

1 EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION



2 **Making Sense of Intersecting Crises: Promises, Challenges,**  
3 **and Possibilities of Intersectional Perspectives in Youth**  
4 **Research**

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8 **Editors' Introduction: Intersecting Crises**

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9 The COVID-19 global pandemic is having a profound effect on young people world-  
10 wide. This Special Issue locates this single, significant crisis within broader, socio-  
11 historically situated intersecting crises (Ang 2021) that are shaping contemporary  
12 lives. These intersecting crises, including precarity, criminalisation, Black Lives  
13 Matter, austerity, and the climate crisis, are disproportionately affecting young peo-  
14 ple. The intersection of such crises is profoundly transforming contemporary young  
15 peoples' lived experiences and imagined trajectories in diverse, contextual ways.  
16 Critically, they are exacerbating and extending persistent structural inequalities  
17 associated with class, race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, and age at a time  
18 when 'transitions to adulthood have become longer, fuzzier, and more complex'  
19 (Macdonald et al. 2019:1). Yet, in grappling with these intersecting crises and trou-  
20 bled transitions, young people are giving rise to new spaces, practices, and conver-  
21 sations that challenge the status quo and create possibilities for more hopeful futures  
22 (Hanckel and Chandra 2021; Woodrow and Moore 2021; Nunn et al. 2021; Bowman  
23 and Pickard 2021). Centering these intersecting crises and their effects is critical for  
24 the field of youth studies as we seek to make sense of contemporary young people's  
25 lives and experiences.

26 This special issue builds on conversations that began in a 2019 workshop on  
27 'Youth Intersections' organised by the *British Sociological Association's (BSA)*  
28 *Youth Study Group*. This dialogue continued across study group (virtual) meet-ups  
29 throughout the pandemic (2020–2021), as well as a Plenary held at the BSA annual

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30 conference 2021. Notable across these conversations among youth researchers was  
31 the role of COVID-19 in (re)producing existing intersecting inequalities and rep-  
32 resenting a new crisis for young people already grappling with myriad contempo-  
33 rary crises. The articles in this special issue draw on interdisciplinary perspectives  
34 to examine how these intersecting crises are playing out in the lives of young peo-  
35 ple right now. Our contributors draw on research undertaken before and during the  
36 pandemic, surfacing how young people can (and are!) navigating intersecting crises  
37 in creative ways, and who and what is supporting them to do so. This special issue  
38 aims to expand the field of youth studies through centering lived experiences by  
39 thinking *with* young people about how we respond to the challenges to youth transi-  
40 tions and cultures these crises are creating. In doing so, this special issue concen-  
41 trates on the ‘unprecedented’ current pandemic moment, whilst recognising conti-  
42 nuousities with past moments, and attending to the cumulative impact of crises on the  
43 (im)possible futures of young people.

#### 44 **Intersectional Perspectives in Youth Studies**

45 As youth studies scholars, we are constantly navigating the tension between theoris-  
46 ing youth and young people’s lives generally, and attending to the specific experi-  
47 ences of particular individuals and groups. Intersectionality, with its focus on the  
48 complex and compounding relations between different forms of oppression and  
49 inequality, offers an important conceptual resource for meaningfully engaging with  
50 differentiated experiences of ‘youth’. Intersectionality as a concept is focused on the  
51 multiple interacting influences of social location, ‘identity’, and historical and ongo-  
52 ing oppression (Tancock 2016). An intersectional approach enables consideration  
53 of how categories of ‘identity’ and social position overlap, and how we might bet-  
54 ter understand identity and oppression by exploring categories such as ‘race’ and  
55 ‘gender’ in unison. Whilst intersectionality focuses on the categories we use to make  
56 sense of the world, it troubles and avoids essentialist understandings of identity.  
57 Intersectional approaches in this way acknowledge the heterogeneity of young peo-  
58 ple’s experiences without obscuring the similarities in, and specificities of, the dis-  
59 advantages they face.

60 However, foregrounding intersectionality is not an easy or guaranteed route to  
61 inclusivity and transformation in youth research or practice, or anywhere else for  
62 that matter. Longstanding criticisms of its unreflective use as a ‘buzzword’ con-  
63 tinue (Davis 2008), as do questions about both ‘the focus on multiple axes of dif-  
64 ference’ and about ‘the need to focus on specific axes over others’ (Hopkins 2018:  
65 585). In this context, we apply intersectionality as a *provisional* concept (Crenshaw  
66 1991; Carastathis 2014), using it as a lens through which to ‘think about how we  
67 think about’ (Carastathis 2016:4) representations, transitions, and lived experi-  
68 ences of young people in COVID-19 times and beyond. Whilst there is increasing  
69 attention being paid to various intersectional youth perspectives (see, for example,  
70 Idriss (2021) on race and Frederick (2021) on disability), we argue there is more **AQ4**  
71 work to be done. This is critical in the context of contemporary crises, which can be  
72 understood, through their intersection, to similarly exceed the sum of their parts. We

73 might consider, for example, how the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, auster-  
74 ity, and precarity combine to shape the experiences of working class young people  
75 in the UK (see Nunn et al., this issue) and Australia (Cook et al. 2021), or how the  
76 racialisation intersects with financial crises to mediate employment outcomes for  
77 young people of colour (Eseonu, this issue).

78 Intersectionality is never divorced from practice, emerging as it did from a socio-  
79 legal concern with Black feminist thinking *and* practice (Carastathis 2014; Alexan-  
80 der-Floyd 2012). These practice-based origins are crucial in shaping intersectional-  
81 ity's efficacy as a tool with which to think about and challenge oppression, and a  
82 means to identify agency or lack of it, within moments, spaces, and times, alongside  
83 acts of resistance and activism. Intersectionality for example is a useful tool to criti-  
84 cally analyse and disparage policies which emphasise 'individual responsibility' as  
85 a so-called solution to navigating crises, be it COVID-19 or others. As a provisional  
86 concept then, intersectionality holds transformative potential as it relates to applied  
87 youth-focused research, policy, and practice.

## 88 Interdisciplinary Perspectives

89 Intersectional analysis can also benefit from an *interdisciplinary* approach (see Deg-  
90 nen and Tyler 2017 regarding Anthropology and Sociology). Recent contributions  
91 to intersectional analyses of youth have emerged from cognate disciplines includ-  
92 ing Childhood Studies and Geography (see Konstantoni et al. 2017; Gutierrez and  
93 Hopkins 2015). The diversity of disciplines contributing to intersectional work  
94 exemplifies the strengths of an interdisciplinary approach to analysing youth experi-  
95 ence and considering youth practices. Whilst interdisciplinary approaches can cre-  
96 ate (sub)disciplinary tensions, these can be productive, and this special issue shows  
97 how such tensions can be a key strength for analysing young people's experiences.  
98 This special issue therefore continues to champion interdisciplinary approaches by  
99 offering contributions from youth studies scholars located within and across various  
100 cognate disciplines, including alcohol and drug studies, criminology, digital sociol-  
101 ogy, education studies, and gender/sexuality studies. In so doing, the papers attend  
102 to the varied socio-historical intersecting crises facing young people, and illuminate  
103 how mechanisms of support as well as control are actioned in youth lives lived at  
104 particular intersections, and the resulting effects. Here intersectionality and inter-  
105 disciplinary function as critical resources for understanding intersecting crises in  
106 young lives.

107 This special issue includes five papers, uniting a range of international schol-  
108 ars examining the changing circumstances of young people, and the tensions and  
109 opportunities of intersectional work from interdisciplinary perspectives. This work  
110 is composed by academics, at various career stages, representing the diversity of the  
111 Youth Studies community, as well as some young student co-authors. Each paper  
112 surfaces young people's experiences as they deal with crises, and create spaces for  
113 themselves, even when structures (continue) to marginalise them.

114 Our first article, by Nunn and colleagues, is a collaboration between academics  
115 and undergraduate students. Reflecting on student experiences during COVID-19,

116 the authors highlight the pandemic's intersection with existing crises and inequalities  
117 that structure young people's lives. At the same time, they introduce the concept  
118 of 'precarious hope' to make sense of the fragile but generative possibilities emerg-  
119 ing from this moment of precarity. Directly addressing student authors' experiences  
120 of feeling ignored and undervalued as young people throughout the pandemic, the  
121 article's co-productive approach is posited as an example of cross-generational  
122 solidarity. The theme of precarious hope situates the ways that (im)possible futures  
123 emerge throughout each paper in this special issue, and the ways that intersecting  
124 crises affect youth lives and trajectories.

125 In the second article, Eseonu draws on case study data to examine youth transi-  
126 tions to employment as experienced by racially minoritised youth in the UK.  
127 Situated against the backdrop of the economic crises of 2008 and the more recent  
128 COVID-19 pandemic, Eseonu argues that the entanglement of race, class, and  
129 opportunity structures works to constrain racially minoritised youth as they transi-  
130 tion to employment. The paper illustrates how individuals working in the employ-  
131 ment support service may provide proactive support for racially minoritised youth to  
132 challenge racialised transitions at this pivotal transition point, hence potentiating a  
133 future better aligned with precarious hope for these young people.

134 Zúñiga and Colin, co-authors of the third article, draw on Hochschild's (1983) **AQ5**  
135 concept of emotional labour to offer a comparative perspective of contexts in cri-  
136 sis for young people — early career high school teachers in Mexico City in private  
137 and public school systems. These young workers (aged 21–31) were at the begin-  
138 ning of their employment trajectories as COVID-19 forced them to pivot to digital  
139 work with their students. Their analysis illuminates teaching practices across private  
140 and public schools, showing how disparities in existing digital infrastructure and  
141 existing inequalities between private and public schools and their student cohorts  
142 forced differing emotional work on these young teachers. The authors refer to this  
143 as 'asymmetrical emotional labours', making visible the varied labour that intersect-  
144 ing crises of COVID-19 and existing social inequalities produced. Yet despite their  
145 struggles, Zúñiga and Colin found hope in the young teachers' capacity to express  
146 empathy towards their students, suggesting the need for empathetic training/spaces  
147 to be built into teacher training.

148 In the fourth article, Woodrow and Moore explore how intersectional disadvan-  
149 tages relating to access to safe and affordable leisure spaces are being compounded,  
150 exacerbated, and extended in familiar and novel ways by the COVID-19 crisis.  
151 They bring together innovative data sets taken before *and* during the pandemic to  
152 show how the liminal leisure status of disadvantaged young people pre-COVID-19  
153 became, albeit briefly, the experience of young people in the UK more generally, in  
154 light of the policing of lockdowns and the closure of night-time economies. They  
155 note, however, that despite some confluence of experience, youth leisure exclusion  
156 remains highly differentiated, particularly given 'intersectionally disadvantaged  
157 young people 'at leisure' are subject to a confluence of criminalisation, exclusion,  
158 and stigmatisation in Covid times' (PAGE).

159 Our final article in this special issue is by Bowman and Pickard. They draw on  
160 60 interviews with youth environmental activists before and during school cli-  
161 mate strikes. Utilising the 'youth-led' concept of 'climate peace', which emerged

162 in their work, they ‘shift the conceptual focus onto the work [that] young peo-  
163 ple are doing, as opposed to the way young people fit into the concepts, struc-  
164 tures and institutions of adult-centred politics’ (PAGE). The article explores how  
165 young people advocated an understanding of peace whilst situated in and nego-  
166 tiating complex competing contexts relating to precarity, activism, and policing  
167 which persistently marginalised them. Bowman and Pickard’s critical argument  
168 for thinking with young people and youth-led concepts emerging out of youth  
169 experiences reinforces the focus on researching and learning with young people  
170 that threads throughout all contributions in this special issue. Collectively, these  
171 five papers open up possibilities for moving youth studies forward as a discipline  
172 not just about but *with* young people. Far from being the conclusion, we offer this  
173 collection to stimulate scholarly thinking in youth studies and youth practice, and  
174 as a critical and hopeful contribution to making sense of young people’s lives in  
175 the context of continued intersecting crises.

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