

THE SOCIAL IMPORTANCE OF CONSUMPTION FOR INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION AMONG CHILDREN IN A MULTI-ETHNIC SUBURB OF OSLO

Abstract

This article discusses the relationship between social networks and consumption for inclusion among peers in a multicultural suburb of Oslo called Dal. Theoretically informed by network analysis of strong and weak ties, consumption as communication and the concept of economy of dignity, the article shows in detail the things and activities which are important for girls and boys. The study is based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork and shows that focusing on social networks and consumption is a fruitful approach to understand social inclusion/exclusion among children and families with immigrant background in societies characterized by commodification of childhood.

Keywords

Children • inclusion/exclusion • consumption • network analysis • economy of dignity

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1 Introduction

The Grorud valley has the greatest number of people with non-western origin living in Oslo, most of whom immigrated in the 1960-70s and later. During that same time span, childhood became increasingly commercialized in all industrialized countries (Cook 2004; Rysst 2008; Pugh 2009). This means it costs money to participate in Norwegian and modern childhoods, both in terms of activities, clothes and other material items deemed necessary for social inclusion (NOU: 2001: 6; Pugh 2009). What in previous generations was understood as luxury goods and a want, for instance a bicycle, is today better understood as a need, something necessary for social inclusion (Lodziak 2002; Rysst 2008; Pugh 2009). This tendency is not particularly Norwegian; commodification of childhood is reported world-wide (Cook 2004; Pugh 2009), or to paraphrase Allison Pugh: “the market permeates the relationships in which children are embedded” (Pugh 2009: 5).

Based on ethnographic research, this article addresses the life of some children and their families living in the Grorud valley, the place I have called Dal; but considering a world-wide commodification of childhood, I believe they represent more people than themselves. At the school Dal, which served as the primary research site, the distribution of ethnicities is: 4% ethnic Norwegians and 96% immigrant origin. However, at the place Dal, the distribution of ethnicities shows a slightly higher percentage of ethnic Norwegians, but they are nevertheless among the minority ethnic groups (Aalandslid & Tronstad 2010).

Many non-western immigrants are financially poor (Bonke & Bergeraas 2005). This indicates that places and schools that include people of non-western origin are also peopled with financially

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disadvantaged families. This situation has importance for social inclusion processes related to consumption. As such, for lack of space, this article addresses possibilities for consumption rather than cultural differences. “Inclusion and exclusion” refer to two levels: one among peers (children) and one to the place Dal through social participation in relevant activities. To be included among peers implies having one or more close friends, or strong ties, and to the place Dal it implies participation in a minimum of activities in the area.

The study is informed by network analysis (Bø & Schiefloe 2007) and is positioned in an overarching understanding of consumption as part of social processes and relationships. Consumption is read as communication (Douglas & Isherwood 1996), as satisfaction of needs (Lodziak 2002) and related to “economy of dignity” (Pugh 2009: 6-10) (see later section). Next, I shall discuss the following questions:

- How is the children's social network to be understood, related to consumption of material items and activities?
- How is the relationship between consumption, material items and inclusion/exclusion processes?
- How is the relationship between the children's and their family's social network regarding inclusion and exclusion?

I will argue that to focus on social network and consumption is a fruitful approach in order to understand social inclusion/exclusion processes among children and families with immigrant background in societies characterized by commodification of childhood (NOU 2001: 6; Cook 2004; Pugh 2009).

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2 The field site and methodology

2.1 The field site

In the Grorud valley there exist many schools. I got access at Dal school, with forms five to ten. As a whole, the school has 460 pupils distributed among 15-18 nationalities, where ethnic Norwegians are among the minority groups. The houses in the area consist of villas, terrace houses and apartment blocks, and most children at Dal school live in apartment blocks. Oslo's famous recreation area, "Oslomarka" is close by. "Oslomarka" surrounds Oslo in west, east and north, and have paths and small roads in the woods for walking, jogging and bicycling. As such, Dal resembles other places at the margins of Oslo city, except that Dal is peopled by a majority of families of foreign origin and thus of many financially disadvantaged families.

2.2 Methodology

In order to grasp the social networks among the children, and with that inclusion and exclusion, the main methodological approach has been long-term participant observation in the fifth, later sixth form, and some time also spent in the seventh form. The sixth form consists of two parallel classes (6A and 6B) with 21 students in each. As a whole, 17 countries of origin are represented, which have been reduced to the following eight broad categories in order to anonymize: the Middle-East, Asia, East-Asia, West-Africa, East-Africa, North-Africa, East-Europe, Norway ("ethnic Norwegian"). About 90% of the children are Muslims, others are Christian, Buddhist or Hindus. I spent most of my time in 6A, because the only ethnic Norwegian student belonged there, and also one with mixed ethnic Norwegian and west-African background. 6B didn't have any ethnic Norwegians. The fieldwork lasted from 2010 to 2011.

I have also conducted 17 conversational interviews with children, mostly in groups of two. The total interview sample consists of 26 children, 2 teachers and 6 parents. The participant observation has included participation in everyday school activities, by sitting at the back of classrooms observing and writing notes. What I did particularly observe was who approached or addressed whom during lessons and breaks, in addition to eavesdropping on conversations everywhere.

When it was time for break I walked with the children to the schoolyard, rather than with teachers to their room. This was to position myself as a non-teacher. By underlining this position, the children gradually relaxed about doing "forbidden" things when I was around. These forbidden activities often involved someone bringing sweets to school as gifts.

In addition to participant observation in school, I attended some out of school events, such as a football match, a festival, 17th of May celebrations (Independence day) and just hanging around the mall. Because I also wanted to get in contact with some parents, I felt this was one way of trying to build trust. At the beginning of the fieldwork, I attended one meeting at the school for parents and introduced myself and the project. I underlined that all names are changed and thus anonymized. All of them received a letter of information and a request for interview. Only a few returned a positive answer, due to language problems and lack of time on their part. I had six interviews with parents.

3 Theoretical approaches

3.1 Social network analysis

According to the Norwegian sociologist Bø and Schiefloe (2007), the first researcher to apply the term social network as it is generally understood today, was the anthropologist John Barnes (1954). He studied a Norwegian fishing community and got the inspiration by watching fishing nets hung up to dry. He was part of the Manchester school in British anthropology. Researchers connected to this school of thought developed the network approach through urban studies in Africa, where much of today's conceptualizations were initiated. One central contribution in this regard was a distinction between the *form* of the network and its *content*. The form of a network describes participation and connections between its parts (for instance children) and can be visualised in a figure. The content of a network refers to how the relations work, their qualities and their meanings (Mitchell 1969; Bø & Schiefloe 2007: 37).

This article applies the above understandings of network form and content, and is positioned in the anthropological network approach which emphasizes participant observation and immersed studying of delineated milieus (Bø & Schiefloe 2007: 37), in this case a school and a classroom. More precisely, I understand a social network to consist of a set of relatively lasting, informal relations between people, which comes into being when relations in one way or other connect people. The relations, or ties, have different meanings and strengths (Bø & Schiefloe 2007: 42), such as weak and strong ties, as people usually have both (close) friends (strong ties) and acquaintances (weak ties). The strength of a tie illustrates the quality of the relationship, as in this definition by Mark Granovetter (1973):

The strength of a tie is a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie. Each of these is somewhat independent of the other, though the set is obviously highly intracorrelated (Granovetter 1973: 1361, also referred in Bø & Schiefloe 2007: 43).

In general, the stronger the ties between people, the more are the resources available for the parties (Bø & Schiefloe 2007). The reason why social network analysis is interesting for my study, is its potential for systematic understanding of the meaning of relationships, relation building and informal social interaction (Bø & Schiefloe 2007: 26). A network approach makes it possible to understand how weak and strong ties among the children are related to consumption of which things and activities. More precisely, a map of children's social network is simultaneously a map of children's popularity and friendship, which guides us in giving answers to the first two questions posed in the introduction.

However, a network approach is methodologically challenging. The expansion and quality of social networks are hard to delineate in an exact manner. Each child's social network goes beyond the school class and other school contexts, and overlaps parents' networks. As such, a ten year-old child born and raised in Norway, but of immigrant origin, may have strong and weak (transnational) ties all over the world. It is relatively easy to observe best friends or strong ties, but weak ties differ in intensity, making some *almost* strong. In other words, some weak ties are weaker (or stronger) than others. For instance, in general at Dal, girls and boys have weak ties to children of the other sex, and some boys and girls also have weak ties to same sex children. A fruitful way to approach the strength of ties is thus to view them along a continuum, from strong to weak, also

suggested by Bø & Schiefloe (2007: 43). The concepts of “strong” and “weak” ties must be read with this in mind, and mapping of strength is important in order to analyse in what ways possibilities to consume influence the building and maintenance of close or not close friendships.

3.2 Consumption as communication

As mentioned previously, my discussion is also inspired by an overarching understanding of consumption as 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). All things carry meaning, but not isolated from the social context. The meaning of each item is in relation to the whole. The things can be markers in social classification, for instance in demarcating social categories among Norwegian children and elsewhere, such as nerds, cool, girlie-girls (Rysst 2008; Renold 2005). The meaning lies in the relationship between the things, similar to how music flows from the relationship between notes, and not from one note only (Douglas & Isherwood 1996). The things that are part of children’s social classification and friendship networks are best understood in relation to each other, where they function as fences or bridges for friendship and belonging.

3.3 Consumption as satisfaction of basic needs and other needs

However, consumption is not only about communication, it also satisfies basic needs and other needs, or wants. Conrad Lodziak argues for an awareness of the material use value of consumption and for distinction between basic needs and other needs rather than basic needs and wants (Lodziak 2002: 1). His argumentation follows the relative understanding of poverty, in which social participation is regarded as a need rather than want (Townsend 1979). As such, Baron and Isherwood’s conceptualization is insufficient for my purposes. In this article I regard all items and activities needed for social participation and inclusion as a need, while “basic” needs refer to obvious needs such as food, housing and clothes to keep warm.

3.4 Economy of dignity

The above understandings resonate with Allison Pugh’s analysis of children’s longing and belonging related to consumer culture in the US (Pugh 2009). She argues that 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). She termed this system of social meanings for the “economy of dignity”. She argues that children “collect or confer dignity among themselves, according to their (shifting) consensus about what objects or experiences are supposed to count for it” (ibid.: 7). In Pugh’s use, dignity refers to “worthy of belonging” (Pugh 2009: 7). Her use of “dignity” refers more to the esteem of others than to envy, to be able to join the circle rather than be excluded from it (ibid.:7). Pugh suggests in an interesting manner what children are up to in their relationships, which, I believe, is relevant for the children in my study too. She 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. And when children—even affluent ones—find themselves without what they need to join the

conversation, they perform what I have termed “facework” to make up for the omission (Pugh 2009: 8).

“Facework” denotes impression management that involves “the presentation of an honourable self in order to gather dignity in public” (Pugh 2009: 52). Pugh mentions four kinds of facework: bridging labour, claiming, concealing and patrolling (Pugh 2009: 67).¹ I want to add a fifth: giftgiving. The term facework is borrowed from Erving Goffman (1959/1992) who used it on apologies and other efforts people employed to patch over interactional blunders. Pugh shifts the focus to the selves doing the feeling (Pugh 2009: 232, note 9). In this article I follow Pugh to denote what children do when they understand they risk exclusion or already feel excluded because they lack “something”.

If Pugh is correct, children come home “with the desires turned into needs by the alchemy of dignity” which most parents respond to in order to satisfy their children’s social belonging (2009 2009: 8; see also Ridge 2002; Rysst 2006). Her thinking resonates with Lodziak’s thinking on consumption as satisfaction of needs and with Miller’s argument that commodities reflect “the material culture of love” and as such are used “to constitute the complexity of contemporary social relations” (Miller 1998: 8). Miller argues that shopping is primarily an act of love in that shopping often is for others and thus strengthens a relationship (Miller 1998: 15-73). In the next sections the above discussion will be applied in the analysis of friendship networks and inclusion and exclusion of the Dal children.

4 Children’s friendship networks

The *form* of children’s social network is constructed based on a sociogram the teacher drew combined with my own observations. The teacher asked the children to write down (in secret) three children they would prefer to work with in their class, which led them to write down their three best friends or those they wanted as best friends, according to the teacher. Based on this information, the teacher drew a network figure based on lines from each child to the names they had written down. This resulted in all children having arrows from ego, but not all had arrows pointed at them. The use of sociograms for mapping marginalization and hierarchies in schools is quite widespread (Bø & Schiefloe 2007: 36), and the teachers at Dal had done so regularly before I started my fieldwork. In combination with my observations the sociogram made much sense and served as a guide for my construction of the children’s friendship network of strong and weak ties. I conceptualized the friendship to be reciprocal, and the relations strong, if two persons pointed at each other. ¹ The following figure shows the friendship network by way of strong and weak ties, where the latter are stippled lines and the former whole lines:

As the figure shows, most of the arrows point at Sahra having North-African origin (7) and Pernille of ethnic Norwegian background (7). Among the boys, most arrows point at Omar with Asian origin (9), David of mixed ethnic Norwegian and West-African background (7) and Robert with East-African origin close behind (6). These children are thus understood to be the most popular children in 6A. Two of the girls and five of the boys have no reciprocal relations, which make up a total of seven children having only weak ties and are thus understood to risk social exclusion among peers.

The diagram shows that strong and weak ties are systematically distributed according to gender. However, the ties are not systematically distributed according to ethnic background: the three most wanted boys and the two girls represent different countries

of origin. However, other research on friendship in multicultural contexts show that children establish inter-ethnic friendships more systematically when they enter puberty and beyond (Tatum 2003; Lewis 2011). The children in this study are younger, which may explain the lack of systematic ethnic strong ties.

Both as individuals and dyads the relationships between Sahra and Pernille on the one side and Omar, David and Robert on the other, are important and interesting because, as popular children and with that dignity and power, they dominate the class context in many ways (see also Hey 1997; Renold 2005; Thorne 1993; Rysst 2008). They are the centre of attention and have the power to define what the relevant tokens of value are, that is, the content of these children's economy of dignity, and thus which persons are in and who is out. These strong ties were very stable during the time I spent with the children (they endured in 2012 too), which makes them even more relevant to analyse for the intentions of this article. I will do that for the boys and girls separately, and through that, give an answer to the first question in the introduction: "How is the children's social network to be understood related to consumption of material items and activities?"

4.1 The economy of dignity in the girls' network

At Dal it is evident that Sahra is popular among the girls, something I observed before the sociogram was drawn. She is, more than Pernille, addressed physically and audibly. When free to choose seats, Sahra is the favourite. Many of the girls also mentioned her, before Pernille, as a wanted friend in the informal interviews. I suggest there are many reasons for her having that position. The most obvious is that she represents the necessary tokens of value materially and socially: She is good-looking, she wears cool enough clothes, she is clever in schoolwork, sports and participates at the Club (to be presented soon). She is also a representative of the majority children at Dal by having foreign background and has a sympathetic personality. From observations and the sociogram her best friend Pernille is also popular and represents similar tokens of value. In addition I don't think it is a coincidence that Sahra, as the most popular, is fair skinned, as Pernille. The teachers at the school say that fair skin colour has higher social prestige than brown and black. Unfortunately I don't have the possibility to explore the meaning of skin colour in this article.

The relationship between Sahra and Pernille illustrates all signs of strength by reciprocity, emotional intensity, intimacy and time spending (Granovetter 1973: 1361). For instance, it seems unthinkable that they shouldn't wait for each other or walk away at breaks with someone else. This would signal that something was "wrong". They always choose to work together in class if that is an option, and sit beside each other if they are permitted. The relationship seems enmeshed in reciprocity and trust. In addition to sharing the same interests, they exchange food, sweets, smiles and gazes.

Sahra and Pernille also share the same style of dressing, which is the style most of the other girls aspire as well. As such, how Sahra and Pernille dress is understood to highlight important tokens of value in the girls' economy of dignity. The way they dress and fix their hair signals that they are interested in looking good, an observation confirmed by their mothers in an interview. Sahra's mother couldn't understand where Sahra got this interest from, and suggested it "must have something to do with the school". The style they sport is a cool, teenage inspired style with tight jeans, long sweaters and sweaters with hoods. They all have shoulder length or longer hair. The different

apparels and hairstyles together make up their aspired style. The clothes and hair styles thus work as bridges for inclusion, and as such these including items can be understood as needs, they are needed for social participation and for feeling of belonging (Douglas & Isherwood; Lodziak 2002; Pugh 2009). Correct clothes and hair styles thus have social importance as bridges in relationships, while wrong clothes and hairstyles work as fences. Hijabs in combination with traditional clothing from foreign homelands work as fences for inclusion in an ethnic Norwegian context, but apparently not hijabs in combination with otherwise cool clothes, illustrated by Rania. She is the only girl in the sixth form at Dal who wears a hijab, but the headscarf does not work as a fence because she also wears jeans and sweaters like the others.

Just which clothes and hairstyles that are defined as necessary for inclusion by children is an empirical question as the necessary things vary between schools, places, regions and countries but probably have in common popular culture, teenage inspired fashion and appearance (Pugh 2009; Rysst 2008). However, as popular girls, the style of Sahra and Pernille was copied by the other girls and may thus be read as parts of the Dal girls' economy of dignity. At another school in the Grorud valley where the distribution of ethnicities was 60% ethnic Norwegians and 40% children of immigrant background and in general included more middle-class people, the tokens of value were more exclusive and the material items of more expensive brands than at Dal (Rysst 2008). The popular girls there were all white, ethnic Norwegian of the middle class, and they had defined what was to be included in their economy of dignity. This resulted in girls with immigrant background from disadvantaged families having a hard time and engaging in "claiming" facework in order to be included (Pugh 2009: 67-68; Rysst 2008). However, the importance of expensive brands is not absent at Dal, as the following conversation with Sahra's mother reveals:

"Mother: When the children were very young, I could buy clothes on sale at *Hennes & Mauritz*, but now when they are older they don't want the same clothes as before. So it is expensive for us as a family. I have to buy clothes that fit their age, and sometimes I don't buy clothes for myself, I totally forget myself. I can only possess one pair of shoes, one dress, one coat...and sometimes I teach them that I cannot afford it all, and they understand that well. They accept that sometimes we cannot buy everything they want. When my oldest daughter for instance want a pair of shoes that cost kr. 1500, then I explain that if she is to buy such a pair of shoes only to herself, what about her siblings? So she understands that well. Sometimes it works, when we plan our spending.

Mari: Do you find that Sahra cares about clothes?

Mother: Yes, that's right. We know many children are bullied because of clothes, and that is rather sad. For instance, some may say "You don't have clothes with a brand", or "you don't wear Levi's, or Adidas or Nike". And you know, when children are young, they don't understand, and they are influenced by that. My youngest daughter comes home and says "She (mentions a name) has clothes with a brand, Nike shoes..." We try and plan so that she doesn't experience that. And as I said, me and their father, sometimes we don't buy anything for ourselves at all. We forget.

Mari: So you put the children first....?

Mother: Yes. For instance, they can tell us at home that we have to buy a Playstation, and I cannot say "no". I cannot say "no", because if I do, the young son (6 years old) may go to a friend

and say “Oh, you have a Playstation and we have not!” I don’t want that to happen, I can abstain from eating so we can buy that Playstation. Children are expensive.

Sahra’s mother expresses very well how consumption and particular things are important in the Dal children’s economy of dignity, which in a sense becomes her economy of dignity as well. Her story shows how low-income families have to prioritize how they spend their money, and resonates perfectly with what low-income parents in Pugh’s study expressed. They all illustrate how “children come first” and by that they are not alone. Research from other Nordic countries and the UK reveals the same (Rysst 2006; Ridge 2002). In other words, it seems as if the majority of parents of all social classes and ethnic groups living in western countries, do their best to help their children comply to their peer culture’s economy of dignity.

Not only material items and hairstyles are included in economies of dignity. The possibility to participate in leisure activities out of school is also important. For instance, Sahra and Pernille go to the so-called “Club” after school. The Club is located in the school basement, free of charge, and offer different activities such as dance, drama, song and the like. Many children go to the Club. This is an institution that aims to increase integration and belonging among the children at Dal by offering activities free of charge so that all children have the financial possibility to attend. Besides activities at the Club, the girls in the sixth form did not have other necessary activities in their economy of dignity.

4.2 *The economy of dignity in the boys’ network*

As we saw in the diagram, Omar appears to be the most popular boy. He and particularly David represent a strong dyad and with that strong ties. However, I don’t understand this dyad to be as strong as the one between Sahra and Pernille. For instance, the diagram shows that Robert has as many wanting him as friend as David. The reason why the dyad (triad) is not as exclusive as the one among the girls, is probably because the most popular activity among the boys is football. They play in every break at school all year, even when the football pitch is full of snow. Most of the boys also attend the local football team twice a week. And the boys talk about football most of the time, also in (slack) periods in the classroom. This implies that football in all its aspects is a vital ingredient in the boys’ economy of dignity, as I will show.

I suggest Omar got this position for at least three reasons, all related to the boys’ economy of dignity: he is judged to be the most talented football player in class, he has been chosen as the captain of the team by their coach, and he has much knowledge about football. In addition, he wears cool enough clothes, which are sporty and hip-hop like. In other words, football magazines, football shirts and all things related to football are thus excellent examples of things that function as bridges in relationships and thus in these boys’ economy of dignity. In addition, Omar also has a quiet and sympathetic personality. He is of Asian background, and as such shares background with the biggest ethnic group of children at Dal school. Regarding appearance he is slim, not very brown skinned, and of average height.

It is also evident that David has a high position because the boys also gather at his desk and call out his name repetitiously. The girls classify him as handsome, he has golden skin and curly hair which he tries to fix into fashionable styles. It is also a possibility that David scores high because he is part of ethnic Norwegian networks, just

like Pernille, his mother being ethnic Norwegian. As such, Pernille and David embody attractive Norwegian competences, for instance fluent Norwegian.

To sum up, football is the most popular activity among the boys and social hierarchy is related to football competence, both as players and general knowledge. Most of the boys seek inclusion in the football group, and try in different ways to establish strong ties to Omar, David and to some extent Robert. In other words, the game of football in all its aspects, material as well as proficiency, is a vital ingredient in the boys’ economy of dignity.

Finally, I want to point to some common attractive dimensions for popularity among girls and boys, namely what they define as good looks. Particularly Sahra and David were classified as good-looking, being of average height and weight, not being too small, too tall, too fat and too dark skinned. In addition, common attractive material items for girls and boys were bicycles, general sports gear and cell phones.

5 Social inclusion and exclusion among the children

This section discusses the second question posed in the introduction, namely: “How is the relationship between consumption, material items and inclusion/exclusion processes?” Regardless of the existent strength of ties, it appears as if both girls and boys pursue reciprocal and trustworthy relationships. The social importance of consumption is highlighted in these relation-building processes. The most obvious illustration occurs when children bring potential gifts to school in an attempt to create stronger ties. The most common gifts are sweets, discretely hidden in pockets and distributed behind the backs of teachers. Particularly for children having only weak ties, this is bridging labour facework (Pugh 2009: 67). In the following I shall therefore present three examples of how three children having weak ties only (Rosie, Adine and Ali) attempt to establish inclusion by gift giving, claiming and bridging labour facework.

The social position of Rosie supports the teacher’s assumption that children name friends or wanted friends in the sociogram, not proficient students. Rosie is the best student but is not named by anyone. One reason for this may be that she is not socially active out of school, she seldom attends the Club because she goes home to do homework and plays the violin. As such, she does not comply with the defined necessary activity in the girls’ economy of dignity: participation in activities at the Club. She attends music lessons at a well-known institute at a more affluent part of Oslo and always reads books in class and outside. Rosie’s family has middle-class background, while most others in the area are from the working class (at least according to their jobs in Norway). All these dimensions may have led the children to classify her as significantly “different” from the others, and thus more easily excluded, in spite of her sporting the same clothing style as the other girls (but having above average height). As it is, I read Rosie to want belonging and to engage in facework of what I termed the gift giving kind, a postulation the following episode illustrates.

One summer day Rosie comes to school carrying two plastic bags filled with different things, such as jewelry and small souvenirs. She says these are things not used by family members anymore, and she therefore wants to give them away as gifts for any girl in the class who responds to her offer. In the breaks she therefore sits down on the ground and spreads the things around her, similar to street sellers. The girls flock around her, and Rosie says they can express

preferences. She also offers some of the things to particular girls, especially Sahra. Through her gift giving, Rosie probably expects some kind of return (Mauss 1966). Maybe she hopes the girls, particularly Sahra and Pernille, openly show that they want to include her in their activities. My observations the following weeks confirm Rosie being included, until something happened and she was on her own again. The gift giving may thus be read to be successful in the short run only. This shows the complexity of inclusion/exclusion processes related to the concept of economy of dignity as personality traits also have importance. The case of Adine illustrates this point.

Adine has, since she came to the school last year, had a provocative behavior and often utters something she knows that makes the recipient angry or hurt, such as “black” or “nigger”. The school doesn’t tolerate racist expressions, which she knows well, but don’t respect. She lets her cell-phone ring in class, which is not allowed. In short, Adine makes a lot of “noise” which make her classmates exclude her. To compensate she has ties to girls in other classes. However, Adine is a good example of how an outsider tries to use consumption of things as bridges for inclusion. She knows the codes in their economy of dignity. One day she brings her new bicycle to school and shows this off by riding about even though that is prohibited. In addition to having a cell phone, which not all children at Dal have, she also wears fashionable or “cool” clothes, such as the so-called “one-piece” suit. This is a wide, whole body suit in loose material, a combined sweater with hood and training trousers. The one-piece can be bought in many colours in different prices, and hers were not among the cheapest. She also boasted of having seven such suits, which illustrate claiming facework (Pugh 2009: 67-68). Even though the cool clothes at Dal didn’t have to be of expensive brands, having clothes of expensive brands *did* trigger admiration, as Sahra’s mother expressed above.

It is obvious that Adine possessed many cool and potentially bridging things in the children’s economy of dignity, and she also participated in activities at the Club. As such, she satisfied much in their economy of dignity. However, the things and activities did not work as bridges in her case (Douglas & Isherwood 1996: xv). Her general behavior, and maybe appearance as above average height and weight, makes the establishment of strong ties difficult. Adine’s case illustrates the complexity of popularity and inclusion, and that this is not achieved through “correct” things only, they have to be combined with other necessary competences. As such, her case resembles that of Rosie, who also dressed in cool enough clothes and was above average height. Children and youth’s attempting to achieve inclusion and popularity through cool things are also reported elsewhere, both nationally and internationally, and can be read to be an attempted inclusion strategy in modern consumer societies (Hey 1997; Thorne 1993; Cook 2004; Rysst 2008, Pugh 2009).

The area of Dal is densely populated. Small roads closed for cars regulate the housing areas. As a consequence, bicycles are widely used by the children as transport to connect to each other. As such, bicycles have both a practical and symbolic function, in that they are used for necessary transport and come in different styles, shapes and prices. And most importantly, bicycles are needs and bridges for inclusion, as the case of Ali illustrates.

Ali is of Asian origin, he is small for his age which is commented upon to his dismay. Similar to Rosie and Adine, his body shape diverges from the average. As a result, his facework includes being cheeky, and also general bridging labour facework (Pugh 2009: 67). As already mentioned, it seems necessary in the boys’ economy of dignity to have a minimum competence in football, both as player and

“theoretically”. Ali didn’t play on the football team in the 5th form. The reason he gave was that he didn’t manage to get to the football pitch. It was too far away for walking, his parents didn’t have a car and he didn’t have a bicycle. He said that when the next school year started he was going to get a bicycle, and then he would join the football team. I asked him if he wanted a special bicycle, and the following conversation ensued:

Ali: Not special, but one that is very nice, that cannot be broken. But it doesn’t matter to me really, as long as it is a bicycle. But if it is a girl’s bike, then I will not have it! (he laughs a bit).

Mari: So it has to be a boys’ bicycle, and then it doesn’t matter how it looks?

Ali: No, not really, but it cannot have squares, then I will not have it.

The social importance of consumption and things is here highlighted in that he didn’t accept *any* bicycle, it had to be of a certain kind after all. I guess he feared humiliation and the feeling of more exclusion if it was a girl’s bicycle or had the wrong pattern. The correct type of bicycle was in the end more important than participation on the football team and with that potential strong ties to some of the boys. The end of this story is that Ali received an acceptable bicycle when the new school year started, and he started playing football. The result of that participation I don’t know.

In sum, “correct” consumption according to the existent economy of dignity contributes well for inclusion, but usually not alone. Personality traits including appearance also play an important part.

6 Inclusion and exclusion among children and their families at Dal

This last section discusses the third question in the introduction, namely: “How is the relationship between the children’s and their family’s social network regarding inclusion and exclusion?” As already mentioned, Pernille is the only ethnic Norwegian student in the sixth form, while David is of mixed origin. Pernille’s family, that is mother, father and sister, has lived at Dal for more than ten years. Her father’s family also lives there, and so her mother’s parents. This means that they have their most important family network in the region, and are in daily contact with each other. Another strong attachment to the area is the fact that both parents work there. They are known and visible in the school contexts and are active in arranging social events in the local Dal community. As such, Pernille’s family is well integrated in the area and has a wide social network of strong and weak ties. Their social capital is strong, based on inner unity and relations in the neighbourhood (Gaini 2010). In this light it is reasonable to suggest that it is positive for immigrant families to be part of their network as it may ease integration and contact with other ethnic Norwegian families and the Norwegian society in general. According to Pernille’s mother, she and her family don’t mind immigrants living in their area. Still, Pernille’s parents don’t have strong ties to immigrant adults, not even to Sahra’s parents, even though the girls walk in and out of each other’s homes. This indicates that cross-ethnic strong ties may be difficult to establish, for reasons that I don’t have the opportunity to explore here.

Sahra’s family has also lived in the area more than ten years, and all the four children are born in Norway. The father has stayed in Norway for more than 20 years, while the mother came after they got married. The family is Muslim, but the daughters dress in western

clothes and participate in local leisure activities such as football and dance (at the Club). The mother, however, wears a hijab and long dresses, skirts and coats. The relationship between Sahra and Pernille contributes positively to both families' social network, as I will now show.

Sahra, and indirectly her family, has ties to Pernille and her family and vice versa. Strong ties to Pernille/Sahra, weaker to the other family members. As has been suggested, Pernille's family has a wide attractive network for immigrant families in particular. By Sahra being the best friend of Pernille, she gets a better opportunity to learn Norwegian traditions and language fluently. It is fruitful for Pernille to be part of Sahra's network in that she better learns how it is to grow up in Norway having immigrant background. As such, Pernille and Sahra are role models for other children by showing that close mixed ethnic friendship is attractive. Their relationship symbolizes an ideal multicultural way of living, in which differences are tuned down and with that also ethnicity (Eriksen 1993).

The implication of Pernille and Sahra's and their families' social networks was illustrated when the Club arranged a Halloween Party for forms five to seven at the school. The Club has three youth workers of which only one has ethnic Norwegian background. One of these is the boyfriend of Pernille's sister. He has East-Asian origin and is often in contact with Pernille. As such, he represents a strong tie in her and her family's network and maybe also in Sahra's, just like Sahra's sisters represent strong ties for Pernille. At the Halloween Party, Sahra's sister helps Sahra and Pernille getting dressed in their Halloween costumes. The sister sits at a table and puts make-up on other children as well. Pernille and Sahra on their part, work "backstage" to prepare the upcoming meal, and are thus part of the organizing team. The Halloween arrangement can thus be read to be part of an overlapping of strong and weak ties of the family networks of Pernille's and Sahra's families. Pernille's sister's boyfriend and Sahra's sister, Pernille's parents and the girls themselves cooperate in the arrangement of the Halloween party. These networks are thus social capital for all these participants (Putnam 2000): Pernille, Sahra, her sister, Pernille's "brother-in-law" and parents. Their combined resources contributed in making the Halloween party a success.

As is the case in Pernille and Sahra's families, the parents of David, Robert and Omar don't socialize either, in spite of the boys having strong ties to each other. However, the parents, through their children, have weak ties to each other. These ties are stronger than the ties the parents have to parents of children not having strong ties to their children. Parents expand their networks and increase their social capital by participation at arrangements in the school context, because they get to know other parents and increase their knowledge of Norwegian society and the local community. The school staff has for a long time wanted more immigrant parents at arrangements. The parents' meetings have had increased participation in recent years, today reaching approximately 80%.

The football context and particularly the football team, can, in line with the school class context, be understood as a social network. The football activities depend on parents' participation in that children have to be driven by cars to matches in other parts of Oslo. Parents' engagement in leisure activities has a great potential for building networks in the area because they meet other parents and increase their knowledge about the neighbourhood. To participate in children's

leisure activities is a result of cultural priorities in the family, in line with permitting the son to play football at the local team. This is because participation costs money (Rysst 2008).

7 Conclusion

This article has shown the fruitfulness of network analysis for understanding the relationship between consumption and social inclusion. Material items and activities that cost money are important in children's economy of dignity and inclusion processes, related to the worldwide phenomenon of commodification of childhood. Migrant families may encounter this childhood commodification for the first time as migrants, a situation that challenges family budgets in unexpected ways. Consumption patterns are thus important fields of study for understanding how migrant families adapt, live and aim to live in their new homeland. The concept of economy of dignity has shown to be well suited for these kinds of studies. However, the article also illustrated that possession of "correct" things and activities did not automatically lead to inclusion; personality including appearance also matters. Finally, examples illustrate that families' social networks are closely intertwined with that of their children, and that children can act as "gate-openers" for their migrant parents' social inclusion in the local area. As such, local communities and political authorities may help these processes by offering free leisure activities where parents are needed as helpers in their children's activities.

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Notes

1. "Bridging labour" was the strategy of those who did not have as much as other; "claiming" was suggesting outright that they owned what they did not; "patrolling" is when children evaluate, challenge, or affirm others' dignity claims; "concealing" involved working to conceal differences from their peers that they perceived as negative (Pugh 2009: 67-69).
2. In my mapping of strong and weak ties, the following factors have been relevant:
 - 1) Repeated patterns of approaching the same persons both in class and outside.
 - 2) Observations of the same persons together at school and out of school.
 - 3) Children's own utterances of who their best friends are.

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