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Feminist Review, No. 55, Consuming Cultures. (Spring, 1997), pp. 4-21.

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Troubled Teens:

Managing Disorders of Transition and Consumption

Christine Griffin

FEMINIST REVIEW NO 55, SPRING 1997, pp. 4–21

Abstract

This article focuses on the representation of youth as a key moment of transition in contemporary western societies, set between the dependent state of childhood and the supposed maturity and independence of adult status. Young people are viewed as gendered, racialized and sexualized beings who also occupy specific class locations, and are assumed to move through crucial points of transition as they leave full-time education and enter the job market, as well as the (hetero)sexual and marriage marketplaces. The article examines some of the main discursive configurations and treatment regimes through which 'troubled teens' are constructed and managed, especially in relation to notions about disordered patterns of consumption and transition. The paper considers the moment of the 'discovery' of adolescence in the late nineteenth century, going on to examine young women's particular relationships to discourses around consumption in the contemporary British youth research literature, and to debates about 'disrupted transitions' and citizenship in the 1990s. The article ends with a brief examination of one approach to the 'problem of troubled teens' in the USA: Specialty Schools that offer a combination of educational, therapeutic and correctional regimes aimed at young people who have been identified in relation to various disorders of transition and consumption.

Keywords

youth; consumption; transition; citizenship; treatment; education; therapy; problem youth

In the summer of 1995 I spent two months in Southern California teaching Summer School. During my visit there was considerable (albeit brief) coverage in the local press and TV news of a young man who had died whilst on a type of 'therapeutic' outdoor camping expedition organized specifically for 'defiant teens'. This was not the only instance of death or serious injury that had occurred in 'wilderness programmes' organized by this particular company, and further investigation revealed a mass of similar 'packages' for young people, which were targeted carefully at particular groups of young women and men – or rather at their parents. The 'wilderness programmes' and 'individualized education plans' offered by

what are known as 'Specialty Schools' in the USA are concerned to police and smooth over potentially difficult moments of transition to adulthood in a 'caring' yet controlling way.

Young people occupy a distinct position in the circuit of consumption, distribution, production and reproduction, which is gendered, sexualized and located in class- and 'race'-specific contexts. In contemporary western societies, youth represents a key moment of transition between the dependent state of childhood and the supposed maturity and independence of adulthood. Young people are located at crucial points of transition as they leave full-time education, enter the job market, and enter the sexual (and marriage) markets (Griffin, 1982). For some the moment of leaving education occurs at 16, for others it is 18 or 22; many young people remain marginal to the job market, as unemployed or on government-sponsored training schemes; and some are marginal to the dominant (hetero)sexual and marriage markets through identifying as gay, lesbian or bisexual. Such 'variations' are not simply a matter of individual differences: these key transitions in the move to adult status construct an idealized norm of the 'right' way to grow up as an adolescent, in order to find your future place in the adult world.

In this article I want to examine some of the main discursive configurations and treatment regimes through which 'troubled teens' are constructed and managed. In particular, I want to develop arguments I have made elsewhere concerning the representation of young people themselves as potentially 'troubled' and subject to specific disorders of consumption and transition (Griffin, 1993). I will also consider the ways in which such representations of 'troubled teens' are gendered, racialized and class-specific. It has been most common to examine young people's location as consumers of material goods, including the construction of 'teenage' markets for music, clothes, make-up, cigarettes, alcohol and so on (Abrams, 1959; cf. Miles, 1995). I want to consider the construction of (certain) young people as *disordered* consumers in racially-structured patriarchal capitalist societies.

Although the primary focus of this paper appears to be youth, I would see this work as a feminist analysis. Many feminist approaches have taken analyses of gender (and also sexual) relations as their primary focus, along with an interest in and commitment to examining issues from women's perspective(s) (Richardson and Robinson, 1992; Griffin and Phoenix, 1994). This approach has predominated amongst Anglo-feminists of the 'First World', and it proved a valuable strategy in specific historical and political contexts (especially from the late 1960s onwards). By the 1990s, it has become more commonplace (though by no means universal) for feminists to argue that gender and/or sexuality can never be considered in isolation

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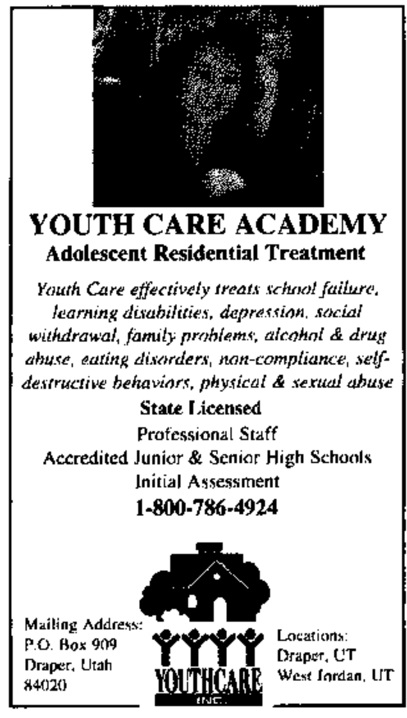
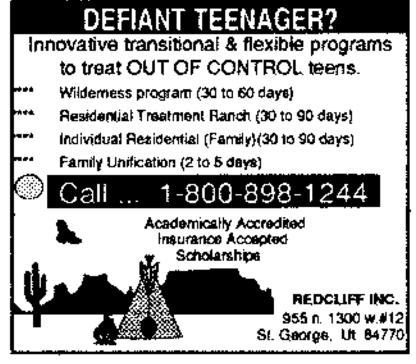
from 'race', class or disability (Mohanty *et al.*, 1991). In addition, those influenced by post-structuralism and postmodernism would question the value of unitary terms such as 'woman' and 'gender' (see Tong, 1989, for brief review).

My approach is somewhat different since I would certainly argue that gender can never be considered in isolation, but in a given context relations of gender, sexuality, 'race', class and disability may (or may not) intersect in a variety of ways. I have been interested in deconstructing notions of 'youth' and 'adolescence', and I would want to retain that deconstructivist perspective with respect to 'gender', 'woman' and other major social categories. Unlike some feminists who have drawn on post-structuralist and postmodern perspectives, I would not deconstruct such categories out of existence. 'Youth', 'adolescence', 'gender', 'race' and so on *can* be deconstructed completely, but they each still retain an undeniable social, psychological, cultural and economic force in specific contexts, and I aim to work with the tension between these two positions. My focus on the nature of constructed transitions into the 'adult' cycle of production/reproduction/consumption for young people does not imply that gender, 'race', class, sexuality and disability are irrelevant or marginal: quite the contrary. I also wish to consider the possibility that in some contexts, gender (and sexuality, 'race' and/or class) may be absent, and that this absence might be worthy of analysis in itself.

Why should youth/adolescence represent such a key moment in contemporary western societies as far as the circuit of consumption/production/reproduction is concerned? The moment of 'youth' (which in practice is a complex series of intersecting moments) is above all about transition and change, and about the *management* of that change. Whilst the dominant model of adolescence, that of physiologically-driven Storm and Stress,





locates such change as biologically determined, many discourses around youth represent the necessity for the young person to learn self-control (e.g. Conger, 1979). The moment of (potentially dangerous) change and transition epitomized by 'youth' is important precisely because it operates in contrast to prevailing notions of innocent dependent childhood and static mature adult status. Constructions of the latter categories are reinforced by default through dominant representations of what it means to be young.

The century since the 'discovery' of adolescence by early US psychologist G. Stanley Hall has seen a series of moral panics over youth by adults in academia, government, social and welfare work (Hall, 1904; Muncie, 1984). The most recent manifestations of such panics include concerns over 'teenage pregnancy', rising youth crime, drug use (e.g. over ecstasy in the UK), and the apathetic 'slackers' of 'Generation X'. Such panics tend to focus on particular groups of young people. In the USA, the incidence of parenthood amongst young, single African-American women was identified as a key factor in the 1992 Los Angeles 'riots', for example (Griffin, 1992). It has become an element of common sense in the British

media to refer to the supposedly novel and rising incidence of 'mindless violence' amongst young white (and African-Caribbean) working-class men. Panics over the use of ecstasy are more recent and currently confined to Britain. Deaths connected with ecstasy are far fewer than those associated with alcohol, but the drug has been demonized following the death of Leah Betts, the teenage daughter of a police inspector (Sharkey, 1996). Panics over 'Generation X' focus on a cultural form which has been associated with the young heterosexual, relatively affluent children of the white middle-classes on both sides of the Atlantic.

In all of these panics, specific groups of young people are singled out for attention, and the focus of concern often deals with some aspect of young people's relationship to the cycle of consumption, production and reproduction. 'Problem teens' appear as a source of (adult) concern over (specific) young people's disordered relationship with consumption (e.g. drug use and food), reproduction (e.g. 'teen mothers') and/or production, which usually refers to the transition from education to the job market (e.g. slackers, youth crime). There are many more examples one could give. The continued development of a feminist perspective on the specific relation of youth to the cycle of consumption, production and reproduction is important, partly because such representations of youth are so profoundly gendered and sexualized. However, it is not possible to concentrate solely on gender, age and sexuality without also considering relations of 'race', class and disability. 'Youth' itself is constructed in monolithic terms as a relatively uniform age stage, but notions of 'deviance', 'disorder' and 'problem youth' are almost always about making distinctions between specific groups of young people. The monolithic category of 'youth' can be mobilized to obscure differences between groups of young people and especially those based on social relations around gender, 'race', class, sexuality or disability.

Youth, Freedom and Control: G. Stanley Hall and 'Discovery' of Adolescence

When adolescence first emerged as an ideological construct in the late nineteenth century, many elements of contemporary representations around youth were forged. G. Stanley Hall's two-volume text 'On Adolescence' is generally taken as the key moment of 'discovery', but Hall was merely a focus for a diverse range of discourses around youth from education, medicine, criminology, the child study movement, other liberal reformers, and the emerging fields of psychology and psychoanalysis (Hall, 1904). Adolescence emerged as a period characterized by inevitable physiological changes and hormonal turmoil, instigated by the onset of puberty

(Griffin, 1993). What came to be known as the Storm and Stress model of adolescence had its origins here. As an age stage, adolescence is fundamentally sexualized, and assumed to be primarily determined by biological forces. Young people's relationship to reproduction (in the sense of reproducing offspring) is central to this construction. Adolescence is also distinctly gendered, since its starting point, the onset of puberty, is assumed to be quite different for young women and men, who are distinguished by their different roles in reproduction. Menarche, or the onset of menstruation, is a (relatively) discrete event associated with the ability to reproduce. The onset of puberty for males is far more fragmented and uncertain, and scarcely emerges as a distinct moment at all (Laslett, 1971). Discourses of freedom and control were central to Hall's construction of adolescence, and they remain with us as key elements in dominant regimes for the representation and management of youth. For Hall, freedom and control were especially associated with 'emerging' adolescent sexuality, a theme which is familiar from the Storm and Stress model. As I have argued elsewhere: 'Hall advocated a contradictory mixture of freedom and control: freedom would allow adolescents to discover their potentialities, and control would be necessary to establish order and self-discipline' (Griffin, 1993: 16). For Hall, sexual impulses provided a particular focus for the management of adolescent freedom and control, represented in a specifically gendered and heterosexualized form (Hall, 1904).

The period of adolescence is constituted as an inevitable, biologically-driven conflict between youthful instincts and desires (for sex, rebellion, freedom from adult control) and the need to control such desires. Adults, in the form of parents, teachers, youth workers and employers, should be the first to assert such necessary surveillance and control, but successful socialization into adulthood is characterized by the development of 'appropriate' techniques of *self*-surveillance and *self*-control. Such regimes are familiar from the texts of feminists who have drawn on Foucault's work on the care of the self (e.g. Probyn, 1993). A great deal of feminist work has also examined the damaging implications of regimes of sexualized self-surveillance for women (Bordo, 1993; Winship, 1981).

Battles over freedom and control are to be fought out in the realm of leisure, education, family life, sexuality and waged work, then, but *within* the (gendered, racialized, etc.) adolescent self. Adolescence is represented as a period in which the desire for 'freedom' (especially separation from the family of origin) is seen as inevitable, and 'defiance' is assumed to accompany such inevitable desires almost as a matter of course. Such 'defiance' is viewed through a lens of 'race' and class, however, as well as gender and sexuality. The management of youth/adolescence for young people and for adults is caught in a tension between discourses of freedom and control.

So whilst 'defiance' and 'rebellion' are seen as inevitable consequences of youth, only certain forms of 'defiance' (varying with gender, etc.) will be tolerated. Young people's 'freedoms' and 'rebellions', such as attempts at independence from the family of origin, for example, are bounded by the constraints associated with adult status and adult positions in the production/reproduction/consumption cycle. Such adult positions are fundamentally gendered.

When 'trouble' does occur, in certain historical and political contexts this supposedly inevitable youthful defiance is represented as intolerable and becomes a focus for adult intervention. It is this area of (adult) concern into which the US Specialty Schools and wilderness programmes mentioned at the start of this article aim to intervene. Adverts for such establishments proclaim their intention to help 'bright but unmotivated' and 'out of control teens', and to bring them 'out of their fantasy world and back to reality' (Griffin, 1996). Regimes of (external, adult) control, sometimes called 'therapy' or 'education', move into place. The desired outcome here is the 'learning' of (self-)control by the 'problem teen' in order to bring them back onto the 'right' path towards academic achievement, professional success, family unity, alcohol and drug detoxification, stable heterosexual relationships (especially for young women) and other forms of 'appropriate' behaviour. Key indices of successful treatment might include the cessation of various forms of 'disordered consumption' on the part of the young person, whether of alcohol, drugs or (for young women) sex and/or food. Distinct futures are mapped out as 'appropriate' for different groups of young people, such that what might be seen as quite acceptable for a white middle-class male (university education, professional career, head of nuclear family household in affluent suburb) would definitely not be seen as relevant for his Black, working-class and/or female peers.

'Trouble' from teenagers (for adults) is represented as inevitable ('part of growing up') but only to be tolerated within certain limits bounded in part by discourses of freedom and control. The latter construct a series of impossible contradictions between the inevitable adolescent separation from the family of origin and the need to maintain family unity (and dependence). Such contradictions are played out at the psychological, social, cultural and economic levels. It is this sense of adolescence as a battleground between 'freedom' and 'control' characterized by disordered paths of transition and disordered patterns of consumption that I want to turn to now by considering the particular position(s) of young women within this arena.

Young Women and Consumption: Stories of Desire, Freedom, Surveillance and Control

Debates about consumerism and women's relationship to the circuit of production, reproduction and consumption have undergone a series of shifts since the 1950s. Mainstream British youth research warned against the dangers of 'mass culture' (a US import) luring young people away from traditional British values with a culture of glamour, excitement and novelty (e.g. Veness, 1962; Carter, 1962). For young women, the dangers and thrills associated with such 'mass culture' were located in the realm of the sexual and the domestic, disrupting 'normal' transitions to heterosexual courtship, marriage and motherhood. These assumptions permeated even the apparently more radical field of cultural studies (Hoggart, 1957). Young people, working-class youth and young women were assumed to be most 'at risk' here, more readily duped by those marketing to the new 'teenage consumer' (Abrams, 1959).

The late 1960s onwards have seen a series of increasingly sophisticated subversions of dominant cultural forms and products by various groups of young people in the realms of music, fashion and art, often blurring and transforming the boundaries between passive consumer and active producer of artifacts (Willis *et al.*, 1990). Appropriations and re-appropriations of earlier styles, nostalgia used in a conscious and humorous way, close associations between musical styles, cultural forms and political activities have all appeared (and re-appeared) over the past thirty years or so. Youthful consumption has been represented as passive conformism, creative resistance, selfish desire, an active construction of the self via the body, in complex ways that have moved a long way from the supposedly gullible teenage consumer of the 1950s (Nava, 1992).

As a practice, consumerism is fundamentally gendered, sexualized, class and race-specific. Mica Nava, in her useful review of recent theorizations of consumerism, argues that such theorizations need to be understood in political and intellectual context (Nava, 1992). During the 1950s and 1960s, conservative, Marxist and early feminist critics (e.g. Friedan, 1965) condemned mass consumption in elitist terms, predicating their arguments on the notion of the passive consumer. During the late 1960s and into the 1970s and 1980s, consumption came to be celebrated by radicals as a form of creative appropriation of, even resistance to, dominant 'high' culture. In youth research, the work of Marxists and feminists concerned with youth cultures and subcultures were highly influential (Hall and Jefferson, 1975). The active 'creative' consumers that provided the focus for much of this research tended to be white, male and heterosexual, either middle-class hippies or working-class 'lads' (e.g. Willis, 1978).

Angela McRobbie's work adopted the perspective of young (white, working-class, heterosexual) women in her studies of *Jackie*, the magazine for teenage girls, and of working-class cultures of femininity, which revolved around the girls' bedrooms rather than the street (McRobbie, 1978; McRobbie and Garber 1975). More recent work has exploded that distinction between passive consumer and creative cultural warrior, examining intersections of 'race', class, gender and sexuality in a range of youthful consumption patterns and cultural practices (Jones, 1988; McRobbie, 1989).

Much of this work has focused on the position of young people in general, and young women in particular, as consuming subjects of material goods. Similarly, feminist analyses of women's relation to the production/reproduction/consumption cycle have concentrated on women's positions as consuming, producing and/or reproducing subjects. What I have argued here and elsewhere is that *young* women (and young men) occupy distinct positions as consumers in relation to discourses of freedom and control in the context of the dominant Storm and Stress model of adolescence (cf. Griffin, 1993). For young people, the cycle of production/reproduction/consumption is represented as something to be entered via a series of transitions into a set of subject positions associated with adult status. For young men, the most crucial subject position often revolves around a job, and for young women, their relation to men and family life as wives and mothers will appear as most important (Jones and Wallace, 1992). Recent reductions in youth employment rates, the benefits system and state provision in the fields of housing, health, leisure, education and training have disrupted these moments of transition to a significant extent, and it is no longer clear how useful such conceptualizations are (or were) in relation to young people's experience of 'growing up'.

Disrupted Transitions: Growing Up in the 1990s

Radical and mainstream youth researchers during the 1980s were arguing that young people in many 'advanced' industrialized nations were facing a crisis due to rising levels of youth unemployment, welfare and education cuts, and a variety of cultural and political changes (Griffin, 1993). Paul Willis, for example, argued in 1984 that rising youth unemployment in Britain would (and had already begun to) seriously disrupt crucial transitions from school into the job market and into heterosexual courtship, marriage and parenthood for working-class youth (Willis, 1984). In addition, the growing independence of young women as a consequence of the 'mainstreaming' of feminism has been seen as a contributory element in this respect. Evidence is mixed however, and although increasing

numbers of young single working-class women are becoming pregnant, the proportion of the population marrying has not dropped significantly, although on average people are marrying later and divorcing sooner than they did twenty years ago (Abercrombie *et al.*, 1994). Some groups of young people may appear to be withdrawing from traditional paths into the labour market and married life, although this is scarcely a matter of 'free choice'. Bob Hollands' study of leisure activities in the north-east of England, for example, indicates that in an area of high unemployment, many young heterosexual working-class whites delay the entry to the adult world of marriage and full-time waged work. They scrape together money, continue to live with their parents, and 'go out' at weekends, often in single sex groups, to pubs and clubs in the city centre (Hollands, 1995). Rising unemployment, welfare and education cuts, and over a decade of right-wing government on both sides of the Atlantic have undoubtedly had a disruptive impact on the (never entirely smooth) transition to adulthood. The 1980s and 1990s have been a period of relative crisis for those managing 'troubled teens' through this period of constructed transition.

In Britain, the seeds of such disrupted transitions and a growing sense of adult concern were evident prior to the 1980s: indeed the history of 'adolescence' has been a story of periodic moral panics (Pearson, 1983). Official concern over the possible effects of youth unemployment on the young people concerned and on 'society as a whole' was reflected in the rhetoric behind the various youth training and job creation schemes developed by Jim Callaghan's Labour government during the mid-1970s. Thatcherism brought a sharp rise in youth unemployment levels, especially amongst Black and white working-class youth, and a new set of schemes which included an increasing element of coercion. From the mid-1980s, such concerns coalesced in the context of more widespread anxieties about 'the state of the nation's youth' which was reflected (in different ways) in texts by radical and mainstream youth researchers (Griffin, 1993). Concern focused at first on working-class young people and the possibility of mass withdrawal from the (dwindling) job market, especially amongst young men. Apparent increases in rates of 'teenage pregnancy' provided the focus for concern over the lives of young working-class women (Phoenix, 1990).

Panics over the detrimental impact of Thatcherite policies on young people revolved around their potentially disrupted entry into 'adult' positions within the production/reproduction/consumption cycle. In 1986 for example, sociologists Frank Coffield, Carol Borrill and Sarah Marshall argued that what they termed the 'unofficial, unwritten [social] contract' between young people and society had broken down in most western countries. This state of affairs had been brought about by 'alarming increases' in youth unemployment in the late 1970s and early 1980s

(Coffield *et al.*, 1986: 203). By 'social contract', Coffield and his colleagues meant more than young people's position in the labour market. They also used this term to refer to 'the means whereby society seeks to integrate each new generation of young people into all its essential activities, which include the formation of new families and the raising of children' (1986: 203–4). In this liberal account of young people's entry into the circuit of production, reproduction and consumption, power, poverty and exploitation figure as integral to the analysis. Gender is not ignored as an organizing force in social relations, and positive discrimination for young women and increased participation by young people in policy making are suggested as possible means of forging a new and alternative 'social contract' (Coffield *et al.*, 1986). The aim of this approach is to smooth over and improve disrupted transitions to adulthood for all young people. 'Shit jobs and govvy schemes' might improve, and youth unemployment would decrease dramatically in Coffield's ideal world, but marriage and the institution of heterosexuality would probably remain all but unchanged. Mainstream analyses of this kind, whilst they do recognize the different relationships of young people to the production/reproduction/consumption cycle, still operate with relatively traditional notions of consumption.

As Gill Jones and Clare Wallace have pointed out in their analysis of 'Youth, Family Life and Citizenship', young people are drawn into the consumer market at an increasingly early age (Jones and Wallace, 1992). It is not that children and young people have *no* involvement with the circuit of production/reproduction/consumption. Far from it, they are increasingly likely to be targeted as consumers, as exemplified by recent attempts in Britain to sell new computer technologies (hard- and software) by presenting them as Xmas presents with an 'educational' function for children (usually boys). What is important about youth as an age stage is that it is represented as the moment at which we enter (or are supposed to enter) the cycle of production/reproduction/consumption *as adults*. Jones and Wallace recognize this when they include poverty and homelessness in their analysis of young people's positions as 'consumer citizens'. Such an inclusion is relatively unusual, since considerations of youthful consumption have tended to be shaped by Cohen's work on 'teenage consumers', and by studies on youth cultures and subcultures and from the sociology of leisure. The main focus of such analyses has been the consumption of material goods and services (e.g. clothes, films, music) and the cultural meanings associated with various patterns of consumption (e.g. Hebdige, 1979). If we extend the concept of youthful (and adult) consumption to include poverty and homelessness, it is possible to locate consumption as part of a cycle which incorporates transitions into the (hetero)sexual and marriages marketplace(s) as well as the job market.

The literature on young people and consumption tends to be characterized by debates over whether (different groups of) young people can be viewed as active consumers or relatively passive victims of pressures to consume (Nava, 1992; cf. Miles, 1995). Such debates often founder on questions of representation: who decides that specific consumption patterns and cultural forms are creative, while others collude with market forces? The 1970s and 1980s brought a new perspective to bear on analyses of culture and consumption: ideas derived from post-structuralism and postmodernism. Complexity, fragmentation, multiplicity and transformation were emphasized, and styles, consumption patterns and cultural practices were less securely tied to specific gender, class and ethnic youth groups (Hebdige, 1979).

By the 1990s, it has become less common (and increasingly difficult) to make clear-cut associations between specific groups of young people and particular styles and patterns of material consumption. Rising youth unemployment and increasingly complex global cultures and technological forms have undermined some of the key certainties on which analyses of youth cultural styles were founded. However, young women have always been relatively marginal to these analyses, as have Black youth, young people with disabilities, gay, lesbian and bisexual young people. Just as young women's voices began to be heard in youth research during the 1980s, arguments derived from postmodernism emerged to question some of the founding assumptions about relationships between culture, identity, structure and agency (Griffin, 1993). Feminists working in this area have had to do some hard thinking. How do feminists working as researchers appreciate the complexities and priorities of young people's lives amongst those who have been relatively silenced and marginalized, both with youth research and in society more generally? In a climate where many issues around academic researchers 'speaking for' others are problematized, there are no easy solutions.

Many mainstream youth researchers have shifted their focus as a consequence of rising youth unemployment and other major social and economic changes. Jones and Wallace, for example, use the notion of citizenship to refer to inclusion or exclusion in mainstream adult society, with its associated rights and responsibilities (Jones and Wallace, 1992). The concept of citizenship removes the biological discourse associated with 'adolescence' and therefore with adult status, and it allows us to represent certain young people as positioned on the margins of citizenship, or excluded altogether. Young people with disabilities or mental health problems, young homeless people and the young unemployed are examples of such marginalized groups. Jones and Wallace cite the work of Ruth Lister (1990), who includes young women and others who have not achieved

financial independence in this group that are excluded from full citizenship. For feminists, citizenship can provide a useful means of thinking about differential access to social, economic and political participation, and it may be especially relevant to discourses of youthful 'disaffection' and 'disenfranchisement' (Bhavnani, 1991). The concept of citizenship enables us to think about diverse elements of the consumption/production/reproduction cycle simultaneously.

The notion of citizenship avoids the tendency to construct young people as either active or passive consumers, but it rests on a dominant concept of the 'citizen', which in itself is a product of a precise historical and political moment. Jones and Wallace do not deconstruct the notion of the citizen to any significant extent. The construct of citizenship is also less valuable as a means of understanding social relations around sexuality, which are central to the management of the transition to adulthood and entry to the production/reproduction/consumption cycle for young people – and especially for young women.

Young women who are identified as having 'disordered' patterns of consumption, whether of food, sex, illegal drugs or alcohol, can appear as a particular problem because their path through traditional routes to marriage, motherhood and a job are blocked. Such discourses construct them in an active mode – as 'food refusers' or 'ever-pregnant teens', but also passively – for mixing with a 'bad crowd', or being 'at risk' of getting pregnant (Griffin, 1993). These discourses also represent young women with 'problems' (and *as* problems) through 'disorders' of consumption and reproduction, and this is especially relevant to panics over young single women with children (Phoenix, 1990).

My argument then, is that we need, as feminists, to move from debates over whether young women are oppressed as passive consumers, or whether they have a potential to create new lives and new selves by transforming, appropriating and reappropriating pervasive patterns and modes of consumption. Our concept of consumption needs to include more than material goods and services and the various symbolic meanings associated with particular consumption patterns. The relation of consumption to the (gendered, sexualized and racialized) body and to the self are equally important. Young people's use of substances such as illegal drugs, alcohol, tobacco and food extend the notion of consumption into the domains of health, medicine and therapy. It is important to consider how various groups of young women (and men) are represented in specific contexts as consumers, and especially as disordered consumers, and the ways in which such representations and the associated regimes of management and treatment are gendered, sexualized, racialized and class-specific.

In a recent study of young people's approaches to health, Julia Brannen, Kathryn Dodd, Ann Oakley and Pamela Storey interviewed young people aged 16 and their parents about health-related behaviours, attitudes and negotiations of areas of potential conflict (Brannen *et al.*, 1994). The resulting text operates from the set of discourses described above, although this is scarcely surprising, since the study was funded by the Department of Health based on a research design which reflected 'common sense' assumptions about young people, health, family life and transitions to adulthood. Brannen and her colleagues follow many other academic and policy texts in this field by associating potential 'teenage problems' and 'risky behaviours' (to health in this case) with a set of practices involving consumption: drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes and taking illegal drugs. They also refer to certain forms of sexual behaviour (especially 'unprotected' heterosexual intercourse outside marriage and/or under the legal age of consent) in terms of potential risk – particularly for young women. Sex is part of the transition into adult positions in the production/reproduction/consumption cycle, since in this form it relates both to consumption and reproduction. Young (and not so young) women are items of consumption for young (and not so young) men (Griffin *et al.*, 1982), and part of the 'risk' posed by unprotected heterosexual intercourse for young women is that of pregnancy. In the Brannen *et al.* study, interviews with young people and their parents illustrate the extent to which these 'risky' activities are often the focus of considerable negotiation and conflict in households. It is from this arena of dispute over consumption and the transition to adult status that the US Specialty Schools mentioned at the start of this article emerged as a broader social response to the problem of 'troubled teens'.

Specialty Schools and associated programmes for 'troubled teens' are a distinctly North American (specifically US) phenomenon. They are predominantly residential, fee-paying and frequently recruit their clientele via approaches to affluent parents through advertising. They do not all work closely with the established, accredited and professionally regulated state health care or educational system, although scholarships and state or federal grants are available. There is, of course, a long tradition of sending the children and young people of affluent parents away to school in other industrialized nations: the English public school system is an obvious point of comparison here. Nor is it unusual to view the rural environment as an area imbued with curative properties or potential for the rehabilitation of troubled youthful psyches (Kett, 1977; Gillis, 1974). In contemporary youth work, outdoor activities form a vital element in both more traditional 'character-building' programmes and progressive group-focused schemes (Ford, 1993).

The notion of therapeutic help for young people with 'emotional and behaviour difficulties' is commonplace on both sides of the Atlantic, as are 'remedial' regimes for 'underachieving' youth in the educational domain. In Britain, these systems might focus on working-class and/or Black youth, however, as would correctional institutions for those who truant from school or 'get in trouble' with the police (Griffin, 1993). What is unusual about these US Specialty Schools is the combination of so many key elements of discourses around 'troubled youth' and associated regimes of treatment, rehabilitation, care *and* control (Griffin, 1996).

Summary

How are we to understand these contemporary constructions of young people, and especially young women, in texts from all parts of the political spectrum? Left and Right appear to argue that rising youth unemployment, welfare cuts and myriad cultural and technical changes have disrupted traditional transitions to adulthood, although such developments are greeted in very different ways. If entry to 'adult' positions in the cycle of consumption, production, reproduction and distribution are being disrupted for increasing numbers of young people in the 'First World', especially if they are working-class and/or Black, what are the implications for feminist theories and practices? It is no longer possible to develop simplistic constructions of (certain groups of) young women solely as passive victims of oppression, pushed into heterosexual marriage and/or motherhood, and gullible recipients of a range of products aimed at a young female market. Nor is it possible to portray all young women as in creative resistance against the forces of patriarchal capitalism, or as active consumers asserting their desires and freedoms in an open marketplace.

For many young women (and young men), dominant representations of 'normal' family life appear as pervasive if increasingly distant images, strongly associated with a particular set of consumer goods – including a VCR and a CD player (cf. Wallace, 1987). Their paths to that Shangri-la may be blocked, and the rosy-tinted image may not be accepted so uncritically by many young people. Here, perhaps, we have one source of the recent moral panics over disrupted transitions to adulthood. What if the bait (steady job, nice things, lovely home/car/baby/husband) fails to materialize at all? For many feminists, the 'bait' of heterosexuality, marriage, motherhood and a shit job has never signified much more than a series of traps, but faced with apparently significant disruptions to the circuit of consumption, production, reproduction and distribution, other uncertainties emerge.

Notes

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