

3. Social and cultural capital meets youth research: a critical approach

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Introduction

In this article I will discuss the relationship of youth research to concepts of social and cultural capital. Firstly, I will critically examine the much-used concept of social capital, which, I suggest, not only functions as a concept but as a strong metaphor for interpreting young people's lives (cf. Field, 2003, 11-40).

Secondly, I turn to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of different forms of capital and examine its strengths and weaknesses while applying it to youth research. Bourdieu's analysis consists of several types of capital, which are closely interconnected. I suggest that their interconnectedness makes the theory potentially useful, since the social and cultural capital which young people have access to is surrounded by (if not converted into) certain material conditions – economic capital. According to Bourdieu, economic capital refers to wealth and financial assets, while cultural capital consists of embodied, body/mind dispositions and goods as well as education. Social capital refers to resources based on connections and group membership; symbolic capital is the form that the different types of capital take, once they are perceived and recognised as legitimate (Skeggs, 1997, 8; Bourdieu, 1997/1986).

The article attempts to explore theoretical arguments concerning social and cultural capital in studies on young people. I will, however, refer to my own empirical analysis on social and cultural capital from the research project *Young people's social and local transitions*, to illustrate problems

related to the concept of capital. My data consists of 61 interviews of young people (from 17 to 23 years of age) in four different areas in Finland. Some of the interviewees¹ attended local schools, others I reached through social services. I have attempted to observe the processes of how social capital is created and used by young people in certain cultural, social and economic locations (Tolonen, 2004; 2005a and 2005b).

Social capital as a metaphor

Theories of social capital and other forms of capitals have been much discussed and strongly criticised in recent years. Some authors explicitly wonder if there is any use for the concept at all (for example Adkins, 2005; Siisiäinen, 2003; Smith and Kulynych, 2002). In the field of sociology, in social capital analysis three major strands are most prevalent at the moment: Coleman's, Putnam's and Bourdieu's analyses (see introductions in Field, 2003; in Finnish, Siisiäinen, 2003). All situate social capital more or less in social networks, but there are also plenty of differences among the three. In Coleman's analysis the formation of social capital takes place in a relationship, for example, between parents and children: in his analysis of the educational success of young people, he tracks down how social capital (in this case, parental support) helps to create human capital (or cultural capital). At the community level he uses the notion of 'closure', which means tight relationships (and norms) among parents and between parents and young people: for example if parents know each other, this may lead to joint norms and sanctions. As a result, social capital is generated in the community (cf. Coleman, 1988, 106; Field, 2003; Portes 1998; Seaman and

¹ Most of the young people selected for this study were currently studying. A total of 26 out of 61, i.e. over one third of the interviewees were studying in polytechnics or vocational schools, and they were primarily from working-class or middle-class families with some vocational or professional education. Ten interviewees had academic backgrounds, and most of them were either applying to or studying at university. Four young people with vocational education had a permanent job. In addition, 21 young people were studying or unemployed.

Sweeting, 2004). According to Field, Putnam's analysis mainly addresses the formation of social capital at the community and State level (Field, 2003 and Siisiäinen, 2003).

In Coleman's analysis social capital is also treated as something public rather than a private entity, and it is argued to be both abstract and functionalist (Field, 2003, 26). Putnam's analysis includes the same problems: he places social capital in social networks, and his analysis emphasises the decline of social capital in American 'civic' society, a view based mostly on a certain degree of concern and a romanticised image of society (Field, 2003, 38-9, also critical overviews in Portes 1998 and 2000; Smith and Kulynych 2002, 158). As well, much of this analysis is claimed to be uncritical about time and history, and conservative in its views on gender and families. Single motherhood is cited as a deficit of social capital, as well as women's involvement in working life (Field, 2003, and Edwards et al., 2003). The most serious criticism, perhaps, is that the concept of social *capital* views social relations with economic terminology, and social networks are seen as exploitative, as if they were commodities to be traded. Social capital is also seen as a very loose concept theoretically, and at times the analysis may lead to tautological statements (that the successful succeed, Portes, 2000, 5). It has also led to numerous different endeavours and developments in the studies of young people (Shaefer-McDaniel, 2004; Seaman and Sweeting, 2004; Raffo and Reeves, 2000).

Social capital may be a loose concept theoretically, but nevertheless it works as a strong metaphor for reading young people's lives. Lakoff and Johnson write: 'The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another. [...] The concept is metaphorically structured, the activity is metaphorically structured, and, consequently, the language is metaphorically structured' (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Lefebvre, 1991; Gordon et al., 1995). As well, Smith and Kulynych (2002) have analysed the language of capital from Roman times up to the

20th century, and draw serious attention to the consequences that the use of the concept may have in social sciences and policy making:

We believe that the use of the language of social capital is more than reflection of an already existing world. The term social capital also helps to create and sustain that world: the language itself has pernicious consequences [...] every time then the inequities of income and wealth of actually existing global capitalism are skyrocketing [...] has been explosion of [...] literature that views [...] social problems in terms of social capital. Such a view suggests that all parties can gain access to capital, just in different forms, and that appropriate 'investments' in social capital will compensate for gross inequities in financial capital. (Smith and Kulynych, 2002, 166-167).

With this example I want to highlight that metaphors thus bring a certain point of view into the picture, and simultaneously, they also hide some other things (or policies). In this article I suggest that describing young people's lives through the notion of social capital may lead emphasising a certain kind of analyses while hiding other things, such as inequalities concerning young people's lives.

Youth research and social capital

While studying young people through the concept of social capital, several problems may appear, including youth research and studies of social capital seemingly to come from different research traditions. Highlighting the differences of these approaches is revealing: researching young people makes the problems of the theories of social capital visible in a certain way.

There are several kinds of developments in research on social capital and young people, some of which refer to Putnam and Coleman (Shaefer-McDaniel, 2004; Seaman and Sweeting, 2004; Raffo

and Reeves 2000). Nicole Shaefer-McDaniel (2004) is developing a theory referring to Putnam's notions, where social networks and sociability, trust and reciprocity, as well as the sense of belonging are included in the analysis. Seaman and Sweeting (2004) base their analysis on Coleman's view of social capital: they study the parental structure of families (criticising Coleman's conservative notions of family life), and they add agency and material conditions to the analysis as well. Carlo Raffo and Michelle Reeves are also trying to develop a new social capital theory for young people, which they call 'individualised system of social capital'. They highlight that young people make decisions individually but these decisions are made in social networks that draw from different material and symbolic resources available for young people. (Their theorisation actually comes quite close to Bourdieu's notions of social and cultural capital, in the end.) James E. Côté (2002) introduces the term identity capital, which highlights agency and personal resources over structures in late modern surroundings such as universities.

When young people have been included in the study of social capital, traditionally, especially in Coleman's analysis, the main focus of the research has been likely to position young people as members of families, communities, school or the State, which is a very interesting analysis. The problem lies with the point of view that young people are treated as the ones receiving social capital instead of creating it themselves (c.f. Coleman, 1988; and critics in Morrow, 1999, 747 and Ellonen and Korkiamäki, 2006), even though some youth researchers have broken down this canon (McLeod, 2000; Stephenson, 2001; Bullen and Kenway, 2004, 2005). For example, Coleman's analysis of 'closure' is quite revealing. It means that if parents know each other, a closure exists in the networks, with the consequence that there is much social control in their children's lives. The phenomenon is mainly looked at from the perspective of the parents: I call this type the *upbringing* version of social capital (Coleman, 1988; Morrow, 1999, 747).

Youth cultural research, on the contrary, is grounded on a strong analysis of teenage peer culture and groups. The kind of youth research that is commonly applied in the Nordic countries has its roots in the Chicago School, adapted through the Birmingham School (Hall and Jefferson, 1986/1976; in Finland cf. Puuronen, 1997, 64-70). Youth research following this tradition has focused on young people's cultural meanings and their values, styles and behaviours (Willis, 1978; Griffin, 1993). Often young people and children were treated as agents and subjects of meaning production (cf. Jenks, 1996). It is assumed that young people are able to create their own worlds and cultures, styles of dressing, music, modes of success in schooling and attitudes towards the adult world. The subjects of this type of youth research were often groups of young people and their way of living, or for example some subcultural styles (Hebdige, 1979). In this type of research the families of young people were treated as the background of the study. However, in some of the analysis, youth subcultures were seen as a part of class cultures (which has been criticised as well), (Willis, 1978).

This kind of terminology had a strong influence on youth research in the Nordic countries until 1990's, before post-modern readings of youth cultures became the dominant discourse in Nordic youth research (cf. Tolonen, 2005b). Muggleton calls this recent period in Britain 'post-subcultural studies' which concentrates for example on club cultures and consumerism. These were considered through change, individualism, fluidity, neo-tribalism and hybridisation (Muggleton, 2005, 214-217; Blackman, 2005). Nevertheless, these studies continue to explore (and value) the meanings of different types of youth cultural phenomena and agency, and not, for example, how profitable these practices (and capital) are for young people in the future or how integrated young people are into their communities, with their social capital.

Cultural and social capital

However, using Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital as a tool of analysis has been quite popular in European sociology of education for some years. This kind of analysis has paid attention to single students and their school success: these are explained by school culture and family background (Vanttaja, 2002; Metso, 2004; Tolonen, 2004, 2005b in Finland, Skeggs, 1997; Allatt, 1994 in Britain; McLeod, 2000 in Australia). In my own work I have been using Bourdieu's version of social and cultural capital, since I have been interested in the social stratification of Finnish society and how individual young people are positioned in this social order. I have been studying individual students, whom I see as possessing, creating or having attained more or less social and cultural capital (Tolonen, 2004, 2005a, 2005b). I find Bourdieu's theory the most applicable to young people's life histories because the analyses include different modes of capital instead of only one (see also Field, 2003; McLeod, 2000). Next, however, I will explore some problems concerning the concepts of social and cultural capital when applied to the lives of young people, and in this case, to my data.

Bourdieu states that social capital is accumulated through durable networks which are based on mutual acquaintances or recognition. In late modern societies this accumulation mainly takes place outside the home (for example at work, in neighbourhoods or in various kinds of social clubs). Social capital has also been as closely connected to symbolic capital, which means in practice that those with more power have access and are able to use their social networks to their advantage more than those individuals with less power in society. (Bourdieu, 1997/1986, 51-52; Siisiäinen, 2003, 210; Portes, 1998)

Ilari, a 23-year-old studying in two faculties at university is perhaps good example of the accumulation of social capital. Ilari also studied subjects such as economics, which are likely to enable him to qualify for more advanced positions in society (with a high amount of cultural, but also economic and symbolic capital) later in life.

Ilari: ... I just get appointed to these student activities [many at his present studies T.T.], [...] I really would not have time [...] But I've made many good acquaintances through these activities [...]not just the people who are studying the same year's course, but others as well [...] There are lots of people I know.

According to Bourdieu, cultural capital is acquired in childhood families through 'habitus'.

Bourdieu's notion of habitus refers to an unconscious way of making decisions: it is embodied, learned in the childhood family (although the learning continues) and taken as self-evident (Bourdieu, 1990, 53-65). Those who have a high amount of cultural capital also can take it also as self-evident, like Ansa in my data, a young woman and a university student of 22 years of age, who had a clear understanding of her background:

TT: [...] How have your educational decisions been influenced and who has influenced them?

Can you say, I mean was it your friends or your family or?

Ansa: Mmm, I suppose that I have had the kind of upbringing that leads to university study.

[...] It is not that anyone ever told me what to do. I suppose it is just like the habit they all have – my parents and their acquaintances – have graduated from university. It is like the only option that came to my mind.

Generally in the empirical data it is quite easy to find a great amount of the right kind of cultural and social capital in the lives of those young people who can be considered to be successful in some areas for the time being.

Bourdieu's theory has, however, been criticised in many ways. First of all, even his theory is rooted in economic capital (other forms of capital convert into economic capital) and second, he believes that all action is interest-oriented (Smith and Kulynych, 2002, 176-177). Third, agency is seen to be missing or underdeveloped in his theoretical thinking (McNay, 2004, 182). Fourth, his theory is inclined to hierarchies among people through the analysis of distinctions, and therefore his theory undermines 'horizontal' relationships (Siisiäinen, 2003, 214; Field 2003, 18-19). Fifth, his theory is seen as elitist. Only those young people who already have much social capital (who belong to the right networks) are able to benefit from it. However, social capital may not be only available to the privileged. As Field states: 'There was no place in his theory for the possibility that other, less privileged individuals and groups might also benefit in their social ties' (Field, 2003, 20; also Tolonen, 2004). Sixth, Bourdieu's theory is also seen to be biased: analysis on gender and ethnicity is either missing or insufficient (cf. Adkins and Skeggs, 2004).

While working with my data and interpreting the transitions of young people (for example, from school to work, moving from place to place) it is evident that the analysis of different forms of capital is not so clear: there are flaws regarding individuals' pathways and decisions, as well as differences among the capital of siblings of the same family, and there are also individuals who do not seem to have very much capital of any kind. Thus we may ask what is wrong with the theory of capital if it does not allow us to see all the strengths and resources available to individuals (Field, 2003, 20). Next, I will demonstrate this, discussing the situation of Heidi, a 20-year-old from a small town (for a more detailed analysis in Tolonen, 2005b). She grew up with her siblings and

practically without any parental support. She had completed comprehensive school a few years earlier. During the time of the interview she had a temporary job and was dreaming of higher education. When she talks about her past she claims she was the one ‘who kept the house standing’ while only 8 years old:

Heidi: It was like I would take care of my sisters and my brother so that nothing would happen to them.

TT: You were afraid of that?

Heidi: I had to be there all the time. If I were not, it would be like my fault if something happened to them [...]

Heidi: At the moment, it’s with the rest of the bunch [meaning siblings T.T.] that I feel that I am most at home, wherever we are [...] not feeling responsible any more [...]

TT: How did you live your own life then?

Heidi: I didn’t have a life of my own back then. I lost four or five years when I did nothing with my life. I mean, I did go to school, but I only spent my time there. I didn’t do any schoolwork. The whole of comprehensive school went by just like that.

It would have been easy to suggest that Heidi did not have much social or cultural capital in the context of capital theory: Heidi did not have high cultural capital with her interrupted education, neither did she have many social contacts which could be converted into economic capital later in life. This type of theory of capital does not allow us to see that she took care of her siblings during her childhood (care work of women, and siblings as a source of social capital) and learned to be a responsible young working-class woman (local culture and identity work) (Skeggs, 1997, Kovalainen, 2004, 156). Caring seemed to be a rich resource for her. Also her siblings can be seen as her social and emotional resource in a difficult life situation; thus both young people and children

can and do create important social capital among themselves, especially in situations where parents are not available (Pösö, 2004; Törrönen, 1999).

Many feminist researchers (who include the experience and complicated processes of women in the analysis, cf. Adkins and Skeggs, 2004) have combined cultural and social capital in their work; for example, in Britain Beverley Skeggs' research (1997) on young working-class women and Diane Reay's (1998, 2000) study on mothers and their children's pre-schooling. In Australia, Julie McLeod (2000) used these terms to study young people's class, subjectivity and educational institutions. Elizabeth Bullen and Jane Kenway (2004, 2005) have focused on young women and education and have criticised underclass theories through capital analyses. The above mentioned analyses are based on further readings on Bourdieu's thinking. These authors suggest that it is important to localise and contextualise the notions of social and cultural capital in order to make a gender-sensitive analysis in which agency is also explored (Skeggs, 1997; McLeod 2000, in the Finnish context Tolonen, 2004, 2005a and b).

Therefore, analysis using cultural capital alone, or combined with social capital has perhaps been more popular than studies which have solely used social capital in the research of young people's education or lifestyles. Cultural capital seems to be more fluid and easier to apply to the different social fields. Cultural capital has also been developed further in the context of youth studies in recent years. In her study of the Norwegian Radical Nationalistic Underground Movement (1991), Katrine Fangen interprets the members of the movement as having 'subcultural capital', which means proper 'stylish matters' and 'ideological knowledge' (Fangen, 2001, 45). Sarah Thornton's research on club cultures also plays with the notion of subcultural capital, which, like Bourdieu's version of it, can also be objectified and embodied. Subcultural capital is embodied in the form of being 'in the know', such as using current slang (Thornton, 1995, 11). Thornton also claims that

subcultural knowledge can be converted into economic capital, since it may help one to attain or maintain work within club culture or the business of club culture, or, for example, working in the media using one's knowledge (Thornton, 1995). However, one might argue that this is not similar to the kind of economic capital developed in Bourdieu's theory (see critics in Qvortrup Jensen 2006).

One of my interviewees Jukka, who I knew since he was a 15-year-old, had developed and created various kinds of social capital through relationships while 15 years of age. He was one of the 'kings' ruling the social life in his school at that time (Tolonen 1998, 9-11) and in this context he had plenty of 'subcultural social capital'. He also was using drugs at the quite early age of 14 in which these contacts also played an important role. However, when I re-interviewed him as a 23-year-old young man, he had found that these social groupings were not very supportive later in life. He had had trouble with the law and had difficulty finding and sustaining work relationships.

TT: We met last time in your grammar school. How is your life now?

Jukka: Well the tape won't be long enough if I tell you everything [...] I don't know. After comprehensive school my life did go in a quite bad way [...] I had trouble with the law and I had to do community service for 40 hours [instead of going to a juvenile detention centre T.T.]. That finished on the last day of 1998.. In 1999 I went in the army and finished an education of a 'medical assistant' there. Since then I have tried to find a job. This year I have been in my second job, but only for two days, since I did not like it there.

While Thornton (1995) and Fangen (2001) have introduced the term 'subcultural capital' in their work, here I propose the notion of 'subcultural social capital'. The concept emphasises social contacts and networks that are valued within youth cultures, and is used to discern contacts that may not be seen to be useful perhaps, later in life. This type of capital could be considered as the 'dark

side of the social capital' (Field, 2003). I do agree with Thornton and Fangen that the term 'sub' is important when studying the cultural and social capital of young people. Young people create capital in the context of all kinds of subcultural activities among themselves, even though from outsiders' (or parenting) perspective this does not seem to be the right kind of capital for coping later in life.

Gender, the economy and social capital

Gender is also a significant issue in the debate on capital (Adkins and Skeggs, 2004). For example, in an analysis of gender and power it is crucial to note who is included or excluded in social networks, or if social capital is an accurate term to describe the activities of women (Adkins 2005). As well, producing social and cultural capital is a gendered and local process (Skeggs, 1997; Reay 2000; McLeod, 2000; Tolonen, 2005b). Here, I will concentrate on the issue of combining social and economic capital in the analysis of young women and men.

Social capital, with its close connection to symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1997/1986; Siisiäinen, 2003, Field 2003) seems to be burdened with the presence of power, and further, economic power, which often is only attainable by adults (and, easier by men than by women). In Bourdieu's theory, one either has or does not have social capital (which can be converted into economic capital), and therefore social capital is a ready-made category. In late modern societies where young people are involved with several alternative life-spheres, this concept is too static.

In her critique of the concept of social capital, Lisa Adkins (2005) claimed that the economic situation has changed, and that 'the social capital concept is inappropriate for post-modern economies' (2005, 208). She notes that in new economies the information flows and their control is

vital, and ‘axes of difference are being reworked vis-à-vis relations to these flows’, and that ‘attention should focus on how, in [...]economic postmodernization the social is being reworked (Adkins, 2005, 209).

Adkins also states that there is a gendered subtext in the theories of social capital. Referring to the work of Molyneux (2002) she argues that ‘social capital theorists overwhelmingly associate social capital with (domestically defined) women, where domestic femininity acts as a sign of social capital’ (Adkins, 2005, 199). She worries that by criticising social capital as not taking into account local and contextual situations, research tends to only theoretically correct conceptualizations of social capital and furthermore place women (or within youth studies, young women) even deeper into the domain of the social, and keep women there instead of placing them as agents within the post-modern economy (Adkins, 2005, 201).

In their recent Australian study of ‘underclass’ young women and their experiences of education Elisabet Bullen and Jane Kenway (2005) base their analysis on Thornton’s (1995) use of the term subcultural capital. They broaden their analyses to include social, economic and symbolic capital to what Thornton called subcultural capital: ‘[...]our usage encompasses social and symbolic capitals as well as cultural capital.’ Their work refers to the material conditions as well, and they state that ‘Subcultural identity is not constituted solely through consumption’ (Bullen and Kenway, 2005, 53).

Are young women in Bullen’s and Kenway’s analyses thus captured in the domain of the social as Adkins (2005) claims this type of analysis might be? Perhaps not: the aim of their analyses is to overcome the difficulties that underclass theories have in interpreting young women’s lives. They build a sensitive picture (as opposed to simplifying theories of the underclass) of experiences of the

school life of young girls who are at risk of leaving school early, experiencing teenage pregnancy, and poor employment prospects. ‘The cultural, social and symbolic capitals they deploy have currency within their social groupings, providing resources and strategies for survival in the classroom and the schoolyard, indeed, for surviving the positional suffering they experience there’ (Bullen and Kenway, 2005, 52-53). In Bullen’s and Kenway’s analysis, therefore, *subcultural* capital is taken into account, but so too are social and material conditions, which does not exclude them from the domain of the economy as Adkins suggests. I agree with Bullen and Kenway that especially with young people at the risk of marginalisation the situation is economic, but social and cultural contexts needs to be explored carefully as well.

One of my interviewees, Marja, is a 22-year-old working-class young woman, who works temporarily at a local shop. Her parents divorced when she was very young, and...

Marja: [...] when I was a little our mother always had violent boyfriends [...] and it was pretty bad when she left us alone for many days when we were about two or three years old. And later she might just go out to have a beer. And then she would come back after a week or so. We were eight and nine years old [...] we had little food, and there were empty bottles from mother. We took them to the food shop and bought something.

And later:

Marja: I want to go on to higher education and study economics [...] I tried once but didn’t succeed [...] I was going to do that again this spring, but couldn’t since I didn’t have the money to buy the books needed for entrance examinations.

TT: You don’t have anyone to help you? Parents of any persons who would support you?

Marja: [...]first of all my mom is unemployed and I have not had any contacts with my father for several years. And there is no one like that [who could help, T.T.]. And now when I am

working, the social services don't help, and my wage is really low, and I will get it next month, which is too late anyway.

Marja: Well generally it could be said I grew up too early. But somehow [...] I am pleased that I learned to be so independent so early [...] I learned very early to work and take care of my own affairs.

Marja sees herself as a survivor and she only relies on her own actions and own agency. On the other hand, she does not think of herself as very successful, not yet: she would like to become an economist later. In her case her personal cultural capital was relatively high (with well-completed upper secondary school) but the material and social resources supporting her were quite low (see more detailed analyses in Tolonen, 2005a).

Especially with young people facing difficult social situations of the past or present, it is important to include both social and economic capital when conducting analyses on gender issues, since all the forms of capital (social, cultural, economic and symbolic) intertwine. It is also important politically, since if only one form of capital, for instance social capital, is explored, one might end up in a situation where appropriate 'investments' in social capital will compensate for gross inequities in financial capital' (Smith and Kulynych, 2002, 166- 167).

Critics and possibilities of the term capital

I think the most serious criticism against theories of social capital is that economic terminology is used and that people are expected to profit from all their social relations: this is a very different approach compared to traditional youth research with youth groups, valued for what they are and what they do, as well as the meaning production embedded in them. Despite heavy criticism, many

researchers do use these concepts when interpreting the lives of young people. In recent years much of the criticism actually refers to the use of the concept of social capital, and many youth researchers actually either use cultural capital or combine the analysis of social capital with different forms of capital. I think the analysis of social capital is most fruitful when it includes an analysis of economic and symbolic capital (e.g. power and wealth), that is where the strength of this theory lies.

However, using an analysis of social, cultural, economic and symbolic capital in the sphere of youth studies may have some positive outcomes. It is currently one sufficient way to analyse social class, the existence of which can not be overlooked in Finnish or other European societies today. Critical arguments of capital theories also bring to light some fruitful subjects: for example the discussion concerning the dialogue of agency and structure in young people's life is important (Raffo and Reeves, 2000). Addressing questions of changes in the economy and its effects on young people's lives and the employment of young people are also important. One significant criticism of capital theory (by Bourdieu) is its elitism: empirical youth research can address some very critical questions to a theory which can not include the experiences, resources and networks of less privileged members of society and see them as valuable. These young people are the ones who mostly challenge the theories of elitist social capital. Also, while analysing these young people it is important to place them not only in the domain of the social (since economic capital is usually low) (Adkins, 2005) as there is a danger of expecting social capital to replace the lack of economic capital (Smith and Kulynych, 2002, 167). So in this case the theory needs to be changed.

To avoid the 'strong use' of the metaphor of capital in youth research – and to make the theory more explicit and applicable to this research – certain questions need to be asked: On what level is the formation of social capital primarily placed? (Level of the State, community, networks or

individuals?) (Field, 2002) Social capital is always local and contextual (McLeod, 2000). Who is able to attain social capital? Who is creating social capital and how and where? How are young people situated in this kind of analysis? (Morrow, 1999; Holland et al 2007) How are things such as gender and the family, or ethnicity conceptualised in the theory? (Edwards et al., 2003; Adkins, 2005) And in the end: What is left outside this kind of analysis? What are the limits of this kind of research? For instance, inequalities are not sufficiently addressed (Smith and Kulynych, 2003).

If the theory of capital is reformulated, this may have consequences in many fields.

In the social political field, for instance, this theory may potentially treat children and young people as creators of social and cultural capital, not just victims of their past experiences or the wrongdoings of the social services (cf. Stephenson, 2001, Tolonen, 2004, Ellonen and Korkiamäki, 2006, 246).

In this article I have presented many critical comments of the theories of capital. Particularly Putnam's theory of social capital seems to be very often opposed with quite a critical tone. Bourdieu's theory, however, is seen slightly in a different way, even though some critics also subscribe to his theory. In feminist critique his theory is taken further on to the ground of the social; capital is seen to be in relation to localities and social contexts. However, Lisa Adkins (2005) is doubtful of this move. She thinks analysis of women should be in relation to post-modern economies. I agree with both feminist arguments: with the first one that social and cultural capital needs to be carefully contextualised in local social relations, and with the second, that women, or in my analysis both young women and men, should be studied also in relation to their economic situation; however, one should do this with caution. In the end, I think it is important not to apply overly ready-made concepts to the lives of young people but to seek how and through what kind of

processes young people's social relations are created, and what kinds of other possible capital, wealth, skills and knowledge can be intertwined in these processes.

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