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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to analyse young people's cultural practices and style seeking by utilizing certain notions of a theory promoted in the 1970s at CCCS (the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham), and especially the notions of 'new studies' on social class that refer to Pierre Bourdieu's concepts. The article takes as its focus the lifestyles of young people in certain localities in Finland. Although the qualitative data from 39 interviews were collected in the Finnish cities of Helsinki and Kajaani, the main focus in this article is on different localities in Helsinki (33 interviews). It is suggested that young people's styles vary within locations and the formation of (life)styles takes place partly within groups, which are connected to the local culture (area, school) as well as to social class (family, school). I argue that no one can, will or is able to manifest any kind of style wherever they wish. One's (life)style is attached to locality, class, gender and ethnicity.

Keywords

young people, styles, lifestyles, subcultures, groups, social class, locality, gender, ethnicity

Back in the CCCS? Does Class Matter?

From the early 1990s onwards, the analysis of social class was more or less forgotten as new paradigms, such as post- and late-modernism, exerted a strong influence on social science as well as youth studies. The silence about 'the old dinosaur', social class, in British as well as Finnish sociology, lasted almost up to the new millennium (see Skeggs, 1997, 2004a; Tolonen, 2008c). Even today, the analysis of class is not the most popular theme in the sociology of youth (with some exceptions, which will be expounded later). However, if closer attention is paid to the living circumstances of young people, it is apparent that social, cultural and material structures have a strong presence in their lives, even in the leisure sphere (see Määttä and Tolonen, 2011).

When it comes to youth studies, the question of class has periodically ignited intensive debate over the years. One discussion focuses on the formation of youth cultures, identities, styles and lifestyles in relation to societal structures such as social class, locality and media (see Blackman, 2005; MacDonald & Shildrick 2007; Miles, 2000; Muggleton, 2005). Youth (sub)cultural styles and activities have been interpreted in various and, at times, contradictory ways, for example by the Chicago school, the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham and in post-subcultural studies (see the substantial overview by Blackman, 2005 and Griffin, 2010).

In this article I argue that class-based differences can be found in the cultural practices and lifestyles of young people (even) in the contemporary (post-)welfare society of Finland. In the analysis, I present two different groups of young people to compare their repertoire of styles and social, cultural and material resources. These young people are not just 'individuals' but members of a group acquiring different resources and belonging to certain localities. I argue that their resources are partly produced in their groups as well as in the localities where they live, and that their resources and localities are at least partly connected to class.

Theoretically, I rely on several sources. First, I briefly examine (certain aspects of) a theory of the CCCS and its critics. Second, I utilize the 'new studies of social class' in which terms such as lifestyle, social class, capital or resources and localities are present when analysing young people's cultural practices (Anthias, 2005; Bourdieu, 1990, 1998; Devine and Savage, 2005; Skeggs, 2004a).

I am aware that the literary production of the CCCS is vast (cf. Blackman, 2005; Hebdige, 1979; Willis, 1978/1984). In this article I investigate only a few of the terms, such as subculture, which, like counterculture, was seen as relating in various ways to the 'parent culture' based on social class (Clarke et al., 1986: 47; see also Griffin 2010: 247). I will look particularly closely at the argument that the production of style was seen to take place especially in the groups and examine my data in this light. As interpreted by the CCCS researchers, the interaction and creation of meaning in groups, especially in the case of working-class young people, was one (imaginary) way of resolving one's class position in relation to the middle-class hegemony. The joint 'focal concerns' of group members were also seen as crucial. Clarke and colleagues (Clark et al., 1986: 45) described subcultures as:

Subcultures ... they are not simply 'ideological' constructs. They, too, win space for the young: cultural space in the neighbourhood and institutions, real time for leisure and recreation, actual room on the street or street corner. They serve to mark out and appropriate 'territory' in the localities.

They went on to say:

They [subcultures] develop specific rhythms of interchange, structured relations between members.... They explore 'focal concerns' central to the inner life of a group: things always 'done' or 'never done', a set of social rituals which underpin their collective identity and define them as a 'group' instead of a mere collection of individuals. They adopt

and adapt material objects—goods and possessions—and reorganise them into distinctive ‘styles’ which express the collectivity of their being-as-a-group ... collective response to the material and situated experience of their class. (Clarke et al., 1986: 47)

Many critical arguments were posited about the theoretical thinking of the CCCS and its (various kinds of) interpretations of youth cultures. The researchers (with multiple interests) of this paradigm were criticized, for instance, for interpreting young people’s cultural practices as being too homogeneous, too group based, too ‘male’, and for not being based on real empirical data, but only celebrating visible public cultures (mainly those of boys). (See critics in Muggleton, 2005; and in Finland see Hoikkala, 1989; Lähteenmaa, 1991)

‘Post-subcultural’ researchers in particular criticized the interpretations of youth cultures as being tightly bound to their class-based parent culture, and youth cultures were instead described as hybrid and changing (cf. France, 2007; Miles, 2000: 4; Muggleton, 2005; in Finland Salasuo, 2006). In addition, the work of the German, Thomas Ziehe, had a great influence on youth studies in the Nordic countries. In his work there was much emphasis on cultural change and ‘new youth’: this was an analysis combining the notions of culture and psyche. The psyche of young people was seen to become ‘overheated’ by rapidly changing culture (see Ziehe, 1991). Both of the aforementioned paradigms highlighted cultural change and individuality in the cultural formations of young people and were predominant in the youth studies of the 1990s and early 2000s in particular.

The notion of subculture was left aside and other terms, such as lifestyle, were adopted instead (see France, 2007; Miles, 2000). Individually chosen lifestyles were based on consumer culture, allowing young people to construct alternative lifestyles with shifting boundaries instead of being attached to class society (Blackman, 2005: 10–14). (Sub)cultures and lifestyles were seen as multiple, fluid and individualistic. Lately, the latter notion has come in for some criticism. Tracy Shildrick and Robert MacDonald have argued that post-subcultural theory has been fascinated by certain music club and dance cultures, media and virtual and individualized lifestyles, leaving aside the cultural lives and leisure practices of the ‘ordinary’ majority at the local level (cf. MacDonald and Shildrick, 2007; Shildrick, 2006; Shildrick et al., 2009: 458; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2006: 128).

In this article I also use the word lifestyle instead of subculture. However, I adopt Pierre Bourdieu’s interpretation of lifestyle, which is not based on individuality (like post-subcultural versions): he links lifestyle together with habitus, and practices of social class. In this research, I use the term lifestyle to refer to young people’s practices of making distinctions (Bourdieu, 1998). In addition, I use the term to refer to taking one’s life as self-evident and a token of being the ‘ordinary’ way of life. Thus term lifestyle is close to term habitus when understood as the habit of doing something (see Bourdieu, 1990 on habitus¹), that is, one does things because he or she thinks he or she has always done so. I see lifestyle as a deeply social phenomenon, not an individualized conception, even if at times it can be seen as privatized (see Devine and Savage, 2005: 6). Lifestyles are thus connected with habitus and

taste, which are not formed mechanically, but through ‘self-evident’ choices (see Bourdieu, 1998: 172–75). Bourdieu’s notions of distinction, taste and habitus link with social fields and connect with class positions. In this article I use the concept of distinction as a tool for analysis.

Social class is thus important in this analysis, but it is not understood as a hegemonic relation in the way it was understood by the CCCS in the 1970s (see Clarke et al., 1986), nor as a more or less static structure of one’s parents’ (father’s) occupations as understood mainly by Finnish sociology in the 1980s (and today) (see Erola, 2010). In some recent sociological studies (cf. Anthias, 2005; Devine and Savage, 2005; Skeggs, 1997, 2004a, 2004b; in Finland Käyhkö, 2006; Tolonen 2008a, 2008b, 2008c) social class has been used as an analytical tool in a new way. Class is not understood as a purely structural thing according to one’s (or father’s) occupation and position, or as having the right kind of ‘class consciousness’. The (new) studies on social class include concepts such as culture, identity and lifestyle, while notions of gender and ethnicity also intersect with the notion of class (cf. Anthias, 2005; Devine and Savage, 2005). It is also highlighted that class is not a stable position in the labour market, neither in education nor the leisure sphere, but rather a reflexive game, through which people acquire capital and resources, and build up identifications and value for themselves as ‘individuals’ (see Devine and Savage, 2005; Lorenzi-Cioldi and Clémence, 2003; MacDonald and Shildrick, 2007; Skeggs, 1997, 2004a, 2004b). One’s class position is changing and ambivalent, as the labour market and jobs are also changing (see also Nayak, 2006). Thus, rather than the given static classification of social class and its lifestyles, the processes of hesitation and variation are shown here (cf. Sennet and Cobb, 1972).

Identifications develop not through consciousness, but through distinctions from others (see Devine and Savage, 2005: 14). The social, cultural and economic resources or capital of different individuals change, and relate to their families and social and cultural locations and fields (Bourdieu, 1997: 47–54; Skeggs, 1997: 8). Young people in different positions and locations acquire different kinds and forms of capital and resources. Here I refer to the four forms of capital defined by Bourdieu: social, cultural, economic and symbolic (Bourdieu, 1997: 47–51). In this analysis I use cultural capital in the meaning of acquiring (the institutional form of) educational capital, and capital and skills attained in leisure practices, and in acquiring symbolic capital (the ‘right kind of lifestyle’, morals and taste valued in society). Social capital is situated in the networks and social relations one has and can rely on. Economic capital refers to attaining economic assets, and to one’s parents’ assets, to which the young people refer in the interviews.

In analyzing my data, I explore how young people distinguish their (life)styles from the locality, including the evaluation of each other’s values, looks, performances, taste and lifestyles (see Hollingworth and Williams, 2009: 468; Sayer, 2005). I examine how young people develop their resources in their groups, and explore how these groups are a part of their class as well as their locality (less so their gender and ethnicity here). (See Anthias, 2005; Clarke et al., 1986; Devine and Savage, 2005; MacDonald and Shildrick, 2007).

Researching Young People and Leisure Time

The research project² Young People's Lifestyles, Leisure Time and Formation of Social Class focuses on young people's leisure activities and social relations. The aim of the study was to question whether and how the meaning of class occurred in the social relations and leisure practices of young people. The research themes included style, friendships, hobbies, the leisure activities of young people and their families, as well as their relation to education and leisure, and virtual and local practices. Qualitative data from 39 interviews of young people (from 13 to 17 years of age) in Helsinki (33) and in the north-eastern town of Kajaani (6) were collected.³ In this article, however, only the data collected in Helsinki have been used (cf. Tolonen, 2010). In all, 16 respondents were girls and 23 boys—owing to the number of volunteers who signed up to be interviewed. Informants were located through youth centres⁴ (22) and through schools (17).

After requesting the consent of the respective institutions, I contacted local schools and youth centres and searched for young people to interview. While visiting the various establishments to conduct the interviews, I also made field notes on the locations. Ethnographic research methods were applied (during four months) in observing youth centres, shopping malls, the gatherings of inhabitants, activists and workers and in collecting maps and photos. My purpose was to get acquainted with the suburb of eastern Helsinki, in which most of the interviews were conducted. In addition, five youth workers and six parents were interviewed (the latter by the researcher Minna Kelhää). The aim of the fieldwork was to gather some background material for the interviews, even though the latter form the primary research data. However, I met most of the young people only on a few occasions, so my relationship with them was not as 'deep' as it would have been in a more longitudinal ethnographic study (see Gordon et al., 2005, 2006; Tolonen, 1998, 2001).

Different kinds of young people were selected as interviewees, not just young people representing a certain visible group or subcultural style, but also 'ordinary' young people attending school or a youth club. My aim was to reach different kinds of young people in the selected areas for study. Primarily, I studied young people in eastern Helsinki, in which the population varies according to social class, age and ethnicity (see the description of the location later in this article). The interviewees contacted through local schools were ninth graders (around 15 years old), as at this level their educational paths had not yet diverged. At the youth centres I also interviewed different young people from 13 to 17 years of age—local young people with no special leisure time projects as well as more 'active' ones with a cultural project in progress, which will be introduced later.

The interviews were conducted in keeping with the interests of my research themes. They included themes such as social and virtual relations, family relations, leisure-time practices, education (attitudes and plans), spatial practices, youth cultural styles and so on. The interviews of young people were ethnographic interviews (Sherman Heyl, 2001) in the sense that they were conducted during the (short period of) fieldwork. By and large, I met the young people once or twice before conducting the interviews. In addition, the interviews were life historical (Gordon and Lahelma,

2003) in the sense that they differed according to each interviewee's personal experience of leisure time, as well as age, and willingness and ability to describe their activities and social relations. The interviews took place in quiet rooms at schools or at youth centres. All the interviews were voluntary and observed research ethics, for example by asking the consent of the young people themselves, as well as that of the institutions, teachers and parents (at schools) and youth workers (at youth centres). As a token of my appreciation for their time, those taking part in the research process were given a small 'gift', such as sweets or soft drinks during the interview, or a cinema ticket afterwards.

Due to the fieldwork process and the catchment areas of the schools and youth centres in question, the data consist of more young people with a working-class or lower middle-class background than an upper or middle-class background, and encompass quite a few children with an immigrant background, with either themselves or one of their parents having moved to Finland recently. In addition, more boys than girls volunteered to be interviewed in public spaces like schools and youth centres (see Tolonen, 2001). These factors were taken into account while analysing the data. To provide some context for the data, many studies show that in Finland about half of the population regard themselves as middle class or lower middle class, and about 20 per cent as working class. Usually these differences are seen to be economic, educational or, more rarely, political (Erola, 2010; Kahma, 2010). In this study, on the basis of the interview material, I have considered young people middle class or working class not only on the grounds of their parents' education and occupation as mentioned in the interviews, but also on the grounds of their own 'cultural understanding' (Willis, 1978/1984: 143–155), understood here as their 'identifications', that is, their orientation towards education and leisure (see Gunter and Watt, 2009; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2006).

The research themes were analyzed by reading through the data (interviews and field notes) and coding the themes, as well as looking for themes with surprising elements, providing room for ethnographic imagination (Atkinson, 1990). A summary was made of each interviewee's current life situation, including relevant research themes. I devised a matrix including all the interviewees and research themes of major interest, such as family relations, education and future plans, locality and mobility, friends and networks, use of the Internet, individual style, youth styles in youth centres or schools, distinctions from other styles, places and use of drugs. With the help of the matrix one could see, for instance, whether the members of certain groups had similar opinions, whether they mentioned each other as a friend, what youth cultural style they liked and disliked and whether they manifested any style themselves. The matrix also allowed me to pinpoint distinctions and comparisons between individuals and at the group level. In addition, I was able to contextualize each interviewee into a group, also in the local area with material and cultural affiliations. This kind of interview data analysis (including knowledge of the field through field notes) can be seen as 'discursive materialistic' (Gordon, 2008: 18–34; McNay, 2004: 176–78; Tolonen, 2008b: 231; Tolonen and Palmu, 2007: 95), or as reverting to the 'cultural turn' (Devine and Savage, 2005: 1–4).

Next I turn to the analysis of the data, or two parts of them. Applying this kind of close reading of two groups to all the groups in the data would be beyond the scope of this article (see also Tolonen, 2010). Therefore two active groups found in different youth centres have been selected to provide a description of the different lifestyles and activities of young people found in different locations. Both groups are from the Helsinki area, and the members of both are between 16 and 17 years old, having made some educational choices after secondary school. I chose one group of girls and one of boys (with one girlfriend included). The lifestyles and leisure time activities of the young people are presented and contextualized in the description of the groups. I primarily examine their ways of making distinctions (Bourdieu, 1998), but some ambivalences and hesitations are also highlighted.

Middle-Class Girls as ‘Theatre Girls’

I met a group of four girls, Minna, Silja, Katariina and Eveliina—‘the Theatre Group’⁵—while visiting a youth centre specializing in media production and visual arts in Helsinki. The first three girls volunteered to be interviewed. They all had middle-class backgrounds and attended the same school, also specializing in arts and media.

The school was situated in the centre of Helsinki. This meant that the students came from all over the Helsinki area, not from any particular suburban area (see the next case). This also meant that the girls were not so attached to certain areas of the city and did not have a strong local identity, but were mobile socially and culturally instead (cf. Savage et al., 2005; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2006; Skeggs, 1997; Walkerdine et al., 2001). They traversed different areas locally and were able to take advantage of different services relating to youth work and culture. Yet this group was not ‘free floating’; they had a strong connection to their (art) school, which was culturally an elite school, possessing certain student cultures (cf. Paju, 2011; Tolonen, 2001; Willis, 1978/1984) and required very good grades to get into.

The group member Katariina described the styles and social hierarchies within the school.

Researcher (R): What kind of youth cultural styles can be found in your school?

Katariina (K): Ok, well, our school has this reputation for being a hippy school, but there really are those with a hippy style ... then there are girls who follow the latest fashion. Girls with confidence and beauty, those who can get all the boys. Damn. People tend to follow what they are doing. When it comes to school privileges, they are at the top of the hierarchy. Then there are those who exclude themselves from these hierarchies—they just do their own thing. Our group is in this category too. We try to be intellectuals (*laughs*). It is rather difficult because people are gathered into two or three cliques.

R: Can you jump from one group to another?

K: I used to do that quite a lot, but it’s problematic at times. If you look at the cliques ... there are Lizzies, hippies and artists or the ones who party a lot. But I can’t really say.

R: Do you mean that you don’t know whether the groups have any specific or unique style?

K: No they don’t.

Katarina distinguished different styles in her school, in which the 'personal hippy style' was the most common. Other styles she described were 'Indie rock types' (even though music was not an important distinguishing matter) as well as 'Cools' and 'Lizzies' (in this school the 'posh ones' who partied and followed the latest fashion) (Bourdieu, 1998; Hollingworth and Williams, 2009). Other distinctions made at the school were based on visibility and audibility: there were the popular ones and the quiet ones (cf. Gordon et al., 2005, 2006; Tolonen, 2001). One distinction was based on activities and one on political opinions. Silja, also a member of the group, said:

In our school there are lots of those people with literary and artistic interests ... and those with theatrical interests ... I don't know if there are any music styles that can be found ... [the styles] are based on their hobbies and interests and so on. It's not like rockers or heavy rockers or hip-hoppers or something there.

This group of girls did not follow any specific style of dress or music. According to Myllyniemi (2009: 98), only 16 per cent of Finns aged 15 to 19 say that they act out a certain popular cultural style: most likely those who do not succeed so well at school and who belong to a lower stratification. The Theatre Girls were characterized more by the style of their actions. Their leisure time consisted of different cultural projects. They produced theatre plays and films and had other media interests. For example, Silja was spending most of her time pursuing cultural 'hobbies', such as theatre and dancing. Previously, she had also been interested in several kinds of sports owing to her parents' wishes. At that moment, she thought she was mainly doing what she had chosen herself, and she had also acquired an important group of friends with whom she shared similar interests. Minna, for example, commented on their media productions:

R: Tell me about your media production activities. How did they begin?

Minna: Well, it all started last year when there was this big media production project organized by the city, which my school friends and I were allowed to take part in. Now we have continued to do things together. Our activities nowadays are based on things like watching plays and films, which is probably the way we, our style, can be classified. I prefer to do these things, and I'm not a fan of any particular bands.

Cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1997) was gravitating towards these girls from various sources: family practices (going to concerts together), school (specializing in the arts), youth work (specializing in the media) and time spent with a group of friends all strongly supported the formation of cultural capital both within this group and for each of its individual members. I contend that these girls were highly privileged culturally and the municipal services (school, youth work) supported this process.

The girls all wore different 'personal' outfits, combining jeans with clothes partly bought from a flea market. One member of the Theatre Group, Katarina, suggested above that in the groups seen at school, no one group had a specific style based on music, for instance. This also implies that several 'personal' styles were represented in one group. This is not in keeping with one of the arguments of subcultural theory,

which states that the styles of young people are formed within groups, style being a collective answer to focal concerns to do with their class position (Clarke et al., 1986: 45–47). The situation here would seem to support individualistic views on the interpretation of youth cultures (cf. Muggleton, 2005). However, I claim that ‘individualistic’ styles were expected and even normative in this school with the ‘personal hippy style’ or ‘individual styles’ comparable to hip hop or ‘ordinary style’ (cf. Gunter and Watt, 2009; Hollingworth and Williams, 2009; Tolonen, 2001).

Minna’s response about the people in her school was:

Hmm, I don’t know. [In (name of her school)] they say that there are quite a few hippies, I don’t know ... if that is actually true, maybe. Perhaps there are more people with a distinct style of their own, compared to other schools.... What is missing from our school are those hip-hoppers ... and we have less than usual of those so-called average/ordinary people ... we have more Manga style ‘freaks’ and others.

Their clothing was seen as an expression of their ‘individuality’ but in distinctive relation to the styles of others (Bourdieu, 1998). I claim that that their different individualistic styles of dress and behaviour were part of a middle-class habitus and lifestyle (Hollingworth and Williams, 2009). Distinctive individuality was highly valued in this respect, but the girls valued a certain kind of modesty and avoided all kinds of excess; it was a question of the right kind of taste (see Bourdieu, 1998; Tolonen, 2001). However, the process of forming one’s own style included various ambivalences as well as distinctions, as illustrated by Katarina:

K: I think my family thinks I am very bohemian, and a hippy-style person, but in our school this statement would make people laugh. They think I am a hippy but in reality I can’t tell at all which style of dress I represent. My mum finds the hippy style amusing.... The problem cropped up the day I was bought a [designer] coat. It was very problematic since I was in this kind of hippy school in which people dislike those who like to show off with designer clothes. I do not like it myself. But somehow [my parents] talked me into buying this coat, since I couldn’t find another one that fitted or something. I never hang around with the kind of people who wear designer coats. I am more with flea-market types and I didn’t know how they would relate to this. Then I tried to hide the fact that I have a designer coat and it was rather weird. But I realized that they would be my friends even though I had a coat like that. Despite the fact that we are more or less from similar kinds of backgrounds or from similar economic situations, one might prefer to hide it, while the other wouldn’t...

R: Why hide it?

K: In my case it’s my mum’s upbringing. She has a very modest background.

In relation to other styles, the girls distinguish their style from those that are too excessive or too ‘shallow’ (Bourdieu, 1998; Hollingworth and Williams, 2009; Tolonen, 2001). Their style was defined by literary hobbies and intellectuality. First, Katarina described some forms of ‘Lizzie’ style, which she saw as too shallow:

It is very difficult to define, damn, but it is like their way of dressing, their ‘aura’, their make-up, and the importance of how one looks. I think ... then their way of drinking and

always rebelling against something, and maybe their way of talking.... Well, the people I hang around with, who value literature, films and the theatre, they don't value this kind of attitude towards life, and neither do I ... people who are just extremely shallow and dumb, and who may be label people and act mean, they make me angry.

Then she reflected on the styles and tastes of popular people in her school, who seem to have the right kind of taste (Bourdieu, 1998):

K: Then there are the popular ones, but they are not Lizzies. There is no correct term for them ... they come from (a more affluent) area.

R: Do they have money, but also taste, or what do you mean?

K: I think taste is the code word here. I have noticed that in our school there are people who hang around in fashion circles and those who have their own fashion blogs and sort of like the right kind of things, things that are 'cool'. They are not excessive fans of anything, just in the right amount—they do not appear to be too fanatical.

R: You mean they intuitively know how to do it?

K: Yeah, and they have a certain kind of taste which, hmm, like being streetwise too, not being too excessive.

Minna distinguished her style from the Indie or Japanese styles, which she felt were too strict. She wanted to be more culturally mobile, to be able to adhere to different things.

R: Well, how would you position ... the style of your group in relation to these styles?

Minna (M): Well, I don't know. I do listen to Indie music and so on, but I wouldn't describe myself as an Indie type of person. I am interested in many things and open to many things ... I listen to different styles of music.

R: What sort of style can't you tolerate?

M: Maybe something like this Japanese style or Goths—they seem to be quite fanatical, in that they listen to only one sort of music and dress according to strict norms. They seem rather funny.

R: Too obsessive, you mean?

M: Yeah.

The girls distinguished their style from other styles that were too ordinary, too excessive or too strict (Gunter and Watt, 2009; Hollingworth and Williams, 2009). The style (music, dress) and lifestyle (way of living, taste) of the Theatre Girls seemed to be personal, individual, not too excessive, intellectual and based on their cultural activities and political views. The girls also claimed that they did not smoke or drink, at least not excessively, and they could be open with their parents about such things. Rather than having similar outfits or taste in music per se, the group was characterized by a similar kind of habitus, including cultural practices such as theatre, film-making, a shared attitude towards education and joint cultural interests (music, theatre) with their middle-class parents. These cultural practices worked as a social 'glue' rather than a 'focal concern' to keep the group together (see Clarke et al., 1986: 45–47). In this type of middle-class lifestyle the 'leisure careers'

(see Shildrick and MacDonald, 2007: 342) supported the girls' educational careers and building of cultural capital in that field (cf. Skeggs, 1997; Walkerdine et al., 2001).

The Theatre Group was a middle-class group situated within the context of a school specializing in the arts. The following group of young people, the Graffiti Group, lived in the same city, but in a very different locality with a distinctive culture of its own.

The Graffiti Group in Eastern Helsinki

The other group I am going to present was located in the eastern Helsinki area, where I studied local young people through both schools and youth centres. The group identified closely with their suburban area (see Savage et al., 2005; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2006), and moved around during their leisure time mainly in the eastern side of Helsinki. Eastern Helsinki⁶ has a slightly younger population, more immigrants, lower educational and income levels and a higher unemployment rate than western Helsinki or central Helsinki.

There were no 'ordinaries', hip-hoppers or heavy rockers in the middle-class school of 'Theatre Girls' based in the centre of Helsinki, but in this eastern area they were common. A 15-year-old girl, Tia, described the styles in her local eastern Helsinki school:

Researcher (R): What sort of youth cultural styles can you point out in your school?

Tia: There are different styles of rockers, then ordinary ones, then the heavy rockers, then Lizzies, and then there are all sorts of different groups of people.

I could identify similar styles in the local youth centre, where I met a working-class group of four young people aged 17. They were engaged in a cultural project including graffiti painting (in a permitted space). I interviewed a girl, Riina and three boys, Vili, Leevi and Ollie, who belonged to this group of friends in a slightly different way. Riina was going out with Vili and had joined the group through him. Riina also had her own girlfriends, and complained that Vili would not join her social networks like she had joined his. Vili and Leevi who had been friends since childhood, felt that they belonged to this neighbourhood, and spent time in the local shopping centre and in the youth centre (cf. Gunter and Watt, 2009; Savage et al., 2005). Leevi had joined the Graffiti Group at the youth centre through Vili.

Leevi (L): Well, my mates were there so I joined the group [at the youth centre].

Researcher: Did you do graffiti before joining this group?

L: Yeah, I did. In underground stations and here and there.

Researcher: Was it important to you, or just fun, for instance?

L: There is always a little bit of excitement there.... There is, like, you want to gain some popularity, and there is this excitement and everything.

Researcher: Popularity ... people go and see your works?

L: Those who paint themselves do.

Ollie had recently joined the group, and he shared an interest in graffiti with the other boys.

I don't know why the police don't stop the youngsters fighting, instead of just chasing the graffiti-makers ... I only paint graffiti in legal places, as I don't want to take any risks myself. When this youth centre gave us the chance to do some it was just fantastic. I don't touch the walls [of private property] myself. But if chances like this [in the youth centre] come up, I do try to paint.... We had a very good feeling, once you had the chance to paint properly. And a couple of times we were allowed to paint on houses which were going to be torn down shortly. I liked graffiti even as a kid.

The style of dress of this group was described as casual, relaxed and 'ordinary'. The boys' style was typical hip hop, characterized by jeans or a tracksuit and cap (cf. Myllyniemi, 2009: 98):

R: What kind of styles can you identify among young people in general today? Can you separate people in some way?

L: Well maybe rocker types, heavy rockers, rap, all sorts.

R: You yourself are wearing this kind of cap and a hoodie.

L: This is more like a sort of rap style.

R: I was going to say that ... and what sort of music do you like?

L: Well, all kinds of rap music. Who would be my favourite? Maybe Asa⁷ ... he is an underground rap musician.

Riina exhibited a female version of this style with longer hair and make-up. She occasionally adopted a more glamorous style—high heels and dresses—when going out.

Practising sports was common in the group: jogging, going to the gym, kick-boxing and snowboarding. Different types of activities common to 'street culture' were also engaged in, such as getting into trouble, drinking⁸ and fighting. This is somewhat in keeping with the CCCS line of argument: 'Much of the working class culture has thus, since the mid-nineteenth century, taken shape around the sphere of leisure—football, the pub, working men's clubs, activities in the street, and so on' (Clarke et al., 1986: 76).

One member of the group in particular, Vili, told stories and anecdotes about drinking and fighting, which he used to do in the past. The following account relates to his leisure pursuits and his educational career:

Vili (V): There were sort of assaults and, as a kid, stealing sometimes. Then I grew up and started to understand those dangers.... Now, this year, I haven't done anything like that. It used to happen when I was drunk and someone disagreed with me about anything at all.... School is the only place where I have fought without being drunk. That is why I reduced my drinking a lot, so that there would be no fights and no bills to pay.

RR: Were you sorry afterwards?

V: No, except for my mum or parents. When I had no money, they had to pay the bills, and the compensation.

R: When you said you reduced your alcohol consumption, how did this happen? Suddenly or gradually?

V: Little by little. Just today my friend Leevi and I were travelling on a bus and talking. We realized it was the two of us who did everything together. Every crime we committed, it was the two of us. Then we remembered that neither of us has done anything for a while. It's refreshing because you don't have to think that every time the phone rings it's the police asking what you've been up to. We thought we have both grown up a bit.

In this sense, leisure, in relation to education and work, is seen as a separate sphere (see Gunter and Watt, 2009; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2006; Willis, 1978). The importance of 'getting into trouble' was a highly valued focus of leisure time. Getting drunk or into a fight was one way of dealing with specific 'material and symbolic' working-class 'body-reflexive practices' (see Nayak, 2006: 814). On the other hand, getting into a fight is part of a gender-specific process of 'growing up' (see Tolonen, 1998), which was considered to happen through this kind of behaviour, and adulthood was reached when this kind of behaviour was (partly) left behind (cf. Clarke et al., 1986: 176; on working-class women, see Käyhkö, 2006; Skeggs, 1997; Walkerdine et al., 2001).

The educational careers of the young people in this group were oriented towards practical skills. They were all in different vocational schools aiming to become 'ordinary' working men and women (see Roberts, 2011). The young men and one woman belonging to this group had not been very successful at secondary school, and some of them had been expelled from school due to bad behaviour (see also Willis, 1978). Their 'leisure careers' (see MacDonald and Shildrick, 2007: 342) had always been important: one of them claimed that secondary school (at 13–15 years) had been like their leisure sphere—they spent their time at school, had fun (and fights), but did not care for schoolwork.

L: Well, secondary school was kind of a wild time and we had this group of friends we hung around with during our free time as well.

R: In what way was it wild?

L: Well, we just messed around ... we missed many of the classes. We had fun, it was sort of like the weekend when we were at school.

At the time of the interviews the then 17-year-old Vili was working and attending the vocational school of construction work at the same time. He said he wanted to find work and he was trying to finish his education, even though he was experiencing difficulty with his studies. Even at secondary school he knew he did not like studying and doing academic work. Now he wanted to finish his vocational school quickly—in order to make some money.

Vili: I'm attending this vocational school and now ... I also started working life. I got to do some real work.... It's nice, and the best thing is that you get paid. The payment is good, I can't demand any better.... I always knew I'm the kind of person who does things, and not the kind who reads. Reading is not my favourite thing. It's important to finish (vocational) school quickly and then I can do some real work and take part in working life.

Both Riina and Vili regarded themselves as working class. Riina explained that when she was younger, her parents had worked hard and there was very little money for

her use. Her mum had done various working-class jobs, and her dad lived elsewhere. I enquired whether the shortage of money had ever affected her life in any way, and she replied:

Like when I was a kid, it was so embarrassing if someone looked at my clothes—I don't like it if someone looks at my clothes like that, ... yes, it hurts and ... I feel bad. On the other hand, I could stare back and ask them what they were looking at.... And then there was my friend Maria. She was dressed like a little princess, she had everything. I wanted to have similar clothes.... My mum has always worked really hard but all the money went on food and rent. At the moment I don't know how I'm going to get the money to pay for my sports stuff.... I guess we are working class, I don't know.

Yet even Riina felt ambivalent about her belonging to the working class (see Savage et al., 2001; in Finland, Kahma, 2010); nevertheless, in my interpretation her way of dealing with education, work and consumption was quite working class. Due in part to a lack of money (economic capital), both Riina and Vili wanted to start working soon. Too lengthy an education (and this kind of cultural capital) was seen as 'wasted' anyway. These 'working-class kids' were 'ordinary' kids who wanted to have an education and a job, but this path should not appear too complicated in the process (see Roberts, 2011: 22).

However, Ollie's case was slightly different. He was the latest member of this working-class group. His parents were both entrepreneurs, and he had a multicultural background. He partied with the others, had a similar style and attended the same school as the others, but his position was more ambivalent than theirs: he wanted to complete his education and, what is more, he wanted to do snowboarding in the future.

R: What do you think you will be doing when you are about 30 years old? Where do you see yourself?

Ollie: Not in Finland. Shooting a film somewhere, a snowboarding film. I don't know where yet, I don't know where my feet will take me.

Ollie did not identify so strongly with the construction business, nor the local culture, as Leevi, Riina and Vili did, who all claimed to be 'a person coming from eastern Helsinki', with Vili going as far as to say 'this is truly my place' (cf. Savage et al., 2005: 101). But with his dreams of a snowboarding future and a more mobile identity (with multicultural capital), Ollie's class position seemed to be less clear-cut compared to the others', as he saw himself as belonging to several places and social networks (see Honkasalo et al., 2007).

I consider the collective lifestyle of this group as representing a working-class lifestyle, in which the meaning of education included practical instead of theoretical knowledge, and was aimed at a relatively fast entry into working life. The meaning of the group was obvious to these young people, and their style of dress and behaviour appeared to be quite unified along with their attitude towards education. They were not so keen on 'making distinctions' from other groups like the middle-class girls earlier (see Bourdieu, 1998: 170). Rather, it seems that this working-class grouping

was one place where their style was confirmed and supported. But I do not mean to present the group as too homogeneous (or homological), even though their experience of class was something that united the group along with their experience of education and working life (see Clarke et al., 1986; Willis, 1978). These experiences are also gendered (see Riina's experience regarding clothing) and ethnic. Class is seen here as a reflexive and ambivalent interplay between gender and ethnicity (see Devine and Savage, 2005), even though there is some validity in the CCCS way of explaining the class cultural experiences of these young people in Finland today.

Conclusions

Finland has been regarded as a classless society for many years by sociologists, or at least the question of class has not been regarded as research-worthy (see Erola, 2010; Tolonen, 2008c). Individuality was emphasized also in youth studies, and the question of class did not gain currency until quite recently (see Blackman, 2005; Griffin, 2010; Muggleton, 2005; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2006). Inspired by the CCCS and new studies on the subject of class, I posed research questions at the beginning of this article: Do young people share content, values and lifestyle within their groups (and not just form individual lifestyles)? How are these groups connected to locality and social class? I argued that class-based differences can be found in the cultural practices and lifestyles of young people (even) in the contemporary (post-) welfare society of Finland.

The two groups analysed above, the 'Theatre Girls' and the male-dominated 'Graffiti Group', have been interpreted in this light. I claim that the groups' lifestyles are class-based, even if they do not always display the homogenous clothing of youth cultural style (see Clarke et al., 1986), but rather share habitus and cultural practices (see Bourdieu, 1998). In the groups under study, there were shared habitual and cultural values and practices (going to concerts, going to the gym, editing movies and other productions or doing graffiti) and an understanding of respectability (drinking habits, abiding by the law) (see Gunter and Watt, 2009; Hollingworth and Williams, 2009; Skeggs, 1997). Not only the collective understanding of what constitutes respectability (see Skeggs, 1997) differed according to the group, but also their appreciation of skills and types of cultural capital. This interpretation supports the arguments of the CCCS (with a little help from Bourdieu), in which sub-cultural styles are seen as group-based, as well as being part of class culture (see Clarke et al., 1986: 47).

Even if the styles were not homogenous within one group (which are not called subcultures here) nor in a homological relationship with their class-based parent culture (see Clarke et al., 1986), I claim that some styles are more likely to appear in certain places rather than others (see also Myllyniemi, 2009: 98). No one can, will, is able or is allowed to perform any kind of style anywhere. I suggest that the groups are clearly formed in relation to other local groups or styles by processes of distinction from, and support for, each other. The groups in this study were part of the local culture. In the first example, in the middle-class school specializing in the arts,

certain styles were popular, including ‘individual’ hippies and the latest fashion. In the school situated in a less affluent area of eastern Helsinki, there were more ‘hip-hoppers’ and ‘ordinaries’. It seems, therefore, that the styles were somewhat related to class and locality (cf. Shildrick, 2006) and to the culture of different schools situated in these localities (see also Paju, 2011; Tolonen, 2001).

Even if the young people did not feel that they belonged to a certain subcultural group or style—only 16 per cent of 15- to 19-year-old Finns say they do (Myllyniemi, 2009: 99)—they still recognized (in their school, youth clubs or centres and in public spaces) that these styles existed, and they saw some of the styles as more distanced from themselves than others. I agree with Nayak (2006: 828) that ‘class is not always something outspoken but rather embedded into one’s style of dressing, moving, speaking and other forms of embodiment’. The young people distinguished themselves from other styles and groups in several ways: styles of dress and music, use of space, leisure time activities (sports, theatre), their use of alcohol and other substances, education, family and in relation to immigration. Through these distinctions, the young people created social and virtual, physical and moral borders between themselves and other groups, while bonding with each other at the same time (cf. Hollingworth and Williams, 2009). The ways in which these distinctions were made were connected to class (and often to gender and ethnicity) in certain localities, as in the cases analysed above.

But a further question remains: can the groups and lifestyles presented here be termed subcultures? Furthermore, are the groups ‘a collective response to the material and situated experience of their class’? (Clarke et al., 1986: 47). I do not claim that these groups are tightly subcultural in the sense that they would be clearly and only part of their class-based parent cultures. Moreover, as stated earlier, class is understood here as a reflexive and ambivalent game (see Devine and Savage, 2005), not merely as a ‘hegemonic power relation’ (Clarke et al., 1986: 12–13), even though young people do have different resources or capital at their disposal to play this game.

Even the term subculture does not exactly describe the groups; still the CCCS tradition points to the directions of groups as one relevant focus of analysis. The groups assume cultural and territorial space on street corners, in shopping centres, youth clubs or virtual spaces. I have claimed here that there must be something in common (ethics, aesthetics, morality, habitual things or focal concerns often to do with the class) if the group is to maintain. Groups are meaningful places for forming one’s style, which may be individualistic or similar to that of friends. Groups provide support, are places of distinction, are always situated somewhere (the local school, youth centre, street, Internet) and form their style in relation to the local and surrounding world (see Shildrick and MacDonald, 2006).

Notes

1. The actor takes his or her actions for granted, they are naturalized and embodied, and ‘the choices’ made are learned in childhood and ‘forgotten as history’ (Bourdieu, 1990: 56).
2. The study is part of and funded by the research programme Young People’s Leisure Activities and Youth Work in Finland 2008–10 led by Leena Suurpää at the Youth Research

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3. For the purpose of comparison in terms of youth styles and standard of living, I chose the smaller north-eastern town of Kajaani, where had I conducted my previous study (Tolonen, 2005, 2008a, 2008b). Kajaani has been experiencing a declining paper industry, high youth unemployment and a fairly new population of immigrants.
4. Youth centres in Finland offer mainly free services to all young people who take an interest in them. They provide both local and virtual services and also indoor and outdoor activities for young people during their holidays. See the introduction to the Youth Department and Youth Centre in Helsinki at <http://www.hel.fi/hki/nk/en/Introduction+of+Youth+Department>
5. The names of the group members have been changed. The names of places and the names of all the informants in this study have been changed to preserve the anonymity of the interviewees.
6. I have chosen to use approximate figures to describe the area under study in Helsinki, in order to avoid revealing the exact location of the interviewees. The statistical data are taken from the publication Helsinki by Districts (City of Helsinki Urban Facts, 2009). In the suburban area under study, the number of people with university-level education (in 2007) is around 20 per cent (in other areas it is 40 per cent), with the average being 25 per cent. The unemployment rate is around 8 per cent, with the average being 5 per cent in Helsinki at the time the research was conducted. Around 15 per cent of the inhabitants have a native language and nationality other than Finnish, this rate being similar to other suburbs in eastern Helsinki, while in western parts of the city it is 6 per cent. In eastern areas the proportion of 7–15 year olds is around 10 per cent, and in some western areas 6 per cent. In eastern parts of Helsinki there is more diversity in terms of social class, education, income and ethnicity, greater variety in the types of housing (owned and rental, often in the same areas), and the population is younger than in western areas. URL: (consulted December, 2012) http://www.hel2.fi/tietokeskus/julkaisut/pdf/10_01_25_Hki_alueittain.pdf
7. Asa is the alias of Finnish rap musician Matti Salo. In Wikipedia he is described as leftist, criticizing politics and politicians, and writing lyrics focusing on suburban life in Helsinki.
8. Finnish drinking habits are partly based on social class as well as gender. Working-class men are more frequent drinkers, and women are also consuming more alcohol than previously (see Mäkelä et al., 2010). Young people’s drinking patterns are similar. According to a study by Myllyniemi (2009: 69), 54 per cent of 15- to 19-year-olds, (n = 294), said they drink alcohol about twice a month, and 8 per cent twice a week. In the lower social strata, 19 per cent of young people aged 15–19 said they drink alcohol twice a week, while in the upper middle strata this figure was about 13 per cent (Myllyniemi 2009: 69–71) (cf. British youth, Blackman, 2011: 105.)

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