

6. Discussion

The two main aims of this thesis were on the one hand, to identify universal and culture-specific characteristics in the concept of human nature, and on the other, to explore the perception of meaning in life and happiness. Furthermore, it attempted to examine ways in which happiness and meaning might be interconnected. A stage model, developed by Oerter, was used to analyze the data and integrate them into Oerter's cross-cultural research on the concept of human nature. Also, differences in the extent of individualistic and collectivistic attitudes amongst the participants were examined. For these purposes, 104 German and 157 Peruvian young adults between 18 and 25 years were interviewed, and their results compared. In line with the hypotheses and the topics discussed in the theoretical part, I would like to review the following results and topics in this section:

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6.1. Concept of human nature

To measure participants' conceptualization of human beings, three questions were analyzed: 1) how should an ideal adult be, 2) how are adults in reality, and 3) could they change from the way they are to a more ideal state.

6.1.1 Ideal concept

Eleven general content categories for the ideal concept were needed to classify the data. The results show that ten of twelve sub-groups share a common basis of the ideal concept. With the exception of the Highland Indians, the categories '*Mature personality*' and '*Social attitude IIIb*' are the two main focuses of the concept of an ideal human being. More than half of the answers of the ten sub-samples was listed in these two categories. This seems to identify two universals in conceptualizing adults. The first is *maturity*, which refers to characteristics such as emotional stability, autonomy, pursuit of own goals, and rationality. The second is a *social attitude*, referring to characteristics such as taking others' interests into

account, respecting and accepting them in their differences, and relating to them. As expected, education seems to have a stronger influence on the concept of human nature than culture. German and Peruvian students have more in common than Peruvian students and the lower educated Peruvian sub-groups. This can be seen, for instance, in the category '*Open-mindedness*', which is a key category for the four German sub-samples and the Peruvian students, but irrelevant for the other Peruvian samples. '*Open-mindedness*' refers to those characteristics which stress the importance of staying open to new experiences, developing further, enjoying being alive, being flexible, spontaneous, curious, lively, venturesome, optimistic, and humorous. One possible explanation for the negligence of this category in the lower educated Peruvian groups could be that their life circumstances are harder than those of the more privileged sub-samples, and the characteristics composing '*Open-mindedness*' could be regarded as luxurious ones which start gaining importance only when basic needs are fulfilled. Regarding one's spontaneity and optimism as important may reflect an attitude which was developed in an environment where the basic worries of existence, such as having enough to eat and having a secure job, do not exist (Maslow, 1971). The fact that the category '*Job*' is more important for the lower educated Peruvian groups than for the Germans and Peruvian students could support this assumption. On the other hand, one would have expected the difference in '*Job*' between Germans and Peruvian students (mean 4.2) and lower educated Peruvians (mean 14.8) to be more pronounced than it turned out to be. If one's job, which assures one's existence, was of prime importance, it should rank amongst the first categories, which is only the case for the Indians, but not for the other four sub-samples.

One interesting cultural difference is the finding that '*Correct behavior*' is considered as more important for Peruvians than for Germans. While both German students (2 %) and non-students (5 %) find this aspect of an ideal person rather negligible, the Peruvian students (8 %) as well as the other Peruvian sub-groups (10 %) consider this a more important aspect. Consequently, '*Incorrect behavior*' plays no significant role in the German sub-samples (mean 1 %), while the Peruvian sub-samples are more concerned about that issue (mean 4 %). This result could be associated with child-rearing patterns that place more emphasis on conformity and obedience in the Peruvian society than in Germany. The majority of German children are brought up more liberally, while most South American children are raised in a more restrictive form, where correct behavior is an educational goal. This difference is not only anchored in parental guidance, but also in the school system, which is more authoritarian than the German one. Of course, the differences described here are not dramatic, since all percentages are rather small, but they seem to be plausible.

The results of the Indians threaten the two assumed universals, *maturity* and *social attitude*. These categories occupy the last two ranks in the female sample, and only get 5 % and 6 % of all answers in the male sample. Both genders agree that being diligent/working hard is the most important characteristic of an ideal adult, but this is the only striking consensus between both genders. Women need three categories to describe an ideal person: 'Job', 'Correct behavior', and 'Relationships' contain 72 % of their answers. Men need four categories for 76% of their answers: 'Job', 'Education', 'Social attitude IV', and 'Relationships'. The recurrent differences between men and women can easily be explained by the division of roles in the village, which is more beneficial for men than for women in terms of encountering new experiences and expanding one's horizon.

6.1.2 Real concept

Fifteen general content categories were needed to classify the data for the real concept. One of the most remarkable results here is the fact that human beings are mainly perceived in a negative way. This might partly be due to the order of questions, since the comparison with an ideal is bound to make a real person look rather poor. But there is no way of knowing how much more positive the conceptualization would have been if we had started with the real concept, and asked for the ideal after that. It is interesting that the Indians seem to be less impressed by the effect of order, and of all sub-groups perceive human beings in the brightest light. Almost a third of characteristics mentioned by them are positive. This could be due to the fact that ideal and real concepts lie closer together in the Indians' perception than in the other groups. The ideal adult is described as someone who works hard, and adults in the Highlands are indeed forced to work hard in real life, so there is a logical overlap. The other sub-samples, which stressed the importance of 'Mature personality' and 'Social attitude IIIb', are more likely to be disappointed if they look at the adults around them, and it is indeed one of the major complaints that adults lack these characteristics. The category 'Ambivalence', however, shows that some participants find it difficult to judge all people as one group and try to distinguish between them, or acknowledge that everyone has their good and bad sides.

An unexpected cultural difference emerged for the category 'Environment', which expresses the view that people are determined by environmental constraints such as not having the opportunity to develop one's capabilities due to the disadvantages connected to belonging to a low social class. In a society such as the Peruvian, which has a distinct and obvious social class-system, it would have seemed plausible that the less educated sub-samples, who are directly affected by these disadvantages, focus on this matter. But it is only

the Peruvian students and the German sub-samples who take it into account. This could be explained with Festinger's theory of social comparison (Festinger, 1970), which points out that stability and continuity in hierarchically structured societies is maintained because people tend to compare themselves with others who are close to their social rank and are not bothered that there are classes which, compared to their own, are either over- or under-privileged. According to Festinger's theory, groups with different characteristics and multiple interests can co-exist in a society without major conflicts, since close social interactions and communication take place primarily within the social groups, but seldom between them. The fact that Peruvian students and the German groups view it as a central characteristic can be explained by a higher social awareness arising from a level of education which the other Peruvian groups did not achieve.

6.1.3. Change

All sub-samples are optimistic about persons being able to change the way they are. This is a comforting perspective if we take into account their rather negative real concept of human nature. On average, no sub-group in this study, although formed by completely different environments, believes that once people reach adulthood, they are condemned to stay the way they are, but can adopt a different personality and behavior. It should not be overlooked, however, that amongst those participants who did not believe in change, a different consensus was reached which claimed that once an adult has reached a certain age and is completely formed, change is unlikely to occur. So two universals seem to emerge: All sub-samples provide two key convictions: the belief in change, but also the belief in reaching a stage where one is too shaped to change remarkably any more. The circumstances which could provoke changes in adults vary from sub-sample to sub-sample. Male Indians, who regard education as the key variable for changing, reached the highest consensus within one group. The female Indians, who are the most skeptical about change, mention self-reflection as main source for it to occur, which is an unexpected result for this sub-sample. Unfortunately, the interviewers did not inquire further, so this must remain unexplained.

6.1.4 Categories

The system of categorization for the ideal concept proved to be more suitable than for the real concept. This is reflected in the fact that the real concept required a higher number of categories, and that respondents made greater use of the rest-category '*Miscellaneous*' (mean ideal concept 1% versus mean real concept 8%). This finding indicates that there is a higher

consensus across all sub-samples for an ideal vision than for conceptualizing the people around them. Another interesting result was that the categories for the ideal concept were suitable to represent the data of the Indians, whereas the categories for the real concept did not serve this purpose very well. Since the Indians represent an extraordinary sub-sample, some of their characteristics will be discussed in more detail below.

Two categories should be deleted from the classification systems for further use: the category '*Descriptions II*' (ideal concept) does not contain enough cases to justify its existence, and the category '*Responsibility*' (ideal concept) and its counter-category '*Irresponsibility*' (real concept) are not helpful for understanding participants' conceptualization of human nature. It became obvious that the construct '*Responsibility*', used by the vast majority of respondents, bears many completely different connotations. Only those cases where participants did not make it explicitly clear what they meant by this term are subsumed in this category, but it became obvious, at a later stage in the course of the interview, that the personal definitions varied to such a degree that the category contains different constructs, and is therefore of little use.

6.1.5 Closer examination of the results of the Highland Indians

What our etic instrument (the adulthood interview) did not capture at all, is the much more complex concept of human nature of the Andean inhabitants than their concrete answers to our interview questions suggest. It became obvious that our questions 'How should an ideal adult be?' and 'How are adults in reality?' were not suitable for reflecting the Indians' versatile conceptualization of the self as described by a number of researchers (e.g. Bastien, 1981; Carpenter, 1992; Mitchell, 1991). In her article 'Hungry earth and vengeful stars: soul loss and identity in the Peruvian Andes', Greenway (1998) describes the Quechuan constructions of body, self, and cosmos that are relevant to explaining their understanding of soul/spirit, interior/exterior, and human/non-human. Although her article is aimed at enlightening the connection between the self and illness, it becomes painfully clear that the Indians' conceptualization of human nature is so entirely more complex than that which we were able to measure with our interview. Their culturally specific understanding of identity, community, and cosmos comprises worldviews of coexistence of present and past, physical and spiritual, alive and dead, and individual and family, which remained completely hidden in our interview. According to Greenway's research, the Quechuas view the body as inseparable from the landscape, and health as associated to the household and community. Their conception of cosmology reflects bodies and spirits as intertwined with mountains and stars in

webs of reciprocal duties. Encounters with a devil, fights with relatives, the omission of sacrificial offerings, or ambivalence about one's identity that shift over the course of an individual's life span as social, economic, or political circumstances change, may result in loss of the soul. The spirit *ánimu* animates the body, makes people behave in certain ways, and provides them with the ability and will to carry out the specific tasks of their social role in the community. This spirit is not part of the body, but it is essential for survival and functioning; without it a person will experience misfortune, ignore social responsibilities, suffer, become ill and die. Different body parts can have different *ánimus*. The embodied spirits are linked to gender identities and are responsible for differences in character and behavior. Humans exist in a landscape that is alive: every hill, spring, and outcrop of rock bears a name and has a history of involvement in a person's life. The living earth and the stars demand certain emotions and behavior, and have a direct influence on a person's identity. The Quechuas believe that at the moment of birth there are many spirits, both good and bad, waiting to possess the newborn. Once the person is born, a struggle begins that is won by the strongest spirit, which consequently possesses that person. The organs of the body are the repositories of emotion, and will cause illnesses when the person experiences excessive anger or sadness. This matches our data, which revealed that the Indians believe that it is not good for a person to be unhappy since this leads to premature aging, illness and death. Greenway goes on describing the Quechuan ethnotheory as follows

"The correct control over interior states is demonstrated in proper social etiquette, eating and sleeping habits, and the sharing of food and labor in a system of generalized reciprocity that is also integral to the Quechuan notion of self. Any deviations from the norms of proper human behavior can be an indication that a person is ill and has lost a spirit. Bad thoughts or intentions with regard to family and friends can make one vulnerable to spirit loss. The jealousy or ill will of others aimed at an individual can cause fright"
(Greenway, 1998, p. 999)

Interestingly, according to Greenway, the Quechuas consider only themselves as humans, whereas non-Quechuas are classified as non-humans, who function according to different rules. This notion was also found in the Yequana Indian tribe by Liedloff (1999), who lived with that tribe for several years in the Venezuelan jungle to study the origins of their happiness.

In a completely different research context in the Peruvian Andes, Vinden (1996) discovered that the Indians' theory of mind and their way of abstract thought are entirely different from western industrialized people. She tried to explore whether or not thinking about thought and its relation to action develops in a similar manner in all cultures. Her sample of 34 Junin Quechua children (age 4-8) indicates that this is not the case. This is of particular interest for our own study, in which we analyze the data with a stage model that assumes universality in human development of thinking. I will come back to this topic below.

These reports show clearly that we did not capture the Indians' conceptualization of human nature. The question which arises now is 'what did we capture then, if not their complex understanding of human nature?' What we discovered should not be regarded as a wrong (in terms of a different) concept. It is certainly not all-encompassing, but can be seen as one aspect of the concept of human nature. This aspect seems to refer to rules of conduct rather than the underlying nature of people. It seems that our questions were understood as 'how should an ideal adult behave, what should they do, what must they not do?' and 'how do adults behave in real life, what do they do?'. It certainly did not help that we unknowingly triggered a different focus, which was the distinction between younger and older adults, which could have misled our respondents even further, and deflected them from what we really wanted to explore. Another problem was that the original interviews were translated from Quechua into Spanish so I could not work with the original material, and some aspects might have been lost with the translation. Even without consulting different literature we became aware that since our understanding of the culture was too restricted, we did not know the right questions to ask to get to the construct we wanted to explore. In the first inquiry, for instance, we were impressed by the lack of answers reflecting the stage level IIIa and by the degree of concretism, which did not reflect the richness of the abstract ideas we had found in Quechuan mythology. We were aware that this might be a result of unsuitable questions rather than a real lack of a structural level or the ability to abstract. So, after long discussions with the Andean anthropologists, in the second wave we included questions which we hoped would evoke answers to provide what we were looking for. This was indeed the case, but rather as an unexpected by-product than what we had aimed at. We had included the question 'What happens after a person dies?' to move away from concretism and get abstract answers. Instead, and to our complete surprise, we suddenly obtained IIIa-answers such as 'Their personal projects in life remain unfulfilled' or 'They cannot reach their personal goals'.

This highlights one of the main problems of cross-cultural research. If the researchers are outsiders, the dangers of getting lost in the alien culture are imminent. Even our close

collaboration with two anthropologists born in the region where the investigation took place did not prevent us from asking the ‘wrong questions’, and thus obtaining the ‘wrong answers’. Conclusions regarding this danger will be drawn in the chapter ‘Cross-cultural research’ below.

6.2. Meaning in life

For exploring the concept of meaning in life, the categories of Peter Ebersole and colleagues (e.g. Ebersole, 1998) were used. One of the most interesting findings is that our participants did not replicate Ebersole’s well-founded result that ‘*Relationships*’ is the strongest category and ‘*Growth*’ a relatively weak one. In the adult sample (N=96, age 30 to 80) of DeVogler and Ebersole (1981), the category ‘*Relationships*’ contained 46% of all cases, while ‘*Growth*’ contained only 7%. The Indians replicate this finding almost perfectly, with 43% for ‘*Relationships*’ and 8% for ‘*Growth*’. But the German sub-samples only have 12% of their answers in ‘*Relationships*’ and 23% in ‘*Growth*’, and the Peruvian sub-samples without the Indians get 14% for ‘*Relationships*’ and 26% for ‘*Growth*’. It does not become immediately clear why the one group whose demographic variables differ the most from DeVogler and Ebersole’s study replicates their findings so well, while those sub-samples which share a more similar life style do not. From a theoretical approach, it seems almost surprising that US participants, belonging to the one nation which has anchored the pursuit of happiness in their constitution, and is famous for the ‘American Dream’, which stands for the pursuit of one’s own goals, should pay so little attention to the category ‘*Growth*’ and so much more to ‘*Relationships*’. The results of the Indians seem to make perfect sense, showing their more collectivistic attitude – an attitude the Americans are not famous for (Markus & Kitayama, 1991b). But Ebersole and his research group were able to replicate this result several times in different age groups, and also in a sample of 46 Mexicans (Jenerson-Madden, Ebersole & Romero, 1992). Richter (1993), who asked 213 Germans, replicated the paramount importance of ‘*Relationships*’ in an industrialized European sample. In her sample this category contains 63%, while ‘*Growth*’ does not rank amongst the first three categories. Other researchers (e.g. Debats, 1999; McCarthy, 1983) also showed that ‘*Relationships*’ seems to be the most important category, while ‘*Growth*’ is relatively unimportant.

On the other hand, Baumeister (1991) neglects the importance of personal relationships for perceived meaning and concludes, on the basis of his empirical studies of personal narratives, that people who have a sense of purpose, efficacy, moral justification for their actions, and positive self worth generally find their life meaningful. This is more in line with

'*Growth*' being the strongest category in our sample. The approach of Emmons, Colby and Kaiser (1998) make the importance of '*Growth*' seem even more plausible. The authors state that the pursuit of personal goals is one of the main sources for meaning.

Theoretically, the discrepancy with Ebersole's findings might partly be due to coding differences. His coding guidelines were not completely unambiguous. Unfortunately, my attempts to contact Ebersole failed, so I was unable to get more specific coding instructions. It is not very likely, however, that confusion should occur between two relatively clear categories as '*Relationships*' and '*Growth*'. So I tend to interpret the data the way they are: our samples rated '*Growth*' as higher as '*Relationships*', which is in contrast to several other researchers, who conducted their studies mainly with US citizens. That might be an interesting cultural difference which certainly needs further replication before drawing premature conclusions.

Cultural differences between the German and Peruvian samples were found for the category '*Existentialism*', which is far more important for the Germans. This could be due to a higher commitment to religion amongst young adults in the Peruvian society compared to the German society, where the role of religion seems to be fading. Religion can be seen as diametrically opposed to an existentialistic attitude, and might explain this result. The assumption that religion is more important for Peruvians obtains further confirmation with a closer look at the category '*Belief*', where we also find cultural differences. Germans have three times more cases in the sub-category '*Political/Social*' than '*Religious/Spiritual*', and although Peruvians also prefer '*Political/Social*', this preference is not as strong as for the Germans. They only have one and a half times more cases in the '*Political/Social*' category, and have more answers in '*Religious/Spiritual*' than the Germans.

The hypothesis that Peruvian students would be more similar to the four German sub-samples in their answers than to the six Peruvian sub-samples could be confirmed for the four key categories '*Relationships*', '*Growth*', '*Pleasure*', and '*Service*', but not for the remaining categories. There are noteworthy differences between the German samples and the Peruvian students for '*Belief*', '*Obtaining*', and '*Existentialism*', and no clear statement can be made for '*Work*' or '*Health*'. These results make it difficult to determine whether education or culture has a stronger influence on the perception of meaning, but I tend to focus on the four strongest categories in which the similarity is higher between Germans and Peruvian students, and thus supports the role of education.

In the case of Peruvian male Indians alone, Ebersole's categories were not able to mirror one of their focuses adequately: namely the remarkable future orientation of the male

Indians, which is not reflected by the present categorization. Their concern for progress in the community (30 answers) disappears in '*Political/Social belief*'. However, this is no real argument against Ebersole's categories, since a general categorization system will always allow different focuses within the categories. If the instruments are too specific for one group they cannot be applied in a wider population, which limits their usability. The answers of the female Indians could be listed without problems in Ebersole's system.

As expected, meaning is conceptualized in more abstract terms by students and in more concrete terms by the other groups, which is especially apparent in the Indians' answers. This result makes sense, and can easily be explained with the contextualistic approach described in more detail below.

6.3. Happiness

It had been unclear whether the categories for meaning could successfully be adapted to the construct of happiness. Using the same instrument was a necessary condition to compare the results and explore the interconnection of the two constructs. The analyses show that, with slight adaptations of the categories, this was indeed possible.

The hypothesis that Peruvian students would answer more similarly to the German sub-samples than to the Peruvian ones could be confirmed. '*Pleasure*', '*Relationships*', '*Growth*', and '*Obtaining*' are the principal categories for the Germans and the Peruvian students, although not in the same order. Germans rate '*Pleasure*' as higher than all Peruvian groups except the female Indians, who are also very pleasure-oriented in their description of happiness.

Contrary to the results for meaning, for happiness '*Relationships*' is the strongest category in all Peruvian sub-groups with lower education, except the female Indians, who mention it in second place, after '*Pleasure*'. The Peruvian students mention '*Growth*' before '*Relationships*'. Three German sub-samples hold '*Relationships*' as second priority, followed by '*Growth*'. These findings suggest that interpersonal relationships are mostly needed to feel happy, but not to feel that one's life has got meaning. The assumption that interpersonal relationships are needed to be happy is supported by the study of Pavot, Diener and Fujita (1990), who found that people report happier feelings when they are in company of others. Also Perkins (1991) found that among 800 college alumni under investigation, those who preferred a high income, prestige, and a successful career to having close friends and a satisfying marriage, were twice as likely as their former classmates to describe themselves as 'fairly' or 'very' unhappy.

The most puzzling result of the rank of '*Relationships*' is the gender difference of the Indians. Contrary to expectation, it seems to be more important for men than for women. While women prioritize '*Pleasure*' for happiness, men mention '*Relationships*' first, followed by '*Life work*'. Women's preference for '*Pleasure*', in their case composed by statements which describe the joy evoked by parties and alcohol, could be due to a concrete understanding of the construct happiness. It is imminent joy, it is a good feeling, such as laughter, relief from sorrow or worries, such as finding a lost cow, and it is mostly of short nature. Meaning of life, on the other hand, was understood as 'what am I here for?', and the answer to that was without doubt the family. But care for the family might not be automatically connected with happiness for women, but with duties, hassles and hard work. Men, on the other hand, who spend most of the day outside their homes, might be able to enjoy the family reunion more when they come from work and see it as a real source of happiness.

It is interesting that the sub-category '*Religious/spiritual*' can be neglected for happiness, and '*Belief*' is almost entirely composed by '*Political/social*'. Apparently, religion is more suitable to provide people with a sense of meaning, but does not necessarily contribute to happiness. This hypothesis, however, is undermined by Myers (2000), and also by the data from 34.706 participants in the American General Social Survey of the National Opinion Research Center, who reported a higher degree of happiness to be related to religious activities. From a theoretical perspective, it seems to make sense that religion is suitable for providing meaning, although it may not increase the feeling of happiness. The nature of religion is connected to a series of factors which can be intimidating and moralizing in daily life, and even demand self-limitations and abstinence from hedonism. Nevertheless, it promises justice and a better life after death, which might be suitable for enhancing one's perception of purpose and meaning. This perspective could explain the higher recurrence of '*Religious/spiritual*' for meaning and not for happiness.

Again, we find a higher degree of abstract answers in the academic sub-samples, which is in line with the hypothesis.

6.4. Interconnectedness of meaning and happiness

The data analyzed were not able to clarify the connection between the two constructs. Some individuals expressed their views about this link, but these few cases were not unambiguous. What became clear is that 7% of the whole sample believes that the meaning in life consists of being happy. On average 8% of the German sub-samples and the Peruvian

students claim that the meaning of life is happiness, while only 5% of the answers of the six lower educated Peruvian sub-samples express the same opinion. No gender difference emerged. Meaning and happiness were understood as two different constructs.

If we regard the sample as a whole, '*Pleasure*', the strongest category for happiness, appears to be less important for meaning, which seems plausible. Having a good time might be inseparably connected with feelings of happiness, but might have less to do with a purpose in life.

'*Belief*' seems to play a much more important role for meaning than for happiness. Also, it seems to be more important for men than for women. For meaning, 20% of all male answers were listed in '*Belief*', while for happiness, only 7% of their answers were listed here. Women provide 11% of their answers to meaning for '*Belief*', and no more than 3% of their answers to happiness in this category. The fact that '*Belief*' is more important for meaning than for happiness makes sense. All four sub-categories of '*Belief*' are categories that deal with political, social, or spiritual convictions; and while the pursuit of those matters may even be connected with a lot of struggle, resignation, stress, and anger in daily life (thus does not contribute to happiness), the knowledge of doing something that is worth all the hassle can certainly contribute to meaning in life. Why '*Belief*' is more important for men than for women is a little harder to understand. Since it is mainly composed of the sub-category '*Political/social*' it is understandable for the Indians with their specific role division, but we find exactly the same pattern in the four German groups. As it seems, men in our sample are more 'idealistic' and draw more feelings of meaning and happiness from their beliefs than women.

If we consider that interpersonal relationships are needed to feel happy but not to perceive meaning, the assumption that happiness leads to meaning could be questioned. It seems more likely that these constructs operate relatively independently from each other, and that those factors which lead to happiness might not lead to meaning and vice versa. On the other hand, the overlap of factors which lead to both happiness and meaning contradicts that notion. In further research, it could be sensible to ask participants directly in which way they think happiness and meaning are interrelated. This study could not give new insights into that question.

6.5. Individualism and collectivism

It was hypothesized that a) Germans would provide more individualistic than collectivistic answers while Peruvians would provide more collectivistic than individualistic

answers, which leads to b) that Germans would provide more individualistic answers than Peruvians, c) that Peruvian students would provide more individualistic answers than the other Peruvian groups but still more collectivistic ones than the Germans, and d) that the Indians would provide the most collectivistic answers of all groups. To test this hypothesis, previous analyses were used: From the ideal concept, the number of cases in the individualistic category '*Mature personality*' was compared with the number of cases in the merged collectivistic categories '*Social attitude IIIb*', and '*Relationships*'. From meaning of life and happiness, the number of cases in the merged individualistic categories '*Growth*' and '*Pleasure*' was compared with the number of cases in the merged collectivistic categories '*Relationships*', '*Service*', and '*Political/Social belief*'.

It was not possible to confirm these hypotheses entirely. What could be confirmed were the following assumptions:

For the ideal concept

1. No significant differences were found for German and Peruvian students, but between Peruvian students and Peruvian non-students, which supports the hypothesis that education has a stronger influence than culture
2. The Indians provide significantly more answers for the collectivistic category than for the individualistic one, and proportionally more than all other sub-samples

For meaning of life

1. Germans supply more cases for the merged individualistic categories '*Growth*' and '*Pleasure*' than for the merged collectivistic categories '*Service*', '*Relationships*', and '*Political/Social belief*'
2. Peruvians supply fewer cases for the merged individualistic categories '*Growth*' and '*Pleasure*' than for the merged more collectivistic categories '*Service*', '*Relationships*', and '*Political/Social belief*'
3. German answers show a higher individualistic tendency than Peruvian answers, which show a higher collectivistic tendency
4. Within German students and within Peruvian students, no significant preference for the individualistic or collectivistic categories could be observed, but there was a clear difference between these groups and Peruvian non-students, who show a significant preference for the collectivistic categories. These results support the hypothesis that education has a stronger influence than culture

5. The Indians have the most pronounced collectivistic attitude of all sub-samples

For happiness

1. Germans supplied more cases for the merged individualistic categories than for the merged collectivistic categories
2. Germans provided individualistic-oriented answers more often than Peruvians
3. German students show a clear preference for the individualistic categories
4. Peruvian non-students supplied significantly less individualistic than collectivistic answers

The following list summarizes the results which **did not confirm** the hypotheses.

For the ideal concept

1. Germans did not supply significantly more cases for the individualistic category '*Mature personality*' than for the collectivistic categories '*Social attitude IIIb*' and '*Relationships*'
2. Peruvians did not supply significantly fewer cases for the individualistic category '*Mature personality*' than for the collectivistic categories '*Social attitude IIIb*' and '*Relationships*'

For meaning of life

1. Within German students as well as within Peruvian students, no difference between the number of individualistic or collectivistic-oriented answers could be observed

For happiness

1. Peruvians did not supply more collectivistic than individualistic answers
2. Peruvian students show no preference for the collectivistic categories
3. The difference between Peruvian students and Peruvian non-students turned out to be only marginally significant
4. The Indians show no clear preference for the collectivistic categories

Although one list of results is perfectly in line with the hypotheses, the other list of results raises doubts as for a clear individualistic-collectivistic attitude of the sub-samples as predicted in the hypotheses. Therefore, it cannot be unambiguously concluded from the

present contradictory data that the Peruvian culture shows a higher degree of collectivism and the German culture shows a higher degree of individualism, that education has a stronger influence on the answers than culture (similarity between students), or that the Indians show the highest level of collectivism.

I can think of two main origins for these surprising findings. Firstly, we assume that the analyses show correctly the degree of individualism and collectivism in the sub-samples and conclude that neither Germany nor Peru can be regarded as a mainly individualistic or collectivistic culture, but contain elements of both. This would be in contradiction to an impressive body of literature (e.g. Markus & Kitayama, 1991b; Holland & Quinn, 1987; Gregory & Munch, 1997; Díaz-Loving et al. 1995), but at the same time be in line with the observations by Wolf (1994), Canclini (1995), Terzani (1997), and Hermans and Kempen (1998), who claim that cultural boundaries are becoming more and more blurred and cultures more and more hybrid, so that the distinction between individualism and collectivism should be regarded with skepticism. It must not be overlooked that over half of the results confirms the individualistic-collectivistic position.

Secondly, we assume that the categories chosen to determine the degree of individualism and collectivism were not appropriate for doing so. There are especially developed instruments to measure these constructs, usually questionnaires which contain between 100 and 200 items (see Triandis, Bontempo & Villareal, 1988). An example is Hui's INDCOL scale (Hui, 1984), which contains items such as 'It is foolish to try to preserve resources for future generations', 'People should not be expected to do anything for the community unless they are paid for it', and 'When my colleagues tell me personal things about themselves, we are drawn closer together'. These instruments were not part of our investigation, so I had to find an indirect measure to analyze the data retrospectively, which might not have worked. The category '*Pleasure*', for instance, which was responsible for the individualistic result of the female Indians when analyzing the data for happiness, was certainly not a good operationalization for individualism, although it worked for the other sub-samples. But most of the answers that the female Indians gave to the question "what is happiness" were listed in the category '*Pleasure*' because of their distinct preference of parties and alcohol consumption. This changes the usual focus of '*Pleasure*'-answers from an individualistic one to one which is ambiguous as for the extent of its individualism-collectivism. To validate my findings, one of the instruments for measuring individualism-collectivism should be applied, before premature conclusions are drawn.

6.6. Oerter's stage model

A stage model designed to capture the structural differences in conceptualizing human nature, which was developed by Oerter (see Oerter, 1999), was used to analyze the adulthood interviews. The model contains five qualitatively different levels, which follow a developmental logic on the dimensions of increasing complexity with regard to differentiation and hierarchical integration. It was hypothesized that there would be differences in the structures of Oerter's stage model between the sub-groups. On average, students of both cultures were assumed to produce higher levels than the other sub-samples. This hypothesis could be confirmed. It supports the hypothesis that formal (academic) education has a strong influence on how people construct the world around them, and which thinking styles they develop (Olson, 1986; Kramer & Woodruff, 1986; Lurija, 1976).

There are a few unexpected results. First, while the model was perfectly suitable for the data of the German sub-samples and the Peruvian students, it did not prove to be completely adequate to reflect the data of the six non-academic Peruvian sub-samples. An alternative category to IIIa and IIIb was inserted, which was supposed to reflect a collectivistic conceptualization and lacked the individualistic elements of autonomy (IIIa) and mutuality based on autonomy (IIIb). Contrary to expectation, however, these two paths did not present disjunctive alternatives, but were both used by the participants. The question arises: how can IIIa and IIIc co-exist? It could be another indicator of hybrid cultures (e.g. Hermans & Kempen, 1998), implying that we find elements of both individualistic and collectivistic imprinting in the Peruvian culture. In this case it seems surprising that we don't find the level IIIc amongst the Peruvian students.

Viewed from a structural point, the sub-samples do not seem to be very homogeneous, since we find some individuals who follow the IIIa-IIIb-path and others who follow the IIIc-path within each of the non-academic Peruvian sub-samples. This could be regarded as an even stronger indicator not only for hybrid cultures, but also for hybrid sub-cultures.

The finding that German men score higher than German women must remain without plausible explanation. In the German society, it is not immediately understandable why our female samples, who are supposed to have the same chances as men to expand their horizons through education and life experience, and should consequently advance equally in Oerter's stage model, should score lower. One could argue, of course, that traditionally, two factors which facilitate the transition within the model, namely political interest and social awareness, are still more commonly expected in men. It would be possible to test this assumption with the present data since the adulthood interview includes questions concerning political

engagement (see Appendix A). However, it was not analyzed within the frame of this thesis, as this was not the focus of my study.

Peruvian students obtained higher overall-scores than German students. Assuming a more collectivistic attitude of the Peruvian participants, we would not expect them to have their strongest focus on the individualistic category IIIa, which is the strongest focus of the German respondents. Since we are dealing with an academic sample, we would not expect them to score lower than IIIa either. This implies that they must score higher than IIIa, and thereby surpass the Germans, which they indeed do. We should note that German students also have one main focus on the highest category IV, while Peruvian students also have a considerable number of cases in IIIa, but there is a significant group-difference in favor of the Peruvians. If one tries to explain this result arguing from a non-individualistic-collectivistic point of view, it seems somewhat more difficult to understand, since both student-samples must, on average, be regarded as privileged in terms of education and life conditions, and should therefore reach higher stage levels equally easily.

The Indians' results deserve special attention. As one would have expected, in both waves men reach higher levels, which can be explained with the labor division amongst the Andean villagers, leaving men in charge of making decisions regarding family and community matters, working to provide food and money for the family, and leaving the village as well as getting in contact with others for trade. Women, on the other hand, are limited to the care of the children and household activities, which provide fewer stimuli to advance in Oerter's model. In addition, boys usually attend primary school somewhat longer than girls, which leads to the assumption that our male participants were also privileged with a higher degree of education.

This brings up once more the role of education in general. In comparison to the other sub-samples, the lower overall-scores of the Indian sub-samples could be explained with the lack of schooling. We found less indicators of abstract thought in the Andean samples. The higher level of abstract thought, evoked by school education, is regarded by some contextualists (e.g. Miller, 1999) as detrimental for fulfilling daily chores in mostly illiterate societies. Rogoff (1990) observes that in the second half of the eighteenth century, a tribe of North American Indians refused schooling for their children, which was offered to them by commissioners from Virginia, since it prevented them from being fully functioning members of the Indian's society. An Indian leader explained that those of the children who had been instructed returned "ignorant of every means of living in the woods; unable to bear either cold

or hunger; knew neither how to build a cabin, take a deer, or kill an enemy, neither fit for hunters, warriors, or counselors, they were totally good for nothing” (Drake, 1834, p. 25).

Seventy years ago, the soviet psychologist Lurija (1986) and his research team also investigated the changes in cognition and behavior through schooling in nomad children of Uzbekistan and Kirgisia, confirming its enormous influence and its effect of breaking with established traditions.

Judging from the answers of the male Indians, it becomes very clear that our sub-sample considers the role of education as important and extremely necessary for themselves and their children; an attitude which goes hand in hand with their general orientation towards progress and modernization, which does indeed obstruct the traditional farmer values, as often seen in the generation conflict which was highlighted as a central theme by our respondents.

Unfortunately, we failed to collect the demographic information of how many years of schooling each respondent had had, which did not give us the option of correlating the years of schooling with abstract thought. But since a high level of concretism and high lack of abstraction were found in almost every participant, we can assume that the usual few years of primary education might not have led to significant differences in abstract thinking, but would rather be expressed in different variables. One of those could be a higher political awareness, which men can cultivate more since they are more usually able to read than women, and have more interpersonal exchange when they visit other villages.

Although the female focus on the category II and the male focus on the category IIIc in both waves seem plausible, it must not be under-rated that single male individuals reached the highest levels of the model, which suggests that formal school education is not a necessary, just a facilitating condition for cognitive development. Only one woman in the female sample reached the highest female level of IIIa-IIIb in both waves. The alternative collectivistic categories IIIc or IIIa & IIIc are also only used by one single individual per category in both waves.

The longitudinal data show that from 27 male subjects, 13 (48%) improved, 12 (44%) remained at the same level, and 2 (7%) decreased. From 18 female subjects, 11 (61%) improved, 5 (28%) remained at the same level, and 2 (11%) decreased. According to Oerter (personal communication, January 20, 2001), being a participant in the first interview can be regarded as a cognitive treatment, an intervention that stimulates reflection and can cause a stage-transition. This would explain the finding that more than half of the Indian sample obtained higher levels in the second wave. It would be premature to conclude, however, that the higher stages are solely the product of cognitive changes. We had inserted a series of

new questions into the second interview, while we excluded others. There is no way of knowing whether we would have obtained more identical overall-scores if our two instruments had been identical in both inquiries.

The 7% male and 11 % female cases which decreased in stage levels present an implicit violation of the conditions of stage models, which assume an irreversibility of the stages (see Hayes, 1998). Again, taking into account that we changed our instrument and that we are dealing with a relatively small number, only 9% of the whole sample, which decreased, any conclusion from this finding would be rather tenuous.

More research in traditionally individualistic and traditionally collectivistic cultures would be useful to find a way of integrating our ‘hybrid findings’ and shed some light on the co-existence of IIIa and IIIc, maybe stimulating an integration of both paths into the structural model of understanding human nature. To facilitate this insight, applying the adulthood interview could be combined with looking for sociological studies within these cultures which could provide further useful data regarding the integration of individualistic and collectivistic elements.

6.7. Cross-cultural research

“The probability of finding a difference between any two culturally diverse groups with any psychological measurement procedure is rather high, and the information value of such a result is correspondingly low.”

Poortinga & Malpass, 1986, p.19

This devastating quotation by two of the most renowned cross-cultural psychologists refers to one of the major problems in cross-cultural psychology. How must and how must we not interpret the differences we encounter in two cultures with our research instruments? Some of them may be deeply rooted in the culture and extend to cognition, emotion, and behavior (‘real’ differences between cultures based on their different contexts), others may only reflect superficial conventions which are unrelated to underlying psychological processes (‘overrated’ differences, see also van de Vijver & Leung (2000)), and a third group may merely reflect that the (usually etic) research instruments produce different results in different cultures without allowing insight in the underlying or resulting psychological processes of the variables under investigation (‘artificial’ differences).

Another dangerous temptation described by Vivjer & Leung (2000) is the overgeneralization of findings. Most studies have relatively small samples which are frequently chosen more for convenience of the researchers than for criteria of representation and appropriateness. Similarly, the instruments are often too short and do not always cover adequately the underlying construct (Embretson, 1983). These factors can lead to a poor replicability, and sometimes produce conflicting results.

The most obvious and easy to replicate cultural differences (mostly between highly distinct populations) are annoyingly those which are most difficult to interpret. This phenomenon is called the *interpretation paradox* (Vivjer & Leung, 2000). In our case of the different stage levels for German students and Peruvian Indians, for example, we have to ask ourselves, how do we interpret the high levels of the students and the low levels of the Indians? The outcome had been rather predictable and would certainly be replicable, but if we want to go beyond the superficial statement that the scores differ because the groups have different cultural backgrounds, we find ourselves in such an almost endless pool of possible variables, which might be responsible for the outcome, that a whole series of additional studies would be needed to identify those which caused the differences, before we could attempt to draw any conclusions. Academic subjects from a highly industrialized western country differ from illiterate Highland farmers in so many respects, that it seems almost impossible to identify the real cause or the conglomerated real causes for the observed differences. Even the instrument, our adulthood interview, could partly have caused the higher levels of the Germans and lower levels of the Indians since it does not consider the possibly different verbal skills of both samples. Contextualists have repeatedly pointed out that using verbal mediation to solve problems is much more prevalent in the western industrialized world (Miller, 1999). Kearins (1981) compared Australian aboriginal children of desert origin and European Australian children on visual spatial memory tasks. The aboriginals, who had performed poorly on classical verbal intelligence tests, did significantly better than whites in these tasks. Kearins (1986) also found that when day care children (4 to 4.5 years of age) were asked to indicate by pointing the direction to their home, 58% of the aboriginal children were correct while none of the university day care center children could do this, and only 5% of those in an urban blue collar center, while the aboriginal children were significantly worse at knowing their addresses, ages, or at counting than were the white children. The aboriginal children were also significantly better at the kindergarten game of fishing (catching artificial fish), which required speed and manual dexterity. Oerter's stage model does not capture those aspects of development which are unrelated to language, and might therefore draw a poorer

picture of the Indians' understanding of human nature than we would find with a non-verbal instrument.

Rogoff (1990) addresses the issue of differences between cultures claiming that

“The purpose of thinking is to act effectively, activities are goal directed (tacitly or explicitly), with social and cultural definition of goals and means of handling problems. The structure of problems that humans intend to solve, the knowledge base that provides resources, and the strategies for solution that are considered more or less effective or sophisticated are situated in a social matrix of purposes and values. The problems that are posed, the tools that are available to solve them, and the tactics that are favored build on the socio-cultural definitions and available technologies with which an individual functions.” (Rogoff, 1990, p.6)

This view is suitable to explain the high number of answers referring to concrete activities in the Indian sub-samples and their lower overall-scores on Oerter's levels. I am especially inclined to believe that 'the structure of problems that humans intend to solve' is of crucial importance, and differs remarkably in our samples. German students are more than likely to have thought, at a previous stage of their life, about the issues brought up by our interview. Occasional remarks, such as 'I have often asked myself why adults are so unhappy in Germany' or 'We have dealt with the meaning of life in school' and similar others, support this notion. An additional, indirect indicator of the prevalence of these matters is the researchers' interest in conducting a series of studies on the concept of human nature. It remains doubtful whether Peruvian Highland farmers were equally frequently confronted with these questions, or if doing so would not have contributed to their dealing with daily life. Viewed as such, Oerter's assumption that the first interview can be regarded as a cognitive treatment and evoke higher levels in the second wave, seems perfectly plausible.

Another general problem of cross-cultural psychology, which became apparent in our investigation, was the emic-etic-dilemma. For instance, categorizing the answers to the question what made a life meaningful turned out to be problematic in the sub-sample of male Peruvian Highland Indians. Not surprisingly, Ebersole's instrument, developed and tested in samples belonging to a highly advanced, industrialized and privileged society, was not the most suitable one for the Andean farmers. There are two alternatives to solve this problem: Following an emic approach, I reject Ebersole's instrument and develop a new one which will do more justice to the data of my particular group. By doing so, I have to give up the

comparability with other groups and all results will only be valid for my specific sub-sample or other samples which resemble that one in demographic aspects. The scientific gain (insight into human's concept of meaning in life) is hugely restricted. Following an etic approach, I force the Andean data into the US-American instruments, obtain comparability, but have to accept that the information value decreases and I do not obtain insight in the Andean reality and their main focus of a meaningful life, as was the case with the future orientation, which could not be reflected through the etic instrument. I followed both approaches in parallel, which might be a good compromise for single studies, but certainly does not present a sensible solution for further research. An important lesson was learned regarding the close collaboration with local experts when exploring a (partly) unknown culture. It might not only be essential for discussing the constructs with colleagues of the culture under investigation, but also to use whatever related sources might be available to get as much insight as possible into the unknown territory.

The problems this study encountered can serve as an example for risks which abound when comparing cultures. In the past decades, psychological research has repeatedly led to painful misunderstandings, above all when dealing with constructs such as intelligence, and when interpreted by the lay public. An impressive historical overview of counter-positions dealing with this matter can be found on the Internet at <http://www.crispian.demon.co.uk/q24.htm>. Psychological findings can be interpreted without taking into account how they were gained and how they must be interpreted, and this can lead to erroneous conclusions. This might result in perilous concepts of laypersons, expressed for example by the 1986 Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone, who claimed that "The level of knowledge in the United States is lower than in Japan due to the considerable number of blacks, Puerto Ricans and Mexicans". These concepts, which can grow on the soil of 'scientific racism' (Leslie, 1990), may tempt others to reject cross-cultural studies in general, and make Weber's point of view understandable, claiming that the appeal to national character is generally a mere confession of ignorance (Weber, 1930/1958). Put in a more psychological manner, Cole et al. state that "Cultural differences in cognition reside more in the situations to which particular cognitive processes are applied than in the existence of a process in one cultural group, and its absence in another" (Cole et al., 1971, p. 184). To conclude this chapter, I would like to quote Berry, who offers the counter-position to Jahoda and Malpass' quotation which I presented at the beginning of the chapter, stating that

"It appears that earlier views that sought to put the blame for unequal test scores primarily on the tests have lost much of their momentum (...) [A] serious concern about cultural bias has become and will remain an inherent aspect of assessment, just as there is continuing concern for validity and the establishment of norms (...) [However] it is now generally recognized that within a society intergroup differences in test scores often are a reflection of a real state of affairs" (Berry et al., 1992, p. 8).

6.8. Conclusions

My hypotheses had mainly been of explorative nature, with few hypothesis-testing elements. This was due to the contrasting positions found in literature, which differ in their assumptions about how universal and how culturally dependent the concept of human nature is (e.g. Cushman, 1990 vs. Oerter, 1996), and to the lack of studies investigating the meaning of life in Peru. I found both universals and cultural specific elements for the concept of human nature, meaning of life, and happiness. The assumption that Peru as a South American country is more collectivistic than the more industrialized European country Germany could not be confirmed. The two cultures contain both individualistic and collectivistic elements. It must not be forgotten that an indirect measure of individualism-collectivism was used, and that the results might have been different if the appropriate questionnaires had been applied. Oerter's stage model produced interesting inter-and-intra-group differences, which gave room for the discussion on how to interpret cross-cultural differences. His stage model was modified by including a collectivistic category IIIc. The attempt to deal with methodological problems, often described in cross-cultural psychology, lay in trying to follow an emic and an etic categorization in parallel, and by special care when interpreting the findings.