

3. Methodological part

3.1. Objectives of the study

The present investigation examines young adolescents' conceptualization of human nature in two countries: Germany and Peru. Amongst the various aspects of human nature under investigation, the focus will be on the perception of meaning of life and happiness. The study is embedded in a large cross-cultural comparison conducted by Prof. Dr. Rolf Oerter, and includes three Asian countries, namely Japan, Korea, and Indonesia, the USA, one South American country: Peru, and one European country: Germany.

The investigation corresponds to the category of theory-driven cross-cultural studies, which part from an existing theoretical background of human development, and take into account contextual factors of the different cultures. Universal structures of the perception of human nature are assumed, but are expected to vary significantly due to different cultural conditions (see hypotheses).

3.2 Samples

Table 3.1 and 3.2 show an overview on all 12 sub-samples. The total number of interviews evaluated for this thesis is 306.

Table 3.1: Sub-samples, first point of measurement (absolute frequencies).

	Students	Non-students	Night-students	Immigrants	Indians
German ♀	37	25	-	-	-
German ♂	25	17	-	-	-
Peruvian ♀	25	-	20	5	30
Peruvian ♂	23	-	15	5	30

Table 3.2: Sub-samples, second point of measurement (absolute frequencies).

	Immigrants	Indians
Peruvian ♀	1 (cross-sectional, added to the cases of the first measurement)	18 (all longitudinal)
Peruvian ♂	3 (cross-sectional, added to the cases of the first measurement)	27 (all longitudinal)

3.2.1 Germany

The 104 German participants were categorized into two groups: students (university and university preparation (German 'Abitur') and non-students, who were in either jobs or apprenticeships. It seems sensible to distinguish between different levels of education, since formal education has been proven to have strong influence on the development of thinking

and attitudes (e.g. Strange & King, 1982; Kramer, 1983; Kramer & Woodruff, 1986). It can therefore be expected to influence the conceptualization of human nature as well.

All German participants lived in Berlin, and were between 18 and 25 years old. The vast majority was not married and did not have children. About a third of the German sample still lived with their parents, two thirds were living on their own, some of them in communities or with a partner.

- ***German students:***

The sub-sample of 62 German students consists of 37 women and 25 men.

- ***German non-students:***

The sub-sample of 42 German non-students consists of 25 women and 17 men.

3.2.2 Peru

The 157 Peruvian participants were categorized into four groups: students, night-school students, immigrants, and Highland Indians. All Peruvian participants were between 18 and 25 years old. Since most readers will probably not be acquainted with the lifestyle of the Peruvian sub-samples, they will be described briefly.

3.2.2.1 Peruvian students

The 48 participants (25 women and 23 men) were studying at two universities in Lima: the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, which is the most famous and most expensive university in the country, and the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, which is a smaller, politically left-oriented university. Both are located in Lima. The vast majority of the students was not married and did not have children.

The main difference between German and Peruvian students is that Peruvians traditionally only leave their original family when they get married. Up to this point, they live with their parents. The majority of the Peruvian student participants belong to the higher middle class and upper class. They grew up in a relatively protected environment. Being a student in Peru is expensive, and can be regarded as a full-time job. The university system is different from the German one. While German students are mainly expected to self-organize their time and studies, Peruvian students are expected to attend and to fulfill a fixed schedule, which does not leave much room for choices of preference, self-organization, and leisure.

Exams are taken at the end of each term, which determine whether the student will be allowed to continue his/her university studies. Underachievement implies expulsion from university.

3.2.2.2 Peruvian night-school students

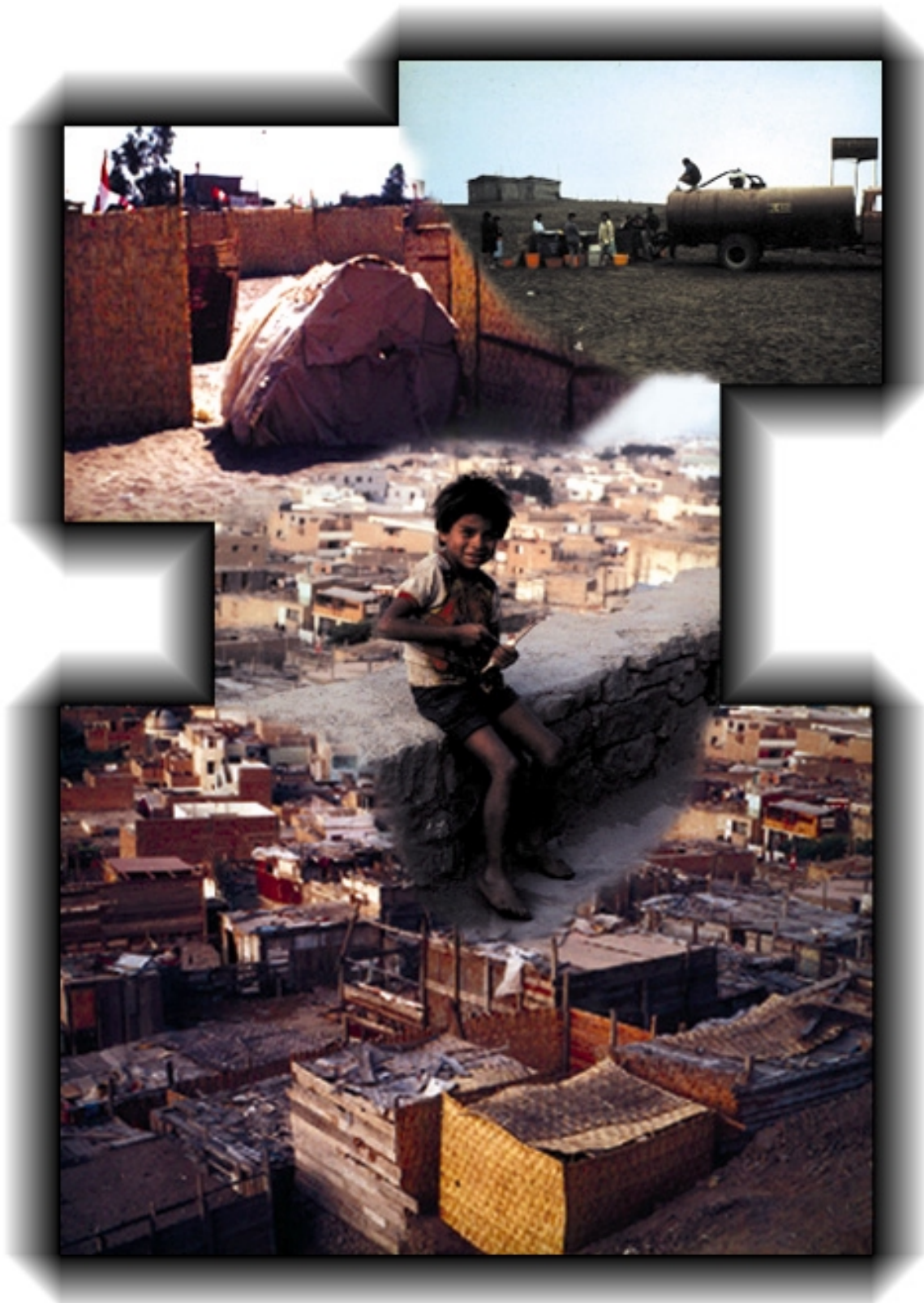
The 35 participants (20 women, 15 men) were studying for approximately four hours at night at the Colegio Bartolomé Herrera in Lima to finish secondary school education. Primary school in Peru lasts six years, secondary school comprises four years.

The participants of this sample come from families with low incomes. They work during the day, and study at night to get the certificate of concluding secondary school education. This certificate would give them access to better paid jobs.

3.2.2.3 Peruvian immigrants

The 14 immigrants (6 women, 8 men) came from the South Andes, and had only received some very basic school education. Some women of this sub-sample speak better Quechua than Spanish. Unfortunately, we failed to record how many years the participants had already lived in Lima. The immigrant sample is the smallest, since the interviewers did not feel comfortable entering the slums with tape recorders and acquiring participants for an interview on human nature.

The participants of this sub-sample live in the slums at the peripheries of the capital. Since the land does not belong to them, they live under the constant threat of being driven away by the government. The life conditions in the slums are very poor. The houses are built from straw mats and cardboard. Many of them do not have a roof. While it hardly ever rains in Lima, the air humidity is very high. This makes the moist, cold winter months of July and August dangerous sources of illnesses such as flu and rheumatism. The families, which may have up to ten or more members, live, cook and sleep in one or two rooms. Water is supplied by a tank lorry, which passes daily and collected in buckets by the slum dwellers. Although various public health campaigns have been aimed at hygienic education, it is still common to neither boil the water before drinking it, nor to protect it from dirt and insects, which facilitates epidemics such as cholera, which is a frequent guest in Peru's slums. The slum dwellers are mainly day laborers, working in jobs such as shoe cleaners at public places, windscreen cleaners at crossroads, bag-packers at supermarkets, etc. The following pictures taken in a slum in Lima give a visual impression of the life standards.



3.2.2.4 Peruvian Highland Indians

First inquiry. The participants were 30 women and 30 men from the provinces of Andahuaylillas and Huaracundo in the Department of Cuzco, South Andes. All the men were

farmers, and all the women worked in the home. Almost all subjects were married and had at least one child.

Second inquiry. Two years later the modified interview could be conducted with 27 (90 %) of the male and 18 (60 %) of the female sample.

The participants live in two villages near Cuzco, in the South Andes. They are not easily accessible, being almost 4000 meters high, but both are trying to modernize. They are building better roads, and introducing electricity and running water, but this is not yet completed. Both villages have access to the radio, and one also has some television sets. The inhabitants generally speak Quechua, the original Inca language, while the younger generation speaks a mixture of Quechua and Spanish. The entire population of the region is officially Roman Catholic, with some rare exceptions, but their beliefs are also still deeply rooted in ancient Inca mythology, which becomes apparent in their rituals and daily practices. Their religious worship incorporates both belief structures, for example when a statue of Madonna is taken from the church for a procession in a bigger village, people will still secretly place potatoes under her clothing, which is an ancient Inca tradition. Their mythology also influences daily life, where they regard some watering holes as 'good' and some as 'evil', and believe that drinking from an 'evil' well brings not only bad luck, but also incurable illnesses, which can even be deadly. All the subjects are farmers, and daily work begins at approximately 4 o'clock in the morning. The men work mainly in the fields, while women's work is more centered around the home, and includes preparing food, caring for animals (usually guinea pigs, chicken, and sheep; some families also have cows). When necessary, women also assist in the fields. Groups of families will occasionally join together to perform some farming tasks collectively. Farming work is usually accompanied by whistling and singing, with the songs reflecting the seasons, and the type of work being done. Community matters are regularly discussed by the men at village meetings, which women do not usually attend. These community meetings are regarded as being equally as important as farming. Men will sometimes leave the village on business matters, or to find work. Men are busy trading farming goods on Sundays, while women will usually only have the opportunity to buy and sell things at special festivals, which only happen every few months. Men consequently have far more opportunity in their daily life for contact both within the village and outside than women. Gender differences are also apparent in education. Of the generation that was interviewed, the men would have attended primary school for an average of five years, while the women would usually only have stayed for two years, and are often illiterate.

Nowadays, most parents are trying to keep their children in school for as long as possible, and are very aware of the importance of education. The inhabitants of the Andes have always had a remarkably hard life. Their very survival depends on the success of their farming, and the occasional bad harvests can lead to widespread famine and death. The hardness of the lifestyle often leads to extreme alcohol abuse (they usually drink a home brewed spirit made of corn) amongst both men and women, which often undermines family life and can threaten their daily functioning. (Baessler & Oerter, 2000).

The following pictures taken in the South Andes give a visual impression of the ethnic group which was interviewed.



3.3 Method

The longitudinal study was initiated in 1996, when all subjects were interviewed for the first time. The second point of measurement extended from 1998-1999. In the sub-sample of Peruvian immigrants, only five men and five women were interviewed in 1996. For the analyses, the transcripts of one other woman and three other men from the second wave were included in the same group, and were not analyzed separately. Unfortunately, no further transcripts were available at the time of writing this thesis. The immigrant sample therefore contains 14 cross-sectional cases. This thesis will only present results from the first cross-section for all sub-samples with the exception of the group of Peruvian Highland Indians in Hypothesis 4. For this sub-sample, the longitudinal data will be analyzed to determine Oerter's stage levels. The reduction to the first measurement of the other sub-samples is due to a high number of drop-out cases in the second measurement, and the transcriptions of the interviews being incomplete at the time of writing this thesis.

3.4 Instruments: The Adulthood Interview

Parting from a constructivist approach, using questionnaires for exploring the conceptualization of human nature seemed to be less appropriate than a semi-structured interview technique, which allowed subjects more freedom to express their views and respond to the interviewer's stimuli.

The conceptualization of happiness and meaning in life was only a small sub-part of the adulthood interview, this is why no standardized instrument like the PIL or the PMP was used for their exploration. Subjects were asked directly "What is the meaning of life?" and "What is happiness"? There were a few additional questions such as "Is happiness important?" and others, which depended on the participants' responses, such as "Is there a difference between goals and meaning in life?", "Is there one meaning for mankind, or does every individual have his/her own meaning?" or "Is there a difference between feeling happy and feeling satisfied?".

The semi-structured interview was developed by Oerter, and includes questions about the perception of human beings such as 'What is your idea of an ideal adult, how should an adult be?' and covers important areas of an adult's life such as job ('Why is it important to have a job?', 'Should an adult keep working even if he/she already has enough money?'), family ('Why is it important to have a family?'), and politics ('Should a person get engaged in political activities?') as well as important attributes such as responsibility ('How would you

define responsibility' and 'Why is it important to be responsible?'). The complete versions of the interview guideline in Spanish and German are included in Appendix A.

The German version of the adulthood-interview was translated into Spanish and Quechua and used for all four Peruvian sub-samples in the first inquiry.

As an additional measurement for underlying worldviews, and for measuring relativistic and dialectical thinking, two dilemma stories sensu Kohlberg were developed by Oerter and included in the interview. In the frame of this thesis, the dilemma stories will be disregarded. In addition, three short stories with further questions were presented. These stories were meant to reflect daily strokes of fate in the Highland communities, and were developed in cooperation with Peruvian anthropologists. They were aimed at capturing some of the Andean worldviews and beliefs. In the frame of this thesis, the scenarios must be disregarded.

For the second inquiry, more than half of the questions were identical, some of them were replaced by others which were intended to find out the understanding of abstract concepts such as guilt and shame ('In which situations do you feel guilty?'), friendship ('How would a person have to be to call him/her your friend?'), and religion ('What happens to a person after his/her death?').

3.5 Procedure

3.5.1 Germany

A German psychologist and myself conducted the 111 interviews in Berlin. We had both previously been introduced into Oerter's structural model of conceptualization of human nature, and trained in interview techniques by Rolf Oerter. Participants had been acquired by posting a notice in Berlin's three universities, and by newspapers' adverts. Subjects were first presented with the adulthood interview and then with the two dilemma stories, which were given to them to in random order. The interviews lasted between 40 minutes and three hours, with an average of 90 minutes. They were tape-recorded and later transcribed. Participation was voluntary. German non-students received a small financial gratification for their participation, psychology students received credits, students of other disciplines received no gratification.

3.5.2 Peru

3.5.2.1 Peruvian students, night-students and immigrants

A group of 12 male and female students of psychology and sociology of the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú conducted the interviews of the three sub-samples in Lima. They had been introduced into Oerter's structural model of conceptualization of human nature, and trained in interview techniques by Rolf Oerter and myself. Participants had been acquired by posting a notice in both universities and the night school, and by entering the slums and asking people for participation. Subjects were first presented with the adulthood interview and then given the dilemma stories in random order. In the sub-sample of the immigrants, the dilemma stories were read to them by the interviewers.

The interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed by the interviewers. The interviewers received a financial gratification for their work. Peruvian subjects did not receive any gratification for their participation in the study.

3.5.2.2 Highland Indians

In both inquiries, the interviews of Peruvian Highland Indians were conducted by two Peruvian anthropologists (male and female) who were born in the region and spoke Quechua. The women were interviewed by the female anthropologist, the men by the male anthropologist. The interviewers had formerly been acquainted with and trained in the underlying theory by Rolf Oerter and myself.

The anthropologists chose two villages, which were accessible to them, and asked amongst the inhabitants for voluntary participation. In 1996, participants were first interviewed about their perception of adulthood and related issues (adulthood interview), and were then presented with the two short dilemma stories in random order. These were read to them, and questions were then asked about what the actors should do to solve the critical situation they were in. In 1998-1999, the scenarios and their corresponding questions were presented between the adulthood interview and the dilemma story. The interviews, which lasted between three hours and two days (interrupted by daily work), were tape-recorded, translated from Quechua into Spanish, and written down by the interviewers. The anthropologists received a financial gratification for their work. Subjects received no gratification for their participation.

3.6 Main questions to be investigated by this research

How universal and how culturally dependent is the concept of human nature? Oerter (1996) states “Human constructive activity is based on biological roots as well as on some basic human experience common to all individuals. Therefore, universal features of human nature must exist” (Oerter, 1996, p. 11). Cushman (1990) holds a more behavioristic view, and opposes that humans do not have a basic, fundamental nature that is transhistorical and transcultural. Culture determines our cognitions, and must therefore produce specific world views and concepts of human nature. He states that “the material objects we create, the ideas we hold, and the actions we take are the consequences or ‘products’ of the social constructions of each particular era. They are cultural artifacts” (Cushman, 1990. P. 601).

What are the cultural differences in the conceptualization of happiness and meaning of life? Maslow (1968), Baumeister (1991), and Köhler (1994) argue that philosophical questions upon purposes in life will only arise once basic needs are satisfied. According to them, in a poor society, such as the Highland Indians or the immigrants, one would expect to find a concept of meaning and happiness which does not go beyond concrete management and easing the daily life struggle. On the other hand, the students in our sample who live under more ‘luxurious’ conditions should address these topics in a broader and more abstract way.

What is the role of education in perceiving human nature, meaning of life, and happiness? Oerter (e.g. Oerter et al., 1996) found that students of all countries in his investigation showed higher similarities, although belonging to different cultural backgrounds, than students and less educated sub-groups of the same culture. There is a large body of literature documenting the correlation between formal school education and cognition (see e.g. Olson, 1986; Kramer & Woodruff, 1986; Lurija, 1976).

Can the assumption that South American countries are more collectivistic than highly industrialized European countries (e.g. Triandis, 1995; Markus & Kitayama, 1991a) be confirmed?