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Archetypes of youth as vectors in power relations - From praises to information operations

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The purpose of this explorative and mixed methods research is to discover and describe the possible archetypes of high school and vocational school students from empirical data produced by young people and media, and to discuss what kinds of power relations these archetypes can create in Finnish society. Indeed, the empirical data produced by young people and those found in newspapers reveal archetypes and various power relations. In particular, the data indicate how the vectors of such archetypes guide thinking about young people and their life courses. In particular, the archetypes illustrate how vocational school students have to defend themselves and their choices in their daily lives, while high school students do not. Furthermore, the empirical data illustrate how the lives of vocational school students are mainly described as happening here and toward the future of the voiceless proletariat, while high school students are considered active and successful changemakers. Vocational school students also question official Finland and the place where they have been situated. Among others, this can create an opportunity for information operations.

KEYWORDS

power relations, high school, vocational school, youth, framing, media

1 Introduction

Respect for various backgrounds and choices in, for example, education and life courses are core principles in Finnish society. The Finnish education system has three levels: basic (primary and secondary education), upper secondary education, and higher education (university level). Basic education is 9-years long comprehensive school, that follows the national core curriculum for basic education. After basic education, pupils select either high school or vocational school. Traditionally, the high school path is a way to universities, and vocational school is a way to working life, but students from vocational school can also continue their studies in higher level. Finland has not only academic universities but also universities for applied sciences, which are practically oriented. In practice, the Finnish education system is very flexible, and there are no “dead ends” for studies. There is also the possibility to study across the traditional paths. In addition, different kinds of supporting systems have been constructed to help students’ everyday life in their studies and broader in their life. All these reflect the idea of equality in education, but also respect for all education.

Although equality is the cornerstone of Finnish education policy and leveling out differences in the socio-economic backgrounds of students is an important goal in educational policy, different school paths, especially high school, and vocation school, are often seen as unequal. Traditionally, they have been respected differently in various media and in society at large, as well as among youth themselves (Meriläinen, 2022; Meriläinen et al., 2022). On one hand, this is natural since different school paths produce different kinds of professionalism, but the problem might appear when and if various media and society put young people in tight frames so that their school paths will guide

and limit young people's life choices. We argue that this framing is real in society, and it is done by creating archetypes of young people. These archetypes might serve as role models against which young people compare their own lives. If archetypes place young people from different educational paths in an inherently different position in society, they may produce negative power relations in society, which can at worst be used in information operations. But is the framing of the youth archetypes different? Framing of archetypes are connected to power relations. Research on framing archetypes has been used to study causal relations and power relations in society in [Sternadori \(2014\)](#) and [Sietz and Neudert \(2022\)](#). This paper contributes to this academic path.

This mixed method research is both explorative and illustrative and combines a theoretical framework with empirical research data gained from youth from diverse backgrounds from high schools and vocational schools, as well as newspapers. By "mixed methods research," we mean research that combines various methods as well as qualitative and quantitative empirical and theoretical data ([Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007](#)). Explorative research can furthermore be defined as a study conducted with the intention of generating evidence that is needed to decide whether to proceed to the next phase of the research ([Hallingberg et al., 2018](#)) with no expected hypothesis.

In the present work, we use the mixed methods approach to examine how young people from two different educational routes, high school and vocational schools, are framed in various empirical data, which (1) are produced by themselves and (2) by $n = 9$ newspapers, and what, if any, archetypes and how these illustrate power relations in Finnish society.

The study's research questions are as follows:

- 1) What kinds of archetypes are found in the empirical data?
- 2) What kind, if any, of power relations do these archetypes represent in Finnish society?

As we will discuss later in the paper, both youth and newspapers hold power in societies as framers of archetypes. Thus, it is interesting for us to see whether there are similarities or differences between the archetypes found in empirical data and how the archetypes illustrate power relations.

The purpose of this research is to describe the archetypes of high school and vocational school students from the empirical data and to discuss what kinds of power relations these archetypes represent in Finnish society. In this paper, the archetypes do not give a permanent reality of young people but demonstrate the frame(s) found in the empirical data. We know that young people are not a homogenous group, but that each young individual is their own person, with their own identities, preferences, dreams and histories. Yet they can define the vectors in thinking present in society at large.

Various actors, from media to the young people themselves, create understandings and archetypes of themselves and others through selective framing. Framing is a powerful tool in power relations and is modular in nature. By our definition, an "archetype" is a distinctive example of a person and the characteristics, issues, actors, and events connected to that person. Archetypes are created by written and unwritten languages, visions, symbols, and sounds alone or within a larger group. These create causal relationships and various multilevel vectors that subsequently guide thinking

and actions in society at the personal and institutional levels. An actor creates and is consciously or unconsciously aware of these archetypes in their heads ([Jung, 1968](#); [Walters, 1994](#)). Values and beliefs are essential in framing and, thus, the creation of archetypes. Values and beliefs guide every actor's behavior, thinking, and communication, thus creating various understandings and archetypes ([Schoenfeld, 1983](#); [Albarracin and Wyer, 2000](#)). [Weber and Crocker \(1983\)](#) discussed cognitive changes regarding stereotypes along with the resulting archetypes and their formation in relation to changes in cognitive processes. They say that stereotypes (i.e., archetypes) can be resistant to change; however, they can change if actors gain more exposure, for example, by meeting people from a group they have stereotypes of [Weber and Crocker \(1983\)](#). Thus, communication and relationships with high school and vocational school students are extremely important, especially to avoid the effects of negative archetypes and subsequent power relations. If youth from a certain study background are framed differently in us-and-them scenario, what possibilities does this kind of framing create for power relations and divisions? In turn, how can these be used as breeding grounds for hate and division between different groups in society, particularly in small- and large-scale information operations by local and international hostile actors?

2 Framing and power relations

Understanding, thus archetypes and subsequent social and political power relation are created by framing. Framing is done by every actor, from individuals (e.g., young people) to the various media, authorities and organizations. Framing has a long history in multidisciplinary research on power relations and many understandings of framing and its nature exist. There are various views of framing in academic disciplines. Relevant for this research is that framing means causal interpretations of issues, actors and events and power they hold in societies ([Entman, 1993](#); [Vliegenthart and Van Zoonen, 2011](#)). Originally the news media were seen as the instigators of framing and creating public opinion and archetypes ([Cohen, 1963](#); [McCombs and Shaw, 1972](#); [Sheafer, 2007](#); [Dunaway et al., 2010](#); [Larcinese et al., 2011](#)). [Guo and McCombs \(2011\)](#) proved media's power and that the media create pictures in our heads, thus archetypes, further showing support for [Lippmann \(1922\)](#) picture metaphor and classical framing and power relations research ([Lippmann, 1922](#); [Lewin, 1947](#); [Cohen, 1963](#); [McCombs and Shaw, 1972](#); [Stone and McCombs, 1981](#); [McCombs, 1997, 2005, 2009](#); [Nelson et al., 1997](#); [Kilburn, 2009](#); [Lecheler and De Vreese, 2010](#); [Carpenter, 2011](#); [Bob, 2012](#); [Schemer et al., 2012](#); [Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2016](#)). The modern interpretations include the framing power of various digital media and individuals from youth to digital influencers. Indeed, framing affects how we see different actors, such as young people, in society ([Mahon and Wartick, 2003](#); [Brewer and Gross, 2005](#)). Framing is an essential and powerful tool in creating archetypes, surrounding realities and subsequent power relations among different actors, issues, and events.

Both young people from high school and vocational schools and various media, create an understanding of themselves, i.e., archetypes, through framing. These are in turn used as reality in

communication selectively by actors who align themselves with the attributes in the archetypes, as framing theory suggests. Thus, it is essential to study framing in relation to archetypes and power relations. Actors make conscious and unconscious evaluations on which actors, events and issues, followingly archetypes are emphasized above, or at the expense of others, and whom among them are seen as the center of particular activities (Vliegthart and Van Zoonen, 2011) and realities. This speaks to the power relations among framing. Additionally, framing is modular in nature, wherein various frames can be added together and changed over time in communication. For example, understanding on youth from high school and vocational schools can change over time. Moreover, the use of multiple frames together is a process defined by Nicholson and Chong (2011) as “bandwagoning.” In relation to modular nature of framing, beliefs and suggestions are essentially at the core in framing the truths of “us and them” (Brown et al., 2008), subsequently creating the phenomenon of “othering” and power relations in society.

Traditional media, such as newspapers, have had a central role in creating understanding, i.e. public opinion on various issues, actors, and events (Carroll and McCombs, 2003; McCombs and Valenzuela, 2014), such as youth from high schools and vocational schools. Peeters and d’Haenens (2005) state that various media have power in creating roles, such as archetypes, and establishing and maintaining power relations between groups. These authors argued that media reporting is transferred to prominent public opinion, emphasizing the transfer of salience from the media to the public. This also occurs on digital platforms and at individual levels. In recent years, digital communication, such as social media communication has increased, especially among young people, as digital platforms have become places for news, information, and social and global participation (Clark and Marchi, 2017; Meriläinen, 2022; Swart, 2023; Wang et al., 2023). Young people communicate their frames, thus archetypes by using digital platforms, thus bypassing newspapers and their archetypes gatekeeping. In turn, these can at best influence public perceptions of them and others (Meriläinen, 2022), thus highlighting the importance of studying archetypes. The effects of framing occur when the particular ways in which issues, actors and events are characterized have an influence on how they are understood by others, such as the youth and media (McCombs and Reynolds, 2002; Brewer and Gross, 2005; Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007). Frames from one arena, such as newspapers, digital platforms such as social media and the Internet can transfer to other arenas. Through a process called the “transfer of frames,” salient issues involving actors and events are transferred between newspapers, word-of-mouth to digital platforms or vice versa.

2.1 Framing and power related to information operations

Studies have found a connection between archetypes created by framing and their credibility, power relations, and information on society (Vargo, 2011; Meriläinen, 2022). For example, Gerhards and Schäfer (2010) stated that access to digital media has transferred one-way monologic communication, such as newspapers, and

power relations to more interactive and multidialectic forms among youth (Granholm, 2016; Pietilä, 2022). Youth use various digital platforms to communicate about archetypes of themselves and others to varying degrees (Bergström and Belfrage, 2018; Meriläinen, 2022). Digital platforms are places for making sense and framing of and by young people (Garcia et al., 2020) without traditional media gatekeeping but also for gatekeeping, power relations, and information operations where archetypes can be used as tools to spread division in societies.

Societies are based on framed information, which is one of their most valuable resources. Such information is created by conscious or unconscious framing and includes archetypes of various kinds. Information is often used to create various realities and influence states, nations and individuals online and offline (Chochowski, 2022) and can also be used as a tool in information operations. Various definitions of “information operations” have been proposed, and discussions of information operations have ranged from defense dialogues to modern online platforms. These operations are always participatory in nature when people partake in shaping and spreading them. Furthermore, information operations are often discussed in the context of military and national defense (Thomas, 1998; Cox, 2006; Turan, 2018) in digital platforms. Weedon et al. (2017) defined “information operations” as actions taken by organized actors, such as governments or nonstate actors, to distort domestic or foreign political sentiments to achieve strategic and/or geopolitical outcomes. Information operations can use a combination of methods, such as disinformation, false news or networks of fake accounts aimed at manipulating public opinion (Weedon et al., 2017). Much like strategic communication, which uses offline and online framing, strategic information operations are efforts made by individuals and groups, including state and nonstate actors, to manipulate public opinion and change (Starbird et al., 2019), while others associate them with elections (Darraj et al., 2017; Davey et al., 2018). These operations are a global phenomenon with political, social, psychological, educational and cybersecurity dimensions (Starbird et al., 2019). They can be effective among those who are othered in society by creating negative archetypes.

3 Empirical data gathering and analysis

In order to be able to study the framing of archetypes, it is important that we have versatile empirical research material at our disposal. Because education is an important area that influences the way people are perceived and treated as individuals and in society, and since there are two main study paths after the basic education in Finland, it is significant that we have the material produced by these young people in use. Furthermore, it is important that we examine the data generated by the central gatekeeper, $n = 9$ newspapers, to see how the newspaper creates archetypes, since newspapers still have a key role as mediators of information and creators of understanding on various issues, actors, and events and the causal relations these form, such as youths from two different study paths.

Table 1 shows the empirical data used in the study and how two archetypes of Finnish young people have been grouped according

TABLE 1 Building the archetypes and description of the empirical data.

Archetypes	Empirical data	Description of empirical data
Vocational school students	Co-research material (qualitative)	Describes the self-understanding of young people studying in vocational schools
High school students	Newspapers (quantitative and qualitative)	Describes the understanding of high school and vocational school student from looking outside in. Rarely uses interviews or youths' voices
	Questionnaire (quantitative)	Describes the self-understanding of young people studying in high schools

to their educational pathways. As can be seen from the table, the data consists of both materials that describes young people from the outside (media) and material that describes young people's own perception of themselves (questionnaire and co-research material). Using these, we have been able to create a rich picture of the archetypes. By analyzing these archetypes, the aim is to see how archetypes potentially frame young people's lives and choices.

3.1 Vocational school data gathering

Qualitative empirical data were gathered by Meriläinen with voluntary and anonymous co-researchers ($n = 362$) between the ages of 16 and 29 years. These participants joined research workshops ($n = 52$) held between February 2021 and May 2023 in vocational schools ($n = 8$) located in Western, Central and Eastern Finland. A longer and more detailed ethical and methodological description of the explorative co-research and data gathering method used in this research with vocational school students can be found in previous works (Meriläinen, 2021, 2022). The data gathering process focused on the broad notions of vocational students themselves and their identities; their social and political participation; the democratic development of societies; students' lives, wellbeing, hopes and dreams and their usage of various media; and how the student co-researchers found the media's (including various digital platforms) depiction of them. However, the workshops were in no way limited to those topics, as the co-researchers were free to introduce ideas from other areas as well. The co-researchers either lived in the eight municipalities or in the surrounding municipalities. Thus, geographically, the sample is diverse and includes young people from varying backgrounds. In this age of digital platforms, there is a possibility that the young co-researchers could be identified from open-source information and their participation in this research. Thus, for the sake of the young people's anonymity, their name, gender, race, field of study, or any identifying variables were not gathered. The names of the participating municipalities were also not stated here.

Various ethical considerations were made in this study. Research with young people was discussed by Martin et al. (2019) and Pietilä et al. (2021). "Explorative co-research" can be defined

TABLE 2 Distributions of students' background characteristics.

Background characteristics	n	%
Sex/Gender ($N = 3,378$)		
Female	2,628	77.8
Male	660	19.5
Other	55	1.6
Did not want to tell	35	1.0
Native language ($N = 3,390$)		
Finnish	3,138	92.6
Swedish	252	7.4
Age group ($N = 3,381$)		
Under 18 years of age	1,779	52.6
18 years and	1,583	46.8
Did not want to tell	19	0.6

Not all respondents answered all background questions and therefore N is different from N of all respondents. More detailed see Hiljanen et al. (n.d.) and Männistö et al. (n.d.).

as a study with the intention of generating evidence that is needed to decide whether to proceed to the next phase of the research (Hallingberg et al., 2018). It can also be used to gain access to young people and to hear them directly without interference. An agreement for the current research was completed in December 2020, with an emphasis on students' voluntary and anonymous participation. Research permits were granted to either vocational schools or cities and by anonymous co-researchers.

3.2 High school data gathering

Quantitative empirical data were gathered by Hiljanen and Rautiainen. In particular, data were collected through a survey that aimed to determine Finnish high school students' perceptions of democracy education and the state of participation in their schools. Questionnaires were sent to the respondents through the Union of Upper Secondary School Students in Finland (*Suomen Lukioalaisten liitto*, SLL) and to members of the Swedish-speaking School Student Union of Finland (*Finlands Svenska Skolungdomsförbund*, FSS). A total of 3,476 responses were received, yielding a response rate of around 10%. The responses were geographically representative but gender-skewed, with ~79% of respondents indicating their gender as female [see Table 2; more details can be found in Hiljanen et al. (n.d.)].

The survey was conducted in spring 2019; thus, it reflected the perceptions of high school students before the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine. The first climate marches that took place in Helsinki were also held just before the survey was disseminated. In addition, during the spring of 2019, parliamentary and European Parliament elections were held, so political debates in the media and society were more visible and heated than in the "usual" spring season.

The survey contained a total of 46 questions; therefore, it offered numerous perspectives and perceptions of high school

students. In this study, we used only part of the data, as our purpose was to establish an archetype of high school students. Thus, the background variables of the questionnaire were especially relevant. We used descriptive statistics methods (see, e.g., Hudson, 2001; Trochim, 2006) to construct the archetype of high school students. Our goal is to emphasize that the archetype we describe does not represent any real high school students in any actual high school, but is more or less the average ones from all the answers given by the respondents (more detailed, see Hiljanen, 2022).

Compared with the vocational school data, the quantitative high school data reflected, to a certain extent, the perceptions of high school students about themselves. Therefore, the archetype created from the data is different in nature from the vocational school data, where the media's framing and archetype creation also play an important role. However, we believe that, despite the differences that emerge from the data, the formation of archetypes and their presentations remain relevant to our examination of the power relations that exist among these groups, particularly those that may be involved in belonging to archetypes in Finnish society.

3.3 Newspaper data gathering

The qualitative empirical data ($n = 4,513$ items) were gathered from several newspapers ($n = 9$) by Meriläinen. To study the decade-long framing of vocational school students, data were gathered from newspaper articles published between 2010 and 2020 in online archives and microfilms. Data containing abbreviations for the words “vocational school student” and “vocational schools,” as well as the names of local vocational schools, were included in the empirical data from online archives. As the microfilms did not have a search function, the research materials collected from the microfilms were gathered by going through all the newspapers on a single microfilm and searching for news items that focused on students studying in vocational schools.

The selected media data must include at least one sentence about vocational school students, while articles featuring simple two-word mentions of vocational schools were excluded, as they did not provide real data for the study. Documents that only mentioned the words “vocational school” or “vocational” were also excluded, as they did not cover “vocational school students” as humans or social phenomena, but discussed other matters, such as renovations of school buildings. In cases of clear mentions, high school students were involved in this analysis. Moreover, the current article did not examine the motives of individual journalists and other writers but rather focused on the broader framing of newspapers. All of the empirical newspaper data were in Finnish.

Rautiainen collected newspaper data ($n = 29$) concerning high schools and high school students from *Helsingin Sanomat*, the main newspaper in Finland (years 2018–2023), through its online archive, using “high school student” and “high school” as search queries. *Helsingin Sanomat* was also included in the previous data gathering by Meriläinen. The collected data were much smaller than those of vocational education used in this study (see next subchapter), and only large articles containing the words “high school”

or “high school students” were selected for this study. The data were analyzed through qualitative content analysis (Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

4 Results

4.1 Archetype of a vocational school student by vocational students

The archetype framed by vocational school students was more multidimensional and profound than they appeared in the newspapers. Yet, to some extent, the archetype must defend themselves against various negative frames in society coming from traditional news, policymakers, teachers, researchers, journalists and even their parents to some extent. The archetype must defend their choices of educational route, opinions, behaviors, looks, places of living, social participation or lack thereof. The archetype indicated that vocational education is not easier than high school education, although newspapers and other traditional media frame it as such. The archetype's graduation and purpose in Finnish society not celebrated, which adds to their framing as part of a faceless proletariat. According to the archetype, high school education and graduation are prestigious celebrations, but graduation in a profession and encouragement for further education are rare.

Furthermore, the archetype respects and values their education and many teachers while also critiquing these. They have a deep dislike for some teachers because they yell, shame, and use excessive force and various bullying tactics toward the archetype. These teachers prevent archetype from going to the bathroom during class or leaving the school premises if they have anxiety or illness-related complications with their health. If, during class, the archetype must go to the toilet, they are prohibited from doing so. Consequently, they have to bleed their periods and diarrhea onto their clothing. The archetype with a health diagnosis is subject to the use of power and violence by some teachers. In certain instances, the archetype faces bullying from some teachers because of whom their parents are or whether they, for example, live in orphanages or supported housing units.

Some teachers assist the archetype toward the goal of achieving mental and physical health, enabling them to reach their dreams in various settings later in life. At times, the archetype says that they are denied their human rights in vocational schools. They also believe that they are mere human shells—customers in schools without any traces of identity or dignity. Thus, they cannot wait to get out of vocational education. The archetype demands changes in vocational education, greater media literacy and further civic and participatory education, which would give them the same premise to be active citizens as high school students. Hobbs et al. (2013) argued that most media-literate students have more positive but nuanced perspectives on the role of journalism and society. They are aware that various opinions exist on the same news story and that the value of information affects decision making on information. Yet, relating to the previous research by Meriläinen (2021, 2022), the framing of vocational school students, the evaluation of nuanced perspectives, comes second to none.

The archetype's health and wellbeing are only framed as worse than that of high school students, as there is a need in society to frame vocational school students as less than their high school counterparts. Yet the archetype is interested in their own health and financial wellbeing. The archetypes belonging to minorities defend their rights resolutely but feel that official Finland does not care about them and their human rights unless these influencers and politicians are progressive. While the archetype has various hopes and dreams and a clear outlook on the future, they also suffer from anxiety, fears, bullying, harassment, and violence, both online and offline. The reasons for these include, for example, different places of study, opinions that differ from others, clothing, style and belonging to a sexual or racial minority. The archetype feels that they are left alone to suffer from these.

In the next section, we will see how the traditional news media depicts vocational youth as having lower mental and overall health than their peers, while the archetype says that these apply to all young people. They say that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected all youths' wellbeing, studies, and future prospects, not just those in vocational education. In some instances, the archetype attends parties and uses substances such as alcohol and drugs, yet they say that all youth do this. In fact, most youth consume energy drinks. Furthermore, the archetype has multiple ideas on how to improve the healthcare system, offer better services for those suffering from various health problems and provide mental and physical aid directly and with a low threshold to young people. The archetype also has various suggestions and routes to improve the state of democracy in Finland—from voting at 16 years old to engaging in grassroots activism and citizen journalism, as well as digital platform encouragement. These stem from both right- and left-wing ideologies.

The lack of respect from society, along with the proliferation of digital platforms, play a key role in creating and shaping the archetype's identity and reality. While the archetype faces several adversities despite their young age, they find freedom, as well as trusted and credible news and information, from numerous online influencers and various digital platforms. They also heavily participate in various ways in society, not only through digital platforms but also by attending demonstrations and making sustainable consumer choices. The archetype says that old people (i.e., those over 40 years old) do not comprehend digital platforms, which are an essential and ever-present part of a young person's life. The archetype argues that old people have tunnel vision and do not want to make the world a better place. At times, the archetype believes that the world belongs to newer generations. At times, their world revolves only around digital platforms, which offer ways to escape loneliness, sadness, and bullying in a world deemed hopeless by the archetype. Ironically, the Internet and digital platforms are also places for bullying, violence, false information and truths, violence, and disordered body images. The archetype is exposed to various forms of truth online. They often turn to digital platforms because no one in official Finland has taken the archetype seriously as a person to discuss their identities, lives, hopes, and fears, their experiences of bullying and sexual violence, and their social and political participation, among others.

When the archetype feels that a content creator and influencer communicates directly to them in a language that they understand and can relate to, that message can be transferred to them as

knowledge. The transfer of information and frames (McCombs and Reynolds, 2002) from various online platforms is evident. The archetype moves effortlessly from one site and platform to another, as discussed in a previous work (Meriläinen, 2022). Information and news, along with their creators, are accepted as credible if they respond to the archetype's personal value framing. Indeed, the empirical results correlate with the theoretical framework stating that people believe information is true based on their personal value framing. Information must also come from trusted sources (Brewer and Gross, 2005; Shen and Edwards, 2005; Slothuus, 2010; Schemer et al., 2012), such as influencers and content creators across digital realms. In addition, entertainment is a strong attribute for creating credible information and news online (Meriläinen, 2022).

The archetype believes that they cannot be influenced by outside sources or information operations because they can distinguish between what is true and what is not. They say they could never be targets of information operations or fake news because they only trust credible sources. Faith in one's ability in critical media literacy is strong. The archetype explains this as a native digital platforms user, while claiming that people over 40 are not. However, no one wondered if, at any point, any content creator may have ulterior motives or even work for a hostile entity, actor or state. Rather, at times, the archetype reflects on the power of artificial intelligence, algorithms and coders in society and the spread of lies. This issue must be further researched in the coming months in relation to power relations and the role of AI, algorithms and information operations in democratic and nondemocratic societies.

Furthermore, the archetype does not trust so-called traditional sources, because they feel that the latter have abandoned them. Yet, in some instances, such as crises and the COVID-19 pandemic, the government and various agencies seemed to enjoy greater public trust than science and journalists. However, the archetype mostly does not trust adults or journalists. They fear them due to their fears of being bullied and ridiculed for not understanding complicated words and political dialogue.

The archetype says they are in their dream field of study and are looking forward to working life and adulthood. At times, they still wonder what their future will be and may be battling severe depression and suicidal thoughts. They have many future plans, hobbies, ideologies and values—from feminism to conservatism, dreams, hobbies, friends and loved ones. Archetype is interested in a wide range of issues, such as working toward their goals in life, human rights (including trans and women's rights), animal rights, gaming, mental health, immigration, taxes, labor issues, history, democracy, climate change, religion, anti-climate and equality actions, rising prices in Finland, the war in Ukraine, etc. They have plenty of criticism of the state of Finnish and global politics and offer suggestions on how to improve the state of the world.

4.2 Archetype of a finish high school student by high school students

According to our data, the archetype of a Finnish upper secondary school student is a person who does well at school, is a native Finn and lives in their birthplace with ethnically

Finnish parents. Only 11% of the survey respondents reported an average grade of <8 in the comprehensive school leaving certificate, which is used to apply for high school. This archetype enters high school well-equipped with knowledge and presumably with a positive attitude toward school. About 97% of the respondents speak one of the two official languages as their native language, 89% live either with both parents or one parent and 91% have both parents who are Finnish. Only 6% have one parent, and 3% have both parents born outside Finland. These highlight the fact that the archetypal white Finnish high school student is a child of white parents and studies in their native language at high school. However, 15% of respondents say they belong to a minority (ethnic background, religious or philosophical belief, sexual orientation or gender identity, disability or long-term illness, physical appearance, and some other minority group), and two out of three respondents say that belonging to a minority has had little or no impact on their inclusion in their respective school communities (see also [Hiljanen, 2022](#)).

The archetype inherits a strong socioeconomic position from home. Archetype's parents are relatively highly educated: 56% of fathers and 68% of mothers have completed higher education. In addition, 87% receive a daily or occasional subscription to a newspaper, and 72% have a large number of books in their home (≥ 50). At home, the archetype receives support and has a role model for civic engagement; in fact, 90% of the respondents estimate that their parents vote in every or almost every election. In addition, 68% say that social and political issues are discussed often or quite often at home. All these are reflected in the archetype's willingness to participate in decision making, such that up to 92% intend to vote in the next general election (or would vote if they were eligible) (see also [Hiljanen, 2022](#)).

The archetype also believes in representative democracy but is not willing to participate actively in the democratic body. About 72% of the respondents believe that voting is a way of influencing society, but only 7% are involved in party politics. This same tendency is also reflected in democracy in schools: 84% of respondents agree or somewhat agree that the student government—the representative body that manages the affairs of high school students at school—is an effective system for managing student affairs, but only 35% are willing to serve on the board. Interestingly, while more than three in four respondents agree that a student government is a good system for advocating for students' interests, only 48% feel that a student government has little or no influence on issues at their high school (more detailed see [Hiljanen, 2022](#)).

Apart from voting, the archetype is socially passive and unwilling to participate directly in civil society. Only a fifth of the respondents are actively or occasionally involved in voluntary activities outside school. The most popular forms of volunteering are involvement in a sports club, scouting or a parish ([Hiljanen, 2022](#)). In other words, it seems that if this archetype is involved in civil society activities and maintenance, it is through hobbies, such as coaching in a sports club or participating in a parish choir, among others. This archetype belongs to the political center-left in terms of values and is slightly more patriotic than the others. Otherwise, this archetype is green, liberal and non-religious.

At school, the archetype has a good relationship with teachers and fellow students. They feel that teachers treat them fairly, are interested in their welfare, listen to what they have to say and are interested in their opinions. They also think positively and respectfully of their fellow students. In other ways, the school as a structure seems fair to this archetype. There are structures in the high school through which the archetype can make their voices heard when necessary, and they feel that they have the ability to correct the situation if they are treated inappropriately in school. In other words, high school is a place where the archetype feels seen as an individual and feels safe ([Hiljanen, 2022](#)).

Even if this archetype does not belong to the minority in school, the picture of a safe school takes on a different color when looking at minority high school students' experiences of their schools, their cultures and their teachers. As noted above, one in three high school students who identify as minorities has negative experiences related to the opportunities for participation that belonging to a minority provides. These experiences are highly diverse in terms of discrimination and bullying and also include more structural discriminatory issues, such as transgenderism and the lack of suitable toilets or changing rooms for non-cisgender people in secondary schools, or the reluctance of students to participate in some community events involving alcohol consumption during students' free time because of their religious beliefs ([Hiljanen, 2022](#)). In addition, some high school students who identify as minorities feel that they are a "multicultural trophy" (as one respondent puts it), referring to the fact that people from minority groups may have to act as representatives of their entire group and answer questions that belong to the entire minority, even though they are individuals. However, it is noteworthy that identifying as part of a minority group and its subsequent effects do not only entail negative experiences. Some high school students who identify with a minority feel that their role has made them more active in advocating for minority issues, or that the existence of minorities enables them to address their issues in their schools.

During the lessons, teachers encourage this archetype to make independent decisions and encourage them to express their opinions often, or at least sometimes. In fact, the archetype experiences opportunities to express their opinions during lessons with considerable frequency. However, it is somewhat less common for teachers to encourage the archetype to discuss issues with people whose opinions differ from theirs, and if the archetype's opinion differs from that of the majority of the class, they sometimes do not feel free to express it. Otherwise, when social and/or political issues are discussed in class, the archetype plays a passive role in relation to teaching: it is common for them to learn these issues using a textbook or by taking notes while the teacher lectures. It is rare, however, for the archetype to play an active role in such lessons. In other words, social and/or political topics are taught to the archetype as knowledge rather than a skill ([Hiljanen, 2022](#)).

4.3 Archetype of a vocational school student by newspapers

All nine newspapers selected in this study framed young vocational school students similarly throughout the decade. Based

on the empirical data, this archetype is a voiceless and faceless proletariat who lives an unhealthy life and uses more substances than the high school archetype. However, in some news items, this archetype has been portrayed as more diverse and has other dimensions, such as being active changemakers with dreams and desires.

As seen from [Figure 1](#) out of the 4,513 items, the archetype's voices are visible in 529 publications through the years 2010–2020, in 11.7% of the published items. Therefore, the archetype could not influence framing at large in various newspapers.

Based on the empirical data, the archetype is a resource for businesses and organizations to fill the labor shortage in Finland. The data show that high school students are framed as successful future changemakers, while vocational school students are not. Instead, their education is designed according to the needs of business life. Education can change rapidly according to the needs of businesses each year. The demand for certain changes is discussed by policymakers, labor unions and business owners, and the archetype is not invited to join such discussions. The downside of this “bandwagon framing” is that the archetype can be reduced to labor without other identities or even a voice. The framing does not incorporate profound reflections on various sides of life, identities, the world and so on.

The archetype's lifestyle choices and mental and overall health are framed worse than those of high school students. The archetype uses more substances than do high school students. They do not read newspapers, lack media literacy and even lack knowledge of sexually transmitted diseases. Additionally, archetype has limited knowledge of societal and political issues outside of vocational education budget cuts. Generally, they are framed as only interested in participating in matters related to vocational education. Archetype must defend their decision to choose vocational education instead of going to high school, as family members take high school studies for granted. Especially if they are women or belong to a minority, the archetype may sometimes face sexual harassment and belittling in the workplace and in society.

In a more positive light, they are framed as successful entrepreneurs and personalities in the fields of media, gaming and beauty competitions. This framing adds more depth to the archetype and its identity. The archetype is also framed as being happy and successful in life in general, with plans for future education and careers. In some cases, the archetype may be involved in grassroots-level policymaking by participating in demonstrations, youth councils and volunteer work, among other things.

Some newspapers describe the archetype's life path, from car accidents to winning labor competitions to being a positive and active person in society. At other times, the archetype is happy and looks forward to an exciting and bright future during and after vocational education. Opportunities brought on by a double degree are highlighted in the bandwagon of positive frames, along with the combination of sports and professional studies. Frames related to the future of the archetype focus mostly on their future careers. On one occasion, the archetype has been framed as someone who obtained their PhD, which is a rarity for this group. In some instances, the archetype studies together in successful collaborations with high school students. Yet these study routes are

largely framed against each other. In various years, the archetype's graduation has been framed as second only to a high school student's archetype or completely missing from all newspapers.

4.4 Archetype of a high school student by newspapers

Two themes were emphasized in the *Helsingin Sanomat* articles. First, high school students, especially girls, are exhausted, experience a great amount of stress from their studies and suffer from issues related to their poor wellbeing. Surprisingly, high school has not been a popular topic among educational scientists, but this theme has been under public discussion during the 2000s because of Professor Katarina Salmela Aro's research group studies (see e.g., *Helsingin Sanomat* 8.4.2022, 12.12.2021). Second, successful high schools and high school students are often featured in *Helsingin Sanomat* articles, especially every spring, when high school students complete their matriculation tests (see e.g., *Helsingin Sanomat* 4.6.2022). Then, the most successful high schools are ranked, and the most successful high school students are interviewed regarding their dreams and plans.

The framing of high school students in *Helsingin Sanomat* is very clear. Expectations toward high school students are high, and the media is interested in their interests and future. At the same time, the media is stressing and worrying about the state of wellbeing among high school students and representing their stressful situations and nausea. The results of the high school student barometer ([Lukiolaisbarometri, 2022](#)) and the high school student report ([Lukiolaisraportti, 2023](#)) are similar. According to a high school student barometer, over 62% of high school student respondents found studying to be an emotionally difficult task. According to the high school student report, more than half of high school students feel stress in relation to their studies after high school graduation. High school students also feel pressure from the media and society concerning their continuation studies in higher education.

5 Discussion and conclusions

The purpose of this explorative and mixed methods research was to describe the archetypes of high school and vocational school students that were present in the empirical data and to discuss what kinds of power relations these archetypes represent in Finnish society. The identified archetypes showed us the vectors that guide thinking about young people and their life course. Vocational school students have to defend themselves and their choices in their everyday life; high school students do not. The life of vocational school students is described as happening here and toward the future of basic work, while high school students are active and successful changemakers representing the future of Finnish society. In other words, high school students are framed more toward the future (with their plans and dreams) compared with vocational school students, who are more clearly bound to the present times and the needs of the labor market.

The empirical data from the nine selected newspapers clearly show that they have more respect for high school students than

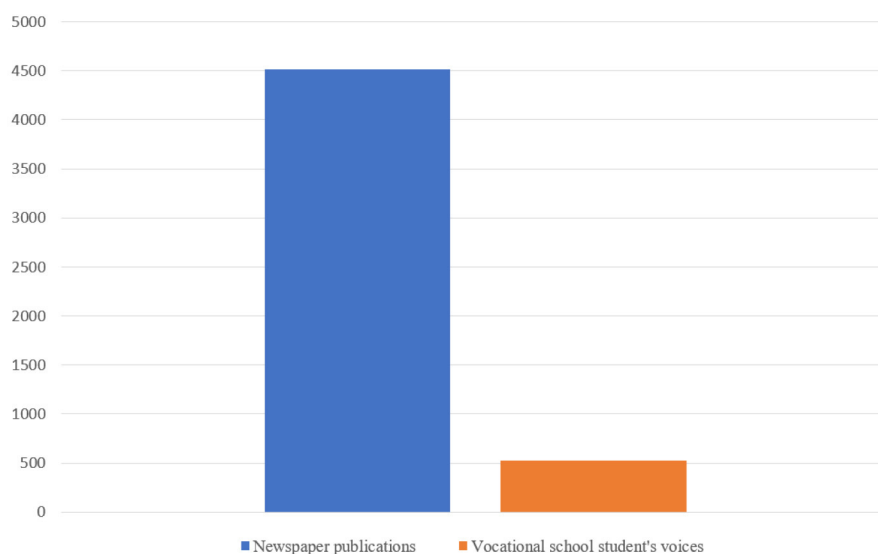


FIGURE 1
Vocational school student's voices in newspapers 2010–2020.

vocational school students. Although some news items include positive framings of vocational school students, high school students are largely seen as changemakers. Vocational school students are typically framed as part of the voiceless proletariat, belonging to corporations as material to put to work. The newspapers have contributed to creating and maintaining a reality in which young people are valued based on their place of study and the assumptions and attributes connected to it. On the one hand, the 10 years' worth of empirical data show that newspapers have created and maintained a place given to vocational school students in Finnish society. However, it seems that this place has been created for young people without their input or the possibility of breaking free from this position. On the other hand, the data produced by vocational school students themselves reveal that young people have to survive in this reality created and maintained by others living in a different world. Vocational school students question official Finland and the place where they have been situated. This can create an opportunity for information operations.

It is perfectly natural to be frustrated with a society that constantly points out that you are a second-class youth. The comparison between high school and vocational school students is abundant and downright ordinary during the 10-year sampling period. Moreover, their lifestyle choices and mental and overall health are framed as less than those of high school students. Newspapers utilized the “othering” framing, which is strengthened by the bandwagoning of multiple frames. In othering, us-against-them realities are created by means of communication-framing and other exclusionary, belittling and blaming actions (Petros et al., 2006; Jensen, 2011; Kamler, 2013). This is also evident from Meriläinen's (2021, 2022) previous studies, wherein those in vocational schools feel a strong sense of “otherness” in the real world, but not so much in the virtual world, where they can move between various platforms and influence more freely and be themselves.

For high school students, it seems that the real world is freer and has more opportunities. The teachers, and presumably the other adults, support the high school students' initiatives in society and the world at large. In many ways, high school students are almost like grown-ups who have the freedom and responsibility that come with this status. In comparison, this framing for vocational school students seems to be missing, especially in the traditional newspapers. Vocational school students are versatile in their identities and showcase detailed arguments to support their identities and beliefs. However, fears of bullying and harassment by adults, journalists and officials, along with stereotypical framing, may play a role in preventing vocational school students from doing so. The role of newspapers and journalists in the othering framing must be studied in the future, because our empirical data show that this is an obvious act that has continued throughout the entire decade.

Is it the case that the perfect productive archetype is a prosperous citizen in a productive society? The archetypes can, at worst, create a blueprint of who is respected and who is not. In this climate, opportunities for different extreme groups and information operations to grow. The findings of this research highlight how vocational school students regard themselves as “others” in Finnish society, while high school students are better respected by officials, teachers, adults and journalists. At the same time, the archetype of vocational school students says they cannot be influenced by outside sources because they can distinguish between what is true and what is not. Furthermore, they have a strong personal belief that they could never be targets of information operations or fake news. Our data do not reveal anything about the perceptions of high school students about this topic, but it seems that according to public opinion, such students, or the youth in general, have better IT- and critical literacy skills than grown-ups, because the younger generations are native digital citizens. However, it seems to us that this is not the case.

While it is true that high school and vocational school students have grown with the rise of digital platforms, this does not mean that they are experts in, for example, how to handle fake news, hate speech, and other negative phenomena on digital platforms, such as information operations of any kind. As part of media literacy, authors such as [Hobbs et al. \(2013\)](#) argue that new skills are needed to both question and utilize digital platforms and become active participants in democracies. However, the need for media literacy is not deemed necessary because personal value framing guides them throughout digital platforms. The students strongly indicated that they themselves would never fall prey to fake news and information online or offline while using, for example, digital platforms more than traditional news and information platforms. As [Arif et al. \(2018\)](#) stated, the intersection between digital platforms and information operations is not well understood. Thus, along with the study of archetypes, this topic must be further investigated in the future.

Furthermore, the archetype never wondered if, at any point, influencers and content creators in different platforms may have ulterior motives or even work for a hostile entity, an actor or a state. According to [Mejova et al. \(2023\)](#), in the online world, different narratives, news and actors from fields ranging from politics to business are competing for clicks. Previously, young people argued that anything goes online as long as you get clicks ([Meriläinen, 2022](#)). Indeed, these operations do not choose political or social sides but have, for example, utilized digital platforms in promoting various causes from #blacklivesmatter to #bluelivesmatter ([Briant, 2022](#)). [Starbird et al. \(2019\)](#) argued that online information operations are participatory in nature, where messages spread through—and with the help of—online crowds and other information providers. In addition, [Briant \(2022\)](#) stated that during the US 2016 elections, Russia conducted various information operations by creating clandestine accounts, while others may have infiltrated social and political movements, such as the Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter movements. Thus, information operations do not need to create new divisions but rather utilize existing divisions and discourses in their operative tactics, which can have lasting effects on Finnish society. Archetypes can be used as a means in these processes.

Overall, our results show, there is a huge gap between the idea of Finnish education system and “ethos.” Our data reveal that young people are treated and defined differently depending on where they study and the status of their studies. On the one hand, the archetypal high school student is an active future builder to whom the world and society appear free and full of opportunities and are thus treated according to this status. On the other hand, at school, the archetypal vocational school student is seen as an enabler of the high school students’ role. They are lower-level workers whose work results and tax payments make high school students’ dreams possible.

The media and public opinion are concerned about both groups but in different ways. Concerns about high school students are crystallized in worries about the burden and stress

of studying, while concerns about vocational students seem to be focused on the fact that they do not fit or conform to a predefined frame. Naturally, power relations also relate to these roles in different ways. High school students are expected to grow up into leadership roles in the society of the future, also leading adults who have completed vocational school and who themselves seem to have only very limited power in official society. If realized, this picture, with its deep divisions between different groups of people, will challenge the very existence of a democratic society.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Author contributions

NM gathered the data of vocational school students, analyzed it, and was the PI for the theoretical framework which was written together with MH and MR. MH and MR gathered the data of high school students. All authors participate to the analysis and writing process. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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