

## Critical and Intersectional Childhood Studies

### A New Theoretical Framework of Adulthood From Transdisciplinary Fields of Critical Age, Gender, Race, and Disability: Studies Based on a Hawaiian Case Study of Reframing Self and Group Identity in Age-Different Learning Environments

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#### Abstract

The article focuses on the re-constructions of power-securing structures behind social inequalities. This conceptual study aims to synthesize different transdisciplinary studies from critical age, gender, race, and disability studies to gain an intersectional view of the power effects of discriminatory social habits, practices, and structures. The results show an intersectional synthesis regarding the phenomenon of adulthood. A typical definition of adulthood is the abuse of power by adults towards children while adulthood/childhood are socially constructed. Adulthood can be seen as the discriminatory axis of social positioning according to age or generation, consisting of subordinating social practices and attitudes that subsume into social norms and structures. The theoretical concept of adulthood contains various methodological approaches and paradigms. Different fields according to social constructivism like ethnomethodology, poststructuralism, linguistics, and symbolic interactionism emerge into a new theoretical framework. Their offered terms like Doing Difference or Age, Subjectivation, and Generationing, are contrasted and brought together into a new theoretical framework and a Theory of Childification. This theory shows a necessary shift of perspectives to the approach of critical adulthood and the question of how child-

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hood is performed by adulthood regarding generationing practices, structures, and privileged adult acting. The new theory reveals recurring patterns, discriminatory structures, and dominating practices based on the example of adultistic narratives. These narratives combine the mentioned disciplines around the subject related to structures, interactions, and cultures. Here, using a relational perspective, unseen, unspoken, and unheard practices by adults are uncovered, and can be applied to a reframing of education and learning environments, or of negative power effects on the lower-status group of children. The theory of Childlization is enfolded in a triad of mature-normative framing, re-framings, and counter-framings to new perspectives on adultism.

With empirical evidence, the article shows a re-framing of learning and identity-building on a community-based level and examples of counter-framings by young actors. In the context of a Hawaiian case study, age-different learning environments of progressive education at six schools in Oahu ( $n=6$ ) can be shown. The case study illustrates examples of critical adulthood in contrast to common adultistic narratives like pathologizing, or educative ordering and the realization of some counter-framings of children. And finally, it emphasizes the necessity of conceptualizing adultism on the part of those affected—accompanied by the demand to equalize children's rights and to deconstruct adultistic concepts of "being a minor child" vs. "being a mature adult". The article is therefore challenging "good" norms and orders of adult societies, citizenship, education, and even research and sciences.

*Key words:* adultism; intersectionality; mature-adult framing; adultistic narratives; critical adulthood; counter framing; age-different identities

## Introduction

### **The Concept of Childhood**

*A dualistic generational view on the binary premise of differentiating between childhood and adulthood requires a relational approach to highlight the shades of being age-different in between. (see Butler, 2001)*

*The concepts you create about something are very important. They are the handles with which you can move the real world. (Bertolt Brecht, 1995)*

The concept of adultism refers to the psychologist Flasher in 1978 and is prominently promoted by Ritz (2013), Liebel (2023), and Meade (2020) in the academic field of Germany and by Fletcher (2015) in the USA. Books on critical adulthood are also available in accessible language and written by young co-authors (Ritz/Schwarzer, 2022). Here, children are to be understood as novices in society who, as newcomers, have to deal with the existing structures to survive in their doubly vulnerable position (inherently and structurally). Adultism as a socio-political phenomenon is established in everyday interactions, norms, and civil rights, and firmly anchored in cultural habits of thought. Adultism is still largely unpopular in the range of intersectional considerations of other structural forms of

discrimination such as sexism, racism, classism, ableism, or even ageism. Adultism is not yet systematically analyzed in the mainstream of age and childhood studies. To conceptualize adultism in a new holistic perspective, it is obligatory to define different concepts and terms. There are terms like childism, adultism, ageism, ableism, infantilization, childizing, generationing, and un/doing age which refer to different disciplines and theoretical paradigms. They focus on studying childhood or older ages regarding social inequalities (Falkenstein/Gajewski, 2015; Schröter, 2018; Wanka/Höppner, 2021). Furthermore, these approaches deal with discriminatory practices and structures that represent an obstacle or disadvantage for the marginalized actors, while adulthood as a normative ideal remains an underexplored territory (Fangmeyer/Mierendorff, 2017). Here, focusing on adultism, the privileged position of mature adulthood will be deconstructed.

The terms child/childhood and adult/adulthood can be understood as social and binary constructs (Alanen, 2005, p. 68 f.), which are culturally established, structurally framed, socially negotiated, and normatively re-produced in symbolic interactions. Structurally, the binarity of age status within the generational order is defined as socially constructed power relations of higher-positioned adulthood versus less-positioned childhood in terms of age status (Alanen, 2005; Moosa-Mitha, 2005; Liebel, 2014). Adultism is detectable in discursive, institutional, and personal practices (Wanks/Hoppner, 2021). In Alanen's words, "children's agency is inextricably linked to the (absence) power that those positioned as children have to influence and dominate events in their everyday world" (2005, p. 80). On the agency level, Alanen speaks of the constant production of the two generational categories of children and adults in "generationing" practices" (Ibid., p. 79). The binary status groups of children and adults reveal themselves to each other in generational interpellation (e.g.. 'My child, I forbid/allow you...!' or 'Mom, may I please...?') and recognitions in a shared construction of the world in which irritation and (de-) stabilization can occur. Overall, age is a procedural social differentiator and contains opportunities for social participation and the availability of socially relevant resources (Höppner/Wanka, 2021, p. 43). The category also indicates age-specific discrimination if subjects do something for which they are culturally and socially defined as too young or already too old (ibid., p. 53). The archetypal form of adultism is oppression due to the binary structural ordering of underage children and full-age adults. This oppressive generational arrangement is legally framed by the concept of children as minors until the mature age of 18 (UN-CRC, 1989).

### **Social Functions of the Power-Securing Concept of Adult Maturity**

Childhood is politically defined as not fully developed, immature, and a-rational and constructed as pre-political and not yet human (Moosa-Mitha, 2005, p. 371). The circularity of the dilemma of pre-constructed abilities that are supposed

to define legal membership and participation and the simultaneity of the constructed lack of these abilities becomes apparent: the education and instruction of 'children' to become mature-adult citizens seems logical or necessary for taking part in society, and receiving legal membership. In political arenas, age is considered a primary exclusionary characteristic and an axis of social and political inequality and injustice (Liebel, 2014, p. 81). The age category is a relevant and necessary political characteristic for the creation of citizenship through the indicator of adulthood and the maturity norm implied by it. The consistent exclusion of young people from positions of power, which are necessary to change and define rights and norms, hinders young people circularly from accessing education, politics, and science to contribute to self-empowerment and social change. The childhood-adulthood construction has various political relevance (e.g., Socialization see Luhmann, 1991, p. 19 ff.; Nation-Building see Zajda, 2009, p. 3 ff.). The indeterminacy and ambiguity of childhood-adulthood is part of its essential characteristics. Precisely in its contradiction, the concept of childhood and adulthood plays a central role in the representation and structuring of the social world in which, with reference to the ideal adulthood, childhood becomes controllable. Ageism and adultism transform the material body into a field of political debate by subjecting the body determined by childhood to state control and surveillance, e.g. through parental authority, and guardianship (Fangmeyer/Mierendorff, 2017). In its physicality and visibility, childhood is also based on an obviousness that is a central component of social perception, identity, and socialization as common sense. The supposedly immediate perception of bodies determined by childhood, which is also reflected in state classification, is not an objectively given phenomenon, but remains, just like the construction of childhood itself, framed and characterized by cultural and social conventions (Foucault, 1994). Childhood is neither an illusion nor is it something biologically given. Childhood is a central element of social structures and influences the idea and representation of human bodies; as a situated, social phenomenon, it is changeable both in its connotations of meaning and in the way in which it shapes society. The concept of childhood is deeply anchored to the universal law of nature of being vulnerable and dependent on the natural state of birth and being in need of nutrition and care by capable persons. Due to this image, generational binarity promotes solidified discriminatory structures of the supposedly perceived inherent origin of Doing Difference (West/Fenstermaker, 1995) and Doing Vulnerability.

### **Conceptualizing of a New Theoretical Framework**

For previous research about social inequalities, age exists as a social category of difference alongside other categories of difference (Falkenstein/Gajewski, 2015; Schröter, 2018; Höppner/Wanka, 2021). Dualistic perspectives explain adultism as a consequence of a social difference, which is created by the category

of childhood as an age phase. Contrastingly, relational perspectives assume that childhood is an ideological construct that is produced through adultistic discrimination (Ritz, 2013; Liebel/Meade, 2023). Although individual options for action can certainly be characterized by prejudice, adultism is a socio-political order determined by childhood and adulthood. In this perspective, adultism is not an opinion of individuals based on irrational prejudices, but a rational social order resulting from concrete, strategic decisions within a generational order of a mature adult elite.

Therefore, the article resolves the structure-agency dualism as a separate analysis of structure and agents, but ultimately in a fusion of relational interdependent perspectives of explanatory patterns. Here, a relational approach helps to synthesize the contradictory perspectives on adultism on the one hand as a socio-political phenomenon on the structural level, and on the other hand as a re-product of symbolic interacting subjects on the individual level of inter-agency. The ethnomethodological approach focuses on the micro level and shows the absurdities and paradoxes of social interactions and individual agency. Without a poststructural view of underlying power structures and orders, the agents appear incompetent, deficient, disturbed or evil, and manipulative (Foucault 1994). Even more, from a structural perspective, relational interactionist definitions fall too short. Adultistic practices are not individual options for action but result from structural relationships. Micro-sociological approaches within *Doing Age/Difference* complement (post)structuralist theoretical approaches to extend the focus on practices, routines, and interactionist negotiations of different actors (Höppner/Wanka, 2021; West/Fenstermaker, 1995). With an explicit focus on the effectiveness of adultistic structures, exclusively structural perspectives on adultism can not recognize changes or emphasize the evaluative and projective agency of the actors (Emirbayer/Mische, 1998). A combination of these approaches generates interrelated subjects as actors with a choice, free will, and possible opportunities as capabilities depending on more or less restricting power structures (Sen, 2007). The poststructural concept of age (Höppner/Wanka, 2021; Schröter, 2018; see Butler, 2001) is combined with a sociological approach of aged-agency (Alanen, 2005). This opens up the possibility of interweaving both approaches to examine firstly, the social functioning and its influence on the construction of difference, and secondly, the interweaving of generational age status with the power-securing structures of age maturity.

### **Unknown, Unspoken, and Unseen Practices**

Due to the construct of minors or underage, children have been consistently excluded from science, research, and politics which leads to epistemic injustice (Foucault, 1994). Young people lack the opportunity to research their age group and the possibility of conceptualizing adultism or their age identity (Marke, 2021). As a strategy of resistance to discriminatory power structures, those oppressed need spaces and audiences to voice their counter-framings from their culture to

cope with the dominant frame (Feagin, 2006/2020). Young people require environments and structures that allow their expression and constructions of an ethical and epistemic counter-frame that resisted the dominant ‘mature adult frame’ and in which an alternative and resistant space of thought and experience is estimated. Therefore, it is necessary to involve children’s views in the definition of adulthood. So far, researchers from different fields have primarily looked at the production of childhood by children themselves (e.g., König/Böttner, 2015; Drake et al., 2021; Ruppin, 2018; Cassidy/Christie, 2014). The overall mechanism from these studies can be reframed as an identity act of subjectification through subjugation due to oppressive adult-centered power structures. In sociological studies, the focus is on structural and social frameworks that create age differences and generational order (Höppner/Wanka, 2021; Alanen, 2005). However, unsurprisingly, adult-led research concentrates less on their practices regarding their “privileges” or the deconstruction of their normative ideal of mature adulthood. Current research projects are less about the demonstrations of power by adults themselves, adultistic narratives, or framings (see Meade, 2020; Prengel, 2013). This approach shifts the prevailing analytical focus away from the marginalized and oppressed subjects and towards the adult actors who benefit directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, from the reproduction of adultistic social structures.

### **Intersectional Perspectives From Transdisciplinary Studies**

A radical contextualization allows a transdisciplinary knowledge synthesis. The master category of age (here) is thus expanded to include intersectional and other dimensions of inequality such as gender, class, race, and ability, which reinforce marginalization and discrimination. The concept of intersectionality expands the view of the overlaps, interconnections, and superimpositions of this category with other categories which leads to the phenomenon of Othering.<sup>1</sup> Adulthood is closely linked to ableism, where discrimination is based on physical disabilities or biological dysfunctions compared to an ideal norm (Kaiser/Pfahl, 2020). Between the two binary poles of socially constructed childhood referring to childishness and adulthood referring to adulthood, other people find themselves differentially positioned.<sup>2</sup> Despite this differential positioning, the binary social structuring between subordination and subjugation persists, and the political and economic interests of the dominant mature-adult group and the various subordinate groups are diametrically opposed (West/Fenstermaker, 1995).

Some integrated transdisciplinary views refer to critical race studies of Feagin (2020), age studies of Höppner and Wanka (2021), and disability studies of Kaiser and Pfahl (2020) and are also based on Butler’s (2001) gender studies. Feagin (2006/2020) argues within his systematic race studies to uncover the normative concept of being white to detect the norm behind the exclusive mecha-

nism of doing difference (West/Fenstermaker, 1995). Critical race studies open up strong demands to ban the structural phenomenon of racism and criticize the concept of ethnicity and terms of race. In comparison critical disability studies argue for the recognition of diverse bodies, abilities, and capacities in society (Kaiser/Pfahl, 2020). Contrastingly, they promote the concept of abilities as long as it is not normative or achievement-oriented. Likewise, critical adulthood does not want to ban the state of growth and developing capacities of young persons. They criticize the structures and interactions regarding an exclusive mature-adult framing (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). A person's individual biographical state of growth or the concept of diverse bodies and capacities should be respected in every agehood. Furthermore, aging and growth could be seen in the light of Butler's (2001) claim for gender diversity, and therefore calling for the respect of age-different identities. Butler conceptualizes gender as the triad of biological sex, social gender, and sexual desire aligned with heteronormativity. Equivalently, age studies (Höppner/Wanka, 2021) differ between calendrical age, social age(hood) or life stage, and age abilities aligned with mature-normativity, and competency-orientation (Marke, 2023a/b). Social chrononorms define specific achievements regarding the calendrical and social age (Wanka/Höppner, 2021). These social concepts of age form one's age identity, well-being, and status. As explained above, the material-bodily appearance of age contributes decisively to the perception and evaluation of age abilities and age status. The ideal age identity is constructed as mature-adulthood with fully and healthy developed physical emotional and social abilities, capacities, and competencies. The granting of maturity appears to be an intangible, constructed, and empirically thin concept that is worth deconstructing in light of the paradoxes of human strength(s) and competencies (Schröter, 2018). For the reason of a 'mature-adult-frame,' a conceptualization of maturity from a hegemonic adult perspective is elementary to be able to understand adultism in a new theoretical frame. In the analysis and conceptualization of the empirically thin concept of maturity or mature adulthood (Fangmeyer/Mierendorff, 2017), there is potential for further research and systematic examination of adultism to define its social influence and function in society like adult privileges and dominance. Thus, new perspectives from gender studies according to Butler (2001), or racial studies according to Feagin (2020) are used for focusing on the power practices of adults like adultistic narratives/mature-adult framings, and integrate them into the collective consciousness. A new conceptualized Theory of Childilization is developed to make adultistic narratives, speech-acts, and framings visible. Childilization uncovers acts and discursive patterns by those (more) privileged of generational ordering as low-positioning, belittling, silencing, and holding down of people categorized within an 'under-age status' of being 'immature'. The decoupling of the terms child/childhood from its ontological, generational, psychological, and biologicistic definition would leave behind a meaningless conceptual shell that is neither methodologically reliable nor empirically substantiat-



ed. Despite its lack of significance, being a child remains an influential, normative idea that is considered real by many and as such produces real social effects and consequences. In a theory of Childlization, the concept of childhood is not replaced, but expanded to include the subjective appropriation of this category to describe the dynamics and flexibility of the relationships between the category of difference and the subject as well as the interplay between social structures and individual-based agency. This conceptual extension is an essential aspect for visualizing the social processes between state institutions and civil society actors in the attribution, resistance, and appropriation of the temporary fixation of the meaning of childhood. The New Theoretical Framework includes the deconstruction of concepts supporting adultism such as learning, competencies, and maturity.

### **Adultistic Structure Analysis**

Structures are hierarchical orders and social trials formed over decades through habits of thoughts and interactions, transformed into shared values and social norms, and visible through public institutions and organizations (West/Fenstermaker, 1995). An adult-centered structure appears to be one of the oldest and most natural in the world. No historical decade can be identified in which children have been in charge (apart from a few underage kings in Ancient Egypt, who were more of a decorative token and were guided by adult interests). Children as “minors” (still) have no civic rights (Gran, 2021). They have historically been defined as private property and means of production (see Aries, 1975) and continue to fulfill this status in functional childhoods, for example in agrarian nations without social security systems. Since the 19th century in industrialized nations and welfare states, the so-called socialization childhoods have developed, which prepare children for their future role as ideal-typical obedient and capable employees and citizens through provision and compulsory education (Bühler-Niederberger et al., 2014). At present, a transition to participatory childhoods is emerging as the norm, where children are encouraged in early daycare and challenged with participatory pedagogy to secure state democracies through values and commitment. In child-centered societies, much attention and social responsibility has recently been placed on children’s shoulders as *the* future (Chung/Walsh, 2000).

Aries (1975) discovers the historical trace of the constructions of childhood and speaks of an individually and collectively significant transmission of intellectual concepts for the formation of age identities. In his analysis of medieval writings, he illustrates a division into conceptual phases of life concerning age and its immense importance for people. He describes the historically developed phases of life as “childhood and adolescence, youth and adolescence, old age and senility” (ibid. p. 73) and this also means social expectations and age attributions of vulnerability and carefreeness in childhood, as well as strength and freedom in adulthood. The construct of a child’s immaturity, for example, is physically based



on the lack of teeth, which makes it impossible to form words and communicate (ibid., p. 76). In addition to a physical deficit, mental abilities that have not yet been developed or experiences that have not yet been made were also considered as natural social limitations. The first three phases of life are described as phases of playing, exploring, learning, and unraveling before one, as a fully grown but still young person, was able to harvest or pass on this maturity and exploit it economically (ibid., p. 80 ff.). The different years of life are accompanied by different standardized phases of life based on biological, natural, or physical attributions that have been collected over centuries in experiences, abstracted into ideas, transmitted in summary, and anchored in the intellectual concepts of people and society as “mental habits” (ibid., p. 74). These established social constructs have served as frames of reference for generations, which are interactively negotiated and recreated. According to Aries, the attributions and divisions of life phases change depending on the social or economic demands on social subjects and show the political functionality of age constructions for the reproduction of a social, economic or political system.

### **Adultistic Narratives and (Counter-)Framings**

One focus of the conceptual study is on reconstructing and analyzing recurring patterns of socially and culturally shared argumentation and discourses to map a kind of topography of the dominant stereotypes and topoi (see Keller, 2019). Narratives are meaningful because they offer explanations for an event or an action in the sense of a cause-and-effect relationship, which is woven into a narrative chain of evidence, where contradictory assumptions are also characteristic. If the individual topic of a discourse comes together to form a narratable structure, it is called narrative or narrative structure. A narrative is a culturally shared discursive speech act that includes more than sequencing motives or events; rather, these must be in a causal relationship or emerge from one another. Argumentation chains that are woven into such an explanatory context can be traced by analyzing narratives, as they are meaningful stories that assign certain roles to social actors and offer interpretations of cause-effect relationships. By resorting to a storyline, actors can actualize discursive categories of very heterogeneous origin in a more or less coherent cultural context. Some adultistic narratives that appear in the mainstream and topologies of childhood merge into a mature adult framing (Bühler-Niederberger et al., 2014; Moosa-Mitha, 2005; Meade, 2020): The narrative of childhood as a phase of development emphasizes that children and young people are not yet fully developed and therefore need to be guided and protected by adults. The narrative of childlike innocence idealizes children as innocent and naive beings. Another narrative constructs children in need of care and protection and emphasizes the responsibility of adults to protect children and young people from negative influences.

The concept of frames was mainly used in cognitive and neurological Sciences

developed to describe perceptual structures. These structures are both in the individual, synaptic connections, and in the collective memory and are inscribed in historical narratives. The concept bridges the contrast between individual and collective as well as between material biological and discursive phenomena to show how people often unconsciously attach meaning to everyday situations. These beliefs are simultaneously incorporated into socio-political ideas and translated into action structures (see Feagin, 2020). This frame, as a socially dominant interpretation pattern, determines ideas of mature adulthood, and rationalizes and legitimizes its social respective generational order. This methodological approach examines adultism both as a material reality and as a symbolic frame of reference. The frame at the macro level stables structural relationships on the micro level, where dynamic individual spaces of interactions are intertwined. This framing permeates all social structures of society and has a concrete material and psychological influence on social reality. The concept therefore fulfills a descriptive and analytical dual function: on the one hand, this frame describes the prerequisites for systemic adultism, on the other hand, it also explains its central reproductive mechanisms.

The ‘mature-adult frame’ represents the central theoretical hinge with which both the continuity of adultistic oppression and the reproduction of the various social institutions and their routines are analyzed and explained. The frame links seemingly disparate social phenomena and at the same time visualizes a system of adultistic oppression that has been elaborated over centuries and operates on different levels. Mature-adult framing is evident in adultistic narratives, particularly in educational and socialization contexts, but also at a political level (exclusion of minor’s rights from National Law, e.g. German Constitutions). Whereas children are portrayed as less than the adult ideal and deficient in terms of their abilities, maturity, and rationality, this becomes visible for example in adults’ paternalistic argumentation states—“children can’t do that yet,” or “You can’t expect children to do that.” If these adultistic narratives were replaced with other marginalized difference categories such as “women,” or “people of color,” the irritation and outrage would be more obvious. More subtly and framed with biological, psychological, and ontological assumptions, adultistic narratives seem to be plausible: “I wouldn’t let a 5-year-old operate on me” (whereas absurdly, the worldwide structurally forced child labor shows what children are “capable of doing” in the war, sex trade, or industry). These framings of the incompetent/immature child and the mature adult are specific perspectives on how a topic is viewed or presented, while counter-framings offer alternative perspectives to challenge common narratives. A current counter-framing by adults is, for example, the empowerment of children. Children are viewed as competent and active actors who can understand and express their rights and needs. This counter-framing calls for children to be actively involved in decision-making processes and for their abilities and opinions to be recognized. It focuses on the voices and rights of children. It is argued that children should be viewed as equal partners in research and that their experiences

and opinions should be taken into account when developing findings (Esser/Sitter, 2018; Bessell et al., 2017). These framings and counter-framings demonstrate a recent shift toward greater recognition of the rights and capabilities of children and to greater diversity and participation (Feldhaus, 2019). Various adultistic framings and counter-framings can currently be identified in adult professions and arenas of childhood which serve different social functions. The empirical focus lies on the counter-framings by young actors themselves at the end of the paper (Miller, 2013; Marke, 2023a/b).

### Reframed Adultistic Effects

Children also deal with the chrononormative demands and expectations of childhood life phase in external and self attributions: Learning and performance expectations, as well as the acquisition of knowledge and skills, are in the foreground for 106 Australian schoolchildren interviewed about identity formation (Drake et al. 2021, p. 107) and also constitute the value of childhood for the children involved in another study from 6 countries (mostly global North) (Cassidy et al. 2017, p. 709 f.). A look at the empirical field of the age status group of children shows that the children surveyed orientate their age identity towards norms such as education, skills, and abilities, which they try to acquire and internalize or fulfill personally. Children actively adopt the prevailing performance orientation and competence normativity into their self-concept and also integrate the negatively experienced adultistic pressure (Drake et al. 2021, p. 105). Concerning a study of the political agency of 70 German daycare children, complicity, rule orientation, and competent compliance appears to be the action strategies of choice over less attractive strategies such as resistance or rebellion in generational arrangements (Ruppin, 2018, p. 29). The fact that the critical questioning of generational order or authorities is not desirable concerning the attainment of citizenship is also recognized and adopted by 133 Scottish students asked about their concepts (Cassidy/Christie, 2014, p. 50 ff.). The impacts and effects of generational ordering practices can be seen in linguistically and physically orchestrated incorporated behavioral dispositions (*habitus*; Bourdieu, 2005, p. 78) and adapted age identities (Ruppin, 2018; Drake et al., 2021).

The causal conditions of an age-related denial of young persons' agency for the hierarchical devaluation of the age status group of children have the consequences of a disregard for their dignity and identities. Empirical findings underpin the phenomenon and, as a consequence, point to the existential suffering of defamed subjects concerning their inferior ability and being. The generational valorization or devaluation of the self becomes relevant in the creation of social inequalities and in the formation of identity. The concepts of agency, voice, dignity, and identity merge in the context of difference- and status-related citizenship and generational attributions of others and self. Generational forms of adaptation and resistance, as well as

change and crises of children and young people, can be emphasized as a transcendence of agency, voice, dignity, and identity and examined based on a reframing model or counter-framings in the identity-forming evaluation of others and self. As a marker of difference, age permeates all forms of social and societal relationships and shapes both social structures and collective and individual identities. On the other hand, the groups defined by these practices determine their own embodied identification in appropriation, distance, and contradiction to it. Therefore, age is not only state and social attribution but also appropriated self-attribution and identity construction. Age is a category of difference, but at the same time, it is also part of a subjectivation that organizes and enables appropriation, empowerment, and resistance. Resistance is the ability to act against dominant social structures and this is articulated in resistant narratives and epistemic, activist counter-framings which can be underlined by empirical evidence of an international case study.

### **Case Study: Counter Framings by Young Actors**

#### ***Results of Observations and Interviews: Adult Teachers' Narratives***

The empirical data within this synthesis is illustrated by a Hawaiian ethnographical case study "A Philosophy of Children's Voices" (Marke, 2023a/b). The study has been conducted since 2022 with the cooperation of Leuphana University of Lüneburg and the University of Hawaii at Manoa. It contains participatory observation at six model schools ( $n=6$ ) at Oahu over one summer semester in 2022. The qualitative research<sup>3</sup> design and ethnography include indigenous and immigrant teacher interviews ( $n=21$ ) and expert interviews ( $n=8$ ) that propagate a progressive educational approach to 'philosophy for children in Hawaii' (p4cHI). There is also an evaluation from children's point of view available (Miller, 2013) which is illustrated as possible counter-framings by young actors.

The ideal goals of p4cHI mentioned by the interviewed adults (teachers, experts) have been empowering children (in their role of students) and putting power-sensible learning structures into weekly practice to cultivate single moments of humanity and equity into a habit and community culture. They expressed the aim for a reframing of learning, like being dependent upon a context in which learners can explore their wonders, needs, and interests rather than conforming to a standardized educational norm. Teachers' community-orientation is based on their assumption that all are capable agents and practicing this through inclusive instruments such as sitting in a circle (Circular arrangement), using a woolen ball (Community Ball) for ordering different statements, voting democratically on children's own questions (Plain Vanilla), or using philosophical rules to reflect on assumptions (Good Thinker's Toolkit). Teachers express new dimensions of a political agency and membership in a mature community that is not based on age or mature-adult framing (e.g., primal wondering, authenticity, true self, speaking from the gut). Teachers explain that they are learning from the students, and they

are learners themselves (e.g., “I learned a lot from you, folks”). There are also some age biases observable around the topic of philosophy, its standards, and criteria about ‘what is a juicy or “good” philosophical question’ (one expert was questioning if a child’s question is philosophical enough, e.g., ‘What is your favorite animal and how is it linked to your personality?’). In sum, it was observable among the teachers that they are reframing learning in age-different environments and undoing age differences through thinking together philosophically on shared foci and engaging personally in a shared space and dialogue with personal facets (e.g., one teacher was talking seriously about the daily life of her cat in order to answer the child’s philosophical question ‘would pets like to be free?’). Their philosophical communication pattern has re-framed educative ordering in an age-different way due to promoting the norm of participation multidimensionally like active listening, being a safe participant, creating new spaces, thinking together, and sharing of ideas as a reconnecting group activity. The Hawaiian case study “Philosophy of Children’s Voices” (Marke, 2023a/b) has shown re-framed learning environments and age-different interactions, but also common “generationing” adult-child or teacher-student interactions. The generational guidance of some adults (experts, teachers) in a classroom has been centered around the community-based goal of how to think deeper and better together, and more hidden about what to think. Therefore, Undoing Age was not observable in total, because the adult teacher is still at the center of communication, leadership, responsibility, initiative, and action, explaining the rules and watching and assessing minor students, but the way of interaction and communication in generational arrangements changed. The assessment is a shared process with evaluation criteria from the students and the dialogues are to some extent driven by the children, furthermore, the selection of the topic and questions is in the children’s hands. The implemented learning structures and environments have been age-different within this progressive educational approach, but not within a non-progressive school system with no access to equal resources or rights for children. Students are dependent on the goodwill and practice of the teacher. From a short-term perspective, projects or approaches do not change school structures, selective grading, generational order, or adultism, but they help the participants to reject the oppressional interactions and narratives.

### **Conclusive Discussion Based on Young Actors’ Counter Framings**

Backed by an evaluative research study on p4cHI (Miller 2013), the minor participants ( $n=13$ ) expressed that they could build up a re-framed self and group identity in age-different learning environments. They mentioned concerning the experience with p4c “It is a place to be myself,” “The teacher is one of us” (ibid., p. 71), and that they liked the peers spurs inquiry, and the pursuit of an examined life. According to Miller (2013), the students re-framed learning similarly to the

teachers' narratives (Marke, 2023a/b) and have been talking about the transformation of knowing and the cultivation of a safe learning environment, the different roles of a teacher as a participant, and the new meaning of learning from each other. Their evaluation appears as possible counter-framings to adultistic narratives and generational ordering in education. "Yeah...there's that stress level of school that does not exist in this class" (ibid., p. 73). "We're a community and I'm not above you, I'm not below you, I'm with you at your level" (ibid., p. 73) "You were so confused as we were too, and we could tell that you weren't lying about it." (ibid., p. 95). The circular seating arrangement and the community ball reframe the situation and power hierarchy symbolically and structure their interactions without having an omniscient adult teacher in the center of power and attention. The p4c experience was linked to feelings and emotions like joy, fun, connection, equality, vibration, and being free from fear and stress. Comparatively, the qualitative research project about the Scottish COOL music project reconceptualizes adultism similarly (Sutherland et al., 2023). They concluded that community-based ethical performances, in-group-interdependency, and a reframing of learning are key elements for breaking up with adultistic narratives, practices, and framings.

Regarding children's rights, Lundy's (2007) conceptualization of article 12 of the UN-CRC and 'children's right to be heard' shows the dimensions of space, audience, voice, and influence to fulfill the UN norm of participating or taking part. The agency-based research design could detect the emotional importance of being part of a maturing community and an intellectual debate, and having their various voices and ideas respectfully taken into account. The observation category of being emotionally and intellectually connected, 'shared vibe,' was one impact of p4c lessons, and for these moments meaningful enough for the children. Nevertheless, it could be dangerous and harmful for those oppressed to take part in an emotionalized educational environment and asymmetric generational arrangements (compulsory schooling) where adult teachers are occurring as equal friends while gaining all of the power and benefits in the background while children are still in a vulnerable, exploited position until they reach 18. Even within existing age-different learning environments and enabling of children's counter-framings, in the end within unequal legal power structures, education has the same goal to socialize children in adults' interest.

Socio-political power structures prevent actor-centered anti-adultism projects like progressive education (p4cHI) from becoming overall effective. However, research shows that these projects enable their participants to resist adultistic narratives and performances by refusing its language and practices. As an effort, research gains ideas of age-different environments and structures, and ideas of relational thinking, and counter-framings within generational arrangements. To analyze the inertia and reproduction of adult domination, interactions at the actor level are of interest to record alternative action strategies and possible counter-framings by the young actors themselves.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For example, white Christian native children from the middle class experience adulthood, but in comparison they enjoy a higher social status due to their construction of an ideal childhood and receive more benefits and resources than the ‘others’ like poor children with a history of migration, different religions, sexual orientations, or of different colors (West/Fenstermaker).

<sup>2</sup> The social concepts of ages are also paradigmatic for the oppression and infantilization of >>”immature/”maldeveloped” people<< who therefore appear small or childlike. For example, people with handicaps or diagnoses of personality disorders like emotional dysregulation (BPD), dependency (DPD), voice dysfunction, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), senility, or dwarfism a short body height.

<sup>3</sup> The data analysis which is shown here comes from the first wave analysis. There are currently more participants taking part in the research with the focus on teacher’s narratives and framings.

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