Heikkilä, Riie (2020). Anything goes for being happy? A qualitative analysis of discourses on leisure in Finland. In Shintaro Kono, Karl Spracklen, Anju Beniwal & Priyanka Sharma (eds.) Positive Sociology of Leisure: Contemporary Perspectives on Sociology of Leisure. London:Palgrave Macmillan. 67–86.

Anything goes for being happy? A qualitative analysis of discourses on leisure in Finland.

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Abstract

Active leisure is strongly linked to happiness and well-being. Yet, actual leisure practices are stratified according to social class and status, and there is no consensus about *what* kind of leisure contributes to happiness. The aim of this empirical chapter is to understand whether some types of leisure are more associated with happiness than others – and why. It uses interview data (n=49) on leisure and cultural consumption with Finnish people whose background profiles statistically predict low cultural participation (such as unemployment and/or low education). Qualitative content analysis is used to scrutinize expressions relating discussed leisure practices to happiness. Finland, one of the most egalitarian countries in the world with high rates of self-rated happiness according to recent reports, makes an interesting context for the study.

Keywords: happiness, leisure, cultural practices, social hierarchies, class, qualitative research, Finland

Introduction: do leisure practices promise happiness?

Leisure practices and lifestyles are strong markers and conveyors of social hierarchies. While upper classes typically consume and appreciate many kinds of different kind of high arts, the tastes and practices of middle and working classes are radically different. In most Western societies, knowing, appropriating and eventually consuming "highbrow arts" has been considered an indicator of cultural capital – thus not an aleatory personal preference but a direct product of societal position and habitus, and therefore linked to power structures in society (Bourdieu 1984). Also, the highbrow arts – such as opera, ballet, and classical music – have been subsidized by the public cultural policies of practically all industrialized Western countries, and they play a strong role in school curricula, making the knowledge and taste of the upper classes look "natural" and sanctioning the lower classes for the lack thereof (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979).

Bourdieu's account on the inevitable link between class position and taste has been contested countless times. Some of the most salient critiques include that cultural divisions might have been especially strong in the society Bourdieu studied, namely 1960s France, and that other kinds of historical, cultural or local contexts might push towards entirely different divisions and boundaries such as for instance socio-economic or moral ones (Lamont 1992). It has also been claimed that cultural practices do not depend uniquely on class positions but also, to an important degree, on individual life courses and significant others (Lahire 2004) or that "highbrow snobbery" as a marker of status in general would be a historical phase, currently being replaced by new kinds of "omnivorous" and tolerant cultural practices (Peterson and Kern 1996).

There is a relatively wide international consensus that active cultural participation is at least to some extent linked to good health and well-being, even happiness. Deeply embedded in the

Western/European intellectual discourse, since ancient times there has been a belief in the "transformative powers of the arts" (Belfiore and Bennett 2007, 138). In contemporary scholarly research, the link between cultural participation and well-being is supported through vast epidemiological research, different kinds of nationally representative social surveys and different practice-based approaches (for a thorough review, see Clift 2012). Time after time, researchers have shown that the larger the amount of cultural activities people attend, the better is their health is and the longer they survive, even if main socio-economic variables are controlled for and in both cross-sectional and longitudinal research settings (Bygren, Konlaan and Johansson 1996; Hyyppä et al. 2006; Konlaan, Bygren and Johansson 2000; Wilkinson et al. 2007). Cultural participation is also linked to happiness as such. Through a scrutiny of cultural participation and happiness in 30 countries in the *International Social Survey Programme (ISSP)* 2007 wave, Ateca-Amestoy et al. (2016) show that most leisure activities, whether home-based, attendance-based or participation-based, have a statistically significant positive effect on self-reported happiness. This is especially true regarding activities that require active attendance. Wheatley and Bickerton (2017) find the same association between arts, culture and sports attendance and subjective well-being but likewise point out that frequency of attendance is an important factor for positive effects: while some types of participation (such as singing or playing an instrument, or active sports) require regular participation for generating positive effects, attending arts events (such as the opera or a musical) generates positive effects independently of the frequency of attendance.

Nevertheless, most scholars recognize that the link between cultural participation and well-being or even happiness should not be understood as automatic or problem-free, even if meticulous and representative data sets are used (cf. Hyyppä 2010). First of all, operationalizations of well-being and happiness vary according to the study in question: objective and subjective well-being are different issues, and general satisfaction or happiness in life is an umbrella concept compared to "domain satisfaction", such as satisfaction regarding work or leisure time (Wheatley and Bickerton 2017). When it comes to individual surveys, measuring happiness often remains a quantified ascending scale: for instance, the previously mentioned *ISSP* survey (Ateca-Amestoy et al. 2016) only has four options for measuring general self-rated happiness (*not at all happy*, *not very happy*, *fairly happy* or *very happy*). Second, it is practically impossible for different kinds of surveys measuring cultural participation to consider all kinds of types of cultural participation that people are engaged in, not to mention that many surveys are biased towards practices typical to middle and upper-middle classes (Flemmen et al. 2017: 146). Finally, different cultural contexts are important mediators of meanings tied to the almost infinite forms of cultural participation and happiness. This, along with the other factors mentioned, makes measuring the real or even perceived impacts of cultural participation a complicated task, mainly because disentangling economic and cultural value is an enormously complex issue (cf. Belfiore and Bennett 2007; Wheatley and Bickerton 2017).

In this paper I argue that the typical operationalizations of happiness and leisure used in most quantitative, nationally representative studies do not necessarily capture all the shades of the connection between them. Therefore, I ask, in the light of a qualitative empirical setting, **what links less privileged and potentially less culturally active groups draw between their leisure participation practices and happiness**. The empirical context is Finland, a Nordic welfare state with a relatively large decommodified public sector, with for instance an entirely public and free education system providing a certain equality of opportunities (cf. Esping-Andersen, 1999) and high self-rated happiness according to the newest United Nations *World Happiness Report* (Helliwell, Layard and Sachs 2018).

The chapter proceeds as follow: I will first review the literature on the links between cultural practices and happiness, and after that present the empirical data and analytical strategy. After this I

will go on towards analyzing the results, first through describing, on the macro level, the occurrences of happiness found in the empirical data and then through scrutinizing more in detail the most pertinent categories. Finally, I will discuss the relevance of the findings in the light of existing research and contemporary cultural policy.

From happiness to cultural policy, and back

It can safely be argued that in the last decades, the incessant pursuit and appreciation of happiness and well-being has occupied a central position in the mindscapes of late modernity post-industrial societies. This has brought about an avalanche of self-help literature and a rise of different mindfulness techniques, all meant to discover and enhance personal happiness and life satisfaction. Recent times have also seen the advent of similarly themed research sub-fields, such as happiness studies and positive sociology, which in this volume is treated mostly under the umbrella of positive sociology of leisure. Originally coined by Stebbins (Stebbins 2009, Stebbins 2020 in this volume), positive sociology aims to showcase and research the activities that make life rewarding, emphasizing personal activity and agency.

However, studying and especially conceptualizing happiness has its caveats. Among others Bauman (2008) argues that the current pursuit of subjective and essentially self-made happiness is an epitome or even justification for the current frenzy of consumerism. Hochschild (2003), in her influential work on emotional labour exemplified through the selection processes, training sessions and experiences of flight attendants, shows that living and experiencing happiness is a complex issue: ideal and actual happiness are different phenomena, and society imposes on us different "feeling rules", for the fulfilling of which being happy becomes another task to undertake in the already complicated economy of feelings. Cieslik (2015) holds that sociology has to some extent clung too much to instrumental or individualistic notions of happiness or "well-being". According to Cieslik, it is especially the World Health Organization that has been playing an important role in introducing happiness and well-being into the research agendas, basically in order to "augment economic indicators of development with other subjective measures" (Cieslik 2015, 423).

Meanwhile, cultural policies everywhere in the industrialized countries do take these subjective measures seriously: they rest upon the assumption that cultural participation enhances citizens' well-being and happiness. While the epidemiological research quoted above has to some extent been able to validate the link between cultural participation and well-being, Belfiore and Bennett (2007) point out that "measuring impacts" of cultural participation is in fact an idealization, something that is useful for guaranteeing and even increasing the public funding for culture and the arts. Belfiore develops elsewhere on the strong belief of the "power of the arts to deeply affect both the psyche and the body" (Belfiore 2016, 12), something that we shall return to in the conclusion.

Above we have seen how well-being and happiness has been understood and operationalized in the scholarly studies on cultural participation. But what about its linguistic or cultural conceptualizations? The ambiguity of the term both in a cross-comparative and historical sense render a global perspective useful: for instance Oishi et al. (2013) point out not only that the meaning of happiness has historically speaking shifted from a conceptualization close to the Greek *eudaimonia*, understood as referring to "good luck" or "fortune" beyond active agency, towards a more agentic and dynamic concept which stresses the individual as a justified pursuer of happiness, but also that there are differences between the way different languages and cultures conceive happiness.

Finally, with the consensus that cultural participation is at least in some ways linked to happiness, different studies, operationalizations of both subjective well-being and happiness, and cultural contexts are different. Therefore, it remains unclear *what* kind of cultural participation is really linked to happiness and how. Does participating in highbrow culture link to a stronger or more enduring happiness, or could it be that participation in general matters for well-being regardless of its status (cf. Miles and Sullivan 2012)? The contribution of this chapter to the above referred discussions and debates will be to bring to the fore, first of all, the fact that qualitative points of view illuminate the link between cultural participation and happiness, and second, that it is important to take into consideration and understand better the associations between cultural participation and happiness in groups that are especially far from privileged class positions and, in a concrete way, arts and culture audiences. Hence, this chapter sheds light on what kinds of leisure contributes to happiness in disadvantaged groups whose background profiles predict low cultural participation.

Research design

Interviews

The empirical data is derived from my *Understanding Cultural Disengagement in Contemporary Finland* research project for which I conducted 49 interviews – out of which 40 were individual interviews and nine were focus groups interviews – in 2018. The overall research focused on a so-called theoretical sample of people whose profiles would statistically predict cultural disengagement or low cultural participation. Interviews were chosen because people with low cultural participation had been found underrepresented answering nationally representative surveys (Purhonen et al. 2014: 423).

Two large national surveys measuring different kinds of cultural practices – *Culture and Leisure in Finland 2007* (N=1,388) and *Finnish Views on and Engagement in Culture and the Arts 2013* (N=7, 859) – were used to define the statistical background factors affecting cultural disengagement most. Two survey questions with a large array of cultural participation possibilities from both highbrow and lowbrow spheres (from classical music concerts to cinema, restaurants, pubs and bingo halls and so on) were used to construct a scale of the groups that never or very rarely attended them. After that, the most salient background factors predicting cultural disengagement were defined: these were *residential* area (with living in the countryside predicting disengagement), *province* (with living in Northern or Eastern Finland predicting disengagement), *education* (with low or no education predicting disengagement) and *occupation* (with especially manual work, but also for instance being on pension of parental leave predicting disengagement).

The interviewees were recruited to mirror these predicting factors as faithfully as possible, while being aware of the fact that these factors would only serve as probabilities. The idea was that each interviewee, whether interviewed individually or in a group setting, would cover at least four of the aforementioned statistically significant indicators of cultural disengagement. The focus groups were so-called naturally occurring groups that knew each other beforehand (cf. Wilkinson 1998), including students of polytechnic schools or customers of unemployment centres. While living in the Northern or Eastern parts of Finland predicted cultural disengagement, approximately one third of the interviews were conducted in the Helsinki metropolitan area because of possible comparisons and work economic reasons. All data is carefully anonymised.

The recruitment thus yielded profiles with low education, mostly manual jobs and so on: interviewed profiles included for instance an unemployed female electrician in a small province city

in Northern Finland, a farmer's wife without any formal education in a small village in Northern Finland, a pensioner with a history of many low-paid manual jobs, and several young people in the Helsinki metropolitan area with no or extremely low education on disability leaves for various reasons. The focus groups were more varied, including for instance some participants with university studies in the unemployed groups. This is why it is difficult to argue that all the interviewees would belong to the working class: meanwhile, they certainly are part of the more disadvantaged groups of Finland, both in terms of economic, social and cultural capital (cf. Bourdieu 1984) and form a certain fraction of underprivileged popular classes. Statistically speaking, these groups are likely to be culturally disengaged and also unhappier (cf. Ateca-Amestoy et al. 2016) at least if measured in the traditional quantitative way. This is what makes the research setting particularly interesting.

The interview guide was designed based on several recent studies on cultural practices (Elliot et al. 2010; Purhonen et al. 2014), focusing on general time use as well as cultural taste, knowledge and participation. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for the interviewees to define themselves what they understood as leisure and offering many possibilities to develop on the topic of happiness or joy as part of leisure practices, for instance through discussing the "dream day" of each participant. It should be stressed that there were no explicit questions on happiness in the interviews, unlike for instance in the study by Cieslik (2015). My expectation was that this would make the naturally occurring expressions of happiness even more spontaneous.

Analytical strategy

Using qualitative interviews to study the link between leisure practices and happiness means adopting a point of view entirely different from the scholarly discussions based on predominantly quantitative, nationally representative data sets. I expected that interviews, especially in the case of a difficult-to-reach group (at least in terms of their participation in national surveys) might be able to attain different embodied perceptions and attitudes (cf. Kvale and Brinkmann 2009) that would be difficult, if not impossible, to detect through quantitative methods. For instance Lamont and Swidler (2014) emphasize the power of interviews in exploring the imagined and potential lifeworlds of the interviewees. In the case of this paper, the use of semi-structured interviews allowed for expressing basically any forms of leisure practices and accounts of happiness or satisfaction (or the lack of those) in a way that quantitative surveys cannot capture with their predefined sets of questions and alternatives.

I used qualitative content analysis, more specifically summative content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005), to scrutinize in detail the expressions of happiness related to leisure practices in the interview data, which consists of circa 1,200 transcribed pages in Finnish. After conducting the interviews and finishing an initial reading of the material in search for the most salient and common expressions of happiness, joy, and satisfaction, the Finnish words I chose to use for finding the objects of analysis were *ihana* (wonderful), *hauska* (fun), *mahtava* (great), *iloita* (get joy from), *iloinen* (joyful), *onnellinen* (happy), *mukava* (nice), *rakastaa* (love), *tykätä* (like), *nauttia* (enjoy), *nautinto* (enjoyment), *elämys* (experience), and *kiva* (nice).

As the initial goal was to focus on participation instead of taste or knowledge, I decided to only take into consideration expressions referring to participation or some kind of action. Thus, the criterion for the formation of the sample of expressions of happiness was that a *verb* would be included or alluded to, no matter what its tense and mode was. I started by searching for all the above-mentioned expressions of happiness connected to a verb and listing them for further classification and analysis, proceeding next to a more general qualitative close-reading (Silverman 2014). In the

following section, I will first present the preliminary analysis on the different types of the occurrences of happiness and then focus on the most salient types.

Occurrences of happiness

Preliminary analysis

My preliminary analysis found a total of 398 expressions of happiness linked to an explicit or implicit verb. Most of the expressions were simple declarative sentences or phrases in the present tense such as ”I like to sing karaoke” or “it’s such good fun to go to the bingo”. Besides these, the expressions of happiness included also references to the past and imagined future: both memories (“there was an ice hockey rink that even Teemu Selänne used to go to, I sometimes played there and it was so much fun”, “as a schoolkid I loved to just be on my own”) and verbalizations of wishes or potential joy derived from something (“I would just love to dance but my husband is stiff as a brick”, “it would be so great to take walks in the forest”).

To make better sense of the data, I chose to organize the expressions into ten thematic categories, paying attention to not only highbrow and popular cultural fields but also inside-home and outside-home activities and different kinds of informal categories of culture, such as social life or sports. The final categorization followed the lines of many contemporary sociological discussions (Bennett et al. 2009; Miles and Sullivan, 2012; Purhonen et al. 2014). The categories I used were the following:

1: Out-of-home ”highbrow” (classical music concerts, opera, museums...)
2: Out-of-home ”popular” (pop music concerts, comedy show, bingo, spa...)
3: Inside-home ”highbrow” (reading literature, listening to classical music...)
4: Inside-home ”popular” (watching TV, crosswords, DIY, baking...)
5: Social life (seeing family/friends, eating out together, associations…)
6: Outdoor life & sports
7: Trips
8: Being alone/”time for myself”/”doing nothing”
9: Work/study
10: Other

Table 1. The categories used for the analysis.

My next step was to divide all 398 expressions into these ten categories. Table 2 below shows their frequencies, revealing that the largest amount fell in the popular sphere, especially in the inside-home but also in the out-of-home category. Another frequent category was social life, followed by for instance “being alone” or “outdoor life”. Apart from these categories, others were less often mentioned; for instance, highbrow activities, whether outside the home (traditional highbrow spectatorship in formal setting) or inside the home (similar, but in informal home settings) were much less often mentioned. In the following three sections, I will scrutinize the three most widely mentioned categories of happiness: the inside-home popular, outside-home popular, and finally social life.

Inside-home ”popular”: 24 % (n=94)
Out-of-home ”popular”: 17 % (n=69)
Social life: 12 % (n=47)
Being alone/”time for myself”/”doing nothing”: 8 % (n=35)
Other: 8 % (n=35)

Outdoor life & sports: 7 % (n=29)
Inside-home "highbrow": 7 % (n=28)
Out-of-home "highbrow": 6 % (n=23)
Work/study: 5% (n=20)
Trips: 4 % (n=17)

Table 2. The frequencies of each category, % (n=398)

Inside-home popular as the main conveyor of happiness: a temple of non-organized relax

In a sociological sense, the individual home is an interesting setting: it is both a private sphere or backstage which researchers might find difficult to access and a site for cultural choices and distinctions through conscious home-making (cf. Miller, 2001). In the empirical data, a vast majority of the expressions of happiness were focused on inside-home activities, especially "popular" ones – varying from consuming traditional popular culture such as watching television or listening to popular music, to commonplace daily routines such as cleaning or cooking. The key element of this category is a certain level of freedom in organizing these activities, both in terms of time and style.

Most people that mentioned everyday tasks in the first place talked about them as something relatively pleasant. The following comment by a disability pensioner living in a very small village together with her cat and husband – who is often away on work trips – and far from possibilities of active formal participation is a typical, frequently reported example from the data:

> I like it a lot when the house is clean. I get almost too fussy when I am alone or when it's just me and my husband, I love that we clean the house and then it's tidy and then we cook some food… this kind of basic things, cooking, baking. -- In the autumn I love to extract juice.
> woman, 59, disability pensioner, very small village

While the expressions of happiness evoked by recurring everyday inside-home routines might not have been especially fervent, it was traditional popular culture that stood out as really gratifying, basically throughout the data. Many interviewees spoke about the relief and relaxation that popular culture consumed at home such as watching TV, playing pop music or browsing the internet was able to provide: often it had to do with the fact that it "gets you away from this everyday misery", like a shopkeeper put it in one of the interviews when justifying her choice for never reading or watching anything reality-based. Sometimes a love for consuming popular culture was conceptualized as something of a "joie du second degré" described by Lahire (2004) as an ironic way of enjoyment that derives from the kitschy status of the culture consumed. A rich example of this was the following excerpt from a manual worker currently on maternity leave:

> I like to watch reality TV -- Temptation Island is on today, I like it because when I watch these kinds of foolish TV series, I'm able to relax completely. I forget my own worries, and I kind of start to live fully with those people. It's really amusing, sometimes it's even annoying if in some series there are some quarrels between people and I get annoyed. It's totally crazy to go so deep into them, but it's my thing. I like all kinds of reality TV things, foreign and domestic and romp, I call them romp… my husband calls it quality poop [laughs]. Quality poop series. But it's my thing, I watch them for one hour or one and a half hours or whatever one program takes, and meanwhile I can totally relax. It is nice.
> woman, 38, manual worker on maternity leave, Helsinki metropolitan area

The joy of inside-home cultural consumption was especially prevalent when one was in life situations that did not allow for much social life: the happiness found in the "inside-home popular" was most often discussed by shift workers and parents of small children (belonging to these groups is also a typical reason for non-participation in culture altogether, see Willeken and Lievens, 2016

and Miles and Sullivan 2012). The following example is from a young man who was both a shift worker and a father of small children, without practically any free time for himself:

> I usually drive a bit around with the motorbike. And then I potter around, often I like to tinker around in the garage doing this and that, my own things. If there really and truly is nothing to do and I can do whatever I fancy, I will tinker around in the garage and maybe take a ride on my motorbike.
> man, 34, truck driver, very small village

Outside-home popular: the escape from (work) reality

The second most salient category was that of "out-of-home popular". This referred to attending events such as popular music concerts or stand-up comedy shows, as well as other less formal venues such as movie theaters, cafés, spas and restaurants. In this category, an overarching and recurring theme was an escape from reality, usually expressed as a momentary relief from tiring manual jobs and tedious shift work (cf. Miles and Sullivan 2012). The first example of the outside-home popular category clearly demonstrates that leisure served essentially as a counterbalance for work. It came from a small-village 54-year old ward domestic who complained throughout her interview that her physical tiredness after shifts practically prevented her from going anywhere after work and that she spent weekends recovering instead of pursuing leisure activities. She depicted her dream day as a getaway from this feeling:

> I would go to some lovely spa where I could swim and just be and pamper myself, I would have a massage and something wonderful, I would go to the hairdresser and to massages and all kinds of treatments and eat well.
> woman, 54, ward domestic, very small village

Several cases exemplified strong joy related to some forms of outside-home popular culture. Especially, concerts were often mentioned as a mix of cultural enjoyment and sociability. In the following excerpt, one of the focus group participants who were unemployed men recalled the atmosphere of a popular music show in which he himself was playing the guitar and singing:

> It was so great when you got the crowd going. They started to dance and all that, and that's the best thing… when you do this musician stuff, it makes you laugh when you have the crowd around you, you start to sing, and if you get them to dance without even asking, that's fun (--) rising the atmosphere is the best thing, you don't think of what you're doing, you just get the crowd going and get this sense of community that hey, this is damn good fun.
> 7 men, 32-61, unemployed, medium-sized city

Finally, the fact that the interviewees came in many ways from underprivileged milieus was seen in the belief that some unrealized leisure practices would bring unforeseen joy: many spoke fervently about the outside-home popular leisure practices they would *like* to have, if they only had the economic means to do it. "I love to go to concerts but I'm unemployed which takes its toll, I don't have much money for these kind of bigger gigs", summarized a 33-year-old unemployed woman, basically unable to attend any of the several activities that she would have been interested in. The lack of money as a barrier to meaningful leisure practices emerged in relation to discussions on both popular culture events such as concerts and theatre shows, and less formal leisure, such as going out with friends and participating in associations.

Social life: cultivating the social self

Existing research, especially the one focused on epidemiological links between cultural participation and happiness, often cites social capital as an important precondition for happiness (cf. Hyyppä 2010). In my interview data, social life was the third most common category connected to happiness. Most expressions of happiness related to social life were rather simple: they were about

joy derived from abundant and satisfactory contacts with family, friends and community members. The first example is from a small focus group with close family members: an elderly couple and their daughter on maternity leave, accompanied by her small child. While the daughter's daily life was understandably filled with tasks and activities related to the family, it was perhaps more surprising that her parents (both on pension) spent most of their leisure time with their grandchild, and that this was depicted as the most fulfilling and most "*quality time*" imaginable.

> Then we have lots of friends, well it varies, sometimes there are larger intervals, but I meet my friends pretty often, both my own friends and the friends we have in common with my husband, but pretty much of my own friends as well. And then we have little Teo! As a grandma I have the right to be with him as much as they let me [laughter], so we play with Teo and go to the library and take him for sleighrides and play here at our place. At with grandpa we take the car and take Teo with us and do whatever we fancy. It's such a wonderful quality time you spend with your grandchild, I just love it.
> 2 women and 1 man, 34-63, pensioneer couple and their daughter on maternity leave, medium-sized city

The importance of good friends for a meaningful and satisfactory leisure time was expressed by all the interviewees. Friends themselves seem to be a contributing factor for happiness. In the following excerpt, a young woman on maternity leave expressed her effort to see her friends more often, something that she found very rewarding at the point of her life in which family obligations occupied a large part of her leisure time:

> I like quite a lot to ask friends to come over. We -- once had an Indian theme, that kind of thing, we cook and have friends over to have dinner. Or then we have this kind of cake thing, my husband bakes several cakes and then we have friends coming. In that way we can invite a bigger group in one go. Sometimes I feel that I see my friends too little, so I have to be inventing excuses and keep on begging that hey, come over…
> woman, 30, student on maternity leave, medium-sized city

Finally, surrounding communities, which in existing research often figure as the context of the supposed positive "impacts" of cultural participation such as contributions to health and education, were referred to in some expressions of happiness (see Belfiore 2002). Although the following example portrayed the importance of good contacts with physical, real-life neighbours for happiness, a satisfactory "community feeling" could also stem from hobby groups or virtual communities, which seemed to provide important contexts for belonging and feeling happy especially for younger interviewees.

> We have friendly neighbours. Immediately when we moved into our house a couple of decades ago we started to fix it. We started to fix the roof, so we sat on the roof and of course painted it, so we waved to everybody and immediately became familiar with all the neighbours. It was this kind of nice thing that we would wave to each other and say something. And then one of the neighbours, the next door one, started to be very helpful. He is also pretty young, well he just retired. He has lots of forces, and he's ready to help immediately if we are ill or need help with snow removal or whatever. We really have nice neighbours.
> 2 women and 1 man, 43-84, farmers

While social inclusion and exclusion were often cited themes in the research literature, in my interviews social life was part of the expressions of happiness much less often than different forms of popular culture. Could social life, sociability and different forms of "neighbourhood revival" be overrated as the most salient sources of happiness?

Discussion and conclusion

This chapter has scrutinized the relationship between leisure practices and happiness in a rich interview data based on 49 interviews with members of socio-economically disadvantaged groups in Finland. The data were analyzed through summative content analysis and qualitative close-reading, which resulted in several salient categories. The three most common sources of happiness

were *inside-home "popular"*, *out-of-home "popular"* and *social life*, which altogether accounted for more than half of all the expressions of happiness. While both research and policy literature most often cite the link between highbrow culture and happiness, this chapter is a worthy reminder that at least in the context of non-privileged groups, it is mundane and popular activities that really foster happiness. In fact, my interviewees rarely mentioned highbrow culture in association with happiness – for instance, being alone or doing nothing were more typically associated with happiness than any forms of highbrow culture. This could be seen as a reflection of Bourdieu's idea of homology, i.e. the match between social positions and cultural hierarchies across different fields, indicating that high classes would go to the opera and enjoy elite newspapers, and that working classes would watch TV and read the yellow press (cf. Bourdieu 1984). My interviewees with disadvantaged backgrounds clearly derived joy from popular, to a certain degree extremely mundane activities that balanced their often extremely tiring everyday and work life.

Here, it is perhaps interesting to recall the pervasive belief underlying cultural policies that culture is "good for you" – a belief that underpins the idea that public funding for culture is important, perhaps even a good investment that can reduce social and cultural exclusion (cf. Belfiore 2002). Instead, we have seen that in the light of the data the most gratifying experiences for disadvantaged groups come from mainly home-based popular culture, not the highbrow culture that enjoys heavy public funding and is expected to provide some kind of returns. This echoes Bourdieu and Darbel (1991) who maintain that the keys to *understand* certain kinds of culture are central for being able to process them. It could be argued that the keys to understand culture are equally important for eventually enjoying them, which was seen in the interview data through the strong links that interviewees drew between popular culture or mundane activities and happiness. Related to this, I have found elsewhere that similar underprivileged groups sometimes adopt very hostile tones towards culture altogether (Heikkilä 2015), highlighting that the "cultural participation brings happiness" belief is true for and a luxury only granted to some.

Some limitations and future directions of research are in order. While this chapter has only examined expressions related to a verb, thus focusing on *doing* something (cultural participation), it might be wise to also analyze expressions of liking *something* (cultural taste), given that we know that participation, knowledge and taste work through different logics and that participation does not entail liking, and vice versa (cf. Yaish and Katz-Gerro 2010). In another vein, this study has built on the premise that quantified measures of happiness do not necessarily capture all the various faces of leisure-related happiness and therefore relied on interviews. Yet, it remains an open question how and through what methods and scholarly approaches happiness or positivity can be best captured and understood by researchers. I encourage future studies to bravely adopt and create different kinds of mixed methods.

It should also be noted that the context of this research was Finland, a relatively rich Western knowledge economy, one of the most egalitarian countries in the world with the highest rates of self-rated happiness. At the same time, the interviewees of this study were a part of arguably the most underprivileged groups of this wealthy society. While it might be assumed that in a country like Finland, it is easy for even underprivileged classes to be relatively happy and derive joy from many kinds of decommodified cultural services (such as publicly broadcasted television and radio or free libraries), one could also speculate that a sense of inferior position vis-à-vis the relatively resource-rich majority could lead to even stronger unhappiness, which could also be also related to leisure. Following this argument, positive sociology of leisure should perhaps pay even more attention to the role of social class and status differences in perceiving, feeling and expressing happiness.

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