Acknowledgements

I am indebted to all those who have helped me over the years gradually develop the ideas in this book. The list is long, but includes the colleagues and clients I worked with when I was a social worker in London and Auckland in the 1970s, who showed me how individuals, families and communities function in the face of adversity; the colleagues I have worked with as a social scientist since, in Surrey, London, Edinburgh, Cambridge and Keele, who have in various ways helped me formulate an understanding of the social world; the wider network of friends who have always provided a sounding board for ideas; and not least the young people and parents who took part in the various research projects which have framed my understanding of youth in late modernity and reminded me what it is like to be young.

Gill Jones (2009) Youth. Cambridge. Polity Press. Ch. 1 1-29

1 What is 'Youth'?

What's in a word?

'Youth is just a word,' according to Pierre Bourdieu, who subsequently goes a long way towards showing how and why this is not the case. As he indicates (1978), 'youth' has been an evolving concept, layered upon layers with values which reflect contemporary moral, political and social concerns. 'Youth' is a social construction with social meanings and it is the task of the sociology of youth to understand how and why these have developed. This book is about the changing approaches to youth as a theoretical concept, and the ways in which these have been applied in practice, including to young people.

The terminology of youth has developed over time, and its etymology throws some light on the problems of current English usage. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (SOED, 1983) 'youth', meaning the period between childhood and adulthood, is Old English (as are the terms 'child' and 'childhood'), while the adjective 'youthful' dates from 1561. The terminology of youth is somewhat restricted compared with that of childhood and leads to confusion. Firstly, whereas 'childlike' and 'childish' can be used to distinguish between positive and negative attributes respectively, there are no corresponding terms 'youthlike' and 'youthish' which

might have similarly distinguished between positive and negative attributes of young people. Instead, 'youthful' serves confusingly to describe both. 'Youthfulness' thus conveys qualities, such as strength, beauty, idealism and energy, which are seen as desirable and coveted by older age groups, but on the other hand is also associated with 'inferior' characteristics of inexperience, lack of wisdom, hot-headedness, experimentation, naivety, greenness, and lack of maturity and sense. For the nineteenth-century composer Richard Wagner, youth represented heroic German nationalism in the romantic tradition of *Sturm und Drang*;[1] indeed Philippe Ariès (1962) has suggested that Wagner's Siegfried was 'the first typical adolescent of modern times'. On the other hand, indicating that youth is not simply a product of industrialization, one of Shakespeare's characters complained about young people (he specified those aged between 16 and 23) 'wronging the ancientry', while around 2,400 years ago Socrates commented that they 'scoff at authority and lack respect for their elders'.[2] So, youth is to be celebrated and deplored, and young people depicted as both heroes and villains.

Secondly, the word 'youth' is often used to denote both a person (in the same way as 'child' or 'adult') and a part of the life course (in the same way as 'childhood' and 'adulthood'). The expression 'youthhood' is now obsolete but, had it persisted, might have prevented this conflation. Although the concept of youth is still upheld as an ideal, once the term is applied to young people it becomes laden with negative meanings and, when it surfaces in its plural form of 'youths' (when, thanks to the media, 'hoodies' come to mind), tends also to be male-specific. I therefore use the term 'youth' in the sense of 'youthhood' to describe the part of the life course between childhood and adulthood (though the difficulties with this application will also become apparent), and also for succinctness as an adjective (such as in 'youth policy' or 'youth unemployment'), but never as a term for young people.

From his readings of French texts, Philippe Ariès (1962) argues that the states of childhood and youth did not exist in the Middle Ages since children were absorbed into the adult world at an early age. From later texts, Ariès identifies seven ages of life – *childhood* (from birth to age seven), *pueritia* (from seven until fourteen), *adolescence* (from 14 until – variously – 21, 28 or older), *youth* (then the central age in the lifespan, lasting until 45 or 50), *senectitude*, and finally two stages of *old age*. These seven stages were linked to the planets and represented an attempt at the scientific understanding of biological destiny. Youth was at this time associated with the ability to be self-sufficient and responsible for others, in a very different construction from that of the present day. Over time, childhood and youth gradually became separated out from adulthood, largely through education, but this was only among the upper class. By the seventeenth century, childhood had become associated with dependence, so that childhood could only be left by leaving the state of dependence (Ariès, 1962), but this still only related to the upper classes. The terminology of childhood (such as 'lad' or 'boy') was applied to many working-class adults who were still in dependent situations, such as servants and apprentices. It was not until the nineteenth century, when child protection laws began to prohibit child employment and education was extended, that working-class childhood came to be distinguished from dependent adulthood. Ariès thus sees current understandings of childhood and youth as the product of industrialization. Youth is also, in other respects, the product of social and educational reforms, mainly during the twentieth century and mainly as a result of the development of welfare capitalism, in Britain at least. It is policy legislation above all else which defines life stages mainly by age, and designs provision accordingly, because age is amenable to measurement.

Pierre Bourdieu reminds us that the apparently arbitrary age divisions in societies reflect power relations and result from forms of manipulation. This does not only apply to youth. He argues that both youth and old age are socially constructed in the conflict (*lutte*) between the young and the old (Bourdieu, 1978). Thus, arguably, both current negative media representations of young people and moral panics over them represent manipulations by older and more powerful age generations. Intergenerational power relations may therefore be the key to understanding youth. To talk about young people as though they were a social unit, with common interests, strengths and weaknesses at a biologically defined age,

is itself an obvious manipulation. The constructions of 'youth' during the modern age say as much about the builders as about their subjects, and the way that the concept of youth has been used clearly relates very closely to historical conditions and the social concerns of the time.

This chapter is about the rise and fall of the concept of youth within a more general story about the building and dismantling of grand narratives. Its theme is to examine the various ways in which young people have been seen to fit structurally with the wider society: by stage in life course, age, generation, social class, gender or as individuals. It begins to address further questions – how to understand the changing 'social context', and the relationship between 'youth', young people and the 'whole', and how and why constructions of youth vary by time and space, historically, cross-nationally and cross-culturally. Youth in late modernity is not the same as youth at the height of modernity, or youth in pre-industrial times. In order to facilitate cross-national variation without resorting to an evolutionary approach, we need to consider how wider social trends, such as empire-building, industrialization and urbanization in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, or the creation of welfare states, new technologies and globalization in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, have affected constructions of youth and the experiences of young people in some countries and could affect them in others.

Key themes

Emerging from this narrative are some key themes which have formed the focus of academic debates over the decades. These have often been posited at first as either/or dualities, though, as the debates progress or collapse, it often seems that there was some right on both sides, depending on the circumstances. Sometimes it seems that the dualities are to be associated with the modern age, when such constructions were common, rather than with late modernity when many commentators reject them as inappropriate, outmoded or untenable. Debates include the following:

1 The *science versus nature* debate was the main thrust of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, with its emphasis on rationality and epistemology rather than on the acceptance of fate. The shift from the dominance of myth and tradition to that of scientific knowledge marked the beginning of the age of modernity. Education was seen as the means of freeing young people from the traditional beliefs otherwise instilled in them by their parents.

2 The *biology versus culture* (and *nature versus nurture*) debates shifted the focus from youth as biologically determined to the study of the impact of social and cultural contexts on young people's experiences of youth. Early psychology was based on individual development and it was only later that the significance of the social and cultural context came to be recognized. The debate has been re-awakened with advances in new genetics, which once again suggest that some physical and psychological conditions are genetically inherited, and that the social is not always paramount. But there is still a tension between the two: at the most basic level, youth is biologically determined, but even this is changing, with earlier puberty, later childbearing and greater longevity.

3 The *age generation or social class* debate, between functionalists and subcultural theorists during the 1960s and 1970s, was over which was the more significant variable for understanding young people's social locations. The challenge became to reconcile the two, and to incorporate other structural factors into a more pluralist approach to youth. Current explanations of social inequality in youth suggest that it is important to understand both the structural and the cultural elements.

4 The *conflict versus consensus* debate, in the context of social continuity and change, posited ideas of generational conflict against ideas of generational conformity. The question was whether young people are socialized to accept the normative consensus or whether it might be part of the role of new generations to challenge and possibly resist it. The question therefore is whether the emphasis should be on effective socialization and social control, or whether challenges to social norms are needed, especially in circumstances where the norms reflect the ideology of a dominant and possibly corrupt power.

5 *Structure versus agency*, the big and long-standing debate in the sociology of youth, is about the extent to which young people are free to choose and act as autonomous individuals and the extent to which they are constrained by societal power structures and institutions. This develops into the *rationality versus culture* explanations of human actions. Here the debate is centred on whether young people's actions reflect the rational choice of autonomous adult individuals, or collective cultural beliefs, including culturally derived forms of rationality or defensive and largely unconscious collective responses to hegemonic power. Theories of reflexivity help to reconcile these 'alternatives'.

6 *Structure versus process* provokes debate about whether young people should be considered in a cross-sectional way as an age generation or smaller age group (perhaps because this facilitates policy development), or whether they can be best understood in relation to the processes of their transitions to adulthood. The recent 'Beings and Becomings' debate in childhood studies (Lee, 2001) warned that a focus on the *process* of childhood meant that children themselves could be lost from view. A challenge for researchers and policy-makers alike is how to reconcile the two.

7 *Contributors or dependants* debate – still largely to be aired – is over how the current complex and extended transition to adulthood is to be understood in terms of dependence. The dichotomizing of individuals into dependants or contributors does not reflect the complexity of young people's transitions. The shame associated with dependence feeds into young people's perceptions of their own guilt and public constructions of blame. This may prove to be the central problem of youth and is discussed in chapter 6.

Some of these themes are raised in the remainder of this chapter, while others are given more attention elsewhere in this book.

Nature or culture

The story of the concept of youth in social science begins in earnest with the Enlightenment, an intellectual movement in

the eighteenth century which marked the beginning of the modern age, paving the way for scientific and technological advances. It represented the triumph of rationality over the fatalism associated with myth and tradition. In the case of young people, rationality was to be developed through education. According to Albert Einstein,[3] 'common sense is nothing more than a deposit of prejudices laid down in the mind before you reach eighteen'. Rousseau showed in *Emile, or On Education* (1762) how education could free children from tradition.

There is some ambivalence over whether young people are to be seen as in need of release from corruption by others or as untamed and untrained, 'savages' even, in their own right. Auguste Comte (1855), seen as the father of sociology, believed that the rationality of positivism provided the means of achieving social consensus. He suggested that an evolutionary process from myth to reason in society was mirrored in individual development, whereby knowledge passes from the theological or fictitious (associated with childhood), through the metaphysical or abstract (associated with youth), to the scientific or positive (associated with adulthood) (Jenks, 1996).

The first social scientist to comment specifically on adolescents was the American psychologist G. Stanley Hall, who described adolescence as both 'a marvellous new birth' and also as the age 'when most vicious careers are begun' (Hall, 1904: 325). He saw it as a perilous age, 'suggestive of some ancient period of storm and stress when old moorings were broken and a higher level attained' (Hall, 1904: xviii). Adolescence was on an unstable threshold between childhood and the rationality of adulthood.[4] It thus represented not only hope for society but also a threat to social stability. Like Comte and others,[5] Hall paralleled individual transitions from childlike pre-rationality to adult rationality with the evolutionary development of societies (to the detriment of each, according to Cohen, 1997). Referring to the United States, Hall (1904: xviii) wrote: 'In vigour, enthusiasm, and courage we are still young, and our faults are those of youth.' Cohen (1997) argues that Hall's conception of adolescents, as pulled by the contradictory forces of the primitive and the enlightened, set up the framework for future moral panics.

Psychological studies of adolescence proliferated. For many psychoanalysts, adolescence was a time when instability and disruption were to be expected. The 'storm and stress' observed during this period in life was seen to derive from the sexual and aggressive drives which followed puberty. Anna Freud (1937: 149–50) graphically described adolescents as oscillating between childhood and adulthood:

> Adolescents are excessively egotistic, regarding themselves as the centre of the universe and the sole object of interest, and yet at no time in later life are they capable of so much self-sacrifice and devotion. They form the most passionate love relations, only to break them off as abruptly as they began them. On the one hand, they throw themselves enthusiastically into the life of the community, and on the other, they have an overpowering longing for solitude. They oscillate between blind submission to some self-chosen leader and deviant rebellion against any and every authority. They are selfish and materially minded and at the same time full of lofty idealism.

Opinions in the world of psychoanalysis varied between those who blamed the individual psychopathology and those such as Bandura (1959) who blamed the external world, believing that reports of storm and stress were exaggerated. Both Bowlby and Winnicott refuted the idea that emotional disturbance was natural to adolescents. Shifting the emphasis from nature to nurture, they indicated instead the long-lasting impact of childhood experience, especially of parenting. From observations with evacuated children during the Second World War, Bowlby (1953) developed a theory of attachment and loss which suggested that delinquency in adolescence could be an outcome of early maternal deprivation. In a similar vein, Winnicott (1964: 228) indicated that a child needed a stable family life ('a circle of love and strength') from which to take risks and progress. For Winnicott, control was as important as care: thus, antisocial behaviour may not be the result of the child's psychopathology but an unconscious attempt to re-establish external control. Recognizing the significance of family relationships is an important step in moving beyond individual biology or psychopathology towards incorporating the social.

Rites of passage

With adolescence seen as a problem in western industrialized societies, anthropologists such as Margaret Mead (1943) and Evans-Pritchard (1951) studied transitions to adulthood in traditional societies – in their cases among Samoan girls and Nuer boys respectively. Their work had widespread influence on psychologists and sociologists of the time. They found that young people in the societies they studied, far from experiencing adolescent 'storm and stress', could make a smooth transition to adulthood through 'rites of passage'. These created clearly defined ritual structures (based on biological development) through which young men and women were accepted into adult status. Adult roles were known, desirable and achievable. There was consensus about them based on tradition handed down by elders – the 'guardians of tradition' (Giddens, 1994). This functionalist approach suggested an unproblematic fit between generations, and smooth transitions to adulthood which were unlikely to be interrupted or remain incomplete (the problems which in western societies were believed to lead to delinquency).

Reuter (1937) defined the basis of 'adolescent disorder' as cultural rather than biological, and identified the need for sociological research on adolescence. He suggested (1937: 419–21) that it was *only* in industrial societies, where there was neither appropriate training for adulthood nor a sure place in the social world, that young people faced an adjustment problem and could find themselves temporarily in a 'marginal world'. Jahoda and Warren (1965: 138) argued that in traditional societies, where physiological maturity and social maturity occur simultaneously, there are no problems with youth, and suggested that 'the level of civilisation seems related to the number of years which a society accords to youth.' They suggest that there is a vicious cycle: 'civilization' = extended youth = problematic youth = threat to civilization. Basically, the problems experienced by young people in industrial societies were created by the wider society and were not intrinsic to youth itself (or 'natural'). In a similar vein, Erikson (1965: 14) suggested: 'It is human to have a long childhood; it is civilized to have an even longer childhood.'

Developmental stages

The notion of life stages which dominated in the Middle Ages as a way of coping with biological fate became a tool of science. Sigmund Freud identified stages in the development of the individual psyche from infancy to youth (discussed in chapter 3). Youth came to be seen as a stage in ego-identity development, involving the shift of the individual from the family of origin to the external social world. The German psychologist Charlotte Bühler (1933) adopted a bio-social approach to human development. Identifying five life phases, she saw youth as the period between the acquisition of physiological maturity (puberty) and that of social maturity (defined by the social, sexual, economic and legal rights and duties of adults). Youth, for Bühler, provided a period for experimentation with ways to be adult.

Erikson's theory of ego development (1965: 254, and see also chapter 3) saw the adolescent mind as a 'mind of the *moratorium*, a psycho-social stage between the morality learned by the child and the ethics to be developed by the adult', and youth as a period of 'structured irresponsibility', during which young people should be allowed to experiment and achieve their own (non-ideological and non-traditional) ethics. He identified eight life stages associated with the development of ego identity, each associated with conflicts to be resolved: basic trust versus mistrust, autonomy/shame versus doubt, initiative versus guilt, and industry versus inferiority all formed part of pre-pubertal development; during puberty and adolescence, the tasks moved on to identity versus role-confusion, and among young adults to intimacy versus isolation. Erikson presents a model in which each task, though problematic, must be 'mastered' for the achievement of ego identity, but this, once achieved, is fixed. Erikson was a student of Margaret Mead and much influenced by her work, recognizing the importance of understanding the social context of ego development. His work has been criticized for failing to recognize that personal development can continue through the life course. The main problem with theories of life-stage development, however, is that they conflate difference and present a unified picture which is then adopted as the norm, any deviation from which can then be pathologized.

This is particularly the case with Jean Piaget's (1972) theory of learning, which fitted with the Enlightenment view but was an exception to a general trend towards the psycho-social. He argued that children acquire cognitive competences according to a universal sequence and can be assessed in relation to this normative sequencing. He identified stages of intellectual growth – pre-conceptual, intuitive, concrete, and reaching formal operations (capable of rationality) by early adolescence. The model represents steps in the expansion of the rational competence of the individual. Piaget's theory has been criticized for its claims of universality and lack of social and historical context (Jenks, 1996). The implication is that individuals should have achieved rationality by the time they become adolescent but may have failed to do so.

Age or generation

The move towards a sociological approach to youth began with explorations of how young people fit into social structures. Instead of simply seeing youth as a stage in the life course characterized by psychological instability, the challenge was to understand the nature of the connection between youth and society in terms of age and intergenerational relations.

This involved a shift in terminology from adolescence to youth. The former is still used, mainly among psychologists, to denote the period between the onset of puberty and adulthood and, being related to the teenage years, is relatively inflexible. Youth, on the other hand, is associated with the period between leaving school and becoming adult in socio-economic terms and thus currently covers the period, in most countries, between around 15 years and the mid-twenties, though both these age 'boundaries' are constantly rising, as this book will show. Youth and adolescence are therefore not interchangeable expressions.

Mannheim's theory of generations

Historical events such as wars, economic crises, natural disasters and mass cultural movements highlight the differences between those who experience them and those who do not, setting up a generational divide on the basis of age cohort. While the world stage was increasingly dominated by the opposing ideologies of communism and fascism, Karl Mannheim, who had been the victim of both, was developing a theory of knowledge which did not involve ideology. There was student unrest in Germany and a search for new solutions to the problem of explaining social change. Gradualist explanations were therefore likely to receive some support, and Mannheim proposed the idea of the free-floating intelligentsia as drivers of change: 'These intellectual elements then become the explosive material for bursting the limits of the existing order, leaving it free to develop in the direction of the next order of existence' (Mannheim, 1952 [1927]: 304).

An essential argument in Karl Mannheim's (1927) *The Problem of Generations* was that members of age generations, though located in the same historical time, were divided by their geographical and social location into 'differentiated antagonistic generation-units' (Mannheim, 1952[1927]: 306). He was referring to age generations (or age cohorts) rather than kin generations. Effectively setting the scene for the later development of the concept of 'peer group', Mannheim indicated that historical events were experienced differently by people in different social and spatial locations. 'The generation unit represents a much more concrete bond than the actual generation as such. Youth experiencing the same concrete historical problems may be said to be part of the same actual generation; while those groups within the same actual generation, which work up the material of their common experience in different specific ways, constitute separate generation units' (Mannheim, 1952: 304).

While the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset (1998 [1931]: 15) saw the generation as 'the pivot responsible for the movement of historical evolution', Mannheim was much more cautious in his basic premise that structures of knowledge were context-specific. Indeed, his work was criticized by members of the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School of Social Research who considered it too relativist, though he thought of himself as 'relationist'. From his own Marxist standpoint, from which class conflict was the main driver of change, Cohen (1997) has more recently criticized Mannheim for producing a historical law of generational conflict, and questions why young people should be the privileged bearers of the *zeitgeist* (spirit of the age). However, Mannheim's insistence that age generations are divided into units seems to refute charges of either periodicity or 'age fallacy'. He was not arguing for chronological homogeneity.

Mannheim's theories have had an impact on theories of social movements. Wallace and Kovatcheva (1998: 41) describe the theory of 'juventization' in 1960s' Soviet society which proposed a similarly gradualist view of social change. Edmunds and Turner (2002) have recently applied Mannheim's theories, though differentiating between 'active' and 'passive' intellectual generations, with varying capacity for social change.

Functionalist theories of socialization

Talcott Parsons's focus was on continuity rather than change. According to Parsons and Bales (1956: 17), 'the central focus of the process of socialization lies in the internalization of the culture of the society into which the child is born.' Socialization theory is closely associated with developmental psychology. Parsons argued that, in a process of primary socialization during childhood, parents taught their children to conform to social norms and learn culturally prescribed future social and familial roles as workers in the labour market or in the home. He emphasized the importance of families as the 'factories' which produce human personalities (Parsons and Bales, 1956: 16).

In an industrial society where home and work had become separated, allowing scope for differing values and more varied biographies, primary socialization within the family could not prepare young people adequately for their future social roles (Reuter, 1937; Eisenstadt, 1973 [1956]). It was therefore necessary to supplement primary socialization within the

family with secondary socialization in institutions set up by the state, such as schools. This 'professionalization of parenting' had the potential for further undermining the role of the family in primary socialization. Cohen (1997) suggested that socialization theory located youth at the point of tension between the competing value systems of the family and those of modern society, and it is thus not surprising that young people were confused about what was expected of them when they became adults. Parsons (1973) suggested that in such circumstances anomie can result. Erikson (1968) described how young people could be bewildered by their own feeling of incapacity to assume the role which society was forcing upon them. But there is a further problem. Because socialization theory was developed in relation to the normative values of male middle-class white Americans, attempts to apply it to other social groups 'inevitably led to a pathological view of their cultures' (Cohen, 1997: 187).

Culture or subculture

Their age peer group provided young people with one means of coping with the conflicting stresses. A debate ensued over whether peer cultures represented defiance, as suggested by functionalists, or were primarily a defensive response to oppression, as suggested by neo-Marxists. The period of national rebuilding following the Second World War had seen the development of the welfare state in Britain, along with the gradual relaxation of rationing, developments in communication technologies and expansion of consumer markets. The extension of education in the post-war period (in the UK, the Education Act 1944 raised the school-leaving age to 15, following many earlier extensions of compulsory education) meant that young people were increasingly segregated from the 'adult world', for which they were supposedly being prepared, in age-specific (youth) institutions. These developments increasingly opened up the experience of youth to working-class young people, who had previously been denied it. There was more scope for expression in language, style and music and, by the end of the 1950s, distinctive

youth culture and styles were developing, influenced by access to US popular culture, from Elvis Presley to the outsiders portrayed in films such as *On the Waterfront* with Marlon Brando or *Rebel Without a Cause* with James Dean. It was the era when working-class culture came to the fore in Britain, too, with the 'angry young men' in theatre and film. It is hard to imagine now the shock impact of Elvis Presley on older age generations in the 1950s, but there was a feeling (yet again) that normative moral values were collapsing. In practice, what was happening was that the working-class popular or 'low' culture was gaining ground while middle-class 'high' culture was losing it.

Youth as culture

In the US, James Coleman (1961: 3) suggested that the school system created circumstances in which adolescents were 'forced inwards' towards their own age group, and developed a society among themselves, with its own culture, norms and status system, barely connected with adult society. For Parsons (1961) and Eisenstadt (1973 [1956]), the adolescent peer group formed its own separate social structure through which young people could transcend the status ascribed through the socio-economic status of their family, and achieve independent status within their own status system and according to their own specific goals and values. Musgrove (1969: 50) believed that young people were becoming a new form of age class 'relatively independent of the stratification system of adults'. Coleman (1961) considered age-based peer groups to be taking on a role of secondary socialization in competition with the school and diverting the energies of the young from its academic goals. Musgrove (1964) suggested that the segregation of young people led to their infantilization, young people behaving irresponsibly because they had no social responsibilities. Long before, Parsons (1942) had also referred to youth culture as a culture of irresponsibility. Charles Reich, in *The Greening of America,* declared that: 'Always before, young people felt themselves tied more to their immediate situations than to a "generation". But now, an entire culture, including music, clothes and drugs, began to distinguish

youth. As it did, the message of consciousness went with it' (Reich, 1972: 253).

In the twists and turns of the career of the concept of youth, the paths now divided between those who stressed youth culture as a counter-culture in conflict with adult 'established' society, and those who saw it as subcultural and reflecting class continuity. In this debate, one of the big questions was whether young people were becoming marginalized by society or whether they were marginalizing themselves.

Conflict or conformity

Opinions differed over whether young people were corrupted by society (and needed to be freed) or were a corrupting influence upon society (and needing to be controlled). Young people have long been portrayed as disrespectful of their elders, as indicated by the earlier quotations from Socrates and Shakespeare. In the period following the Great Depression, there was an increased interest in the 'moral threat' posed by adolescent behaviour in the US. The Chicago School developed socio-ecological studies of young people. Robert Park (Park, Burgess, and McKenzie, 1925) began to study urban social groups as a means of understanding conflict and social change, finding that subcultural groups developed out of normal conditions of urban social life rather than individual or group psychopathology (Downes and Rock, 1982). Whyte's classic study, *Street Corner Society* (1943), proposed that deviant acts were a function of the relationship between the neighbourhood, the family and the young – in other words, they arose out of cultural conditions.

Even so, the increasing visibility of youth cultural styles set up the conditions for adult paranoia about a 'generation war'. With the appearance of Teds in the 1950s, mods and rockers in the 1960s, and hippies in the 1960s–70s, the apprehension of the 'older generation' increased – to paranoia at times (see S. Cohen, 1973; Pearson, 1983). The 1960s – described by Galbraith as 'The Affluent Society' (the Prime Minister Harold Macmillan had told Britain, 'you've never had it so good') – provided a seemingly class-free climate in which theories of generational conflict could easily take root. Studies of youth culture, such as that of Riesman (1950), suggested the relative omnipotence of the adolescent peer group. Suddenly it seemed that young people were becoming significant consumers (Abrams, 1961) and developing styles which were outwardly very different from those of their parents.

There were other reasons for trying to understand what was happening. Alongside the development of popular culture (music and style), there was a new political awakening among young people who were more openly critical of the performance of their governments than their parents may have been in their own youth during the war, when national loyalty was expected. During the 1960s, when the US and USSR came perilously close to starting a new world conflict during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, and as a response to the Vietnam War, anti-war, anti-colonial and anti-nuclear movements led to demonstrations and marches in many countries. These events coincided with the spurt in development of sociology as an academic discipline during the 1960s and had an immediate impact on the formative years of many now established or retired academics, many of whom were, as students, involved in them. The student movement of the time seemed to represent a form of counter-culture. Commentators such as Wilson (1970), Musgrove (1964, 1974), Friedenberg (1973) and Rex (1972) suggested that the generation struggle was eclipsing the class struggle in the 1960s, especially when social class barriers appeared to be breaking down.

In the UK, the early 1970s saw the start of the decline of the trade union movement with conflict between the miners and the government. Having rejected a class analysis, functionalist commentators were drawn back into a crudely Mannheimian explanation of generational change. The concept of 'counter-culture' effectively meant intergenerational conflict. The question was whether the impetus was offensive or defensive. Musgrove (1974: 19) described the counter-culture as a 'revolt of the unoppressed', suggesting that it was not a revolutionary ideology but part of an 'exploratory curriculum' (of the type Bühler had proposed in 1933) and 'the pervasive spirit of a new generation'. Commentators such as Bensman (1973) and Mills (1973) considered that groups such as hippies were proposing an alternative society.

John Rex (1972) claimed that the extension of education was resulting in new challenges to the British ruling class as a new generation of highly educated young men and women emerged, outside the power class and bearing its own counter-culture and values.

Others saw the counter-culture as a response of the oppressed. Friedenberg (1963: 4) thought of adolescents as 'among the last social groups in the world to be given the full colonial treatment'. He wrote later (1973: 116) that generational conflict was inevitable, since 'adolescence is conflict – protracted conflict – between the individual and society,' though he also questioned whether this was really making a comment on adolescents, or a more fundamental statement about society. As Sheila Allen (1973: 53) indicated: 'It is not the relations between ages which explain change or stability in societies, but changes in societies which explain relations between different ages.'

Fears of a generational breakdown – 'generation war' – eventually faded, because of an increasing awareness of the continued significance of social class. Feuer (1969: 33) pointed out that generational consciousness, though important, was 'not strong enough to bind students and workers of the same age' (though this point is debatable since the May 1968 riots in Paris involved students and workers). There were indications that 'generational' conflict could take different forms in different social classes and was therefore not 'generational' in this sense at all. In all, there was still evidence to support Mannheim's concept of differentiated generation units.

Realization dawned that the student cultures of the 1960s, though expressed in the peer group, were often based on normative values also held by adults (Berger, 1963), indicating that young people were basically conformist rather than in opposition to adult society (Friedenberg, 1973; Zweig, 1963). This was put down to changing circumstances rather than an earlier misdiagnosis. In 'The Vanishing Adolescent', Friedenberg (1973) suggested that the 'stormy decade' of identity-seeking adolescence was disappearing because of the school socializing agenda to produce conformists. Whatever the youth culture, the norms remained those of the adult

world, and the adults remained in control. Parsons conceded that: 'The general orientation appears to be, not a basic alienation, but an eagerness to learn, to accept higher orders of responsibility, and to 'fit', not in the sense of passive conformity, but in the sense of their readiness to work within the system, rather than in basic opposition to it' (Parsons, 1973: 50).

In other words, Coleman's (1961) analysis had failed to understand that youth culture is 'rooted in the parent soil' because he had taken an uncritical view of adult society and neglected the relation of adolescents to it (Berger, 1963: 399). Jahoda and Warren (1965: 138) argued for the adoption of a more rigorous analysis, saying that: 'It pays to be pedantic about a definition of this age group and to link it to the usual concepts in the social sciences.' By the 1980s, functionalist theories became discredited in much of the European research. However, some elements returned in the 'underclass' debate which entered the UK from the US in the 1990s (see chapter 4). It still continues in some elements of youth policy and, in particular, in the notion of normative transitions to adulthood and of individual responsibility for 'successful' and 'failed' (both normatively constructed) transitions.

Subcultural studies

Mike Brake's (1980) review of subcultural studies defines the relationship between subculture and culture. The term 'culture' refers to socially acquired or learned forms of beliefs and behaviours, often distinctive to particular social or ethnic groups. Cultures may represent a source of identity, belonging, legitimacy and social control. Within a post-traditional complex society there are different cultures, some associated with different social classes. Class subcultures are subsets of these 'parent' class cultures, containing some shared elements and some distinct ones, thus representing either an extension of the parent class culture or opposition to it. They exist where there is an organized and recognized constellation of values, behaviour and action perceived as different from prevailing norms – of the dominant class culture (Brake, 1980).

Following this approach, the middle-class student movements might have been seen as middle-class subcultures rather than as evidence of a youth counter-culture.

Explanations of deviancy shifted away from seeing it in terms of individual psychopathology. In the UK, Albert K. Cohen (1955) argued that delinquency represented a subcultural solution to the exclusion from the opportunity structure experienced by working-class young people. In other words, youth behaviour was to be seen as collective action but at a subcultural rather than a generational level. Mays's study of young people in Liverpool concluded that delinquency was 'not so much a problem of maladjustment as adjustment to a subculture which was in conflict with the culture of the city as a whole' (Mays, 1954: 147).

Until now, the focus had been on middle-class youth, but it was now time to turn to what was happening among young people who were not students, and specifically the working class. Interest in working-class culture became widespread in the 1970s through the work of E. P. Thompson and Richard Hoggart (the first Director of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham). During the 1960s and 1970s, the social class basis of youth in the UK was examined through work at CCCS on the meaning of youth subcultures, and at Leicester University on subcultural processes (Brake, 1980). Subcultural studies came to dominate theoretical development in the sociology of youth in the 1960s and 1970s.

The theories appear in many ways to integrate many functionalist ideas within a structural perspective ('structural-functionalism'). Clarke et al. (1976: 21), like Coleman, suggested that secondary schools 'created the pre-conditions for the emergence of a specifically "adolescent society"'. Peer cultures were seen to have grown up in response to education policies and institutions, rather than spontaneously. In *Learning to Labour* (1977), Paul Willis described how the peer group contributed to the reproduction of manual labour through reinforcement of anti-school culture. This has some resonance with the functionalist concept of secondary socialization, but the emphasis was now on how and why working-class culture led young people to exclude themselves from the middle-class opportunity structure, drawing on Gramsci's

(1971) concept of 'cultural hegemony'. The overall finding (e.g. Clarke et al., 1976; Murdock and McCron, 1976) was that there was no such thing as a 'youth culture', standing in direct relation to the dominant culture of society; instead, youth *sub*cultures were articulated to the dominant culture via their own parent-class culture:

> The major cultural configurations will be, in a fundamental though often mediated way, 'class cultures', and so youth subcultures co-exist within the more inclusive culture of the class from which they spring. . . . The young inherit a cultural orientation from their parents towards a 'problematic' common to the class as a whole, which is likely to weight, shape and signify the meanings they then attach to different areas of their social life. (Clarke et al., 1976: 13)

These studies proposed a different construction from the studies of youth cultures of the 1960s. The move had been away from seeing youth as a homogeneous counter-culture, or age class ('a class in itself'), to seeing young people's values and actions as rooted in their social class positions.

Age or class

There followed a debate on the relative emphasis to be placed on social class and age, a debate which is still current. Eisenstadt (1973 [1956]) had asserted that age and age differences were crucial determinants of human destiny. Hall and his CCCS colleagues argued against what they saw as the functionalist 'obsession' with age. They criticized the life-stage approach of Havighurst and Dreyer's (1975) depiction of youth, arguing that there could be 'no sociology of youth, since differences of class, race and sex mean that young people experience very different types of youth in their trajectory to adulthood (and very different types of adulthood at that)' (Hall et al., 1976: 17). They insisted that, once pluralism is introduced, the concept of 'youth' is broken down, and that: 'Youth as a concept is unthinkable. Even youth as a social category does not make much empirical sense' (Hall et al., 1976: 19).

Marsland and Hunter (1976) defended their fellow-functionalists, pointing out that the emphasis on class in subcultural studies had led to a false denial of the significance of age, and arguing that it was necessary to conceive of youth as a period of transition in order to understand its essential nature. The assertions of Hall and his colleagues, they say, 'seem to us to represent an account of youth which is constrained to deny falsely the significance of one set of forces in social life – the psycho-social forces organized in the age system, out of fear that their recognition may challenge the determinative pre-eminence of another set of such forces – those of class' (Marsland and Hunter, 1976: 10). Murdock and McCron acknowledged that age was an important factor in structuring the social situation of young people, since some experiences are youth-specific: 'It is not therefore a question of simply substituting class for age at the centre of analysis, but of examining the relations between class and age, and more particularly the way age acts as a mediator of class' (Murdock and McCron, 1976: 10).

In a similar vein, though from a different perspective, Smith (1981) also criticized the 'New Wave' for confusing age and generation, and for failing to explain the difference in response of the young and of adults to what they described as a *class* problematic. The CCCS explanation for this was the 'specifically generational experience of the young' (Clarke et al., 1976: 49). This is where they confuse generation and age. The problem is that generational experience is concerned with age *relations* rather than age transitions – so here Marsland and Hunter really have a point. But there were other limitations too. CCCS still produced a very partial analysis of youth and did not indicate why some young people adopt particular youth styles and 'modes of negotiation and resolution', yet in similar situations others do not, as Murdock and McCron (1976) conceded.

The emphasis was on white male working-class peer subcultures. Perhaps it was important to the development of cultural theory at the time that this relative homogeneity be maintained. Later writers (Jenkins, 1983; Brown, 1987) partially redressed the balance by researching conventional working-class young men. However, young women and the middle class were still largely overlooked, as were young people's domestic lives.

Gender and pluralism

By the late 1970s, feminist sociologists were challenging the male dominance of subcultural theories. Most researchers were male, and concerned with subcultures which were acted out by males in the public arena (McRobbie and Garber, 1976). Subcultural styles, as identified according to street styles, confirmed female stereotypes, subordinating women to the role of followers and pillion passengers, there to satisfy the sexual and status needs of males (see McRobbie and Garber, 1976). Willis (1981: 67) later acknowledged that he 'did not specify clearly enough the oppression of girls in the male counter school culture'.

Female sociologists such as Angela McRobbie and Chris Griffin shifted the balance of subcultural studies to girls, identifying the 'culture of the bedroom' as the main setting for female friendships and the culture of femininity. Research on young women showed that for working-class girls, a dominant gendered ideology of romantic love led to commitment to marriage as necessity rather than choice (Leonard, 1980; Pollert, 1981). But there were criticisms that the feminist perspective on the sociology of youth had shifted the balance too far, and in focusing on seeing women as the victims of patriarchy, failed to recognize that they were victims of the whole capitalist economic system. Anne Campbell (1981), in her study *Girl Delinquents*, argued that, 'dizzy with monomania', women had become obsessed with their total uniqueness. As a result, it becomes difficult to understand female subcultures (as McRobbie (1980) also acknowledged). Should they be seen as a response to the same structural class constraints as those facing males or as the product of patriarchy? Nevertheless, Stuart Hall (1980: 39) acknowledged that the work of feminist sociologists 'sent certainties and orthodoxies back to the drawing board', since a 'theory of culture which cannot account for patriarchal structures of dominance and oppression is, in the wake of feminism, a non-starter.'

Other power structures, including heterosexism (Rich, 1981) and racism (Solomos, 1988), were perceived as also cross-cutting the class structures of industrial capitalism. However, there were dangers with this new recognition of heterogeneity. The pluralist and relativist approach can lose sight of the commonalities among young people and perhaps particularly the *dynamic* inherent both in youth and in the social structures which give it context. Increasing pluralism fragments the concept of youth to the point where any essential character risks being lost (as Hall and his colleagues indicated). But there is also the dynamic of social change, and battles over the meaning of youth are both continuous and historically specific. The world is changing and the concept of youth changes with it. The subcultural studies programme of the 1960s and 1970s represents, however, a high-water mark of youth studies in the modern age, and had theoretical strengths which have been less apparent since.

Youth in late modernity

The study of youth has gone through many stages reflecting shifts in societal concerns and structures. Commentaries on youth even a decade ago bear little relevance to the concept now. The following chapters will take up the story of developments in youth studies over the last twenty or so years but first a brief historical perspective is again needed.

Broadly speaking, grand narratives such as those of functionalism and structuralism associated with the height of modernity are becoming less relevant and we appear to be reaching the end of the modern age. Social class is now recognized as only one of several dimensions of social stratification and its cultural aspects are now considered to be as significant as its structural ones. The development of mass consumerism in most societies means that as much can be learned about social groups from their consumption behaviours as from their relationships to the modes of production. Globalization has led to massive socio-economic change, including greater migration shifts which in turn threaten intergenerational social cohesion. The political ideologies

which framed much of twentieth-century history have nearly collapsed, to be replaced with religious fundamentalisms, and 1960s fears of impending nuclear war have been replaced with more immediate fears of suicide terrorism. These shifts have lent themselves to interpretations which move right away from those associated with modernity. Some commentators argue that we are now in a postmodern age; others that what we are experiencing is late modernity.

The two main streams in youth studies in the UK are split between these two perspectives. On the one hand, youth research has shifted to the holistic study of young people's transitions to adulthood, developing the theories of reflexivity of Giddens, Beck or Bourdieu and seeing the social world as one reflecting late modernity – with all its pluralities and relativities – and with its reframing of the concept of individual agency. This is an approach which has lent itself to use and abuse by researchers, policy-makers and practitioners. On the other hand, cultural studies have developed away from the neo-Marxist approaches of the 1960s and 1970s to apply postmodernist[6] or poststructuralist approaches to youth, focusing on surface and style rather than hegemonic resistance, in the wake of theories of the 'fragmented self' (Bauman, 1995), or adopting the nihilism of Baudrillard in an increasingly esoteric way.

This chapter has considered competing ideas about the location of young people in the wider social structure on the basis of generation, social class and gender. Many commentators, including Giddens, Beck and Bourdieu, have argued that these 'structuring' variables have lost their potency. What does this mean for youth studies? Basically it strips the concept of youth of much of the meaning accumulated since the Enlightenment. We are left with biological age and location in time – in other words, we are back to the conceptualization of youth before social science began. The increasing relativity in debates over how to locate youth in the overall social structure ended up almost annihilating it. As Griffin (1997) says, youth has become invisible. All we seem to have left are individualized young people, loose collectivities of 'tribes' and caricatures.

Does this mean that we are left with untheorized 'young people' now? Having begun to understand the complexity of

youth, we now have to go back to the drawing board. Theories of reflexivity offer one way forward, potentially helping with the process of evaluating and, if appropriate, reconstructing the concept of youth. Pierre Bourdieu's development of the concepts of *habitus* and cultural capital has proved valuable to youth studies. Ulrich Beck's (1992) reflexive modernization thesis has been frequently applied to the study of youth. He suggests that social change resulting from scientific and technological developments has led to a new modernity associated with the 'risk society'. Fragmentation of the established structures of reproduction in society and a breakdown of traditional institutions mean that individual social roles are no longer clear. Individuals, free of these structures, are thus forcibly emancipated (or individualized) and must reflexively construct their own biographies; but emancipation brings risks. Anthony Giddens (1991) suggests that in late modernity an infinite range of potential courses of action (and attendant risks) is open to individuals and collectivities. His argument is that life is not so much a biographical project as a 'reflexive' one. Life transitions demand the exploration and construction of the altered self as part of a reflexive process of connecting personal and social change (Giddens, 1991: 33). This is very much the theme of this book, linking the individual with the social and trying to understand the source and impact of social change.

These theories have had an enormous impact on youth studies over the last decade but it seems that theories of youth have failed to progress. Although sociologists have often used youth as a laboratory for the development of social theory, youth studies have failed to reciprocate and draw adequately on these wider theories. Cohen (1997) complains of the atheoretical empiricism of youth transition studies, pointing out that policy-makers, politicians and professionals still widely believe in a 'bio-political model of youth'. Lash (2007) criticizes poststructural cultural studies for failing to engage with the problems of power and class. Roberts (2003) argues that youth researchers have been insufficiently proactive in defining and prioritizing youth questions, instead merely responding to policy concerns. Griffin (1997) argues that youth studies literature should have been more reflective and, in particular, should have been asking why there was so much interest in youth. What, actually, is 'The Youth Question' (Cohen, 1997) and why is it asked?

The organization of this book

This book is concerned with approaches to the study of youth, and as such it does not aim to review empirical research on young people. In the following chapters, I examine approaches to the concept of youth within broad conceptual themes – action, identity, transition, inequality and dependence. By electing to take this route rather than follow the more conventional route of organizing according to substantive areas of life, I am maintaining the focus on youth as a concept with reference to developments in wider social theories within these themes. The aim is to evaluate whether these theories can help inform current constructions of the concept of youth or prompt a process of reconstruction.

Youth studies have taken off in recent years in many areas of the globe and it would be impossible to do justice to all the research that has been undertaken. Youth policies show a similar proliferation, with countries which previously lacked any specific national youth policy now looking for international models from which to develop their own. Though the theoretical frameworks discussed in this book emanate from many different countries, mainly in Europe and North America, most of the substantive research programmes and almost all the policy initiatives discussed are UK-based. This has allowed me to evaluate the ability of a wide range of theories to illuminate the circumstances of youth in Britain but does not lead easily to direct generalization from the British case since, for a range of historical and other reasons, youth in the UK cannot be seen as typical of that in other countries.

The next three chapters evaluate changing theoretical perspectives in the main fields of youth research. Chapter 2 identifies a culture of blame which has developed around young people. It examines whether changing theories of action can explain what young people do, developing the debate over structure and agency, and considering the extent to which young people really can claim (or be attributed with)

ownership of their actions. Thus, though the main focus is on the competing explanations of rationality versus culture as drivers of action, these have to be set in the context of theories of individual cognitive and social development. The chapter considers explanations of youth subcultures, old and new social movements, and the question of suicide terrorism – the latter probably the ultimate test of theories of action – before concluding with some policy considerations. Chapter 3 considers the theme of identity development in youth. It opens with a critique of recent attempts in social science to apply labels to age generations, before moving on to consider the shift over time from a modernist psychoanalytic preoccupation with the self, through the incorporation of a neo-Marxist sociological perspective, to concerns about identity in late modernity, and even nihilism in postmodern accounts. The chapter reconsiders youth subcultures in the light of poststructural theories of youth styles. It then considers the concept of reflexive self-identity, applying this to the idea of identity capital and learning identities in youth. Chapter 4 starts by considering how the idea of life stages has persisted and resulted in a further labelling of age generations in which they are often blamed for the phenomenon of extended dependence. It moves on to consider how the agenda of researching youth transitions developed in social science. The chapter considers whether the idea that there has been a shift from standardized to 'choice' biographies has any relevance, when young people's transitions are so structured by the institutions of the state. Then, drawing on individualization theories and the notion of reflexive biographies, it applies ideas on the nature of action, decision-making and strategy to the problem of how and whether young people 'manage' risk and opportunity during their biographies of transition to adulthood. It concludes with a discussion of how youth policies might be revised to create a structure of support for transition.

By chapter 5, it is time for a fuller consideration of the reasons for variation in youth transitions and thus to take on board the problem of heterogeneity in youth, so here we retreat from postmodernism (which seems to deny both structure and agency) to reassess the importance of the structural constraints associated with social class, gender and ethnicity

in the lives of young people. The main emphasis of the chapter is social class. The chapter reviews the problems of applying social class analysis to young people because of their transitional status. It shows how political constructions of youth have shied away from social class explanations of inequality to focus on agency and individualized them through the concepts of underclass and social exclusion. It argues that inequalities in youth have their roots in structural disadvantage which may be acted out in cultural ways. Chapter 6 develops the problem of dependence which is at the core of transitions to adulthood and which makes it so difficult to apply theories designed around adults to young people. It argues that young people should be seen as social agents, socially connected through ties of obligation and reciprocity, but that social policies have created a situation which threatens this social bond by applying a model of dependence which breaks cultural norms and induces shame. It therefore considers the family as a context in which young people's actions and decisions are shaped. It is argued that the transition between private dependence and public independence is a key feature of the concept of youth which has received far too little attention, but which represents a way forward for youth studies.

The final chapter summarizes the book before drawing conclusions, partly in relation to the debates identified at the start of this chapter and partly in relation to new ones. It considers the precarious relativity of the concept of youth, whether a pluralist approach to youth can have integrity, and how the concept of youth can be developed within the broader study of age and generation relations in changing societies. The chapter considers how the concept of youth might be developed cross-nationally and its relevance to societies which may fit less comfortably within the model of late modernity. The emphasis on prescriptions for young people (reflecting political agendas) rather than descriptions of them is reassessed and implications for policy reviewed.