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Social Distinction in Children's Peer Groups: First Results from Brazil and Germany

This paper presents preliminary results from a cross-cultural study on peer group practices of preadolescent pupils in contrasting social and educational settings in Brazil and Germany. Based on a distinction theoretical approach and referring to studies from the field of inequality research, school and youth research, the reconstructive investigation aims at the production of social inequality in peer groups of preadolescent youths. In this first publication, the variety of dimensions of social distinction in children's practices is highlighted, covering as varying fields as social categories of inequality, class or gender, as well as questions of school achievement, adolescent development or taste. In the following, the lack of research into social distinction is demonstrated in line with some possible points of reference in diverse fields of study (1). In a second step, the methodology of the underlying study is presented (2) and, thirdly (3) some first reconstructive results are shown – both with special attention to the cross-cultural character of the investigation. Finally, some conclusive remarks are given on further cross-cultural studies in the field of childhood and youth research on social inequality.

1 How Do We Learn Social Distinction? – A Lack of Research on Inequality

Social inequality has many faces. Beside its visible effects and the underlying social characteristics, such as class, gender or race and ethnicity, to which we refer while discussing current problems of inequality in our society, there is a far less investigated dimension of the constitution of inequality. Distinctive practices in everyday life have been known since Bourdieu (1974, 1982) as behavior that constitutes inequality. However, as Daloz (2007) introduces, many sociologists before Bourdieu, such as Simmel, Elias, Veblen (1994) or Goffman (1951) also drew attention to certain characteristics in the way of living, which is understood today as distinctive or distinguishing behavior. Most newer and current attempts, however, refer to the theoretical analysis by Bourdieu (1984), who describes distinctive patterns and practices as cul-

tural practices of taste related to specific habitus and capital formations. He differentiates three aspects of analysis of phenomena of distinction: the social position of an individual, the cultural value of distinguishing objects, and the construction and reconstruction of the esthetics of distinction itself.

Even if this theoretical conceptualization of distinction serves well for studies on distinctive practices, apart from certain fields, such as studies on elites (see i.e. Verba, 1987; Swaan et al., 2000; Daloz, 2007) and the German tradition of life style research (see i.e. Otte, 2005; Schulze, 2005; Richter, 2006), empirical investigations into phenomena of social distinction remained lacking until the present. The little research there is, therefore concentrates on socioeconomic and cultural-esthetic differences in situations of life and life styles, while other dimensions of the production of inequality, such as gender or ethnicity are faded out (see i.e. Cicourel, 1993).

Especially on the field of childhood and youth not much empirical work has been done to highlight processes of learning and development of distinctive practices (see i.e. Reay, 1995; Goodwin, 2003). From inequality research focusing on educational participation we know that different social groups, all ahead social classes and ethnic groups in many countries are sorted together to somehow homogenous groups by unequal educational possibilities in school systems (see i.e. OECD, 2005; Marks, 2005; Motiram/Nugent, 2007). Other studies in the field of educational science show that schools and other educational institutions themselves take part in the production of attributions concerning class (i.e. Gambetta, 1987; Ball et al., 2002; André, 1997), ethnicity (i.e. Solorzano, 1998; Fergusson, 2000), gender (i.e. Carvalho, 1999; Faulstich-Wieland et al., 2004), but also of school attainment (i.e. Mehan, 1992; Helsper et al., 2001) or deviant behavior (i.e. Fergusson, 2000; Bishop et al., 2004). Furthermore, research on student culture indicates mechanisms in peer culture participating in the production of basic social categories and affiliations on the one (see i.e. Willis, 1977; Helsper, 1989) as well as school outcomes and attainment on the other side (i.e. Damico, 1975; Kinney, 1993; Zschach, 2008). But even if these studies give interesting insights into the interactive and institutional production of social groups, they fail to throw light on the distinctive processes going on in the peer culture of children and youths.

Instead, studies from the field of social psychology investigating the development of social attributions during childhood show that children at such an early age as six, are able to securely attribute a binary categorization of social class (i.e. Leahy, 1981, 1983). In addition, it is known that this ability to categorize people develops further during childhood and early adolescence. In this field, there are some empirical studies on other social characteristics, such as gender (i.e. Kohlberg, 1966; Gelman/Collman/Maccoby, 1986; Carey, 1995) or ethnicity (i.e. Williams/Moreland, 1976; Tajfel, 1981) indicating that children learn to differentiate between biological and social

attributions at a very early age. The peak of stereotypical ideas on gender and race has been measured during basic school and it declines afterwards (see Aboud, 1988; Carey, 1995). Cross-cultural studies, such as an investigation into social attributions of children and youths in the U.S. and India (see Miller, 1984) thereby suggest culture-specific points of reference for the development of systems of attribution, as well as differences in the processes of learning to stereotype. These studies give interesting insights into the development of social attributions and stereotypes, but they do not enlighten practices of social distinction *per se*.

On the contrary, some reconstructive studies on peer cultures of children and youths indicate different modes of peer group construction, such as class, gender, race and ethnicity (i.e. Adler/Adler, 1998; Reay, 1995; Goodwin, 2003). Furthermore, dimensions of consumer culture (i.e. Chrisholm/Pitcairn, 1998; Cook, 2000; Martens/Southerton/Scott, 2004), but also aesthetical attitudes and youth practices, such as style, music preference or clothing (see i.e. Hebdige, 1979; Holert/Terkessidis, 1996; Pereira, 2007) seem to serve as patterns of peer culture construction.

2 Methodical Background

The empirical basis of the analysis presented in this paper originates from two reconstructive studies in Germany and Brazil which are based on the same methods of data collection and connected by a similar object. The German material, on the one hand, is taken from the study ‘Peer groups and school related selection’¹, which is carried out as a longitudinal qualitative investigation on the importance of peer groups in and outside of school on school achievement and careers during childhood and youth (see Krüger et al., 2008a, 2008b). The data used for the present analysis is drawn from the first of three waves of data collection in this investigation, carried out during winter 2006/2007. The Brazilian data has been collected in a project on ‘Doing gender in peer groups’, carried out by the author in winter 2007/2008².

Both studies apply a recent approach in childhood research; children are seen as active individuals who participate in the construction of their social environment, and a special importance of the social world of peer groups is suggested (Younniss/Smollar, 1985; Corsaro/Eder, 1990). Furthermore, both studies use the same complex setting of methods of data collection based on

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- 1 The study is financed by the German Research Foundation (DFG), led by Heinz-Hermann Krüger and conducted at the Centre of Education and School Research at the Martin-Luther-University of Halle-Wittenberg.
 - 2 Based on a research stay at University of Brasilia financed by a research scholarship of the German Research Foundation (DFG).

a preliminary quantitative study with 200 students at five schools of different poles of the German school system³ and 100 students at two contrasting schools in the Brazilian school system, narrative interviews with about 60 German and 16 Brazilian children, as well as ethnographic field work and group discussions with ten children and their peer groups in Germany and eight peer groups in Brazil from different social backgrounds (for further methodological detail see Krüger/Pfaff, 2008). As overall strategy of data interpretation within these two research projects on children's peer groups the documentary method is implemented, which aims at decoding frames of collective orientations based on common experiences of people within a certain social context (see Bohnsack, 2003; Bohnsack/Nentwig-Gesemann/Nohl, 2001).

Concerning the topic of the presented study, documentary reconstructions serve to enlighten the basic structure and frames of orientations related to processes of peer group building and distinctive practices towards other peer and social groups. Therefore, the diverse material, such as interviews, group discussions and ethnographic field work, is used to focus on different aspects of the phenomenon of social distinction: While the documentary interpretation of interviews (see Nohl in this volume) can serve to indicate the importance of the social position of the family and the specific habitus of social distinction transferred by the parent generation, group discussions are used to understand and describe the interactive construction of processes of distinction within a local peer culture and beyond. Ethnographic field work might attract attention to certain forms of distinction based on observed behavior in the investigated peer groups.

For the presented analysis, mainly data from group discussions has been transcribed and systematized along different discriminable practices of distinction. The data material included has been traced to a detailed documentary interpretation and is mainly supposed to indicate the broad variety and diversity of practices of distinction in different social settings. Hence, social as well as cross-cultural comparisons remain limited in this first analysis. This limitation includes the last steps of the formation of types in the documentary interpretation. The following analysis is a first attempt to construct a sense-genetic typology of processes of social distinction in the stage of pre-adolescence in two different cultural settings. A sociogenetic comparison of the various social and cultural contexts will not be made yet.

³ For detailed description of the German school system see i.e. Marsh, Köller, and Baumert (2001). Our investigation took place in grade 5, when the children were already separated in different courses of education. Thus, the data collection included a high qualifying grammar school (*Gymnasium*), a compulsory school including and integrating all different courses of education (*Gesamtschule*), a secondary modern school (*Realschule*), and a low educating school (*Hauptschule*). To avoid unnecessary simplifications the following pre-sentation uses the German terms.

3 Fields and Practices of Social Distinction in Childhood: First Results

Even if there is a lack of studies analyzing practices of social distinction among children and youths and related learning processes, some investigations give helpful insights into certain dimensions of distinction, such as gender and sex (i.e. Thorne, 1993), class (i.e. Adler/Adler, 1998; Chassé/Rahn, 2005; Elliot et al., 2006), race and ethnicity (i.e. Daoud/Quiocho, 2005), adolescent development (i.e. Wagner-Willi, 2005) among others. In the following analysis a first systematization of dimensions of peer distinction is carried out and some first insights into their social conditions are given. Therefore, we begin here with the most investigated social categories of inequality gender, class and race.

3.1 Gender and Sex

Especially on the field of gender and sex various reconstructive (i.e. Thorne/Luria, 1986; Maccoby, 1990; Thorne, 1993; Breidenstein/Kelle, 1998), but also cross-cultural quantitative studies (i.e. Harkness/Super, 1985; Chen et al., 1992; Killen et al., 2002) have been carried out in the investigated age group of preadolescence to underline the universal existence of the so-called 'two world approach', which states the separation of boys and girls at nine to twelve years of age. Different investigations have also been carried out regarding the development of gender roles and stereotypes on sexuality which lead to processes of exclusion and stigmatization in preadolescent and adolescent peer groups (Hill/Lynch, 1983; Plummer, 2001).

However, the age-related importance of these two aspects of social distinction within peer groups is very obvious in diverse empirical materials of the present investigation. The vast majority of the investigated groups in the research processes organized by the children themselves were of gender homogenous composition. During the group discussions, the teenagers express their understanding of friendship and spare time activities, school, and without being questioned, images of their own and the opposite sex (see also Pfaff/Zitzke/Zschach, 2008). Predominantly, children often reflected the phenomenon of gender separation in their discussions, whereas, in most cases, the same sex affiliation is seen as a natural behavior, as some German boys state:

“Well, I mean only to stick to the point for example that only boys with boys and girls with girls, that’s just by nature” [Tim⁴ and friend, 11 years old, *Gymnasium*, Germany]⁵.

Two male Brazilian friends give a very similar description:

Am: Because nowadays the schools are more separated into small groups. There are the most elegant and futile girls, there are the girls who are not that futile, there are the popular boys, who have most friends.

Bm: ☺ we also have a group ☺ [...]

Am: of annoying and ugly girls [Mateo and friend, 12 years old, private school, Brazil]

The friends describe the organization of peer culture within schools as gender separated groups with certain characteristics. Furthermore, these characteristics are related to traditional gender roles where girls are sorted concerning their beauty and futility. In addition to gender-related dimensions of distinction, the discourse of Mateo and his friend associate aesthetical and character-related aspects to the categories of boys and girls. This relation draws attention to the intersection of dimensions of social distinction which we will find in many examples of distinctive behavior and discourse of preadolescents.

As documented by the quoted segments of group discussions, gender separation in both cultural contexts during preadolescence is seen as the normal form of social organization of peer culture.

As stated by studies in the field, deviations of gender separation in most cases lead to exclusion of children from peer groups or represent, if tolerated, a high social status of a certain child (Thorne, 1993; Oswald, 1995). At the same time, violations of gender-related peer homogeneity are used by children to legitimate exclusions of peers from common play. This is usually also true for gender-untypical behavior (Eder, 1995; Renold, 2004, 2005). For instance, in a group discussion with 10 to 14 year-old German girls from different migratory backgrounds the non-feminine behavior of a peer is criticized:

Jw: actually she’s really nice but she is (.) well (.) she doesn’t behave like a girl [...] when we met them on the way to the funfair we just ran into her [...] then she went to her father and did (.) well I don’t know (.) welcome him like an old man like she slapped him on the back and said hello.

all: [laughing] [Aylin and friends, 10 to 13 years old, *Hauptschule*, Germany]

4 For detailed information on the German children see the biographical and group portraits in Krüger et al. 2008.

5 The citation of segments of the discourses uses capital letters for the identification of speakers and small letters for the characterization of their sex. Breaks are cited in seconds in brackets, indentations signify overlaps of speakers and a smiley ☺ shows that something is said laughing. Unintelligible or hardly intelligible words are written in brackets and the symbol [...] marks cuts of the cited part of the discussion (for detailed description of the German children and their groups see Krüger et al. 2008). Own translation of the German and Brazilian citations.

This behavior does not lead to the girl's exclusion but provokes the girls to make fun of her which appears to be a kind of deprecation. Especially in the Muslim migratory community the relation between father and daughter is scrutinized rigidly by the girls.

This is very different in the case of a German upper class girl group where the untypical behavior of one girl contributes to assert her high social status within the group.

Yw: What differentiates you from other groups?

Tw: we are simply the coolest gang of the world (.) the wild chicks

Va: ☺ 2 ☺

Fw: └ we have Theo in the group

Nw: └ yes indeed

Tw: Well, I'm a unique girl.

Ow: └ well you have ()

Fw: └ exactly Theo has

Nw: └ exactly you are no girl and no boy

Tw: ey! (throws a key at Nadja)

Nw: But it's true in some regards (.) as good as you play football

[Nadja and friends, 10 to 11 years old, *Gymnasium*, Germany]

Differences like these can also be found in groups of boys from different social backgrounds as well as in Brazilian peer groups (i.e. Pfaff, 2010). Social distinction in those cases goes along a certain behavior in a special cultural, social, as well as gender-related context.

3.2 Class

Most theoretical concepts of distinction as well as scientific investigations of distinctive practices exclusively relate these phenomena to the dimension of social class (critically i.e. Reay, 1995; Cicourel, 1993; Reinders/Mangold/Greb, 2005). Thus, distinction is seen as a phenomenon to construct, present and reproduce differences between members of different social milieus (Bourdieu, 1982, p.62). In the context of youth and school research, various studies refer to a high social homogeneity of preadolescent peer groups and networks of friendship (Hallinan, 1980; Eckert, 1989; Adler/Adler, 1998; Elliot et al., 2006). On the one hand, this is related to the social exclusiveness of certain schools and types of schools. In the present sample the high differentiation of the German and the separation of social classes in public and private schools in the Brazilian school system leads to a vast homogeneity of the investigated groups of pupils. Two examples from two groups of girls from Brazil and Germany show how children from upper class families and elitist schools describe social differences:

Y: Do you have friends in public schools too?
 Af: yes we do [...] in the house (()) In the house are many children and all go to public schools.
 Y: mhm.
 Bf: I don't know anyone
 Dm: I know kids from public schools (())
 Cf: I know one boy, but he left the public school you know now he goes to a private school too
 Bf: I don't know anyone from a public school
 Af: I know someone
 Dm: I know some in my house [...] because my mom is a teacher and she teaches at a public school. Once I was there with her and knew them just as I became a friend of them. You know when I get to know someone I easily become friends
 Bf: I don't [Sarinha & friends, 534-558, private school, Brazil]

As this extract from peer discourse shows, for children from a Brazilian private school it is not very common to have friends who attend public schools. Only Sarinha (Af) who herself comes from a middle-class family admits to having friends in the residential building she lives in – all of them attend public schools. After her statement, the way of dealing with this topic changes, as the children only talk about knowing people from public schools and not about having friends anymore. Thereby, even to know children from public schools needs to be legitimated, as in the case of one girl (Cf), who explains that her friend already changed to a private school and one speaker (Dm) who finally devalues friendship to legitimate his contacts to the children at the public school where his mother works.

A similar tendency of stigmatization of contact to pupils from less elitist schools can be found in a German girl group, who describe themselves in contrast to pupils of a public school in a socially deprived district of their city:

Tw: lets take the Reudnitzers as the ultimate opposite. actually, the Reudnitzers are stupid (.)
 Al: [☺ 2 ☺]
 Nw: [stupid isn't the word for it [...]]
 Tw: well, all our parents work. [in direction of Pw] do your parents work? yes your parents work, too.
 Fw: actually my parents have attended college and university.
 Ow: [mine as well.
 Tw: [Absolutely, my parents studied as well
 Fw: [yours as well? [in direction of Pw]
 Ow: [my father studied languages
 Pw: [my parents didn't study
 Tw: [your parents didn't study?
 Pw: [they haven't attended high school
 Tw: [I see they don't have A-level [Nadja and friends, 1-100, Gymnasium, Gemany]

In the girls' discourse, the children from a public basic school (*Hauptschule*) in a deprived district of the city are understood as “*stupid*” and, therefore, intellectually inferior to them. The reason and legitimation for this construction, however, is not the school and the achievement of the stigmatized children themselves, but the educational and career achievements of their parents. Because they attend a school in an urban area where unemployment is high, the girls in this group understand the other pupils implicitly as children from uneducated and unemployed parents. The social distinction in this group thus reaches into the group itself, as one girl, who is not so familiar with the others yet, needs to legitimate her parents who did not attend high school and university.

These two examples from group discussions in Brazil and Germany render obvious that children use diverse indicators and characteristics to measure and construct social class and to distinguish themselves from others, such as school type, education, parents' education and job status, or city district. At the same time, the importance of social distinction to identify oneself becomes obvious.

Further analysis in this field can unfold different practices and mechanisms of distinction and of addressing and identifying the issue of social class in different cultural as well as social settings.

3.3 Race and Ethnicity

Empirical studies on racial or ethnical distinction during childhood and youth mainly have been carried out in the field of social psychology and research on social identity (i.e. Tajfel, 1982; Phinney/Cantu/Kurtz, 1997; Roberts, 1999). They show, for instance, that even small children are able to identify people of their own and different race and ethnicity and that this behavior is mainly based on emotional and valuing aspects of attribution (i.e. Tajfel, 1981). Other studies investigate the development of social and cultural identity of adolescents from minority groups, such as Turks in Germany (i.e. Brüß, 2000; Merkens/Wessels, 2003) and highlight the importance of distinctive practices for the development of self-esteem and cultural identification in both, minority and majority groups.

More recent investigations draw attention to the intersection of the social categories of gender, class and race, and state the varying importance of these dimensions of social classification for the organization of peer culture (i.e. Adler/Adler, 1998; Goodwin, 2003), for relations of recognition within peer groups, but also for depreciative behavior among peers (i.e. Reay, 1995).

In the present study and its rich empirical material, distinctions related to race and ethnicity are relatively rare at first sight. Particularly, in the Brazilian group discussions, the children barely pronounce racial differentiations,

preconceptions or racist behavior as a subject of their discourse. Only in some narrative interviews stories like the following are told:

“The boys don’t like being with me. This is because they are very prejudiced with the race of people. There was a mulatto boy he lived there by the school, my friend, he was the only friend I had in this grade [Y: mhm] and the boys called him a ‘Cuban cigar’ because he was mulatto [...] And he liked to play football, we played with him. He never cheated on me, never cheated on me, and also he was my only friend until he finally left the school. Up to now they still call him a Cuban cigar.”

[Interview William, 373-382, 11 years old, public school, Brazil]

Interestingly, as in this case, most expressions of prejudiced or racist behavior, the Brazilian children in my sample do not relate to their own experience but to things that happened to friends or class mates. William, whose own parents come from different ethnic backgrounds (Afro- and Indio-Brazilian) describes the discriminating practices of his class mates, how they happened to his friend. In the introduction to this story, he names the race-related preconceptions of the other boys in his class as reason for his loneliness. His only friend had the same racial background as he himself, but finally left school after experiencing racial discrimination. However, the discrimination does not aim at certain minorities as racial groups but targeted the racial mix, which in fact, is the majority of the Brazilian population. Belonging to a certain race seems to be related to a certain identity, while this seems not to be the case for being part of the mixed majority.

In the German sample, only the children with migratory background talk about experiencing ethnic discrimination, as Aylin and her friends tell in the group discussion:

Aw: Or eh, for instance, the eh there are these foreign groups here and for example me and the other girls we are all foreigners and there are these Germans coming to annoy us

Dw: Or for example there are situations we address them because they annoy us all the time and bother us (())

Sw: Or ehm there are some eh, for example which annoy us and say well you have different color of skin (.) I don’t like that (10)

[Aylin and friends, 11-13 years old, *Hauptschule*, Germany]

Even if the discourse on this subject among the girls remains very general and no specific experience is mentioned, it is obvious that the type of discrimination concerning race is the same as related by the Brazilian boy. Skin color for the children works as a criterion to distinguish within peer culture, to make friends, or to exclude. But in contrast to William’s story, Aylin and her friends relate discriminative behavior directed at themselves, even if they have no specific experience to tell.

The perspective of the discriminating German majority can be found in the group discussion of Chantal and her school friends:

Dw: [swallows] ah well (.) and (Sehnaz, Tugba, Büsra, Özlem) (Öz-)
 Cw: well the Turks
 Dw: hello, I'm talking
 Cw: the Turks are so
 Dw: Özlem is- (.) Özlem is ok, though
 Cw: ☺[laughs]☺
 Dw: Özlem is really ok. really, Özlem is ok
 Ew: yes
 Cw: yes Öze- and Büsra too
 Dw: no
 Cw: yes
 Dw: no , the shoes she wears
 Cw: yes [...]
 Ew: well and all annoy ehm Sehnaz also because she wea- ehm has a headscarf
 Dw: and there says (.) the others always say I (.) I also want to wear a (kepi)
 Cw: ☺[laughs]☺ but this
 I: hm-hm
 Cw: now is not anymore. it only was when she wore it, when she started to wear it [...]
 Ew: °but its normal that when she wears the headscarf°
 Ew: °but if she would sit in front of me or like that it would disturb me too but° [...]
 Ew: yes she is sitting very far in the back now
 [Chantal & school-friends, 10-11 years old, comprehensive school, Germany]

While talking about other groups of children, within their turn one girl finally comes to tell about some girls with Turkish migratory background, whom she names individually first. As the discourse shows, the migrant girls are basically understood through their cultural identity and depreciated as such because of their style and cultural habits. Individual girls of this group who are recognized by the German girls have to be identified separately and are not accepted without doubt by the group. Ethnical discrimination here appears to be based on stylistic differences and distinctions but is identified and named in the manner of cultural and migratory background of the group discriminated against.

3.4 Generation

Aesthetic dimensions of distinctive behavior in children and youth contexts are also of certain importance concerning the distinction of generations. Related to this, not much research has been done up to the present, except for the very broad tradition of reconstructive work on youth cultural styles. As already stated by Parsons (1964), youth culture is created by young people in distinction to adult society related to aesthetic and value matters. Diverse mainly ethnographic (i.e. Trasher, 1927; Willis, 1977), but also other reconstructive studies (i.e. Helsper, 1989; Bohnsack et al., 1995) as well as some investigations in the field of political science (i.e. Inglehart, 1997) represent those differences (for summary cf. Pfaff, 2010).

From the perspective of developmental psychology as well as socialization theory, the distinction between children and adults can be seen as an early indicator and step towards the entry into the life span of adolescence (i.e. Fend, 2000). Thereby the peer-group disburdens the family from being the one central agent of socialization (i.e. Zinnecker, 2000), identity building is more based on relations to friends of the same age group than on those with parents and teachers (i.e. Corsaro/Eder, 1990).

Thus, according to expectations, we do indeed find strong evidence for first practices of distinction towards the children's own parents, as well as towards teachers in the children's discussions in both cultural and most social contexts.

Concerning the separation from parents, two central elements can be found in the empirical material. Firstly, as Chantal and her friends state in the following, children do not want to share activities within the peer group with parents anymore:

Dw: well and one time we met in the city, only her, me and Lisa-Marie, because Anna could not come, and there she had we first went to the city

Cw: with her mother

Dw: [annoyed] with her mother

Cw: ye-es

Dw: and then

Cw: [well (.) first they went to the dentist

Dw: well and then we all wanted to enter with her, and she the mother said no no only Lisa and then we had to wait there [...]

Cw: eh but the mother well we both felt stupid that her mother came, because we wanted to meet Lisa alone, I don't want to insult her but she tells her mother everything, this is ok but

Dw: everything

[Chantal and school friends, 10-11 years old, comprehensive school, Germany]

Peer activities, as documented in this quotation from the girl group, are supposed to be kept separate from activities with parents. The children reject an influence of Lisa-Marie's mother on their spare time activities. At the same time, the experience with her and her mother leads to the exclusion of the friend, who is criticized for having too close a relationship with her mother in the following.

A second dimension of the beginning distinction of preadolescents from their parents can be seen in this segment of the discussion of Isabela and Luana:

Bf: whatwe do? God, how many times did we go out of the house like, without permission

Af: ok. No, not me

Bf: at school.

Af: no, I will not go to school either but my mother knows.

Bf: your mother knows, for sure.

[Isabela and Luana, 12 years old, 97-104, public school, Brazil]

The girls, who normally need parental permission to leave the house, test their growing autonomy while going out without asking their mothers' consent. In their discourse, they make fun of their mothers' lack of knowledge, which is also related to their habit of absenting themselves from school. This latter practice does not only undermine their parents' authority, but also their teachers', who are a second group of adults, preadolescents start to set themselves apart from. Two examples from different educational and social settings in Brazil may demonstrate milieu-related differences in the children's differentiation from their teachers:

Af: The science teacher, my God! She's so annoying

Bf: when she comes and someone is on his feet still she writes down his name. well Paula I don't know

Ef: no, but the name = her voice is nerve-racking this Barbara, is she Barbara?

Af: (()) her arms are really strange

Bf: I hate this teacher (()) she only screams, she doesn't know how to talk to anyone

Af: she only knows how to make point deductions::: for us

[Marietta and friends, 235-242, 11-12 years old, public school, Brazil]

In their talk about the science teacher, the girls depreciate the teacher in two ways. On the one hand, they describe her as draconian, when they complain about notes for misbehavior and point deductions. On the other hand, the girls devalue physical aspects of the teacher, such as a "nerve-racking" voice or "strange" arms. Interestingly, the same mode of devaluing distinction can be found with pupils from secondary schools with lower final qualification (Hauptschule) in Germany (see Zschach 2008 for detailed reconstructions). For instance René and his friend state in a group discussion: „*Smith the Crone the ugly she overacts [Rm: she has such such such a hooting laugh] yes (2) and she is always wearing the same (clothes)*“ (GD: René, 209-213). This quote contains the same two dimensions of being draconian on the one and being physically exceptional on the other hand.

A very different way of distinction from teachers, however, can be found in the investigated higher qualifying milieus. Two boys from a Brazilian private school describe their "most annoying" teacher as follows:

Bm: the most annoying? That's the science teacher. [...] she is very demanding.

Am: like, she demands very much from us, you understand? But she doesn't answer questions we have when she writes on the black board

[Mateo and Oscar, 12 years old, private school, Brazil]

The distinguishing criticism of these children does not relate to the person of the teacher or to her strictness, but concerns her ability as a teacher to impart knowledge. The boys complain that the science teacher does not answer their subject-related questions which implies criticism on her ability to explain the subject matter. Similar to the personal mode of distinction in the low-qualifying schools the education-related mode of criticism in higher-qualifying schools has also been addressed by German pupils. For instance

Nadja and her friends [262, secondary school, Germany] state: “*we should demand Mrs. F. give better lessons*”.

As distinction from the adult generation, personified i.e. by parents and teachers, seems to be an important step in preadolescence in both investigated cultures, also certain modes and practices of distinction concerning generational differences exist independent of culture-related differences in family relations and school organization and climate.

3.5 Further Dimensions of Distinction: Development, Taste and Achievement

Gender, class, race/ethnicity and generation can be understood as basic social categories to identify and structure society, and they are associated with distinction since they are used to explain relations of inequality. However, more recent reconstructive work on childhood and youth suggests that further dimensions exist that preadolescents resort to for distinguishing within their peer culture and beyond. Another three aspects obvious in the German as well as in the Brazilian material, are outlined briefly in the following: *personal development on the way to adolescence* as an age related dimension, *taste* as an aesthetic dimension of personal style, which gains certain importance in the context of youth culture and, last but not least, *school achievement* as a specific aspect which has very different meanings in diverse social contexts.

3.5.1 Distinction via Development

Studies on peer organization and group constitution during childhood suggest, that individual development towards adolescence, shown by indicators, such as physical advancement in development, style or morale and behavioral autonomy, must be understood as important aspects of the distribution of sympathy and friendship (i.e. Tajfel, 1981; Adler/Kless/Adler, 1992, Wagner-Willi, 2005). Thereby the research perspective is just as diverse as the phenomenon itself: while social psychology asks for indicators for group constitution and stigmatization (i.e. Tajfel, 1981; Brüß, 2000), more recent ethnographic child research deals with aspects of peer life, such as popularity (i.e. Adler/Kless/Adler, 1992; Adler/Adler, 1998) or peer rituals and school yard practices (i.e. Wagner-Willi, 2005).

Personal development in its various facets can be found in the material of the present study in different contexts and seems to occur mostly in connection with further aspects of social distinction. The following part of a discussion in a girl group for example indicates how adolescent development is used as an indicator related to gender separation and to the deprecation of members of the other sex:

Yw: And with boys you don't really want to deal with them
 Mw: └ Nooo ☺
 Bw: No, not necessarily, ☺ about the boys in our class we just laugh ☺
 Mw: they only played football the whole time nothing else (.) yesterday at the bonfire lit
 for Easter they just played football with small kids.
 Bw: No this was no small child this was Fritz ☺ (3)
 Mw: ☺ 3 ☺ he is ☺ he is just as big (.) he is just as tall and is in the fourth grade
 Bw: └ Well I thought who I thought who is this?
 Mw: └ Well I thought this as
 well the whole time
 Bw: and then hey, this might be Fritz
[Melanie and friend, 11 years old, *Gymnasium*, Germany]

Melanie and her friends confirm the interviewer's suggestive question, which must be seen as a reaction to the girls' discourse, in which boys as playmates up to this point of the discussion are ignored. Here, the girls use two arguments for their distance from boys: on the one hand, boys serve more as topic of conversation and for jokes than as interaction partners. On the other hand, the girls insist on differences in leisure practices (Thorne, 1993) which make interaction impossible. If boys "*only play football the whole time*" they are not considered as playmates. This attribution is associated with the diagnosis of a developmental lag of boys (see also Adler/Kess/Adler, 1992). The example of Fritz, a boy from fourth grade they could not identify at first, is used to make fun of someone – here the girls demonstrate their practice of ridiculing boys. Gender-related distinction here is legitimated and carried out through diagnosing a developmental lag in one of the boys.

Another example relates adolescent development to generation as the Brazilian girls in their debate reflect their parents' concepts of their own physical and moral development:

Gf: my dad said that I can only have a boyfriend once I am sixteen.
 Af: my sister asked to be allowed to have one when she was fourteen and my dad said that she is only allowed once she turned fifteen. She said that it is bad to have to wait for so long. But she as well he will talk that she's not hiding that she stays with the boy because he is very good-looking [...]
 Ef; then well, my dad well, it's I think, well [...] well, my dad he does not stay with me because I live in one house and he lives in another, my dad lives in South R. and I live in North R., you understand [..]. Well, he says he will kill the good boy, without benefit.
 ?f: ☺2☺ [...]

Gf: I think it's like that, my parents think well I have to protect my daughter have to protect her, but they have to know that one day we will grow up and they will not be able to keep their protection and we have to go out in the world and they have to let us go.
 Af: well but for a mom and a dad we never grow up.
[Maria-Clara & friends, 11 to 12 years old, public school, Brazil]

While talking about their relations to boys and having a boyfriend, the girls comment on their parents' limitations of their autonomy concerning romantic relations. The story about the older sister as well as the last expressions show huge differences in parental and self-perceptions of the own stage of development. Especially the fathers' fears and attempts to protect them from too early a romantic relation must be understood as a common experience which is made fun of in the girls' group. As the final general comments indicate, however, no common orientation frame exists in this group concerning the acceptance of the parental protection versus distinction against parental influence in interpersonal relations.

Not in physical regards but in relation to intellectual development, the German girls around Nadja practice distinction from families and children from contrasting social classes:

Cw: But sometimes, some people stop short in front of us and the best is, the children they sometimes look at me awkwardly and ask what songs that are. although everybody knows them like ‚A Mighty Fortress‘ or something like this.

Aw: └ not everybody
some kids just watch TV.

Cw: └ But don't they play it there as well?

Aw: └ Well ehm you know Leo
yes and Leo's mother is language-thingamy therapist?

Cw └ yes.

Aw: and she has children who only watch TV all day and therefore can not speak

Bw: what?

Aw: └ yes! (1)

[Nadja & friends 2, 150-162, 10 to 12 years old, *Gymnasium*, Germany]

These girls, who learn to play string instruments together in a Christian context, during the Christmas Season present their accomplishments at the local market place. Thus, Christmas carols are part of their cultural capital and they cannot imagine children growing up without this knowledge. At the same time, they share the experience of children, who until they listen to their performance have never heard certain songs. Their theory about this lag in cognitive development is quite simple, because it associates social class as well as education with certain spare time activities: being culturally or intellectually uneducated for them is based in a leisure time limited to watching TV contrasting to their own education- and culture-oriented hobbies.

Summarizing this brief outlook on practices of distinction related to concepts of development, it can be seen that they are often connected to further dimensions of social distinction. Others, such as the perception of developmental advance in ethnic minorities or majorities addressed by the girls or the attribution of a cognitive lag to boys in their class in relation to their school achievement could be added.

3.5.2 Distinction via Taste and Beauty

The same intersection can be found for aesthetic forms of social distinction, as it is very important for the existence of youth cultural styles for any given generation to develop their own styles. This type of distinction has been investigated first with standardized cross-sectional studies on youth leisure activities and life styles (i.e. Zinnecker, 1987; Fritzsche, 1997), and later in reconstructive studies comparing different youth cultures (i.e. Fornäs, 1995; Holert/Terkessidis, 1996). Hebdige (1979) was the first to show how young people use and re-interpret social symbols for collages and thus construct new and provocative semantics within their social contexts. More recent studies, however, investigate processes of distinction within certain youth cultures among certain traditions or styles (i.e. Hitzler/Pfadenhauer, 1998; Schmidt/Neumann-Braun, 2004; Calmbach, 2007).

In preadolescence, however, youth cultural styling is not yet very common. Nevertheless, the investigated groups use patterns of style and taste for a demarcation from their peers or other people. Actually, most groups address the dimension of aesthetics when asked for their relationships with their peers. This can be seen, for example, in the statement of a group of German carnival dancers about another dance group:

Mw: F-City, well they have yes actually around our age
Mw: L small oh well
Dw: but they don't do nice dances
Mw: they also don't have nice costumes
Sw: L he here
Dw: L they also don't have a nice hairstyle
Sw: ☺and there is a gay who is part of the group☺
All: ☺ (5)☺

[Chantal and her dancing group, 18-25, 10 to 16 years old, various schools, Germany]

In the institutionalized context of carnival dancing groups the patterns of taste and beauty are fix. In their debate, the girls start with the search for a comparable group with regard to the participants' age and later on, evaluate certain aspects of their dancing from a general evaluation to concrete aspects, such as costumes and hairstyle. Finally, the participation of a boy in the girls-dominated sphere of carnival dancing groups is addressed in the same breath but in another way than concerning the aspects of taste and beauty: it is treated with irony by calling the boy gay on the one and responded by long laughter by the others on the other hand. Next to aspects of beauty, those of achievement (no nice dances) and doing gender (gay) are used by this group of girls to practice distinction from other dancing groups in the same field.

In contrast, another example from the school group of Aylin shows how taste and beauty are used to stigmatize children and to legitimate violence on the one hand and to judge in relation to gender-roles and gender-related behavior on the other:

- Aw: I don't like it when one says well he doesn't look good, I go and insult him or I beat him up briefly (.) this is fun for me, he doesn't have power anyway, ehm I demonstrate my power and eh [breathes] (let) everything out. I really hate this too
- Sw: or eh eh a girl from the 6th grade she wears very short dresses and then she always goes to the boys and throws herself at them very crudely even though they are together with other girls, actually I don't like this too because they could be from her class

[Aylin and friends, 54-60, 10 to 14 years old, *Hauptschule*, Germany]

In this part of the discussion Aylin and her friends talk about the unfairness of some other pupils and of school life in general and therefore practice distinction against the stigmatization of individuals with reference to style and beauty. At the same time, the next expression demonstrates this form of social distinction within peer culture very clearly. Based on the observation of the clothing style of a girl from the 6th grade the girls associate unfair behavior related to romantic relations and judge the girl.

Finally, a part of the discussion of Maria-Clara and her friends indicates the general importance of beauty and taste:

Y: And what is this about beauty?

Bf: ah

Gf: ah beauty is everything

Af: yes that's everything

Gf: one has to use make-up I already asked my mom my mom already bought, one has eye shadow

Af: I have make-up, I have lip gloss, I have lipstick (())

Bf: one has to, surely

Ef: Samira does=all the girls surround Gabriela to ask for her lip gloss

Gf: all the girls have make-up, have lip gloss, to make its its like when we have we are ready and beautiful

Ef: eye shadow, the lip gloss is very =oh for me the mouth has to be the most important for me it's the mouth

Af: this lip gloss is a sensation.

Gf: the mouth has to be the most important for me.?

Bf: yes the mouth principally

Gf: the mouth and the eyes need most make-up (())

Ef: my dad doesn't let me use make-up

Af: my dad doesn't like it either.

[Maria-Clara and friends, 476-495, 11 to 12 years old, public school, Brazil]

In this part of the discussion, a strong orientation towards female beauty and the use of make-up can be found in this group of girls. Even if the general statement that "beauty is everything" remains very general and no reasons are given, the following discourse with participation of all group members indicates a certain perception of beauty. Being beautiful for these girls is strongly connected to the use of beauty products and therefore related to somewhat traditional female gender roles. This orientation must be understood as a basis of processes of distinction from other girls, and, as the last

expressions in this segment show, also from parents insofar as they criticize the girls' attempts to put on make-up to be more beautiful.

Anyway, the present examples show that the dimension of aesthetics with aspects such as beauty and taste, is again related to other categories of social distinction such as gender or generation.

3.5.3 Distinction via Achievement

Since most studies on peer culture have been carried out in the social context of schools, it is particularly the matter of school achievement in relation to peer groups which has often been the topic of investigations. Concerning patterns and practices of distinction some important results can be captured (see summarizing Zschach, 2008): Firstly, studies from the 1970s described peer norms concerning school achievement as varying between school-oriented and school-depreciative and stated an significant influence of those clique values on the school outcomes of the members of a group (i.e. Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey, 1970; Bradley, 1979). Secondly, various studies deal with the popularity and strategies of behavior of successful pupils within the peer group (i.e. Juvonen/Murdock, 1995; Pelkner/Boehnke, 2003; Breidenstein/Meyer, 2004). According to them, good pupils try to present their high achievement as a result of their natural talents in order to avoid the impeachment of being a nerd. Therefore the way to deal with good results varies in different cultures. Thirdly, based on the present German material, Maren Zschach (2008) indicates different ways of communication about school-related results within peer groups: one is to talk more about the achievement of others and avoid the topic of one's own results, another is the leveling of differences in the general achievement and a third is to taboo results entirely. Especially the first strategy seems to be important for the present investigation.

In contrast to school-related patterns, other forms of achievement, such as in sports or leisure time activities, are only rarely investigated. Nevertheless they are of certain importance in many groups, for such who establish school-depreciative values on the one hand and for special institutionalized groups, such as sport teams or musical groups on the other.

Both types of distinction via achievement, school and leisure-related ones, can be found in the diverse material from group discussions with German and Brazilian preadolescents, but for the present paper we want to fade out leisure-related aspects. As an example for school-related distinction René and his friend distinguish themselves from the good pupils who, from the 5th grade on in a highly differentiated German school system went to a high qualifying school:

„two girls from our old turn they have been real [...] crawlers. and now they go to the *Gymnasium*, they always got good results just because they crawled“

[René and friend, 24-27, 11 and 13 years, *Hauptschule*, Germany]

The boys do not respect the former class mates' good results at school as a matter of learning achievement, but as a wrongful preference by the teachers who have been taken in by the girls' polite behavior. In their perspective, it is not personal achievement but pupil-teacher-relations which is decisive for school careers. This point of view prevents the boys from recognizing their own low achievement.

That the comparison of school achievements within the turn is important for the pupil is indicated by two expressions by Mateo and his friend Arthur:

“well, we like to know, we are curious, we like to know the results of the others but only when they choose to tell they tell, if they don't want to they don't tell”

[Mateo and Oscar, 596-598, 12 years old, private school, Brazil]

“there was a boy there who only got good results, so as for being his friend you had to have good results as well, because he thought like, ah, if you have bad results this will have a bad influence, I will not be able to play with you because you will make me get bad marks as well.”

[Mateo and Oscar, 649-652, 12 years old, private school, Brazil]

In the first expression, one of the boys reflects the general curiosity of the pupils within the turn to compare results and outcomes. Everybody wants to know the results of the others. But at the same time he stresses that the exposure of one's own marks is optional, i.e., that who does not want to share, can keep his results secret. With this description, the boys create the impression of a relatively open atmosphere without a peer-related pressure to get higher grades at their school. In contrast to this, Mateo later tells the second story to give an impression of the situation at another more expensive school with a high reputation which he went to first. He thereby expresses the general fear of a decrease in achievement because of certain peer relations. In this point of view, the peer group appears to be a risk factor in terms of school success.

4 Final Remarks: Cross-Cultural Reconstructive Research on Patterns of Distinction

There is a lack of studies on practices of distinction in the field of research on social inequality. The way to construct inequality in daily interactions and social situations up to the present is only rarely investigated. Above all, the variety of dimensions and aspects of distinction have been ignored by a research tradition which mainly focuses on social class as the traditional axis of

inequality research. Furthermore, especially investigations of childhood and youth are absent from existing research on processes of social distinction.

The present paper presents a first attempt to start fill this gap by exploring different dimensions and patterns of social distinction in preadolescent peer groups and beyond. Anyhow, various points of contact can be found in studies from social identity research, school research and cultural studies on youth. These different lines of investigation, for instance, indicate that beside the social categories of class, gender, and race or ethnicity children use further dimensions to organize peer culture and to distinguish their peers from other social groups. Furthermore, they give important insights into how practices of distinction and attribution are learned during childhood and youth and also about the relevance of distinguishing behavior in group construction.

Firstly, there seems to be distinguishing behavior and orientations in all groups under investigation, so they seem to be an important characteristic of preadolescent peer groups. As a second result, a variety of dimensions of social distinction in preadolescent peer culture can be stated. In addition to the categories mentioned above, the presented first analysis includes further dimensions of generation, individual development, taste and beauty as well as achievement. Other dimensions, not subject of this paper, are patterns of behavior and morale as well as norms of friendship. Exploring these additional dimensions of social distinction in preadolescent peer groups must be left to further research and publications. As many examples in the present paper indicate, secondly, preadolescents from different cultures, educational settings and social backgrounds share these basic dimensions of social distinction. Distinguishing practices concerning gender, class, race or ethnicity, generation, development, achievement and taste seem to be part of identity building at the threshold between childhood and youth.

Thirdly, this is also true for some concrete practices of social distinction and some modes to distinguish in different social contexts. For instance, concerning the universal gender-related segregation of peer culture in preadolescence, we found a reflection of this behavior in both cultures mostly in education-oriented contexts. Furthermore, the way of dealing with deviations from gender-separation and roles differs in both cultures along the lines of different educational contexts: it is depreciated in lower and valued in higher education milieus. Related to class, the brief outline of interpretations of two examples from a secondary school (*Gymnasium*) in Germany and a private school in Brazil on one hand, shows a general tendency to stigmatize children from lower-educating schools in both cultures. On the other hand, it refers to the variety of indicators the children use to construct class as a dimension of distinction. As a last example, distinction *vis-à-vis* teachers can be named, which varies very much in the different educational settings. While children from the *Gymnasium* and private schools criticize teachers'

achievements on their jobs and concerning their teaching practice, children from *Hauptschule* and public schools depreciate their teachers on the grounds of physical characteristics and patterns of behavior. These modes of generational distinction towards teachers are the same in Brazil and Germany, even if the structure of the educational system is very different. Other examples could be mentioned showing cultural, education- or gender-related similarities or differences in practices of social distinction.

Finally, a similar situation can be found in Brazil and Germany concerning the intersection or interdependence of different dimensions of social distinction in the practices of the investigated preadolescents. As stated for the example of development-related distinctions which at the same time relegate to the categories of gender and class, various practices of distinction at the same time refer to more than just one dimension. They use categories of distinction as indicators for others. Whether all processes of distinction finally trace back to the sociodemographical dimensions of class, gender, race/ethnicity and generation needs further interpretation and research, and will be explored during the next phases of the current project.

Thus, some areas of interest for further research are already mentioned. Based on the diverse material from Brazil and Germany, the variety of dimensions of preadolescent practices of social distinction can be explored, the interdependence of those categories has to be investigated and the concrete educational, social and cultural circumstances and contexts of the production of those practices need to be reconstructed.

Future research has to outline in particular the development of processes and practices of social distinction during childhood and youth and therefore needs longitudinal research designs. Furthermore, reconstructive and standardized studies on categories and practices of distinction in a cross-cultural perspective need to be carried out to underpin and examine existing results.

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