JENNY SLATER

5. PLAYING GROWN-UP

Using Critical Disability Perspectives to Rethink Youth

INTRODUCTION

I write this chapter 12 months into my PhD exploring intersections of youth and disability. Based within critical disability studies (CDS), I am using disability as a lens to rethink 'youth'; exploring how discourses 'youth' play-out with those of 'disability,' and visa-versa. My thoughts in this paper are not grounded in empirical fieldwork, but intertwine a year's reading with my own thoughts as a 23-year-old, new-to-the-world-of-research definitely-not-grown-up. The musings presented here reflect this; based upon feelings expressed in a paper I gave when three months into my PhD, they extrapolate the 'youth' dis/abled young people find themselves within. I present the introduction from the original paper here to set the scene.

"Shit, This Is Proper Grown-up Stuff"

Three months ago, after four years as an undergraduate student followed by a long and lazy summer back with my parents, I made the journey to begin my PhD at Manchester Metropolitan University. Before summer, I lived with my big brother; now I have my own flat in a new city. The title of this chapter, 'Playing Grown-up,' reflects a feeling I've had since the move: "shit, this is proper grown-up stuff." It is a phrase that has both crossed my mind and passed my lips on numerous occasions. I make that distinction, between thinking and speaking, because they tell different stories. "Shit, this is proper grown-up stuff" emerges as a thought at times of personal reflection. Alone in my flat, panicking because I can't disable the smoke alarm, or remembering how, as much as I wanted my own place, it was nice to have my brother in the room next door to have whisky-fuelled putting-the-world-to-rights conversations with. It is a reflection of the new, scary bits of my life: moving to a big city where I don't know anyone, living alone for the first time and feeling like a fraud, like I've tricked somebody into letting me do a PhD when I've only just graduated from my undergraduate course. Said aloud, however, it's meant in jest, acting as an icebreaker if I have to reveal my age. The situation I'm in does seem ridiculous, totally surreal. Dr Jen? It's a joke! And, by joking about it, I'm protecting myself, pre-empting what I think you may be thinking – yes, I know I shouldn't really be here, I'm not a real grown-up.

Where am I going with this? There are two points I feel need interrogation. Firstly, when I share this phrase with another person there is no precursor needed,

A. Azzopardi (ed.), Youth: Responding to Lives, 75–91.

there is shared cultural understanding between us of what it means to be 'grown-up.' We both 'get' the joke. Through our laughter, we agree that my current situation is more 'grown-up' than my previous one. Secondly, the phrase reveals my personal insecurities about this 'more grown-up' status. The worry being that others will consider me a fraudulent adult. My new friend and (as I've meticulously worked out through my anxious over-thinking) next youngest PhD student, jovially highlighted that, if everything goes to plan, I will be younger than her current age when I hand in my thesis. Although meant lightly, it did nothing for my adult status. Seeming young (or too young to be doing what I'm doing, perhaps) is my biggest concern when sitting around a table feeling intimidated by clever, academic grown-ups. McRuer (2006) makes the connection between disabled people 'passing' as non-disabled and queer people 'passing' as heterosexual: at the minute, I am feeling the need to 'pass' as adult. If, as is commonly asserted, youth is a time that precedes adulthood (Wyn & White, 1997), there must be certain benchmarks I can meet to prove myself as adult.

I am told grownups start the first year of their PhD with a literature review. Great, starting my literature review (researching around youth) can double as developing my strategy of adulthood deception. Jenny Slater, A.K.A. Hercule Poirot. If while researching literature on youth, I can work out what adults are meant to do and be, I may be able to convincingly fill that role.

Signposting

12 months down the line, I am not sure I feel any more grown-up, but my lack of grown-up-ness is worrying me less. This chapter uses critical reading of literature to think-through s my youth/adult/not-grown-up-enough-to-be-a-PhD-student dilemmas. Although not the sole focus of the chapter, CDS perspectives remain throughout. I have several reasons for using the conceptual lens of disability to critique discourses of youth and adult. Firstly, my own grounding in and passion for CDS, alongside a commitment to fighting for the rights of disabled people. I will argue that as a group wrongly positioned as passive (Hughes, 2001), the current individualistic neoliberal drive could prove particularly harmful to disabled youth. Therefore, there is an urgency to questioning dominant discourses of youth alongside disability. However, considering the lived-realities of other marginalized young people is equally important. If the UK 'riots' of summer 2011 have taught us anything, it is that we need to start listening to young people (Brand, 2011). CDS can help us to begin vital interdisciplinary conversations. As Goodley (2011, 157) writes, "while critical disability studies may start with disability, they never end with it." CDS is an interdisciplinary theoretical endeavour that seeks to capture and interpret the lived experience of disability whilst disturbing traditional conceptions of both dis/ability and, more widely, difference (Campbell, 2009; Goodley, 2011). To consider difference more widely than just disability, CDS demands intersectionality. I therefore take and intersectional, interdisciplinary approach. I conflate literature from Disability Studies, Critical Youth Studies, Youth and Community Work, Critical Psychology and Youth Subcultural Studies.

I begin with a background to developmentalism, theories which continue to dominate our thinking of child, youth and adult (Burman, 2008a, 2008b). As these theories consider adulthood the 'end point' of youth, I argue that theorising adulthood is vital to understand discourses of youth.

Writing from within CDS, Campbell (2009) poses that we think about difference by stepping back from the academic discussion of disability, removing the gaze from the disabled body, to instead focus upon constructions of ability. In my musings over youth and adulthood I remain vigilant to ableism, utilising Campbell's definition ableism as:

> A network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human. Disability then is cast as a diminished state of being human. (Campbell, 2009, p. 44)

Continuing through the paper I argue that "the corporeal standard" (Campbell, 2009, p. 44) body is inherently adult. An ableist perspective is therefore an adultist perspective and an adultist perspective is innately ableist. Conversely, I also find that the corporeal standard adult body must remain 'youthful.' In order to pass as adult, therefore, I must understand what it means to be a youth – taking creed of which parts of 'youth' to keep hold of in my quest to be adult! Having found UK policy-based definitions of youth inconsistent, I turn to consider how youth research has been tackled and socio-cultural discourses which form our conceptions of 'youth.' Exploring this literature alongside media portrayals of young people leads me to develop my own framework for exploring discourses of youth, which I categorise as Youth as Active, Youth for Sale and Youth as Passive. The remainder of the chapter examines these in turn.

(The Tyranny of) Developmentalism

If age is assumed to be a 'biological reality,' youth is a way of constituting a population based upon this 'reality' (Wyn & White, 1997). This was the assumption of developmental psychologists in the 'normative period' of developmentalism (Berk, 2010). Hall in the late nineteenth century grounded studies in evolutionary ideas, generating norms and averages which he claimed represented 'typical development' (Berk, 2010; Burman, 2008a). Hall developed the 'storm and stress' model of adolescence. Attempting to explain the (continually) prevailing view of young people as rebellious and irresponsible (Wyn & White, 1997) he argued adolescence is a period of neurological turbulence which paralleled human 'development' from 'savages' into 'civilised beings' (Berk, 2010). Piaget took a similarly homogeneous view in the 1930s: his cognitive-development theory suggested a set of universal problem-solving stages which children pass through as they mature to adulthood.

It is easy to criticise such theories from CDS perspectives: with an assumption of a 'norm' we oust those that do not fit. Wyn and White (1997) highlight the conception of 'youth' as a homogeneous group has been troubled by youth

researchers periodically (yet sporadically) over the last 40 years. Allen in 1968, for example, argued 'youth' is a result of social, cultural, political and historical relations rather than any 'biological reality.' It would be fictitious to write that developmentalists take a purely biological stance. Piaget saw human adaptation to environments as key to development, and the nature/nurture question is a classic illustration of biology/society debates. Furthermore, Berk (2010, p. 7) highlights that although the majority of early twentieth century developmentalists focused on the time preceding adulthood, more recently a lifespan perspective is taken. Development is considered a continual process, not ending at 'adult,' and multiple and diverse trajectories, influenced by both hereditary and environmental factors, are allowed for. Despite this, there remains an overriding assumption that development has "universal features" (Berk, 2010, p. 7) and the job of the developmentalist is unchanged: how to "best describe the differences in capacitates among infants, children, adolescents and adults" (Berk, 2010, p. 6).

Ideas from developmentalism influence day-to-day living to become 'common-sense knowledge' (Burman, 2008a). Although there is acceptance of diversity within age-groups, we implicitly associate certain characteristics with particular ages (Berk, 2010; James, 2000). Furthermore, although there an individualistic discourse of young people making their own future decisions, in reality, the choices on offer are limited – and more limited for some than others (Facer, 2011; Hicks, 2002; Kelly, 2006). Wyn and White summarise transition as follows:

> The concept of transition, which has the imagery of process, fluidity and change, has been harnessed to a static, categorical notion of youth. Hence, although we appear to be dealing with a concept which has change and process at its centre, it offers instead a perspective on youth as a steady progression through identifiable and predictable stages, to a set end point: adulthood. (Wyn & White, 1997, p. 94)

This 'harnessed' concept of transition is linked intrinsically with development. Development theory, argues Burman (2008b, p. 35), "makes assumptions about who is more/less developed," whether in terms of individuals meeting certain benchmarks or when considering larger scale phenomena, such as global systems (the terms more or less economically developed countries illustrate this). Development is about change, but changing in the 'right' way. Development is directional. To develop is to progress. The offshoot of this is that development is based upon norms and, as Burman (2008b) points out, allows for slippages: from young person to young people; from the way it is, to the way it has to or should be. Considering youth as transient is to consider young people as less-than-adult, focusing on futures rather than here-and-now experiences. It sees adulthood as the full stop at the end of youth.

Defining Youth in the UK

If youth is about becoming adult, at what (st)age does one leave youth and enter adulthood? A definition of 'youth' could help me 'pass' as adult. Let me return to

my own situation. As a 23-year-old in the UK, although I would have access to some schemes aimed at 'young people,' legally, I left childhood and became an adult five years ago. Policy-based definitions of 'young person' are inconsistent, spanning the legal definitions of child and adult. Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2011) highlight that government definitions of 'child' are not straight forward either: the mother of a 'disabled child' hoping to access services may find their 'disabled child' is neither 'disabled' nor a 'child' in one service, yet fulfils both definitions of another. Leaving childhood and entering adulthood is more complicated than reaching 18. To date, I have failed to find a universal government definition of young person. According to the UK's DirectGov (2011) website (which compiles information on government public services):

- Since being 20, I have been too old to contact a Connexions Advisor offering "information, advice and support on a range of issues affecting young people."
- I would have to be between 13 and 18 to take part in the UK Youth Parliament.
- If I was unemployed, I would be in the bracket of young people, aged 18-24, to be referred to the government's 'Work Programme' after nine months, rather than the statutory12 months for over 25.
- Until scrapped in March 2010, I was able to access subsidised theatre tickets for 'young people' under 26.
- Since 16, I have been eligible for discounted train fares, and will be until my 26th birthday.

It seems that there is no longer an assumption in government policy that children and young people's needs slot into age brackets: the Kennedy review of NHS services recommended a move away from offering services based upon birthdays to one based upon individual needs (Department of Health, 2010). Policy makers proclaim that youth is not age-bound, but a stage of life. Nevertheless, there is expected correlation between the two. One of my first Manchester discoveries was a coffee shop with free-refills near my flat. The same place had also been discovered by a group of new mums who ambled in with their pushchairs to talk 'baby.' It did not take very much eavesdropping to realise that these women were more than aware of the targets their babies 'should' be hitting (Piaget's theory in action on the streets – or in leafy suburban coffee shops, at least). With young people, the targets are not handed out in medical literature, but implicit cultural expectations. Your aim, hooded youth, is to reach adulthood.

Hitting the Benchmarks of Adulthood

How will I know when I have reached adulthood? For me to 'pass' as grown-up it is essential I find out the benchmarks I must meet. Even if I am legally an adult, I need to pass culturally as well. Gordon and Lahelma (2002, p. 2) tell us that, "constructions of adulthood emphasise independence, achieved through separation from parents, financial self-sufficiency and established heterosexual relations." Some of these things I recognise: my own flat, independence; a regular income, financial self-sufficiency. But wait: I should not be speaking to my Mum every day, my emotional attachments should have moved on to a male partner (the

heterosexual expectation). That is the first thing to remember: do not let on about the daily calls to mum, sort out a male partner instead, and then I will be a proper grown-up.

Following Gordon and Lahelma (2002), maybe my task is do-able. However, continuing my literature review/undercover mission of personal deception I realised that it was not going to be that simple: adulthood seems a contradictory place to be. Furthermore, as my reading became interdisciplinary, I saw that although 'adulthood' may not be referred to, it is often the unspoken assumption (the subject is assumed to be adult). Therefore, when Giroux (2009) talks of the neoliberal, and Erevelles (2002) the humanist subject; when Shildrick (2009) writes about the autonomous and Kelly (2006) the neoliberal self; when some within CDS reject the able and recast the temporarily able-body (McRuer, 2006); they are all speaking of what those within development/youth/psychology simply call (normative) adulthood (Burman, 2008b; Wyn & White, 1997). Amalgamating the criteria from these various disciplines, I found that to pass as adult I need to be:

Autonomous Independent Sovereign	(Burman, 2008b; Davis, 2002; Erevelles, 2002; Giroux, 2009; Gordon & Lahelma, 2002; Kelly, 2006; McRuer, 2006; Shildrick, 2009; Wyn & White, 1997, 2000)
Compromising Conservative Moderate Rational Silent	(Allen, 1968; Burman, 2008b; Davis, 2002; Erevelles, 2002)
Entrepreneurial Financially self-sufficient Employed	(Giroux, 2009; Gordon & Lahelma, 2002; Kelly, 2006)
Responsible Resolved Stable Unified Whole	(Blatterer, 2010; Erevelles, 2002; Kelly, 2006)
Coherent	(Erevelles, 2002)
Cognitively Stable Knowing Knowledgeable Worldly	(Burman, 2008b; Wyn & White, 1997)
Powerful Strong	(Burman, 2008b; Wyn & White, 1997)
Authoritative Respected	(Burman, 2008b; Wyn & White, 1997)
Masculine	(Burman, 2008b)
Fluid	(McRuer, 2006; Wyn & White, 2000)
Youthful	(Blatterer, 2010; Priestley, 2003; Wyn & White, 2000)

Figure 1. Signifiers of adulthood

This perhaps explains some of my reasons for feeling the need to pass as adult; to be grown-up, is to hold authority and respect; to be taken seriously (Burman, 2008b; Wyn & White, 1997). It is not going to be an easy task though; McRuer (2006, p. 9) writes that "the ideal, able-bodied identity can never, once and for all, be achieved." Assuming that the ideal 'able-bodied' identity would also be adult, in light of the above, I tend to agree with McRuer. For me, perhaps the most obvious issue is my gender. For disabled young people that find themselves in my 'trying-to-be-a-grown-up' predicament, the task is a greater one; adulthood is wrapped up in ableist ideals: independence valued over interdependence; an emphasis on financial self-sufficiency; discourses of strength, power and wholeness. The final criteria also put me in a slight quandary, whilst trying to be grown-up I also have to be youthful. Blatterer (2010, p. 74) explains this, writing that "youth as a value is today replacing adulthood as a category," meaning, "the ideal is to be adult and youthful but not adolescent" (p. 69).The situation gets more complicated; to pass as adult I must hold on to some bits of youth but discard others. To figure out how to be grown-up, I need to know what we mean when talking about 'youth.' If there is no age-bound definition to help me, and the developmental argument does not sit, my search must consider cultural constructions surrounding 'youth.'

My detective work continues.

Conceptualising Youth

So far, 'youth' has only been defined by 'what it is not': i.e. not-adult; i.e. not in possession of the things in the above table. This definition is unsatisfactory in many ways, but particularly when we consider that 'youthfulness' is a valued attribute of adulthood. Priestley (2003) identifies three alternative approaches to researching youth. All lay outside of development psychology (though are undoubtedly influenced by it) and place youth within social contexts. Firstly, youth as a cultural category considers youth alongside cycles of production and consumption. Youth Subcultural Studies, predominant in the 1960s and 1970s, took this approach, considering young people as active consumers shaping markets, and constructed youth as a time for testing boundaries and forming identities (see, for example, Bennett, 2008; Hall & Jefferson, 2006b; Hodkinson, 2008; Hodkinson & Deicke, 2008; McRobbie, 1982). Second is a modernist approach (France, 2007) defining youth as a stage of life associated with particular social processes; a time prior to working life. This approach arose as industrialisation led to increased institutionalisation and Priestley is not alone when he highlights that it was more appropriate in immediate post-war years when there were clearer coming-of-age signifiers, such as marriage, more distinct boundaries between education and work, and it was likely one would remain in a job for life (see also, Blatterer, 2010; Wyn & White, 1997). Analysing today's young people from this perspective has left theorists attempting to map extended, complex transitions. The term 'boomerang transition' has been used to describe how a young person might move in and out with their parents on numerous occasions,

and ‘emerging adulthood’ describes yet another life-stage, that between adolescence and full adult status (Berk, 2010; Blatterer, 2010).

From the above, we see ‘transition’ has multiple meanings. Transition can refer to: a cultural transition, where young people leave behind the cultural positioning of child/young person by meeting the discursive signifiers of adult; a legal transition, where young people gain adult ‘rights and responsibilities’ such as being granted suffrage and held legally responsible for law breaking; and, particularly relevant to disabled young people, a transition from children’s to adult’s services (Morris, 1999). Whatever the meaning, adulthood is the full stop at the end of youth. The third approach Priestly (2003) highlights, however, looks at youth differently: relating ‘youthfulness’ with bodily perfection. Again, youth and time are inextricably linked, however, whereas with the first two approaches the emphasis is on reaching adulthood, a culture striving for ‘eternal youth’ conceptualises youth as a valued attribute of adulthood. “Although when discussed explicitly youth is about transience, when discursively, perhaps implicitly used, youth is about the desire to pause time” (Slater, 2012a, p. 2).

The meaning of youth is more complicated than an age-bound category: it has been abstracted from the lived-realities of young people’s lives (Bennett, 2008). Media messages are similarly inharmonious: young people are either risky and rebellious or passive and unproductive. Whichever way, we want to get them to adulthood, and fast. At the same time we are constantly reminded whatever our age of the expectation to remain ‘youthful’ by buying cosmetic products (Davis, 2002; Giroux, 2009). To explore youth further I will refer to these depictions as Youth as Active, Youth as Passive and Youth for Sale. Certain research approaches trend towards particular depictions of young people. When considering youth as a cultural category, for example, young people are considered to be actively striving for an adult identity: they are active youth, i.e. active ‘becoming-adults.’ Considering youth alongside institutional structures and processes, however, constructs young people as passively moving from one service to another; pawns in a production process carving suitable adult citizens. They are passive youth, i.e. passive ‘adults-to-be.’ Research around the youth-thing of the beauty industry predominantly takes a feminist standpoint, criticising pressure put on women to retain youthful looks, but rarely engaging with the complexity of meanings we attribute to youth. Youth is simply the (abstracted) product to be critiqued, i.e. youth is for sale (see Slater, 2012a, for a more detailed account of Youth for Sale). Over the remainder of the chapter I will consider each construction in turn alongside popular media messages we are delivered about ‘youth.’ A CDS lens will help me critique each depiction. Figure 2 below offers a visual representation of this framework.

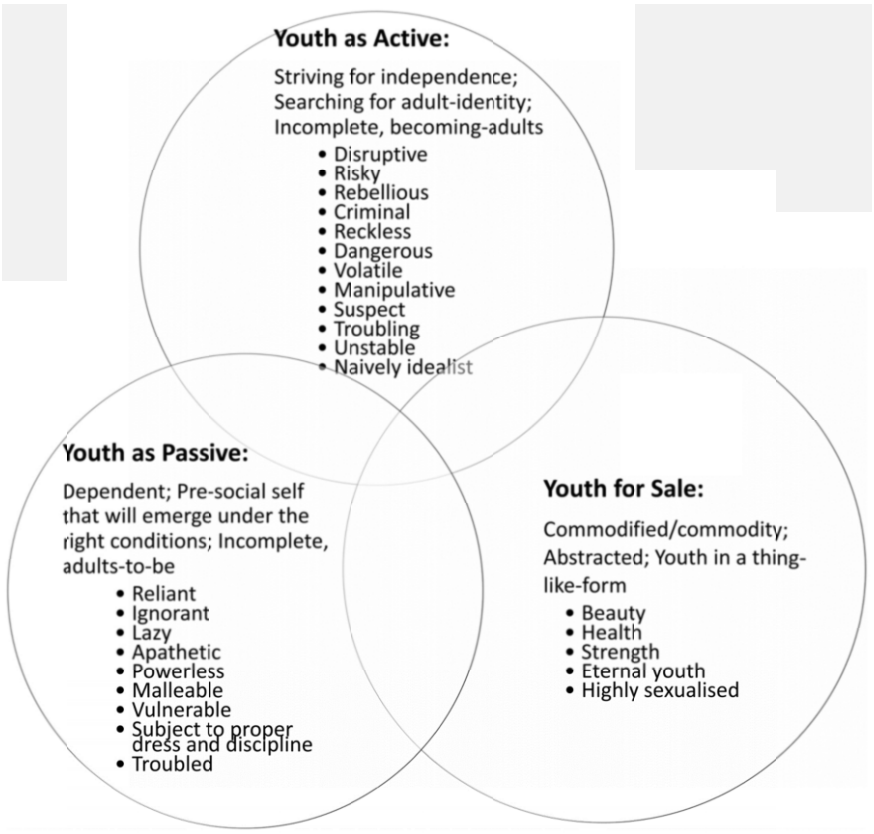

Figure 2. Youth as Active, Youth for Sale, Youth as Passive

YOUTH AS ACTIVE, YOUTH FOR SALE, YOUTH AS PASSIVE

Youth as Active

Youth as Active and Youth as Passive both begin from the assumption that young people are incomplete adults. I have distinguished, however, between young people as passive adults-to-be and active becoming-adults. Becoming-adults leads to the assumption that young people are actively seeking a) an adult identity and b) independence. Youth work literature trends towards this approach. Government policy is surrounded with rhetoric of consulting with young people (Department of Children School and Families, 2007), encouraging young people to actively engage with services and politics, and youth workers expected to act within this policy (Wood, 2010). However, it is only ok for young people to be active if they are active in the right 'adult' way (Slater, 2012b; Wood, 2010). Consider UK student

anti-cuts demonstrations in 2010 which saw hundreds of thousands of young people rally to oppose cuts to education. Rather than celebrate young people's political engagement, media attention soon rebranded demonstrations as 'riots' (McSmith, Garner, Wright, & Gonsalves, 2010). Furthermore, the individualistic media response to the UK's 'riots' in August 2011 deemed young people criminals, rather than seeing a group frustrated and let down by political systems (Brand, 2011). Although government rhetoric wants to consult with young people, these consultations are searching for particular answers. We do not want our young people to be too active. Although we may consider youth as active, we do not consider youth as rational, as, to be rational, one must be adult. Therefore, active youth without adult mediation leads to disruptive, risky, rebellious, scary, criminal, reckless, dangerous, volatile, manipulative, suspect, troubling, unstable, and, in terms of politics, naively idealist young people (Allen, 1968; Giroux, 2009; Kelly, 2003, 2006; Priestley, 2003; Slater, 2012b; Wyn & White, 1997).

Disabled young people are rarely positioned as active youth (see Slater 2012b for an analysis of youth and disability in relation to student protests). However, if we look discursively at associations made with disability, parallels can be drawn. Davis (2002) writes that whilst the normative body is silent and moderate, an ill body is equated with excess and excitement, either hypo or hyper, leading to connotations of noise, attention, irritation and stimulation. Similarly, Shildrick (2009) highlights that the 'able-body' is unspoken, almost redundant and only considered if in some way 'different' to the pseudo-norm. Those that are 'differently embodied' are judged as morally-deficient (Garland-Thomson, 2002). Similar assumptions are made of young people: 'hoodie' acting as a synonym for young person. According to Erevelles (2002) disability is associated with incoherence. Again, an association that can be linked with both passive and active youth: 'text talk,' 'new-fangled' language and teenage 'grunting.' Youth and disability both linked with deviation. Furthermore, in the same way that the non-disabled body is implicit, something McRuer (2006) calls compulsory able-bodiedness, adulthood is an area that there has been little attempt to theorise (Blatterer, 2010). Although we link youth with becoming-adult, what we mean by adult has become an implicit belief that is crying out for interrogation. Therefore, similarly to Campbell's (2009) reasons for theorising the 'able-body,' theorising adulthood seems key to theorising youth. When we think about the ableism inherent to adulthood, we see this is particularly pertinent to disabled youth.

Youth Subcultural Studies has been accredited with carving positive pictures of active young people (Hodkinson, 2008). The 1950s and 60s for the first time saw young people in possession of disposable incomes, resulting in the development of youth markets. Youth Subcultural Studies looked at youth cultures developing from these markets alongside cycles of production and consumption: positioning youth as active, discerning consumers, re-appropriating market commodities. Ethnographic research concerned the lives of young people engaged in 'deviant' subcultural activity, often based around particular tastes in style and music – mods, punks, and so on. Rather than conceptualise deviance as implicitly negative, the result of psychological deficiency, Youth Subcultural Studies conceptualised

deviant youth behaviour as a metaphor of wider social change: simultaneously acting within, reflecting and challenging political landscapes (Hall & Jefferson, 2006a). By the 1980s, however, the discipline was criticised for only engaging with public, spectacular accounts of male youth – ignoring more private accounts of young women. As McRobbie (1980, p. 41) succinctly puts it, "few writers seemed interested in what happened when a mod went home after a weekend on speed. Only what happened on the streets mattered." Feminist scholars have addressed this, and other intersections of race and sexuality have also been considered (Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005). Disability, however, is rarely mentioned (Butler, 1998).

Priestley (2003) is not alone in highlighting the barriers disabled young people may face to youth cultures (see also Hughes, Russell, & Paterson, 2005). I do not dismiss this, however, I am wary of relegating disabled young people to the realms of passivity. A lack of engagement between youth cultural studies and CDS should not assume a lack of participation of disabled young people in youth cultures. It is also interesting to consider the discursive positioning of disability in relation to subcultures. Scholars have noted the subcultural use of the freak spectacle, particularly within rock music (Church, 2006). If Youth Subcultural Studies offers the most spectacular accounts of youth, freak shows arguably offer the most spectacular accounts of disability. Again, we see the linking of deviance with youth and disability: a notion that could prove problematic if linked to individual psychology. However, as Youth Subcultural Studies has framed deviance as resistance to political hegemony, I can see positive, queering potential in this relationship.

Youth for Sale

Considering youth alongside cycles of production and consumption, Youth Subcultural Studies overlaps Youth as Active and Youth for Sale. Recent postmodern discussions from the discipline have reassessed the term 'youth cultures,' deeming it empirically inaccurate – unrepresentative of cultures bought into cross-generationally (Bennett, 2008; Sweetman, 2001). Bennett (2008) writes that "the 'reality' of youth is being constructed for us, and for young people themselves, by empowered 'outsiders' – journalists and other social observers with access to 'official' and 'authenticating' channels of the media who use this power to express a particular point of view" (Bennett, 2008, 30). As well as reasserting the argument I make throughout this paper – that discourses of youth do not represent lived realities of young people's lives – Bennett also highlights that signifiers of youth are no longer age-bound, but available for cross-generational consumption. Working from within cultural studies, Bennett writes of buying into youth cultures as a way of feeling, rather than a way of being. A night at a gig, for example, allowing cross-generational access to a sense of fast living and freedom associated with youth culture. Cultures that perhaps choose to link themselves with the freak spectacle, and therefore disability (Church, 2006; Waltz & James, 2009).

Hughes et al. (2005) warn us that "youth and its signifiers will sell, disability will not!" Here, Hughes and his colleagues are considering the equating of youth with another side of Youth for Sale: beauty, health, strength, energy and sexualisation (Heiss, 2011; Slater, 2012a). Beginning with the assumption that the body is discursive and culturally ascribed with meaning, feminist scholars have critiqued notions of the ideal body, highlighting that the ideal body is always young (Heiss, 2011). This does not mean, however, that the young body is always ideal. The body of a young disabled person, for example, may not meet normative conventions of ideal beauty (Slater, 2012a). A feminist-disability perspective adds depth to an exploration of bodily perfection. Disability, traditionally paired with asexuality (Garland-Thomson, 2002), does not immediately sit with sexy signifiers of youth. If these are the youthful aspects I am meant to be keeping hold of in my drive for grown-up-dom, the ableism surrounding adulthood is once again highlighted. Furthermore, although there is an infantisantilisation of disabled people, the commodification of youth perhaps ensures those 'differently embodied' remain outside the realm of 'the beautiful.' Such commodification arguably ousts all empirically young people, as it is only ok to hold these sexy signifiers of youth if one is adult enough. The sexualisation of youth seems to span passive, active and commodified youth. Young people, on the one hand, passively in need of protection from adult fetishisation (Criminal Records Bureau vetting procedures – a police check required in the UK to work with children and other groups deemed 'vulnerable' – illustrate this).On the other, actively and problematically highly sexualised and sexually driven. Whilst at the same time promoted and commodified as sexually desirable. Shildrick (2009, p. 60) highlights the similar complexities of discourses around sexuality and disability: disabled people simultaneously construed as asexual yet fetishised (see Horgan, 2003, for young disabled people's views on disabled youth's positioning in regards to sexuality).

Davis (2002) takes a cultural disability studies stance to sum up our strife for eternal youth in his discussion of care of the body. Care of the body involves the consumption of vast numbers of products without which we are incomplete. He argues that buying into the cosmetic industry has become a requirement of citizenship. Giroux (2009) makes similar arguments specifically in relation to the commodification of youth. Referring to the biopolitics of commodification, he argues that at best young people are useful consumers, at worst, they are a threat. The power of consumption strengthens the discourse of individualism; it is not that you merely want something, it is that you need it, as without it, without being a consumer, you cannot be a citizen. Failed consumers become part of the disposable population. Arguably, passive youth could fit into this bracket of failed consumer.

Youth as Passive

Youth as Passive is arguably the approach that most research concerning disabled young people takes. It considers young people as adults-to-be, taking a structural approach to conceptualising youth. Young people are pawns in a process, being passed from one service to another (France, 2007; Priestley, 2003). Wyn and White

(1997) highlight that this approach considers pre-social young people that, given the right conditions, can be shaped to become 'suitable adult-citizens.' On one level, this leaves society with responsibility towards a supposedly powerless and vulnerable group. However, it also leads to the less paternalistic and more demonising depiction of lazy, ignorant and apathetic young people. The 'teenage slob' presents a problem to neoliberal ideals, as not acting poses as a challenge to the pedestalled competitive, entrepreneurial subject (Stevenson, 2011). A passive generation, however, also means a malleable generation, and the negative portrayal of apathy legitimises the 'need' for adult, often professional intervention to carve young people into active independent citizens valued in a neoliberal society (Kelly, 2006).

Kelly (2006) argues that those least likely to meet the neoliberal ideal are labelled 'youth-at-risk.' For some 'at-risk' groups (here I would put working class youth and black boys, for example), the perceived 'risk' is that they are too active (again, see media coverage of the UK's 2011 'riots'). For disabled young people, however, the perceived 'risk' they present is passivity (Slater, 2012b). As Priestly (2003) highlights, leisure opportunities for disabled young people often focus on preparing for a 'meaningful' life without work. In criticising service provision, however, it is important to tread carefully: at the time of writing UK welfare services are facing massive cuts, which will undoubtedly affect young and disabled people and I am wary of not adding to government ammunition. The depiction of disabled people as passive, dependent and a drain on resources proved particularly dangerous at the time of the eugenics movements, and the UK government is today painting a similar depiction to justify their destruction of the welfare state (Garthwaite, 2011; Hawkins, 2011).

Here Giroux's (2009) engagement with the biopolitics of commodification becomes relevant; although speaking in an American context, his arguments resonate scarily closely with welfare-cutting Britain. Giroux (2009, 31) cites Bauman when he writes, "in the society of consumers no one can become a subject without first turning into a commodity." A commodity must be flexible enough to be remarketed in order to avoid disposal. If youth has been commodified, idealised and made into a sellable thing, it is also disposable. A market commodity has to be flexible (we see this in our signifiers of adulthood) and able to remarket itself in order to remain sellable. Left in the realms of passive youth, it is easy to see how disabled people would fall into the disposable population of 'failed consumers.' Although I strongly contest that disabled young people are passive, the construction of disabled people as passive is used to legitimise welfare cuts (Garthwaite, 2011) which ironically carry with them an increasingly penetrating welfare gaze (Shildrick, 1997). Furthermore, considering disabled youth as passive, furthers arguably well-meaning paternalistic, 'it's-for-their-own-good' attitudes that restrict and oppress disabled people, particularly those with the label of intellectual disability.

CONCLUSION

Through the Youth as Active, Youth for Sale, Youth as Passive framework, I have outlined some contradictory discourses of youth which I argue result from the positioning of young people in relation to an imagined adult norm. I began the paper trying to convince you of my grownup status. However, after fretting over passing as adult, I have decided that I do not want to after all. So, I am 'coming-out.' It seems more fun to be excitable, attention-seeking and irritating than silent, moderate and conservative. I have used CDS perspectives to highlight that unquestioned discourses of adulthood normativity are particularly harmful to disabled youth. Therefore, highlighting rather than masking my failure to embody adulthood ideals seems important to establish a solidarity politics of youth. Butler (1993) distinguishes between being virtually queer, "which would be experienced by anyone who failed to perform heterosexuality without contradiction and incoherence (i.e., everyone)" (McRuer, 2006, 30), and critically queer, which would mean "working to the weakness in the norm," using the inevitable failure to meet up to this 'ideal' as a way of mobilising. McRuer (2006, 30) draws on this to distinguish between being virtually disabled and, what he terms, "severely disabled":

> Everyone is virtually disabled, both in the sense that able-bodied norms are "intrinsically impossible to embody" fully and in the sense that able-bodied status is always temporary […]. What we might call a critically disabled position, however, would differ from such a virtually disabled position; it would call attention to the ways in which the disability rights movement and disability studies have resisted the demands of compulsory able-bodiedness and have demanded access to a newly imagined and newly configured public sphere where full participation is not continent on an able body.
>
> We might, in fact, extend the concept and see such a perspective not as critically disabled but as severely disabled, with severe performing work similar to the critically queer work of fabulous. (McRuer, 2006, p. 30)

Like McRuer (2006) argues in reference to disability, I argue the impossibility of embodying normative adulthood. I therefore offer a critically young positionality. Although I, like everybody else, may be becoming (Shildrick, 2009), I am not becoming-adult. Rather, I argue my becoming both inside and outside of academia involves becoming critically young. I do this through an ongoing process of critical interdisciplinary engagement and self-reflection (as demonstrated in this paper). To be critically young is to be vigilant to and consciously work against adulthood normativity. To use the inevitable failure to meet up to adulthood normativity as a way of mobilising. Adulthood is an inherently ableist and hetronormative concept. Being critically young therefore requires us to be both critically queer and severely disabled.

Developmental discourse is a stark example of largely unquestioned discourses of normalcy, which restrict many more than just disabled youth (Burman, 2008a, 2008b). I believe, however, that CDS and the lived-experiences of young disabled

people can help us to question these dangerously engrained norms (Michalko, 2010). Beginning, though never ending with disability and the embodied-lived experiences of disabled youth (Goodley, 2011, p. 157) can help us to consider complex and contradictory discursive constructs which surround youth and adulthood. Listening carefully to those at the margins allows us to explore interconnections of social policies and broad regimes of social inclusion/exclusion (Shildrick, 2004). One result perhaps being, that we can all be freed from the pressure to 'play grownup.'

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Jenny Slater
Department of Education, Childhood and Inclusion
Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, UK