



ANALYSIS / RESEARCH

Car-Centric Youth Subculture in Türkiye: Wherever the Car Takes Us

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Abstract

This study investigates the car-centric youth subculture (CCS) in Türkiye, examining how automobiles operate as mobile spaces for identity formation, social interaction, and symbolic resistance. It analyses the psychological, social, and spatial motivations underpinning CCS, the symbolic meanings ascribed to cars, internal group roles and status dynamics, and the ways mobility enables young people to negotiate and reconfigure urban public space. By integrating insights from subcultural and mobility studies, the article elucidates the transformation of localized street-corner sociability into city-wide mobile practices.

A qualitative research design drawing on phenomenological and narrative approaches was employed. Data were generated through in-depth interviews and participant observation with 13 participants (7 men, 6 women) recruited via purposive and snowball sampling. Following data saturation, analysis was conducted in MAXQDA, producing 361 codes clustered into 2 overarching themes and 14 subthemes.

The findings indicate that CCS is primarily driven by needs for belonging, solidarity, and self-expression rather than economic motives. Automobiles function as symbolic artifacts and “mobile rooms” that facilitate identity work and provide emotional refuge. Cohesion is sustained through shared rituals, differentiated roles (car owner, sidekick, guest, rookie), and consensus-based informal regulation, including mechanisms of inclusion, exclusion, and conflict management.

Keywords: Social Change, Youth, Subculture, Car-Centric Socialization, Social Environment.

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Özet

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'deki otomobil merkezli gençlik altkültürünü (car-centric youth subculture; CCS) inceleyerek otomobillerin kimlik oluşumu, toplumsal etkileşim ve simgesel direnç açısından nasıl "hareketli mekânlar" olarak işlediğini ele almaktadır. Araştırmada CCS'yi biçimlendiren psikolojik, toplumsal ve mekânsal güdülenmeler; otomobillere atfedilen simgesel anlamlar; grup içi roller ve statü dinamikleri ile hareketliliğin gençlerin kentsel kamusal alanı müzakere etmesine ve yeniden düzenlemesine nasıl olanak sağladığı analiz edilmektedir. Alt kültür ve mobilite çalışmalarının kuramsal çerçevesinden yararlanarak makale, yerel ölçekteki sokak köşesi sosyalliğinin kent geneline yayılan hareketli pratiklere dönüşümünü açıklığa kavuşturmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Çalışmada fenomenolojik ve anlatı temelli yaklaşımlara dayalı nitel bir araştırma tasarımı benimsenmiştir. Veriler, amaçlı ve kartopu örnekleme yöntemleriyle seçilen 13 katılımcı (7 erkek, 6 kadın) ile gerçekleştirilen derinlemesine görüşmeler ve katılımcı gözlemler aracılığıyla elde edilmiştir. Veri doygunluğuna ulaşıldıktan sonra analiz MAXQDA programı ile yürütülmüş; toplam 361 kod 2 ana tema ve 14 alt tema altında sınıflandırılmıştır.

Bulgular, CCS'nin ekonomik güdülerden ziyade aidiyet, dayanışma ve kendini ifade etme gereksinimleri tarafından yönlendirildiğini göstermektedir. Otomobiller, kimliğin inşasını destekleyen ve duygusal bir sığınak sağlayan simgesel nesneler ile "hareketli odalar" işlevi görmektedir. Grup bütünlüğü ise ortak ritüeller, farklılaşmış roller (araç sahibi, yancı, misafir, çaylak) ve kapsama/dışlama ile çatışma yönetimini içeren uzlaşıya dayalı gayriresmî düzenleme mekanizmaları aracılığıyla sürdürülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal Değişim, Gençlik, Alt kültür, Araba Merkezli Sosyalleşme, Sosyal Çevre.

Introduction

Today, the increase in average life expectancy means that periods such as youth, old age and adulthood are also extended. In this context, the study examines the youth period. When we look at the total and young population, average life expectancy and youth unemployment rates of the Turkish Statistical Institute and The World Bank, the significance of the youth period for Türkiye becomes clearer. When the total and young population rates are examined, it is seen that while in 1935, the ratio of the young population in the total population (16,200,694) was 15.1%, in 2022, this ratio in the total population (85,279,553) was 15.2%. The average rate of European Union countries is 10.5%. It appears that Türkiye has a dynamic yet stable demographic structure in terms of its young population. According to The World Bank data (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2023a; 2023b; The World Bank, 2025a; 2025b), the average lifespan for someone born in 1960 in Türkiye is approximately 51 years, while the average lifespan for someone born in 2021 is approximately 76 years. These rates are above the world average. While the average life expectancy for those born in 1960 is 51 years, the average life expectancy for those born in 2021 is 71 years in the world. When the youth unemployment rate is examined, it is seen that the rate, which was 17% in 2005, increased to 25.2% in 2019 and declined to 19.4% by the end of 2022 in Türkiye. Worldwide, these rates were 13.7% in 2005 and rose to 15.6% in 2022.

As can be seen from the data, while Türkiye is above the world average in terms of the number of young population and average life expectancy, it is below the world average in terms of youth employment. This indicates that

Türkiye has a large and active young population with spare time. Leisure and cultural consumption, especially during youth but in general, is one of the prominent contexts of the modern era (Giddens, 1991). This shows that there are social dynamics suitable for the development of different youth subcultures. Subcultural experiences which develop in young people's spare time activities will be decisive in the continuation of their lives (Hatiboğlu & Habermas, 2016).

Therefore, the subject of the current study is youth subcultures in Türkiye. It is seen that youth studies in Türkiye started after the World War II and most of their studies focused on the university youth (Bayhan, 2015). Although Türkiye's social conditions are quite productive for youth subcultures, it is seen that subcultural studies in general and studies on youth subculture in particular are not sufficient.

When we look at the studies on youth subculture, it is seen that they become specific in areas such as daily life routines (Çakmak & Aktan 2018; Çelik & Lüküslü 2012; Yaman, 2013; Yavuz, 2015; Malone, 2002; Ajmal, 2024), music (Çerezcioglu, 2014; Frith, 1996; Kaymas, 2012; Sarıköse, 2022; Solomon, 2005), sports (Bulgu, 2005; Kara & Güngör, 2021), fashion styles (Ertürk & Ruşan, 2018; Serbes & Güzel, 2020), addiction (Arslan & Kırlioğlu, 2019), identity construction (Asutay, 2017; Doğan, 1993; Clarke, 2012; Neyzi, 2001; Özipek, 2013; Özyegin, 2015; Şahin, 2021) and violence (Bozkurt & Gülerce; 2019; Şimşek, 2022; Duru et al., 2023).

The article addresses an area that has received little attention in the literature (Holtz, 1975; Ortay et al., 2020; Dundes, 2023). There are academic studies on this topic by Yavuz (2015), Açıkalın and Çakır (2024a; 2024b) and Ülkebaşı Tüzen (2024) in Türkiye. The current study specifically focuses on the car-centric youth subculture as a mobile space, with reference to Whyte's (1941; 1993) concepts of corner boys and street-corner society. Young people who used to hang out on the corners of neighborhoods and walk around the streets now find opportunities to patrol city streets and gather at city corners as cars have become more common. Thus, the center of gravity of the youth subculture has shifted from neighborhood streets and corners to the urban landscape.

Youth subcultures should not be understood solely as everyday forms of socialization but also as symbolic sites of resistance to the dominant culture. The contributions of the Birmingham School, most notably Hall & Jefferson's (2006) resistance through rituals, illustrate how young people contested the social order through rituals and quotidian practices. Building on this perspective, Hebdige (2002) underscores the ways in which subcultures construct meaning through "style," with hair, clothing, and spatial practices serving as crucial vehicles of resistance. Within this framework, the automobile emerges not merely as a means of transportation but as a subcultural artifact that young people mobilize as an emblem of identity and defiance.

The aim of the study is to understand, explain, and explore this car-centric subculture. Accordingly, it examines why and how young people socialize in cars. Unlike much of the youth subculture literature, which focuses on identity and belonging within fixed urban settings, and car-centered studies that often emphasize consumption or vehicle modification, this study conceptualizes the automobile as a mobile socio-spatial environment.

Method

Subculture theory is used in the theoretical framework of the study. It is possible to trace the origins of subcultures much further back. However, the term was first used by Lee (1945) and became widespread after the Second World War. Cohen (1971) used this concept in 1955 to analyze the lifestyle of boys' gangs which were traditional in criminal neighborhoods.

Although it has not been a long time since it became widespread, the meaning of subculture is always controversial (Hebdige, 2002). As discussions become widespread, different definitions have emerged and the origin of the

expression becomes unclear (Jenks, 2005). The term subculture refers in this study to cultural variants displayed by certain segments of the population. Subcultures are distinguished not by one or two isolated traits but they constitute relatively cohesive cultural systems. They are worlds within the larger world of our national culture (Komarovskiy & Sargent, 1949). Jenks (2005) states that subcultures are not completely independent from society, but they have new identity resources that arise from the new areas where people settle. In other words, each subculture is actually a different processing of the cultural raw material which is the common asset of the society (Hall & Jefferson, 2006). In the study, the new car-centric youth subculture is examined as a new source of youth identity.

The main and sub-problems of the study are as follows:

Main problem: How does the car-centric youth subculture serve as a mobile space for identity construction, social interaction, and symbolic resistance in the urban context?

Sub-problems:

- I. What psychological, emotional, and social motivations underlie young people's participation in car-centric socialization?
- II. How do spatial and symbolic meanings attributed to automobiles contribute to the construction of group identity and belonging?
- III. What kinds of roles and hierarchies (if any) are formed within car-centric youth groups, and how are these roles negotiated?
- IV. In what ways does the mobility provided by cars enable young people to access, occupy, and redefine urban public spaces?
- V. How does the car-centric youth subculture reflect a transformation of traditional street-corner sociability into mobile, city-wide youth practices?

The study is a qualitative study. It adopts a phenomenological approach as it focuses on the socialization experience in the car. In addition, it incorporates a narrative approach, as participants were encouraged to express their subjective experiences through the interview guide in a sincere, open-ended, and free-associative manner. Whyte states (1991; 1993; 1994) emphasizes that describing the time spent with the community will also assist in examining the data obtained from the fieldwork. He even generously shares his experiences in his work. For these reasons, the data collection method of the study is in-depth interview and participant observation with a semi-structured interview guide. Whyte's field research experiences were also used to investigate the car-centric youth subculture.

The sample was selected through purposive sampling.

Participants were men and women who expressed a strong desire for car-centric socialization in their daily lives. The aim was to include individuals who declared that they could not continue their daily lives in a healthy way without engaging in car-centric socialization. During the selection of the study group, preliminary interviews were conducted with 43 individuals. Most of these individuals were not included in the final sample because they were not suitable for the study's purpose. As a result, 7 men and 6 women who were determined to be fully suitable were interviewed. In accordance with the principles of qualitative research, particularly drawing on theoretical sampling and data saturation approaches (Charmaz, 2006; Guest et al., 2006), the inclusion of 13

participants was deemed sufficient to reflect the diversity, depth, and complexity of meanings associated with the car-centric youth subculture.

All the participants were reached through the snowball sampling technique. During the study, interviews were conducted in locations where participants felt comfortable. Participant observations were also carried out in the participants' everyday environments.

The recorded interview and observation data were coded using the MAXQDA program. A total of 361 codes were generated and grouped under 2 themes and 14 subthemes. These themes and subthemes were then subjected to descriptive content analysis.

Table 1. Information about the Participants

Order	Name	Age	Gender	Educational Background	Staying with Parents	Marital Status	Economical Situation	Socializing in The Car (Years)
1	Efe	30	Male	High Sch.	Yes	Single	Medium	12
2	Can	34	Male	Uni.	Yes	Single	Good	11
3	Hiç	37	Male	High Sch.	No	Single	Medium	15
4	Mert	24	Male	Uni.	Yes	Single	Good	6
5	Alfred	39	Male	Uni.	No	Single	Medium	20
6	Faruk	21	Male	Uni.	Yes	Single	Medium	5
7	Arda	23	Male	Uni.	Yes	Single	Good	6
8	Nihal	20	Female	High Sch.	Yes	Single	Medium	2
9	Civciv	19	Female	High Sch.	Yes	Single	Bad	2
10	Sude	21	Female	Uni.	Yes	Single	Medium	3
11	Nilüfer	36	Female	Uni.	Yes	Widow	Medium	24
12	Damla	23	Female	High Sch.	Yes	Single	Good	5
13	Merve	23	Female	Uni.	Yes	Single	Medium	4

Reliability and Ethics of the Study

The study was initiated following the approval of the Bandırma Onyedi Eylül University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee, as documented in their decision dated April 30, 2024, under the meeting number 2024-4. Preliminary interviews were conducted to determine the most appropriate sample for the study. The participants signed an informed consent form. Audio recordings of the interviews were made with the participants' permission. Any experiences the participants chose not to disclose in non-recorded interviews were excluded from the observational notes. Furthermore, the participants were informed that they could request the deletion or addition of any shared experiences at any stage of the study. To verify the credibility of the data provided by the participants, two methods were employed. Firstly, the information given was corroborated using open sources. Secondly, the consistency of the narratives was tested through extensive engagement during both

recorded and unrecorded interviews. Excerpts from the interviews are included in the study. Upon completion of the study, it was reviewed by an expert with an academic background in qualitative research methods.

Findings: Car-Centric Youth Subculture

Why is Car-Centric Socialization (CCS) Preferred?

Biographical reasons: It appears that there are two biographical reasons why the participants prefer car-centric socialization.

The first is the vaccination of driving joy: All the participants have childhood memories/feelings about the time when they started driving. It is understood that these feelings are the basis of the participants' preferences for socializing in the car. The emotions involved in these memories are different (curiosity, surprise, compassion, joy, belonging, panic, thrill, excitement, risk, success, friend appreciation, calmness, self-confidence, security, control, focused thinking). But what these memories have in common is the intense feeling of happiness experienced in the car. Even though many years have passed since this experience, the feeling of intense happiness at the beginning of each experience in which the participants socialize in the car is reinforced again and again. As this feeling strengthens, car-centric socializing behaviour becomes almost an addiction.

The moment when Can got attached to the car is the moment when he listened to thriller and horror stories on the radio of the parked car on a rainy day, while lightning was flashing at night (thrill). For Cıvı, after her parents' divorce, the only place where she felt happy was the truck rides with her father (love, affection). For Mert and Nilüfer it is when they had an adventure by taking their friends with the car they smuggled from their families (panic, fear, excitement, risk, success, friend appreciation). For Damla and Merve, it means playing fun games with their family/friends in a car with a big sound system (joy, belonging). For Sude, Hiç and Alfred, it means going to places where they can focus on their own thoughts by looking away from home and crowds (safety, control, focused thinking). For Nihal, it is when she turns on the music in her friend's car while she has a lot of troubles in her mind, she can get away from her sadness and synchronize herself with her friends in the car. For Faruk, this is the moment when he surprised his family by getting out of the car his father rented while he was returning home after buying bread. (curiosity, surprise). For Arda, it is the day when his father gave him the car on a long journey and he took the family to his hometown while the whole family was sleeping in the car (self-confidence).

The second is the flying carpet effect created by the car. Before the participants started to socialize by driving, they socialized in their homes, in secluded corners of the neighbourhoods, in school gardens, and in coffee houses/cafés. At this stage, participants did not prefer public transportation to socialize. They had a socialization circle that includes areas they can reach on foot. Their childhood and early youth years were spent in this circle where they could socialize. Participants loved the places where they socialized during this period, but as they grew up, they felt that the circle in which they could socialize on foot was getting smaller, and this created a feeling of being stuck. Participants are emotionally attached to the neighbourhood in which they live. They have no intention of living elsewhere.

However, participants who step into every detail of the region where they live consume the socialization they can reach within walking distance. At this point, the car creates an opportunity for the participants to break away from the living spaces where they love but increasingly feel stuck in. Thanks to their cars, while the participants maintain their emotional attachment to their neighbourhood, they also can join the adventure they want like a

flying carpet. It is seen that the participants perceive their cars as a mobile room. The participants, most of whom live with their parents, are often more interested in their cars than their rooms at home. For the participants, when they park their car to eat, it can be a dining room, when they park to have sex, it can be a bedroom, and when they park to chat, it can be a living room. And when the adventure is over, they can return to their favourite neighbourhoods.

Participants state that they do not need a psychologist as long as they can socialize by car because they can recreate the happiness which is missing in their ordinary life that they cannot control, again and again, whenever they need it, in the cars they can control.

Psychological, social and economic reasons. Biographical reasons are supported by the participants' answers to the question of why they prefer to socialize in the car (social, economic, psychological). For all the participants, the primary reason for socializing in the car is to commiserate, think deeply, focus, calm down, etc., which are psychological needs. The second reason is social needs such as entertainment, solidarity, belonging, conversation, etc. Participants state that there is no economic reason for them to socialize in the car. Participants even state that if they have the financial means, they would buy a better car and spend more time in the car.

Frequency of socializing in the car. When we look at the frequency of the participants socializing in the car, it is seen that all the participants definitely are in contact with their cars during the day. The participants, Mert, Faruk, Arda, Nihal, Sude, Damla and Cıvıvı socialize in the car every day. Hiç, Alfred and Merve state that 3-4 days a week is enough for them.

Preferred hours for socializing in the car. All the participants prefer the hours when the city is quieter to socialize in the car. These hours are the morning hours when the city has not yet woken up, and the evening hours when it sleeps. While Sude and Alfred, the participants, prefer to socialize in the car in the mornings, all the other participants prefer to socialize in the evenings. Sude and Alfred are car owners who prioritize themselves.

Preferred weather conditions while socializing in the car. Since the participants always socialize in the car, they do not care about the weather conditions. However, there are ones who especially love rain (Hiç, Faruk, Cıvıvı), winter (Nihal), summer (Merve) and spring (Sude, Damla).

How is car-centric socialization (CCS)?

CCS is a result. People who prefer car-centric socialization appear to have known each other very closely and for a long time. For people who prefer car-centric socialization, socializing in the car is not an area or environment where new interactions are established. Since the participants perceive the car interior as their home, private room or even their children (Nilüfer), they do not socialize in the car with anyone they do not test. Therefore, car-centric socialization is an outcome in interpersonal interaction.

The most important virtues for the participants who socialize in the car are to be happy to socialize in the car, to be respectful of privacy, to be trustworthy, to be in control of their behaviour, to be predictable to those who know them, not to be selfish, not to be arrogant, not to be stingy, and to be agreeable/adaptable. Therefore, people who are tested in daily life and prove their virtues may eventually become involved in socialization within the car. In this context, Efe states that they have been socializing with almost the same members for fifteen years. Almost all of Efe's group are childhood friends.

CCS is a subculture. Car-centric socialization appears to create a car-centric subculture. The main motivation of the car-centric subculture is the psychological needs such as commiserating, chatting, focusing, etc.. The second motivation is the need to socialize. Economic motivations are ineffective. Four of the twelve people got

interviewed in the study consist of members of different car-centric socialization groups (Efe, Hiç, Mert, Alfred, Arda, Sude). The participants always socialize with the same group of friends. Group members meet face to face at least three times a week and are in constant contact online. However, the participants do not have effective social interactions with their social environment, including their families.

In this context, Can makes the following analysis for people like himself who socialize around cars. Can states that caravanners, boaters and motorcyclists are luckier because they are not mistaken for those who drive vagrants. According to Can, car-centric socialization should be evaluated together with socialization such as socializing with a caravan, a boat, a motorbike. Can compares all these people to compasses. One end of the compass is at their fixed residence while they travel in different places with the other end of the compass (car, caravan, boat, motor).

Car-centric socialization occurs so frequently, intensely, and enthusiastically that it generates its own symbolic language. For example, there are nine people in Arda's group of friends, and each of them uses a unique nickname for one another. Arda explains that when he hears his nickname, he immediately knows which group member is addressing him. Calling someone by the wrong nickname is considered disrespectful. Civciv highlights this symbolic closeness by noting that she does not know which food her mother likes but can list the favourite foods of each group member. Within these groups, members commiserate, have fun, argue, reconcile, and plan events while communicating quickly, intensely, and effectively through their symbolic language.

Communication within the car takes place in an almost frictionless environment. This amplifies the participants' happiness -already enhanced by the "flying carpet" and "vaccination" effects - and strengthens loyalty within the group. Communication difficulties that often occur in daily life are rarely experienced during car-centric socialization, and when they do arise, reconciliation is typically achieved through the strength of group communication. For this reason, individuals who slow down the rhythm of interaction are not well liked. Outsiders unfamiliar with the group's subculture lower the quality of communication to the average level of everyday life, which diminishes the happiness derived from the car. Consequently, participants are reluctant to accept guests or rookies into their groups.

Each group establishes a sense of belonging to specific regions, concentrating their socialization in certain areas while both parked and cruising. Participants say that even if they do not communicate with group members, they can guess who is doing what, where, at what time.

Guest and rookie statuses are required to enter the group. By looking at the behaviour of these people outside and inside the car, it is tested whether they have the virtues blessed by the group. However, if the group cannot reach consensus, the apprentice is not accepted as a member.

If members do not show expected behaviour, there are warning, suspension and exclusion processes.

Status and role in the car. After the interviews, it is understood that there are four statuses and roles during car-centric socialization. These are car owner, sidekick (group members who do not own a car), guest and rookie. Almost everyone who socializes around cars owns a car according to their budget (Efe, Can, Hiç, Mert, Alfred, Faruk, Arda, Civciv, Nihal, Sude, Nilüfer). When we look at the vaccination processes of car owners, we see that they experience happiness through being a driver. Car owners have been aiming to own a car since they were young. For these people, owning a car is necessary for car-centric socialization.

It is understood that car owners are divided into two groups. These are self-centered car owners and group-centered car owners. It can be said that the basis of this distinction lies in the vaccination experience. Mert, Alfred

and Sude who prioritize themselves got away from the social conflicts of their adolescence by getting in their cars. They were alone during their vaccination in the car. It was just them and their car. In a sense, the injection of happiness occurred when they and their cars synchronized. The vaccination experience of the participants who prioritized the group took place within their family and friend groups. The happiness of these people was achieved by synchronizing themselves and their cars and companions.

Group-centered car owners (status) are Efe, Can, Hiç, Faruk, Arda, Civciv, Nihal, Nilüfer. For these people, group decision is more important than their own decisions. More accurately, they can integrate their own decisions into group decisions in order to be happy socializing in the car.

Self-centered car owners (status) are Mert, Alfred and Sude. These people's self-prioritization should definitely not be confused with selfishness. All of these individuals are sincerely loyal to the in-group virtues. However, this is the only way they can achieve the feeling of happiness in the car. Even if these people are happy to socialize within group members and have all the virtues, they expect their own rules (who will sit next to them, what music to listen to, where to go, etc.) to be taken into account, especially in their own cars. These people cannot integrate their decisions into the group decisions. All the three participants stated that no matter how much they socialize with groups, they cannot help spending time driving alone after the group disperses (or at any other time). These people's groups are the groups with the fewest members. It consists of four or five people.

Only Damla and Merve among the participants do not have cars. Damla and Merve have sidekick status. The concept of passenger is deliberately not used for these people because, as can be seen in more detail in the event planning, car owners often use their car in a 'co-op driving' (like co-op farming) manner and socialize by traveling in each other's cars.

But the real reason that puts them in sidekick status is that they are not very enthusiastic about owning a car. When we look at the vaccination process of the sidekick, we see that they experienced happiness while driving the car driven by her father/uncle (Damla) and driving the car driven by her friend (Merve). For these people, owning a car is not necessary for car-centric socialization. Merve says that she feels car sick but tries to suppress this discomfort because car-centric socialization with her friends is very enjoyable. Damla states that if she becomes a driver, she will be deprived of the joyful atmosphere in the car because she will have to focus on the road.

The most important motivation for car-centric socialization for car owners are psychological elements such as sharing their problems with each other, chatting, deep thinking, and focusing. The most important motivation for sidekicks is social reasons such as noise, entertainment and solidarity.

Guest (status) is a person who temporarily participates in in-car socialization with the reference and accompaniment of the car owner or sidekick. Even if it is an issue that disturbs others, the participants are very patient for the sake of the person who brings the guest. The participants can tolerate even the matters that they would not normally tolerate when it comes to guests. The first reason for this is that the person responsible for the guest is the person who brings the guest. The person who brings the guest guides her/him because that person has a good command of the communication within the group. The second reason is that the guest is participating in socialization for a temporary period.

Rookie status is gained when a guest expresses the desire to become a permanent member of the group. There is no strict limit on group size; however, participants (Efe, Hiç, Mert, Alfred, Arda, Sude) stated that ideal groups consist of at least three and at most ten people. This creates a sense of wholeness. Groups do not actively seek new members, but guests may request rookie status. When such a request is made, all group members must

agree. If even one member refuses - saying, for example, "I just don't feel comfortable" - the candidate is not accepted, regardless of who made the reference. As noted earlier, this is linked to the group's desire not to lose the happiness they have cultivated. If consensus is reached, the rookie is granted limited participation. If they prove their virtues during this extended probationary period, they are eventually accepted as members. This process develops organically and without formal rituals.

Group-centered car owners and sidekicks are generally more open-minded toward guests and rookies, while self-centered car owners remain sceptical. For example, Sude stated explicitly that no new member can join her group. The "mortar" of car-centric socialization is meeting frequency. The participants emphasized that no one in their group ever leaves; at most, attendance frequency decreases. Meeting frequency is a key parameter. As meetings become more frequent, members forge stronger bonds.

Arda calls this situation "ossified roster", which means core roster. This squad meets from time to time separately from other members. From time to time, especially after picking the others up or dropping them off at their homes, ossified roster come together to meet psychological needs. There may be more than one ossified roster within a group. Members consider this situation normal because the interests of the group are kept ahead of the interests of the bone cadre. Interestingly, the ossified roster is not a factor of separation but rather the cement of the group. As will be explained in more detail in the section where intra-group crises are addressed, the ossified roster plays the role of mediators in intra-group problems.

There is no hierarchy in CCS groups. Regardless of the closeness and frequency of meetings in the car, there is no hierarchy in in-car interactions. The fact that the virtues within the group are clear and only those who prove these virtues are included in car-centric socialization allow the interaction within the group to function almost smoothly. People who engage in car-centric socialization are in constant interaction through applications such as WhatsApp. A democratic consensus process based on good will and open communication is implemented in all decision-making mechanisms.

All the participants stated that they are in a solidarity that makes it impossible to understand who the car owner is when viewed from the outside. Car ownership is not a determining factor in interpersonal interactions. In fact, because everyone's car is used intermittently in a cooperative manner, car owners regard the others as co-users rather than subordinates. Both group-centered and self-centered car owners tend not to transfer financial burdens (fuel, traffic fines, etc.) to other drivers or passengers. This tendency persists even when their financial circumstances are strained. However, if the financial situation is genuinely inadequate, other drivers and passengers assume responsibility without hesitation, showing solidarity before the car owner even has to raise the issue.

The group has no expectations from guests and rookies during the processes. Nevertheless, rookies are observed closely to see how they behave in such situations. Mert states that in many similar situations, they ended interactions with a rookie who held himself back.

Activity planning in CCS. The fact that in-car interaction is so strong makes activity planning much faster and easier during car-centered socialization. In this context, there are nuances between different status holders. Self-centered car owners tend to plan their events by corresponding through applications such as WhatsApp the night before. These people tend to participate in events knowing where to go with whom and what kind of event to do. Still, they comply with the decisions that may change within the car without showing their reluctance. However, in such a case, they leave the group early and carry out their plans alone. Group-centered car owners,

sidekicks, guests and rookies make joint decisions in the flow of daily life. People who occupy this status only plan socializations (picnics, entertainment, etc.) that may last throughout the day, the night before. However, they tend to willingly comply with decisions that may change within the car. Especially short-term socializations are momentary. Most of the participants state that they plan short-term activities. Instant planning skills show the cohesion of the group. For this reason, during the interviews, it is seen that the participants feel proud and enjoy when talking about their instant planning skills.

The motivations underlying event planning reflect the broader reasons for socializing in cars. For car owners, who make up the majority of the group, psychological needs (e.g., sharing problems, deep thinking, focusing) take precedence, followed by social needs. For sidekicks, the order is reversed: social needs (noise, entertainment, solidarity) come first, followed by psychological needs. Car owners often fulfil their psychological needs with their ossified roster before or after events, while meeting their social needs with the broader group.

There appears to be two types of activities in car-centric socialization. The first is parked activities and the second is driving activities.

When planning parked activities, places that are already known are decided the day before or instantly, appropriate to the nature of the activity. Where the car will be parked directly depends on the nature of the event. Food, drinks, chairs, tables, etc. are provided for events to be held in the park. Such logistic needs are met beforehand. For conversation without alcohol, picnic, view, sex, deep focus, commiserating, etc., there are parking spaces suitable for such events. All the group members know these places. For example, Efe and Hiç state that when they want to have sex while they are doing an activity with their lovers, they drive their cars towards the parking lot where sex is taking place and during this time they give their lovers a flirtatious look. Girlfriends know where the road will lead. Efe and Hiç say that if the girls laugh, they turn to the sex parking lot, and if they want to go somewhere else, they steer to a new route.

In cases where it is decided to organize an activity while traveling by car, different routes are used depending on the nature of the activities. If the event has a social purpose, it is carried out by pausing cars from time to time on the lively streets of the city, turning up the music volume, and dancing on the roadside. If the event has a psychological purpose, it is carried out at a slow pace in the deserted streets of the city. Music is an absolute indispensable part of the event, especially when the car is driving. The owner's phone is integrated into the car. Music preferences are made via this phone. While self-centered car owners tend to listen to their own music, other statuses pass the phone from hand to hand and make music choices in turn. Entertaining songs with high energy are always played at the beginning of the events during the tour. But then, the music preferred by the members determines the course of the event.

Members send messages inside and outside the car through the music they prefer. For example, if a member of the car constantly chooses "emotional music", it implies that he has a problem he wants to talk about. The message given outside the car is usually directed at the current or ex-girlfriend or another group member who is not attending the event. That is, while driving, sometimes the driver directs the car towards the house of the ex or new lover of a member of the car. This situation is noticed by all members. Meanwhile, another member in the car plays a song special for his friend and the girl he loves. And just as the car passes in front of your ex or new lover's house, it turns up the volume of the music so much that your lover at home can hear it. On the one hand, this is a gesture that members make to their friends. On the other hand, it is a message given to the lover. It is understood that Cıvıv, a woman, Faruk, a man, and many other participants performed this ritual on their ex

or new lovers. Apart from this, this is also a ritual to make a member who is not participating in the event happy by playing his favourite music loudly while passing by his house. If members are in communication, most of the time this ritual is performed by communicating with the member outside the car and informing him/her.

Even though there are events that are occasionally held only while driving in the car, the events held while driving in the car are generally short-term and involve the process of gathering members for the parked event and planning the event. Groups always organize short-term driving activities after starting and finishing their parked activities.

In the interviews with the participants, it is seen that there are almost no problems with other cars, residences and workplaces, both in the driving activities and the parked activities. Members already state that they want to stay away from people, so they make every effort not to disturb people outside the group.

It is understood that from time to time there are short-term interactions with other parked groups at parked events. In this context, spontaneous rules have been formed to avoid problems among those who hold activities in parks. For example, some of these rules include entering a parked area with the headlights turned off, parking cars back-to-back or side by side to ensure privacy, and listening to music at a volume that will not disturb others. Arguments can occur especially in parking lots where alcohol is consumed, but the arguments are ended before they escalate thanks to the mediators on both sides who don't consume too much alcohol. Attendees certainly don't tend to have lasting interactions with people they meet during parked events. In this sense, intergroup interactions are characterized by caution and restraint.

Covering expenses during CCS. There are also nuances depending on the status in terms of covering the expenses incurred during the events. Self-centered car owners tend to let everyone cover their own expenses. Other statuses tend to cover expenses jointly. One thing that all the participants strongly agree on is that they do not expect any financial support from members who are financially in bad conditions. As stated above, there are psychological and social reasons for car-centric socialization but there is no economic reason. Therefore, covering event expenses is, in a sense, performed with the feelings of solidarity and brotherhood. When the participants were persistently asked what would happen if members whose financial situation wasn't good could not participate in expenses even for three or five months, they all stated that it wouldn't matter even if this situation continued for years. When the participants were asked what they would do if there is a member who does not want to participate in the event because they cannot afford the event, they stated very firmly that, if necessary, that member would be forcibly removed from their home and included in the activity. In such a case, giving up a member is perceived as a shame within the group, an "unacceptable sin" committed against virtues.

Crisis situations during CCS. The gravest shame for the group is a crisis between members, as it threatens group unity. Creating conflict and refusing to reconcile is seen as disgraceful and induces panic throughout the group. Despite these norms, crises do occasionally occur. Even when only two people are involved, the crisis affects the entire group. Interestingly, different CCS groups reported managing crises through the same three-step algorithm.

The first step is to de-escalate and postpone the crisis because the members have good intentions towards each other and believe that once the tension of the incident eases, the parties will be able to reach an agreement without selfishness. According to the group doctrine, it is shameful to spoil the fun of others during the event and to insist on doing so. Therefore, members who create a crisis postpone the problem for the moment and are expected to meet and compromise among themselves later. In this case, if a compromise is reached, the

problematic members are condemned and socialization continues.

The second step is mediation and the first decision. At this stage, the “ossified roster” acts as mediators and presents an objective evaluation of the incident to their close friends. The group removes the member who refuses to compromise from the group to make self-criticism.

If no resolution is achieved, the third step is the jury stage and final decision. At this stage, the issue is evaluated within the whole group. At this point, all group members who are not parties to the incident discuss the incident among themselves like a “jury” and announce their evaluations that they agree with in a meeting with the discussing parties face to face.

The group expects the members to make sincere self-criticism and make concessions. For this reason, the member deemed at fault is removed from the group for a while. It is understood from the interviews that the participants quarrelled, anticipating that they would compromise even in very serious crisis situations. For example, Mert (self-centered car owners) says that he took a friend out of the car in the evening, 30 km away from the city, with whom he had been swearing and arguing. When asked how his friend got home, he says, “I guess he hitchhiked.” When asked how he can be so cruel, he replies, “If he doesn’t know how to survive, he has no business among us.” When asked later whether they had reconciled, he said that they came together again at the next event and remembered the incident by swearing again, but this time laughing. Mert does not say why he kicked his friend out of the car. However, he says he believes that if he commits a similar disrespect, he deserves to be thrown out of the car, and that he will definitely reconcile somehow with his friend who also threw him out of the car.

Discussion

The results of this study provide a unique perspective on how the car-centric youth subculture (CCS) serves as a mobile space for identity construction, social interaction, and symbolic resistance within the urban environment. In exploring the narratives of the participants, it becomes clear that the car is more than a technological device or a means of transportation rather it is a cultural artifact, a social medium, and a symbolic site where values, identities, and senses of belonging are continuously negotiated. These findings contribute to a growing body of literature that emphasizes the importance of automobility in youth cultural practices, thereby responding to what Carrabine and Longhurst (2002) identified as sociology’s long-standing neglect of the car as a central social and cultural phenomenon.

Psychological, emotional, and social motivations. One of the core findings of this study is that participants in CCS engage in car-centric socialization due to a combination of biographical and psychosocial motivations. These include childhood experiences with cars, the desire for solidarity and brotherhood, and the search for recognition in a world where young people often feel marginalized or overlooked. The fact that CCS members frequently gather at least three days a week highlights the importance of these practices as routines of social and emotional regulation. This finding resonates with Carrabine and Longhurst’s (2002) argument that automobility mediates sociability and extends youth networks by providing both imaginative possibilities and practical opportunities for connection. Psychological motivations also include the emotional security and sense of belonging that members derive from the group. Participants repeatedly emphasized that cars were not simply “machines” but rather mobile rooms - private spaces where they could express themselves away from parental or societal control. This finding aligns with Best’s (2011) view of youth identity work, where young people construct symbolic sanctuaries to help them navigate uncertainty and marginality. In this context, CCS emerges not only as a leisure activity but also as a critical psychosocial resource for identity formation and community building.

Spatial and symbolic meanings of automobiles. The automobile within CCS emerges as a deeply symbolic artifact that transcends its utilitarian purpose. Cars serve as markers of individuality, group belonging, and status within the subculture. Participants' narratives demonstrate that car modifications, styles, and even choices of cruising or parking spots serve as forms of symbolic communication. These practices align with Cross's (2018) historical analysis of youth car culture, which shows that automobiles have long served as both personal expressions and collective symbols of subcultural affiliation.

Moreover, the ritual of jointly covering expenses, rather than attributing costs to individual members, transforms economic transactions into acts of solidarity. This practice functions as a ritualized affirmation of group values such as loyalty, equality, and brotherhood. O'Connor and Kelly (2006), in their exploration of car theft among youth, emphasize how practices surrounding cars intersect with performances of gender, toughness, and loyalty. While the CCS groups in this study do not engage in illegal practices, their collective approach to economic contributions similarly reflects a symbolic commitment to solidarity and mutual support, thereby reinforcing their subcultural boundaries.

Roles, statuses, and group dynamics. The findings reveal four distinct roles within CCS: car owner, sidekick, guest, and rookie. While participants often emphasized the horizontal and non-hierarchical nature of the group, these roles indicate that subtle distinctions and structured expectations nonetheless shape group dynamics. Car owners - particularly those differentiated as self-centered or group-centered - play a pivotal role in shaping practices and influencing group culture. Group-centered owners are more likely to emphasize solidarity and inclusivity, whereas self-centered owners use their cars as status markers and as a means of asserting individual prestige.

This echoes Yavuz's (2015) study of modified Tofaş car subcultures, where masculinity and identity were negotiated through ownership and modification practices. Within CCS, these distinctions extend beyond gender performance to the very logic of group belonging. The mechanisms of warning, suspension, and exclusion reflect a highly developed internal system of regulation that balances the need for solidarity with the enforcement of shared norms. In this sense, CCS embodies both the horizontal dynamics of peer groups and the regulatory systems of more formal organizations, suggesting a complex interplay between informality and formality.

Mobility and the Reconfiguration of Urban Space. Cars within CCS are not only symbolic artifacts but also vehicles of mobility that allow young people to access, occupy, and redefine urban public spaces. Parking lots, secluded streets, and cruising routes become the equivalent of "street corners" in Whyte's (1993) classic formulation of urban sociability. However, unlike traditional corner societies, CCS members are not spatially restricted to neighbourhoods; instead, they extend their sociability across the urban landscape, creating a new form of mobile youth culture.

This finding resonates with Hawley et al. (2020), who emphasize the normative expectations and social implications of youth mobility and driver licensure. For CCS members, access to a car is not only a marker of adulthood but also a passport to visibility and legitimacy within urban life. The reappropriation of public spaces through mobility challenges conventional understandings of urban belonging and demonstrates how young people actively negotiate their place in the city.

From street-corner sociability to mobile subculture. Perhaps the most significant contribution of this study is its demonstration of how CCS represents a transformation from traditional neighbourhood-based sociability to city-wide, mobile subcultural practices. Whereas Whyte's (1993) corner boys were restricted to local neighbourhoods, CCS groups reconstitute the "corner" as a mobile entity that can shift across time and

space. This mobility not only expands the geographic scope of youth interaction but also amplifies the symbolic possibilities of belonging and resistance.

Ülkebaş Tüzen (2024) and Açıklan and Çakır (2024a; 2024b) argue that contemporary subcultures and youth practices are increasingly shaped by mobility and consumption, which redefine the boundaries of identity, community, and resistance. CCS exemplifies this transformation by demonstrating how cars enable young people to move beyond localized boundaries and create city-wide networks of affiliation. In doing so, CCS underscores the enduring relevance of subcultural theory while simultaneously highlighting the need to update it to account for the dynamics of mobility in contemporary urban life.

Conclusion

Taken together, these findings highlight that CCS is not a marginal or trivial pastime but a complex social formation with significant implications for understanding youth, mobility, and urban culture. Cars, within this context, are simultaneously material objects, symbolic resources, and mobile spaces that enable young people to construct identities, perform solidarity, negotiate roles, and reconfigure the urban landscape. By situating CCS within broader debates in subcultural studies, the sociology of consumption, and mobility studies, this study underscores the necessity of recognizing car culture as a central dimension of contemporary youth life.

CCS should be evaluated under the broader umbrella of “vehicle-centric socialization” (VCS), alongside forms of socialization such as those involving boats, motorcycles, and caravans. In this context, vehicle-centric socialization (VCS) is suggested as an umbrella concept, and there is a need for further sociological studies on the subject. As Downes (2013) notes, “subculture will generally persist only as long as the problems to which it provides a solution persist.” In this study, it is understood that the main motivation for participants’ CCS is psychological in nature. Therefore, it would be valuable to conduct psychological studies in addition to sociological research.



GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Türkiye'deki Araba Merkezli Gençlik Altkültürü: Araba Nereye Biz Oraya

Muhammed Ferit Duman*

Günümüzde ortalama yaşam süresinin uzaması gençlik, yaşlılık, yetişkinlik gibi dönemlerin de uzaması anlamını taşımaktadır. Türkiye İstatistik Kurumunun ve Dünya Bankasının toplam ve genç nüfus, ortalama ömür beklentisi ve genç işsizlik oranlarına bakıldığında Türkiye için gençlik döneminin ne kadar önemli olduğu daha iyi anlaşılmaktadır. Türkiye'nin genç nüfus sayısı ve ortalama ömür beklentisi bakımından Dünya ortalamalarının üzerindeyken genç işsizliği bakımından dünya ortalamasının altındadır. Bu durum Türkiye'de boş zamana sahip geniş ve hareketli bir genç kitleye sahip olduğu anlaşılmaktadır. Özellikle gençlik döneminde ama genel olarak boş zamanlar ve kültür tüketimi modern dönemin öne çıkan bağlamlarından biridir. Bu bağlamda makale çalışması gençlik dönemini ele almaktadır.

Makale çalışması seyyar bir mekân olarak araba merkezli gençlik alt kültürünü ele almaktadır. Mahallelerin köşe başlarında takılan, sokaklarında volta atan gençler arabaların yaygınlaşmasıyla beraber şehrin caddelerinde devriye atmakta ve şehrin köşelerinde 'takılma' imkanını yakalamaktadırlar. Artık gençlik altkültürünün ağırlık merkezi mahallenin sokakları ve köşeleri değil kentin caddeleri ve köşeleridir. Çalışmanın amacı arabanın merkezinde olduğu bir alt kültürü anlamak, açıklamak ve keşfetmektir. Bu bağlamda çalışma gençlerin neden araç içinde sosyalleştikleri ve araç içinde nasıl sosyalleştiklerine odaklanmaktadır.

Çalışma nitel bir çalışma olarak tasarlanmıştır. Çalışma arabada gerçekleştirilen sosyalleşme deneyimine odaklandığı için fenomenolojik desenlidir. Ayrıca katılımcının öznel deneyimlerinin görüşme kılavuzu üzerinden samimi, açık uçlu ve serbest çağrışım ile ifade etmesini gerektirdiği için anlatı desenlidir. Çalışmanın veri toplama yöntemi ise yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme kılavuzu ile derinlemesine görüşme ve katılımcı gözlemdir. Kişilerle yapıla ön görüşmeler sonucunda amaca tam uygun olan 7 erkek ve 6

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kadın ile görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Katılımcıların hepsine kartopu metodu ile ulaşılmıştır. Çalışma sırasında görüşmeler katılımcının kendini rahat hissedeceği mekanlarda yapılmıştır. Katılımcıların yaşam alanlarında katılımcı gözlem gerçekleştirilmiştir. Kayda alınan görüşme ve gözlem verilerin analizi MAXQDA programı kullanılarak kodlanmıştır. Toplamda 361 kod 2 tema ve 14 alt tema altında betimleyici içerik analizi tamamlanmıştır.

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Yapılan çalışma sonunda gençlerin arabada sosyalleşme tercihlerinin başında sosyolojik nedenlerin olduğu görülmüştür. Sosyolojik nedenlerin ise iki tane olduğu anlaşılmıştır. Birincisi tüm katılımcıların hayat öykülerindeki en mutlu anılarının arabada geçtiği bu nedenle araba ile mutluluk deneyiminin erken yaşlardan itibaren iç içe geçtiği görülmüştür. İkinci neden ise arabanın yarattığı uçan halı etkisidir. Böylelikle gençler bir yandan içinde yaşadıkları aidiyet hissettikleri mahalleriyle bağlarını koparmadan kilometrelerce ötede yine kendilerini ait hissettikleri araçlarında sosyalleşebilmekte ve ardından evlerine geri dönebilmektedirler. Psikolojik nedenler bağlamında ise katılımcıların araç içinde dertleşme, derin düşünme, odaklanma, sakinleşme, dayanışma, aidiyet, sohbet gibi ihtiyaçlarını karşılamalarıdır. Katılımcılar için arabada sosyalleşmenin ekonomik bir nedeni olmadığı görülmüştür.

Katılımcıların arabada haftanın en az üç günü, genellikle akşam ender de olsa sabah sokakların تنها olacağı saatlerde hava şartlarını pek önemsemeden sosyalleştikleri görülmüştür. Araba merkezli sosyalleşen gençlerin kendi aralarında ortak sembolik dil geliştirdikleri anlaşılmaktadır. Grup içinde hiyerarşi, roller ve statüler bulunduğu tespit edilmiştir. Grup üyeliği kazanma, etkinlik planlama, kriz çözüme, gruptan çıkarma gibi faaliyetlerin grup içinde gelişen sembolik dil, rol ve statülerle ilişkili olduğu anlaşılmıştır.

Sonuç olarak araba merkezli sosyalleşmenin, Whyte'in (1941; 1993) köşe çocuklar (corner boys) ve köşe başı toplumu (street corner society) kavramına benzer şekilde bir altkültür olduğu görülmüştür. Araba merkezli altkültürler hakkında daha fazla sosyolojik ve psikolojik çalışma yapılması gerektiği ortaya çıkmıştır.

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