Youth transitions in supported accommodation: exploring the possibilities of being ‘in-between’

Emma Thorpe, PhD candidate
Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, Coventry University

Research context
Young people’s transitions from childhood to adulthood are fraught with contradictions and seemingly restricted by complex social systems of power. Young people from low socio-economic backgrounds are particularly impacted by this through having less access to resources that assist in making ‘successful’ and faster transitions to adulthood. As a consequence they are more likely to experience negative impacts upon material, physical and mental wellbeing (Young Women’s Trust, 2016). In addition, mainstream youth work has arguably become increasingly controlled by the state, with little space for critical practice (Cooper, 2012). With this background, the research considers how young people experience and make sense of being ‘in transition’, and whether their position as ‘in-between’ offers possibilities for thinking critically about the structures that surround their experiences.

Research Aim
To explore how a group of young people experience and make sense of being ‘in transition’ to adulthood in the age of neoliberalism.

• To consider whether being ‘in transition’ provides a space in which processes of critical consciousness are possible.
• To identify ways in which practitioners could improve working practices to help young people through these transitions.

Theoretical framework

Applying Bourdieu’s theories to help illustrate both the constraining and dynamic structure of social reality (Mills, 2008).

• Habitus: socialised norms that guide behaviour and thought.
• Capital: cultural, social, symbolic – means by which power relations are maintained in society.
• Field: social/institutional spaces in which capital is distributed and reproduced.

Using the concept of Liminality to position young people who are ‘in transition’. A state of ‘in-between-ness’ experienced by those on the threshold of structural classifications (Turner, 1974). Space of ambiguity, liberation from social obligations and possibility?

Considering the possibility of Critical consciousness: a process in which “normal” thinking is interrupted, and what is accepted as common sense is questioned and exposed.

Questions
• Can instances of critical reflexivity be observed in the everyday lives and experiences of young people who are ‘in transition’?
• How can we as researchers, practitioners and policy makers engage with young people who are in transition to foster critical reflexivity?

Methods and data collection
• Ethnographic research carried out in a supported accommodation project in a post-industrial Midlands city inner suburb.
• Data collected between July 2016 and April 2017.
• Participants included 23 young people aged 18-24 currently residents in the supported accommodation project, former residents, and youth practitioners.
• Methods of data collection:
  • Participant observation and field notes
  • Participatory and creative activities
  • Semi-structured interviews
  • Group discussions

Contact details
Email: ridleye@uni.coventry.ac.uk
07450041650