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KATE BROWN, *Vulnerability and young people: care and social control in policy and practice*. Bristol: Policy Press, 2015, pp 252, ISBN 9781447318170, £70.00 (hbk).

Vulnerability is a notion which serves as a motif, particularly within the fields of social policy and practice. However despite its growing use, the concept is of itself vulnerable with both its meaning and parameters remaining 'somewhat elusive' (Munro and Scoular 2011: 189). In *Vulnerability and Young People*, Brown successfully synthesises the concept of vulnerability from philosophical debate, through to policies and interventions, and to lived experiences, guiding the reader along the thread and beautifully weaving a captivating narrative. Through investigation of the theoretical and real world implications of vulnerability Brown brings some clarity to an otherwise 'unclear, catch-all concept' (Misztal, 2011: 5). Brown's message, as with that of others, is that vulnerability is a double-edged sword – whilst it can be used as a tool for effective social change, the manner in which it is deployed allows agencies to control and manage 'problematic' individuals (see also Munro and Scoular, 2011). Her 'central contention' (p. 25) within this book "is that in a context of economic liberalism and welfare retrenchment, the rise of vulnerability in policy and practice can serve to further marginalise those who might be considered the 'most vulnerable'" (p. 25) – something which Brown later reiterates (p. 191). Brown's text is divided into 8 chapters; each exquisitely written with wonderfully worded titles which allude to the various themes unpacked and exposed throughout. The text combines a literature review of vulnerability (Chapters 1 and 2), an analysis of the rise of vulnerability within national policy (Chapter 3), and a case study (Chapters 4-7), thus affording adequate attention to both theoretical and empirical discussion. The empirical element includes interviews with 25 'vulnerable' young people aged 12-18 and interviews with 15 providers (practitioners and policy makers). The case study also includes ethnographic immersion in practitioner worlds. The fieldwork was conducted in a large city in England (with a population of around 750,000) and access was secured through six 'gatekeeper' agencies (p. 19).

Discussion begins with the narratives of two 'vulnerable' young people (Brown also ends on a similar note). By commencing in such a way Brown achieves two equally important goals. Firstly, she prompts the reader to consider the meaning of vulnerability through exploring the lived experiences of 'vulnerable' young people. Secondly, by placing these two narratives at the outset of the text, Brown highlights their symbolic significance. These accounts are essential to generating a deeper understanding of an inherently problematic concept. Brown's interest in vulnerability, as she explains in Chapter 1, was "something that developed gradually through a mixture of experience working in the voluntary sector services for 'vulnerable' people, and later through returning to university to learn more about social approaches to 'problem' groups" (p. 5). She explains that, whilst often deploying the term 'vulnerable' during her employment, she became 'increasingly uneasy about this' (p. 5). Through her work she experienced the ways in which vulnerability was "to some extent conditional on 'appropriate' behaviour" (p. 5) and linked to the notion of deservingness (p. 6).

In Chapter 1 Brown provides crucial context for the remainder of the book, with a detailed and broad literature review that enables the reader to capture the essence of 'The Vulnerability Zeitgeist'. This is elaborated upon further in Chapter 2 ('Making Sense of Vulnerability') where Brown unpacks this troublesome concept and identifies five 'different, if overlapping' themes (p. 28), discussing these each in turn. She explores the nuances within the concept and carefully unifies eclectic and diverse literature from a range of disciplines. In doing so, Brown allows the reader to gain a firm grasp on what is otherwise an often intangible notion. These manifestations are identified by Brown as natural or innate vulnerability (linked with child development – see pp. 29-31); situational vulnerability (bound-up with 'deservingness' – see pp. 31-33); social disadvantages (tied to spaces of vulnerability – pp. 33-36); universal vulnerability (pp. 36-39); and 'vulnerability as a

concept closed related to risk' (page 28) which Brown deems its 'conceptual cousin' (see pp. 39-43). It is here Brown draws attention to how vulnerability is 'intrinsically linked to ideas about weakness and frailty' (p. 42), connecting this to the idea of 'performing vulnerability' (p. 43), something to which Brown later returns (see Chapter 4). Brown then moves on to chart 'The Rise of Vulnerability in Social Policy' providing 'a brief overview of historical patterns' (p. 49) from the 1950s, with the Wolfenden report, to the exponential rise of the use of the concept in the mid-2000s, before examining the use of 'vulnerability' in housing policy (pp. 50-52), adult social care (pp. 52-53), crime and anti-social behaviour (pages 54-56) and in children and young people's services (pp. 56-59). Brown also cites sex work and terrorism as examples where this term has been deployed (pp. 55-56). The former example is important in two key dimensions. Firstly, there are clear links with sex work and Brown's empirical study – such as the interplay between vulnerability and transgression and the idea that notions of vulnerability are often inextricably bound-up with gender (see Chapters 4 and 7). Secondly, sex work serves as an excellent example of how the concept of vulnerability can be used to serve a dual purpose (see also Munro and Scoular, 2011). The inclusion of the latter example is perhaps slightly more difficult to appreciate.

Thereafter Brown addresses how vulnerability is used and interpreted by those who 'design and deliver services' (p.71) 'vulnerable' young people (Chapter 2). Here she draws attention to the dual purpose of vulnerability – the label brings with it the potential for increased support for young people and can also conversely result in tougher punitive sanctions (see pp. 84-5). Brown also highlights how the 'wider structure, systems and processes' (p. 89) such as performance indicators can result in 'cherry-picking' (pp. 89-90). The impact of structure is also explored later (Chapter 7 - 'The Social Mediation of Vulnerability') but from the perspective of the 'vulnerable' young people, where Brown notes the 'balancing act' between care, control, and consultation (pp. 161-165). These two chapters, taken together, contain important lessons for policymakers or those involved in 'Vulnerability Management' who would be wise to heed Brown's findings.

In Chapter 5 Brown explores the life stories of young people, detailing the difficulties they have encountered, the relationship between transgression and vulnerability (an important thread to understanding vulnerability), and their 'imagined futures', before moving on to examine the lived experiences of 'vulnerable' young people (in Chapter 6). In the aptly named 'Vulnerable Identities?' (Chapter 6), Brown discusses her most notable finding – the rejection, by these young people, of the 'vulnerable' label (p. 134). Chapter 6 is brilliantly written and generates a deeper understanding into what vulnerability means. For example, whilst vulnerability is a subjective term, Brown identified a common thread whereby the notion 'was associated with personal weakness and deficit' (p. 127). Brown also explores the relationship of vulnerability with agency, choice, resilience, control, and lack of physical power. Vulnerability is appreciated as a term which has 'gendered dimensions' (p. 92) for providers *and* users of services (see pages 92-5 and 127-9), viewed as a 'masculinity deficit' (p. 128) and tied to the 'sexuality of young women' (p. 128). It is also 'socially constituted' (pp. 130-1), 'subject to revision and reassessment' (p. 140) and 'influenced through relations with others' (p. 140).

Whilst vulnerability may denote positive characteristics, it may also have negative connotations (see Levine, 2004: 396). The latter was true for all but one of the 'vulnerable' young people (pp. 141-4). Most of the young people viewed their lives as ordinary and the 'vulnerability' label posed a significant challenge to this. Moreover, the label was rejected by the young people as it undermined their strength and ability to overcome adversity. This resonates with a quote from Fineman where she notes that vulnerability can have the effect of marking individuals 'as lesser, imperfect, and deviant' thereby placing 'them somehow outside of the protection of the social contract as it is applied to others' (Fineman, 2013: 16). Linked with this, Brown thus suggests that vulnerability is "more of a 'top down' rather than 'grass roots' phenomenon" (p. 147), commenting that resistance

is "unsurprising given how far dependency has been positioned as the antithesis of 'normal' and acceptable' citizenship" (p. 147). Brown ties the threads together in 'Vulnerability, Care and Social Control' (Chapter 8) and draws upon Foucault's idea of 'governmentality'. She also sets out three sensible recommendations (pp. 192-3) which have implications for policy, practice, and research. Firstly, she calls for greater scrutiny of vulnerability-based approaches. Secondly, she seeks a "more overt acknowledgement that 'vulnerability' and 'transgression' are not mutually exclusive states" (p. 192). Finally she asks for further investigation into 'how vulnerability connects with and is shaped by normative assumptions and practices' (p. 193).

Although I would describe Brown's work as utterly brilliant, there are some broad-brush statements that I find rather troublesome. The grouping together of 'offenders' and 'victims' is somewhat problematic as it is well-established that the former do not attract the same level of protection on account of their vulnerabilities when compared with the latter (Brown briefly mentions the protection for witnesses and victims – see p. 10). The notion of a 'vulnerable' victim is not a particularly thorny issue. 'Vulnerable' victims are afforded protection through the 'special measures' (Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999). By contrast, 'vulnerable' suspects and defendants provide a perfect example of the interplay between vulnerability and transgression. By virtue of being suspected of committing an offence, an individual's vulnerable identity is somewhat compromised. This links nicely with the idea of 'performing' vulnerability. On a related point, Brown, when discussing offenders, does not differentiate between the categories (e.g. detainee, 'suspect', defendant, and 'convict'). The significance of this distinction is two-fold. Firstly, at a practical level, the protection afforded to an individual is dependent upon his/her status i.e. the 'vulnerability criteria' for 'suspects' differs to that for defendants at trial. Secondly, at a conceptual level, even defendants in the criminal process may not necessarily be offenders in the sense that they may never have actually offended. Whilst greater exploration may have overcomplicated discussion, these important distinctions should nevertheless be made. Moreover, these examples provide interesting comparative discussion for exploring the deployment of vulnerability – the concept is used for different purposes depending on its context.

Vulnerability and Young People is essential to anyone exploring and interacting with the concept of vulnerability (particularly Chapters 1-3). It is an important read for those who are interested in social policy, young people, youth justice, and (albeit to a lesser extent) gender or criminal justice. Brown has carefully struck the delicate balance between viewing young people as "'fragile' and marginalised in some ways" and affording them autonomy as 'potentially skilled social actors' (p.18). With the exception of the criticisms (above) and a typo on p. 56, Brown's work is sophisticated and engaging yet easily digestible and accessible. The text is both theoretically and empirically relevant. The empirical analysis is rich, thick, nuanced, and carefully situated within the existing literature. Brown's account of vulnerability is both convincing and credible, particularly as she does not shy away from exploring the negative case. By involving practitioners and young people, Brown provides a holistic and multi-faceted account of vulnerability. She has admirably tackled an important, sensitive, and highly contentious topic with rigour, attentiveness, empathy, and understanding. Leaving the reader with a quote from John (Male, 16) urging that we 'try and figure it out first' (p. 195) Brown's ending as is powerful as her beginning and serves to further highlight that vulnerability should be approached with scrutiny, caution, and care.

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