

Youth Culture in Ireland

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Abstract: The forms of youth cultures which exist among school-going adolescents in Ireland are explored in this article. A survey, using a comparative research design of eight groups of school-going adolescents, was carried out in an attempt to explore a range of youth cultural behaviour patterns in Ireland. The eight groups were differentiated by social class, locational (urban-rural), gender and educational status positions. The findings of the survey indicated that the majority of the pupils were committed to school and were also involved in out-of-school youth cultures. Quite clearly pupils were not forced to choose one of two fundamentally opposed cultures, but could subscribe in varying degrees to both. While the work of Murdock and Phelps (1973), Willis (1977), Cohen (1972) and Clarke *et al.* (1976) was drawn upon to provide an interpretative framework to assist in the understanding of the findings of the study, it was found necessary to go beyond their paradigms in order to reach an adequate understanding of the range of Irish teenage cultural practices.

I INTRODUCTION

The study, on which this paper is based, explored the forms of youth cultures which existed among school-going adolescents in Ireland. It investigated the relationship between such cultures and the social class, gender and locational position (urban-rural) of these young people, and the social contexts of school, peer groups and parents which may have influenced the development of youth cultures. The study was exploratory. It was particularly interested in examining the contexts of home, school and peer group relationships within which youth leisure cultures develop, drawing on

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the early work of Coleman (1961) in the United States and of Sugarman (1967) and Murdock and Phelps (1973) in Britain. It sought to investigate if social class and locational position influenced the development of different youth cultures based on some of the questions raised by Cohen (1972), Clarke *et al.* (1976) and Willis (1977), and to investigate the existence and extent of an adolescent culture of femininity drawing in particular on McRobbie and Garber's (1976) work.

The study was not an intensive investigation of a distinctive and tightly bounded youth subculture. Rather it investigated some of the broader questions regarding the social contexts within which youth cultures develop. In order to do this a comparative research design was set up to include eight groups of school-going adolescents. As there is a lack of research findings on distinctive class cultures, distinct locational cultures and of gender cultures in Ireland, there is inevitably a lack of research on the relationship between parental and/or dominant cultures and youth cultures in Ireland.

Rather than concentrating on one specific group of adolescents, adolescents of different social class, locational, gender and educational status positions were selected in order to map initially the extent of involvement by adolescents of each of these different groups in teenage cultural practices. Concentration on one specific group of adolescents would have led to uncertainty about the extent to which the cultural behaviour patterns of the group studied were similar to, or different from, the cultural behaviour patterns of teenagers in other class, locational, gender and educational status positions, simply because there is a lack of research data in relation to these different groups. Therefore, the setting up of a comparative research design was an attempt to explore in an initial way the range of youth cultural behaviour patterns in Ireland. The absence of sociological research findings on the cultural behaviour patterns of Irish youth is not attributable to Irish sociologists' lack of awareness of youth as a "problem". As far back as 1967, in *Christus Rex – An Irish Quarterly Journal of Sociology*, attention was drawn to this:

Youth have always had problems and there have always been problem youths. Now there is a wider problem – the problem of the Modern Youth. . . . There is at least the danger that in Ireland we may have to face the same problem in the near future (Forde, 1967, p. 45).

For the writer of this article, Forde, a Catholic priest, the "Teenage Revolution" was a far greater problem than that of the rapidly increasing incidence of juvenile delinquency:

It is the new way of life, the new attitudes and values, the new entertainment, dress and hair-styles of many English teenagers, the majority of whom are not delinquents. So distinct have they become that one can almost talk of a new culture (Forde, 1967, p. 49).

However, while Forde recognised that this "English teenage culture" was already having some influence in Ireland, he did not advocate that sociological research be carried out in order to establish an accurate picture of the situation and lifestyle of teenagers in Ireland. Indeed, it is evident that his article, while appearing in one of the major sociological journals of the 'sixties, did not prove to be an inspiration to sociologists to explore the cultural behaviour patterns of youth in Ireland. On the contrary, research undertaken by sociologists on Irish youth has tended to concentrate on teenagers and education (Ryan, 1967; McCluskey, 1973; Drudy, 1975), or on more specific phenomena such as their drinking behaviour (O'Connor, 1972) or community participation (O'Donoghue, 1971). While the general leisure patterns of teenagers have not been totally ignored by some of these researchers, no serious attempt has ever been made to address youth culture in itself in Ireland as a sociological phenomenon.

II SOME CENTRAL DEFINITIONS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Youth Culture

The sociology of youth was dominated for many years by structural-functional theory. It was structural-functional theory through the writings of Talcott Parsons (1942) which first introduced to sociology the concept of youth culture and subsequently youth subcultures, the terms of which are, by now, extensively documented. The argument made by Parsons about the phenomenon of the youth culture was elaborated on by Coleman (1961) in his study of American adolescent society, and later, Sugarman (1967), commenting on British teenagers, similarly noted that the psychic strains of adolescence and the presence of a youth culture encouraged a considerable diversion of time and energy away from more conventional social and educational pursuits.

In the modern literature, however, the emphasis has changed to a neo-Marxist analysis of youth. This theoretical position not only views class as a major explanatory variable in explaining youth culture, but class defined in Marxist terms. While the proponents of this stance have offered several definitions of youth cultures, nevertheless, on account of the exploratory nature of the study, no single definition appeared to be totally pertinent. Clarke's conceptualisation of youth relied heavily on social class:

... the young inherit a cultural orientation from their parents towards a problematic common to the class as a whole, which is likely to weight, shape and signify the meanings they attach to different areas of their social life (Clarke *et al.*, 1976, p. 29).

Additionally, they dealt only with youth groups which had "... reasonably

tight boundaries, distinctive shapes which have cohered around particular activities, focal concerns and territorial spaces." (Clarke *et al.*, 1976, p. 29). When these tightly defined groups were also distinguished by generation Clarke *et al.*, referred to them as youth subcultures.

For Cohen:

[a] subculture, by definition, cannot break out of the contradiction derived from the parent culture . . . subculture is also a compromise solution between two contradictory needs; the need to create and express autonomy and difference from parents and, by extension, their culture; and the need to maintain the security of existing ego defences and the parental identifications which support them (Cohen, 1972, p. 23).

He thus saw the latent function of subculture as ". . . to express and resolve, albeit magically, the contradictions which remain hidden or unresolved in the parent culture." (Cohen, 1972, p. 23).

Contrasting somewhat with these definitions, both Murdock (1974), and Brake (1973) emphasised the problem-solving nature of subcultures, though they placed this within a social class perspective. For Murdock, subcultures were:

. . . the meaning systems and modes of expression developed by groups in particular parts of the social structure in the course of their collective attempts to come to terms with the contradictions of their shared social situation (Murdock, 1974, p. 213).

Similarly, Brake suggested that subcultures arose as attempts to solve certain problems in the social structure which were created by contradictions in the larger society. Bearing in mind the above definitions of youth subcultures, Hebdige's point that different youths bring different degrees of commitment to a subculture, appeared to be of particular relevance to this present exploratory study of youth cultural forms in Ireland.

Hebdige stated that a subculture:

. . . can represent a major dimension in people's lives . . . or it can be a slight distraction from the monotonous but nonetheless paramount realities of school, home and work (Hebdige, 1979, p. 122).

Youth cultural behaviour was broadly defined for the purposes of the research on which this article is based as leisure time activities in which adolescents were involved, and which were relatively distinctive to adolescents. Additionally, it was decided that the definitions of subcultures discussed above would provide interpretative frameworks to aid in the understanding of the findings of the present study.

The study focused particularly on young people's different degrees of involvement in the sports environmental culture and on their involvement in the pop media culture, such as discos, pop music, television and magazines. The researcher did not set out to investigate the role of "style" in pupils' cultural practices as defined by a specialist or homologous use of commodities, symbols or argot, as is present in clearly structured, tightly bounded subcultural groups, such as that of the Skinhead or the Rocker. Similarly, because of the methodological procedure adopted in the present study — questionnaire survey rather than an ethnographic study — the researcher did not set out to extensively explore meaning systems for the pupils, or processes of why and how resistance comes to be articulated.

Youth Culture and Social Class

The centrality of class to structuring youth subcultural forms has been extensively documented (Clarke *et al.*, 1976). The social class of adolescents appears to be an important independent variable not only in influencing how "successful" pupils are at school (Jackson and Marsden, 1962) but it also seems to be a determinant of their access to different youth subcultural forms (Murdock and Phelps, 1973). Nevertheless, while it has been argued that youth subcultures are class based, most of the research carried out has focused on working class, as opposed to middle class, subcultural groups, and additionally it has failed to take account of "respectable" youth in the same (working) class location (Murdock and McCron, 1976). It was thus decided to include in the study population, pupils from both middle class and working class backgrounds, in order to explore what, if any, were the similarities or the differences in the forms of the youth culture of pupils from these class positions.

Youth Culture and Gender

The emphases in the documentation of youth cultures have tended to focus on the male and masculine values (Murdock and McCron, 1976) and, consequently, this may influence our conceptualisation of youth cultures as predominantly male. Because so little has been written about the role of girls in youth cultural groups in general (McRobbie and Garber, 1976) it was decided to include both boys and girls in the present study. It was felt that if there were evidently some "masculine" focal concerns characteristic of male cultural forms, there might also be some "feminine" focal concerns characteristic of the cultural forms in which young girls were involved and which have been hitherto untapped by sociologists.

Youth Culture and Locational Position

Locational position as a critical variable in structuring youth cultural

forms has not, in general, been dealt with by sociologists. An exception to this is Willis (1977) who appears to be somewhat sensitive to the influence which regional working class culture may have. Nevertheless, it was felt that within the Irish context the urban-rural locational position might be of relevance in structuring different youth cultural forms and, consequently, pupils from both an urban area and a rural area were included in the study population.

"Drop Out" – "Successful" Pupils

"Drop-out" was the term assigned by the researcher to all currently enrolled pupils who indicated their intention of not completing the second-level cycle of education. "Successful" was the term assigned to pupils who intended to complete the second-level cycle of education. These terms correspond to the more conventional categorisation "early leavers" and "educational persisters", respectively.

While ideally the researcher would have liked to divide both the middle class and the working class samples by geographical location and in terms of educational status position, it was not possible to do so given the time and financial constraints imposed on the study. Under these circumstances the division effected seemed to be the most appropriate, i.e., a division of the middle class in terms of locational position and of the working class pupils in terms of educational status.

III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Teenagers who were attending secondary schools were chosen as the universe of the study. The researcher decided that the most appropriate way of gathering the required information was to survey the pupils using a self-administered structured questionnaire. It emerged from a pilot study carried out by the researcher and from other research carried out, notably by Murdock and Phelps (1973), that this universe population and research method was suitable for the exploration of such factors as the role of school, social class, gender, family situation, and teenagers' cultural behaviour patterns. It was decided not to include a comparative group of teenagers who were working because of the constraints already referred to above. As the survey was of a defined and readily identifiable population, the size of the sample was largely dictated by the need for a basis on which to make statistical inferences regarding the subgroups belonging to the overall study population. The schools were chosen for the study to meet the criteria of providing respondents differing in social class, gender, locational and educational status position. In all there were eight schools in the sample and they yielded a total study population of 389 respondents, ranging in age from 14 to 16 years.

The Dublin metropolitan area was chosen as the urban location and a small midland town was chosen as the rural location. Before the particular urban schools to be used in the study were selected, the social class composition of various localities was first established so as to ensure that the schools subsequently chosen would yield a sample of pupils of the desired social class backgrounds. Social class was primarily determined by the type of housing in the area, i.e., whether it was owner occupied/privately rented (middle class) or corporation housing (working class). Additionally, the type of school in the area, secondary or vocational, also served as a useful indicator of the expected social class background of the pupils attending the school, as research evidence (Kelleghan and Greaney, 1970) clearly suggests that middle class pupils are over-represented in secondary schools and working class pupils are over-represented in vocational schools. It was primarily on this latter basis that the rural middle class schools were chosen. (The social class of the pupils, on the basis of father's occupation, was also established from the completed questionnaires and this proved to be consistent with the initial assumptions regarding the social class composition of the schools.) Once the urban and the rural locations to be used in the study were decided upon, and the expected social class background of pupils attending various schools within these areas established, the division of schools on the basis of gender was a straightforward matter.

When contact was made with the Principals of the schools chosen for inclusion in the study, it was arranged that the researcher would be given two consecutive class periods with a particular class, or a combination of two classes in the same year, to yield approximately 50 pupils, during which time the pupils would complete the self-administered questionnaire. It was also arranged with the Principals in the working class schools chosen that the classes selected to participate in the study would contain an adequate representation of both "successful" and "drop-out" pupils. The fieldwork was conducted from November 1981 to January 1982. Because some pupils were absent on the day the questionnaires were completed and because there was more than the required number of pupils in some classes, the total number of pupils in the sample was 389 (see Table 1).

IV MAIN FINDINGS

Liking for School

It was evident from the data collected that the majority of the pupils in the study population (63 per cent) liked school a lot, particularly meeting their friends there and the subjects they studied. The aspects about school they most disliked were the rules imposed and the long hours they had to spend at school and only 9 per cent of the pupils said they did not get on

Table 1: *The study population*

<i>Pupils</i>	<i>Number</i>
Middle class urban boys	52
Middle class urban girls	52
Middle class rural boys	51
Middle class rural girls	44
Working class successful boys	45
Working class successful girls	47
Working class drop-out boys	45
Working class drop-out girls	53
<i>Total</i>	389

well with their teachers. Almost all of the pupils said they had friends at school, and they participated with them in sporting activities, or else they talked about general teenager topics such as music, discos and dating, or they did their homework together. It appeared, overall, that the working class successful girls, and the middle class urban girls were the pupils who liked school the most, while the working class drop-out boys and the middle class rural boys were the pupils who liked school the least (see Table 2).

Table 2: *Index of pupils' liking for school*

<i>Scale item in order of difficulty</i>	<i>Guttman score</i>	<i>Middle class</i>				<i>Working class</i>			
		<i>Urban</i>		<i>Rural</i>		<i>Successful</i>		<i>Drop-out</i>	
		<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
<i>per cent</i>									
Like school a lot	(3)	73	83	57	79	73	86	45	74
Get on well with teachers	(2)	23 (96)	13 (96)	35 (92)	16 (95)	21 (94)	14 (100)	36 (81)	20 (94)
Friends at school	(1)	2 (98)	4 (100)	8 (100)	5 (100)	6 (100)	0 (100)	17 (98)	6 (100)
"No" to all items	(0)	2 (100)	0 (100)	0 (100)	0 (100)	0 (100)	0 (100)	2 (100)	0 (100)
<i>Total %</i>		100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>N =</i>		51	53	51	43	44	50	47	50

$$X^2 = 41.78, \text{ df } 21, p \leq .001$$

(Figures in parentheses indicate cumulative percentages)

Peers

The majority of the pupils reported that they had a group of friends both inside and outside of school, and less than a quarter of them said they had a group of friends only in school. Outside of school time, the pupils said they participated in sporting activities with their friends, went to discos or just hung around together without doing anything in particular. In order to be popular with the group of friends with whom they associated the pupils stated it was necessary primarily to have a nice personality, while pop cultural, neighbourhood environmental, school and sporting activities were also sources of peer group popularity. The vast majority of the pupils said that they and their friends enjoyed the same kinds of activities (92 per cent), liked the same kind of music (81 per cent) and clothes (80 per cent), and shared similar attitudes to life in general (81 per cent). While it emerged that the majority of the pupils (74 per cent) had a high degree of orientation to their peers, it was apparent that the middle class rural girls and the working class drop-out boys had the greatest degree, and the working class drop-out girls, the middle class rural boys and the middle class urban girls had the least degree of peer group orientation.

Parents and Peers

Even though it was clear that the pupils were greatly oriented towards their peers, nevertheless, they also had a high degree of orientation to their parents – in fact only 6 per cent of them reported that they did not get on well with their parents. It appeared that parents and peers were two relatively independent reference groups, each with its own sphere of influence and competence in the pupils' lives. This was particularly in evidence when pupils were questioned as to whom they consulted for advice in times of difficulty. For example, 73 per cent said that if they needed advice about what to do after school and 62 per cent said that if they needed advice about what subjects to study at school, they would expect to go to their parents, while if they needed advice in relation to a boy-girl relationship dilemma, they would expect to go to their friends (66 per cent).

Use of Free Time

All of the pupils had favourite ways of spending free time (see Table 3). The most popular activities they engaged in were outdoor active sports, such as field games, tennis or basketball, and just under a quarter of the pupils stated that going to discos was their favourite leisure activity. Reading, personal hobbies, watching television and listening to records were also reported. The pupils participated in these activities on a regular basis with their friends either in their local neighbourhood (45 per cent), or at home (24 per cent) or at school (23 per cent). While the pupils in all of the sub-

Table 3: *Pupils' favourite leisure interests*

Leisure interest	Middle class				Working class				Total
	Urban		Rural		Successful		Drop-out		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
	<i>per cent</i>								
Sports	41	38	74	42	50	37	51	26	45
Discos	22	34	8	9	14	33	21	50	24
Reading	10	6	4	26	2	10	2	10	9
Hobbies	21	2	10	2	14	2	5	8	8
T.V.	2	9	0	7	9	6	5	2	5
Records	2	7	2	7	7	6	7	2	5
Drinking	0	0	2	0	2	0	9	0	2
Cinema	2	2	0	0	2	4	0	2	1
Other	0	2	0	7	0	2	0	0	1
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
N =	51	53	50	43	44	49	43	49	382

$$X^2 = 133.94, \text{ df } 56, p \leq .001$$

Missing cases: 7

groups in the study population reported a sporting activity and going to discos as their favourite leisure interests, it was clear that the middle class rural boys had the greatest tendency to report sports, and the working class drop-out girls had the greatest tendency to state going to discos as their favourite leisure activity. A social class difference among the pupils was apparent when consideration was given to where pupils reported participation in their favourite leisure activity. The working class pupils had the greatest tendency to state the local neighbourhood, while the middle class pupils had the greatest tendency to state either school or home.

At the time the interviews were carried out, 34 per cent of the pupils said they were dating somebody of the opposite sex and 78 per cent of the total study population said they had dated somebody prior to the interviews being carried out. It was evident that the middle class female pupils, both urban and rural, least frequently reported having had a dating relationship, while the middle class rural boys and the working class drop-out pupils, both male and female, most frequently reported this. The majority of the pupils said they did not smoke either cigarettes or pot, or drink alcohol on a regular basis. However, it emerged that although still a minority, the working class drop-out boys had the greatest tendency to report engagement in these activities, while this was least apparent for the middle class female pupils in the study.

Media Participation

Over half of the pupils (55 per cent) said they generally listened to the radio every day, on average for one and a quarter hours on weekdays, and for one and three-quarter hours at weekends during the school term. The pupils' favourite radio programmes were those which featured mainstream pop music. Listening to records or tapes a few times every week was also reported by the majority of the pupils in the study (66 per cent).

When consideration was given to pupils' ownership of music playing equipment, it emerged that 37 per cent of them owned two pieces of equipment, and 27 per cent reported owning three pieces of equipment, that is radio, record-player and tape recorder.

Favourite Singers and Bands

A first preference for a mainstream pop singer or band was expressed by 53 per cent of the pupils, and 28 per cent stated a first preference for a new wave singer or band. Thirteen per cent of the pupils stated a first preference for an Irish pop singer or band, and 6 per cent said they did not have a favourite singer or band. It was noteworthy that even though pupils were definite in their choice of favourite singers or bands, very few had ever attended live performances by them.

Regardless of whether pupils expressed preferences for mainstream pop, new wave or Irish pop singers or bands, there was a definite consensus among the pupils as to their reasons for their choice of favourite singers or bands: the intrinsic nature of the music itself – sound and beat – was the reason stated by 72 per cent of the pupils. Finally, in regard to pupils' pop music preferences it was found that pupils did not tend to identify with just one type of pop music, but often liked two or three types simultaneously, such as Rock and Roll, Ska or Reggae, or Punk.

Television, Magazines and Fashion

Television was watched at least a few nights every week by 69 per cent of the pupils in the study population, and they stated that they watched it for one and a half hours on weekdays and for three and a quarter hours at weekends during the school term. "Top of the Pops" and one of the American soap operas (such as *Dynasty* or *Dallas*) were more frequently reported as their favourite television programmes by the girls in the study population than by the boys. The latter had a far greater tendency to state a crime detective, comedy or sports programme as their favourite.

Just over a half of the pupils said they bought magazines on a regular basis, that is, at least once a month. It was clear that the working class drop-out girls most frequently reported buying magazines on a weekly basis, and the boys in each of the subgroups had the greatest tendency to report never

buying a magazine. As with pupils' favourite television programmes, a clear gender difference was apparent with respect to the magazines pupils reported buying regularly. The girls in the study said that they bought young romance magazines such as *Jackie*, while sport or adventure magazines were most frequently bought by the boys, particularly the middle class rural boys. Furthermore, the male pupils also had the greatest tendency to report buying specialist and music magazines.

With regard to fashion, the majority of the pupils, 60 per cent, said they liked to wear particular clothes because they were comfortable. However, the female pupils in the study population most frequently reported that they liked to wear particular clothes because they were fashionable. It was noteworthy that the working class drop-out boys also had a tendency to report wearing particular clothes for this reason. Additionally, the pupils in this subgroup had a tendency to report liking to dress as their friends did, or to symbolise the music they liked by the clothes they wore.

V SUMMARY AND INTERPRETATION

Overall, from the results of the survey, it was evident that the majority of the pupils liked school a lot and were involved in out-of-school youth cultures. This finding would seem to be supported by Murdock and Phelps' (1972) argument that, contrary to what Parsons (1942), Coleman (1961) and Sugarman (1967) suggested, pupils could be highly committed to both school and to an out-of-school youth culture. Hence, pupils were not forced to choose one of two fundamentally opposed cultures but could subscribe in varying degrees to both. It was clear that school provided a base where pupils met their friends and engaged in leisure activities with them. The claim (Coleman, 1961) that one of the main institutional bases for the youth culture was the school may also be supported by the evidence from the survey of a positive relationship between pupils' liking for school and their peer group orientation. There was also some evidence that the values of the peer group tended to concur with the values of the school rather than invert them. For example, to have a good reputation in school was ranked fourth overall by the pupils as a source of peer group popularity. However, it was apparent that the working class drop-out pupils, both male and female, were those who had the greatest tendency to state an out-of-school pop cultural or neighbourhood environmental leisure activity as a source of peer group popularity.

When consideration was given to pupils' spare time activities it was clear that the pupils in the subgroups were involved in both sporting and pop media activities. The middle class rural boys were those most involved in sports, such as football, and the working class drop-out girls were those

most involved in pop such as going to discos. Overall, it appeared that the working class drop-out girls and boys were the pupils who most actively attempted to negotiate a distance for themselves from school. Their more frequent participation in their leisure interests in their local neighbourhood; their dating patterns; their greater experience of smoking cigarettes and "pot" and drinking alcohol; their greater tendency to spend less time doing homework and more time doing household chores, in addition to supplementing their pocket money by having a part-time job during the school term, seemed to point clearly to this direction.

The importance of the local neighbourhood for the development of male subcultures among working class boys is clearly evident in the work of Willis (1977). He noted how the subculture of "the lads" drew its inspiration from the "shop floor" culture of adult males in the local neighbourhood. In the present study, while participation in leisure activities in the local neighbourhood area was common to both the working class drop-out and successful pupils, there was no further evidence to suggest that for the working class successful pupils this was a means of distancing themselves from their experience of school. It is tentatively proposed that the non-distancing from school by the working class successful pupils was a result of the non-compulsory nature of school for them because these pupils had chosen to stay on rather than drop-out. Willis has pointed out that mobility striving is meaningful for individuals: ". . . some working class individuals do make it." (Willis, 1977, p. 128). Successful working class pupils in a working class school may therefore be aware that their mobility chances may be quite high, as over 50 per cent of the 14-19 age cohort have already given up the race (Rottman, *et al.*, 1982, p. 52). Their knowledge of this may not, of course, be articulated verbally. However, it may be learned implicitly from the expectations of teachers and the processes of streaming and achievement testing within the school (Murdock and Phelps, 1973, pp. 59-61).

With regard to pupils' pop music preferences it clearly emerged that the working class girls, and to a lesser extent, the working class successful boys had the greatest tendency to state a mainstream pop singer or band as their favourite. On the other hand, the middle class urban boys and the working class drop-out boys were those who most frequently expressed a first preference for new wave singers and bands. The culture of femininity thesis put forward by McRobbie (1978) may be drawn upon to assist in understanding the greatest attraction of mainstream pop singers and bands to the working class girls. This culture of femininity thesis is essentially based on the ideology of romance and the attraction of marriage for young working class girls who accept the social and material limitations of their subordinate class and gender position in society. They did this by identification with the traditional role of woman in society, that is as homemaker and wife, rather

than postponing marriage for a time or having a career of their own. At this present stage in their life cycle it is suggested that the working class girls, unlike their middle class peers, negotiated their distance from school and oriented themselves to an adult world by an identification with mainstream pop singers or bands whose song lyrics were predominantly concerned with themes of romance.

The attraction of middle class urban boys to new wave singers or bands may be understood by drawing on Murdock and Phelps' (1973) statement that underground music, and presumably by implication, any anti-mainstream pop music such as new wave, was largely the prerogative of middle class adolescents who saw themselves as constituting an opposition to mainstream forms of social organisation and cultural expression. Cohen's thesis (1972) also had significance here, especially as it is developed by Clarke *et al.* (1976). They have noted that the middle class parent culture also harbours unresolved contradictions which pose problems for adolescents. Clarke and his colleagues have pointed out that there is an inherent conflict in contemporary middle class culture between the values of thrift, sobriety and puritanism of the protestant ethic, and the permissive hedonism of the post 'sixties era.

The musical tastes of the middle class urban boys in this study may indicate the symbolic resolution of their cultural dilemmas. It may be suggested that their "hedonistic", oppositional aspirations found expression in their musical taste, while their allegiance to the core of the protestant ethic is represented in their commitment to school. Thus, they expressed opposition in a very "safe" way, and a way which did not, in effect, interfere with their long-term occupational and material interests. Similarly, the evidence indicated the plausibility that the working class drop-out boys were attracted to new wave singers and bands as a means of expressing their overall distance from middle class values and forms of social organisation, particularly school. Furthermore, the evidence suggested that they were attracted to new wave and not to mainstream pop singers or bands, and this may have served to mark their differentiation from the working class "upwardly mobile" successful pupils and also from the working class drop-out girls.

As noted already, a distinct gender difference was apparent with regard to pupils' favourite television programmes and with regard to the magazines they read on a regular basis. Taking this information into account, it was decided to construct an index in order to carry out a preliminary exploration of pupils' orientation to a culture of femininity. The culture of femininity index was composed of items which related to romance, pop and fashion and was based on pupils' involvement in the pop media culture. It was evident that the working class drop-out girls were the pupils with the greatest degree of orientation to the culture of femininity (see Table 4).

Table 4: Index of pupils' orientation to a culture of femininity

Scale item in order of difficulty – from the least to the most frequently occurring item	Guttman score	Middle class				Working class			
		Urban		Rural		Successful		Drop-out	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
<i>per cent</i>									
Like to wear fashion clothes	(5)	0	11	0	7	0	4	0	8
Reasons for favourite magazine	(4)	0 (0)	26 (37)	0 (0)	14 (21)	0 (0)	26 (30)	0 (0)	34 (42)
Favourite sections of magazines	(3)	0 (0)	17 (54)	0 (0)	16 (37)	0 (0)	14 (44)	0 (0)	18 (60)
Read "young romance" magazines regularly	(2)	0 (0)	9 (63)	0 (0)	21 (58)	0 (0)	18 (62)	0 (0)	30 (90)
Favourite TV programmes – soap opera, "Top of the Pops"	(1)	35 (35)	21 (84)	23 (23)	23 (81)	34 (34)	24 (76)	28 (28)	8 (98)
"No" to all items	(0)	65 (100)	16 (100)	77 (100)	19 (100)	66 (100)	24 (100)	72 (100)	2 (100)
Total %		100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
N =		51	53	51	43	44	50	47	50

$\chi^2 = 179.15, df 35, p \leq .001$

(Figures in parentheses indicate cumulative percentages.)

It is thus concluded that overall the working class drop-out girls were able to negotiate some space for themselves from school by involvement in the pop media culture which was best symbolised by their engagement in the culture of femininity. It is suggested that the working class drop-out boys, in contrast with the working class drop-out girls, negotiated a distance from school and from middle class values in general through active engagement in their immediate environmental culture. The latter, by virtue of its location

in the working class neighbourhood embodied working class values which tended to emphasise "macho" traits. This finding accords with that of Willis. He found sexism to be a feature of "the lads" subculture (1977, p. 43). They defined themselves *vis-à-vis* girls and consequently enacted their own sense of superiority.

Furthermore:

. . . the resolution among working class girls of the contradiction between being sexually desirable but not sexually experienced leads to behaviour which strengthens "the lads" sense of superiority. This resolution takes the form of romanticism readily fed by teenage magazines. It turns upon the "crush", and sublimation of sexual feeling into talk, rumours and message-sending within the protective circle of the informal female group (Willis, 1977, p. 45).

It is clear, therefore, that the working class drop-out girls in the Irish schools under investigation here engaged in a similar cultural practice to their English counterparts.

However, the culture of the working class drop-out boys did not exhibit the strongly "oppositional" and "differentiational" elements that Willis identified among "the lads" (1977, pp. 11-88). This may be explicable perhaps in terms of Cohen's (1972) thesis. His analysis of Mods, Skinheads, Crombies, etc., indicated that working class teenagers – especially the respectable working class – experience considerable dilemmas in their own parent culture. It is tentatively suggested, therefore, that in this study, working class drop-out boys (and girls also) were not oppositional in their relationship with school because of the underlying contradictory values in their own cultures. Thus, it appears that Willis' counter-school culture theory explains the relationship of only a tiny minority of working class youth within the school system. However, as there is as yet little definite evidence to affirm or negate Cohen's thesis in the present study, this would appear to be a hypothesis worthy of investigation within an Irish context.

VI CONCLUSIONS

It would seem that while the social class of the pupils exerted an independent influence on the subcultural response of the pupils in the subgroups in the study, it was not as straightforward or as predetermined as Clarke *et al.* have proposed. It was apparent that the working class drop-out pupils were those with the greatest involvement in distinctive cultural activities, and at first glance this seemed to be supportive of Clarke's claim that the young inherit a cultural orientation from their parents towards a problematic common to the class as a whole. Consequently, the function of working class

culture and working class subcultures was to win space from the dominant middle class culture (Clarke, *et al.*, 1976, pp. 45-52).

However, while all the working class pupils in the study shared a similar subordinate class position, the influence of this independent determining factor was mediated by how successful the working class pupils were at school. It was evident that there was a distinct division among the working class pupils between those who intended to stay on at school until they had their Leaving Certificate completed, and those who intended to drop-out. Therefore, while the social class position of the pupils was important in separating the middle class and the working class pupils, success at school was important in influencing a division among the working class pupils themselves.

Furthermore, the actual form of the working class drop-out pupils' cultural response was mediated by their different gender positions. This was quite clear from the data which indicated that the working class drop-out female pupils were oriented to the pop media culture which was essentially based on an ideology of romance, while contrasting with this, the working class drop-out male pupils were oriented to the neighbourhood environmental culture, where "macho" values were an essential requirement.

Hence, the social class of the pupils, mediated by how successful they were at school, and in turn further mediated by the gender position of the pupils, appears to provide a more comprehensive understanding of teenagers' cultural behaviour patterns, rather than viewing social class position alone as the all encompassing determinant of youth cultural behaviour. Because of this apparently more complex relationship between social class and teenage cultural behaviour, by implication it would seem that there must also be a more complex relationship between social class and cultural reproduction in general. Willis' argument (1977, p. 174) that the cultural practices of groups are dynamic entities entering into dialectical relationships with the structures within which they develop seems to be of relevance here. His explanation of this dialectic within working class culture, however, needs to be elaborated in order to explain the findings from this study. The working class were by no means uniform in their cultural practices or value orientations. While "school" knowledge may not be a valuable exchange commodity for a large section of working class youth, given their mobility chances in Irish society (Rottman, *et al.*, 1982, pp. 39-73), it is nevertheless valuable for that minority, which indeed Willis admits, who enter the white collar sector from the upper echelons of the working class. This is clear from the findings here that the working class successful pupils in working class schools appeared to have allegiance to the "school" knowledge paradigm.

To explain the pattern of youth cultural behaviour among the middle class pupils in the study we have to go beyond Willis. As already discussed

earlier, Cohen's hypothesis as elaborated by Clarke *et al.* is the most useful in understanding the cultural behaviour patterns of the middle class urban boys, specifically indicated by their pop music preferences. Most of the literature in youth cultures ignores rural society. It is being suggested here that the cultural behaviour patterns of the middle class rural boys may have some parallels in working class cultural practices. The primary leisure interest of the rural boys was football, a sporting activity in which physical strength is stressed. Like their working class counterparts the parent culture of the middle class rural boys is one in which economic wealth is still partly determined by physical prowess. Consequently, for boys in rural Ireland physical strength may not just be a "macho" value, but may also be of economic importance, considering the dominance of farming in the local occupational structure.

Similarly, the mainstream literature on youth cultures largely ignores the role of girls in youth cultural forms. In this study, an understanding of the cultural behaviour patterns of the working class girls is provided by McRobbie (1978). Her thesis is based on the ideology of romance for working class girls, given their class and gender subordination in society. McRobbie's thesis may also partially explain the cultural behaviour patterns of the middle class girls in the study, both urban and rural, given the extent to which they may be subordinated by their gender position in contemporary Irish society. However, in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their behaviour, further research with middle class girls seems necessary. Overall, in Ireland, the position of girls in youth cultural forms may be summarised by McRobbie's conclusions relating to their British counterparts:

It may then be a matter, not of the absence or presence of girls in the subcultures, but of a whole alternative network of responses and activities through which girls negotiate their relation to the subcultures or even make positive moves away from the subcultural option. . . . Girls can be seen to be negotiating a different space, offering a different type of resistance to what can at least in part be viewed as their sexual subordination (1976, p. 216, p. 221).

In conclusion, it appears that the work of Murdock and Phelps, Willis, Cohen or Clarke *et al.*, do not provide us with adequate paradigms for the understanding of teenage cultural behaviour patterns in Ireland. Rather, each one makes a partial contribution to our overall understanding of the forms of youth culture which exist in contemporary Irish society. Furthermore, it seems plausible that if future research on distinct youth subcultural groups should be undertaken, the cultural behaviour patterns of working class drop-out boys might provide the context within which such research could begin. It may be that when such teenagers respond in an oppositional

and differential manner through subcultural activity, not only to school and to middle class values in general but also to specific aspects of their parent culture, that a distinctive tightly structured youth subcultural style might be apparent.

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