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1

Introducing Gender

The question of how boys become men or how girls become women may seem absurdly simple. But if the question is simple, the answers are certainly more difficult. This book is about the making and unmaking of gender. It asks how do boys become men and how do girls become women in late-modernity? What does it now mean to be a 'proper' girl or boy? What are the costs of failing to inhabit this identity? And what are the possibilities for doing gender differently in the contemporary global economy?

Throughout this book we argue for a global perspective on gender that recognizes difference and diversity across time and place. We are interested in how gender relations are produced and reproduced on a world stage and the impact this is having upon new generations. Of particular interest here is the way in which gender is embedded in national and local cultures, institutional sites and settings, as well as everyday social relationships. Furthermore we are concerned with how gender interacts with age, class, ethnicity, sexuality and a host of other complex dynamics. In large part we are motivated by a curiosity to understand how gender is experienced, enacted and embodied in daily life, frequently in ways that are competing and contradictory. In this chapter we explore the different features of the title, *Gender, Youth and Culture*, through the following sections: gender practices; constructions of childhood and youth; playing with gender; and youth and youth studies. This is followed by an introduction to the structure and content of the book. As an introductory chapter we outline and discuss many of the contemporary debates and issues in these fields. Our focus is upon the salient features of gender, youth and culture that inform this book. Beginning with a consideration of gender practices, we document our interest and approach to gender as a lived process. This is followed by a discussion of constructions of childhood and youth in which we recognize the shifting boundaries between these social categories and the implications of this for understanding young lives. The third section of the chapter considers some of the ways in which gender and play come together in cultural analyses of children and young people's lives before moving on to a discussion of youth and youth studies. Here we focus upon the ways in which young people have been made visible through different research traditions and approaches. The final section of the chapter provides an introductory mapping

of the subsequent chapters of the book, outlining the content and main themes of each chapter.

Gender Practices

Recent developments in arts, humanities and social sciences have seen a growing interest in issues of gender, particularly in relation to young people, globalization and popular culture. Current scholarship on gender and youth is exemplified in works on class and gender formations (Skeggs, 1997; 2004), young masculinities and schooling (Mac an Ghail, 1994; Frosh *et al.*, 2002), young femininities and girlhood (Hey, 1997; Harris, 2004; Aapola *et al.*, 2005) and young people's gendered and racialized relationships to post-industrialism (Delamont, 2001; Nayak, 2003a). This burgeoning literature points to the abiding importance of gender as a conceptual category for understanding the organization and interpretation of human relationships. While much work in the field of gender research has focused exclusively upon young women and more recently young men, surprisingly few studies have taken a holistic approach to the subject, integrating work on masculinities and femininities. An abiding focus upon the gendered subjectivities of either boys or girls has tended to privilege one or other of these identities by holding them apart. However, our own ethnographic observations would suggest that one of the primary means through which young men and women define themselves is through and against one another and alongside imaginary notions of masculinity and femininity. The impact of separate sex studies is particularly revealing where there is a tendency in at least some research to conflate sex with gender, thus identifying boys with masculinities and girls with femininities. In this way 'sissy boys' remain tied to some peripheral, if failing, notion of masculinity, just as 'tom boys', despite their name, continue to be positioned as the temporary occupants of an aberrant femininity. As even these more extreme subject positions show, sex continues to remain the ultimate arbiter of gender relations, that irrevocable grain of truth. Categorically sex relates to specific anatomical differences, chromosomes, hormones and developmental markers such as facial hair or breasts, while gender refers to the cultural elaboration of these bodily signs through clothing, hairstyle or, as we shall see, even one's taste in film or music (Chapters 7 and 8). However, as Cream (1995) illustrates through the example of intersex subjects who are born with genitalia that is explicitly neither male nor female, sex itself can be socially constituted through the surgical scalpel and parental choice at birth. When discussing sex and gender a danger haunts categories that unwittingly collapse to presume that masculinity is something all boys inhabit while girls are the sole occupants of femininity. In this way gender – we believe mistakenly – can appear as a product or outcome of the sexed body.

Looking at the working and reworking of gender between and amongst boys and girls offers a rather different way of approaching the topic. Our concern then is not to compare and contrast the behaviour of boys with those of girls and so reach conclusions – a routine means of preserving the sex/gender binary – but instead to focus upon what we might call the ‘practice of gender’. In talking about *gender practices* we are moving away from notions of gender as either a biological essence or a knowable category that is fixed upon the bodies of men, women, girls or boys in the ways we previously described. Gender practices involve an understanding of gender as a lived process rather than a proper object that we are each magically endowed with as an unwritten consequence of our sex. Through this approach we aim to show how gender is a set of relations configured through technologies, bodies, spatial, discursive and material processes. Thinking about gender in this way enables us to see how it is ‘summoned into life’ under the weight of particular historical conditions, how it is discursively struggled over, repudiated or enacted. Exploring gender practices places attention upon the production, regulation, consumption and performance of gender in late-modernity – the structuring schematic of this book. By adopting this approach we aim to illuminate first, how gender relations are embedded in different societies; second, how they are discursively enacted and encrypted with specific indices of power; and third, how they can occasionally be reconfigured in different times and spaces. Throughout we argue that the making and unmaking of gender is no random occurrence, or *fait au accompli*, but the shaky happenstance of identification, embodiment and the rigidly routine rituals of gender demarcation that are a feature of everyday life.

By examining gender practices and in particular how they are produced, regulated, consumed and performed, we can gain a fuller insight into broader gender patterns and arrangements. This enables us to interpret the relationship between gender and power and to see how gender is institutionally organized, discursively constituted, embodied and transfigured in social life. It can begin to explain how gender relations are embedded within the social fabric of human societies and come to shape the choices and possibilities open to us as gendered subjects. This suggests that gender is not simply a matter of choice, but a negotiation that occurs within a matrix of social and historical forces enshrined in the ideological arenas of law, religion, family, schooling, media, work and so forth. And while gender structures may appear enduring, they too are continually subject to change and vary over time and place. In this respect, gender structures, rather than being determining, only come into being in and through social action, what we have been calling *gender practices*.

The production of a seemingly coherent gender identity is then the result of a series of successive, though never fully accomplished, ‘gender achievements’. These ‘achievements’ conceal an extraordinary amount of mental and physical labour that go into making these identities appear normal, ‘just so’. Yet if there is

no determining link between sex and gender, the question of how boys become men and how girls become women is itself theoretically constrained by a slew of political presumptions. By raising these questions we recognize that we too are in danger of replicating sex/gender categories, and in Chapter 8 we make a concerted effort to rethink gender 'otherwise'. The theory and illustrations we draw upon indicate that gender is not an identity that prefigures action, but is an activity that gives rise to how we come to understand and experience ourselves as gender subjects. Gender is not, then, the precursor of action, rather, it is its immediacy and after effect.

This book is concerned with the *coming-into-being* of gender. For young people the phrase 'coming-into-being' is especially apt as they undergo a great deal of physical, cultural and emotional change. In beginning to unravel some of the theoretical knots that bind gender to sex we do not seek to absent the role and agency of the body. Indeed some feminist poststructuralist accounts of gender have paid an enormous amount of attention to the multiple and complex configurations of gender power, but have occasionally rendered the human body obsolete. As part of a politically informed anti-essentialist project, this tendency to elide sex difference and the 'overdetermined' presence of the body as the atomized essence of 'who we are' is understandably compelling. However, as sociologists of the body and the new queer theorists we discuss in Chapter 8 amply illustrate, bodies are not docile, passive conduits for action. Bodies are both the objects and subjects of gender process: they are socially constituted but remain wilful agents that participate in their own making and that of others. Gender practices are embodied activities that carry with them a scattering of feelings, affect and emotion. These assemblages are also affected by the corporeal mechanics of the body regarding health, dexterity, dis/ability, body mass or skin pigmentation. Gender is sculpted through such mundane bodily processes as aging, giving birth, hair loss or weight gain. It is also culturally signed and manipulated through such corporeal activities as the use of cosmetics, tanning or plastic surgery. We should, then, be wary not to 'write out' the body from existence or set sex and gender apart from corporeal activity. For young people the coming-into-being of gender is always an embodied act. The proliferation of social terms already bestowed upon them throughout their short lives – as babies, toddlers, infants, children, offspring, adolescents, teenagers, youth and so on – iterates the discursive making of young people that come to mark their bodies in altogether different ways, as we shall now explore.

Constructions of Childhood and Youth

Over the last decade or so Childhood Studies has become a recognized area of research and analysis reflected in a growing body of literature that points

to the importance of childhood as a conceptual category and a social status for the study of a previously overlooked or marginalized group – children (Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 1992; James and Prout, 1997; Gittins, 1998; Montgomery and Woodhead, 2003; Kehily, 2004). How does this development relate to the concept of youth and youth studies? Is a young person still a child or does youth signal a move out of childhood and the onset of adulthood? These are key questions to ask, as they reveal how children, youth and adults are terms that gloss over a great deal of complexity and carry with them a substantial amount of discursive power. In this respect we can consider childhood and youth as contingent constructions, forever in the making.

Cultural investments in the idea of childhood as a state of innocence can be contrasted with notions of youth as difficult, 'out of control' and potentially dangerous – a symbol of what is wrong with the neighbourhood or the country more generally. The concept of childhood in the West is underpinned by twin images of children as either innocent angels or evil devils (Warner, 1994; Kehily and Montgomery, 2003; Valentine, 2004). The Romantic inspired child of innocence also calls into being its opposite – the demonic child. This duality is often used in the media and can be seen in contemporary views and images of childhood generally. Childhood figures in the contemporary British and North American imagination exist in an idealized state but children who break out of this state, especially through crime, are increasingly penalized and demonized. The potential wickedness of children seems to be reserved for some young people and aberrant children. Childhood innocence is celebrated and protected while individual children who transgress may be vilified – their behaviour placing them beyond the realm of 'proper' children and normal childhood. Central to contemporary approaches is the understanding that childhood and youth are not universal states. Rather they are culturally produced and as such will vary across time and place. An example of this can be seen in a British cultural geography study of 'fear of crime' with 449 school students aged 12–15 years (Nayak, 2003b). Those living in certain suburban neighbourhoods were repeatedly described as 'children' (i.e., those in need of protection), while those of a similar age in the inner city and nearby working-class estate were regularly depicted as 'youth' (by implication those that are likely to exacerbate fear of crime simply by 'hanging out'). Moreover these relations were gendered with boys (61 per cent) significantly more likely to be stopped by the police than girls (41 per cent). This reveals, first, how childhood and youth are contingent social constructions and, second, how notions of good/evil are tied to relations of gender, place and class. Economic and socio-cultural factors continue to shape childhood and youth on the international stage. A recent UNICEF report (2007) on the well-being of children and young people in 21 industrialized countries ranked the UK at the bottom of the table in their assessment of child well-being and the US as second

from bottom. The report focused on six areas: material well-being; health and safety; educational well-being; family and peer relationships; behaviours and risks; and young people's own perceptions of well-being. The report placed The Netherlands at the top of the table, followed by Sweden, Denmark and Finland. The report offers an economic account of the findings, powerfully suggesting that despite national wealth, children who grow up in poverty are more vulnerable, their experiences of childhood more difficult, leading the UK Children's Commissioner to comment, 'There is a crisis at the heart of our society'.

Developmental psychology has documented the stages and transitions of Western childhood. Within this framework childhood is seen as an apprenticeship for adulthood that can be charted through stages relating to age, physical development and cognitive ability. The progression from child to adult involves children in a developmental process wherein they embark upon a path to rational subjectivity.

Sociological approaches by contrast have been concerned with issues of socialization: ways of exploring how children learn to become members of the society in which they live. The differences between the two approaches are outlined and discussed in an academic intervention that sets out the parameters for a 'new sociology of childhood' (James and Prout, 1997). James and Prout propose that 'the immaturity of children is a biological fact of life but the ways this is understood and made meaningful is a fact of culture' (1997:7). They suggest that there is a growing body of research that signals an emergent paradigm for the study of childhood. Key features of the paradigm as outlined by James and Prout include the following:

- Childhood is understood as a social construction.
- Childhood is a variable of social analysis.
- Children's relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right.
- Children should be seen as active social agents.
- Studying childhood involves an engagement with the process of reconstructing childhood in society.

Most researchers working within this paradigm take their lead from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child by defining childhood as the life stage from 0 to 18 years, subsuming youth into the childhood years. Studies of young people and particularly those defined through the social category 'youth' have a history largely outside of Childhood Studies and continue to be studied as young adults rather than late childhood subjects (see below for a further discussion of youth and youth studies). We now elaborate our discussion of childhood by considering its relationship to gender.

Playing with Gender

Some of the differences between childhood and youth can be discerned by focusing upon the notion of play. Many studies of children and young people use the term *play* to refer to children's activities, while young people are viewed as engaging in leisure and youth subcultures rather than play. Children's play is commonly viewed as benign – imaginative, exploratory and a 'safe' way of dealing with difficult emotions. Play is often regarded as one of the most distinctive features of childhood. Indeed for many people, children's capacity to play, their enthusiasm for playing and the importance attached to being allowed to play define childhood. The Romantic movement in eighteenth-century Europe fostered the idea of play as essential for children, most famously in Rousseau's words, 'Is it nothing to jump, play and run all day? He will never be so busy in his life' (Rousseau, 1979[1762]:107). Building upon the Romantic idea that play encourages self-expression, educationalists in the West suggested that play was a natural way for children to learn. Child developmentalists in particular attach significance to play as a central way in which children learn the complex skills required to reach adult maturity. It can also be seen as a form of body-learning, through the development of such qualities as balance, hand-eye coordination, physicality and motor skills. From the twentieth century onwards, the consensus among professionals working with children suggests that play is significant and necessary – *the work of childhood*.

Studies of children's cultural worlds have drawn attention to childhood as a gendered experience. Thorne's (1993) US-based study of children, gender and play is especially insightful as her focus is on boys and girls (aged 9–10), using ethnographic methods to study their social worlds in a public elementary school. Her account captures the energetic and highly charged nature of children's cultural worlds where friendship involves engagement in imaginative forms of physicality, talk and action. To the adult researcher the rapid movements of children at play appear haphazard and chaotic. However, after several months of observation Thorne begins to make sense of children's play from the perspective of children themselves. Thorne's analysis suggests that children's friendships have a structure and an internal logic that makes sense to the children involved. Through patterns of friendship and rituals of play children create meanings for themselves and others. An example of this cited by Thorne is the way in which children use everyday objects such as pencils, crayons, erasers, toy cars, magnets and lip gloss. Thorne suggests that these objects acquire symbolic significance among friends. In the school context where children have little power these objects become significant as tokens of friendship that can be bartered and exchanged. Thorne observed that the objects constituted a flourishing 'underground economy' and indicated that among the children she studied, they

acquired use-value in contexts where patterns of trade marked circles of friendship in the following ways – ‘as a focus of provocation and dispute, as a medium through which alliances could be launched and disrupted, as sacraments of social inclusion and painful symbols of exclusion, and as markers of hierarchy’ (Thorne, 1993:21).

Thorne identifies a further example of children creating meanings through friendship in playground chasing games. Here Thorne describes and comments upon the widespread invocation of ‘cooties’ or rituals of pollution in which individuals or groups are treated as carriers of contagious ‘germs’. She documents the experiences of some unfortunate children whose undesirability is captured and pronounced by the tag ‘cootie queen’ or ‘cootie king’. Thorne suggests that, in general, girls are seen as a source of contamination, referred to by boys in one school as ‘girl stain’. ‘Girl stain’ involves boys treating girls and objects associated with femininity as a polluting presence; the reverse did not readily occur. This indicates that gender power may further be used to privilege masculinity whilst denigrating femininities as subordinate.

Thorne’s analysis of these games points to the relationship between children’s cultural worlds and the broader context of power relations in which they exist:

When pollution rituals appear, even in play, they enact larger patterns of inequality, by gender, by social class and race, and by bodily characteristics like weight and motor coordination. . . .

In contemporary US culture even young girls are treated as symbolically contaminating in a way that boys are not. This may be because in our culture even at a young age girls are sexualized more than boys, and female sexuality, especially when ‘out of place’ or actively associated with children, connotes danger and endangerment. (Thorne, 1993:75–76)

Thorne points to the further significance of gender in children’s cultural worlds through her conceptualization of ‘borderwork’, a term used to characterize the ways in which children tend to form single-sex friendship groups that serve to create and strengthen gender boundaries. Thorne suggests that children’s friendship patterns create a spatial separation between boys and girls that they work to maintain through play and social interactions more generally. Drawing up boundaries, however, also creates opportunities for transgression, crossing the line to disrupt gender-appropriate behaviour or ‘border crossing’ as Thorne terms it. While most children adhered to gender-defined boundaries, Thorne did notice that border crossing appeared to be acceptable among girls or boys who had achieved a position of high status within their peer group. We return to Thorne’s powerful elaboration of ‘gender staining’ in Chapter 8 where we discuss how gay subjects may especially be interpreted as defiled, polluting bodies in youth friendship circles.

Studies focusing upon children's friendships point to the fragility of gender 'borders' and the fragmentation of borderwork. Hey's (1997) study of friendship among teenage girls in the UK points to some under-acknowledged features of same-sex friendship groups. Hey's ethnographic study of girls (aged 11–18) in two secondary schools challenges many assumptions relating to girls' friendship with each other. Hey suggests that feminist researchers have a tendency to romanticize girls' friendship, to view them through the celebratory lens of girls' capacity for sharing, caring and mutual support. By way of contrast, Hey documents and discusses the frequent interactions between girls that centre upon the less than supportive practices of bitching, falling-out and rituals of exclusion. In Hey's account girls can be seen to be engaged in patterns and practices of friendship that are fuelled by tensions and conflict as much as support and care. Frosh *et al.*'s (2002) study of boys and masculinity illustrates some striking features of boys' friendship. Their interview-based study of boys (aged 11–14) in the UK suggests that boys' relationships with each other are structured around the contradictions of masculine identities. Many of the boys they spoke with saw masculinity and toughness as inextricably linked, thus making it difficult for them to discuss feelings of emotional closeness and intimacy within male friendship groups. In individual interviews with Rob Pattman, however, many boys did discuss feelings of intimacy and vulnerability at school and within the family. Frosh *et al.* comment upon the ways in which conforming to masculine norms may constrain boys and leave them with few opportunities to express their feelings. Connolly's (1995) account of children's games and friendships in multi-ethnic English primary schools imparts that the practice of gender power may be given a further twist when racist insults are deployed. As Troyna and Hatcher (1992) have demonstrated *mainly white* primary schools are also sites within which race categories are used as an exacting form of 'borderwork'. The above studies contribute to an understanding of childhood by problematizing the notion of 'innocence' and 'friendship' as a natural self-evident feature of children's lives in Western societies and pointing to the ways in which gender and ethnic alliances are continually worked at and shored up.

Youth and Youth Studies

In contrast to the creative and constructive ways in which children's play is cast, young people's play and leisure activities are commonly seen as potentially threatening and disturbing. It may be for these reasons that play has historically been disciplined through the rule-bound formation of team sports and physical education. The notion that young people *need* to play and that this may serve useful functions is rarely indulged. Rather young people 'at play' can become a source of evidence to indicate that they are unfit for adulthood. Studies of subcultures demonstrate how the idea of youth can be associated with 'moral panic', threat and danger (Cohen, 1972; Hall and

Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979). It is possible to suggest that young people's play can be seen as imaginative expressions of late childhood/early adulthood that have many points of continuity with children's play. In a discussion of rave culture in Chapter 7, McRobbie draws a direct comparison between the rave party and childhood. Both states share a love of carefree abandonment and enjoy the comforting paraphernalia of childhood: dummies, primary colours, lollies and songs from children's television programmes can be found among the accessories of ravers. Graham Dawson's (1994) psychoanalytic account of masculinity in *Soldier Heroes* broadens these ideas further, demonstrating how the activity of play can extend, at least in sublimated form, into manhood.

The focus on young people's leisure activities remains one of the ways in which youth have been researched and theorized. In the UK the study of young people has been marked by two contrasting approaches: youth cultural studies and youth transitions. These approaches have been distinguished by a different set of concerns emerging from different disciplinary traditions, methodologies and theoretical perspectives. The youth cultural studies approach has been characterized by the study of spectacular youth subcultures of the post-war era such as skinheads, punks, mods and rockers. Associated with the work of Birmingham University's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, these studies focused on the ways in which young people's collective sense of style, attitude and self-expression could be understood as forms of *resistance through rituals*. Using ethnographic methods and semiological analysis, this influential body of literature drew upon Gramscian inspired theory to suggest that young people's subcultures opened up an intergenerational dialogue in which young people commented upon their parents, their locality and the socio-political context of their lives (Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979). Hall and Jefferson suggest that working-class youth subcultures involve young people in a 'double articulation', first with their parents' culture and second with the broader culture of post-war social change. Critical and occasionally angry, expressed through clothes, music and style, youth subcultural formations came to be understood as creative commentaries on the dominant culture in which young people imaginatively reframe their own lives. To view youth subcultures as adolescent rebellion is to underestimate the extent to which young people seek to address issues of generational change and social structures. From a cultural studies perspective, youth subcultures are purposeful interventions, imbued with meaning.

More recent studies of youth cultures have been influenced by post-modern theory rather than post-Marxian perspectives and have developed a strong critique of the Birmingham Cultural Studies approach (Thornton, 1995; Redhead, 1997). Premised upon the argument that 'we're all mainstream now', contemporary approaches to youth cultures document the significance of global media cultures and patterns of consumption as key changes in young

people's lives, producing fragmented and ephemeral youth groupings rather than full-blown subcultures. Redhead (1997) characterizes these changes as a shift from subcultures to 'clubcultures' – indicating the salient presence of corporate leisure facilities and global media forms in young people's everyday lives. Redhead defines clubcultures as global and fluid youth formations that are based on media fashions and the niche marketing of dance music as a youth culture-for-all. He refers to clubbing as 'hedonism in hard times' (1997:4) suggesting that it is both an escape and a riposte to political realities. In this respect clubcultures have interesting points of resonance with the 'double articulation' of earlier subcultural formations. The fragility of youth cultures in a globalized media world has led many researchers to suggest that the term 'subculture' should be replaced as it is no longer useful for describing the connections young people make with each other and their social context. Current contenders for the newly reconfigured subcultural crown include 'scenes', 'tribes', 'lifestyles' and 'neo-tribes' amongst numerous other post-modern terminology. While 'scenes' explores musical collectivities, 'tribes' and 'neo-tribes' draw upon the work of Maffesoli (1995) to describe loose groups of young people whose stylized tastes and lifestyles come together during moments of shared interest (see Bennett, 1999; Blackman, 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 2005 for a further discussion of these themes). Maffesoli suggests that consumption patterns and practices enable individuals to create moments of sociality. 'Tribe' describes an ambient state of mind and point of connection that is not necessarily class bound or subcultural. A feature of post-modern approaches to youth culture is a tendency to produce rich and aesthetically pleasing accounts of young people at play at the expense of some earlier subcultural themes. Youth subcultures as interpreted in the CCCS moment, while focusing upon the cultural, were also a comment upon social class, economic context and social change. Significantly, recent studies of youth cultures appear to elide matters of social class and offer little commentary upon the new social divisions that emerge in global economies (Hollands, 2002). Chatterton and Hollands (2003) in their discussion of young people in the night-time economy draw upon Appadurai's global sense of place when writing of 'urban playscapes' as an attempt to recognize the place-specific role of youth identities within late-modern economic and cultural exchanges. The movement from subcultures to 'scenes', 'tribes', 'neo-tribes' and 'scapes' reflects a shift from locally bound to globally connected youth cultures.

In contrast to culturally oriented approaches to youth cultures, the youth transitions approach in the UK has focused largely on structural arrangements that shape young people's lives and experiences. Emerging in the 1980s at a time of dramatic social change for young people, the notion of transitions sought to explore the ways in which young people manage the transitional life phase from school to work and, in doing so, navigate a course from adolescence to adulthood, dependent to independent citizen and member of the workforce.

The concern in this approach has been to document the impact of structural inequalities on young people and the differences these make to experiences of work, family, community and social mobility. At a time of high unemployment, the implosion of the youth labour market and the introduction of youth policies designed to keep young people in forms of education and training that effectively restricted their life-choices, 'factual' accounts of the school to work journey appeared timely and necessary. Using empirical methods such as questionnaire and survey, with some follow-up interviews, the youth transitions approach can be viewed as a top-down research initiative that positions young people as the unwitting subjects of class structures and economic forces. However, this view underestimates the capacity of the approach to document the social experiences of young lives and communicate these experiences to policy audiences in sensitive and thoughtful ways. Studies of youth transitions have been critiqued for their mechanical, positivistic and somewhat linear approach to young lives. An aspect of the critique is the recognition that the sequential progression from school to work has become so diverse and fragmented that the idea of transitional and incremental movement from one state of being to another is unhelpful, even redundant. MacDonald *et al.* (2001) reassert the value of the transitions approach as a way of making sense of young lives. Arguing that youth transitions are inherently complex and unpredictable, MacDonald *et al.* suggest that the strength of the approach lies in its potential to understand the complex relationship between personal agency and structural constraints as played out in young people's lives. Moreover there is a need to appreciate that many studies defined by this approach have moved beyond the positivistic methods employed by early studies. MacDonald and Marsh (2001; 2006) use features of biographical life-history method to develop an analysis of socially excluded youth in the north-east of England. Their analysis generatively draws upon biographical cameos to illustrate how accounts of personal experience offer a glimpse into wider social processes of division and hierarchy that impact upon young people's lives and the ways these processes can be reproduced and inhabited. Finally MacDonald *et al.* suggest that a youth transitions approach can incorporate the cultural by taking a holistic approach to young people's experiences. The concept of 'alternative careers' referring to the drug dealing and criminal activities that replace legitimate forms of employment for many young people in their study necessarily involves a consideration of the cultural context of young lives where style, leisure and friendship groups interact in particular ways.

Recent work on UK student cultures indicates that many young people are extending 'studenthood' beyond the period of study associated with Further and Higher Education. Insecure labour markets and the financial barriers first-time buyers face when it comes to home ownership is leading a greater number of former students to take up temporary work in the service sector as a means

to extend studenthood and maintain at least some independence away from the parental home. In the context of the wider culture in which youth transitions to adulthood are becoming extended, non-sequential and uncertain, youthful play may be a way of immersing oneself in the perpetual present of an in-between state. However, the contemporary construction of student night-life and the commercial links between university campuses and corporate merchandizing has led some writers towards a critique of what they term 'studentland' (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003). Within this particular market segment, 'The "corporate campus" and the surrounding corporate city are increasingly intertwined. The future of work and place in studentland is not just up for grabs: it is also up for sale' (p. 147). In Chapter 7 we also allude to the ways in which the concept of girlhood is packaged as a desirable commodity by media cultures and sold to adult women through dreams, fantasies and images of desire. These examples further indicate the fuzzy borders that exist between childhood, youth, studentdom and adulthood.

Our own approach to the study of youth and culture recognizes the contribution of the different perspectives discussed above. In keeping with other researchers (MacDonald *et al.*, 2001; Hollands, 2002) we would also suggest that the youth cultures tradition and the youth transitions paradigm exist as roughly sketched categories rather than mutually exclusive approaches to the study of young people. In a discussion of these two approaches, Cohen and Ainley (2000) propose a 'third way' for the future of youth studies while Wyn and Woodman (2006) suggest that the concept of 'generation' offers a more effective way of conceptualizing youth. Cohen and Ainley suggest merging cultural and structural approaches in ways that address gaps in our understanding of young lives. Cohen and Ainley indicate that the question of how people learn culture remains underdeveloped in both approaches and suggest that a combination of actor network theory and interdisciplinary collaborations between educationalists, youth researchers and social policy analysts may provide a way forward in generating new studies of young people in changing times. They also call upon teachers and youth workers to play a part in defining and implementing the research process. While the approach developed in this book would not fit into the 'third way', we attempt to hold in play the cultural and the structural in ways that make sense of young people's lives in changing times. We are also interested in exploring different 'geographies of youth' (Skelton and Valentine, 1997) in order to understand how young people's experiences vary over time and place. In doing so, we hope to promote a better understanding of place and its relationship to youth, as well as gaining insight into the role of youth cultures and global change in late-modernity. A discussion of our approach is documented in the following chapter, while below we outline the overarching structure of the book.

Structure

The volume is organized in two sections – Section I documents contemporary concepts, theories and ideas on gender and youth formations, and Section II crystallizes these ideas by locating them through ethnographic research into the life-worlds of young people. In the second part of the book the focus is upon the production, consumption, regulation and performance of gender in everyday life.

In this brief introduction we have described theoretical and conceptual approaches to gender, youth and childhood. In the following chapter we explore our methodological approach along with two prominent themes that have arisen in late-modernity with regard to constructions of youth and gender relations. The first theme considers the role of ‘risk’ and individualization in the construction of contemporary youth identities. Here the doing of youth is no longer seen as a class-bound, collective, subcultural practice – if indeed it ever was – but is increasingly regarded as a highly individual ‘project of self’, a perspective we critically discuss and sensitively open out for critique. A second theme concerns globalization and the postcolonial. The focus here is upon the diverse flows of subjects and objects in late-modernity and the way in which these relations cohere within a postcolonial frame. Our accounts of South Asian young graduates in Bombay call-centres, Lebanese youth fighting racism on Sydney Beaches, British Muslim young women deploying fashion to form new femininities and Korean folk singers participating in Japanese musical cultures offer illustrations of these new power-infused transcultural relations. The chapter concludes with an explanation of our research methods to investigate gender and youth – primarily ethnographic and cultural studies analyses. Here we focus on the value of biographic, ethnographic and representational methods in order to understand the ‘economies of signs of space’ (Lash and Urry, 1999) and the processes of globalization. A concern is to begin to grapple with the bewildering but provocative potential of global ethnographies.

In Chapters 3 and 4 we investigate gender relations in late-modernity by identifying the role of recent labour market transitions and their impact upon young lives. Using cultural studies and media analysis we argue that the defining signature of gender relations in late-modernity is etched into an understanding that young men and masculinities are ‘in crisis’, while young women are portrayed as the ideal neo-liberal subjects and beneficiaries of flexible labour and mass consumption. We view these cultural representations as powerful tropes that conceal as much as they reveal. The resonance of these themes and the affective qualities they carry echo back to us, we suggest, through global media images that in turn may become embodied in everyday life. The crisis of masculinity is seen and felt in such films as *Fight Club*, the *Rocky* series and *Falling Down*. The project of neo-liberal femininity with its silent promise of individualism, consumption and sexual satisfaction, explored in Chapter 4, is

also virulently prevalent in such popular television series as *Sex in the City*, *Ally McBeal*, *What Not to Wear*, *Ten Years Younger*, *Would Like to Meet* and *You Are What You Eat*.

In Chapter 5 we draw upon a series of selected readings to examine gender relations in a global context. Our aim in this book is not to achieve international coherence, itself an impossible task, but to show how the practice of gender varies across time and space and is particular to specific cultures. The 'critical readings', as we have chosen to style them, further indicate that there are thematic connections to be made when we look at gender and youth in world societies. Here we reveal how gender is connected to power, how it operates as an 'organizing principle' in many Western and non-Western societies, and how it is continually being made and remade under differing conditions of social and economic transformation. The chapter draws upon ethnographic and anthropological insights to illustrate these points.

In Section II we turn to an ethnographic and cultural studies exploration of the production, regulation, consumption and performance of gender and how these processes connect with youth identities. Chapter 6 focuses upon the production and regulation of young masculinities and femininities. The chapter investigates the role that institutions, work-based cultures and regional histories play in manufacturing ideas about gender. Using ethnographic observations, we consider schools as sites for the production of gender and the making of young masculinities and femininities. This approach is designed to look at the role of national and local cultures, the significance of state regulation and the extraordinary capacity that young people have to 'shore up', subvert and indeed produce their own gender identifications. In Chapter 7 we turn to the issue of youth consumption by exploring the role of popular culture through various genres of music, film, soap opera, pulp fiction and magazines. The focus is in part upon the way merchandizing operates to produce gendered subjects through the creation of segmented and niche youth markets. However, we are also concerned with how young people negotiate global culture in friendship circles in local circuits. Here we explore not only how young people from the West position themselves through global culture but also how non-Western youth may adopt and adapt processes of globalization and Americanization. The focus in this chapter is upon the different gender subject positions made available through consumption, which remains one of the most sophisticated ways through which young people embody and transform gender identity.

In Chapter 8 we engage in a detailed discussion and application of 'queer theory'. Our argument is that queer theory offers a new moment for rethinking the subject. But although queer thinking has been a key topic of discussion rooted in North American feminist philosophy and cultural studies these ideas have too often been cut adrift and marooned from the actual experience of young lives. The absence of empirical research illustrating how queer theory can be transposed into queer practices is especially apparent. There is also

a paucity of academic enquiry utilizing these perspectives within youth and childhood studies. For example the 'new sociology of childhood' proclaimed by James and Prout (1997) fails to register with these new ways of thinking about identity, action and the construction of sex categories. In using queer theory to interpret the actions of young people we focus upon the regulation and performance of gender to examine how gender can be done and undone. Here we address the interplay of gender and sexuality, the role of identification and dis-identification, acts of gender 'passing' and transgression, as well as the plethora of ways in which gender is performed, embodied and psychically envisioned.

We view queer methodologies (see Halberstam, 1998; Rasmussen, 2006 for discussion) as an invaluable and highly specialized technique for understanding the humdrum and habitual investments we each make in gender and sex categories. In particular the notion of gender as performance is especially compelling when it comes to understanding masculinity and femininity as arbitrary signs, fictions that are made to appear real through corporeal forms of embodied activity. In this way we reveal how young people can regulate the unruliness of their bodies by adopting seemingly fixed gender positions although these are not without contradiction or personal cost. Throughout this book we maintain a keen interest in locating theory through practice. In connecting queer theory to everyday practice we argue that gender performances are always sited, that they occur within particular places and that this has a bearing upon the bodies and activities made possible within these spaces. Our intention is to bring together the material, discursive and imaginative aspects of gender to move towards an embodied interpretation of young lives. We conclude by arguing for new dialogues between these repertoires and the recognition that the somewhat abstract work on gender, performativity and the body can benefit from the fleshy corporeality of 'real life' experiences. Overall we welcome the creative tension that may arise between different theoretical and political approaches and hope that these contradictions can be utilized in the search for a more complex, but ultimately more meaningful understanding of young lives.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused upon the social construction of childhood and youth. It suggests that gender and youth relations need to be looked at a global scale to understand variations across time and place. And it argues that gender is better understood as a process that is given meaning through gender practices. To illustrate this we drew upon examples of 'borderwork' in which the interplay of power led to highly exacting gender-dividing practices. These practices were seen to valorize particular versions of masculinity at the expense

of femininities and subordinate masculinities. We then outlined two different approaches to youth, focusing upon youth cultural studies and youth transitions to investigate the ways in which structure and culture can be more effectively brought together. We concluded the section by outlining the two-part structure of the book and gesturing towards our theoretical approaches in the subsequent chapters.

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