

Followup Report

The Finnish 'Senior Dance' vs the U.S. High School Prom

Laura Paatelainen, Spring 2010

The Finnish senior dance is annually a topic of discussion in Finland. Every year it is claimed that the senior dance is becoming more and more similar to American high school proms, yet no research has been done to support this claim. Therefore I thought it would be useful to give an overview of the similarities and differences between the two events.

The idea of the paper was to find out whether there are similarities between the Finnish senior dance and the American senior prom, and whether these similarities are the result of Finns adapting aspects of the American senior proms to the senior dance.

However, it soon became clear that, as a Finnish student who has no connections to the United States, it was impossible for me to write about the senior proms in an objective manner, as my idea of the event was mostly based on films, books and commercial websites.

If my own idea of the American senior proms was based on popular media, then wouldn't it be realistic to assume that that would be the case with other Finns also? In that case, might one also assume that — if the Finnish senior dance has indeed been influenced by the American prom — the influence of the American proms would have been as they are portrayed in the popular media? To find answers to these questions I did some original research for the paper in both countries.

Possible Finnish research topics

The Finnish lukio and how it differs from the American high school? Both schools are upper-secondary level. However, it is clear there are many differences between the schools – for example, the age of the students attending the schools, the subjects taught, extra-curricular activities, the relationship between students and teachers (formal vs. informal), etc.. It could also be assumed that there would be similarities between the two institutions.

Possible American research topics

The influence of the income level of one's family to one's senior prom.

Overall it would seem that the American senior proms have not been widely researched. There are many aspects that would provide interesting research topics. One possible topic would be the influence of the income level of one's family to one's senior prom. Is it automatically so that the children of 'wealthy' families are bound to spend more money on their senior prom? Do children of families with lower income levels spend considerably less money on their senior prom, or do they feel pressured to spend more money on the prom even though they could not really afford it?

Differences between senior proms in small towns vs. big cities.

While writing this paper it became clear to me that high school proms in small towns might be very different from the proms of the large cities. However, due to the small number of responses I got from American respondents it was not possible for me to research this aspect. Nevertheless I do think it would be interesting to find out how the senior proms in small towns and large cities differ from one another. If possible, the topic could be widened to research overall differences between small town high schools and the high schools of the big cities.