YOUTH AND GENERATION

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CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Young people experience a world that is significantly different from the world their parents knew as young people. These young lives are being changed alongside large-scale transformations in education, work and relationship formation in many parts of the globe. Although these changes are clearly documented in North America, Western Europe and Australia (Vosko, 2003; Bynner, 2005; Leccardi and Ruspini, 2006; Andres and Wyn, 2010), they are not limited to the Global North. The expansion of higher education, rapid integration into a global economy and contested and changing possibilities for relationship and household formation are also creating profound changes in many former communist-bloc countries (Roberts, 2007; Roberts and Pollock, 2009) and across Asia, Africa and South America (Nilan and Feixa, 2006; Tranberg-Hansen et al., 2008).

These changes have been driven by the implementation, sometimes under duress, of 'market' reforms, opening domestic markets to international trade, liberalising labour laws and pushing to increase individual investment in post-secondary education (Marquardt, 1996; Ball et al., 2000; Thrupp, 2001; Nilan and Feixa, 2006). While the impacts of these changes are far from limited to the young, it is the experience of youth that has been most reshaped by this wave of reform. They as a group are most affected by education and labour market changes and are also among the group most likely to be experimenting with new ways of living in response to new conditions, such as those facilitated by new digital technologies, and to be pushing for social change.

While young people in some parts of the world are seen as politically apathetic, under some conditions (including high youth unemployment and undemocratic government) they are driving significant political change. Young people have been at the centre of the social movements attempting to reshape North Africa and Western Asia (or the 'Middle East'). Structural changes in the experience of youth have been one of the major catalysts of these uprisings. Driven in part by experiments with democracy, demands for human rights and supported by the rise of a 'digital generation', the revolutionary movements in 2011 in Tunisia and Egypt for example have also been fostered by highly educated but unemployed young people who have embraced the call to further their education but have not been rewarded with the job opportunities promised (Castells, 2012: 66; Herrera, 2012).

Youth unemployment and the poor employment conditions facing young people are not only a problem in the Global South. Even if it is yet to lead to uprisings elsewhere, this does not mean that young people in the Global North are not suffering or protesting. In a reversal of the direction in which influence among youth cultures is often assumed to flow, the Occupy Movements that sprang up in many parts of the Global North in recent years, with its catch cry of 'we are the 99 per cent', were a response to precarious conditions of employment once squarely associated with the Global South, but now also spreading across the North (Beck, 2000; Standing, 2011). The Occupiers in New York City and elsewhere also drew their inspiration in part from the example of the revolutionaries of North Africa and West Asia (Castells, 2012).

At a time of unprecedented investment by governments and young people in further education, unemployment and temporary and precarious employment are also on the rise for young people across the world, making it appear unlikely that the 'neoliberal bargain' that promises individuals a return for their investment in human capital can be maintained (Brown et al., 2011; ILO, 2013). This could shape a generation. Considerable evidence has been amassed to show that unemployment and even precarious employment in the late teens and twenties have a scarring effect on young people, correlating with relatively poorer employment prospects and conditions into middle age and beyond. This has been found in countries of the Global North, like France (Chauvel, 2006), and also countries like Brazil in the Global South (Cruces et al., 2012).

Despite the apparent significance of these changes, recent youth research shows the enduring nature of patterns of structural inequality over time. In response to this, there has been a chorus of voices within youth studies highlighting the risk of exaggerating change. Researchers caution against relying on a simplified account of the past to create the appearance of a contrast with

the present (Goodwin and O'Connor, 2005), or failing to recognise that the same groups of people are the 'winners and losers' (Roberts, 2003). Gender, class, ethnicity, disability and other social divisions continue to profoundly shape outcomes. If new possibilities for young lives have been created, it appears to be only a smaller group of privileged young people who really get to make choices about their future (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005; Roberts, 2007). In other words, it can often seem that the more things change, the more they stay the same (MacDonald, 2011). Understanding the dynamic between continuity and change is one of the central challenges for youth sociology today.

This book addresses the complex issue of the interrelated transformations of societies and individual biographies and how these impact on the social dynamics of inequality in young people's lives. We agree with youth researchers who suggest that interrogating the relationship between continuity and change is the substance of the promise and challenge of youth studies. Robert MacDonald (2011: 440, emphasis in original) for example believes that it is the '*asking* of these sorts of questions – questions about social change, social continuity, about inequality and the position of young people's transitions in these processes – that … gives youth studies its particular appeal and purpose'. This view is also the foundation for arguably the most influential youth studies text of the past two decades, Andy Furlong and Fred Cartmel's (2007 [1997]) *Young People and Social Change*. These authors concisely state how concerns about the balance between continuity and change set the central questions for contemporary research:

> Young people today are growing up in different circumstances to those experienced by previous generations; changes which are significant enough to merit a reconceptualization of youth transitions and processes of social reproduction. In other words, in the modern world young people face new risks and opportunities … But the greater range of opportunities available helps to obscure the extent to which existing patterns of inequality are simply being reproduced in different ways. (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007: 8–9)

In many ways our book takes up the spirit and challenge expressed in these words. The changes occurring around the world in the experience of youth point towards the need for a reconceptualisation in youth studies. Our concern however is that the view embedded in the second half of this quotation has been far more influential than the first in youth studies, and represents a

common, but we will argue limited, way of thinking about inequality as evidence against social change. While it is rare to find a youth researcher who would contest absolutely that significant change in the experience of youth has occurred, it is common for youth researchers to assert that fundamental social stratification is simply reproduced *despite* change (Roberts, 1995; Lehmann, 2004; Evans, 2007). To some extent this is also expressed by Furlong and Cartmel (2007: 8), who emphasise 'that there are powerful sources of continuity; young people's experience continues to be shaped by class and gender'.

In this book we aim to rethink how the relationship between change and inequality is understood in youth studies, based on the starting point that this 'reproduction' of inequality is not simple, and that the creation of inequality is not opposed to but integral to change. We argue that if youth researchers are to understand the emergence of new patterns of inequality, it will be necessary to develop conceptual approaches that can analyse entrenched (and new) forms of inequality as part of the process of change. Too often these elements are seen in opposition, creating a conflation of 'continuity' and inequality. This is sometimes represented by the claim that because older forms of stratification have changed the outcome is a reduction in inequality. More commonly, continuity and inequality are conflated through arguments that evidence of inequality is evidence against change.

While youth researchers should contest accounts of youth that downplay inequality, the more significant challenge facing youth studies is that too often simply showing that class or gender still matters is seen as an important contribution in itself, and, as such, limits the analysis in some youth research from more fully understanding the contemporary dynamics and changing nature of inequality (Woodman, 2009: 253). As such, we also argue that new risks and inequalities do not simply mask old forms of inequality, but are central to the way inequalities, including those of class and gender, are being made afresh in contemporary conditions. To put this rather simplistically, creating a balance sheet that places change in young lives in one column and inequality in the other will not realise the promise of youth studies. This promise is not achieved through simply tracing social change, or highlighting patterns of continuity, but through showing how the two are intertwined.

Individualisation

One of the contributing factors to the conflating of inequality with continuity is a widely held belief that influential contemporary sociological theory

both overemphasises change and downplays inequality. A shared point of departure for much contemporary sociological theory is that a series of shifts that began in the latter parts of the twentieth century are reshaping both the self and society (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992; Bauman, 2001; Sassen, 2008; Archer, 2012). Although the details vary, these theorists argue that a qualitatively new form of social organisation is emerging that impacts on how people imagine and build their biographies. In youth studies in particular, the concept of individualisation as proposed by Ulrich Beck and colleagues (Beck, 1992, 2007; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), has been extensively discussed and critiqued. The 'individualistion thesis' is consistently interpreted as making two key claims. The first is that social structures, such as gendered role expectations about work and motherhood and the class structuring of education and employment opportunities, are weakening. The second is that in the space left in the wake of these weakening structures the work of shaping the future increasingly becomes the active responsibility of each person who can and must now make choices about their future.

Sociological youth research is an obvious area of study to put claims about the biography to the test and there is a substantial body of research that gives unequivocal evidence of patterns of inequality and their continuity over time. Based on consistent findings of the persistence of inequality, many youth researchers have heavily criticicised theories of individualisation for either de-emphasising, or worse, actively denying the (unchanging) nature of inequality (see Andres et al., 1999; Evans, 2002, 2007; Lehmann, 2004; Brannen and Nilsen, 2005, 2007; McLeod and Yates, 2006; Roberts, 2010, among others). We acknowledge the important contribution that these researchers have made to cataloging patterns of inequality, and some aspects of their theorising of it. However, the conclusion that theories of individualisation do not enable an account of inequality is too simplistic. The theory of individualisation is complex, presenting apparent contradictions that require interpretation. We argue, however, that the way individualisation has been predominantly understood in youth studies has missed one of this theory's central claims. This oversight is not primarily because of the theory's own ambiguities, although they do exist, but because the individualisation thesis has become a trope employed as a foil to emphasise empiricist analyses of inequality.

We offer an analysis of the individualisation thesis that opens up a more nuanced understanding of how key elements of the theory work (Woodman, 2010). The concept of individualisation offers a sense of the active work that people must do to shape their lives. Yet far from proposing a weakening of social structure that frees individuals to shape their own lives, individualisation

indexes an unequal but spreading challenge of keeping the biography from breaking into pieces in the face of new structural constraints, which are contradictory or ambivalent in their demands (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 22).

While we use the individualisation thesis, this book is not a straightforward application of the concept of individualisation to thinking about youth. Despite arguing that people must now actively shape the biography in new ways, most of the individualisation theorists say relatively little about the detail of how people actually respond to the changes that individualisation brings. We use the idea of individualisation as a description of the conditions of contemporary youth, taking it as a starting point but using a variety of other theories, including Bourdieu's theory of habitus and concepts from post-colonial theories often considered to be incompatible with individualisation. Our analysis does not interpret individualisation to be a privilege of the most resourced to make choices about the biography, but sees it as a structural challenge faced most acutely by the least resourced. This becomes a point of departure for theorising the way that inequality is made in contemporary conditions among young people, including by class, gender and race.

We draw on a range of theories because the challenge of analysing young lives in context is complex. We explore the processes through which social relations create unequal outcomes to understand how these processes interrelate. Attending to the interrelation of different institutions and actors that shape contemporary conditions can highlight changes in the meaning and function of aspects of social life that would otherwise appear unchanging over time. For example, Saskia Sassen (2008) in defending her claims about the profound impacts of globalisation highlights how social arrangements and shared beliefs, such as the idea of sovereignty, can endure over time while coming to play a much more significant and sometimes radically different part in a social formation over time. As we have already mentioned, the changing nature of youth labour markets and conditions of employment is a significant dynamic impacting on young people across the world. Understanding this dynamic requires an understanding of new global processes.

Sassen (2008) argues that economic globalisation, including the rise of non-state economic actors such as multinational firms, could not have happened without the highly developed financial and legal mechanisms within nation states. These mechanisms, which once strengthened the nation state, have become disembedded from the context in which they originated, to be repositioned to serve cross-national actors' purposes (such as forcing opening national economies to global trade) (Sassen 2008: 13–14). For our purposes we use and develop the concept of generations to provide a conceptual

anchor for investigating the complex intertwining of change and continuity in the production of inequality in the lives of contemporary young people.

Generation

In the context of the rise of theories proposing a new modernity and their impact in youth studies, Ken Roberts (2003: 27–8) has argued '[w]e need progress, not more restarts … Constantly seeking new approaches, perspectives and paradigms is a recipe for stagnation … We have foundations, an impressive track record of youth research, on which to build. Why kick past achievements away?' There is an intuitive truth in this claim. In part this book returns to and affirms the importance of the longstanding focus on transitions, cultures, class, gender and race in youth sociology. However, our way forward is neither to start from scratch nor to refuse to jettison what we have.

While unequal outcomes for different groups of young people remain predicable to a significant degree, they do not emerge from an abstract or inevitable social logic. Instead they are the outcomes of institutional arrangements adjusting to social change, and through people actively maintaining distinctions and advantages over others in new conditions. For example, at the same time as education has become more important, the outcome of this investment in education has become more tenuous, with secure professional employment elusive for many and casual employment at the lower ends of the service industry growing rapidly (Furlong and Kelly, 2005; Andres and Wyn, 2010). It is only through rethinking our frameworks for contemporary conditions that youth research can remain relevant and reaffirm its core concepts such as class, gender, race and identity (Woodman and Threadgold, 2011).

In this spirit, one of our conceptual strategies is to follow a long tradition in sociology of reinventing older conceptual frameworks to better fit new times and new places (Abbott, 2001). As well as drawing on a relatively recent conceptual contribution, the theory of individualisation, we return to some of the oldest sociological thinking about young lives in the form of Karl Mannheim's (1952 [1923]) essay on generations. The sociology of generations is part of a broader tradition that asks not only how youth transitions and cultures have or have not changed, but also how the very meaning of youth as a relational concept is shaped by contemporary conditions (Allen, 1968; Lesko, 1996; Mizen, 2002; Blatterer, 2007). Along with other authors who use frameworks that emphasise a relational understanding of youth (but who may not embrace the term 'generations'), we argue that the changing patterns of

work, study and living arrangements mentioned in the opening of this chapter point to a new socio-historical economic and policy formation that does not simply change the timing of transitions or young people's leisure practices, but more foundationally transforms the types of adulthood available and the possibilities open to young people (Wyn and Woodman, 2006).

While this broader tradition of attending to the relational shaping of youth continues to be influential in youth studies, the sociology of generations can provide tools for focusing thinking about continuity and change. Mannheim (1952) highlights that at particular points in time a generation of young people will face conditions different enough from those facing their parents (in their youth) that the rules for how to achieve a basic sense of ontological security, let alone sense of success, will have to be rewritten. It is the young generation that rewrites these rules. Mannheim's theory, however, does not present a generation as an homogeneous group of young people. He argues that a generation is made up of sometimes radically different and potentially politically opposed 'generational units' (Mannheim, 1952: 8). According to Mannheim, class was one of the significant elements that contributed to the heterogeneity of a social generation. These units are groupings that, while sharing the same generation, react in different ways to the conditions of their times due to their different social positions.

We argue that this central element of Mannheim's framework was overlooked by youth researchers in large part because of a similar conflation of continuity and inequality to that which influences youth research today. Mannheim's theory of generations was, to the detriment of youth studies, largely abandoned as the notion of generations was linked to an implicit and homogenising type of generationalism in the work of mid-twentieth-century functionalist sociology that was heavily critiqued by subcultural scholars in the 1970s.

While we hold that Mannheim's (1952) theory of generations continues to be valuable for thinking about youth, for our purposes his framework needs updating. One limitation is his focus on politics. His theorising tends to rest on the potential for a shared consciousness to emerge among some sections of a generation as a catalyst for political movements, neglecting other more mundane and affective forms of generational subjectivity. To attend equally to everyday and embodied forms of subjectivity created in the context of generational conditions, and to ask how they are entangled in the creation of contemporary inequalities, we draw on the concept of habitus taken from Pierre Bourdieu (1990). Bourdieu is often associated not just with the theorising of inequality but also with proposing a relatively

mechanical theory of social reproduction. By highlighting points in his work where Bourdieu theorises social change, and by showing that neither Beck's theory of individualisation or the concept of generation downplays inequality, we argue that we can legitimately create what for some may seem like an improbable theoretical combination. Drawing on this combination, we propose using a concept of internally differentiated social generations as a useful frame for investigating class, gender, race and, although they are not our focus here, potentially other social divisions such as those related to disability, sexuality and health in a changing social world.

New Life Patterns

In the mid-twentieth century Robert Nisbet (1962) argued that sociology cannot, on the whole, mimic the procedures and methods of the natural sciences, but instead does and should mix 'art and science'. Some sociology is closer to art and some to the empirical procedures of the natural sciences. Nisbet makes a related distinction between 'grasp' and 'reach' sociology. Grasp sociology is close-grained empirical analysis of the details, while reach sociology treats data as a starting point for making larger claims and speculates on future trends. This book presents sociology as a mix of grasp and reach. In building our case for rethinking change and inequality in the lives of young people we draw on theories and data from around the world, almost unavoidably given the current political economy of academic knowledge, with a focus on the Global North. It is not, however, a detailed empirical monograph or an overview of current research from across the world. Many of our examples come from our own work on the Australian-based longitudinal mixed-methods 'Life Patterns' research programme, with the fuller empirical detail available in other publications that we will reference along the way.

Life Patterns has followed the transitions of two cohorts of young Australians across two decades. The first stage of the programme commenced in 1991, following a cohort of young people who had just completed their secondary education. A second cohort were recruited in the mid-2000s, and finished secondary school in 2006. Despite fifteen years difference in their age in many essential ways their lives have been the same, shaped by the ongoing expansion of education and a decline in the youth labour market with a recession in Australia in the early 1990s from which it never fully recovered. The significant difference between the two is that the first cohort experienced the digital revolution, the shift in mobile phone and internet technology to

generally affordable and ubiquitous modes of communication, in their teens while the second cohort have lived their entire lives with this technology part of their everyday experience. Apart from this the experiences and attitudes of the two cohorts appear to have much more in common with each other than with the preceding (Baby Boomer) generation (Wyn et al., 2008). While the experiences of the participants in this research programme will differ from that of other young people in other places, the analysis of their experiences helps us both to investigate the impact of social changes that are widely experienced and provide a case study for illuminating what we see as the limitations of current conceptualisations of inequality in youth research.

As we will show in the coming chapters, the Life Patterns participants have been reshaping patterns of parenthood, marriage, cohabitation and work. They have, to greater and lesser degrees depending on the resources they have available to them, needed to rethink adulthood in terms not dependent on stability, security and continuity, and have also needed to see themselves as responsible for their outcomes even in the face of significant structural barriers. This does not make them all the same. As will become clearer in coming chapters, highly stratified life chances and the ways that young people have worked within the conditions they face have created relatively complex, diverse, and also unequal life pathways and outcomes. Using the birth of the cohort who graduated from secondary school in 1991 as our reference, we refer to this long generation in Australia as the post-1970s generation (Dwyer and Wyn, 2001). Such a categorisation is unlikely to fit perfectly in other parts of the world, and could no doubt be challenged, depending on the criteria used, even for Australian young people.

The possibility that the categorisation of generations may differ does not diminish the value of using the social generations lens that we advocate in this book. The concept of social generations is too fuzzy, and the world itself too complex, for 'objective' criteria on when one generation ends and another begins to be agreed upon. The identification of a generation, or the boundaries of a generational unit, will necessarily have a heuristic quality. By reviving the concept of social generation for use in sociological youth studies, we are not arguing that at some point in recent history the experience of youth, globally, was so radically transformed that everything significant was either reversed or made insignificant in one moment. Young people's lives and attitudes are not alien to those of the generation before. Indeed, the Life Patterns research shows that the post-1970s generation had hopes that were similar to those we associate with the 'Baby Boomer' and other generations – fulfilling work,

security of work and relationships and a happy family life (Andres and Wyn, 2010). In the coming chapters we highlight many generational commonalities as well as tensions and note that factors that shaped the experience of youth in previous eras and other places have not 'disappeared' but may be playing a new role in new times and places. Generation is hence a valuable concept for orienting investigations in a changing world where old divisions have to be actively reinforced and even made anew to continue.

Structure of the Book

The lives of young people today are not the same as they were for members of the post-war baby boom in their youth. Using the concepts of 'social generation' and 'individualisation', developed with the help of many other theoretical resources, we aim to provide a framework for the widely-shared goal of understanding patterns of inequality in changing times. We begin to build our argument in Chapter 2 by sketching out the current conditions of young lives in different parts of the world, including the shift of cultural, economic and political influence away from Europe and North America, before turning to the specific conditions in Australia. We focus on the expansion of educational participation, the creation of new forms of consumption, youth cultures, and the changing nature of work on a global scale. The chapter shows that far from making the social divisions of class, gender, location and race long identified by sociologists irrelevant, these changes appear to point to new ways in which longstanding inequalities are being produced and entrenched. This raises the question of which conceptual tools provide the most effective grasp of the processes creating inequality in the context of changing times, which we take up in the chapters that follow.

In Chapter 3, using changes in the experience of youth traced out in Chapter 2 as a backdrop, we discuss debates about change and inequality in youth studies. Our particular focus is on the individualisation thesis (Beck, 1992). In one way our aim is deflationary, to show that the concept of individualisation is not as radical or innovative as many assume and that it has many points of resonance and overlap with unlikely sources, such as theories of intersectionality or hybridity. Our aim, however, is also to show that, given the concept of individualisation is not the radical denial of social structure that some assume, it nonetheless raises key points about the conditions of contemporary life for young people that are often overlooked.

Above all, we argue that some of the responses to the individualisation thesis in youth studies conflate inequality with continuity, limiting at least some contemporary youth research from fulfilling its promise.

Throughout the chapter we revisit debates about individualisation and the 'reflexive' shaping of life chances to create an alternative understanding of the concept that is both well supported by the writings of the authors who developed the thesis and by empirical patterns identifiable in the lives of young people in the Life Patterns research programme. We understand the individualisation thesis as issuing a challenge to researchers to reconceptualise class, gender and race for contemporary conditions, in which an ever greater number of incompatible or unreachable demands are foisted upon young people. As such, we also argue for thinking of reflexivity as an effort to hold together competing and sometimes seemingly incompatible demands. In everyday life, and across the biography, we hold that it is not the most privileged but the least who are likely to face the greatest demands to be reflexive.

Chapter 4 builds the conceptual basis for our approach to youth studies. We show how the relatively neglected work of Karl Mannheim (1952) on the sociology of generations provides a foundation for thinking more productively about the relationship between change and inequality in young lives. While in need of some updating, the concept of a social generation points towards a framework that enables an understanding of social change and of inequality. Mannheim distinguishes three primary components of a generation: the cultural and structural conditions in which a generation is shaped; the ways that young people develop particular dispositions in the context of these conditions; and differences between groups of young people sharing a generation (which he calls different 'generational units'). As a generational unit is on one dimension defined by their difference to the generation before and on another by its differences with other units within the same generation, it can provide the basis for a framework that explicitly enables an analysis of the active recreation of stratification in the context of social change.

In Chapters 5 and 6 we apply this generational framework to engage with the two most influential streams of contemporary youth research. While the sociology of youth is constituted by a loose constellation of approaches and interests, including studies of crime and deviance, leisure, family life and sexuality (Griffin, 1993), summaries of youth sociology widely recognise that for the last quarter of a century or so the field has had two dominant streams, a transitions approach and a cultures approach (Cohen, 2003). In these chapters we aim to show that a social generation frame provides

another way to bridge the concerns of the two approaches and to better bring together their separate insights.

In Chapter 5 we turn to the value and limitations of recent transitions research, which traces young people's movements in and out of education, employment, relationships and housing arrangements. We argue that, while it has been and remains a valuable dimension of youth studies, the transitions paradigm and common understandings of the metaphor of transition reflect an underpinning in theories of youth development. This heritage makes it difficult for researchers to see beyond the boundaries of the transition from youth to adulthood, and hence to also see beyond debates about whether transitions are delayed or messy to ask about the relational construction of youth and adulthood. The meaning of adulthood, that which is being transitioned 'to', can change over time (Blatterer, 2007; Silva, 2012). Without a proper concept of generation, youth researchers can misdiagnose generational conditions and the subjectivities with which they are intertwined as simply a change in the timing of transition, or as the invention of an entirely new life stage (Arnett, 2004).

In Chapter 6 we apply our generational framework to an analysis of the relationship between change and inequality in youth cultural forms. We situate our analysis within ongoing debates about whether these forms are 'post-subcultural'. Since the subcultural approach tied to the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) first emerged in the 1970s, a stream of research has developed and strengthened over time that challenges the CCCS's key claim that the most significant youth cultural forms can be understood as subcultures of larger class cultures. Recent 'post-subculture' concepts such as neo-tribalism have been proposed as better able to capture contemporary modes of cultural practice and group belonging. In this chapter we suggest that the tendency to conflate evidence of inequality with evidence against change (which has tended to frame debates about individualisation) is arguably even starker on both sides of the post-subcultural debate in this stream of youth research. This has led post-subcultural theorists to simplify the position of the subcultural approach and fail to see continuities. It has also emboldened critics of post-subcultural approaches to over-emphasise the extent to which post-subcultural theorists have dismissed structural inequality and hence themselves pass over too quickly the substance of the challenge of tracing inequalities in new times.

As with the concept of individualisation, we interpret the post-subcultural turn less as a denial of structured inequality than as pointing to the challenge

of tracing the impact of unequal resources in the context of the seemingly more fragmentary but still profoundly powerful sets of social structures in contemporary modernity. We finish the chapter by arguing that a biographical approach provides a way to understand youth cultural practices in the context of 'youth transitions' and generational change. This entails investigating young people's multiple engagements – in education, employment, cultural forms and relationships – and how they interact. Particularly in the context of individualising social structures, investments and demands in one sphere may or may not articulate easily with those in other spheres. Certain work practices for example may make participating in some leisure forms impossible.

In Chapters 7 and 8 we apply a biographical approach to examples taken from the Life Patterns research programme and return to larger questions about the challenges for youth research in the coming decades. Chapter 7 investigates the way the temporal structures of society are shaped for the current generation of young people in Australia, including by the rise of new information-communication technologies. Time is implicitly central to youth studies. Transitions research investigates the movement from one status to another and cultural research has focused on practices that unfold over time and the changing temporal orientation of youth cultural groupings. Yet concepts of time are rarely explicitly developed in youth studies. In this chapter we argue that focusing on the temporal structure of everyday life can clarify the nature of social change and its relationship to forms of inequality.

The chapter focuses on the impact of insecure and variable work on relationships with others, suggesting that the experience of youth is made in everyday life through synchronising social practices with significant others, and variable work patterns can make this harder. The timetables and rhythms of young people's lives have become more unstable and fragmented and hence less likely to neatly align with those of their friends and family unless active effort is expended synchronising lives and scheduling time together. This structural desynchronisation points to new forms of time-based inequality that impact on the way that young people and their networks of significant others can use the passing of time to build resources, enjoy the present, and shape the future. The chapter is hence a concrete example of the way that inequalities that in the abstract have a long history, such as control over time, are coming to function in new ways.

In Chapter 8 we turn to place. The changing experience of youth is not homogeneous across space. Space, place and mobility need to be part of any conceptualisation of youth. Youth research has tended to neglect place, but

driven by human geography youth researchers are beginning to pay more attention to place and mobility and the way that these shape opportunities and identities (Nayak, 2003; Hopkins, 2010; MacDonald et al., 2010; Farrugia, 2014). In Australia, and possibly other countries, a significant marker of this generation's experience may be the need to coordinate varying 'non-standard' work hours, and also for many the timetables set by educational institutions, with the wish and need to regularly spend time with significant others. In other societies generational patterns are more significantly established through revolutionary social action, such as North Africa, partly in response to a lack of employment opportunities commensurate with growing levels of education, or through social transformations involving the extension of educational opportunities and flows from rural to urban settings, such as China.

The book finishes with a short conclusion. The conditions that shape youth experience vary across place and social position. Not only will these conditions vary across space, but the concepts that will help youth researchers to understand this experience may also be somewhat different in different places. Yet despite these differences the lives of young people around the globe are increasingly interconnected, which makes it almost impossible to avoid an awareness of other ways of life. While a global generation as an homogeneous entity is an impossibility, youth studies will need conceptual devices to analyse the way that the current young generations around the world are connected by digital technology, new demands for education, the impact of neoliberal economic pressures and associated forms of inequality, which in different ways shape all young lives.