Prejudice and discrimination in childhood: Children's agency in intersectional structures of domination

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Abstract

Based on a project carried out in Saxony-Anhalt, Germany, the article provides a framework for intervening into power relations in kindergartens, both theoretically and practically. Drawing on notions from Childhood Studies and German Critical Psychology it reviews a range of findings, concepts and methods from Social Psychology on prejudices and discrimination in Early Childhood. In its course, research questions are derived from valuable insights, and shortcomings are pointed out in order to suggest conceptual and practical alternatives, namely, a form of subject-scientific action research.

Keywords

action research, agency, childhood, childhood studies, discrimination, prejudices.

Introduction

This article aims to develop a crucial part of a framework for researching how children gain and develop agency in intersectional structures of domination, including prejudices and discrimination. This question is explored by my research group *KiWin-With Children into the World of Diversity* [Mit Kindern in die Welt der Vielfalt hinaus], which is based in the East German State of Saxony-Anhalt. Over the course of three years, from 2016 until 2019, we are accompanying several groups of children in their everyday life in four local kindergartens and observe their peer interactions with respect to practices of inclusion and exclusion. The project is based on the categorical and methodological concepts of German Critical Psychology (Holzkamp 1985

[1983], Tolman/Maiers 1991, Painter et al. 2009, Reimer/Markard 2014), and grounded in the fundamental notions of Childhood Studies (Qvortrup et al. 2009, Corsaro 2015). We therefore presuppose that these children's lifeworlds are structured by intersecting forms of domination inherent in German society at large. The empirical questions are, how they manifest, and in what ways they are reproduced and how they can be overcome. Our focus lies on structures of domination with respect to age, in which children are collectively subordinated to adults, as well as to class, gender, and race, in which children are positioned differently. These structures present children with possibilities for gaining and developing agency – either by reproducing or by transcending domination. In terms of German Critical Psychology, these possibilities for action represent variants of restrictive and generalized action potence (Holzkamp 1985: 367ff). Nevertheless, as these categories are domain-general, it is difficult to draw from them concrete research questions without the mediation of more specific concepts and findings on the ontogenesis of prejudices and discrimination. Hence, we need to determine the potential contribution of pertinent approaches to our research project, as well as limitations which we will seek to resolve.

Part One of this article describes the professional and academic fields of practice in Germany from which our project has evolved and to which it intends to contribute. Part Two situates *KiWin* in the longstanding international research tradition pertaining to prejudices and discrimination. Part Three formulates fundamental research questions that derive from the review of basic concepts in Social Psychology, namely categorization, stereotyping, prejudices and discrimination. Part Four revisits additional findings from contemporary research and discusses the methods critically. Part Five delineates our research concept and methodology, followed by the conclusion in Part Six.

1. Contextualizing *KiWin* with professional and academic fields of practice in Germany

In the past 15 years, elementary education has found increasing recognition as an integral part of the education system in Germany. One indicator of this process is the introduction of academic degrees in addition to the traditional vocational training for teaching staff. Another indicator is the agreement, made in 2004, by the ministries of the sixteen states of Germany, regarding a framework for elementary education, which was followed by the issue of guidelines by all federal states. In the national framework, as well as in the guideline of Saxony-Anhalt, the welcoming of diversity and the urge to overcome inequalities are prevalent themes. This created a demand among students and professionals for

concepts and pedagogical means that would contribute to the creation of environments in which children can "be different without fear" (Adorno 1997 [1951]: 116; translation KRG).

Furthermore, through a series of programs, that started in 2001 and have lasted to this day, the federal state of Germany initiated the creation and adoption of practices against right-wing extremism and various kinds of prejudices (Heitmeyer 2002-2011; Decker/Brähler 2008, Decker et al. 2010; Decker/Kiess/Brähler 2012, 2014; Zick/Klein 2014, Zick et al. 2016). The initiative, titled "Rise of the decent people" ("Aufstand der Anständigen") and announced by Chancellor Schröder on 4 October 2000, was sparked by two terrorist actions: a bomb attack directed against immigrants, among them Jews, in Düsseldorf on 27 July 2000, and an attempt to set fire to the New Synagogue of Düsseldorf on 2 October 2000. It realizes the idea that hate crimes can, in the long run, best be countered by strengthening democratic forces in civil society. In 2007, elementary education was incorporated into the state programs, following the recognition that an important form of prevention of prejudices and discrimination can be carried out in this field. A few years earlier, from 2003 onwards, the Berlin-based project *Kinderwelten*, founded by van Leer, had adopted Louise Derman-Spark's anti-bias program (Derman-Sparks 1989, Derman-Sparks/Brunson-Phillips 1997), which is now widely considered a core approach against prejudices and discrimination among preschool children in Germany (Wagner 2008, 2013).

Against this backdrop, the project *Ino and Kivi – Children for Diversity* [Ino und Kivi – Kinder für Vielfalt], initiated in 2011 and financed by the abovementioned state programs, set out under my supervision to explore and develop pedagogical concepts suitable for the rural areas of East Germany, the social, political and educational conditions of which differ in various ways from those of an urban metropolis such as Berlin. *KiWin* continues to explore and account for these specificities. Nonetheless, what holds true for cities and rural areas alike is that, in my academic and professional experience, the majority of discourses and practices concerning elementary education are substantially adult-centered: parents and professionals are (seen as) the main actors, and pedagogical strategies are developed for their use. Similarly, the dominant research on the effectiveness of pedagogical methods addresses different aspects regarding the environments created for children (Beelmann et al. 2010; Jugert et al. 2016), but does not investigate how children view these surroundings, nor does it consider how these surroundings are created and transformed by the children themselves. Furthermore, from the adult-centered perspective – which professionals and parents alike tend to adopt – prejudices and discrimination displayed by children are seen as an effect (or imitation) of adults' behavior at home or in the

kindergarten. In contrast to this logic, our current research project *KiWin* views children as the main actors and is interested in the children's perspective. Hence, the project concentrates on how children bring about practices of inclusion and exclusion in their intra- and intergenerational interaction, notwithstanding the fact that they obtain at least part of their knowledge of stereotypes, prejudices etc. from adults.

While our approach aims to suggest an innovative strategy within the international field of research (as I will discuss in detail below), it also clearly fills a void in the German-speaking research arena, in which the ontogenesis of prejudices and discrimination in infancy, early and middle childhood remains a blind spot for several disciplines. This can be exemplified in the following brief summary of relevant contributions in the pertinent fields of research: Developmental Psychology does, of course, address relevant processes in these age groups, such as perception, language acquisition and cognition, yet it does not directly investigate the development of prejudices and discrimination (Oerter/Montada 2008, Lindenberger/Schneider 2012); on the other hand, prejudices are a prominent topic in Social Psychology, though not in a developmental perspective (Jonas et al. 2014). Similarly, while Socialization Theory and Research investigates prejudices and discrimination in the context of political socialization, it focuses on adolescence, but not on earlier periods in childhood (Hurrelmann et al. 2008). A partial exception can be found in the concept of Authoritarian Personality, developed by some of the founders of Critical Theory, which refers to a syndrome that is assumed to originate from certain familial constellations and corresponding experiences of young children (Adorno et al. 1995 [1950]). Nonetheless, even here childhood plays only a retrospective role, when right-wing attitudes of adolescents are interpreted as a result of certain patterns of attachment (Hopf et al. 1995). Fortunately, in Anglo-American academia, there is a longstanding research tradition on the ontogenesis of prejudices in childhood, from which we can derive important research questions and concepts.

2. Situating *KiWin* in the international field of academic research

In the Anglo-American academia, research on prejudices in childhood dates back to the 1930's (Allport 1954), and has since accumulated an extensive database and generated various theoretical perspectives (Quintana/McKown 2008). At present, we can distinguish five prominent approaches which apply preexisting theories to the (developmental) investigation of prejudices in childhood:

(1) Canadian Frances Aboud (1988, 2003) promotes a cognitive theory that refers to Jean Piaget (1896-1980, Switzerland) and Lawrence Kohlberg (1927-1987, USA).

(2) Gordon Allport (1897-1967, USA) is generally regarded as the originator of a learning theory which does not have a prominent proponent at present, but rather serves as an antipode (Aboud/Doyle 1996).

(3) In the tradition of Henri Tajfel (1919-1982, Poland/Great Britain), Australian Drew Nesdale (2008, Nesdale et al. 2008) puts forward the Social Identity Developmental Theory.

(4) The Israeli researchers Yona Teichmann and Daniel Bar-Tal (2008) emphasize societal conflicts while drawing on Tajfel and on the Intergroup Conflict Theory developed by Muzafer Sherif (1905-1988, Osman Empire/USA) and Carolyn Sherif (1922-1982, USA). Paul Connolly of Northern Ireland (Connolly et al. 2009) conducts research in a similar vein, making use of Bourdieu's notion of habitus.

(5) Finally, Kenneth B. Clark (1914-2005) and Mamie P. Clark (1917-1983) highlight the meaning of racism for children from the African-American communities in the USA (Clark, K. B./Clark, M.P. 1952; Clark, K.B. 1963). This last-mentioned perspective is highly important for the following discussion, due to its understanding of prejudices from the standpoint of the subordinated, i.e., African-American children.

2.1 A Particular or comprehensive approach?

Considering this compilation of differing theoretical approaches to the study of prejudices and discrimination, one might ask which approach *KiWin* should adopt. Yet, we at *KiWin* believe that we are not to choose, but rather to understand which detail of the common subject matter is captured by each of these perspectives. In our view, all of the core aspects addressed in these approaches play a role in the acquisition and employment of prejudices by young children: (1) the development of cognitive capacities; (2) learning activities; (3) one's status in society (examined by means of social comparison); (4) large-scale societal conflicts; (5) and the different impact that forms of domination have on the subordinated, in contrast to those in dominant positions. Moreover, though the task of integrating these various approaches has been formulated before (Aboud 2005: 318ff), our way of tackling it leads beyond the main road of positivism.

The research conducted by *KiWin* is attempting to utilize the abovementioned theories not as hypotheses in the strict sense, but rather as means for guiding the collection and interpretation of data. This is based on the

conviction that the positivistic form of scientific knowledge production regarding human actions is prone to a misperception of the relation between theory and data, maintaining that the former can be falsified by the latter, whereas, in fact, data can merely exemplify such theories but not falsify them (Holzkamp 1986, 1994). Inasfar as this holds true, it explains the empirical evidence connected to all of these theories, as well as the reason why the positivistic model for advancing scientific knowledge by dismissing falsified theories apparently does not bear fruit in the realm of social sciences.

Instead, the approach that would advance our knowledge about the ontogenesis of prejudices is a systematic dialogue on the theoretical relation between the different facets that are investigated in each respective approach, but not within the positivistic framework (Aboud 2005: 318ff). The *KiWin* research group suggests that the concept of reinterpretation (Markard 2009: 299ff), developed in German Critical Psychology and based on its categorical framework (Holzkamp 1985), can contribute substantially to this task. A thorough reinterpretation of the abovementioned theories cannot, of course, be detailed here; rather, it is part of the work ahead of us. Nonetheless, in Part Three, I will offer a close reading of various traditional concepts and methods and discuss the incorporation of their insights into our approach, as well as point out their shortcomings, thus shedding light on the ways we suggest to deal with the variety of theoretical perspectives.

2.2 Identical or varying subject matters?

Another conclusion we at *KiWin* draw from this compilation is that, even though all of these different approaches study prejudices and discrimination, their subject matters are hardly identical. This follows from the varying historical and regional conditions in which the abovementioned classical and contemporary scientists have conducted their research. Thus, the investigated intergroup relations carry specific histories (i.e., slavery, genocide, poverty) with significantly different outcomes for both subordinated and dominant subjects. Moreover, even though the social categories at stake – race, nation, religion and ethnicity – are more or less prevalent in each case, their interrelations vary and they are (re)produced differently, both historically and at present: inequality between the respective groups may be guaranteed by law, or exist despite legal equality (USA, Australia); religion and nation can merge (Israel, Ireland), or remain relatively independent of each other (USA).

Therefore, we at *KiWin* cannot apply the unaltered basic concepts (prejudice, discrimination, etc.) to any given constellation we encounter. Rather, in our research we must be sensitive to historical distinctions as well as to the

specific qualities and interrelations of prevalent social categories in Germany today. Moreover, we must take into consideration the specific meaning of each constellation with respect to the subjects in the dominant and subordinated position. Keeping this in mind, we nonetheless derive many of our research questions from the basic concepts in Social Psychology (see below).

2.3 Conceptualizing the development of prejudices and discrimination from infancy to adulthood

For the *KiWin* research group, the most instructive idea regarding the development of prejudices and discrimination from infancy to adulthood was gained from Gordon Allport's seminal work, *The Nature of Prejudice*, published in 1954. His book is an extensive review of the contemporary body of knowledge on this topic and it includes a part on childhood. Again, our reading differs from the positivistic reference (Dovidio et al. 2005, Aboud 2005), in that we are primarily interested in the conceptual, comprehensive approach to the ontogenesis of prejudices covering the timespan from infancy to adulthood.

We also find of importance the fact that the trajectory of prejudice is critically viewed as inherent in the US-American culture, as it had been depicted in an influential publication at the time (Myrdal 1944). This culture is characterized by contradicting forces: the humanitarian-Christian values of equality on the one hand, and structures of inequality with respect to class and race on the other (Allport 1958 [1954]: 313ff). Allport argues that (white) children who grow up in this culture do not necessarily need to develop prejudices, but if they do, their prejudices mirror and reproduce this two-faced culture, thus mastering "the peculiar double-talk appropriate to prejudice in a democracy" (295).

With regard to the prevalence of this contradictory character of society in childhood, Allport reasons that it is not only the transmission of specific content, but also a specific form of education that sets the stage for the development of prejudices or tolerance (282ff): if children experience love and feel secure, they will develop a fundamental understanding of equality and trust; on the other hand, if adults impose their will without explanation or negotiation, children will deduce the ruling of power and authority, and will gain a hierarchical understanding of society. It seems that Allport is depicting ideas from *The Authoritarian Personality*, which had been published some years before as part of the *Studies in Prejudice* (Horkheimer/Flowerman 1950), while transforming its retrospective notions into the present experience of developing children: the exercising of authoritarian forms of education in a democratic society.

Within the authoritarian educational constellation and the ensuing hierarchical understanding of society, specific prejudices, which are based on generalized social categories, are likely to be acquired. It is noteworthy that Allport (1958) describes the *development* of the cognitive capacity of forming generalized categories: it begins with the perception of cues related to social categories (287ff), followed by the adoption of swearwords (and thus of negative evaluations of social groups) in the process of language acquisition (289ff), pregeneralization without full cognitive understanding of their meaning (linguistic precedence, 292ff), and, lateron, the generalization of prejudices (294f). Being aware of the confinement of many contemporary research approaches to cognitive processes, due to their preferred methodology (see below), it is equally noteworthy that Allport acknowledges the fundamental difference and complicated relation between prejudices and discrimination: he states that prejudices can coexist with democratic behavior, that discrimination can occur on the basis of or independent from prejudices, and, finally, that prejudices and discrimination can concur (14ff, 47ff). He concludes that reproducing prejudices and discrimination in a democratic society can lead to inner conflicts, which may be dealt with by means of repression or rationalization on the one hand, or by (partial) compromises or integration on the other hand (309ff).

Keeping in mind that Allport's work does not reflect systematically on the meaning of prejudices and discrimination for subjects in subordinate position, what can we at *KiWin* learn from his considerations with regard to the development of prejudices and discrimination in childhood? First, we need to conceptualize the existence and acquisition of prejudices and discrimination as something that is embedded in a democratic society, and hence contradictory in character. This ambivalence can be assumed to manifest in the relation between children and adults in the participating kindergartens, which is why it is important to pay attention to the interplay of inclusion and exclusion in our reasearch. Secondly, with respect to children in dominant position, we need to consider the alternatives of conforming or non-conforming with the dominant culture. Thirdly, we need to maintain our consideration of the developmental stages regarding the children's capacity of forming generalized social categories, instead of presupposing that they perceive them the same way we do. Finally, we must be sensitive to the difference and ambivalent relations between prejudices and discrimination, rather than deducing one from the other.

3. Deriving research questions from basic concepts in social psychology

To the extent that, notwithstanding the different historical and political constellations, all of the various approaches mentioned above do have a common subject matter, it is defined by a set of basic concepts in Social Psychology: social categories, stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination. These concepts determine the scope and structure of what becomes visible in research, and therefore are not and cannot be analyzed or tested in the research itself (Markard 1988). As with the different approaches and theories presented in the previous and following sections, in our project at *KiWin* we interpret these concepts through the categories of German Critical Psychology, i.e., as aspects of agency, in order to derive from them research questions. For this purpose, we refer to their fundamental meanings, without particularizing the manifold definitions and theories related to each concept (see for instance: Zick 1997, Hormel 2007).

3.1 The meaning of categories and categorization regarding social groups in childhood

The fundamental act in the formation of prejudices is social categorization. Categorization is the grouping of objects on the basis of certain criteria. This process entails the accentuating and disregarding of information; thus, categorization reduces complexity and enables perception. Furthermore, it is based on the cognitive capacity of inductive generalization and deductive subsumption. In other words, this process enables human beings to identify objects as elements of a certain class (Brown 1995: 40ff; Klauer 2008: 23ff).

Nonetheless, the categorization of material objects and of humans is of a fundamentally different quality. Objects are produced with a certain purpose and this intention is materialized in their characteristics. Therefore, the categorization of objects is based on criteria that are indeed inherent in these things. For instance, spoons are made for eating liquids, and therefore one of their sides is concave and connected to a handle; these traits indicate that an object is a spoon, and convey the central meaning of a spoon. The categorization of human beings into social groups may be said to function similarly, but it differs in a significant regard: it does not derive from inherent traits, but from social practices and societal structures. For instance, the subsumption of human beings into the social group of women can be based on physiological traits such as features of the reproductive system. However, related criteria such as chromosomes and hormones are not as homogeneous and distinctive in men or women as common sense may assume. Moreover, the better part of the meaning of "being a woman" is not assumed from these traits, but from social practices and societal structures

such as patriarchies, which enable and disable the agency of individuals categorized as women or girls. Similarly, the meaning of "being" dark- or light-skinned evolves from and in specific social practices that are related to colonialism and racisms. The same holds true for the other social categories. Hence, in our research we focus not only on the construction of social categories by highlighting certain traits ("cues" according to Allport), but also on the meaning of "belonging" to social categories, i.e., the membership to a group on the basis of social practices and societal structures, which affect the children's agency.

Following these distinctions, research questions that are related to social categorizing can be articulated:

1. Which social categories do children construct and reconstruct?
2. Which criteria in the sense of traits do they rely on? Which information do they accentuate or neglect?
3. To what extent do they employ inductive generalization and deductive subsumption?
4. Do they, and to what extent, distinguish between traits and practices?
5. Are they, and to what extent, aware that social categories are socially constructed and societally (re)produced?
6. Do they, and to what extent, understand themselves and others as belonging to certain social categories?
7. Which meaning do they ascribe to group-memberships?

3.2 The meaning of stereotypes and stereotyping regarding social groups in childhood

Stereotyping is another essential act in the formation of prejudices and built on categorization. The term refers to the expectation of certain additional traits to be characteristic of elements that belong to a particular category, or of certain behaviors to be displayed by members of a social category. Like categorization, this process enables agency insofar as it discharges us from the constant need for evaluation and re-evaluation (Brown 1995: 82ff, 90f; Petersen/Six 2008: 45ff). However, stereotyping can become dysfunctional when it is rigid and inflexible (Brown 1995: 111ff). Horkheimer illustrates this ambivalence as follows: "Without the machinery of stereotypes someone could not cross the street, even less serve a customer. But he must be capable to limit the generalization, lest he goes wreck and ruin. Beyond the English Channel, cars drive in the left lane, and in these parts, customers change their taste increasingly fast. One cannot always satisfy them according to the same scheme." (1962: 87f; translation KRG)

As in the case of categorization, here again we need to reflect on differences between stereotyping of objects and human beings, as well as on different kinds of associations made in this process. For instance, to expect an object comprised of a concave part and a handle to be suitable for eating fluids realizes its objective or societal meaning, i.e., what this object has been made for in certain societies. On the other hand, the assumption that persons categorized as "woman" on the basis of their reproductive physiological characteristics will also wear their hair long and work in educational professions may be an adequate expectation where pertinent social practices and societally produced gender-division of labor are prevalent. However, the perception of correlations between traits lacks understanding of the formation of these phenomena and their relation. A deeper and more important insight with respect to developing agency would be to note that the correlations between sex, hairstyle and profession are not the result of inborn "traits" and contingent "behaviors," but rather the result of gender relations, which impact habitus and agency. The capability for such an understanding demands flexibility, but flexibility is merely a necessary, not a sufficient condition for understanding stereotypes as a result of social practices and societal structures.

Against the backdrop of these considerations, the following research questions can be derived:

1. What traits and behaviors are associated by children with (members of) which social categories?
2. Do children conceive of their environment in the sense of superficial correlations between characteristics of social groups such as traits and behavior?
3. To what extent do children generalize their expectations, and do they handle their expectations in a flexible way?
4. In what way and to what extent do children understand social practices and societal processes that underlie superficial correlations?

3.3 The meaning of evaluations of social groups (prejudices) in childhood

Prejudices are built on categorization and stereotyping, as they add a (predominantly) negative emotional evaluation of (a member of) a social group. More generally speaking, prejudices refer to evaluations of a person as a group-member, and therefore fully exist once a social group has been categorized and stereotyped in a general way. Allport's classic definition of prejudices is referred to in Social Psychology until this day: "an avertive or hostile attitude toward a person who belongs to a group, simply because he belongs to that group, and is

therefore presumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to that group." (1958, 8; Petersen/Six 2008: 109)

This definition highlights the connection in prejudices between emotion and cognition (social categorizing and stereotyping), while others stress the instantaneous connection between categorization and emotion (prejudice as an affect). Both notions are relevant in our research. As mentioned above, in his description of the ontogenesis of prejudices, Allport mentions the phenomenon of linguistic precedence, in which children acquire swear words and understand their powerful, negative meaning without having acquired the general social category addressed by them and before knowing what the corresponding behavior of its members would be. And he mentions the display of prejudices based on generalized social categorization and stereotyping.

Another aspect usually mentioned when defining prejudices is that sometimes the emotional value seems to be positive, for example in the case of philosemitism or in the romantic primitivism ascribed to black people. Both examples reflect superficial impressions resulting from the different ways in which racisms – ascribing power to Jews in modern anti-Semitism, and simplicity to Blacks in the process of colonization – have developed and are reproduced. Hence, "positive" and "negative" stereotypes partially reflect ideological knowledge, while the related concept does not enable an understanding of their genesis and function in power relations such as anti-Semitism and colonization.

Against this backdrop the following research questions can be suggested:

1. With respect to which persons do children demonstrate prejudiced emotions?
2. To what extent is there a discrepancy between emotion and cognition, in the sense of linguistic precedence and pre-generalized categorization?
3. To what extent are prejudices based on generalized categories and stereotyping?
4. To what extent do children understand the power relations behind the emotionally charged categorization and stereotyping?

3.4 The meaning of discrimination of social groups in childhood

Following the general psychological distinction between cognition and emotion on the one hand, and behavior on the other, Social Psychology distinguishes between discrimination and the other aforementioned concepts. The contemporary definition (Petersen/Six 2008: 161) still relies on Allport's work, which differentiates prejudices from several forms of "acting out prejudice" (1954: 14ff) or "rejection of outgroups" (47ff): antilocution, avoidance,

discrimination, and genocide. Hence, in contrast to contemporary usage, Allport does not refer to discrimination as an umbrella term for manifestations of prejudice, but confines it to institutionalized or legalized practices of the following kind: "Discrimination comes about only when we deny to individuals or groups of people equality of treatment which they may wish" (50). Furthermore, Allport considers that prejudices are not necessarily acted out, and, after the abolition of legalized discrimination, concepts of institutionalized discrimination include the notion of making unjustified distinctions without shared prejudices (Hormel 2007: 65ff). Hence, Allport's superordinate phrasing – acting out of *prejudice* – becomes somewhat paradoxical, which is why we at *KiWin* use the term discrimination to designate all forms of "rejection of outgroups".

The potential discrepancy between prejudices and discrimination has been noted in the mid-1930s by Richard LaPiere, leading to a critique of research that is confined to measuring "a symbolic response to a symbolic situation" (1934: 230) – i.e., attitudes – instead of investigating intergroup relations in social reality. Allport bypasses the methodological critique and states that this study demonstrates that both types of attitudes "are >true< attitudes, fitted to two different situations" (55). In German Critical Psychology (Markard 1984: 104ff) as well as at *KiWin*, LaPiere's critique has borne fruit in relation to the methodological approach (see below).

Considering the difference between interpersonal and intergroup relations, I would like to call to mind that for actions to be understood as an element of discriminatory intergroup relations, it is necessary to act with respect to a person as a member of a social category. Thus, it is important to consider the extent of generalization underlying discrimination.

Against this backdrop the following research questions can be derived:

1. Do children reject outgroups?
2. Which forms of discrimination can be observed?
    a. Do children verbalize prejudices?
    b. Do children distance themselves from other children because of their membership to a certain social group?
    c. Do children exert violence against children of a certain social group, and due to this membership?
    d. Do children institutionalize discrimination (i.e., create "rules") in their interactions and intergroup relations?
3. Are these forms of discrimination based on prejudices?
4. Are these forms of discrimination based on pre-generalized or generalized categorization and stereotyping?

3.5 General conclusions from discussing basic concepts for our research

The phenomena involved in our subject matter – facets of cognition (categorization, stereotyping), emotion (prejudices) and action (discrimination) – are manifold, and any researcher used to the positivistic model will argue that is it impossible to derive and test hypotheses from such a broad range in one research project. But, as mentioned before, at *KiWin* we do not seek to test theories or to directly pursue every single question derived from the basic concepts in our empirical research. Rather, the concepts and questions are to increase our sensitivity for phenomena potentially prevalent in the interactions we observe in the kindergartens (see below). Inasmuch as they appear, they can do so in various combinations: categorization and discrimination, for instance, can exist without prejudices, but prejudices and discrimination do not appear without any cognitive representation of social categories and associated stereotypes, albeit, as in the case of linguistic precedence, diachronic and synchronic developments are possible.

4. Contemporary research: Relevant phenomena in childhood and the dominant methodological approach

This section reviews contemporary research that details some of the abovementioned relevant processes, such as rudimental categorization in infancy, language acquisition and identification with social categories in early childhood, and, finally, the formation of prejudices from early childhood through adolescence to adulthood. While we at *KiWin* gain important insights from these concepts and findings, the dominant methodological approach to the study of prejudices in Social Psychology is discussed critically.

4.1 Infancy: Beginning to reconstruct social categories

Activities which bring about capabilities that are relevant for the formation of prejudices and discrimination begin in infancy. The research conducted by Quinn et al. (2008), which investigates social perception, allows us to understand some relevant processes occurring in this period of life. It does not intend to contribute directly to our subject matter, but it does address processes that are fundamentally relevant, namely the preference for faces representing social categories such as race and gender.

The method utilized by Quinn et al. is a standard visual preference test in an experimental setting (18). It involves displaying on screen a random choice of

two face-pairings out of 12 faces to 16 Caucasian newborns and 20 Caucasian 3-month-old infants (19f). Each face was created by computer-generating six natural faces, all of which presented characteristics that are considered by Quinn et al. to be representative of male or female gender and of Caucasians and Asians (18f). We can assume that in this research, the characteristics which are meant to represent the social categories "race" and "gender" have been stereotyped through the computer-generating procedure, and that these are understood in terms of a binary, or mutually excluding, construction of (facial) phenotypes. Consistent with the implicit idea of Experimental Psychology (Holzkamp 1995 [1993]: 22), the faces are inadequately understood as stimuli and the children's activities with respect to these faces as reactions, while the researchers' "reasoning" (Quinn et al. 2008: 17, 21ff) approaches an adequate understanding of the children's activities in terms of actions (Holzkamp 1995: 27ff). According to the definition and operationalization, a child shows preference by a relatively longer time of fixation, which is reliably different from chance. The child's preference is measured by determining the fixation duration on the basis of filming the eye-movements, and is calculated as the ratio of summed time of fixation on face 1 (i.e., female) and summed time of fixation on faces 1 and 2 (i.e., female and male) converted into percentages (20). Following this definition and operationalization, none of the newborns showed preference for female faces (21), but 16 out of the 20 3-month old infants did (20), with values 48,11% versus 57,69%. These infants had female primary care-takers. In a similar study with infants raised by male primary care-takers, the preference was for male faces (17, 23).

Regarding race, newborns and 3-month old infants were exposed to Caucasian/African, Caucasian/Asian and Caucasian/Eastern-European face-pairings; the newborns did not show preferences, while the 3-month old infants preferred Caucasian faces in each case (17). The infants were all born to Caucasian care-givers and predominantly exposed to Caucasians (ibid.). These studies, as well as studies conducted in Israel with Ethiopian/Caucasian face-pairings shown to Israeli (presumably Ethiopian) children and in the USA with Chinese children exposed to Asian/African, Asian/Caucasian, and Asian/Middle Eastern faces (ibid.), led to the finding that "differential exposure during the first 3 months of life to same- and other-race faces results in a consistent preference for same-race faces" (ibid.). The authors rule out sensory maturation as a driving force (ibid., 22), and suggest that experiences and cognitive processes can explain the phenomena (16f., 22).

While I concur with the authors' general notion regarding experiences and cognitive processes as driving forces of these developments, the theorization of the data can be deepened by articulating two important dissenting opinions.

Firstly, the notion that 3-month old infants can relate to social categories on a generalized level is untenable, since this would imply that they have already acquired a cognitive representation of these categories, including a pre-lingual concept. It is more likely that infants in these situations acquire knowledge regarding phenotypical stereotypes through the comparison between the characteristics of the differently stereotyped faces presented in the experiment and those of the faces known to them from everyday experience. In other words, they are likely to be in the midst of reconstructing categories on the basis of phenotypical criteria, but certainly not of applying social categories. Secondly, and consequently, the assumption that infants relate to faces in terms of sameness and otherness of gender or race is equally unsustainable, as this would presuppose the capacity of self-identification with one of the categories at stake. This process is likely to commence much later-on in the development of children, based on language acquisition (see below). Nevertheless, inasmuch as these infants are learning to form categories based on phenotypical stereotypes, they will eventually be capable of subsuming themselves and others to them.

Furthermore, the duration of fixation is probably not an accurate indicator for the infants' preference: if they are processing information and comparing stereotyped characteristics, they may do so whether or not they fixate on certain faces longer. Finally, regardless of whether the infants express preferences for certain kinds of faces, they apparently do not express fear or rejection of any of the faces. Thus, these data would not exemplify the assumption of a very early acquisition of prejudices, i.e., an emotionally negative evaluation of "other" faces on a pre-categorical level.

Notwithstanding these critical comments, the research conducted by Quinn et al. supports our understanding that from early infancy, children are likely to compare visible (and audible) characteristics of human beings (faces, voices etc.) they perceive at their homes and in the nursery, and to begin reconstructing social categories on the basis of these cues, before they understand and produce words. But, since the participants cannot yet communicate verbally, their behavior regarding such characteristics remains as incomprehensible as their meaning for the babies, due to the impossibility of validating our interpretation in a dialogue with them.

4.2 Early childhood: Language acquisition and the identification with social categories

In the ensuing development of children's agency, language acquisition is a milestone, both in general and with respect to the formation of and identification with social categories. A study conducted by Bar-Tal and Teichmann in Israel

offers an understanding of the recognition and acquisition of verbal labels and the identification with the designated social categories.

In the study Teichmann an Bar/Tal (2008) involved 80 Jewish Israeli children aged 2 to 6, who were asked a set of four questions regarding labels for three social groups – Jew, Israeli, and Arab – which relate to prejudices and discrimination in Israel: "1) >Have you heard the word Arab/Jew/Israeli?<; 2) >Do you know what an Arab/Jew/Israeli is?<; 3) >Can you describe or tell me something about an Arab/Jew/Israeli?<" and 4) ">Are you a Jew/Israeli?<" (464) Conceptually, these questions correspond with different developmental levels of acquiring verbal labels for social categories: the initial is the capacity to recognize the word (question 1), followed by the acquisition of the category (question 2), which involves the (re)construction of what the category means to the child (question 3), and, finally, self-identification with social categories (question 4). Within the methodological frame of Experimental Psychology, the researchers' questions are understood as verbal stimuli and the children's answers as verbal reactions instead of intersubjective actions. Since this part of the review focuses on the phenomena of language acquisition and self-identification, it suffices to discuss the findings regarding the first two labels.

All of the children aged 3 to 4 (100%) had heard the word Jew and 95% the word Israeli. Of the younger children, 90% had heard the word Jew and 60% the word Israeli, with 65% identifying as Jews and 55% as Israelis, many of them "before demonstrating category acquisition" (ibid.) – a diachronic development of recognition/acquisition and self-identification with a social category. All of the older children (100%) knew both Jew and Israeli, and most identified as such (73% and 77% respectively).

Unfortunately, the children's remarks on their understanding of the labels for social categories are not reported, nor do the authors elaborate on theirs, even though this would be most valuable for interpreting the children's "responsive behavior" as actions. For example, the supposition of citizenship as a criterion for defining the social category Israeli subsumes both Jews and Arabs, but many Arabs living in Israel will not identify themselves as Israeli; the same may hold true for Jewish immigrants, if the concept Israeli is ascribed exclusively to Sabras (Jews born in Israel). In addition, some Arabic-speaking Jews share cultural practices with Palestinians, while the practices and understanding of "being" Jewish may differ considerably between secular and orthodox Jews, and so on and so forth. Therefore, the meaning of "knowing" what the terms Jew and Israeli designate will vary widely, as will the meaning of identifying with these scoial categories, depending on the backgrounds of the children involved in this study.

Based on this understanding, it is of great importance that the research conducted at *KiWin* explicates the ambivalent facets and layers of meaning of

(labels for) social categories prevalent in the German society, while elucidating which meaning the children (re)construct with respect to (labels for) social categories that they know, use, and apply to themselves (and others). This will in turn enable us to determine the criteria children use, the kinds of stereotypes they may associate with the different categories, the variety of floating meanings and the flexibility of handling them, and, finally, the degree of generalization. For although the verbal labels are by definition general, we cannot assume that the children have already formed a general understanding of them.

4.3 The development of prejudices throughout childhood – Findings and methodology

The considerable body of cross-sectional research on prejudices that covers the entire trajectory of childhood allows for meta-analyses, which describe the development of prejudices in terms of their degree (Raabe 2010: 120f, 182), starting from the age of 2 up until the age of 18 and older (Raabe 2010, Raabe/Beelmann 2009: 115ff). These studies demonstrate an increase between the age groups 2 to 4, with a peak in the age group 5-7, a steady (but not systematic) decrease over the age-groups 8-10, 11-13 and 14-16, followed by a slight increase until the age-group 17-19. In this section, the relevance and meaning of this curvilinear trajectory is commented on, and then two of the typical methods applied in the original studies are discussed.

Relevance and meaning of the findings on the development of prejudices

In order to assess the relevance of the inverted U-shape outlining the degree of prejudices throughout childhood, the following qualifications and restrictions should be mentioned. Firstly, these data do not indicate the dissemination of prejudices in the respective age groups, but the intensity of prejudices by trend. Secondly, the evidence does not contain information regarding the degree of generalization achieved by children of different age groups, so that the average intensity in different age groups is likely to refer to different stages of generalization. Thirdly, most of the primary studies concentrate on prejudices held by members of dominant groups regarding members of subordinated groups (Raabe 2010: 74ff), and therefore the trend is valid only for the dominant groups within each age group (145f). In fact, reviews have pointed out that the trajectory differs in children belonging to subordinated groups (49f; Brown 1995: 157f). Fourthly, within this probabilistic methodology, the determination of trends such as the degree of prejudices in different age groups implies by definition a variance of empirical, individual cases. Practically speaking, the trend does not represent a necessary developmental trajectory, and empirical individual

developments differ from it. Fifthly, the trend does not hold true for all social categories: it "is valid mostly for prejudices regarding ethnicity and race", and is "not [so much valid] regarding national groups, disability, gender groups, homosexuals and old people" (189, translation KRG). Finally, the intensity of prejudices from childhood through adolescence to adulthood is, although relatively different, generally low (average between 0.15 and 0.29) (121).

If all of these restrictions hold true, which informational value *does* the presentation of a developmental trajectory by trend convey? It would be fair to posit that the curve does not represent the development of prejudice in childhood, but a statistical trend in developmental changes in the generally low intensity of prejudices among children of dominant groups with respect to ethnicity and race. This trend is not the norm, and differing trends are not "anomalies" (Brown 1995: 158), but each one is at least bound to the specifics of certain social categories, and is dependent on the position of the subjects in power relations.

Considering these findings, we at *KiWin* should have been able to expect – on average – a low level of the specified prejudices in the participating kindergartens. But, inasmuch as statistical trends and actual, individual developments (of prejudices) differ systematically, the trend deviates from the social reality in which our research is situated. Nevertheless, prejudices among the children in our project could be characterized as more or less "intense", even though we would not be able to apply measures utilized in the experimental settings. However, the focus on measuring (the intensity of) prejudices follows from the experimental-statistical methodology, while we at *KiWin* are more interested in the premises and reasons children may have for displaying (more or less intense) prejudices, be it in an experimental setting or in the kindergartens (see below). In order to reconstruct premises and reasons, and since the meta-trend abstracts from the experimental settings in which the data were collected, it is important to understand how prejudices and their intensity are investigated by considering typical methods utilized for measuring them (Raabe 2010: 53). Two of these are presented in the following.

Measuring prejudices: PRAM and MRA

The *Preschool Racial Attitude Test* (PRAM II) was developed in the USA for the research of prejudices regarding race. The negative evaluation of a social group is indicated and measured by the child's "selection of light- and dark-skinned figures in response to stories containing positive and negative adjectives (e.g., good, nice, kind; bad, naughty, mean)" (Williams et al. 1975: 494). The "figures" are intended to represent two social groups: "Euro-Americans" (E) and "Afro-Americans" (A). In the original study, the test was administered by examiners,

who were (considered as) Euro-American and African-American and distributed equally to 483 preschool children from first to fourth grade, who were also (considered as) either African-American or Euro-American.

In the test procedure, the children are to relate 24 positive or negative adjectives in a forced-choice format, i.e., associate each adjective to only one of the figures. A positive evaluation of one figure is interpreted as a negative evaluation of the other figure and vice versa. In order to obtain a measure, the value 1 (numerical relative) is allotted to each negative evaluation (empirical relative), and the relation of the positive and negative sum-scores of each figure is interpreted as a neutral (12:12), or more or less intense positive or negative attitude ("bias") towards one of the two social groups. The most indisputable critique of this classical method pertains to the forced-choice format, arguing that it confounds preference for one group (presumably the in-group) with the rejection of the other (presumably the out-group), and that both preference and rejection should be measured separately (Doyle/Aboud 1995: 210; Aboud 2003: 48).

The *Multiresponse Racial Attitude* (MRA) measure was developed in response to this critique (ibid.). It allows generating indices of positive and negative attitudes toward any social group separately, and enables the differentiation of in-group-positivism from out-group-negativism. In this procedure, children are to assign 10 positive, 10 negative, and 4 neutral adjectives, along with a short verbal input (see below), to drawings that depict heads of children "differing only in skin colour and hair texture" (50), which are produced in sets classified as "boy set and girl set" (ibid.) and administered in a same-sex logic.

While the immanent critique of *forcing* children to make certain choices is limited to the potential confoundation of in-group-favoritism and out-group-negativism, it applies to several other implications of both procedures. For example, the children cannot choose between assigning and not assigning adjectives to drawings, and are therefore forced to enact stereotypes with respect to drawings. They are equally forced to enact evaluative assignments implicit to the adjectives presented to them. In this respect, these measures resemble the measures for collecting data on prejudices among adults. In both cases, the items and the possible responses are designed by the researchers, and cannot be commented on or altered by the participants according to their own view. However, measures for adults allow at least for alternative "responsive behaviors" (such as degrees of agreement/disagreement with statements), but not the ones designed for children.

In addition, due to the methodological logic, the participants are not able to articulate whether or not they find it reasonable at all to enact stereotyping, or

how they interpret the figures' behavior. It is, for instance, well possible that children find it nice to paint on walls with crayons (one of the behaviors to be evaluated negatively and ascribed to one or more of the drawings), while being fully aware of the fact that adults prohibit such behavior and identify it as naughty. Thus, the participants' negative "responsive behavior" would not express a their negative evaluation of such a behavior and of (the drawing of) a child, but rather a (forced) conformism in the generational order (Alanen 2009). It is also noteworthy that the drawings and their verbal labels designate a single child, and not a social group, while the children's "responsive behaviors" are interpreted as an evaluation of a social group. Hence, instead of designing methods fit for investigating the process and degree of generalization – which is, as has been argued, a fundamental and decisive question in the developmental research on prejudices in childhood – both methods do not unequivocally operationalize a social group, but a single child which is presumed to represent a group.

It seems that the experimental settings create the abovementioned "symbolic response to a symbolic situation" (LaPiere 1934: 230). Both, the PRAM and MRA situate children in artificial environments, in which they are forced to enact stereotypes and evaluations with respect to representations of individual children. The limited experimental conditions facilitate conforming behavior, while the children's reasons for their actions and the meaning they ascribe to the situation remain unknown. Moreover, these methods are not sensitive to the degree of generalization in the children's use of social categories. For these reasons, and because the experimental setting differs vastly from the children's environment at *KiWin*, there is, unfortunately, not much to learn from these experiments for our research. In contrast to this dominant methodology and as intended by LaPiere, *KiWin* attempts to investigate prejudices and discrimination in a specific social reality, in which concrete children and adults interact with each other, while taking into consideration the process of generalization in the display of social categories.

5. Delineating the conceptual and methodological framework for *KiWin*

As has been mentioned in the introduction, our research project *KiWin* pursues its overarching question of how young children gain and develop agency in intersecting relations of domination, based on the categorical framework of German Critical Psychology as well as on notions of Childhood Studies. Since the latter incorporates Sociology, Political Sciences, Education and Psychology, one could assume that German Critical Psychology would align easily. And yet,

the relation between the two approaches has not yet been systematically discussed. Childhood Sociology/Childhood Studies have attempted repeatedly to conceptualize agency (Alanen 2009; James/James 2008; Kelle/Hungerland 2014; Eßer et al. 2016), and these attempts have resulted in many valuable assumptions regarding the relation between agency and structure. Yet, it is our contention that German Critical Psychology offers a more systematic execution of the paradigmatic venture onto which Childhood Sociology/Childhood Studies embarked towards the end of the 20th Century: to apply to children the fundamental categories that constitute the theoretical space of Social Sciences, and to analyze what children do (agency) within historically specific forms of childhood (structure) (Prout/James 1990: 7ff).

Following this assertion, our research relies on the category "action potence" in German Critical Psychology for its study on children's development of agency within structures of domination. This category incorporates assumptions about the societal nature of human activities (Tolman/Maiers 1991, Painter et al. 2009, Reimer/Markard 2014), that result from empirical research into the evolution of humankind. The methodological status of a category means that action potence does not describe activities observable at present, but rather serves to analyze these activities, i.e., to ask questions regarding their interrelation with the social worlds and with societal structures, as well as with intentions of the actors. Five of these assumptions pertaining to the conceptualization of the relation between agency and structure will be outlined in the following. Then, the implicative methodology and methods are described. In both cases, the relevance for our research at *KiWin* will be pointed out.

5.1 Analyzing children's agency in terms of action potence

The first assumption pertains to the societal mediatedness of subjectivity and the societal nature of humankind. Ever since the societal mode of development became dominant, human offspring has needed to gain action potence in different societal circumstances, so that cognition, emotion and action (as aspects of action potence) are necessarily related to and primarily embedded in the forms of practice and thought that constitute societal relations. Therefore, the steering of the development of action potence by genetically programmed maturation can be excluded based on historical-empirical grounds, and regardless of actual-empirical research such as the one carried out by Quinn et al., which was discussed above. What *is* genetically enabled, however, is the societal nature of humankind – its capacity to develop into vastly different societal conditions and to become agentic therin. This is why, from the standpoint of German Critical

Psychology, adults and children must not only be seen as actors, but as actors in society.

The second assumption specifies this relation between actors and society: human action potence is neither an effect or a function of societal conditions, nor is it entirely undetermined by them. Actions, thoughts and feelings of an individual are possible, but are not objectively necessary in character; they result from a de facto subjective choice of specific possibilities for action (premises), and the subjectively perceived interests of the individual (reasons). From this follows methodologically that research must reconstruct the standpoint of the subject, be they adults or children. Hence, the category action potence inquires why, with respect to premises and reasons, did a person utilize specific possibilities for action and not others. In our case: which premise-reason relations underlay the reproduction of stereotypes or of discriminatory behavior by children? This understanding of human activities is opposed to framing children's acquisition of prejudices and discrimination in terms of stimulus and response, as is the case in the traditional research discussed in this article. At *KiWin*, the traditional methodological concept of testing hypotheses in terms of stimulus and response thus needs to be substituted by reconstructing children's activities – such as infants' perception of facial information, children's self-categorization, etc. – in terms of premise-reason relations, which can be exemplified, but not falsified by empirical data.

The third assumption considers action potence and its premise-reason-relations as embedded in historically concrete societal conditions and power relations. This encompasses Allport's (and, respectively, Myrdal's) view of the two-faceted structure of democratic societies, but holds that it is the capitalist mode of production which concurrently brings about essential contradictions in thought and practice. Following the idea that actions can serve to reproduce or to transform power relations inherent in capitalist societies, the category action potence becomes twofold. It suggests the possibilities of conforming to practices of domination (restrictive action potence) as well as attempts to overcome them (generalized action potence), and asks why, with respect to premises and reasons, people, be they adults or children, act, think and feel in one way or the other. In order to understand children's activities in this sense, we at *KiWin* need to analyze the environments in which they act, with respect to existing power relations and to the position of the children therein. On this basis it is also essential to discuss with the children how they view their environments, according to which they chose certain possibilities for action or inaction (premises) based on certain intentions (reasons).

The fourth assumption details the potentially contradictory character of restrictive action potence. It is suggested that forms of restrictive action potence

are not only harmful to others, but may also be ambivalent with respect to the subject itself, if and insofar as the reproduction of power relations grants possibilities for action, but simultaneously recreates constellations that are detrimental to the subject. It is also suggested that within forms of restrictive action potence, cognition tends to be confined to reproducing the realm of social interaction while ignoring its social mediatedness. Simultaneously, emotions within the restrictive mode potentially represent an adequate evaluation of an individual's situation, thus creating a continuous conflict with cognitions that block problematic implications of restrictive agency. These assumptions about the potentially contradictory character of restrictive action potence further the issue that was addressed by Allport, when considering that inner conflicts can result from becoming agentic in a dominant position in American Culture and how they can be dealt with. Allport may have limited his considerations to late adolescence and adulthood based on the notion that young children cannot be assumed to be fully aware of these ambivalences, but it seems that children nonetheless develop their action potence from the very beginning under contradictory conditions. Hence, at *KiWin* we are paying attention to related phenomena.

The fifth assumption to be mentioned here pertains to the individual's development in childhood. The development of action potence is the process by which human beings overcome the discrepancy between objective possibilities for action and the subjective capabilities needed for realizing them. While this process is clearly not confined to childhood, it is essential for *KiWin* to understand how infants and children develop (Holzkamp 1985: 417ff; Markard 2009: 222ff). As mentioned, the idea of a phylogenetically programmed process can be ruled out. Rather, the driving force are a child's activities, which lead to the experience of discrepancies between capabilities and possibilities. On a categorical level, the most general discrepancy occurs between agency in its societal mediatedness and agency, based on experiencing society as a mere surrounding. At least three processes enable children to overcome this discrepancy: beginning ontogenetically and from a subjective standpoint within seemingly quasi-natural conditions, children's activities result in realizing cooperativity and meanings within the realm of social interaction, followed by transgressing the limitations of acting within a social world and, finally, acquiring action potence within the societally mediated world. The importance of these distinctions in our actual-empirical research was pointed out when research questions were derived from the basic concepts: understanding the difference between perceivable but superficial correlations between traits, their social construction and societal mediatedness enables children not only to represent stereotypes etc., but to gain insights into the power structures from which they

emanate. This gives way to a critical stance and generalized action potence. In our research at *KiWin*, we are investigating these processes in more detail.

5.2 Methodology and methods: Subject-scientific action research

Finally, some fumndamental assumptions at *KiWin* pertain to the methodology. Within the positivistic methodology, prejudices are conceptualized as constructs, which are then operationalized and measured on interval-scale-level (as in the above-mentioned PRAM and MRA). In this procedure, prejudices are interpreted in terms of reactions to stimuli. If the subject matter could be reconstructed adequately in these terms, it would make perfect sense to isolate a limited number of factors, to hypothesize their relation, and to put this hypothesis to the test under controlled conditions in a laboratory. It would be equally reasonable to distill statistical patterns by reviewing original studies or by conducting meta-analyses, and to explain these quasi-laws retroactively by one theory or by a combination of theories. But, as this outlining of empirically grounded categorical assumptions has demonstrated, the subject matter agency/action potence does not adhere to the logic of cause and effect. If the primary quality criterion for scientific research is to use methods that can grasp the object in its entire complexity, a nomothetic methodology cannot be applied.

It is for this reason that the *KiWin* research group chose to investigate prejudices and discrimination and, more broadly, children's agency in intersectional power structures in the field, i.e., in the social reality in its unreduced complexity of four different kindergartens. In this setting, the field researchers adopt the role of adult playmates, as opposed to that of kindergarten teachers. They do not initiate activities, but observe them and participate in them inasmuch as the children want them to do so. Embedded in social reality, the researchers document situations in which the children activate social categories of interest, such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, and class. They also document situations in which power structures and children's actions are prevalent. The collected data consist of descriptions of interactions that involve only children and of interactions involving children and adults (the researchers and/or kindergarten teachers). These data are analyzed with respect to the predominance of power relations, restrictive and generalized action potence, on the one hand, and of categorization, stereotyping, prejudices and discrimination, on the other.

Since German Critical Psychology is a subject-scientific variant of action research, the analyses serve practical purposes and involve children and kindergarten teachers as experts and agents of change. The concept outlining this process is comprised of four phases and is referred to as "course of development" [Entwicklungsfigur] (Markard 1985; 2009: 279ff).

In the first phase, the existence of certain power structures and the (non)conformist actions of children and adults, as they appear in the corpus, are theoretically elucidated and exemplified by selected data. The next step is to present these findings to the actors, to determine via discussion if, or to what extent, they share our view, and to reconstruct their premises and reasons for restrictive or generalized action potence. This second phase involves the validation not only of data, but also of theories, and it requires cooperation between the actors and the researchers, as well as learning processes on both sides. The former need to gain an understanding of the theories presented to them, and the latter must familiarize themselves with the viewpoints and circumstances of the children and professionals. Furthermore, this leads to the collection of additional, mostly verbal data about premises and reasons, that could not be reconstructed by means of observation.

Once actors and researchers share an analysis of power structures and of the actors' involvement in their reproduction ("problem theories"), the third phase begins, which aims at producing suggestions as to how to overcome these constellations ("solution theories"). This process appropriates examples and theories that enable generalized action potence, which can be reconstructed from the collected data, from others' experiences, or from preexisting theory. Again, once actors and researchers are in agreement, the fourth phase is initiated, in which the actors attempt to put solution theories into practice. This phase includes the collection of observation and verbal data, which allow for the documentation and analysis of experiences had in this process. Failures are analyzed again with respect to problems and solutions. Successes consist of a course of development that results in empirically grounded problem and solution theories. Both are instructive for other actors in similar situations. Through these subject-scientific means of action research, we at *KiWin* hope to produce theories pertaining to concrete constellations, which can nonetheless be generalized both theoretically and practically.

6. Conclusion

At the outset of our research project *KiWin*, I embarked on reviewing a broad range of the existing research on prejudices and discrimination in childhood, because I wanted to develop an understanding of our subject matter that would help to specify the broader question of how kindergarten children gain and develop agency (in terms of action potence) in intersecting power structures. The result is twofold: on the one hand, I gained research questions and many valuable insights, which enhance our sensitivity in the collection and interpretation of

data; on the other hand, I identified some limitations that are mainly due to a the application of basic concepts without specifying them with respect to the historical and political constellations, as well as to the dominant methodology.

All in all, at *KiWin* we aim to approach the field with a comprehensive view, which pays attention to the potential prevalence of social categorization, stereotyping, prejudices and discrimination on cognitive, emotional and motivational dimensions of the children's agency/action potence. This is supported by an awareness of the societal embeddedness of these phenomena and, thus, their historic and regional specifics. We must pay close attention to the differential meaning of these phenomena to subjects in dominant and subordinated positions, as well as to the premises and reasons of restrictive and generalized actions potence related to them. Considering the limitations of experimental and statistical methods, at *KiWin* we intend to adopt a methodology and utilize methods that will allow us to contain these phenomena in their actual complexity and in their developmentally different forms.

We believe that the subject-scientific approach fulfills these requirements and that it also enables us to involve the children and kindergarten teachers in a collective process of describing and analyzing the reproduction of power structures, part of which are prejudices and discrimination. In this process, we intend to develop theories and practices that may contribute to creating an environment in which it is indeed possible to be different without fear.

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