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Adaptation and resistance in adolescence: A case study of teenagers imagining adulthood

Andrea Kleeberg-Niepage, Anton Perzy, Sandra Rademacher and Michael Tressat

Abstract

To ask young people about their prospects of life and ideas of their future is quite common within in the field of Western youth research. For many years, the usually quantitative studies show that—at least in Germany—many adolescents seem to be rather pragmatic and very well adjusted to the expectations of mainstream society. Such results regularly lead to both relief and disappointment. Politicians are relieved, for such outcomes seem to imply neither an oncoming uprising nor the necessity for social changes. Researchers, on the other hand, are rather disappointed because the Western conceptions of youth and adolescence postulate and demand a certain resistance against and challenging of the worlds of adults through the young generation.

When we got the first results from our own, qualitative and cross-cultural, study in which we asked children and young people - especially in Ghana and Germany - to imagine their lives as adults we actually felt disappointed, too. In interviews and essays, the German participants - on whom we will focus here - expressed no worries, irritations, or dissatisfaction, and no resistance to social conditions, with the exception of some criticism of school and school learning. Particularly relevant, their essays revealed almost standardized life plans centered on choosing a career, engaging in everyday work, starting a family, building a house, enjoying leisure time, and traveling. Instead of complaining about today's youth we took our disappointment as a source for challenging our own assumptions about youth and adolescence and for a deeper analysis of the data. In this paper, we will, first, reflect on the extent to which adaptation and resistance is particularly characteristic of adolescence and whether it involves political resistiveness. Second, we analyze those few examples in our German sample that - at least on the manifest level - resist rather than conform to social expectations and norms of a "good" future. By reconstructing the latent meanings behind this manifest resistiveness, we work out its modus operandi thereby drawing on Klaus Holzkamp's

distinction between restrictive and generalized agency. Finally, we discuss the significance of these findings for youth research.

Keywords

adolescence (young people, youth), adaptation, resistance, images of the future, latent meanings, restrictive and generalized agency

1. Introduction

In developmental psychology and education, adolescence is constructed as the life phase in which the most fundamental biological, psychological, and social changes that an individual can experience over the course of life occur (Silbereisen & Weichold, 2012; Oerter & Dreher, 2008; Ecarius, 2009). These changes resp. transformations are viewed as the cause of various psychosocial or identity crises (e.g. Erikson, 1958). Additionally, there are more frequent violations of social taboos and norms during adolescence in comparison to other life stages (Moffit, 1993; Raithel, 2011; Greve & Montada, 2008). They are often ascribed a temporary character, since in most cases the deviant behavior diminishes when adolescence ends.

Due to their changing social status, young people are generally expected to challenge and question the existing order—and, by extension, the adults within that order—at least to a socially acceptable extent (Greve & Montada, 2008; Silbereisen & Weichold, 2012). In Germany, this topic is often accompanied by a reference to the so-called 1968 movement, which was partially student-led and in fact brought about significant changes in West German society.

In contrast to the social changes of that time, which were mainly driven by the younger generation, in recent years repeated findings in quantitative research focusing on adolescence point out that youth today espouse attitudes, values, and visions of the future that tend to be pragmatic and that they desire to adapt to existing social conditions (e.g. Shell Deutschland Holding, 2010, 2015; Sturzbecher et al., 2012)—something that researchers certainly consider unsettling. At the same time and somewhat contradictory, the results of the 17th Shell Youth Study of 2015 also show a regained interest of the younger generation in politics (Shell Deutschland Holding, 2015). How this new interest will play out, remains to be seen. Nevertheless, the data seems to indeed suggest a renewed dynamism among a younger generation that had formerly been labeled “pragmatic.”

Specific expectations of youth can also be found in Frigga Haug’s qualitative work on visions of the future of young people. In the 1980s, analyzing the essays presented in “A Day in My Life in 20 Years” written by 11-to-15-

year-olds living in Germany, she was both surprised and disappointed by the envisioned scenarios (Haug, 1991). Despite years of wide-ranging discussion on feminist ideas, most girls seemed to dream of having and caring for a traditional nuclear family, while boys imagined themselves exploring the world (almost always without mentioning a family).¹ Twenty years later, Frigga Haug and Ulrike Gschwandtner replicated the study (Haug & Gschwandtner, 2006) with essays from 13-to-18-year-old adolescents in Germany and Austria.² Again, the authors looked for signs of the influence from feminist ideas, anti-war movements, and the fundamental social changes taking place during the economic crisis of the 1990s. But here again, they found few essays addressing social, economic, and ecological problems or engaging with the emancipatory thoughts of earlier generations (such as the so-called “generation of 1968”).

On the contrary, the essays revealed ideas of a life that is, in equal measure, individualized, adapted, and consumption-oriented, one which seemed detached from those social conditions of significance to the authors of the study. The researchers, again disappointed, concluded that these findings pointed to a need for action and gave the primary and secondary school system, an “*institution that assumes responsibility for collective democratic processes*”³ (ibid., p. 8), an essential role in overcoming the apparent split between individual and social life in children and adolescents, or, one might say, in teaching them resistive thinking.⁴ Given the multifarious criticism of school as an institution focused on teaching individuals to adapt to rather than resist existing social power relations, thereby indirectly reproducing the existing social inequalities (e.g. Bernfeld, 1973; Dreeben, 1968; Jackson, 1968; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1971; Foucault,

¹ The survey took place in secondary general schools (“Hauptschulen”) in what was then West Berlin. In Germany, degrees from lower secondary schools rank lowest with respect to students’ chances on the training and employment market. Thus, milieu specificity has been recorded here, which might not have been the case in schools with higher qualifications.

² This time, teenagers were interviewed at different types of schools. However, the authors did not systematically investigate whether the difference in school types caused any of the differences in the teenagers’ visions of the future. They primarily focused on gender differences between the visions of boys and girls.

³ All quotations from German references are translated by the authors of this article.

⁴ Haug and Gschwandtner (2006) understand the emerging split in the essays between a social life with a variety of problems, such as unemployment, conflicts, and pollution of the environment, and a private life that can be individually steered, as the dominant strategy through which the young interviewees deal with their visions of the future. They view a strategy which does not relate social processes to personal life as “rather convenient equipment of humans for a neoliberal policy” (p. 15) or—so one could phrase—as an adaptation strategy. According to this understanding, resistiveness presupposes overcoming this split and turning away from individualizing social problems.

1977; Holzkamp, 1995; Menzel & Rademacher, 2012), this conclusion is remarkable. In view of such criticism, research should also address the significance of the school system as the specific context where young people produce their visions of the future (see also sections 3a and 4 in this article).

Similar results initially arose from our own cross-cultural research, in which we asked children and young people—especially in Ghana and Germany—to imagine their lives as adults. In interviews and essays, the German participants expressed no worries, irritations, or dissatisfaction, and no resistance to social conditions, with the exception of some criticism of school and school learning. Particularly relevant, their essays revealed almost standardized life plans centered on choosing a career, engaging in everyday work, starting a family, building a house, enjoying leisure time, and traveling. By contrast, the Ghanaian youth were able to clearly express their displeasure with social conditions and injustices, especially in their own country. At the same time, they showed few signs of resistance but rather expressed the subjects' conviction that they would be able to overcome these difficulties through hard work and strong faith in God (Kleeberg-Niepage, 2017).

In this article, we begin by reflecting on the extent to which adaptation and resistance is particularly characteristic of adolescence (and not of adults or children), and whether it involves the political resistiveness Haug and Gschwandtner (2006) were hoping for. Looking at the essays in our German sample, we then analyze the few examples that—at least on the manifest level—resist rather than conform to the social expectations and norms surrounding accepted definitions of “good” adulthood or a “good” future,⁵ either within a typical narrative of the future, or in relation to the research task at hand. By reconstructing the latent meanings behind this manifest resistiveness, we work out its *modus operandi* and discuss its significance for youth research.

2. Youth between adaptation and resistance

2.1 Youth as a cohort

The span of life we call “youth” today, though conceptualized differently at different times, has been viewed across historical periods and cultures as the period of life when adolescents experience and navigate especially serious upheavals or crises. Traditional and modern rituals for easing young peoples'

⁵ Thereby, we do not imply that in the essays apparently adapted at the manifest level, resistance cannot be reconstructed at the latent level, but we will not go any further here.

transition from childhood to adulthood, and considerations and recommendations for the handling of adolescents in educational institutions, especially with regard to morality or to biopsychosocial models of development, are consistent with a socio-cultural response deemed necessary to these upheavals, albeit based on different theories of reference. Apparently, young people cannot become adults who both preserve society and further its development without such a response.

Until the middle of the 20th century, such a reaction—at least in the West—focused mainly on the external guidance, education and adaptation of the adolescent to socially and culturally desirable social roles. Finally, with the development tasks formulated by Havighurst (1948), the active role of human beings in this development and socialization process came into view. For adolescence, Havighurst formulated tasks such as achieving emotional independence from parents and other adults, preparing for a career and for marriage and family life, or pursuing socially responsible behaviors.

At the same time, individual and social prerequisites have been postulated for the mastering of these developmental tasks, which differ historically and culturally. At the individual level, for example, psychological models of cognitive development (Inhelder & Piaget, 1980) state the basic possibility of coping with adolescence. Reflections on Erikson's (1958) youth moratorium refer to structures that have emerged in Western societies from the extended educational and training periods which provide time and space to young people to actively cope with adolescence. Within this moratorium, in which young people largely free of social responsibility can try out different social roles, ways of life, and courses of action, the crises and conflicts associated with the upheavals or tasks can be socially tolerated and eventually overcome.

Among adolescents, anomalies which nowadays are increasingly construed within a neuropsychological paradigm—such as mood swings, diminished impulse control, increased fears, and aggressiveness—were and are interpreted at the social level as a questioning of both the existing world and the order of the adult society. Well into the 20th century, and partly to this day, this questioning was regarded as a problematic and rather disruptive feature of adolescence and thus as a potential threat to traditions, institutions and culture in general (see also Fend, 1988). Given this presumed threat to the social order, it has been suggested that the concern for youth expressed in science and society often hides concerns about culture, society, or the survival of democracy (Reinders, 2001).

On the other hand, the conflicts that young people have with parents in particular and adults in general, also known as “*Sturm und Drang*,”⁶ are generally viewed positively as a sign of striving for individual autonomy (Silbereisen & Weichold, 2012). Thus, the elaborated model of identity development in

⁶ fig. turmoil

adolescence developed by Marcia (1966) on the basis of Erikson's work, in which exploration and openness to newness are prerequisites for the *development* of identity (in contrast, for example, to a mere *takeover* of identity), recognizes youthful explorative behavior beyond the family of origin as important to the development of an independent identity.

From this perspective, a creative, innovative moment seems to be inherent in youth-specific conflicts. Researchers tend to view this "creativity in conflict" not only as typical, but also as necessary for young people and the advancement of society. In this conception, something new arises from young peoples' altercation with and resistiveness against the given and the traditional and unfolds at a higher individual and social level.

2.2 Youth as intergenerational position

Justifications for the necessity of such altercations can be found, for example, in King's (2013) psychoanalytically and socio-psychologically influenced perspective on adolescence. She regards the youth phase not as a status passage in which young people fit into the development gaps provided by the adult generation, but as a time in which fundamental new formations of social and family relations take place. In the context of adolescent transformation processes or restructuring processes that lead to increased autonomy and agency or to a "position and attitude of psychological and social agency, an ability to care for others, and productivity" (ibid., p. 71), life visions of the adult world are challenged.

From this perspective, the particularly crisis-prone nature of adolescence is rooted in the transformation of generational relationship structures to which the young person has to connect, both in a distancing and in a bonding manner, in order to advance her or his own identity and life plans. In addition, there are simultaneities and ambivalences characteristic of the youth phase. On the one hand, young people are confronted with new demands, such as those brought on by the transformation of intergenerational relations or the simultaneity of transmission of social knowledge and its renewal. On the other hand, new spaces of opportunity for individuation processes are opened up. In modernized societies, the adolescent moratorium is such a space of opportunity that, depending on the familial opportunity structure, brings together both enabling and resistive strategies of response to social conditions (see King, 2013).

In Oevermann's (2001) perspective of socialization theory as well, crisis-proneness, in the sense of generational altercation, is a central characteristic of the youth phase:

Youth must therefore be innovative and provocative in differentiated societies. The therein expressed degree of supposed nonconformity with the prevailing norms of adult life is socially almost mandatory. Youth has the function of being rebellious and innovative. Finding the right dose is one of the central tasks of crisis management... (p. 109)

Again, the attainment of individual autonomy is presupposed to be the central task and goal of the youth phase. In this view, adolescents can only achieve this if they succeed in finding a balance between their own intentions and the need to adapt to external, social, and occupational constraints and accept compromises. Oevermann conceptualizes this balancing process as decision crises that have to be overcome, especially during ontogenetic detachment crises, as in adolescence (Oevermann, 2004). The adolescent crisis ends when the adolescent becomes aware of the probation problem for the first time and assumes responsibility for it.

2.3 The dialectic of adaptation and resistance

Despite the diversity of the above conceptions of adolescence, researchers agree that conflicts, altercations, and transformations, on the one hand, and coping, integration, and adaptation, on the other, are central elements of this life-stage for the development and socialization of an autonomous subject. In other words, individuation in intergenerational relationships is structurally characterized by the dialectics of resistance and adaptation.⁷ Resistance is aimed at simply passing on or reproducing existing values, behaviors, and beliefs; yet new values, behaviors, and beliefs can only be produced from or on the basis of what already exists. It has to bear upon the having-become-this-and-not-that due to one's social background and must therefore always be socially adapted to a certain extent. From a socialization theory perspective, resistance and adaptation can thus be theorized as a conceptual reformulation of the dialectical tensions between crisis and routine, transformation and reproduction, and autonomy and attachment, which can be conceived as growth and conservation from an ontogenetic perspective, and thus an anthropological constant.

Even though political resistiveness is not discarded or necessarily included to this point, existing social power relations are challenged by young people who seek to transform them. From the perspective of both ontogenetics and socialization theory, the disputes, conflicts, and upheavals discussed relate primarily to the social role and position as well as the subjective experience of

⁷ Holzkamp (1996) describes this dialectic on yet another level, namely the already adapted adults on the one hand, and the young people still working against it, that is, keep resisting, on the other hand.

the adolescent subject. These may contain a certain potential for a resistiveness of young people, which may even be political. Whether or not it develops into explicit expression again depends on the social conditions, specifically on the resulting possibilities and limitations.

How people in general—and not only adolescents—behave vis-a-vis these possibilities is formulated dialectically by Klaus Holzkamp (1985) in terms of restrictive and generalized agency. For him, people have a double opportunity to act under existing (social) conditions: either they get by within the realm of existing possibilities, not exceeding them and ultimately adapting (restrictive agency), or they question the existing framework, seeking to transgress it and gain control of the social possibilities of life (generalized agency). Writing from within the Marxist tradition of critical psychology (*Kritische Psychologie*), he assumes that the current social conditions are in need of change and that remaining in a restrictive agency would ultimately run counter to the subject's interests.

From this perspective, the disappointment of Haug and Gschwandtner (2006) with the essays of the youth who participated in the study is intelligible. In these essays they see, above all, indications of restricted opportunities for action, of withdrawing into private life, and only little evidence of transgressing the given social framework. Why the researchers chose to interview teenagers instead of subjects from older age groups remains unclear. In our opinion, this aspect of the study raises more questions than it answers. For one thing, it obliged them to focus only on subjects' plans or visions of their imagined future lives, and not their actual lived experience. In addition, the essays were written in a school context, which may already have prompted most students to "stay in the frame" in their visions. Finally, the analyses focused primarily on the manifest level of the essays and less on their latent content.

In the case analyses presented in this article, we therefore focus on the importance of school as an institution that influences both data collection and the data itself, as well as the difference between manifest and latent level of meaning as a structuring relationship for the case.

3. Analyses

3.1 Project layout and the function of the research question

To empirically investigate the outlined dynamics between adaptation and resistance in the juvenile phase, we contrast the reconstructions of essays from two young girls with their visions of the future. The two essays were collected

during our interdisciplinary and cross-cultural research project “Children’s and young people’s images of the future in Germany and Ghana.” They were written by two adolescents, aged 18 and 17. Both live in Germany, but come from different social milieus. The case of Tracey can be classed with an underprivileged milieu, the case of Henriette with a bourgeois milieu.

The two essays stand out from our sample in that they do not develop an optimistic projection of the future, but—at least at first glance—make particularly critical references to their own future and that of society. The essay subject is dictated by our research stimulus: “How do you imagine your life as an adult?” Although we ask children and adolescents about their visions of the future indirectly, our underlying aim is to cast light on their current world and self-references as viewed from the perspective of development and socialization theory. We are interested in how the adolescents link their biographical having-become in the here and now with thought-experimental visions of the future. To answer this question, we collect different types of material. In addition to the essays that constitute the focus of this article, we also collect drawings and photos made by children and adolescents.

When analyzing the data, we are essentially concerned with the respondents’ self-positioning. With the visual data, this self-positioning can be worked out in particular by looking at the angle chosen for any given drawing or photograph (see Kleeberg-Niepage, 2016, Maier & Rademacher, 2016). This procedure can also be figuratively applied to essay analysis. In particular, the beginning of an essay can be interpreted as a self-positioning vis-a-vis the task posed by the researchers—both formally, as a positioning in reference to the research setting, and in terms of content, as part of the substantive answer to the question of how children and young people envision their lives as adults.

So, although we ask children and adolescents about their conceptions of adulthood, we are not interested in their concrete ideas *per se* or the extent to which these forward-looking ideas are realistic or utopian. Rather, we use the subjects’ responses to cast light on the typological characteristics of the case, which can be reconstructed from the present self-positioning of the adolescents.⁸

⁸ The case concept is broad. It does not exhaust itself in comprehending the case only in its subjective intent, but also in explicating the underlying structures and their production mechanisms. For the subject’s actions only make sense against the background of objectifiable options for action. If teenagers currently rebel, a rebellious youth is “normal”; if adolescents are currently pragmatically adapted, a rebellious adolescent is “special.” In this way, the social environment structures the possibilities of the subject. Nevertheless, the subject is not completely bound to these conditions, but always has the opportunity to decide otherwise. In this respect, the characteristic decision-making structure of the subject is to be understood as both an idiosyncrasy of the case and an expression of coping with general structural problems in a society (dialectics of the general and the particular).

In our opinion, asking subjects to express ideas about their own future gives us access to the current, temporally and spatially bound world and self-positioning of children and adolescents. As Arnett (2000) notes, “Speculating about the future can be a useful way of assessing the present.”

After thus clarifying the research interest of our study, we focus on the essay stimulus used. As discussed above, in formulating this stimulus we were interested in what is implicitly expressed. In asking how children and teenagers envision their adult lives, our stimulus implies that the addressee is not yet mature—that is, that adulthood lies in a future towards which the addressee incessantly and continuously moves. In everyday life, this is reflected in the common question to children: What do you want to become later in life? Although the question of future being induced by our research now enters the world of the child or adolescent, it is at the same time a “natural” question that, to varying degrees, consciously or unconsciously influences the present.⁹ The main point of the case is to understand how the children and adolescents relate to the research stimulus and the future-orientedness of the subject. The fundamental openness of the future challenges the interviewee both in “real” life and in this research—be it as an opportunity to shape a possible life path or as an imposition.

As previously explained, for the stimulus “How do you imagine your life as an adult” we collect different types of materials: drawings, photographs, and essays. Basing this article on the two essays, it is necessary to determine the characteristics of this type of protocol. First of all, the artificiality of the material stands out. An essay is a text written on a specific topic rarely encountered or discussed in everyday life and, in contrast to a letter, an essay does not open an immediate dialogue with a counterpart. In the lifeworld of children and adolescents, essays are found predominantly in the school context. In school, essays typically are written for a purpose. They do not offer students an opportunity to reflect on both themselves and the world and write down their thoughts; rather, they are ultimately subjected to performance assessment through grades. Equally, through the analysis of school essays we learn something about the (strategic) (self-)positioning of adolescents in relation to the fulfillment or non-fulfillment of formal demands on this type of text set by educators’ standards of external assessment.

⁹ In the psychological conception of “possible selves,” that is, of potential visions of an individual’s future self (Markus & Nurius, 1986), those visions of the future are viewed as important impulses for the motivation and the behavior of a person in the present. The view of a possible future self, desired or feared, into which experiences from the biographical past also flow, thus always has an effect on the cognition and behavior of a person in the here and now.

School writing assignments rarely include reflection essays which aim to present personal ideas, experiences, or opinions. In this respect, a research-induced tension characterizes the design of our study, which is that the formal rationality of school essays and the material rationality of the writing subjects' personal visions of the future converge. In case-reconstructive interpretation, focusing the analysis on how the writers resolve this tension while performing the assigned tasks has proven fruitful.

Two summarized case reconstructions are presented below. As a reminder, the cases were selected according to the criterion that potentials of resistiveness were recognizable on the manifest level of the text.

3.2 Case study 1: "Tracey"

Tracey is 18 years old at the time of the inquiry and lives with her parents in a rural region of Northern Germany. She has a secondary school leaving certificate ("Hauptschulabschluss") and is currently attending another school in preparation for a vocational training.¹⁰ Tracey has two older brothers who also graduated from secondary general school and have been unemployed ever since; however, they no longer live with their parents. According to the data in the data sheet, the father works as a "welding expert," the mother as an "ambulance service worker."

Tracey's essay was collected as part of a university seminar. For this purpose, a blank was distributed to the respondents, with the stimulus "*How do you imagine your life as an adult?*" printed as a headline at the top in the middle of the sheet. There were 15 lines each on the front and back, framed by a black line. Tracey has filled the whole space from the first to the last line with her handwritten text. Only in two places does the text on the right side protrude beyond the framing into the marginal area of the page. With regard to spelling,

¹⁰ In the German school system, the secondary general qualification ("Hauptschulabschluss") is the first general education qualification. It can be acquired after the 9th grade. Even though it is a regular degree, the secondary general school certificate is considered to be of low quality and detrimental compared to an intermediate school certificate (a secondary school diploma after the 10th grade) or the "Abitur" (acquired after the 12th or 13th grade) and less valuable and disadvantageous in the competition for a training place. Schools with only this type of qualification, so-called "Hauptschulen" (secondary general schools, grades 5-9), are often socially stigmatized as "residual schools" with a socially and cognitively disadvantaged student body. Their merging with so-called "Realschulen" (intermediate schools, grades 5-10), during the last years, did not lead to de-stigmatization as had been hoped; on the contrary, stigmatization was often transferred to the new "Sekundarschule" (as this new type of intermediate secondary school is called).

punctuation, and sentence structure, the text is flawed. The handwriting appears inexpert; at the same time, the effort to write carefully is noticeable.

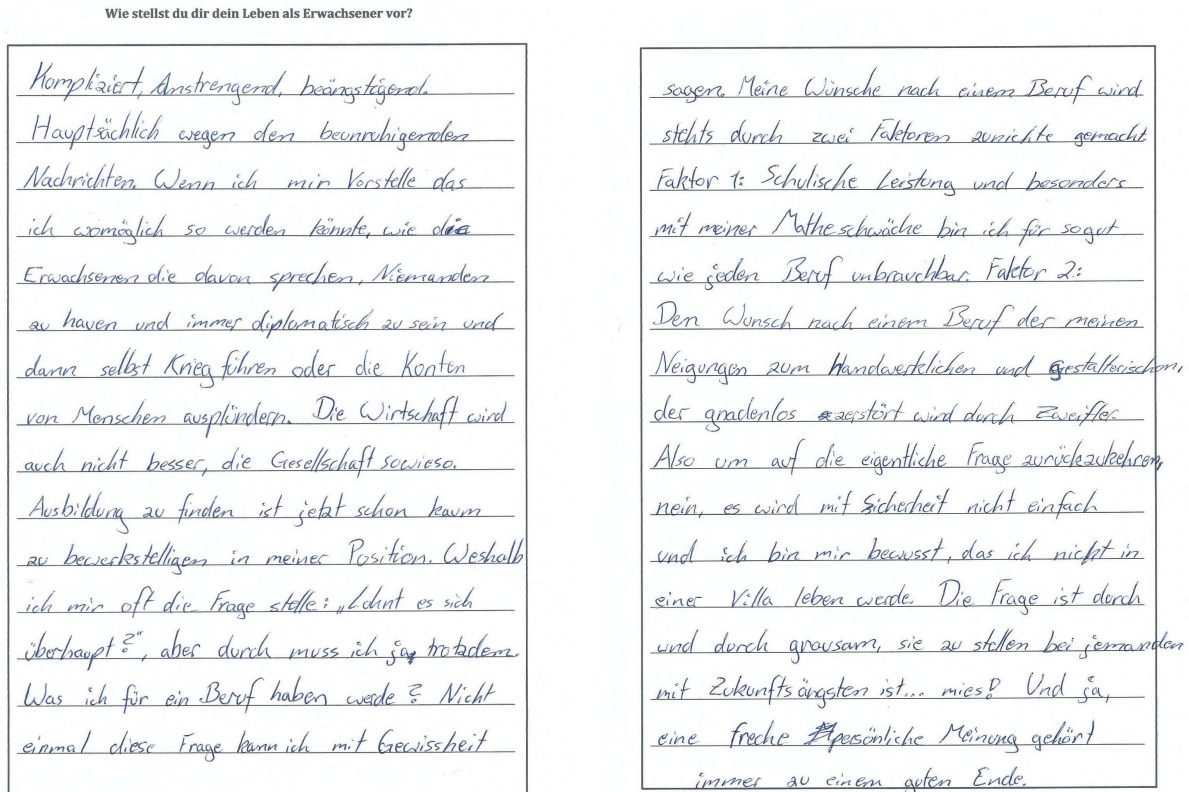


Fig. 1 Essay Tracey, 18 years¹¹

The first line below the stimulus heading reads:

S1: Complicated, Exhausting, scary.

¹¹ “Complicated, Exhausting, scary. Mainly because of the disturbing news. If I Imagined that I could possibly become like the adults who talk about not hitting Anyone and always be diplomatic and then go to war or plunder people's accounts. The economy will not be any better, the society anyway. Training is already now hard to manage in my position. That's why I often ask myself, “Is it worth it at all?”, but I have to go through it anyway. What kind of job I will have? Not even this question I can say with certainty. My desires for a profession is always nullified by two factors. Factor 1: School performance and especially with my math weakness I'm unusable for virtually every job. Factor 2: The desire for a profession that my inclinations for craftsmanship and design, which is mercilessly destroyed by doubt. So, to return to the real question, no, it certainly will not be easy, and I am aware that I will not live in a villa. The question is cruel through and through, asking it to someone with fears about the future is... lousy! And yes, a cheeky personal opinion always belongs to a good ending.”

This sequence of words starts the essay's continuous text. It is not a headline, although it has a heading-like character. Neither is it a complete sentence, but an enumeration with three words that awakens associations with an advertising-effective book title of a guide or attention-attracting slogans of a help-promising call center. In this respect, it is a thematic condensation that has to be understood as supposedly preceded by an altercation process which is outlined in this listing merely with keywords. Although this sequence is not and does not want to be a headline (it is not centered either), it is a quasi-headline that anticipates what might be the result of the thematic discussion at the end of the essay, already as the opening of the text.

The anticipation happens in a mode that is, as mentioned, reminiscent of a book title in the style of an advertising slogan. For that purpose, messages are condensed and stylized so that motivation arises to prompt consumption. If something is strung together in keywords, an inner context (between the keywords and the underlying topics) is implied, but this is not further elaborated. The keyword triad is remarkable as an opening of the essay as it proceeds in the logic of culture-industrial heading or catch-line formation, although in a broader sense, it is a reflection essay in which the writer is asked to discuss her own, subjective point of view. After detailed analysis of the essay's first sequences, we return to the contextualization of the text.

The listing of the three words at the beginning of the essay raises the question of their intrinsic connection. Ostensibly, it looks like an escalation that moves from the "Complicated" to the "Exhausting" to the "scary," and at the same time goes hand in hand with a qualitative change from subject-relatedness to individual feelings. However, at the structural level of meaning, the analysis reveals that the escalation does not proceed in the direction of approaching the subject, but just the other way round. "Scary" is not so much an authentic expression of heightened anxiety as a result of exhausting complexity. In contrast to the speech act "I am scared of the gathering thunderstorm," in the phrase "the gathering thunderstorm is scary" the sensibility of the subject is externalized and attributed to a specific thing: the thunderstorm.

Although only a subject can be scared, here it is a thing to which the "scary" quality is attributed. This separates the anxiety from the subject feeling the anxiety. This shift from subject to thing makes this sequence appear an inauthentic speech act of a subjectively perceived anxiety. In terms of a risky case structure hypothesis, it can already be assumed in the analysis of the first sequence of the essay that the anxiety has shifted to an object and that this is accompanied by the subject's avoidance of self-positioning. This avoidance is most evident in the renunciation of a pronoun at the beginning of the essay. Formally, this first sequence can be understood as a direct response of the 18-

year-old pupil to the research stimulus “How do you imagine your life as an adult?”: “Complicated, Exhausting, scary.” In material terms, however, with this very answer Tracey avoids positioning herself as a subject.

So, although the question explicitly aims at taking a subjective standpoint (*your* life, not *a* life), the answer does not enclose an answering subject. As a subject, Tracey could have written, “I imagine my future life to be complicated, exhausting, and scary,” or “I imagine my future life to be complicated and exhausting, and therefore I am always scared of the future.” But she does not write that.

What does it mean that a question that is aimed at subjective expectations of the future is answered in a stylized way that does not lead to the replying subject but distracts the attention away from it?

This is, so our hypothesis, an expression of a case-specific form of resistiveness which is directed against both the formal and the content requirements of the task. For Tracey does not answer the question in the intended sense of the research stimulus. Nonetheless, she does not refuse to participate in the research, but answers—in that stylized, future-pessimistic way. At the same time, she submits herself—unintentionally—to the question that she apparently wants to criticize. To this extent, one might say, this is a case of adapted resistiveness. The elaborated structural logic reproduces itself in the following sequence:

S2: Mainly because of the disturbing news.

In Tracey’s eyes, the news is disturbing; that is, the coverage of events that take place in spatial distance from her and about which she is informed perturbs her. The fact that it is not about tangible disturbing events, but rather about news in general, creates the image of a young woman who wants to appear as an informed listener of news, but at the same time conveys the image of a culture-industrial consumer with seemingly little expertise but a lot of cultural pessimism. What she finds worrying are not real events in her close or distant environment, but probably global events in which she does not participate but from which she merely learns from the news – presumably via a culture-industrial mediator.

These news stories about events in which Tracey is not involved are the starting point for her visions of the future and her anxieties about it. Since there seems to be no recourse to her life and her own experiences, this second sequence of words seems similarly stylized to the first one. In the subsequently cited justification for her pessimistic view of the future, she again ascribes a quality to a thing, namely to the news in its flatness, while still refusing to

position herself by using a pronoun. This mode of relating to the world seems childishly naive, as an expression of a little reflective world and self-positioning. Therefore, with the analysis of the following sequence, we want to investigate the question of what might have motivated this stylized answer mode:

S3: If I Imagined that I could possibly become like the adults who talk about not hitting Anyone and always be diplomatic and then go to war or plunder people's accounts. The economy will not be any better, the society anyway.

Although Tracey now uses the pronoun “I” for the first time, the adults to whom she relates this “I” in a delimiting manner remain nebulous. In the same breath, concrete adults who *are hitting* and abstract adults who *wage war* or *plunder people's accounts* become thematic. This sequence reads like a radical sweeping blow against adults who are at a tremendous distance from the teenage author. This detachment is not only evident in the content of this sequence, but also in its grammatical form: the conditional sentence “if I imagine that I could possibly become like...” lacks the sequence, i.e. the main clause, so the “then...”. Illustrated as a negative foil, the double morality of the adult world is indeed denounced, but the subsequent personal impact is not elaborated verbally.

This can be seen as a form of expression of a child's self-view and world view, in which complex facts and contexts are simplified. In contrast to children, who normally explore the world with structural optimism, the already mentioned (cultural) pessimism is developing further. One could take this as a positioning that is simultaneously and in a contradictory way characterized by “childlike” criticism and “adult” cultural pessimism.

S4: Training is already now hard to manage in my position.

After having criticized abstract conditions up to now, Tracey for the first time mentions a problem that affects her personally: the search for a trainee position as an almost impossible task. It is interesting at this point that she uses the term *position* and not *situation*. Grammatically, two phrases are merging into one: in my situation or because of my position. Again, the abstractness of the criticism is striking. Neither is the development of her difficult position explained, nor are the conditions criticized that led to the unfavorable position in the training market. Instead, she problematizes the postulation that an individual who receives an unfavorable positioning as part of social status allocation still has to master it all alone. Tracey's stance calls into evidence her internalization of social problems and the impossibility to distance oneself from these problem areas while simultaneously criticizing them.

S5: That's why I often ask myself, "Is it worth it at all?", but I have to go through it anyway. What kind of job I will have? Not even this question I can say with certainty.

The question Tracey poses here, "Is it worth it at all?" is basically a leading question, since she "knows" the answer already. At school, she has probably sensed that the social allocation process carried out in the course of school selections may have placed her in a loser position. In that sense, it does not really pay to make any further efforts. It is more reasonable, within one's own limited scope of action, to come to terms with a possibly bad secondary school leaving certificate. The connotation contained in this question, "Is it worthwhile in the first place, if I now put in a lot of effort and yet have no chance to catch up with the academically successful pupils and their training opportunities?" is already answered in the negative by asking this question.

The fact that there is little scope for criticizing the conditions of failure due to the deeply rooted sense of self-responsibility for one's own failures is basically logical. In this context, Bourdieu and Passeron (1971) refer to a "process of self-elimination" when the lack of cultural capital, due to their social background, means that competition and performance requirements can no longer be met at school, and underprivileged students leave the school system as if by itself. And this practice of dropping out seems legitimate to everyone involved. In this respect, the case points to how school socialization hampers the formation of problem awareness which would hold the system and its structure accountable; that this does not or cannot happen is all the more astonishing if someone like Tracey, in the transition from school to the vocational world, experiences for herself that she is basically without a chance and it is not worth any further effort.

Because Tracey has obviously internalized that she herself is to blame for her positioning, the criticism she voices of society remains very distant and tenuous in her argumentation. In a mood of stylized pessimism about the future, she presents a naive criticism such that the arguments appear pretentious. At this, language and socialization of her social background certainly play a significant role. The striking stylistic figures fail to appear convincing, which reinforces the impression that the criticism is unsubstantiated. With regard to the reflection of the research setting, it should be noted that the essay format implicitly presupposes a routine in handling textuality, as is to be expected in bourgeois milieus.

However, Tracey seems to be trying not only to fulfill this requirement, but to exceed it. The stylizations, in this light, can also be read as an effort to meet demands that are difficult to "manage" against the backdrop of Tracey's social

upbringing. In the figure of stylizing the lack of opportunity and the pessimism, a certain resilience of Tracey's vision of the future seems to be justified. Thus, she creates a stylized framework for herself, which on the one hand stabilizes her and on the other hand limits her – and from which she can voice a certain criticism and resistance to the prevailing conditions.

How resilience and resistiveness are mutually interlocked in their stylized mode becomes all the more evident if one considers that Tracey, at the time of the survey, is more or less in transition from school to the world of work and thus experiences for herself first-hand the lack of opportunities to which she refers as an acute crisis. Given these circumstances, she has every reason to despair; but that is not what she does. Against this background, Tracey's deflection of the insight that the social system has designated her as a loser may even play an existential role. The adoption of this third-party assessment as a means of assessing her own personality prevents her from credibly criticizing the social conditions and reinforces her experience that she herself cannot change anything, and thus her habitual pessimism.

3.3 Case study 2: "Henriette"

Henriette is 17 years old at the time of the survey and lives together with her parents in a northern German city. She attends upper secondary school of a bilingual grammar school (conforming to the 11th grade). Henriette has a younger brother who attends the 9th grade of the same grammar school. The father is a graduate businessman, the mother works as a specialist in the pedagogical field.

Henriette's essay is not handwritten, as is usually the case in our sample, but typed. We therefore assume that Henriette wrote the essay outside of school, that is, privately, and that it was collected by a student teacher who had access to the school. The essay is divided into five paragraphs of different lengths with a total of 48 lines; the text is written in a sans-serif font and fully justified. At the beginning, there is a center-justified, bold, and underlined headline. Both the typewritten and edited format as well as the relatively large size distinguish Henriette's essay from Tracey's. The essay format, parents' professions, and type of school point to a social background or social milieu of origin that seems to place a higher value on education and privilege than Tracey's.

Über meine Zukunft

Ich befinde mich gerade 1,5 Jahre vor meinem Schulabschluss und man sollte meinen, dass ich in den zurückliegenden 6,5 Jahren die Möglichkeit hatte, mir zumindest grob vorzustellen, wie es nach der Schule weitergehen soll. Das ist allerdings leider nicht der Fall. Das mag zum einen daran liegen, dass ich mich schlecht auf eine meiner Interessen festlegen will, sowie dass es mir schwerfällt, ein besonderes Talent meinerseits festzustellen, auf dem ich meine zukünftige Berufstätigkeit basieren lassen will und zum anderen daran, dass es zwar Berufsinformationstage an unserer Schule gibt, die einem jedoch größtenteils nur Lehramt-, BWL- und andere Wirtschaftsstudiengänge vorstellen.

Mein grober Plan besteht also bis jetzt daraus, nach der Schule für voraussichtlich ein Jahr Deutschland zu verlassen, um entweder über Work-and-Travel oder über Hilfsorganisationen in einem anderen Land Erfahrungen zu sammeln und meinen Horizont zu erweitern, um einen Eindruck von dem Wissen zu bekommen, das man nicht in der Schule gelehrt bekommt, das aber meiner Meinung nach viel lebensnotwendiger sind als Algebra.

Das hört sich soweit ja zumindest teilweise nach einem Plan an. Wenn man aber bedenkt, dass beruflicher Erfolg und finanzielle Unabhängigkeit, was ich mir vielleicht utopischerweise eines Tages erhoffe, in welchem Beruf auch immer und was nebenbei gesagt doch auch ständig das uns vorgesezte Ziel dieses ganzen Wettbewerbes ist, nicht unbedingt Freunde von Familiengründung sind, so sollten die Grundsteine für diese Art von Karriere optimalerweise vor meinem 30. Geburtstag stattfinden. Angenommen ich bin mit 18 mit der Schule fertig, komme mit 19 aus dem Ausland zurück und mein Studium dauert ungefähr 8 Jahre (was gut möglich ist, wird ein potentiell erfolgreiches Berufsfeld gewählt und mögliche Komplikationen impliziert), so bin ich 27 Jahre alt und habe noch ungefähr 3 Jahre um mir einen Arbeitsplatz zu sichern und an meinem beruflichen Aufstieg zu arbeiten oder, da mir das ewige Dasein als Teil einer Firma, immer dem nächst höheren Rang nachhechelnd doch irgendwie widerstrebt, selbst eine Firma zu gründen. Soweit so gut, doch sollte ich mich nun der Familienplanung annehmen und eines Tages aus dem Mutterschutz wiederkehren, so garantiert mir niemand, dass ich eben jenen hart erarbeiteten Arbeitsplatz zurück bekomme. Es sei denn natürlich, dass es mir auf eine Weise möglich wäre, meine Leitposition in meiner Firma in der Zeit größtenteils abzugeben und ich darauf hoffe, dass sie weiterhin auf Erfolgskurs ist.

Unterm Strich sehe ich meiner Zukunft nicht sonderlich motiviert entgegen, nicht weil ich nicht gerne arbeite oder in Projekten aufgehe, sondern eher weil ich mich in eine Art Modell gesteckt fühle, in dem deine „Rangordnung“ mit Abschluss der Schule in Form von Noten und später in Form von Studienabschlüssen gewertet wird, die aber weder Intelligenz, Kollegialität, Motivation, Kooperationsfähigkeit noch Charakterstärke messen können. Was nebenbei gesagt auch eine abartige Illusion wäre. Was ich damit sagen will ist, dass unsere Einstiegschancen in die Berufswelt abhängig sind von Werten, die basieren auf der Willkür der Lehrfiguren, die sich selbst anmaßen, Menschen einzuschätzen, die sie 180 Minuten die Woche unterrichten und dass auch nur in dem Maße wie sie Lust haben (da wahrscheinlich verbeamtet und sowieso nichts zu befürchten), die wiederum mehr oder weniger willkürlich für diesen Job angestellt wurden und weiterhin von Werten, die einem zwar zeigen, in wie weit man die angeforderten Aufgaben erfüllt, aber doch keine Erklärungsgrundlage liefern,

warum ich wegen der theoretisch verzeigten Abiturprüfung in Religion und des dadurch gesunkenen Schnitts keine Chance auf ein Medizinstudium habe.

Abschließend muss ich sagen, dass ich auch keine Lösung zu genanntem Bewertungsproblem habe und es, wie erwähnt, noch weitaus schlimmer finden würde, würde in Zukunft die eigene Charakterstärke von mehr oder weniger korrupten oder willkürlich ausgewählten Beamten gemessen werden. Aber all diese Punkte sorgen dafür, dass ich mich nicht gerade darauf freue, eine Wahl treffen zu müssen.

Fig. 2 Essay Henriette, 17 years¹²

¹² “I am just 1.5 years from graduation and one would think that in the past 6.5 years I had the opportunity to ask myself at least roughly how to go on. That is regrettably not the case. On the one hand, I find it difficult to focus on one of my interests or discover a special talent with me on which to base my future professional life, and, on the other hand, that though we have career information days at our school, they mainly provide information on teacher education, business administration, and other economics courses. My rough plan so far is to leave Germany after school and to gain experience through Work-and-Travel or aid organizations in another country and expand my horizons to get an idea of the kind of knowledge not taught in school but that is much more vital than algebra. That sounds pretty much like a plan, at least partly. If one considers, however, that professional success and financial independence, which I am – perhaps utopian – hoping to achieve one day, in whatever profession and what, by the way, is the promoted goal of this whole competition, not necessarily being friends of starting a family, so the foundation for this kind of career should be laid before the 30th birthday takes place. Assuming I finish school at 18, I come back from abroad at age 19, and my studies last about 8 years (which is well possible, if a potentially successful professional field is chosen, and possible complications implied), so I am 27 years old, and I still have about 3 more years to secure a job for me and to work on my professional advancement or, since I somehow jib at the eternal existence as part of a company, always panting for the next higher rank, to found a company myself. So far so good, but should I now take on family planning and return from maternity protection one day, no one will guarantee me that I just get back this hard-earned job. Unless, of course, it would be somehow possible for me to largely hand over my lead position in my company over time, and I hope that it will continue to be on the road to success. The bottom line is that I don’t look very motivated towards my future, not because I do not

The first line of the typed text reads:

S1: **About my future**

This sequence is centered, underlined, and placed in boldface type directly above the text, like a headline. A headline is the title above a text and the most succinct description of the work to follow, which it introduces and summarizes in a highly condensed form. The headline gives the text a formal, weighty character. The fact that Henriette adds a headline to her text can be understood as a statement about the research question, in that the futurity it implies is isolated and adulthood eradicated. In so doing, Henriette initially defies the formal research routine to overfulfill it, as it were, in the next move, by altering and interpreting the research question to fit her individual situation. Her twofold typographical marking of the headline via the use of bold, underlined letters, highlights and emphasizes—perhaps over-emphasizes—the significance of her own vision of the future.

On the content level, however, this ostensible, formally stylized meaningfulness is hardly apparent, for Henriette occupies a speaker position characterized by a monologue “about” her future and thus about herself. In such a supposedly reflective position of speech about oneself from a non-ego position, one’s own life becomes a topic that can be referred to and described as a case-specific distancing of speaking about life from (a position of) life itself. One’s own life virtually becomes a product, a cultural object which, although it originates from the practice of life, has at the same time distanced itself from the corporeal positionality of the subject. It has decoupled from the subject, so to

enjoy working or working on projects, but rather because I feel I'm stuck in a kind of model where your “ranking” ends with school grades and later in the form of degrees, but which cannot measure intelligence, collegiality, motivation, ability to cooperate or strength of character. By the way, that would be a weird illusion. What I mean by that is that our chances to enter the vocational world depend on values based on the arbitrariness of teaching figures who presume to judge people they teach 180 minutes a week, and only to a degree they feel like doing (since probably tenured and nothing to worry about, anyway), who in turn were more or less arbitrarily hired for this job, and continue to have values that show how well one is fulfilling the requested tasks, but cannot explain why I have no chance of studying medicine just because of theoretically blowing the graduation exam in religion and thereby cutting the grade point average. Finally, I have to say that I have no solution to the assessment problem and, as I said, would find it much worse if, in the future, one's own strength of character would be measured by more or less corrupt or arbitrarily selected officials. But all these points ensure that I'm not exactly looking forward to making a choice.”

speak. By contrast, the thought-experimentally formable speech act represented by the headline “my future,” would have foregone that detachedness in favor of an immediate subject-relatedness. The fact that Henriette’s contentual statement about her own future appears to be distanced and disconnected from the subject is the other side of the formal, external statement about the research task. Ambivalences thus characterize the adaptation-like transformation of the research question into a question about the future.

S2: I am just 1.5 years from graduation [the German expression “Ich befinde mich...” which is analogously translated here with “I am...” conveys a second meaning, “I am located...,” to which the following analysis refers].

The first sentence of the continuous text is instructive for a further determination of the distancing hypothesis. “I am [located]...” represents a spatial positioning, a locating act. However, “I am [located]...” is not linked to a place, but to a date specified as a decimal number. That is, a temporal positioning of the ego is made under the guise of a spatial positioning. The “location” and “time” of this (position) determination is Henriette’s graduation. The ego’s whole being seems to orient itself towards this end. Although the essay begins with the self-presentation and self-positioning of the ego, it remains a weak, unreactive ego. Conceivably, it would have been different if Henriette had said, “I will graduate in 1.5 years.” But that is not what she says. With her wording, she presents a self (or ego) that has nothing to decide and to create by itself, but is merely located at a more or less specific point within a school schedule.

With Schütze (1981), this could be described as a radical form of orientation (of life) towards the institutional time schedule, as becomes visible in the case of Henriette. School years literally seem to structure biography and consciousness; the individual’s subjectivity disappears behind school matters. In this process, it only remains to identify one’s own place on the given track, so to speak, because the time units of the sequence pattern are fixed and predetermined. In this way, “I am [located]...” becomes understandable; it presupposes a subject that in the logic of school routines seems largely effaced by its subjectiveness.

Another reading of “I am [located] ...” makes it possible to extend the previous hypothesis with respect to the *modus operandi*. One may say “I am in a permanent contract (of employment),” or “I am on vacation.” These speech acts emphasize that someone is in a particular state. In a state description, the processual and dynamic developments that have led to and/or characterize that state are frozen. It would be different if, for example, Henriette had said, “I am now in upper school and heading for graduation.” But she does not say that, she

is in a condition that can simply be called “school.” The condition, which manifests itself in a case-specific coping mode, consists of submitting to the school schedule up to the institutionally decided end. It reveals a conforming ego that seems to no longer assert any self-determination. In this respect, the uninvolved narrative ego, which has become clear in the sequence so far, appears to be a consistent expression of school-related de-autonomization of the subject. Based on the case characteristics worked out so far, the following analysis will be guided by questions to find out what conception of the future can be formulated with this self and world positioning, what consequential problems this entails, and how the text passages identified with resistance and criticism of school and society fit into it.

Assuming I finish school at 18, I come back from abroad at age 19, and my studies last about 8 years (which is well possible, if a potentially successful professional field is chosen, and possible complications implied), so I am 27 years old, and I still have about 3 more years to secure a job and work on my professional advancement or, since I somehow jib at the eternal existence as part of a company, always panting for the next higher rank, to found a company myself. So far so good, but should I now take on family planning and return from maternity protection one day, no one will guarantee me that I will just get back this hard-earned job. Unless, of course, it would be somehow possible for me to largely hand over my lead position in my company over time, and I hope that it will continue to be on the road to success.

Henriette formulates at this juncture, in the mode of “assumption,” evidently unquestioned statements about future stages of life (graduation, year abroad, study, professional footing, starting a family, and motherhood), following a fairly strict timetable and presenting them in a sequence to be managed and checked off. Our concern is not the concrete ideas per se, but to decipher the underlying habitual dispositions, that is, the generative structure of the case expressed in Henriette’s vision of the future and stated in this way and not any other way. It is revealing in this sequence that her actual life plan is not subjected to a hypothetical test by the introductory “assumption,” but merely its chronology. She apparently does not question whether she will graduate from school, stay abroad after graduation, go through a long study phase, and achieve motherhood at the age of thirty. The only question is whether the implementation of the specific plan will be feasible for every single calculated year.

In spite of the opening “assumption,” the time plan worked out by Henriette and outlined in her essay admits to a tested, fundamental practical viability. It is the edited essay itself that claims validity as a checked text, and accordingly also

the plan formulated in it. However, close analysis of the material level of the plan reveals a discrepancy. In addition to the orientation towards institutional and professional stages of a bourgeois “normal biography,” the plan contains stages unlikely to develop in the described way. In particular, the “company founder” episode seems naive; it is more of a utopian dream than a plan. And with that, it finally takes on the function of a placeholder in the present, a desirable but unlikely ideal, which subsequently makes the development of feasible plans potentially more difficult, and ultimately constrains Henriette’s visions of the future.

There is nothing unique in this vision, something that the ego chooses out of interest and for whose realization it works passionately. Although specific, the scheme of life looks like a template that was set up but not adjusted, thus remaining purely formal. It is distinctive of this selection mode not to *decide for* something, but to *oppose* and avoid less attractive options. In this respect, such a vision of the future indicates a present-day disposition of the subject that could be described as phlegmatic, insofar as there is always a “too little.” The interest in creating something in accordance with one’s own will is often not strong enough to overcome the necessary hurdles. Henriette, for example, opts against the arduous ascent of the corporate ladder as an employee and instead “plans” as a new graduate of an unknown field of study to become head of a company in an unspecified branch of the economy. Here, hedonistic elements mingle with an improbable plan for the future, in that it is indeterminate at crucial points and thus appears to essentially be motivated by the avoidance of professional efforts. It seems as if Henriette is trying to set forth the idea of a successful bourgeois life, though, this very idea remains oddly strange to her and appears in its material vagueness distanced and unrelated.

Henriette does not seem to be driven by joy, conviction, greed for money, or other motives, but simply submits to the “storyboard” of a bourgeois-capitalist life. She does not really want what she should eagerly wish to accomplish or to achieve. As an employee, she would have the option not to run after a career but rather to establish herself in the mediocrity of an ordinary job; but Henriette cannot verbalize and claim this for herself. Performance pressure and coerced individuation weighs upon her and she senses that she cannot really mitigate the constraints, as long as she avoids making decisions on reorganizing her life. By planning to set up, through eight years of study (!), a school-like sheltered environment which largely relieves her of pending life decisions, the time pressure following the sheltered period is already looming in the ideas of the 17-year-old. After her extended studies, she only has three years left to embark upon her scheduled career, before she has to take on family planning and then “return from maternity protection one day” (!) to the vocational world.

Although avoiding any decision relieves her of the burden of having to decide, it also puts a strain on her, because in carrying out that act of avoidance she has unintentionally decided something. In Henriette's tightly timed schedule of fixed options, the phlegmatic indecision and material vagueness of her plans for the future unfold in a strained dynamic. In this dilemma, the intrapsychic suffering inherent to this mode of self and world positioning becomes apparent.

What do these ambivalences mean in terms of their potential for resistiveness in this type? It seems irritating at first glance that the institution which largely relieves Henriette of life decisions through a so-called "educational moratorium" is at the center of her criticism. So what kind of criticism is this—what does it consist of, and what not?

What I mean by that is that our chances to enter the vocational world depend on values based on the arbitrariness of teaching figures who presume to judge people they teach 180 minutes a week, and only to a degree they feel like doing (since probably tenured and nothing to worry about, anyway), who in turn were more or less arbitrarily hired for this job and continue to have values that show how well one is fulfilling the requested tasks, but cannot explain why I have no chance of studying medicine just because of theoretically blowing the graduation exam in religion and thereby cutting the grade point average.

In contrast to Tracey, Henriette with her phrase "our chances to enter" focuses on the plural and thus abstracts again from her own person. Besides, it is about "job opportunities" and not, as it was with Tracey, first of all just about a "training place;" for Henriette and the generalized group of people to whom she attributes herself, evidently only career advancement is worth considering.

With the perception that her chances of entering "*the vocational world*" depends on teachers, Henriette harshly settles scores with them in the following: these chances are dependent "*on values based on the arbitrariness of teaching figures,*" which in addition "*presume to judge people they teach 180 minutes a week.*" She thereby produces an interesting contradiction, because assessments are either arbitrary or value-bound. And values are, in terms of social regularity, just detached from the individual arbitrariness Henriette brings up here. It indicates an internal contradiction, because Henriette unconsciously shares the values that she overtly criticizes by projecting them onto the teachers and thus externalizing them. With this, the real teachers, whom she could have mentioned by name, become abstract "teaching figures." That, in turn, is functional as a means of qualifying them as carriers of injustice to whom Henriette also belongs by social affiliation, a fact she tries to dissociate from. In this respect, criticism of school appears to be unreliable, for the denounced, arrogated assessment of

people by “teaching figures” stands in contrast to the school logic of evaluation of rendered exam performances, which Henriette fundamentally shares when she complains that she was unfairly rated and placed in this process. It is not a criticism of the allocation of life chances in schools, but only of having unfairly ended up on the losing side.

Not only does the criticism remain superficial, but so does Henriette’s own relation to her criticism, which seems to be hasty and lacking in authenticity. For in her life plan so far, neither manifest nor latent signs can prove that she suffers from having no chance to study medicine and achieve a corresponding career. If one assesses the previous findings, the criticism seems hollow and inauthentic in that it reproduces the mode of distancing and, one could say, is like a part of the stylized self-enactment logic of the case, fashioned as a put-on and mere attitude.

Like Tracey’s essay, Henriette’s writing is molded by a distinctive, stylistic element: while Tracey’s case reconstructs a logic characteristic of the culture industry (advertisement), Henriette’s case presents a speaker position that tells its own future as if it had already taken place. As in a literary work (see, e.g., Oevermann, 1997), one’s own life becomes a fictional reality (“About my future”) and thus the real open-endedness of the subject’s future life is closed off and enclosed in a technical narrative figure.

The narrative ego, i.e. the speaker position, appears to be in a positionality detached from the practice of life itself, a disintegration of form and substance. The narrative figure seems to be motivated by a serious commitment to the research question. Yet this inner, fictional reality of discussing one’s own future cannot be sustained in the work. As with Tracey’s case, this creates the impression of an inconsistent overall structure. The intended altercation with the surrounding world, written in the respective form or style, and mirroring the question about the future, turns into an affirmation of the given situation. At the same time, the indeterminacy of the future, if managed in this way, leads to a dynamic intensification of the adolescent individuation problem.

3.4 Comparative discussion

Both of the analyzed cases present a contrast to most other respondents in that they do not answer the research question with a typical narrative of an average adult life, but instead articulate criticism. This criticism—towards adults in general (Tracey) and teachers in particular (Henriette)—indeed reflects, on the manifest level, conflicts and disputes with the given situation which fit in with the previously outlined youth-typical dialectic of adaptation and resistance. On the latent level, however, as the analyses show, the alleged resistance remains

within the limits of a milieu-specific self-organization into existing scopes of action.

Although Tracey deplors her assigned, economically marginalized social position, she adapts to it. Her resistance, her fight against the research question's imposition, acts as a defense against the idea that there is something for her to imagine or even to shape, beyond what's waiting for her anyway. Allowing such an idea of agency and self-efficacy would reveal the integration of social space allocation into the self and pose a threat already averted—both from the performance logic of bourgeois-capitalist societies, for which Tracey is not sufficiently productive, and also from the questioning of this logic, which would make her own involvement in the maintenance of the status quo visible. Tracey's own efforts, for example in terms of her education, are therefore not worth it; the lack of achievement potential was already certified by her graduation, bad marks and the diagnosis of "weakness in mathematics." In addition, no immediate existential crisis will threaten her if she refrains from these efforts. Ultimately, she acts against her own interests, and that such interests—such as a "skilled trade" or "living in a villa"—do indeed exist can also be deduced from the accusatory style of the essay.

At the same time, Tracey is not just a victim of social circumstances. She acts not only within them, but also towards them. In the face of her almost nonexistent social and cultural capital and lack of visions regarding what or how it could be different, settling in the fringes of society seems to be comprehensible, indeed reasonable. In contrast, an opposition to those structures of power responsible for her socio-economic marginalization – that is, political resistiveness – would be downright unreasonable and self-destructive. The laboriously averted threat to her self-esteem would be updated, Tracey would appear as a person who cannot redeem the promise of advancement in bourgeois-capitalist societies, and her own participation in the social circumstances would be visible. Therefore, her criticism of "adults" remains abstract, on the surface, and eventually implausible (see Osterkamp, 1997).

Henriette also adjusts to a condition she calls "school." In this condition, she just "is [located]" and waits for a pre-determined end: graduation. Until then, she negates her own scope of action and does not claim or struggle for autonomy. On the one hand, she directs her criticism against the competitive pressures of society, and on the other hand, against the fact that she is evaluated by teachers at school. She accuses these "teaching figures" of arbitrariness and listlessness and denies them the ability to evaluate her properly. Since these ratings can once again break through to her starting position in post-school competition, Henriette's criticism closes here: the competition is rejected if one's own good starting position is uncertain.

Which (allegedly denied) life chances specifically interest her remains unclear; her explanations follow an almost schematic bourgeois ideal model of a professional career that corresponds to the status of her social background. She does not resist it, but she doesn't want to "pant for" it, opting rather to start right from the top of the professional hierarchy, preferably as the founder of her own company. Henriette senses, as it were, that there will be an appropriate place for her and that this place, regardless of her plans or her own efforts, is waiting for her, which is why she can safely avoid the latter. Instead, despite all her criticism of school, she mentally endorses an institutional sanctuary for eight more years, which is then called "higher education."

Henriette's criticism is not directed against social conditions of domination and power, either. Her general blaming of "teaching figures" does not touch on the selection function of schools in bourgeois-capitalist societies, and in her essay society's competitive pressure on the individual is only worthy of criticism if her own good starting position is endangered. This shows Henriette's own entanglement and involvement in the capitalist achievement-oriented society from which she will, as she already knows, eventually benefit. The articulated criticism remains external and implausible. In anticipation of this profit, a fundamental questioning of the achievement principle would be unreasonable. The price paid for this is a life plan in avoidance mode. Not only her own efforts or concrete determinations are avoided, but also the exploration of extended opportunities for action, which were, in contrast to Tracey, indeed available to Henriette due to her social and cultural capital.

4. Conclusion

The cases analyzed show that both Tracey and Henriette comply with the developmental and socialization-oriented demands on youth in such a way that, when asked about their visions of the future, they deal critically with their concrete life situations, challenge the conditions in which they find themselves, and struggle for both their own conception of identity and their ability to cope with the adolescent crisis.

In the detailed analyses presented above, we were able to work out that on the manifest level the explicit resistance to social conditions or institutions (school) ultimately remains within the milieu-specific scope of action. Albeit in different ways, both Tracey and Henriette remain in a passive-lamenting subject position. In the analyses, the presented resistance turned out to be a form of adaptation in which criticism remains within the existing system. As in the case of Tracey, the subject may give up individually, blame herself for failing, and fail

to criticize the social conditions in which she views herself as powerless, not least because avoiding such criticism prevents her from despairing altogether. Or, as in the case of Henriette, the subject may maintain her self-esteem by blaming school and the teachers for what she imagines as a perhaps curtailed life. In the end, this justifies her passivity and smoothes the inconsistencies in her life plan.

In Holzkamp's terminology, both cases are examples of restrictive agency. In Tracey's case, this is expressed as a warding off a threat to the self, and in Henriette's through her knowledge about the existence of a socially recognized place. In this way, both positions block the subject's ability to make the "effort of ascent" (Silkenbeumer & Wernet, 2012) and widen their scopes of action, a stance which from the position of the respective subjects may seem "reasonable." There is an obvious contradiction between the promise of pluralism and the multiplicity of opportunities presented by postmodern society, and the perceived narrowness of the actually existing opportunities for a life plan rated as successful. On that note, it seems reasonable to renounce efforts. For if cultural conditions are reflected in intrapsychic dispositions, as reconstructed in the cases of Tracey and Henriette, then, little or no potential can be mobilized for a change of self and world relation.

In both cases, school as the central institution in the participant's life appears to be a place that paralyzes autonomy, in which one just "sojourns," but which does not open up room for maneuver in the present or opportunities for the future. Even the criticism of school stays "in the frame" and does not aim to provide social living conditions, which can also be explained by the reproduction of a mode acquired in school: Holzkamp (1995) speaks of defensive, resistant learning when learning acts¹³ as defense against threats (bad grades, punishments, etc.), calling this the common case in school. With regard to the two essays analyzed, the thesis is that the school-based mode of defensive, resistant learning is actually the precursor of restrictive agency.

Last but certainly not least in this context, we should ask what we as researchers really expect from young people who—either at school or in an essay writing activity clearly associated with school—are asked to answer the question of how they imagine their lives as adults. Why should we (as Haug and Gschwandtner, 2006) be disappointed with adapted, standardized courses of life or pseudo-resistive statements, and lament poor resistance or lack of system criticism—especially since such criticism would ultimately be directed against an establishment to which the researchers themselves generally belong?

First of all, a possible form of resistance or criticism by the interviewees—in particular the refusal to participate in the research process—does not come

¹⁰ The counter-proposal is the subject's "expansive learning" out of world interest and the effort to tackle a problem of action (see Holzkamp, 1995).

into focus at all. We only work with those data that result from a certain submission of the subject to the research requirement. In addition, a look at the possible reasons for the frequent production of standardized and adapted visions of the future under the given conditions of the survey would be worthwhile: By reproducing perceived normative concepts of life in the course of the task and distancing myself from them as a subject, I make myself unassailable, reveal no personal thoughts, and probably meet the expectations of teachers in particular or adults in general.. With this approach, I again use those strategies of selective communication acquired by me during my school years, which enable me to survive school (see Holzkamp, 1993, 1995).

Furthermore, one could ask whether disappointment with young peoples' lack of resistance does not—inadmissibly—equate adolescence-typical conflicts in the described dialectics of adaptation and resistance with *political* resistance in the form of system criticism. Whereas indications of (adjusted) resistiveness as part of adolescent coping with crises are to be expected in such essays, political resistance in the sense of opposition to social conditions is not necessarily to be expected—at any rate, no more or less than it is from adults, for example.

Drawing upon critical psychology (“Kritische Psychologie”), with its distinction between restrictive and generalized agency, it would therefore be more appropriate to ask why people, in general, often choose restrictive agency.

In the cases of Tracey and Henriette, we see how neo-liberal ideologies of self-responsibility and self-optimization turn into subjective premises for action (see also Rose, 1996). Particularly through school processes of socialization, subjects experience and internalize the fact that they themselves are presumably the architects of their own fortunes, and that it is their own responsibility to productively use the multitude of opportunities available to them to shape their lives. The seemingly unlimited variety of options (keyword: social plurality) which are supposed to be open to all (keyword: equal opportunities) makes it difficult to find occasions or targets for an opposition based on the prevailing social conditions. I do not have to fight for something if I could achieve it—at least theoretically. Behind this neo-liberal logic, the societal conditionality of subjective problem situations becomes invisible. Conflicts and criticism are not directed against the social conditions, but shift to the intrapsychic of the subject.

It is therefore hardly surprising that no evidence of political resistiveness is found in our empirical material. But instead of asking for schools (as Haug & Gschwandtner, 2006) to teach young people critical thinking, youth research would be exciting if it a) directed attention to those social structures, institutions, and practices that paralyze resistiveness against prevailing conditions; b) addressed *how* social problems are subjectified; and c) focused on the young

people's perspective on their own role and position in society and their experience of adolescence.

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