

# 9. Consumption Practices and Social Inclusion Among Children in Lillehammer

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**ABSTRACT** This chapter discusses children's consumption practices. Participation contributes to social inclusion, particularly of immigrant children. Children define which material items and activities that are necessary for social inclusion. Football is an inclusive activity among boys and girls in Lillehammer. Still, it appears that relatively few girls, although more boys of immigrant origin play organized football. The reasons for this are a combination of cultural, social and financial factors.

**KEYWORDS:** children | immigrant origin | social inclusion/exclusion

## 9.1 INTRODUCTION

Norway has experienced an increase in ethnic diversity through immigration since the late 1960s. Today, Norway has approximately 5 million inhabitants, of which immigrant-born and Norwegian-born to immigrant parents make up 16.3% of the total Norwegian population (Statistics Norway, 2016a). Immigrants and Norwegians born to immigrant parents, hereinafter referred to as 'people of immigrant origin', are present in all Norwegian municipalities, including Lillehammer, which is the field site of this study. In November 2018, the total population of Lillehammer was 28,034 (Statistics Norway, 2018). In January 2016, the total number of immigrant-born residents in Lillehammer and Norwegians born to immigrant parents was 2,772 people. Thus, 11.9% of the total population in Lillehammer is of immigrant origin, compared to 33% in Oslo, which has the largest proportion of immigrants in Norway (Statistics Norway, 2016b).

Estimations in Norway over the last thirty years show that differences in income level are increasing. Unemployment, insecure attachment to the labour market and dependence on welfare measures is believed to be particularly relevant in families having a history of flight and refugee status (NOU 2011:7). These are, in general,

poorly off financially (Epland & Kirkeberg, 2015; NOU 2011:7). In Lillehammer, as in most cities, the living conditions of people vary, particularly between families of immigrant origin and the ethnic majority. This situation may affect social participation and inclusion of immigrant children in particular.

During the last twenty years, a commercialization of childhood has increasingly dominated growing up in so-called western countries. A commercialization of childhood means that more and more aspects of children's lives have a price (NOU: 2001; Buckingham & Tingstad, 2010; Cook 2004). Social participation, which is essential for social inclusion, is thus a financial challenge in low-income families (Pugh, 2009; Ridge, 2002). Against this backdrop, I will discuss which consumption practices appear to be important for social inclusion among boys and girls in Lillehammer. The questions I address are:

- ▶ Which consumption practices dominate among 12-year old girls and boys, and to what extent do children of immigrant origin participate in these practices?
- ▶ In what ways do these dominating consumption practices relate to social inclusion, particularly among immigrant children, and how is that connection to be understood?

For studying consumption practices, a local school in Lillehammer is chosen as the study site. In the following, I will first present a literature overview, then methods, theoretical approaches, results, discussion and conclusion.

## 9.2 LITERATURE OVERVIEW

A search on Google Scholar on the theme 'Immigrant children and social inclusion' gave 574,000 results, which tells us that the theme is well documented. A study from Canada shows, for instance, that one in five immigrant children reported feeling like an outsider, with boys revealing higher levels of psychological isolation than girls do. More than one in ten were socially isolated and reported never participating in organized activities (Oxman-Martinez, Rummens, Moreau, Choi, Beiser, Ogilvie & Armstrong, 2012). A more detailed search on 'Sports and social integration of immigrant children' gave 109,000 results. These include, for instance, titles of experiences of sports of young women with an immigrant background (Walseth, 2007), social integration experiences in general of young immigrants in sports clubs (Zwahlen, Nagel & Schlesinger, 2018), to mention a few. A search in Norwegian on the same theme gave only 244 results, but also these titles mirror the international themes mentioned above, particularly that of why minority

girls participate less than minority boys and definitely less than majority girls (Kulturdepartementet, 2014; Strandbu, 2006; Strandbu & Bakken, 2007; Walseth, 2006). Immigrant girls appear to be more studied in a Norwegian context than are immigrant boys (Seippel, Sisjord & Strandbu, 2016: 26).

There also exists recent research showing the importance of finances for social participation in general (Sandbæk & Pedersen, 2010; Thorød, 2012; Bakke, Solheim & Hovden, 2016). Previous studies among children in Oslo have indicated the importance of participation in sports for social inclusion, particularly that of organized football, among both girls and boys of most ethnic backgrounds (Kristoffersen, 2010; Rysst, 2008, 2016). As participation in sports and other forms of social participation in organized activities costs money, participation across different income groups becomes an issue of local social policy in Norwegian municipalities. Indeed, both national and local political aims emphasize the social inclusion of all children, irrespective of ethnic or socio-economic background. In some of the literature reviewed (Sundvoll & Tjønndal, 2015; Broch, 2015), three dominating explanations are presented of why participation in sports of minority youth is difficult: cultural, religious and financial barriers (Broch, 2015; Strandbu & Bakken, 2007).

Political focus on the expenditures of participation in various sports activities is explicitly included in the Norwegian government's two-year plan for fighting child poverty, 'Children living in poverty' (*Barn som lever i fattigdom*) (Regjeringens strategi, 2015-2017). Here the national government encourages, among other suggestions, various sport clubs and municipalities to try to include as many children as possible, and to apply for extra funding in order to achieve this aim (Nuland, Fløtten, Hjort & Bache-Hansen, 2009).

### 9.3 METHODS

The methodological point of departure is a conviction that participant observation over time in combination with conversational interviews will bring forth reliable information on children's social participation and inclusion. I did participant observation two days a week from August to December 2015, in the 6<sup>th</sup> Form of 12-year-olds at a local school I have called Mesna. According to the principal, the school has a total number of about 595 students who represent 21 languages, but the vast majority of pupils are white native Norwegians. In the spring the following year, I spent another month with the children. In addition to participant observation in classrooms and during breaks, I interviewed 25 children in pairs, groups of two or three on leisure activities, friendship circles and identity. Among these

were eight boys, of whom only one had immigrant origin, and 17 girls, of whom five had immigrant origin.

In addition, I interviewed the leaders of Lillehammer Football Club (LFK), Lillehammer Women's Football Club (LKFK) and two coaches, and also four social workers employed in the municipality, in the section of 'Culture and Leisure time' (*Kultur- og fritid*). These data enrich the information from my observations and interviews with children.

All the families received a letter of information about the project, and all the interviewees returned to school with a letter of consent from their parents. All names and ethnic origins are anonymized, also the school, but not the city and football clubs of Lillehammer.

#### 9.4 THEORETICAL APPROACHES

Much research with children has shown how possession of certain material items and participation in certain activities are vital for inclusion in the local peer culture (Pugh, 2009; Rysst, 2008; Rysst, 2013; Ridge, 2002). According to Allison Pugh, children decide among themselves which consumption practices concerning goods and activities are needed for social inclusion. She argues that in order to achieve the experience of belonging in the peer group, children 'claim, contest, and exchange among themselves the terms of their social belonging, or just what it would take to be able to participate among their peers' (Pugh, 2009: 6). She terms this system of social meanings the 'economy of dignity' and writes: 'children together shape their own economies of dignity, which in turn transform particular goods and experiences into *tokens of value suddenly fraught with meaning*' (Pugh, 2009: 8, my emphasis). Consuming these particular goods and experiences hence becomes a form of communication, where consumption is part of social processes and social relations (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996; Miller, 1998; Pugh, 2009). Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood write that 'goods are neutral, their uses are social, they can be used as fences or bridges' (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996: xv). The goods, such as clothes and sports gear, can also be markers in social classifications, for instance in demarcating social categories among children (Rysst, 2008, 2013). As such, in Lillehammer, the children I got to know classified each other as 'popular', and 'invisibles', a classification in which participation in certain activities, possession of certain clothes and smartphones were vital classificatory criteria. The goods and activities that are part of children's economies of dignity are best understood in relation to each other, where they function as fences or bridges for social participation and inclusion.

Informed by the work of Tess Ridge and others (Ridge & Millar, 2000; Ridge, 2002; Room, 1995; Davis & Hill, 2006) I argue that social participation of children among peers, is a prerequisite for social inclusion and reduces the risk of social exclusion. Ridge and co-author Jane Millar, argue for a child-centred concept of social exclusion, which may mean

... much more than exclusion from society as conceived by adults, but also critically exclusion from children's society. In this respect childhood needs to be seen as a social experience in itself, one that has its own norms and customs, and where the demands of participation and inclusion may be considerable, likewise the cost of exclusion. (Ridge & Millar, 2000:162)

In line with this, Room argues that social exclusion is a relational, rather than a distributional concept: 'social exclusion focuses primarily on relational issues, in other words, inadequate social participation, lack of social integration and lack of power' (Room, 1995:6). I understand social inclusion to imply socializing with peers/friends in and out of school. Social exclusion 'refers to people being unable to afford to participate in socially expected purchasing and activities' (Davis & Hill 2006:3). The concepts of inclusion/exclusion thus exist on two interrelated levels: first, participation or not in relevant peer activities, second, difficulty or not in building friendships due to participation or not in relevant peer activities.

## 9.5 RESULTS

The data from the interviews and observations among the 25 children is produced by systematized search for information along three dimensions: dominating consumption practices and ethnic background; consumption practices, social hierarchy and social inclusion; and consumption practices, price and popularity. The data is primarily discursive: *utterances* about what the children do, not what they actually do, which may not correspond (Jerolmack & Khan, 2014). The observations, however, give information about practices in class and during breaks.

### 9.5.1 DOMINATING CONSUMPTION PRACTICES AND ETHNIC BACKGROUND

The interviews reveal that football is the most dominant leisure activity for both girls and boys. The following conversation is representative for how the boys talked about it:

Interviewer: It is my impression that playing football is an activity most of you engage in?

Peder: Yes, actually, this is so. And it is something most of us like doing.

Mari: Do most of the boys play football in the 6<sup>th</sup> Form?

Peder: Yes, all the boys in 6A (the other class) and most of us in 6B play.

The other boys confirmed that football was the most popular activity, and one added ice-hockey, handball, cross-country and downhill skiing. Participation in paid organized leisure activities varied from participation in none to three or four, among girls and boys alike. However, of the eight boys in 6B, three did not play football. One of these was Kim, of Asian origin. He said he did not participate in any paid, organized activity out of school, and that he seldom played with other kids in afternoons. Two ethnic Norwegian boys did not participate in football anymore but had done so previously. They said they quit because other boys had bullied them when they made mistakes.

One of the coaches of LFK informed me that out of 20 boys in the 6<sup>th</sup> Form (6A and 6B), the vast majority had been enrolled in the football activity. Of the few not enrolled, he had been told by three boys of Asian origin that their parents wanted them to go into music rather than football. If this is correct, it indicates that the reasons for non-participation were not financial.

In sum, of the football activity in 6A and 6B, none of the five boys of immigrant origin plays.

When it comes to the girls, football was also said to be the dominant organized activity, as in the following conversation with Mette, Karen and Rebecca. The first two are ethnic Norwegians, the third is of mixed Norwegian and Polish origin:

Interviewer: What will you say is the most common activity for girls and boys to participate in in your class?

M and K: Football.

K: That is, like, football is the activity we all participate in....

R: Not all!!

Interviewer: Not all.... because you don't play football.... But when you say that "all" play football, does that include the boys as well?

K: Yes, perhaps boys even more...All of them participated or have participated at some point.

Rebecca participated in a choir for girls, because she said, 'she did not like football'. Among the five girls having immigrant background in 6B, only one girl, Kudra, of Kenyan origin, played organized football in LKFK. She was the only immigrant girl who explicitly expressed that she wanted to blend in and be part of the native Norwegian group. However, some variation in organized leisure activity comes forth in the interviews with the girls. This variation is directly related to ethnic background, as in this interview with Dimitra, of Russian origin and Sirin, who has a background from Afghanistan:

Interviewer: What do you think is the most popular activity to participate in after school?

Dimitra and Sirin: Football.

Dimitra: But I don't like football.

Sirin: Not me either.

Dimitra: I think it is a 'boys' sport', and I am not allowed to play organized football. My mother wants me to attend activities like dance, athletics....

Sirin: Yes, more like 'girls' activities'.

Dimitra: Yes.....dance, athletics, music lessons....

Besides underlining that they "don't like football", the above conversation highlights the issue of gender and cultural values as reasons to why these girls don't play football. In addition to football, various dance activities, music lessons, choir and skiing came forth as other activities among the girls. In sum, among the girls, one of five girls with immigrant background play organized football. An overview from the leader of LFK shows that of 600 players, 96 boys have immigrant origin (estimated by foreign names). Among the girls, the leader of LKFK informs me that of a total of 395 players, only ten girls have immigrant background (estimated

by foreign names). This indicates that for Lillehammer as a whole, relatively fewer girls than boys of immigrant origin play organized football.

### 9.5.2 CONSUMPTION PRACTICES, SOCIAL HIERARCHY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

When I interviewed the boys and girls separately in groups in the 6<sup>th</sup> Form, they talked spontaneously about who belonged in the ‘popular’ group and who belonged among ‘the invisibles’. ‘Popularity’ denotes rank in the hierarchy of social positions (Adler & Adler 2001:38). The children were quite unanimous as to the group memberships. As one boy said, ‘we see who are popular by all the children who follow them around’. According to the children, the most popular girls and boys were all active footballers. I asked Peder and Simen about the possible social consequences of no participation in football:

Interviewer: What do you think it is like for those few who don’t participate in football? Do you think they may feel a bit marginalized (‘utafor’)?

Simen: Nooo.... we usually try to include them really, by not talking that much about football at school, instead on our way home....

Peder: We try to make everybody participate on our team, because we need more players on our team.

It appears that the children are aware of the risk of experiencing social exclusion when not participating in football. One of the coaches said that participation felt so important that some boys ‘played because of the social aspect of participation’, although they were not very interested in the sport itself. This fact was also relevant for the girls. In the following interview with ethnic Norwegian Kristin and Hilde, and Kudra mentioned above, Kristin is very aware of this:

Interviewer asks Kristin: Kudra and Hilde both play football, like so many others. Do you feel that you actually should join the team too, since all the others play football?

Kristin: Yes, it is a bit like that sometimes. I think that... there is a lot of conversations about football, like, ‘did you see that match yesterday!’....I would

have felt more ‘in’ in this class if I had played football, but I am not very interested in football, I like to play, but not as an organized leisure activity.

Kudra: I am the most popular girl of immigrant origin (implicitly she thinks this is because she plays on the team).

The children said that they, the teachers and parents often discussed the importance of social inclusion for all, and the interviews show their awareness of this.

### 9.5.3 CONSUMPTION PRACTICES, PRICE AND POPULARITY

Participation in sports costs money. Information from the *Museum Maihaugen* in connection with the exhibition ‘Sports for all?’ (*Idrett for alle?*) (June 2017 – December 2017) shows the following total expenditures per year in Lillehammer for 12-year-olds: downhill skiing: kr 84 000; cross country skiing: kr 38 000; skate dancing: kr 22 500; football: kr 11 800; handball: kr 9 800; indoor athletics: kr 3 650. This information was collected from the leaders of the various sports clubs, in the case of football from the boys’ club (LFK). It is obvious that participation in sports, included football, is quite expensive for low income families.

Social workers of the municipality in Lillehammer are aware of these expenditures. A municipality-initiated project, *Active Leisure Time (ALT)* set up an “Equipment bank”, in collaboration with *Fretex* (an idealistic organization that runs second hand shops all over Norway). This equipment bank offers relevant material items, such as various skis, ski boots, free to use one day at a time for the whole family. The organizers believe that it is important to dispose of as much new and modern gear as possible, so that children using this gear minimize the risk of being stigmatized for using the bank (because they are poor). According to a social worker interviewee, the people working in *ALT* therefore continuously apply for additional funding in order to buy new gear, as they know some items have higher symbolic value than others do. In other words, they are aware of the systems of meaning around material things and activities.

From the interviews with the boys and girls, it also came forth that certain clothes with brands were attractive items. Particularly because the category ‘popular’, according to the boys and girls, often involved boys and girls having clothes of brands, such as *Polo* or *Parajumpers*. Smart-phones, particularly not too old iPhones, were also attractive items. It is well known among the children and adults that gear and clothing vary in quality and price, and that popular children often sport the most expensive brands, as comes forth below:

Mari: Why do you think these girls (Mette, Karen, Anne) are popular?

Kudra: Hmm . . . I think it is their behaviour. . . . They spend a lot of time with people in the other class, . . . and then there is their appearance; that is, they buy new clothes, new brands.

Kristin: Very long hair. . . . And that they know and talk a lot about others.

Kudra: And they spend a lot of time with the boys, tease them and such.

Mari: Do you then feel pressured to have similar clothes?

Kristin and Kudra: Yes, a bit.

Kudra: But it is very difficult because you want to be popular too. . . . and be liked by many. That's why I want to get new some clothes and such.

Mari: I see, but what are the cool shops?

Kudra, Kristin, Hilde: It's WOW, New Yorker, not so many shops here in Lillehammer, that offer the cool and popular clothes. Then you have to go to Oslo or order them online.

Kristin: Abercrombie and Parajumpers, those are clothes with brands, and they cost... a jacket from Parajumpers cost 8000 kroner...

Kudra: ...and that is not something everybody can afford!!

Interviewer: kr 8000!! Can anybody here afford that?

Kudra: Yes, Lisa and Anne, Anne has one of those jackets (she was one of the three girls categorized as 'popular' by the others).

In sum, the results show a connection between expensive consumption practices and social hierarchy.

## 9.6 DISCUSSION

If Pugh is right in that ‘the desire to belong’ is what is most important for children, not particular things or activities as such, it becomes relevant to elucidate the details in this meaning making in order to understand how to better include marginalized children. If Pugh also is right in that the most important relational process among children concerns how to secure the experience of belonging among peers, and that children’s ‘longing and belonging’ makes children everywhere ‘claim, contest, and exchange among themselves the terms of their social belonging, or just what it would take to be able to participate among their peers’ (Pugh, 2009:6), the popular children at Mesna School may be understood to have, because of their peer power (Adler & Adler, 2001) decided that participation in football and possession of certain clothes and smartphones make up ‘the terms of their social belonging’, that is, their economy of dignity. When the activity of football is understood as part of this economy of dignity, this participation includes a value of belonging. This implies that those who do not participate may experience social exclusion on both levels mentioned in the introduction. This ‘fact’ appeared to be known among the children themselves, as shown in the interviews. I thus argue that the children who do not participate do not have what is needed ‘to join the conversation’ (Pugh, 2009). This is a term broadly understood to mean they don’t have the social competence needed for inclusion in the peer group, in this case knowledge about football and what, for instance, happened last night during the training or match. Kristin indicated this awareness of lack of competence very well above. Related to minority children in Lillehammer in particular, I therefore argue that they increase their possibility of experiencing social inclusion among native Norwegians if they participate in football, because football is a theme of conversation in many social contexts, also in school, as my observations and the children indicated. As such, football as a necessary consumption practice, a necessary bridge for inclusion, becomes a challenge for immigrant parents in low-income families. However, the reasons for participation or no participation in football, when most children appear to know its inclusive or bridging qualities, are quite complicated to fully understand.

For instance, in the case of Kim of Asian origin, both his parents had low-income jobs, which makes it possible that his lack of participation is because of financial barriers. He did not participate in any paid, organized activity. On the other hand, two other Asian boys said their parents wanted them to play music rather than football, indicating cultural reasons rather than financial, but also these families’ cultural gender values regarding their sons’ socialization. However, I do not know if these boys said this in order to make it plausible that they did not participate in football,

I do not know if they actually did take music lessons. According to Pugh, children who for some reasons are unable to match the contents in the economy of dignity, use what she terms ‘facework strategies’ to navigate the economy of dignity in order to keep their dignity. She identified four such strategies: *bridging labour* (transform a perceived lack into something admirable); *claiming* (say they have something they do not have); *patrolling* (challenge other’s dignity claims) and *concealing* (hiding personal or social differences that carry a stigma) (Pugh, 2009: 66–71).

I find the strategy of ‘concealing’ an interesting heuristic device for the children in this study. The real reasons for no participation in football, for instance lack of money, could be why the two Asian boys *said* they were to go into music instead. By drawing on my observation data for additional information, I saw these boys and others of immigrant origin playing football in breaks with the other boys.

A ‘concealing’ strategy may also throw light on the girls’ expression ‘we do not like football’, which of course may be true, but may also conceal that they cannot afford the participation and therefore find a plausible excuse. I know their parents were either unemployed, single, one having a low-paid job in a maternity home. When the girls explain their lack of participation by a dislike of the game in combination with their mothers’ opinion of football as a game for boys, the girls, for whatever reasons of no participation, feel they keep their dignity in the peer group. No one can accuse them for not liking the game. Concealment or not, the girls nevertheless bring forth gender values that may point to cultural and not financial hindrances for their lack of participation.

In contrast to the girls’ possible concealment of the real reasons for no participation, are the boys who the coach say play ‘because of the social aspect of participation’. Implicitly this statement says that the boys actually do not like football but play because they want to experience belonging in the peer group and be part of the conversation. By participation in football, they conceal that they do not like a sport the majority of the children of both sexes enjoy, which may be experienced as shameful. However, whatever the reasons for no participation in football, the non-footballers indicate that the reasons behind lack of participation are more nuanced than only low income. The two native Norwegian boys who quit playing because they were bullied for not playing well enough, that is, because of bullying, also underline this. As such, the study indicates both social, cultural and financial barriers of participation in the dominant consumption practice of football. This finding is in line with other research (Broch, 2015; Strandbu & Bakken, 2007, Sundvoll & Tjøndal, 2015).

The fact that the popular boys and girls play football and engage in other expensive consumption practices, show the connection between popularity and the con-

tent in the children's economy of dignity. As popular children, they have power to define this content, which may be experienced as a hindrance for inclusion of children from low income families. The football clubs and Lillehammer municipality are aware of the relationship between high expenditures and social participation. As such, they may be understood to be aware of the phenomenon of economy of dignity in the children's culture.

## 9.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that the activity of football is an important part of the economy of dignity of 12-year-old girls and boys at Mesna School in Lillehammer. I have suggested that participation in this activity enhances children's experience of belonging and wider social inclusion in the peer group, irrespective of ethnic origin. The boys and girls in the 6<sup>th</sup> Form were aware that those who did not participate in football, risked the experience of being socially marginalized.

The leaders of the football clubs and the social workers in Lillehammer were conscious about the including mechanism of participation in football for all children, and for boys and girls in low-income families in particular. Therefore, they offered free participation to those they knew were poorly off financially. However, according to the children, some immigrant families have cultural values that prioritize other activities than football for particularly their daughters. As such, the chapter has indicated that financial situation may be a barrier for social participation, but also that cultural and social barriers, such as bullying, must be taken into consideration as including/excluding mechanisms. More research and knowledge of financial, cultural and other possible barriers of social participation is necessary if the political aim of including more children of immigrant origin in their local communities is to be fulfilled.

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