



Marginalized Youth. An Introduction.

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The life conduct of marginalized groups has become subject to increasing levels of risk in advanced capitalist societies. In particular, children and young people are confronted with the harsh consequences of a “new poverty” in the contemporary era. The demographic complexion of today’s poverty is youthful, as a number of government reports have once again documented in recent years in Australia, Germany, France, Great Britain, the US or Scandinavian countries. Key youth studies have shown a growing fear of the future among young people – especially with regard to the threat of unemployment and poverty. However, these results have not yet produced any fundamental critical political reaction.

Theories of modernization had great influence in the 1990s on the systematic and political debates in the fields of Child and Youth Welfare. These theories implied that child development is a highly risky process, however a process which is increasingly less socially structured than in previous generations. In contrast, today’s youth are afforded, ostensibly at least, unprecedented levels of personal „choice“. Independent of his or her origins, policy makers and scholars alike seem to give the impression that life can be conducted and organized by the single actor himself. Yet while contemporary youth may be experiencing new options for mobility, recent discussions on „risk-societies“ conceptualize choice in another way. A growing cadre of scholars now contend that to grow up in advanced capitalist and liberal societies is a highly precarious process for a considerable proportion of the youth.

Today’s impoverished „classes“ are not entirely alone in their struggles with social marginalization. Current studies show that feelings of uncertainty and insecurity are common in large parts of the society. The middle classes try to defend their social status by constructing the idea of a „new underclass“. People of that „class“ are addressed in reference to their everyday life culture. They are considered to lack the „will to advancement“. Perhaps then, we would do well to pause in order to consider whether we know enough about the specific everyday life culture of children and young people. This SW&S Special Issue centers on the following questions regarding *Marginalized Youth* in an international comparative perspective.

How can we analytically describe the everyday life culture of children and young people facing processes of social marginalization? What research findings are internationally available? What are some of the predominant ways in which children and young people conduct and manage their lives in highly precarious contexts? What kind of child and youth welfare policy interventions would be appropriate as a reaction to increasing marginalization? Are the current professional strategies of social work and social policy adequate or not?

We are very pleased to offer the SW&S readers a great selection of international prominent authors and assume that thereby this SW&S Special Issue on *Marginalized Youth* will forward the critical discussions in social work and social policy on this fundamentally important analytic and political questions.

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