonical’ texts of the CCCS, such as Hall and Jefferson’s *Resistance Through Rituals* (1976) or Willis’s *Learning to Labour* (1977), it is hard to see much evidence of the ‘celebratory’ approach to youth culture of which they are often accused: if anything, they seem rather gloomily preoccupied with the limited and self-defeating nature of much youthful ‘resistance’.

Yet if recent researchers have perhaps been unduly inclined to caricature the CCCS approach, and to proclaim that we are in the age of the ‘post’, a careful reappraisal of this tradition is certainly necessary. Critiques of the ‘Birmingham School’ have commonly focused on a small selection of early studies and tended to ignore its wider body of work. CCCS has been set up as the ‘straw man’ to be knocked down in order to make way for the post-subcultural new order. This compressed reading overlooks the diversity of interests and methods within the Centre. Collections such as *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et al., 1978), *Off Centre* (Franklin et al., 1991) and *Border Patrols* (Steinberg et al., 1997) bear testimony to the range of work exploring ‘race’, gender and sexuality, respectively, while also offering insights into the politics and pedagogy of collaborative work (see Kehily, 2010). CCCS can be seen as part of a broader project of knowledge production that was also radical in educational terms, blending new ways of looking with new ways of working together. The CCCS experience entailed working collectively towards shared goals, developing new ways of understanding the interplay between individual and society, for instance through autobiography, memory work and narrative approaches. Distinctive features of work from the Centre such as the concern with the aesthetics of writing, historically informed accounts, and the early recognition of intersectionality remain under-acknowledged in subsequent critical accounts.

Meanwhile, the ‘classic’ Birmingham studies of the 1970s also need to be understood in their historical context, as a contingent response to a particular set of cultural and political circumstances. Read today, they speak of a society beginning to fragment, with the collapse of an

industrial economy, the rise of global migration and the challenges of new forms of 'identity politics'. It would indeed be surprising if the insights and analytical concepts developed at this time were sufficient to encompass the vastly changed circumstances of the twenty-first century. Yet ultimately, the CCCS offered a theory and an analysis of youth *subcultures*, and not of youth cultures more broadly: not least for political reasons, it was self-consciously concerned with an important but limited range of cultural practices. As authors such as Gary Clarke (1981) pointed out at the time, there was a bias in favour of the spectacular – a bias that inevitably led to a neglect of the complexity and diversity of most young people's experience. The cultural practices of the 'ordinary' young people of the 1970s – the teenyboppers, the glam rockers, the disco dancers – barely make an appearance in the CCCS texts of the time (although there are couple of notable exceptions to this: McRobbie and Garber, 1975; Taylor and Wall, 1976). One suspects that such apparently conformist, consumerist tastes would have proven hard to mobilize in the interests of the Centre's broader political project.

Recent authors have attempted to reconceptualize the concept of 'subculture' – or alternatively to replace it with different metaphors (see Bennett, 1999; Hesmondhalgh, 2005) – although such attempts have been less than conclusive. In a manner that directly echoes Clarke's argument from 1981, they have suggested that contemporary youth cultures are generally more diverse, more fluid and more provisional than the 'classic' subcultures of the CCCS research of the 1970s. Card-carrying members of subcultures are, they argue, few and far between; and contemporary youth cultural practices are more commercialized, and more politically ambivalent. While some groups – such as goths or 'emo kids' – can perhaps still be accounted for in terms of subcultural theory, the range of cultural practices that followed in the wake of the 'club cultures' of the late 1980s and 1990s are much harder to explain in terms of resistance and hegemony.

This post-subcultural moment has resulted in a stronger emphasis on the mercurial character of youth formations. Soaking up the impact of late modern 'choice biographies' and processes of globalization, post-subcultural studies have drawn attention to plurality, fragmentation and the proliferation of multiple cultures of youth, with shifting 'scenes' and changeable alliances based on notions of style and taste (Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003; Redhead et al., 1997; Thornton, 1995). The investments of these second- and third-generation youth researchers appear to cohere in the sphere of leisure. Going out, drinking, clubbing

and group participation in city centre nightlife have become the focus of studies that portray youth as the hedonistic occupants of 'cool places' (Skelton and Valentine, 1998). The interpretative shift from reading young people's practices as meaningful social commentary to an exploration of pleasure-seeking individualism can be seen as a reflection of changing times, as well as the changing political and emotional investments of researchers themselves.

The post-subculturalists in their turn have been rightly criticized for their neglect of the continuing relevance of class (Blackman, 2005; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2005). The latter argument has to some extent been reinforced by the recent emergence of a new working-class 'folk devil' in the figure of the 'chav' – a figure that, as Mary Jane Kehily and Anoop Nayak explain in their chapter, has become the vehicle of a contemporary form of class disgust. In practice, the work of the 'post-subculturalists' also appears oddly preoccupied with spectacular manifestations of youth cultural style: there are many cultural practices that are engaged in by 'ordinary' young people that continue to fall well outside the remit of such research. Academic researchers still appear strangely reluctant to look at the relatively mundane, conservative things that the majority of young people do in their leisure time – and indeed to consider the possibility that in such respects, young people may actually be rather more like adults than we might be prepared to admit.

The rethinking that is taking place here is thus a necessary, ongoing process: it reflects changes in academic fashions as well as youthful ones, and it relates to much broader social, cultural and political changes. Yet in reassessing academic traditions, it is important to avoid a kind of 'presentism' – a tendency to reread the past in light of the very different circumstances of the present. Like youth culture itself, academic research in this field needs to be understood historically, in terms of the imperatives of its time.

Youth

A further reason for rethinking relates to the category of 'youth' itself. Like 'childhood', youth can of course be seen as a social construct. The ways in which societies divide up the life course vary significantly across different time periods and cultural contexts. Historical studies of youth (e.g., Gillis, 1981; Mitterauer, 1992) and 'classic' anthropological accounts (e.g., van Gennep, 1909; Mead, 1928) illustrate something of the diversity here; and these differences have also been increasingly

apparent in recent studies of youth culture (see, among many others, Austin and Willard, 1998; Nilan and Feixa, 2006; Nayak and Kehily, 2007). Yet even within contemporary Western societies, many of the meanings that are associated with youth are undoubtedly changing; and the period that is encompassed by the term 'youth' itself seems to have become ever-more elastic.

Thus, on the one hand, it can be argued that childhood seems to be blurring into youth – or at least that public perceptions and anxieties about such a prospect appear to be growing. The recent debate in the United Kingdom (and in many other English-speaking countries) about the 'sexualization' of childhood provides an especially controversial case in point here (see Bragg and Buckingham, 2013). Campaigners in this area are crucially preoccupied with policing the boundary between childhood and youth, in relation not only to sexual experience but also to sexual *knowledge*; yet in a period when sexual representations have become much more widely available through digital media, such attempts at regulation appear increasingly impossible to sustain. This example of course reflects a wider anxiety about the 'disappearance' of childhood, in which the media and popular culture are frequently seen as the destroyers of children's innocence. While this argument has been around for many years, it appears to have taken on a renewed force in recent years, not least in response to children's growing access to consumer culture (see Buckingham, 2011).

Yet on the other hand, we are also witnessing an extension of youth, or a blurring of the boundary between youth and adulthood. If youth is, as Erikson (1968) argued, a kind of 'moratorium' – a liminal, in-between state – then it is arguably one that appears to be lasting much longer and ending much later than it used to do. Young people are leaving the family home at an older age, and 'settling down' in terms of stable jobs and relationships at a later point. Indeed, the lack of stable jobs or affordable independent housing means that 'settling down' is hardly a prospect for many young people. Some psychologists argue that this period of 'emerging adulthood' is now continuing well into the thirties (e.g., Arnett, 2004); while in a different way, sociologists confirm that the 'transition to adulthood' has become a significantly more unstable, precarious process (e.g., Blatterer, 2007). Indeed, one might well ask what kind of state young people are transitioning towards: what is the stable condition of adult maturity which young people are apparently taking longer to achieve? It could be argued that, for all sorts of reasons, the values of achieved 'adulthood' are less easily obtainable than they used to be, but also, for many, less desirable in the first place.

Media and marketing undoubtedly play a key role in this process, but it is a difficult and ambivalent one. The marketing of computer games or rock music, for example, increasingly seems to reflect a broadening of the youth demographic – a sense that ‘youthfulness’ is something that can be invoked, packaged and sold to people who are not by any stretch of the imagination any longer youthful. As Andy Bennett (2007) has pointed out, forms of popular music that were once identified as exclusive to youth are now increasingly attracting multigenerational audiences: this applies not just to well-established styles (like punk and metal) that have established, ‘die-hard’ fans, but also to newer electronic dance styles. Similar phenomena can arguably be identified in areas such as fashion and the fitness industry. As Bennett suggests, contemporary marketing often implies that you are ‘as young as you feel’. However, there may also be a contrary process of reaction here. Young people may come to resent older people trespassing on ‘their’ territory, and seek to defend it by deploying ever-more arcane and inaccessible forms of cultural capital. Meanwhile, marketers and media producers may find themselves trapped in an ever-moving spiral of credibility, where broadening one’s audience comes to be seen as a form of ‘sell-out’ and a betrayal of authenticity (see Buckingham’s chapter in this volume).

‘Youth’ is, of course, a matter of lived experience; but its cultural meanings are socially and historically defined. At present – at least in Western societies – it appears that these meanings have become more problematic, and more contested. While it has always been seen as a state of transition, the status of youth seems to have become ever-more provisional and uncertain. In this context, we might well ask whether it still makes sense to think of ‘youth culture’ as something that is specific to young people at all.

The global and the local

Much of the discussion thus far requires further qualification and rethinking once we begin to include a global perspective. For several years, one of the present authors (DB) taught a masters’ course about youth culture to a very diverse group of international students. The course often began with an autobiographical ‘icebreaker’, in which the students were invited to describe their own relationship with youth culture, and specifically with the role of media. The exercise was designed to raise broader questions – for example, about what it means to be a ‘member’ of a youth culture – but it also very clearly demonstrated a range of cultural differences. In terms of media, what the students

recalled from their own youth was often a complex mixture of the global and the local. They talked about mainstream British or US pop music or Hollywood teen movies, but also about Brazilian funk, Danish death metal, Japanese anime and cosplay, or French ska. Furthermore, it was clear from the comparisons between them that 'youth' as a specific life stage, and 'youth culture' as an aspect of that stage, was not a universal experience. For many of them, youth was not about resistance, subversion and subculture at all: it was a period of relative conformity, of remaining close to their parents and their parents' values, and of doing what was expected of them. While some described themselves as members of specific 'subcultural' groups, this was not a common experience: most were aware of such groups, but felt ambivalent and uncertain about the possibility of identifying with them.

Teaching these students – and indeed younger, but equally diverse, groups of undergraduates – about the canonical texts of youth culture research ('Birmingham and beyond') reinforced a sense that the academic debate about youth culture is highly culturally and historically specific, indeed, almost parochial in its limited scope. As we have suggested, the CCCS approach arises from a particular moment in the history of post-war Britain, and from a particular *interpretation* of that history. Its cultural specificity – or even its parochialism – is not simply about the specific phenomena it explored (the skinheads, the teddy boys or the punks), but also about the theories that were used to explain them.

As teachers and researchers, we have become increasingly aware of the potential mismatch here, between the experiences of our global students and the kind of research and theory that they can use to help them understand those experiences. It remains important for students to read 'canonical' texts – although we can certainly have a debate about which texts are in or out. But the abiding question is whether that canon of texts any longer equips us with the theoretical concepts and tools that we need in a context of increasing global diversity and mobility. As Ritty Lukose argues in her chapter – and as several other contributors to this book amply demonstrate – we need to understand the various manifestations of global youth culture not just in relation to broad theories of globalization but also in the context of specific local histories and circumstances. This 'globalizing turn' in youth culture research has been manifested in many other recent texts (e.g., Huq, 2005; Maira and Soep, 2005; Nayak, 2003; Nilan and Feixa, 2006), and represents a much-needed opening out of the field.

Meanwhile, of course, the media play a crucial role in these changing relationships between the global and the local. Young people are now

growing up with significantly greater access to globalized media: media companies are increasingly constructing and targeting global markets, and young people are using new media to form and sustain transnational connections. Growing numbers of them have also experienced global migration, and inhabit communities in which a wide range of global cultures mix and cross-fertilize (see de Block and Buckingham, 2007). New media technologies offer new possibilities for transnational connectedness and dialogue; and yet the media market is increasingly dominated by a small number of global corporations. These developments are manifested in youth culture in specific ways, through the emergence of a global *lingua franca* (e.g., in the form of MTV or celebrity culture) and through the development of new 'hybrid' forms (as in the case of hip-hop or bhangra).

However, this is not simply a matter of changing relations between 'centre' and 'periphery': on the contrary, youth cultures typically display a complex and uneven negotiation between the global and the local. For some young people, the 'flows' of global capital can be enjoyed and embraced in ways that increase the repertoire of expressive youth cultures and styles. For others who are geographically displaced and living transitional lives, their relationship to global cultures may seem distant and remote; and there remain significant inequalities in access to media, both within nations and at a global level. The study of youth culture in this wider global context thus challenges the limitations of place-based research, and necessitates a less parochial approach; and it also requires innovative methodologies for accessing the cultural worlds of young people.

Media

Media have always occupied a rather awkward position in research on youth culture. In much of the early CCCS work, media were implicitly identified with mainstream adult society and with the operation of hegemonic power. They were seen as purveyors of misrepresentations (as in 'moral panics') or of 'the dominant ideology', a mysterious force that was seen to impose consensus and obedience to the social order, even among those whose interests it did not serve. Following the theory of 'repressive tolerance', the media's attempts to respond to youth culture were judged to merely recuperate and commodify its resistant potential (Hebdige, 1979). Over time, however, that narrative came to be challenged: it was recognized that youth culture was always mediated (or 'mediatized'), and that the protagonists of youth subcultures

often used the media in very deliberate ways for their own purposes. Academic accounts emerging in the wake of the 'club cultures' of the early 1990s (e.g., McRobbie, 1994; Thornton, 1995) moved significantly beyond the conspiratorial views of the early CCCS approach.

The emergence of digital media, and especially of so-called 'participatory' or 'social' media, marks a further shift, and indicates a further need for rethinking. Clearly, it is important to avoid the kind of idealistic celebration that has often characterized both academic and popular accounts of these developments. Nevertheless, these new media do offer significant opportunities for communication and self-representation, and young people are often in the vanguard of such practices. To date, however, there has been relatively little cross-fertilization or dialogue between youth culture research and the growing body of academic work on young people and new media. There is often passing mention of youth culture in new media research – for example, in the large-scale MacArthur Foundation studies (e.g., Ito et al., 2010) or the monumental European surveys on young people and Internet safety (e.g., Livingstone et al., 2011) – but in general the topic seems conspicuous by its absence. Meanwhile, publications on youth culture tend to include only token chapters on digital media, as though authentic youth culture is still seen to be happening offline.

The popular conception of young people as 'digital natives' or as a 'digital generation' has rightfully come in for considerable criticism (e.g., Buckingham, 2006; Herring, 2008; Thomas, 2011). Such arguments typically rest on a combination of technological determinism and an essentializing or exoticizing view of young people. Here again, it is important to insist that much of what young people (and indeed adults) are doing online or with mobile technologies is not spectacular or glamorous or revolutionary, but fairly mundane and banal. Yet the fact remains that most young people today have grown up with relatively instant access to digital technology – and here it is important to include those in the developing world, for whom that technology most frequently takes a mobile form. It may well be that much of what they are doing online is simply a displacement or an extension of what previous generations were doing offline; and it may well be that the distinction between online and offline is rapidly becoming meaningless. However, a principled scepticism and a longer-term historical approach should not lead us to ignore what is genuinely new.

Here again, the analysis of online youth culture needs to extend beyond the spectacular *subcultures* of fan communities, hackers and dedicated gamers that have already been disproportionately heavily

researched. The more mundane processes of self-representation on social networking sites, the routine exchanging of photographs on mobile phones, and the commenting on video clips on sharing sites are everyday aspects of contemporary youth culture that are in need of more sustained and systematic research. Meanwhile, it is important to recognize the consequences of a culture of constant connectivity, in which the imperatives of self-advertisement are so critical and so intense. In this new situation, the forms of identity and relationship that are central to how we think about youth culture may well be changing in some quite profound and unpredictable ways.

Who's rethinking?

Finally, it would be worth asking about who is involved in this rethinking. We have already raised several questions about *them* – about how we identify and analyse the youth we select to study. But what about *us* – the researchers, academics, and perhaps public commentators who are doing this? And how do *we* relate to *them*? These are issues we take up in greater detail in our concluding chapter, but they are worth flagging up at this point.

There has been some useful discussion in recent years about the relationship between 'insider' and 'outsider' research on youth culture (e.g., Best, 2007; Hodkinson, 2005; MacRae, 2007). However, we would argue that the large majority of youth culture researchers are *by definition* outsiders: they are people who were formerly young. This does not invalidate the whole enterprise, but it does point to the need for rather more critical reflexivity than has often been the case. Youth culture researchers are by no means immune from the tendency to exoticize, to romanticize or to vicariously identify with those whom they study. Like many public commentators, and indeed many other adults, they can easily fall prey to the pleasures of nostalgia or wish fulfilment. Alternatively, they can implicitly judge present-day youth cultures with the 'wisdom' of hindsight, and indeed with a kind of historical condescension: young people weren't like that in *our* day.

In research and in many other fields of practice – education, marketing, welfare, politics, media – the figure of 'youth' is variously imagined, represented, invoked, deployed and addressed; and in the process, its reference point acquires a somewhat elusive quality. Research, like media, is a form of representation; and while this is unavoidable, it needs to be acknowledged. Perhaps we should be most suspicious of it when it purports – as youth culture research often does – to speak *on behalf*

of those whom it claims to represent. As we discuss in our concluding chapter, this often creates difficulties when we seek to respond to the growing demand for 'youth voice': ethically, methodologically and politically, 'giving voice' to young people, or enabling them to 'find' and use their own voices – while a laudable aim – is unlikely to be a straightforward matter.

Overview of the book

This book is organized in five parts, each containing three chapters. The first looks at broad theoretical and disciplinary issues in youth culture research. Subsequent parts consider the changing relations between the global and the local; media and consumption; youth participation; and political activity.

In Chapter 1, Christine Griffin explores the legacy of the Birmingham CCCS work on youth subcultures, briefly considered above. She engages with recent critiques, reasserting the value of the CCCS's focus on the mediated cultural practices through which young people constitute themselves and their gendered, classed and racialized identities. However, she also points to the need to draw on more contemporary social theory, not least in order to understand the changing nature of young people's identity construction, for example, in relation to their uses of social media.

Ritty Lukose's chapter re-evaluates frameworks for cultural studies of youth, drawing on the author's own work on globalization, youth and gender in India. Tracking changing understandings of 'culture' at the intersection between British Cultural Studies and American Anthropology, the chapter draws out the specific problems and possibilities of a distinctly cultural approach to the study of youth, and to the politics of youth identity. Lukose describes how she needed to rethink these existing frameworks in her efforts to make sense of the cultural politics of globalization, youth and gender in contemporary India.

The final chapter in this part, by Mary Celeste Kearney, makes the case for a historical approach to the study of youth cultures, both in general and specifically in relation to the author's own work on girls' media-making. Challenging a narrow preoccupation with new media technologies, the chapter draws attention to the continuities as well as the discontinuities in girls' media practices across generations. Kearney argues that this historical approach is very much in line with Cultural Studies' legacy of contextualized analysis; and that the study of previous generations of girls' media-making can help us better understand the media practices of today's female youth – and vice versa.

In Part II, 'The Global and the Local', the emphasis shifts to more detailed empirical studies. Hilary Pilkington presents some themes from her ongoing ethnographic research with skinheads in the far north of Russia. She traces the individual trajectories of some of her respondents in, through, and out of the 'skinhead' identity, discussing core elements of skinhead subculture – style, ideology and violence – as well as their family lives, friendships, the city they lived in and their educational, work and leisure contexts. In this way, the chapter develops an understanding of 'subculture' not as separate from but as deeply embedded in everyday lives and the structures and agencies that shape them.

In Chapter 5, Carles Feixa and Oriol Romaní look at a youth cultural phenomenon that articulates the global and the local in quite particular ways: the Latin Kings and Queens Nation in the Catalan city of Barcelona. Beginning from an incident of inter-gang violence, they trace the ways in which the phenomenon of 'Latin American street gangs' was represented in the mainstream media, and the meanings of 'nationhood' for the participants themselves. They look behind the headlines to explore how migrant youth are creating new forms of community and sociability that cut across borders of time and geography, reflecting new forms of globalized and nomadic identity.

In the final chapter in this part, Sunaina Maira takes us to another, very different context, presenting material from her ethnographic study of South Asian Muslim immigrant youth in the United States. Her research addresses issues of national belonging in the post-9/11 moment, exploring the impact of the 'War on Terror' on the everyday lives of working-class youth from communities targeted as suspect citizens or un-American aliens. The research focuses on a group of high school students who did not belong to formal 'activist' groups; and it interrogates the meaning of politics, citizenship and dissent in a climate of political repression, taking the argument beyond the binary of resistance and complicity.

Part III contains three chapters focusing on another of our key themes: media and consumption. Kyong Yoon explores how young people in East Asia are appropriating cultural commodities from other East Asian countries. Drawing on ethnographic inquiries into young South Koreans' engagements with Japanese media commodities, the chapter examines how these intra-Asian youth cultural practices make use of new digital technology and confront the complex mix of nationalizing, localizing and globalizing forces. The emergence of this intra-Asian youth culture usefully challenges received notions of global youth culture, which are predominantly focused on the non-Western localization of Western youth cultural forms.

In Chapter 8, Patrick Alexander explores how age is negotiated as an aspect of social identity by students and teachers at an English secondary school. The chapter proposes the idea of ‘age imaginaries’ as a means of conceptualizing the multiple discourses, practices and processes of meaning-making that combine to shape notions of age-based identity. Alexander explores how ideas about ‘childhood’ and ‘growing up’ are mediated through exchanges and interactions related to Internet use and mobile phone technology, in the context of lessons and in the ‘illicit’ media consumption and discussion that takes place on the margins of formal schooling.

Finally in this part, Mary Jane Kehily and Anoop Nayak explore how young people on the margins of social exclusion respond to the pejorative ways in which they are typically represented in mainstream media. They develop two parallel case studies, of ‘pram face’ teenage mothers, often seen as incompetent and unable to lift themselves out of the ‘cycle of poverty’, and ‘chav lads’ from unemployed families, who are frequently condemned for their criminal activity and for ‘inappropriate’ consumption practices. Drawing on their own long-term ethnographic research, Kehily and Nayak explore how these young people negotiate, displace and resist the affective power of these representations.

In Part IV, contributors address the theme of participation in a range of contrasting ways. Lissa Soep presents some experiences from her research at a community-based youth media organization in San Francisco. She analyses the production and the longer-term reception of two youth-generated radio stories about Kosovo and Northern Ireland that sparked tensions at the intersection of local, national and global youth cultures. Unlike much youth media research, the account here extends well beyond the production process by tracking the ‘digital afterlife’ of these stories, as they were linked to, commented upon, embedded, and otherwise reproduced online, in ways the authors themselves could neither predict nor control.

Helen Thornham and Angela McFarlane consider debates about media participation by means of a critical case study of the BBC ‘user-generated content’ project *Blast*. This now defunct online resource for teenagers aimed to inspire and equip its users to become creative content producers. The authors challenge the fantasies of creativity, learning and participation embedded in the project, arguing that they effaced significant questions around authorship and power. They propose that this form of user-generated work may merely represent a form of ‘interpassivity’, in which ideas of creative self-expression may actively prevent meaningful participation.

In Chapter 12, David Buckingham considers participation in a much more commercial context, that of contemporary marketing to young people. Beginning with a brief look at the history of youth marketing – and at academic responses to it – he moves on to consider a range of new participatory marketing practices, including peer-to-peer marketing, social networking, and ‘co-creation’. Buckingham explores how these new practices are legitimated through new forms of market research discourse that represent young people not as ‘passive consumers’ but as active agents and participants; and he concludes by considering some of the troubling similarities between these arguments and those of some contemporary academics.

The final part of the book looks at politics, in both the narrow and broader senses. Kathrin Hörschelmann and Elisabeth El Refaie address the theme of citizenship, looking specifically at young people’s interpretations of the medium of political cartoons. Drawing on qualitative research with school and college students in Bradford, UK, the chapter draws attention to the diverse, transnational character of young people’s political concerns and identifications, and makes the case for an ‘agonistic’ conception of politics that moves beyond the rather worthy and consensual notions of citizenship that currently tend to dominate discussions of young people’s civic participation and citizenship.

Chapter 14, by Ofra Koffman and Ros Gill, explores the emphasis on adolescent girls that has recently emerged within global health and development initiatives. They analyse the discourses of ‘the girl effect’ that have been promulgated by an alliance of corporate bodies, charitable foundations and NGOs, which see girls as holding the key to ending world poverty and improving well-being in the developing world. Examining media outputs and offline events, they interrogate the notions of girlhood, ‘sisterhood’ and the North/South divide that are being articulated in these initiatives, arguing that they work to efface continuing global inequalities.

Finally in this part, Rupa Huq’s chapter moves away from the traditional focus on urban youth to address the experiences of suburban young people from different ethnic minority groups in two contrasting areas in the north and south of the United Kingdom. She explores the consequences of different histories of migration and settlement, experiences of ‘fundamentalism’ and anti-Muslim prejudice, and changing patterns of social mobility and political affiliation. In the process, Huq complicates familiar narratives of both ‘radicalization’ and ‘assimilation’, pointing to the emergence among second-generation migrants of a unique suburban British–Asian ‘habitus’ that transcends geographical location.

As the diverse contributions to this book suggest, 'youth' has been variously imagined, represented, invoked, deployed, researched and addressed. Yet in the process, its reference point tends to be somewhat elusive. By contrast, in fields such as education, politics, research and governance, there is a growing movement to promote, engage and listen to 'youth voice'. In these contexts, the category of youth is once more stabilized, and assigned attributes of obviousness and authenticity; and the participatory dimensions of new media are frequently celebrated as the transparent means by which youth can be accessed – and indeed 'empowered'. In the concluding chapter, Sara Bragg and David Buckingham look back over the volume as a whole, and seek to draw out some of these contrasts and connections with practice. In particular, the chapter explores how the kinds of critical, reflexive research discussed in this volume might help us respond theoretically, politically and methodologically to the demand for 'youth voice'. While offering suggestions for future research and practice, it also seeks to respect the elusiveness of youth for which our contributors have, collectively, argued.

In suggesting the need for some rethinking, then, we hope that this collection also demonstrates the need to maintain some continuities with the established traditions of research on youth culture. Youth cultures are undoubtedly protean and ever-changing, especially in an age of global media; and youth culture research needs to change with them. Yet it should also learn from and build upon the achievements of the past. We hope that the diversity and quality of the contributions we have gathered here illustrates the continuing vibrancy of this tradition of research, and its relevance to the present and the future of youth cultures.

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