

Ageism in Youth Studies

Ageism in Youth Studies:

Generation Maligned

By

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Photographs by the author, including the cover photo taken during Tahrir Square demonstrations in Cairo, July 2011.

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OTHER BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR

50/50 Marriage (Beacon Press)

50/50 Parenting (Lexington Books)

Editor, *Women's Culture* (Scarecrow Press)

Editor, *Women's Culture Revisited* (Scarecrow Press)

The Religious Ideas of Harriet Beecher Stowe (Edwin Mellen Press)

Essential Energy Tools book and 3 videos (Equality Press)

21st Century Families: Blueprints for Family-Friendly Workplaces,

Schools and Governments (Equality Press)

The Teen Trip: The Complete Resource Guide (Equality Press)

Editor, *Everything You Need to Know to Succeed After College* (Equality Press)

How to Survive Your Parents' Divorce (Equality Press)

Editor, *Quick Healthy Recipes: Literacy Fundraiser* (Equality Press)

Your Mindful Guide to Academic Success: Beat Burnout (Equality Press)

Global Youth Values Transforming Our Future (Cambridge Scholars Publishing)

In Process:

Global Youth Activism: The Wave of Uprisings Since 2011

Brave: The Global Girls' Revolution

Tactics and Goals for Changemaking

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Young people critique all my books about global youth. Thanks to engineering student Kevin Sugia for his editorial comments and gratitude to Professor Namita Ranganathan and Dr. Vikas Baniwal for providing insightful editorial suggestions.

INTRODUCTION

While researching Generations Y and Z for the past decade for a book series about global youth activism and viewpoints, I discovered a split between scholarly viewpoints about Gen Me vs. Gen We. Some researchers fault youth for being narcissists and others praise them for being altruistic. I was surprised that many scholars who write about youth don't actually talk to them or include their voices when young people face difficult economic challenges globally, with high youth unemployment rates and increasing tuition costs. It's easier to blame the victim than the economic system that generates more and more inequality, just as teachers get blamed for structural problems in the education system. *Ageism in Youth Studies: Generation Maligned* exposes how authors ignore youth, disparage them, and fault them for being anxious, depressed and narcissistic without pressing for change in the economic system that harms them. Youth are the best-educated generation ever, an altruistic group that cares about global problems. They should be viewed as a resource in the present, as they are in Nordic countries, rather than as a source of trouble.

Scholars falsely assume that because youth-led uprisings are featured in the media that they are the subjects of extensive research, but in fact the research is paltry. Mine are the only books on recent youth activism that include interviews and surveys from every major continent rather than only regional coverage, because Ph.D. students are trained to focus narrowly. Youth are ignored despite their leadership in recent global uprisings that unseated entrenched dictators. Ageism is prevalent in scholarship as scholars continue to fault youth for being delinquent or politically apathetic when the reality is they're disgusted with the corrupt political system. Neoliberal economics must be exposed in its focus on individual achievement rather than social movements and focus on youth subcultures (music, clothes) rather than economic barriers caused by growing inequality. Movement-relevant research applied to youth-led changemaking is sorely needed, as advocated in *Learning Activism: The Intellectual Life of Social Movements* (2015) by Canadian Aziz Choudry. Most of all, scholars need to include the actual voices of youth, not just the results of multiple-choice surveys.

British sociology professor Robert Hollands rejects the “dominant theoretical thinking about young people and politics [that] overemphasizes

the importance of individualism and ‘lifestyle politics.’” He observes that the individualistic post-materialist approach often views youth in the “deficit model” as apathetic, disengaged, and self-absorbed rather than as working for social change and capable of collective action. In youth studies, young people are normally “objects” of analysis without the scholar doing participatory research directly involved with youth.

Much of the generational research is done in the United States and the United Kingdom, although 87% of youth live in developing countries. Psychologist Jeffrey Jensen Arnett points out that the study of adolescence began in the US early in the 20th century and that the study of US adolescents still dominates the field.¹ He reports that most of the scholarly journals devoted to the age group 10 to 25 are from the US with the occasional European researcher. Perusing *The Journal of Youth Studies*, I found authors from Canada, Australia, Germany, and Sweden, as well as the US and the UK.

Scottish sociologist Andy Furlong explains that researchers focus on youth problems because of government interest in preventing health problems caused by drug and alcohol use and preventing economic and social unrest caused by youth unemployment. Australian professor Peter Kelly also cautions against the influence of “governmentalised” studies of self-interest to government departments, corporations and NGOs that are interested in topics like youth alcohol and drug use.² A search for global youth on Google and Amazon.com turns up many studies on youth tobacco use and other health problems.

The approach to youth studies for over 50 years was to focus on adolescence as a developmental stage to form identity in the transition to adulthood. Group identity was studied as being shaped by class, race, gender, and nationality, and approached as a predictable stage or structure of transition. The focus on the norms of transition “produced a near consensus among youth researchers that contemporary young people’s transitions are faulty,” described as being “lost,” “on hold,” “emerging,” or “post-adolescence.”³ They’re viewed as becoming, rather than being in the present. The developmental approach is criticized for a myopic focus on the economic transition from school to workplace and for assuming that the process of individualization is similar for adolescents everywhere. The cultural approach looks on youth subcultures, especially those that challenge the older generation such as punks and skinheads. In the focus on lads’ subcultures (as boys are sometimes called in the UK), girls and youth social action were left out of Birmingham School scholarship in England.⁴ Sociologists are criticized for neglecting the tactics of social movements “with their emphasis upon structural strain, generalized belief,

and deprivation.”⁵ “Post-subcultural” debates ensued, interested in multinational and cross-generational research.

Scanning the *Journal of Youth Studies* from 2011 (the year of the Arab Spring youth-led uprisings) to 2016 found only one mention of the uprisings of 2011 to 2014, three pages in an article about youth activists from 1908 to 2013.⁶ A similar search of the *Journal of Adolescence* found only one issue on political engagement but none on rebellions (June 2012).⁷ Most of the academic books on global youth are anthologies of specialized ethnographies about small groups of young people in various regions without much connection between the book chapters. For example, one anthology includes chapters on Thai makeup saleswomen, former child soldiers in Sierra Leone, Latino use of political graphic art, and a Sri Lankan refugee. Paolo Gerbaudo is an exception in that he includes interviews with activists of various ages in *The Mask and the Flag: The Rise of Citizenism in Global Protest* (2016). In an email correspondence he agreed, “As you said there is very little in terms of global studies of contemporary movements and less so from a youth perspective.” The rare book that does focus on youth is *Youth Rising?* (2015) in which Mayssoun Sukarieh and Stuart Tannock analyze the portrayal of youth in global uprisings, but acknowledge that they, too, do not include their actual voices. Books about the uprisings published from 2012 to 2016 are listed in Appendix 6.

The three books I wrote for young people about school success, how to survive their parents’ divorce, and a guide for teenagers, are based on youth experiences because other advice books I’d read sounded like adults preaching and giving advice from on high to unaware young people. This approach made me want to do the opposite. My previous books drew from North Americans, so I was curious about young people’s attitudes globally now that the Internet connects them. Most of my dozen books reveal the voices of ignored groups such as egalitarian couples, feminist women’s culture, and young people.

To learn how Generations Y and Z are shaping our future, I generated a worldwide network of youth informants so that if I have a question about a current event I can email someone in that country. I surveyed 4,075 young people (with a slight female majority) in 88 countries, did extensive follow-up interviews via email with some of the respondents, and interviewed others in person or on Skype. Over 60 of the video interviews are on the global youth YouTube channel.⁸ The research began in 2004 in Japan and continues to the present. I visited young people in their homes or schools in Brazil, China, Cuba, Egypt, Greece, India, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, South Korea, Switzerland, Tanzania, Turkey, and the UK as well

as US states in all regions. Dialogues with youth ranged from Tahrir Square in Cairo, Rio slums, villages in Tanzania, India and Indonesia; posh London and Shanghai homes, a Turkish middle school, Indian and Japanese high schools, as well as a school on the small island of Lanai in Hawaii. The quantitative survey findings are found in Appendix 1 while the qualitative global youth series quotes youth extensively. Some of the SpeakOut respondents are quoted some of them in this book, identified by the first name they selected, age, gender and country (e.g., Chris, 16, f, England).

As I researched global youth activism and viewpoints, I was shocked that many researchers didn't talk to their subjects, relying solely on Internet surveys and other quantitative work. The intent of this book is to point out a blind spot in current research based on adult arrogance that permits some researchers to not even personally talk to the young people they write about. I found a similar blind spot while writing my book about *The Religious Ideas of Harriet Beecher Stowe: Her Gospel of Womanhood*. Her emphasis on pure women as agents of salvation was very obvious and not at all subtle, but no researchers mentioned it due to a sexist blind spot. This has gradually changed as feminist scholarship developed since 1963 when the Second Wave of feminism began with Betty Friedan's work. If an author wrote about African Americans, he or she would certainly interview and quote pertinent individuals, but the same assumption isn't made regarding youth. A difference between ageism, sexism and racism is that we don't stay young, while most of us retain our gender and skin color.

The blindspot about gender appeared again in charges that young people in the US increasingly suffer from mental health problems, with anxiety and depression at the top of the list. I found only a few sentences in the middle of two articles on the topic of mental health that mentioned the increase in young women becoming the majority (57% in 2013) of college students. This is highly significant because the increase in reports of mental health issues to campus counseling centers is "largely driven by girls," as Professor Jean Twenge found when researching national surveys. We socialize girls to ask for help while boys are supposed to "man up," "hang tough," and not be sissies. We can't conclude that US Millennials are more anxious and mentally troubled as a generation, only that girls are more likely to talk about their feelings but this fact is not widely discussed.

Ageism in Youth Studies: Generation Maligned is a case study in the inexactness of social science, academic adultism, and the need to research "from the bottom," as explained in feminist Standpoint Theory, discussed in Chapter One. I hope it leads the reader to explore my global youth

series based on youth voices to see how they'll change our future and to learn to respect their capabilities as leaders in the present. Researchers on youth should be held to a standard of listening to and consulting their subjects or else face criticism of ageism, as we've learned to do since the 1960s with regard to sexism and racism in scholarship.

Abbreviations and Definitions

A Globalization Glossary is available on the Emory University globalization website.⁹ Definitions of political terms and social movement theory are found on the book website along with global studies centers.¹⁰ Definitions of youth and social movements are described on the global youth book website.¹¹

- CSUC*: California State University Chico
- EU*: European Union of 28 member states
- Freshman*: An Indian SpeakOut student informed me they replace sexist “freshmen” with “freshers,” the British term. I try to use “first year.”
- GLBTIA*: Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and asexual preferences
- Globalization*: Transnational exchanges of information, money, products, labor, people, goods, resources, diseases, culture, and media.
- Generation birth periods*: Using Neil Howe’s dates: Baby Boomers (1943 to 1960), Gen X (1961 to 1981), Gen Y (1982 to 2004), and Gen Z (2005 to the present). More information about Gen Z can be found on the book website.¹²
- Generation We and Me*: In the US some scholars view Generation We as socially involved and motivated to help others, while others complain about lazy narcissistic Generation Me.¹³ The “Me Decade” label was coined by Tom Wolfe in a 1976 magazine article.
- ICT*: Information and communication technology including the Internet
- MENA*: Middle East and North Africa
- NPR*: National Public Radio
- NEETs*: Young people not in education, employment or training
- Neoliberalism*: The dominant global economic policy associated with privatization, deregulation and free trade. It’s associated with Professor Milton Friedman of the University of

Chicago, who influenced President Ronald Reagan and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. It's criticized by the global justice movement and is the main enemy of the recent global uprisings.

Standpoint Theory: It values the observations of grassroots and marginalized people. It developed in the 1970s out of Marxist feminist thought, maintaining that research that focuses on power relations should start with the oppressed. Feminists are especially interested in this approach.

UNICEF: The United Nations Children's Fund

WHO: World Health Organization

Notes

¹ Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, ed. *Adolescent Psychology Around the World*. Psychology Press, 2012, ix.

² Peter Kelly, "An Untimely Future for Youth Studies," *Youth Studies Australia*, 2011, Vol. 30, Issue 3, pp. 47-53.

³ Johanna Win and Dan Woodman, "Generation, Youth and Social Change in Australia," *Journal of Youth Studies*, Vol. 9, Issue 5, 2006.

DOI: 10.1080/136762606000805713

⁴ Mary Bucholtz, "Youth and Cultural Practice," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 31, June 14, 2002, p. 539.

<http://www.linguistics.ucsb.edu/faculty/bucholtz/node/1>

⁵ John McCarthy and Mayer Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 82, No. 6, p. 1212.

⁶ Ken Roberts, "Youth Mobilizations and Political Generations: Young Activists in Political Change Movements During and Since the Twentieth Century," *Journal of Youth Studies*, March 13, 2015.

DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2015.1020937

⁷ <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/01401971/35/3>

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/user/TheGlobalyouth>

⁹ <http://sociology.emory.edu/faculty/globalization/glossary.html>

¹⁰ <http://wp.me/p47Q76-52>

Yale Center for the Study of Globalization, Yale University

The Globalization Website, Emory University

The Institute for Research on World-Systems (IROWS), University of California at Riverside

New Global History, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

GW Center for the Study of Globalization, George Washington University

Globalization and Democracy Research: Responding to Globalization, Colorado University

Center for Global, International and Regional Studies, University of California Santa Cruz

¹¹ <https://globalyouthbook.wordpress.com/2014/07/04/global-youth-activism-definitions/>

¹² <http://wp.me/p47Q76-wf>

¹³ Jerry Pattengale, "Janus Generation," *Inside Higher Education*, January 19, 2010. <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2010/01/19/pattengale>

Twenge et al. list the WE and ME researchers in the following article:

Jean Twenge, W. Keith Campbell, and Elise Freeman, "Generational Differences in Young Adults' Life Goals, Concern for Others, and Civic Orientation, 1966–2009," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2012, Vol. 102, No. 5, pp. 1045–1062. DOI: 10.1037/a0027408

CHAPTER ONE

AGEIST SCHOLARS IGNORE YOUTH



Environmental demonstration, Chico, California, 2015

Adults need to look at the little things more, the flowers growing in sidewalk cracks, dew on spider webs in the morning, saying good morning to strangers, and walking barefoot in the grass. To stop worrying about money, materials, jobs, and themselves. I wish adults weren't so afraid to be children. People always say teenagers are bad, or create trouble; this is what people have created. We are told we have no wisdom and that we have nothing to say. If people would just let us speak, they would find the optimism and love we all carry. We want to be heard. Let us.

—Chauncey, a 15-year-old girl from Portland, Oregon

Young people don't just play Nintendo and eat crap.

—Oscar Morales, Colombian leader of a Facebook campaign against FARC

Our proposal for more movement-relevant research seems to have had some effect in the last few years.

—Chris Dixon, Ph.D.

Contents: Youth Activists are Ignored, Sociologists Focus on Culture Rather than Economic and Political Issues, Neoliberal Economics is the Root Problem--Not Style, Applicable Social Movement Theory Needed, and United Nations Includes Youth

If ageism is discussed at all, it is usually in terms of discrimination against older workers, yet the majority of youth studies scholars are ageist in their neglect of youth leadership or dismissal of young people as troubled or apathetic, and as problematic rather than as a vital resource. The discussion of ageism should be added to researchers' awareness of racism, classism and sexism. Generations Y and Z are critical of traditional institutions, in love with technology, leaders of global uprisings that ousted dictators, and creators of a youth culture often copied by older people. Some of these young people think there's a generational gulf, especially in understanding technology and the ability to learn quickly. Michael (16, m) from Ethiopia, explains that adults approach youth as if "we cannot do anything right. It's blatant that the gap between the two age groups is widening astoundingly. Cooperation from both age brackets is required to taper this gap on the basis of rapport and mutual understanding." Youth are the least-studied age group (defined by the United Nations as ages 15 to 24) or if scholars do study them they too often focus on problems, delinquency, deviancy or rebellious subcultural styles rather than what young people think or how they contribute to their communities.¹

Long ago philosophers such as Plato, Rousseau and Locke understood the need to train youth to be leaders, but this ancient insight needs to be applied to youth who want to lead now, not in the distant future. I'm continually surprised by books about youth that don't include youth voices or government task groups on youth issues consisting entirely of adults. In my county in Northern California, the Board of Supervisors' youth panel was mostly comprised of grandparents, some of whom resented that I assisted youth in organizing and leading Youth SpeakOuts that generated ongoing Youth Councils.

Youth Activists are Ignored

History reveals that young people have been at the forefront of progressive social movements globally. For example, nine months before Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white person in Montgomery, Alabama, Claudette Colvin, age 15, declined to give up her seat. I list 44 youth-led uprisings since 2000 on the Global Youth book website.² International Monetary Fund research confirmed that although the 1.8 billion young people ages 15 to 24 are powerful change agents and their numbers will increase for several decades (especially in Africa), they're the most overlooked age group, ignored by researchers, business thinkers, and policy analysts.³ Despite their potential power, "The world's 1.2 billion adolescents and young adults are probably the most neglected—by policy analysts, business thinkers, and academic researchers—of all the age groups," agreed Harvard professor David Bloom.³ Few studies of youth civic engagement focus on activism, such as global justice or environmental movements; rather most scholars look at individual actions such as voting.⁴ Few adult-centric researchers look at "youth as being political actors in their own right" in the present. Even studies of social movements ignore youth movements and generally "youth remains accidental or at best peripheral to the central focus of these studies" on AIDS, new media, music, conflict, marginalization, etc.⁵

Teens are even neglected in health studies when they are grouped with younger children or with young adults.⁶ In another important field, South African academics report that, "Journalism globally tends to ignore the experiences and stories of the marginalized, which include young people."⁷ They recommend actually listening to these groups to counter stereotypes--the theme of this book. A South African academic points out that although youth unemployment is a major problem and is getting worse in his country, "the absence of young voices on the subject stands in the way of understanding and solving the problem."⁸

Even many youth-serving organizations ignore youth or parade them as occasional tokens, according to a 2015 telephone conversation with Sacha Green-Atchley, coordinator for the global Coalition for Adolescent Girls.⁹ She reported that girls she talks with from various countries want to be respected and listened to, rather than face condescending attitudes and “ridiculous prejudices” against young people. Ageism is the only reason I can think of to explain such neglect of a crucial and talented cohort.

Emily Bent interviewed girls involved in the United Nation Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) programs.¹⁰ Bent applies Standpoint Theory to her research about girls active in the CSW. The girls told Bent they didn’t have actual input into UN policy-making. A teen named Jessica reported that when they tried to say something that wasn’t strictly on the agenda, the adults took the microphone away. Young women representing indigenous youth in Latin America to the UN reported that all discussions are in English, which means an interpreter is always talking for them instead of their own voices.¹¹ Youth-serving agencies need to respect and actually listen to the people they serve.

Despite increasing interest in girls’ studies over the last two decades due to their role in economic development to counter the fear of disaffected young men, Bent reported, “The research on girls and politics is surprisingly incomplete” and invisible.¹² Most of the interest in girls’ studies, youth studies, and children’s rights examines their future impact on politics when they will be able to vote—rather than their current activism. However, several international studies cited by Bent found that girls valued political participation as much as or more than boys, although some view it as a masculine arena. Girls were more likely to imagine themselves becoming politically involved in the future if the media discussed women politicians. Some girls are interested in politics, but consider the traditional forms corrupt and dismissive of their views. The US editors of *We Got Issues! A Young Woman’s Guide to a Bold, Courageous and Empowered Life* (2006), reported, “Young women in this country expect to be ignored. Most young women believe that people don’t really want to know what we think.”¹³

Other academics agree, “There is not much research exploring leadership development and civic participation among youth, and even less among young women,” even though research suggests that women leaders are more likely to collaborate rather than dictate.¹⁴ Feminist and queer scholars point out “the near total absence of any references to women or feminism” in scholarly analyses of globalization.¹⁵ Girls’ media activism in Australia, England and the US is discussed in *Next Wave Cultures: Feminism, Subcultures, Activism* (2008), edited by Australian Anita

Harris. She states, “Very little has been said about either the political participation or nonparticipation of young women in particular,” with the exception of feminist “generation wars” and criticisms of the quieter political activism of Third Wave feminists. Similar to Harris, Jessica Taft reported in *Rebel Girls* that, “Despite their activism, girls are rarely considered and written about as significant political actors. They appear but do not speak.”¹⁶ They’re left out of academic research on youth movements and Taft added that the focus is on college students rather than teenagers.

Hava Rachel Gordon conducted ethnographic and intersectional feminist studies of high school activist groups in Oakland, California and Portland, Oregon. They represented a variety of subcultures, including jocks, brains and freaks; she studied the groups as social movements rather than as subcultures to highlight their political activism. She said scholars who studied youth agency expressed in youth subculture music and style have debated about whether this resistance is political and “most have maintained a curious silence regarding young people’s overtly political resistance through social movement activism.”¹⁷ Gordon reported, “There is a notable silence in the social science literatures on adolescence and political action,” assuming that social movement activists are adults.¹⁸ She suggested that one reason for the neglect is that much teen activism occurs at school away from public notice, as was true for the political action groups she studied. High school student activists create underground newspapers, student unions, environmental groups, and GLBTIA groups, and they campaign for curriculum changes such as adding ethnic and gender studies. Gordon found, as I have, that even studies of age inequality leave out young people’s voices and activism, viewing them as future citizens and voters, as in the common expression that “children are our future,” but not as important now. A local high school class in Chico, California that I challenged to get involved selected their activist issues as too much homework and too strict a late to class penalty. They weren’t interested in national issues like the lack of a US government youth policy.

Many scholars bemoan a “worldwide crisis of youth political disengagement,” apathy and lack of political knowledge, yet Gordon points out that they should consider how youth define politics and activism in an era when they distrust political parties and government.¹⁹ She adds that ageism “plays a major role in constructing youth political alienation,” viewing youth activism only in terms of their consumption practices. Many of the teens she interviewed tried to join adult political groups, but were routinely patronized and marginalized, as young feminists complain

about older feminists in the US (see my *Brave: The Global Girls' Revolution*).

My reviews of the scholarly journals of *Youth Studies*, *Mobilization*, and *Social Movement Studies* from 2011 to 2015 found only one article with youth activism in the title and that was about the organization of the 15M movement in Spain, not young people. *The Global Studies Journal* included one article on students' Internet use at the American University of Nigeria. The endnote reports on lack of coverage of youth activism in my review of youth studies journals.²⁰

Youth movements are “mostly invisible, within the broader context of systematic misrepresentation of youth throughout the globalized media system,” according to MIT media professor Sasha Costanza-Chock.²¹ She explained that when positive media coverage does occur, it usually features an individual rather than youth in social movements. British sociologist Robert Hollands also observes that in studies of youth their voices are usually omitted.²² He calls for the inclusion of the thoughts of young activists, as he does in his article on the 2010 student occupations of over 50 British universities to protest spending cuts and tuition increases. US education expert Melanie Brown argues that “youth have become the most discussed and the least heard from population in our society,” seen as the cause of problems rather than finding opportunity in “youth engagement.”²³ Henry Giroux, Mike Males, Lawrence Grossberg and other authors refer to a war on youth; however, they too don't include youth voices in their books.

Youth Studies professor and author Brian Barber points out that, “Real-time accounts of the workings of a revolution are rare. Rarer still are real-time accounts of how youth identities form...” Barber is one of the few scholars who spend time interviewing young activists, in his case Egyptians.²⁴ A key finding of a UNICEF study of Middle Eastern youth was, “Youth identities and values are under-researched and are complex” because of the constant changes in local and foreign influences. Indigenous communal religious values are influenced by globalized individualistic Western values.²⁵ For example, young activists' use of music and art in the Arab Spring uprisings is “neglected and often categorized as youth subculture, yet it was shaping a whole generation of trans-national activists and artists.”²⁶

Editors of a book on *Student Activism in Asia* (2012) get to the core problem that despite the visibility of student protests and their vanguard actions, because they are so common, they seem “to require no explanation.”²⁷ They point out the lack of comparative research on the causes and effects of student activism, with the exception of some interest

in specific local uprisings in the 1960s and 70s, such as anti-war or anti-nuclear movements. It's remarkable how the important role of students in the Asian region is "poorly chronicled and understood."²⁸ I would in turn wonder about the editors' lack of mention of young women's roles or feminism.

Professors who've critiqued my global youth activism books generally wrongly assume that there are many studies of activist youth, simply because it's widely known that youth are at the forefront of uprisings. Academics seem to have a blind spot regarding their neglect of youth voices. Although I've researched since 2004, I haven't found any other studies of youth that ask them open-ended questions about their philosophies and concerns. Most ask specific questions about health practices (e.g., smoking, drinking, sex, AIDS), risky behaviors, Internet use, or preferences for brands and products. Academics often rely on numerical survey responses to multiple-choice questions or disconnected anthologies of ethnographical studies observing small groups, rather than talking with a variety of young people. For example, the Social Network Analysis (SNA) of social movements uses quantitative methods graphing ties between nodes such as the followers of a Facebook page.

An anonymous academic attempted to list books about global youth activism for me, but all were written before the recent uprisings or don't include them, nor do any of them feature the role of young people. His inability to name a book about global youth activism but his certainty about his accuracy reveals the ageist blind spot for academics. They see youth in news videos of the recent uprisings and somehow assume familiarity translates into research.

There are several other books out right now that address the issue of youth and contemporary activism. Marina Sitirin's Everyday Revolutions [2012, about Argentina, while her 2014 book with Dario Azzellini, They Can't Represent Us expands to look at the development of democracy in various countries, with a focus on process but not youth, similar to Maeckelberg] is one, as is Marianne Maeckelberg's The Will of the Man [2009], about the alterglobalization movement. She explains, in contrast to previous social movements, the alterglobalisation movement's form of organization is its ideology. Both also address the rise of horizontalist politics. Jeffrey Juris has written about youth activism, technology, horizontalism, in the context of the alter-globalization movement and Occupy. [Juris co-edited Insurgent Encounters (2013) an ethnography anthology about the global justice movement and World Social Forum. Youth are mentioned in less than 10 pages.] David Graeber's Direct Action [2009] about the global justice movement] also involves some fairly sustained consideration of the links

between direct democracy, new radical politics, history, and youth culture
[outdated].

Policymakers need adequate research to create effective youth development programs. Because information about youth is lacking or fragmented, Nicole Goldin concludes, “the needs of young people often remain unexposed and marginalized by their complexity.”²⁹ A major challenge of our time is to insure that “this transformative generation” of youth—a quarter of the world’s population, have the resources they need to thrive. Because information about youth is lacking or fragmented, “the needs of young people often remain unexposed and marginalized by their complexity.”³⁰ To begin to correct the “data gap” about global youth caused by too “narrow a line of inquiry,” three organizations sponsored a report on *The Global Youth Wellbeing Index* in 2014. Researchers drew from data representing almost 70% of global youth that revealed a large majority of those aged 10 to 24 experience low levels of wellbeing. They reported that current data on youth is “often incomplete, inconsistent, and uncoordinated across sectors, institutions, countries, and regions.”³¹ The report acknowledges some data is compiled by the World Bank, WHO, UNESCO, and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, etc., but there’s a “lack of sufficient age-disaggregated data or coverage.” Sample sizes are often small and narrow, only asking about a topic like consumer behavior or political opinion. The report recommends deeper-dive case studies to add to knowledge about youth development from a systems’ viewpoint.

Iranian Asef Bayat points out that while studies of youth issues have multiplied, the focus is not on youth: “Youth as a social category has curiously been absent from the prevalent social movement debates. In general, scholarly attempts to conceptualize the meanings and modalities of youth movements remain rare,” other than analyzing their problems or subcultures.³² Bayat suggests approaching youth movements by acknowledging youthfulness, as an experimental time free of responsibility for others, unique to modern urban spaces (similar to Jeffrey Jensen Arnett’s idea of “emerging adulthood”). Authorities who oppose these adventurous experiments provoke a youth “nonmovement” when a collective youth identity develops; then a “collective joy became a medium of subversion.”³³ It gives young people power when millions of them live their daily lives in a way that challenges authority. For example, six Iranian women and men under age 25 were arrested in 2014 for posting an “obscene” video, charged with “promotion of immoral acts” and “distribution of images disturbing public chastity.” The women weren’t veiled and they were joyfully dancing with the men to the song “Happy,” shown on video.³⁴

They were forced to recant on national TV with their backs to the camera and to blame their director. The dancers were released but the director was kept in captivity. They were sentenced to suspended jail terms and lashes. The Twitter hashtag #FreeHappyIranians went viral. President Hassan Rouhani then tweeted, “#Happiness is our people’s right. We shouldn’t be too hard on behaviors caused by joy,” indicating a split among the older and younger authorities.

Bayat gives other examples of nonmovements that developed in Iran by the mid-1990s such as college students who refused to take religion courses, and girls and boys who disguised themselves as the other sex and talked to the opposite sex on cell phones or in taxis, made love, didn’t say daily prayers, watched smuggled videos, danced together in the streets when their soccer team won, set off illegal firecrackers to celebrate New Year, and listened to rap and metal music played loudly on car stereos. An Iranian woman office worker told me what happens in homes like hers is very different than what officials dictate. Thousands of youth NGOs, as well as youth magazines and local associations, developed throughout Iran. However, creating major change requires that other age groups join youth struggles, as they did in the Green Movement protesting fraud in the 2009 Iranian presidential elections.

Feminist Standpoint Theory maintains that social research should begin from the bottom up with marginalized people’s lived experiences. A “standpoint” is defined by Marxist theory as a collective identity or voice gained through collective political struggle. Knowledge is grounded in a social context rather than in abstract universal truth. That approach believes that marginalized and oppressed people know the most about their situation and is touted as “one of the most influential and debated theories to emerge from second-wave feminist thinking.”³⁵ This theory evolved from Marxist feminism along with the Third Wave emphasis on intersectionality. In addition to gender, we’re influenced by the interactions of our class, ethnicity, nationality, age, religion, and sexual preference. As feminist philosopher Sandra Harding explained, “Standpoint theories map how a social and political disadvantage can be turned into an epistemic, scientific and political advantage.”³⁶ Applying this theory would include the voices of young people.

The consequence of ignoring youth is reported by former United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who warned, “Investment in youth issues and young people remains eclectic, erratic and subject to political whimsy.”³⁷ He added that some of the current spending is ill-advised: “Stop spending millions on conferences contemplating the apparent or assumed lack of interest of young people in current

participation offers. Spend some time and money to make new offers instead.”

Sociologists Focus on Culture Rather than Economic and Political Issues

Irish academic Laurence Cox suggested in an email correspondence that one reason for “scholars’ reluctance to emphasize youth as a central political actor” is reaction to earlier theories that focused more strongly on youth, as in the 1930s when youth movements were associated with fascism. Nazi youth “Brown Shirts” were influential in ushering in Hitler as they chanted slogans like “Step down you old ones” and “National Socialism is the organized will of youth.” Earlier, Karl Mannheim discussed “The Problem of Generations” in his 1923 essay, reasonably explaining that generations are shaped by major historical events when they’re growing up, but he was criticized for being Western-centric. In *We Make Our Own History* (2014), Laurence Cox and Alf Gunvald Nilsen fault recent social movement theory for ignoring history and not approaching movements as developing and changing.

In the 1960s, youth activists said they couldn’t trust someone older than 30. During this time Canadian Marshall McLuhan was criticized for being eccentric or utopian with his over-emphasis on the power of media to shape attitudes. He said in a 1969 interview, “television-conditioned youth ...mindlessly acts out its identity quest in the theater of the streets, searching not for goals but for roles, striving for an identity that eludes them.”³⁸ Another influence, the feminist theory of intersectionality downplayed the centrality of age in shaping multiple identities, thereby influencing contemporary theory.

The academic study of youth sub-cultures (such as punks or hippies) developed from the study of urban gangs in the 1920s at the University of Chicago and later at the Birmingham School in England, founded in 1964. Academic Elisabeth Soep points out that Birmingham resistance studies over-emphasized resistance in youth cultural activities, clothes and music, especially among white working-class lads, leaving out girls and other classes. The newer approaches are interdisciplinary and transnational drawing from Marxism, post-colonialism, postmodernism, post-subcultural, feminism, and ethnic and queer studies as well as cultural studies and sociology. These postmodern approaches view youth cultures as more fluid, influenced by advertisers, and interested in the intersectionality of race, class, gender, age, etc.

Youth culture can no longer be located in one place as “lines between identity categories” are blurred, adding to fluidity.³⁹ In the age of the Internet, scholars are interested in “transnationalization” and “glocalization” as young people draw from capitalist global media and hybridize it with their local culture. Advertisers often aim to sell their product as empowering, in some ways coopting youthful rebellion. They also target males and females differently, reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes. For example, Super Bowl ads in 2015 included a Carl’s Jr.’s ad featuring a naked woman eating a hamburger in a very suggestive way (President Trump unsuccessfully nominated CEO Andy Puzder, who defended the ads as all-American, for Labor Secretary) and another ad with Kim Kardashian wearing her underwear for T-Mobile. A few positive ads showed an athletic young woman and confident girls for the “Always” brand of female hygiene products that advocated rewriting the rules for girls. The ad encouraged father involvement to encourage daughters to be strong.⁴⁰ (Many young female activists have a father who believes in their abilities, such as Malala Yousafzai.) GoDaddy included recognition of women computer programmers in its 2017 Super Bowl ad, an improvement from its sexist ad in 2013. Some of the 2017 ads were accused of being oppressive to men, who were portrayed as idiots.⁴¹

After reviewing studies of adolescence, Gordon reported that New Childhood Studies corrected the essentialist theories that emphasize standard human developmental stages to adulthood and focus on socialization for adulthood. It views youth as autonomous “producers of culture in their own right” with more agency than older scholars granted them.⁴² Adolescence is increasingly seen as socially constructed, not biological and universal, as psychologists defined it at the beginning of the 20th century. Lesko and Talburt maintain that the belief in “normal” developmental stages isn’t challenged enough and prefer a more “rhizomatic approach to youth studies that works against linearity.”⁴³ Although scholars often assume that “youth” is an objective and essential category, in fact it’s defined subjectively and changes over time, manipulated as “an artifact” to manage populations.⁴⁴ US professor Thomas Popkewitz states, “Youth is a fabrication that historically entails science as a technology to change social conditions by changing people.”⁴⁵ Part of this socialization process is the subordination of youth who are viewed as deficient adults simply because of their age, in rampant ageism.

However, critical of postmodern or poststructural approaches, UCLA philosophy professor Douglas Kellner faults them for “subjectivism and relativism, often bordering on nihilism,” and advocates instead critical theory associated with the Frankfurt School, a German Marxist-oriented

research center.⁴⁶ He says this approach aims to be applicable to social change that can emerge from contradictions and crisis in capitalist societies in a time when social theory is in “acute crisis” with its “fragmentation, trivialization, and academicization.”

Other youth studies scholars are interested in comparing characteristics of Generations X, Y, and Z, or immature adolescent brain development leading to more risk taking, as seen in Andy Furlong’s *Youth Studies: An Introduction* (2012). The newer concerns of youth studies are the complexity of the creation of youth identity and culture, international influences with global media and migration, and identifying ways to support positive youth development as with school-based health centers. The Positive Youth Development movement counters the old emphasis on youth deficits and delinquency of mainly teenage boys, with community efforts to provide young people with the skills they need to transition into adult life and prevent risky behaviors. Reflecting psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner’s focus on the ecological system, Johanna Wyn advocates more interest in youth in the context of their family relationships, which is neglected in the focus on developmental stages.⁴⁷

Some scholars emphasize the process of transition to adulthood, including the new stage of emerging adulthood, defined by developmental psychologist Jeffrey Jensen Arnett. In addition to his books, he founded a periodical and the Society for the Study of Emerging Adulthood. Groups of disadvantaged youth can’t easily transit from school to further education to full-time work, as Australians Dan Woodman and Johanna Wyn point out.⁴⁸ They explain that the transition approach dominated scholarship along with the view of adolescence as a time of “storm and stress” until recent emphasis on the different social generations. They compare the two different approaches, faulting the transition approach as a “new ageism” that imposes the older generation’s definition of adult success. Also, since the early 1990s neoliberalism has increased the time young people spend in post-secondary education along with increased costs and precarious labor markets even for university graduates, burdening them with large debts. Being in debt can restrict choice--including dissent.

Canadian sociologist James Côté doesn’t agree with Arnett about his view of a new stage of development and criticizes youth studies for ignoring the negative impact of neoliberalism on youth who face an uncertain future in contrast to the rich elite who can easily pay for their children to attend expensive universities that lead to good jobs. He faults Arnett’s theory of emerging adulthood for implying that un- or under-employment is a choice, indulging in “finding themselves” in a carefree

time without family responsibilities and constraints. Also, the focus on transition to adulthood implies that youth aren't stable, but potentially out of control, disturbing, even freakish.⁴⁹ My research leads me to view Côté's approach as the most salient.

Neoliberal Economics is the Root Problem, Not Style

Côté and others criticize scholars for neglect of macro-economic influences such as the use of youth as a reserve labor force and high youth un- or under-employment. Additionally, Côté warns of the "growing stigmatization of youth over the past century," especially in terms of claims of biological inferiority that dwell on the adolescent brain as irrational and thrill seeking. The flip side of this trend is, over the last two decades, increasingly describing adults as superior, responsible, and mature, although an objective look at the news does not back up this perspective. As Lisa (13, f, California) said, "For those who created this mess in a world of chaos, just like you said to us about our rooms, 'Clean it up!'"

Côté argues for "a new political economy of youth," a conflict theory that generates radical solutions to material problems. He opposes reformist structural approaches that accept the neoliberal status quo when schools and universities themselves perpetuate subordination by teaching obedience to hierarchical authority. Côté faults cultural and sociological studies of youth for ignoring the economic situation, being "preoccupied with subjectivities rather than the material conditions" of youth as the proletariat and potentially revolutionary class.⁵⁰ He explains that since the 1980s youth studies have focused on working class youth cultures instead of analyzing youth as a disadvantaged class or the new proletariat, to use Marxist terminology.⁵¹ He regrets that the "political-economy perspective" that looks at root causes and "radical solutions" has been ignored in youth studies, thereby strengthening neoliberalism. He warns, "With few youth-studies theorists speaking for it directly, the neglect of the political-economy-of-youth perspective threatens to render youth studies an 'apology' for neoliberalism," which causes the "deterioration of youth living conditions." He laments that the "youth studies field is in a state of disarray, with a number of isolated silos of researchers" with different approaches, inhibiting scholars from influencing government policies.

Ronald Inglehart's research on the impact of the economy on a youth generation's values in the 1970s carries over to the current highlighting of precarious youth unemployment as a major influence on Generations Y and Z. Inglehart reported young people are more open to post-modern

values when a country's stage of economic development and security is advanced, whereas economic decline, as in Russia after the breakup of the USSR, increases materialist values.⁵² Democracy declined under Vladimir Putin and his appeal to national pride and orthodox values, which he foments as a global movement including covert support for the election of President Donald Trump.

Oxfam reported that 62 rich people own as much as the poorer half of the world's population whose wealth dropped by 38% since 2010.⁵³ With regards to the 87% of youth who live in developing nations, the West fears that the young men of the "youth bulge" in Sub-Saharan Africa and MENA will bring chaos and more uprisings. It follows that groups like the World Bank emphasize entrepreneurial "girl power" for stability. In her book *Powered by Girl* (2016) about how adults can assist girls' activism, Lyn Mikel Brown faults adults for not stepping up to help often enough, because, "Our adult privileges blind us to the brilliance of the youth all around us."⁵⁴ She reports that neoliberal media feature the individual "cando" girl on her own, ignoring the importance of youth activist groups such as the SPARK movement for gender justice.⁵⁵ The other side of the fear of youth rebellion is romanticizing of their ability to save us from adult failures, due to being less tainted and more pure of heart, similar to the Western view of women as virgin mother like Mary or temptress like Eve. Young people quoted in Chapter Four reveal that this expectation to be the problem-solvers adds to their anxiety and worry.

The neoliberal emphasis on individuals pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps is reflected in economic development programs and academic youth studies, when what's actually needed is a new vision of a more equitable "alternative world" that includes plans for economic opportunities for young people (discussed in my *How Global Youth are Changing the World*). Social movement and feminist scholars are criticized by peers for neglecting economic forces that lead to high youth unemployment rates globally.⁵⁶ Specifically, European and North American New Social Movements (NSM) theorists are criticized for focusing on "issues of culture and collective identity," although the recent uprisings were propelled by economic and political grievances. As a consequence, "This legacy has given social movement scholars a generalized sensation of helplessness when trying to analyze and explain the 2011-2012 cycle of contention."⁵⁷

The editors of a *Current Sociology* issue on a "new wave of global mobilization" fault New Social Movement (NSM) scholars for moving away from "political economic concerns" to focus on culture and identity.⁵⁸ However, NSM interest in the formation of new group identities

is applicable to the uprisings that developed a group belief in the human right to dignity that includes having a job. This approach contrasts to earlier social movements where activists identified themselves, not as the people—the 99%—but as workers, students, Marxists, or members of political parties. The *Current Sociology* editors conclude that group identity formation is “absolutely central” in recent uprisings and is shaped by strong emotions such as moral outrage. Shared identity unites people in a movement. Researcher Susana Galan stated that although “emotions have been traditionally banished from political analysis,” she believes they stimulate political activism through outrage, shock, and other feelings.⁵⁹ This led her to study the Egyptian revolution of 2011 through women’s personal blogs, “intimate publics” that connected strangers in a common feeling of anger about injustice.

The main deficit of recent social movement studies is the neglect of the impact of neoliberal capitalism, according to Italian scholar Donatella della Porta in her book *Social Movements in Times of Austerity: Bring Capitalism Back into Protest Analysis* (2015). She observes that the takeover of free market neoliberalism from the Keynesian welfare state of the early 1970s resulted in the “proletarianization of the middle classes.” She advocates that scholars should include the approach of political economics while maintaining social movement understandings of the impact of emotional grievances. However, some scholars also criticize social movement scholars for disregarding the mobilizing impact of emotions such as indignation, hope and the joy of being in a united movement.⁶⁰ Everyone I interviewed who participated in a large uprising in Egypt, Brazil, Turkey and Greece told me how thrilled and joyful they felt being part of a unified crowd. I too was filled with joy being part of the largest march in my town’s history, the Women’s March that I helped organize the day after President Trump’s inauguration. We knew we were marching in solidarity with over four million people in Washington, D.C. and a half million more around the world.⁶¹

British sociologist Michael Burawoy called for a public sociology that extends outside the ivory tower and “contributes to emancipatory social change” in a time of “market tyranny and state despotism.”⁶² He is one of the few scholars who include actual youth voices in his writing. Lesko and Talburt point out that young people haven’t benefited from youth cultural studies or the neoliberal “can-do” glorification of individual effort and entrepreneurship. This failure is described in *Our Schools Suck* (2009) regarding students of color in inner-city schools in the US. An example of the biased selection process is an Australian Muslim Youth Summit

picked youth leaders who would describe their personal successes rather than the social barriers and prejudices faced by Muslims.⁶³

Della Porta asks in *Social Movements in Times of Austerity*, “Why, with few exceptions, have issues of class lost relevance in research on social movements? Why is literature on political cleavage more and more focused on elections, and detached from protest?”⁶⁴ She wonders why social movement scholars focus more on the “how” of protest, structures such as the mobilization of resources, finding political opportunities such as allies, or framing their message, rather than analyzing the social basis of protest. She faults scholars who rarely refer to class in their analysis of contentious politics, although the recent anti-austerity movements are propelled by the precariat--the newly insecure middle-class.

Della Porta criticizes cleavage theory for stressing the role of organizations--mainly political parties, in structuring social conflicts, instead of studying “the new middle class, the empirical base of a new cleavage, endowed with post-materialist values” and dissatisfied with representative democracy.⁶⁵ (In *Party Systems and Voter Alignments*, 1967, Stein Rokkan and Seymour Martin Lipset defined some of the main cleavages after the Industrial Revolution as urban elites vs. the others, state vs. church, and owner vs. worker.) Della Porta advocates, “The concept of cleavages, as main social conflicts, which are culturally and politically structured, could help investigating the relations between structural condition and social movements.”⁶⁶ This constitutes a newer version of Marxism in that she thinks of cleavages in terms of class struggle. The old social movements were based on unionized workers with vertical organizations, while the new social movements appealed to the new middle class with single issues like the environment. The Global Justice Movement was a coalition of classes and the “movement of movements,” while the newer anti-austerity movement is based on the precariat class and their desire for direct democracy and horizontal organizing expressing interest in intersecting issues. Like Côté, she advocates that social movement scholars include economic and political theory to analyze the neoliberal impact on class.

Della Porta says the scholarly exceptions that do include class analysis include areas studies, such as in Latin America and the Global South, post-Marxist studies of the precariat by young scholars, and macro World-Systems analysis. This is associated with Immanuel Wallerstein whose “knowledge movement” criticized modernization theory’s over-emphasis on nations when we live in a global system. His approach looks at the dominance by the core developed countries in relation to semi-peripheral countries and peripheral countries. Applying this approach, della Porta