

# Youth on Screen: Representing Young People in Film and Television

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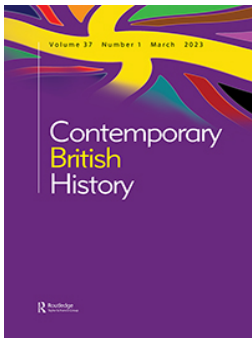
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## Youth on Screen: Representing Young People in Film and Television

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This final section deals most explicitly with conceptualisations of history in popular culture. The canonisation of *Pride* as a memory resource is demonstrated by Horvat's interactions with archivists at the People's History Museum, the emergence of LGSMMigrants and the reignited interest in LGSMM at *Pride* events across the country. By demonstrating the obfuscations in the film's content, Horvat makes a case for considering the types of queer histories which are being presented as vital queer memories. Beyond this and perhaps most pressingly, it asks once presented with these pasts, what kinds of futures are viewers encouraged to seek.

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### **Youth on Screen: Representing Young People in Film and Television**, By

David Buckingham, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2021, vi + 192 pp., £55 (hbk), ISBN 978-1-5095-4525-4. £17.99 (pbk), ISBN 978-1-5095-4526-1. £12.99 (ebk), ISBN 978-1-5095-4527-8.

For historians of youth, media, and popular culture, David Buckingham's *Youth on Screen* offers a clear and engaging study of the relationship between television, film, and youth across the post-1945 period. The book, drawn from Buckingham's online project *Growing up Modern: Childhood, Youth and Popular Culture Since 1945*, offers readers a study of predominantly British and American films and television series spanning almost seventy years. *Youth on Screen* is organised thematically, and utilises a mixture of films and television across the book's six chapters (excluding the introduction and conclusion) to draw together questions about the representation, construction, and reception of ideas about youth and young people. Buckingham's *Youth on Screen* is a strong addition to the rich literature on youth media, and its mix of historical and contemporary examples ensures it will be of interest to those working across a range of fields.

Following the introductory chapter, chapter two considers the construction of the juvenile delinquent in the 1950s, suggesting that the tensions exposed by juvenile delinquent films—namely the film industry's need to court the growing youth market and the simultaneous desire to 'reassure adult audiences of its responsibility and respectability' (p. 37)—resulted in a number of contradictions in the genre. The juvenile delinquent was a common trope through which the 'problem' of youth and its potential solutions might be explored but it was also, explains Buckingham, an approach that became a cliché remarkably quickly. Chapter three uses the case study of the 'pop film', where music stars play themselves or versions of themselves, to consider the complex relationship between the film industry and youth culture. The pop film is presented by Buckingham as a potentially 'ambivalent' phenomenon (p. 41), one that can both celebrate and critique the processes by which young music stars are made. In many ways, chapter three offers productive ways of thinking critically about the way that authenticity is explored (and exploited) on screen. Chapter four's focus shifts more directly to consider adult representations of youth. While this is a theme that runs clearly through *Youth on Screen*, chapter four's focus on nostalgia via issues such as generational change and personal development allows Buckingham to explore the emotional implications of youth and growing up. Chapter five explores adolescent girlhood, and offers the final thematic case


study. Through this chapter Buckingham complicates the representations of ‘coming of age’ narratives as being moments of ‘empowerment or liberation’, and instead suggests that a study of media representations of girlhood demonstrates that it can also be understood as ‘ambivalent and dangerous’ (p. 118). Buckingham considers not only the ways in which adolescent girls’ sexuality is framed as dangerous or disruptive, but also explores representations of young women’s agency.

The case studies presented in the final two chapters present perhaps the most direct discussion of youth television and film as a genre. Through two studies—*This is England* (film, 2006) and the three follow-up television series (2010, 2011, 2015), and *Skins* (television series, 2007–2013)—the two chapters focus on the challenge of representing youth in the long-form storytelling format, as well as the continuing popularity of this medium despite the rise of short-form entertainment pioneered through platforms such as YouTube. Chapter six, in particular, offers a critical and thoughtful discussion of *This is England* as both a ‘state of the nation’ and a ‘state of youth’ story of 1980s Britain that is grounded in analysis of both the characters’ and Shane Meadows’ reflections on the decade.

*Youth on Screen* has much to offer historians of youth and popular culture, and reflects directly on the use of television and film as a historical source. In the concluding pages Buckingham offers reflections on reading history *from* film and television, and history *in* film and television. On the former, Buckingham warns historians against the temptation to contrast representations of youth in any given time period, but rather to think about what they might reveal about adults’ changing conceptions of youth. On the latter, Buckingham notes the importance of historical work that seeks to untangle the ‘distinctions between the popular representation of a decade and the much more diverse and complex realities of the time’ (p. 167). *Youth on Screen* takes readers beyond the well-known ‘youth’ films and television shows, and its chronological breadth allows Buckingham to draw some unexpected and enlightening comparisons about genre and narrative.

While the book is written and presented in an accessible and very readable format, those wanting a detailed discussion of the wider scholarship on youth media will need to look elsewhere. Buckingham is clear, in the book’s opening pages, that *Youth on Screen* is designed as a book geared to students and general readers ‘at a fairly introductory level’ (p. 5). As such, it is a text that will, for those not widely read in film and media theory, need to be paired with additional scholarship. The final pages of the book offer a brief list of suggestions for further reading, alongside a full bibliography.

*Youth on Screen* will be of interest to students of contemporary popular culture, as well as scholars wanting an accessible introduction to key case studies exploring representations of youth. Its broad chronological focus, cross-Atlantic comparisons, and consideration of changing representations of youth into the twenty-first century offers a welcome addition to the increasingly dynamic field of youth studies.

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