URBAN ENCOUNTERS WITH STRANGERS – THE ICT AND YOUNG PEOPLE’S EXPERIENCES OF ADULT SOCIAL CONTROL IN PUBLIC PLACES IN HELSINKI

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DIGITAL YOUTH IN THE MEDIA CITY (DIME)

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BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- Classic accounts on city life need updating (e.g. Chicago School, Robert Park, Georg Simmel, Erving Goffman)

- **How does digitalisation, technologisation and mediation formulate social interaction and practices in the city?**

- How does underage youth (14-17 year olds) take part in the creation of social order in the city and how do they negotiate the norms regulating conduct in public spaces in the media city? (Media city – concept suggested by Myria Georgiou and refers to communication practices in city, city branding, distance – proximity, symbolic power and control in city)

- Methodological approach: metro as a starting point and an example of a technologised public space; ethnographic case studies (Pokémon Go, sticker artists, urban circus, graffiti artists), interviews with young people, ethnographic diaries ...
INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONS IN THE METRO

Technological vehicle, carries masses of people
- Social interaction between diverse groups of people and diverse generations
- Technology as an integral part (mobile phones, CCTV cameras, billboards etc.)

Negotiated social order
- Encounters and negotiations between strangers who are physically close but socially distant (presentation of strangeness, Simmel)
- Social control is formed in these negotiations (formal and informal)
- Experience based and affective places where young people learn about city space as young people’s spaces

Young people’s point of view
- Stories about “ambiguous” encounters with adults, what kinds of meanings are given to them? What do these stories reveal about public transport as youth spaces?
- Data: Ole Hyvä Helsinki (You are welcome Helsinki)—art project by the city of Helsinki in 2016 ja 2017. Interviews with 57 young people aged from 14 to 18 years old.
"THE NORM OF SILENCE" AS A CENTRAL FEATURE OF METRO SOCIABILITY

Finnish Nightmares

Sometimes it can be like that. For instance, you bump into a stranger, apologize, everyone smiles, and then ‘okay, goodbye’. Or, okay, someone dropped something, forgot something and then you kind of ‘hey, you dropped your umbrella’, ‘okay, thanks’... [you] don’t necessarily go to talk to a stranger because you don’t know whether [he/she] wants to talk, what kind of person [he/she] is. You don’t know whether [he/she] will look at you strangely if you start talking and everything... This kind of norm of silence is very hard to break. Even if you are not afraid of embarrassing situations, somehow it does not feel natural. (Neo, 17-year-old male)
AMBIVALENT ENCOUNTERS WITH ADULTS – AS NARRATED BY YOUNG PEOPLE

1. Sexual harassment - Young girls talk about encounters with middle age men in public transport

2. Viewing young people as problems, pejorative attitude towards young people - Young people talk about their interaction with elderly.

3. Racism - Young Finns of African ethnic background tell about their encounters with adults in the city

4. Encounters with intoxicated adults - Young people tell about everyday encounters with adults in metro.

Photo: Metro travelers, 1980’s. Unknown author, Helsinki City Museum.
SEXUAL HARASSMENT

It was precisely on the metro where the incident occurred and it was very distressing when someone started to follow me. He followed me for fifteen minutes or so, then I kind of ... very nice [ironical tone], he shouted after me that I was really beautiful and everything. Yeah, those are very distressing experiences for me at least. (Minna, 17-year-old female)

Ruska, 16: Once some guy just put his hand on my knee and started to move his hand and then I kind of really hit his hand and left.

Interviewer: Well done!

Ruska, 16: And then people sort of noticed that something had happened but they did nothing; they kind of said nothing to this person.

Interviewer: So no one intervened?

Ruska, 16: No one. (Ruska, 16-year-old)

Once I was going to school and there [on the metro] was someone, a sort of, some guy was staring at me and smiling. And when I was about to leave, he winked at me. I just looked at him in astonishment. I was going to school! It was kind of amazing [said ironically], yes. (Olivia, 17-year-old female)
And than I also noticed that elderly or older people [think to] have a right to intervene in public places in young people’s business. I have heard many stories that if you wear shorts you should put your trousers on, older people just say it like that. Once I met this kind of granny who started to look at me very sweetly, smile at me, and I smiled back, and than she said ‘you have very ugly eyebrows, why did you paint them like that?’ – So she just very sweetly smiles to me and than continues saying that you look awfully ugly, and should clean your face up.

So, I don’t really understand, you can’t say ‘mind your own business’ or anything like that because there is still some kind of authority-politeness kind of position. I was expected to apologize for my ugly eyebrows and then leave.

(Lotta, 17-year-old female)
PEJORATIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS YOUNG PEOPLE

There are young people who behave well and there are noisy young people. [People] always look angrily at those who are very noisy. I even do it myself. As for me, no one ever looks at me. I am kind of invisible [...] I never cause any kind of disorder, so no one ever looks at me.

(Alex, 17-year-old male)

An old man came and tapped me on the back and said: when you’re young, it’s good that you can sit [on public transport], so when you get old you’ll be able to stand. Then I asked: do you want to sit here? He said that he didn’t. He told me to go ahead and sit, if it was so important for me. In retrospect, I should have said that yes, I actually wanted to sit down. But in that kind of situation witty replies seldom come to mind. Besides, it’s probably better not to start a quarrel, even if it sometimes crosses your mind to answer an inappropriate comment in an equally inappropriate way.

(Satoshi, 17-year-old male)
Well, usually I travel on the metro with a phone in my hands. I listen to music, or watch something, check Twitter or apps like that. So if someone comes and actually speaks to you, some random dude, then you can just pretend that you aren’t listening to him or haven’t noticed him. That’s what I always do. It’s a kind of safety issue for me, meaning that I don’t necessarily need to encounter people.

(Minna, 17-year-old female)
I use a bus line that starts outside the metro station. One Saturday evening at the bus stop, I realized that a man was staring at me. I thought, okay, now [I] should do something, and I decided to call a friend. I talked to her during the entire bus trip home. I felt safer since I could not have been attacked while on the phone, especially seeing as I told my friend where I was and some other general information just to be on the safe side.

(Olivia, 17-year-old female)
SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE?

→ As based on the young people’s accounts the social order in the metro is defined by the ”norm of silence” also in situations in which the young person’s encounter is unpleasant, and can be defined even harassment. Accordingly, the young person is left to cope with the situations by him/herself.

→ Moreover, the young people are expected to behave well and the adherence to norms is also monitored, but despite this they can encounter pejorative treatment from fellow passengers they define adults.

→ Young people do see that they do not have the power to change this state of affairs – but they engage diverse individual safety routines and coping strategies in ambivalent situations.

→ Young people also tell about how they do not have the courage to intervene in e.g. racist situations even if they disagree (and hence the norms related to civic inattention get strengthened).
For instance if I travel in the evening, than it certainly a lot better if there are some guards. Even if nothing is happening, it gives a kind of feeling as if something would happen, than there would be no so much danger...

So usually they [guards] are there on metro. [But] when there are some strange guys, or someone is drunk or someone starts to come on me, so those guards are never around. (Lotta 17)
POKEMON GO – HYBRID REALITY GAME THAT FOSTERS INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY?
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Breaking communication barriers, learning use of social media (messengers), improving ITC skills
THANK YOU!

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