

Adults Only

A genealogy of the politics of (not)Adult

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Certificate of Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

The problem of policing the discursive boundaries of what I describe as “(not)Adults” has been the subject of significant analysis in public policy and research since G. Stanley Hall (1904) first coined the term “adolescent” at the turn of the twentieth century. Much of the theorising of youth within youth studies and public policy on youth that have followed Hall has assumed unchallenged commonsense notions around what it is to be an authentic young person and what it is to be an authentic adult. These assumptions have contributed to the co-construction of particular, limited and often pathologised versions of young people.

However, in more recent times within the field of youth studies, following on from the work of Foucault on power/knowledge, these assumptions have begun to be challenged. This thesis takes up this challenge and contributes to this new thinking by drawing on Foucault’s governmentality, discourse and subjectivity to consider the conduct of conduct, in relation to the practices of working youth and the work of positioning young people as (not)Adults. To do this, a method of genealogy is utilised to explore the history of four discourses that contribute to the politics of the formation of (not)Adult subjectivity. These discourses are examined in relation to a range of historical texts and artefacts, philosophical texts, the narrative of the history of childhood, 19th century self help manuals and advice pamphlets for good parenting, research on adolescent development and media articles. The discourses are then examined in relation to the practical world of youth work, against texts such as minutes, training manuals, reports, photographs, workshop notes, email, written correspondence and reflections by youth workers. The purpose of this genealogical exploration is to open up the notion of “discursive literacies” and also to contribute to the ever-growing body of Foucauldian work in the field of youth work. The task is not to define what is the right way to do youth work or to be captured by the politics of exclusion, but instead it is to open up the discourses in order to consider what other ways of working (not)Adults are possible.