

e-ISSN 3060-5059

DOI: 10.67227



IJTIMOIIY-GUMANITAR SOHADA ILMIY-INNOVATSION TADQIQOTLAR

ILMIY METODIK JURNAL

Scientific and Innovative Research in
Social and Humanitarian Studies

Vol. 3 • Issue 10

2026



Founded in 2024



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IJTIMOYIY AVLODLAR VA YOSHLAR TADQIQOTLARI: YOSHLAR HAYOTIDAGI DAVOMIYLIK, O'ZGARISHLAR VA TENGSIZLIKNI QAYTA ANGLASH

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Annotatsiya.

Mazkur maqolada ijtimoiy avlodlar konsepsiyasining zamonaviy yoshlar tadqiqotlaridagi nazariy ahamiyati Karl Mannxaymning avlodlar sotsiologiyasi asosida tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotda avlodlarning shakllanishi tarixiy o'zgarishlar, ijtimoiy tengsizlik, madaniy amaliyotlar va avlodlararo munosabatlar bilan bog'liq holda yoritiladi. Uy-joy, bandlik, iqtisodiy beqarorlik hamda oilaviy moliyaviy aloqalarga oid ilmiy qarashlar qiyosiy tahlil qilinib, yoshlarning hayotiy yo'nalishlari turli ijtimoiy sharoitlarda shakllanishi asoslanadi. Natijada ijtimoiy avlodlarni bir xil xususiyatlarga ega yosh guruhlar sifatida emas, balki tarixiy jarayonlar va ijtimoiy tafovutlar ta'sirida shakllanuvchi murakkab munosabatlar tizimi sifatida o'rganish zarurligi ta'kidlanadi.

Kalit so'zlar: ijtimoiy avlodlar, yoshlar tadqiqotlari, Karl Mannxaym, yoshlarning hayotiy o'tish bosqichlari, tengsizlik, temporallik, avlodlararo munosabatlar, Global Janub.

СОЦИАЛЬНЫЕ ПОКОЛЕНИЯ И ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ МОЛОДЁЖИ: ПЕРЕОСМЫСЛЕНИЕ ПРЕЕМСТВЕННОСТИ, ИЗМЕНЕНИЙ И НЕРАВЕНСТВА В ЖИЗНИ МОЛОДЫХ ЛЮДЕЙ

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Аннотация.

В статье рассматривается теоретическое значение концепции социальных поколений в современных исследованиях молодёжи на основе социологии поколений Карла Маннгейма. Анализируется взаимосвязь формирования поколений с историческими изменениями, социальным неравенством, культурными практиками и межпоколенческими отношениями. На основе сравнительного анализа научных подходов к вопросам жилья, занятости, экономической нестабильности и семейных финансовых связей раскрывается влияние различных социальных условий на жизненные траектории молодых людей. Обосновывается необходимость изучения социальных поколений не как однородных возрастных групп, а как сложных социальных образований, формирующихся под воздействием исторических процессов и социального неравенства.

Ключевые слова: социальные поколения, исследования молодёжи, Карл Маннгейм, молодёжные переходы, неравенство, темпоральность, межпоколенческие отношения, Глобальный Юг.

SOCIAL GENERATIONS AND YOUTH STUDIES: RETHINKING CONTINUITY, CHANGE AND INEQUALITY IN YOUNG LIVES

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Abstract.

This article examines the theoretical relevance of social generations in contemporary youth studies through Karl Mannheim's sociology of generations. It explores how generational formation relates to historical change, social inequality, cultural practices, and intergenerational relationships. Drawing on a comparative analysis of scholarship on housing, employment, economic insecurity, and family financial relations, the article considers how different social conditions shape young people's life trajectories. It argues that social generations should not be understood as homogeneous age groups but as differentiated social formations shaped by historical processes and unequal access to resources. This perspective offers a framework for understanding continuity and change in

young people's lives.

Keywords: social generations; youth studies; Karl Mannheim; youth transitions; inequality; temporality; intergenerational relations; Global South.

Introduction. The concept of generation occupies an unusual position in youth studies. Although widely used, the concept remains theoretically contested. Public discourse routinely describes young people through generational labels—Millennials, Generation Z, and Generation Alpha—and attributes to them distinctive attitudes towards work, family, technology, politics, and consumption. Academic research has often been more cautious. In sociology, the idea of generations has long been criticized for its tendency to transform historically situated cohorts into apparently homogeneous social groups. In youth studies, generational explanations have also been associated with accounts that obscure class inequality, racialization, gender difference, and the uneven distribution of resources. Yet the concept has repeatedly returned whenever researchers have confronted a basic problem: young people grow up under social conditions that are not identical to those experienced by their parents when they occupied the same position in the life course.

This problem has become particularly acute in the contemporary period. The transition from education into employment has been reorganized by the expansion and restructuring of higher education, insecure and segmented labour markets, rising housing costs, and the weakening of some institutional guarantees associated with earlier forms of social citizenship [1, pp. 1–20]. Family formation has become more temporally extended and economically differentiated. Digital infrastructures have transformed communication, cultural participation, and political expression while simultaneously generating new forms of surveillance, commercialisation, and inequality. Migration, climate change, economic crises, and geopolitical instability increasingly shape young people's expectations about their futures. None of these processes affects all young people in the same way. Nevertheless, they can alter the conditions under which an entire cohort or generation encounters adulthood.

The central question addressed here is: How can youth researchers conceptualize historical change without turning young people into homogeneous generational types? Conversely, how can they analyse class, gender, race, sexuality, disability, and place without reducing youth experience to the reproduction of social positions inherited from the past?

Karl Mannheim's sociology of social generations offers a useful starting point, provided that it is critically reconsidered rather than simply revived. Mannheim's concept should not be understood as a claim that people born within a particular period possess a common mentality. Nor should it be used as a substitute for cohort analysis. Its analytical value lies in identifying a relationship between historical time, social location, and life-course position.

Youth studies already has well-developed traditions for analysing social change and inequality. Transition approaches examine education, employment, housing, and family formation; cultural approaches examine identity, leisure, media, and collective practices; critical scholarship investigates class, gender, race, sexuality, and other dimensions of differentiation. These traditions do address social change, but approaches centred primarily on structural continuity or cultural specificity can struggle to explain how historical transformations shape diverse youth experiences.

A generational perspective helps connect broad social transformations with young people's lived experiences without assuming that similar conditions necessarily produce similar responses. Recent critiques nevertheless reveal the limitations of such an approach [3, pp. 66–81]. For example, Hoff argues from a cultural-studies perspective that social-generational approaches can risk reproducing a materialist logic in which changing economic conditions are implicitly treated as generating corresponding forms of consciousness. His critique suggests that generational sociology should understand culture as actively shaping social experience, not merely responding to material change.

The discussion begins by revisiting Mannheim's theory and distinguishing social generations from demographic cohorts and popular generational labels. It then traces the changing place of generational analysis within Anglophone youth studies, considers its renewed relevance, and examines critiques concerning inequality, culture and intergenerational relations. The final sections develop a relational approach linking historical time with social location, cultural practice and exchange between generations. The discussion of South African youth and financial interdependence is particularly important here because it demonstrates why concepts developed predominantly through Global North experiences cannot simply be universalized. Mathebula and Walker's analysis of young people's financial relationships with family members illustrates how economic dependence and responsibility can coexist, challenging linear models in which youth transition culminates in individual financial independence [4, pp. 808–822].

Social generations should not be treated as an overarching explanation of young people's experiences. Rather, they offer a temporal and relational perspective on how historical changes influence the reproduction, negotiation and possible transformation of existing inequalities.

From Cohorts to Social Generations.

The modern sociological discussion of generations emerged in the context of early twentieth-century transformations in understandings of youth, age, and social change. G. Stanley Hall's influential psychological account treated adolescence as a relatively universal developmental stage characterized by "storm and stress" [5, p. 534]. Anthropological work such as Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* challenged the assumption that youth experience could be explained primarily through biological development by demonstrating substantial cultural variation [6, pp. 1–13, 59–74]. European theories of generations introduced another dimension: youth could also vary historically. The young person growing up after a major war, economic crisis, or political transformation did not necessarily confront the same possibilities as someone occupying the same chronological age in an earlier period.

The First World War played a particularly important role in early twentieth-century thinking about generations.

The language of the “lost generation” captured the perception that historical rupture could create distinctive experiences among people whose formative years coincided with extraordinary political and social disruption. Ortega y Gasset's work similarly connected generations with historical change, arguing that different generations occupy different relationships to their historical circumstances [7, pp. 11–18].

Mannheim's contribution was more sociologically systematic. His essay “The Problem of Generations,” originally published in 1928 and translated into English in 1952, remains the most influential formulation of the concept. Mannheim rejected both an exclusively biological understanding of generations and a purely historical understanding based on arbitrary birth intervals. A generation was not simply a collection of people born during the same twenty-year period. It emerged through a relationship between age location and historically specific social conditions.

Three related concepts are central to Mannheim's account.

The first is generation location [8, p. 290]. People born at approximately the same time share a position within the historical process, but this does not automatically produce a social generation. A generation location becomes sociologically significant when members encounter a distinctive set of social circumstances that creates possibilities and constraints different from those experienced by preceding age groups.

The second is generation as actuality [8, p. 303]. A generation becomes socially consequential when people located within the same historical situation become involved in common processes of interpretation and action. The relationship is therefore not deterministic. Historical conditions provide a field of possibilities, but people interpret those conditions differently.

The third is generation units [8, pp. 304–305]. Members of the same generation can respond to shared historical circumstances in radically different ways. Mannheim's examples of politically conservative, romantic, and liberal youth demonstrate that generational experience does not imply ideological uniformity. Different groups may occupy contrasting positions within the same generational location.

Much contemporary discussion of generations, however, runs counter to Mannheim's argument. Popular accounts frequently assume that a birth cohort has a characteristic personality: one generation is entrepreneurial, another narcissistic, another digitally native, another politically progressive. Such descriptions reproduce precisely the form of generational reductionism Mannheim sought to avoid.

It is therefore necessary to distinguish a demographic cohort from a social generation. Ryder (1965) conceptualized the cohort as a population aggregate defined by a shared demographic event or period. Cohorts are useful in demographic and longitudinal research because researchers can define and measure them precisely. A “cohort of people born in 1980” or “students entering university in 1999” is an analytically clear population.

By contrast, a social generation takes shape through shared historical circumstances and their interpretation; its boundaries cannot always be determined in advance. It becomes visible through historically significant transformations and through the ways people respond to them.

The distinction does not make the two approaches incompatible. Cohort analysis and generational sociology can complement one another. Quantitative longitudinal research can identify cohort differences; sociological generation theory can ask what social processes make those differences meaningful. The problem begins when statistical differences are automatically interpreted as generational consciousness or when a generational label is treated as an explanation in itself.

Mannheim's approach thus draws attention to the processes through which a generation forms, rather than treating its existence as an explanation in itself [9, pp. 481–495].

The marginalization of generational analysis in youth studies.

Despite the theoretical importance of Mannheim, generations became relatively marginal within Anglophone youth studies during much of the second half of the twentieth century.

One reason was the rise of structural functionalism. Parsons (1942), Eisenstadt (1956), and Coleman (1961) treated youth in relation to the institutional requirements of modern society. The expansion of education and the separation of young people from adult occupational roles contributed to the development of distinctive youth cultures. Youth could therefore be interpreted as a transitional and potentially disruptive stage produced by the organization of modern institutions [10, pp. 604–616; 11, pp. 1–20; 12, pp. 1–20].

These accounts were subsequently criticized for treating youth culture as a relatively autonomous age-based phenomenon. The emergence of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) approach represented a decisive shift. Hall and Jefferson (1975) and Clarke et al. (1976) interpreted post-war youth cultures through class relations, ideology, and material inequality [13, pp. 1–15; 14, pp. 9–74]. Punk, skinhead culture, and other youth formations were understood not simply as expressions of a generational gap but as cultural responses to class location and social restructuring.

This perspective established an enduring principle in youth studies: young people do not become socially significant merely because they are young. Their experiences are shaped by class relations, gender regimes, racialization, and other structures of power.

Over time, however, the contrast between class and generation became overly rigid. Murdock and McCron (1976) themselves warned against treating class consciousness as the only meaningful dimension of youth experience. A focus exclusively on class could be as reductive as a focus exclusively on generation.

The later development of post-subcultural research further complicated the picture. Scholars questioned whether relatively coherent subcultures remained the dominant form of youth cultural organization in societies characterized by individualization, mediated consumption, and fluid identities [15, pp. 599–617; 16, pp. 629–645]. At the same time, youth-transition research developed around education, employment, housing, and family formation. This

tradition emphasized the changing institutional conditions under which young people moved into adulthood.

Furlong, Woodman, and Wyn (2011) argued that the division between cultural and transitional approaches was itself problematic. Young people's cultural practices cannot easily be separated from labour markets, education, housing, and family relationships. Nor can transitions be understood without considering the meanings young people attach to them.

Generational sociology contributes a historical perspective through which material conditions and cultural responses can be examined together.

Yet it would be mistaken to describe the history of youth studies as a simple movement from "generation" to "class" and then back again. Mannheim's original approach already acknowledged social differentiation. The more important historical issue is that later uses of generation often became associated with homogeneous age-based explanations, while youth studies increasingly developed more sophisticated accounts of inequality and cultural difference.

The challenge is not to reinstate generation as the dominant category, but to develop a concept compatible with the insights of contemporary critical youth research.

Why Generations Have Returned.

The renewed interest in generations reflects changes in the social conditions of young adulthood.

During the post-war period in many Western societies, transitions from education to work, independent housing, and family formation were often represented through relatively standardized sequences. This image was never universally accurate. It excluded or marginalized many young people on the basis of class, gender, race, and sexuality. Nevertheless, it provided an institutional reference point against which subsequent changes could be measured.

Since the 1980s, many of these pathways have become less predictable. Labour markets have become more segmented, temporary, and insecure. Higher education has expanded, but credentials do not necessarily translate into secure employment. Housing markets have become increasingly difficult for many younger adults. Family formation has been postponed and increasingly differentiated by social position.

These processes have been extensively documented in youth-transition research. What the generational perspective adds is the possibility of asking whether the relationship between institutions and life-course expectations itself changes historically.

Woodman and Wyn's research in Australia provides a useful example [17, pp. 1–30]. Young people leaving school during the 1990s encountered labour-market conditions that differed substantially from those experienced by many of their parents. Educational expansion became increasingly important as a response to employment insecurity, while credentials themselves became less reliable guarantees of stable careers. Young women in particular experienced an expansion of educational opportunity alongside continuing gendered constraints in employment and family life.

These developments do more than prolong the transition to adulthood; they reshape the relationship between education, employment and family life.

Describing these developments only as "longer transitions" assumes that the meaning and destination of adulthood have remained unchanged. A generational approach asks whether the destination itself is changing.

What counts as a successful adult life? What does independence mean when housing costs require prolonged family support? What does a career mean when employment is episodic? What does family responsibility mean when young adults provide financial support to parents or siblings?

Such questions help explain the renewed interest in generational analysis. It provides a way of connecting changes in social institutions with changes in the horizons of possibility available to young people.

The contemporary return of generations should therefore not be understood as a rediscovery of a lost category. It reflects a theoretical need generated by social change.

Generation is not homogeneity: inequality within generations.

Race and migration similarly shape generational location [18, pp. 215–230; 19, pp. 1–20]. A young person from a racialized minority does not simply experience "the same generation" as a privileged member of the majority population. Historical relations of racialization structure access to housing, employment, citizenship, and cultural recognition.

Place is equally important [17, pp. 1–30]. Generational processes are never entirely placeless. The historical experience of young people in a major global city cannot be assumed to represent youth experience in a rural community, a deindustrialized region, or a peripheral economy.

These observations do not invalidate the generational perspective. They clarify what it must mean.

Generation should be treated as one axis of social location among several, but with a distinctive temporal property. Class, gender, and race structure access to resources; generation concerns the historical conditions under which those resources acquire particular meanings and consequences.

An important distinction follows: inequality varies not only within generations, but also in the mechanisms through which it is reproduced across generations as historical circumstances change. Recognising such changes goes beyond observing that young people have diverse experiences.

Culture, Temporality and the Critique of Generational Approaches.

The return of generational sociology has generated an important contemporary criticism: the danger of treating social conditions as producing corresponding forms of consciousness.

Hoff's (2023) intervention is particularly valuable here [3, pp. 66–81]. Drawing on Raymond Williams, he argues that cultural processes should not be treated as a simple "superstructure" generated by material conditions [20, pp. 121–128]. His analysis of housing transitions and leisure among young British men demonstrates how cultural practices participate in the construction of transitional pathways rather than merely reflecting them.

This critique calls for a more nuanced reading of Mannheimian sociology.

A simplistic generational model might proceed as follows:

1. Economic conditions change;
2. Young people experience those changes;
3. They develop new attitudes;
4. A new generation emerges.

This sequence assumes a direct causal relationship that overlooks social and cultural mediation.

A more useful account treats these processes as mutually influential:

1. Institutions and material conditions change;
2. Young people encounter those conditions through differentiated social locations;
3. They interpret and negotiate them through existing cultural repertoires;
4. Their practices can reproduce, modify, or challenge those conditions;
5. These responses contribute to the historical formation of subsequent conditions.

Cultural practices are thus integral to the formation of social generations.

This is consistent with Mannheim's own insistence that generation does not mechanically determine consciousness. It also connects generational sociology to Williams's (1977) concepts of dominant, residual, and emergent culture [20, pp. 121–128].

The implication is that generational change should not be measured only through attitudes. It may be expressed through new practices, expectations, temporalities, and definitions of what constitutes a viable life.

For example, a young adult who does not expect to own a home may not simply have a different "attitude" from their parents. Their relationship to work, partnership, mobility, and place may be reorganized around a different understanding of what adulthood entails. Likewise, young people who remain in education longer may not simply delay adulthood; they may inhabit a different relationship between education, identity, and employment.

Temporality is central to this argument. Youth is not simply a biological age or a chronological stage. It is a socially organized experience of time.

Young people can experience time as acceleration, delay, suspension, anticipation, or uncertainty. A labour market that postpones stable employment can extend youth, but it can also alter the meaning of adulthood. A housing market that delays independent living can intensify intergenerational dependence while simultaneously increasing young people's expectations of autonomy.

The temporal dimension also explains why two people of the same chronological age can occupy very different social positions.

Generation and life course therefore need to be analytically connected but not conflated. Life-course analysis asks how lives unfold over time; generational analysis asks how historical transformations alter the conditions under which life-course trajectories unfold.

The combination is particularly useful for youth studies because youth is precisely the period in which individuals encounter institutions that mediate their movement towards adulthood.

Beyond the Global North.

One of the major weaknesses of generational debates has been their tendency to generalize from Western European, North American, and Australian experiences.

Terms such as "independence", "adulthood", "homeownership", and "career" are often treated as universal aspirations. They are not.

Research from South Africa provides an especially important corrective. Mathebula and Walker (2025) examine financial interdependence among young people and show how young adults can simultaneously depend upon family resources and carry significant financial responsibilities towards parents and other relatives [4, pp. 808–822].

Such findings challenge linear accounts of the transition to adulthood.

In a conventional transition narrative, the sequence is: dependence → education → employment → financial independence → adulthood.

But where family networks operate as systems of mutual obligation, the sequence may instead look like: dependence ↔ contribution ↔ education ↔ employment ↔ reciprocal family responsibility.

The young person does not necessarily become an autonomous individual by leaving intergenerational relations behind. Adulthood may involve a transformation of those relations.

INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONS, INHERITANCE AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

A second major criticism of generational analysis concerns its tendency to emphasize conflict between age groups.

Public discourse frequently represents generations as competing for resources: young versus old, Millennials versus Baby Boomers, renters versus homeowners, workers versus retirees. Such narratives can obscure the extensive solidarities that connect generations.

Families are often the primary institutions through which resources move between generations.

Parents provide housing, money, childcare, education, and social networks. Young adults may subsequently provide care, money, and practical support to parents. Intergenerational relationships are therefore simultaneously emotional, economic, and institutional.

Generational change does not eliminate such relationships. Indeed, social change can make them more important.

When welfare states, labour markets, or housing systems become less predictable, families can become

increasingly significant buffers against institutional insecurity. But access to family resources is highly unequal. A young person whose parents own property and possess professional networks enters an uncertain labour market differently from a young person whose parents have limited savings and precarious employment.

Intergenerational solidarity can alleviate immediate insecurity while also reproducing inequality.

The same family resources that protect young people from economic uncertainty can contribute to widening differences between those with and without access to such support.

Bourdieu's analysis of social reproduction helps explain this relationship. Inherited resources are not simply transferred intact. They must be converted under changing institutional conditions. The capacity to use family resources effectively can itself become a form of advantage.

Generational sociology can therefore make a distinctive contribution to inequality research.

Towards a Relational Sociology of Generations.

The preceding analysis supports defining a social generation as a historically situated and internally differentiated formation produced through the interaction of life-course position, changing social conditions, cultural practices, social inequalities, and intergenerational relations.

This definition differs from a cohort in four ways. First, it is historical. Generations emerge through processes of social change rather than predetermined chronological intervals.

Second, it is relational. A generation exists in relation to other generations and to institutions.

Third, it is differentiated. Members of the same generation occupy unequal class, gender, racial, sexual, geographical, and embodied positions.

Fourth, it is processual. Generations are not fixed identities but formations that can become more or less socially consequential.

The proposed definition builds on Mannheim's account while addressing its limitations.

The first analytical task is to identify a generational location: What historically specific transformation is occurring, and how does it intersect with the life-course position of young people?

The second is to identify social differentiation: Who encounters that transformation, and under what conditions?

The third is to analyse cultural mediation: How do young people interpret, negotiate, and give meaning to changing conditions?

The fourth is to examine intergenerational relations: What resources, expectations, obligations, and conflicts connect young people to previous generations?

The fifth is to examine consequences across the life course: Do historically distinctive experiences remain consequential after youth?

The framework brings together approaches that youth research often treats separately.

Youth transitions are often analysed as sequences of movement between institutions. Youth cultures are analysed as symbolic and cultural practices. Inequality research examines differentiated access to resources. Generational sociology can connect these dimensions by introducing historical time as an explicit analytical category.

Housing provides an illustrative example.

A transition approach can analyse movement from the parental home to independent housing. An inequality approach can compare homeownership by class. A cultural approach can analyse how young people construct identities through renting, shared living, or digital practices.

A generational approach asks an additional question: What happens when the relationship between housing, employment, family formation, and adulthood changes historically?

The value of generational analysis lies less in adding another variable than in bringing these questions into a common historical framework.

What a Relational Generational Approach Changes in Youth Studies.

First, it rejects generational stereotypes. Terms such as "Millennials" or "Generation Z" can be used descriptively, but they should not be treated as sociological explanations. Researchers should specify the historical processes that make a cohort distinctive rather than assuming that the label explains its behaviour.

Second, it reconnects youth transitions and youth cultures. The distinction between transition and culture remains analytically useful, but it should not become a division between material and symbolic worlds [3, pp. 66–81]. Hoff's cultural-studies critique demonstrates why cultural practice needs to be treated as constitutive of transitional pathways rather than simply as an outcome of them.

Third, it makes inequality dynamic. Class, race, and gender should not be treated only as stable attributes that differentiate young people. The question becomes how changing historical conditions alter the mechanisms through which these inequalities operate.

Fourth, it complicates "progress". Generational narratives often imply that each new generation is more tolerant, educated, individualistic, or technologically sophisticated than the previous one. Such narratives confuse social change with social progress. A generation can experience expanded educational opportunities while facing greater employment insecurity. It can experience greater sexual freedom while facing new forms of digital surveillance. It can be more globally connected while living in increasingly unequal housing markets.

Fifth, it changes comparative research. Instead of searching for universal generational characteristics, comparative research should identify comparable historical transformations and examine their local mediation. This is especially important for research outside the Global North.

Sixth, it changes how researchers think about the future. Young people are frequently described as the "future of society". This language can obscure their present social position. A generational approach instead asks how young people

participate in producing social futures through their responses to changing conditions. This returns us to Mannheim's original concern. Generations become sociologically important not because they are young, but because they can become carriers of social change.

GENERATIONAL ANALYSIS AS A SOCIOLOGY OF UNCERTAINTY

One of the most important consequences of this approach is that it shifts attention from "delay" to uncertainty.

Much contemporary youth research describes extended transitions: longer education, later home-leaving, postponed marriage, and delayed parenthood. These descriptions are empirically important, but they can imply that young people are simply taking longer to achieve the same outcomes as previous generations.

In many cases, that assumption is questionable.

The issue may not be that adulthood has been postponed. It may be that the institutional meaning of adulthood has changed.

Stable employment may no longer precede family formation in the same way. Homeownership may cease to be the central marker of independence. Educational credentials may become necessary without being sufficient for occupational security. Family support may become more important precisely as cultural expectations of individual autonomy increase.

These contradictions generate uncertainty.

Uncertainty is not distributed equally. Young people with economic and cultural resources can manage uncertain futures more effectively than those without them. Yet uncertainty can nevertheless become a defining historical condition shared across otherwise different social positions.

Shared exposure to historical change does not imply identical experiences or outcomes. This distinction provides a basis for reconsidering Mannheim's theory in contemporary youth research.

CONCLUSION

The sociology of generations occupies a productive but unsettled position within contemporary youth studies. Its history reveals both why it became marginalized and why it has returned.

It became problematic when generation was treated as a homogeneous age category, when it was separated from class and inequality, or when it was used to produce stereotypical claims about the characteristics of entire cohorts. But these are not inevitable consequences of generational analysis. They are consequences of a particular way of using the concept.

Mannheim's original formulation was more nuanced. His distinction between generation location, generation as actuality, and generation units already recognized that shared historical conditions do not produce uniform responses. The task today is to extend this insight by incorporating the theoretical developments that have occurred in youth studies since Mannheim.

A contemporary sociology of generations must therefore be simultaneously temporal, relational, cultural, and intersectional.

It must recognize that young people encounter historically changing institutions at particular points in their lives. It must examine how class, gender, race, sexuality, disability, and place shape those encounters. It must treat culture as constitutive of responses to structural change rather than as a simple reflection of material conditions. And it must understand intergenerational relations as simultaneously mechanisms of solidarity, transmission, obligation, and inequality.

The inclusion of research from outside the Global North is particularly important. The example of financial interdependence among young South Africans demonstrates that the supposedly universal trajectory from dependence to individual financial independence is historically and geographically specific.

This suggests a broader redefinition of the object of generational sociology. The question is not "What is Generation X, Y, or Z?" Nor is it simply "Are young people different from their parents?"

The more productive question is: How do historically specific transformations alter the relationship between young people's life-course positions, inherited resources, cultural practices, and intergenerational relationships?

This question makes generation analytically useful without making it analytically dominant.

The principal contribution of a generational perspective is therefore to make historical time visible within the study of inequality and youth. Class inequality does not disappear when historical circumstances change; its mechanisms can change. Cultural practices do not float independently of material conditions; they help constitute how those conditions are experienced. Intergenerational solidarity does not contradict generational change; it can be one of the principal mechanisms through which change is negotiated and inequality reproduced.

Generations should consequently be understood not as fixed groups but as historically situated social formations.

Such an approach also provides a way of reconnecting two longstanding traditions within youth studies. The transition perspective asks what happens to young people as they move through education, employment, housing, and family institutions. The cultural perspective asks how young people create meanings and identities through everyday practices. A relational generational perspective asks how both processes are transformed by changing historical conditions—and how young people themselves participate in producing those transformations.

Generational sociology therefore seeks not to predict the characteristics of an age group, but to explain how the opportunities, constraints and meanings associated with youth, adulthood and the future change over time.

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