Young People, Risk Taking and Risk Making: Perspectives for Social Work

Young people in late modernity are configured both as our most precious unit of investment in the future, and as endangered and dangerous. Youth at risk, and the imperatives to monitor, contain and sustain them in the transition to adulthood and good citizenship, have come to the fore on multiple academic, professional and public agendas.

Within the domains of social work policy, practice and academic discourse, however, there are noteworthy ambivalences and disjunctures in the framing of young people and risk-taking. In recent neo-liberal policy developments, for example, the troublesome youngster displaces the troubled from centre stage. But mainstream academic social work has had relatively little to say, either about the category of risk-taking youth, or by way of critique of current policy representations. This paper explores research-based and theoretical constructs of agency, identity and development to inform and critique social work regulatory practices with young people and risk- taking.

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