

The Fluid Nature of Street Culture: Non-Violent Participation, Changes in Adult Life, and Crumbling Ethnic Barriers in Germany

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Abstract

This paper examines changes in the practice of street culture among non-violent young adult men. Many individuals who participate in street culture behave and talk in a pretty rough way among each other and act almost aggressively. This is done for establishing a certain reputation and self-image that relates to street culture rules and it is even widespread among non-violent players of this milieu. A comprehensive look on their behavior includes modifications of street culture practices in adult life. Another aspect of the fluid nature of street culture are crumbling ethnic barriers in this milieu in Germany. The latter contributes to further modifications, for instance, in social contacts and language use. The author provides supportive evidence from the existing literature and field work he has done in Germany.

Keywords

street culture – delinquency – identity

1 Introduction

The mention of street culture often conjures up images of violence in marginalized urban neighborhoods. This is because most of the research activities relate to juvenile delinquency. Although Anderson already mentioned non-violent

street culture practice in his seminal work,¹ it is often just addressed subordinately like some kind of byproduct. Specific research or in-depth examinations of non-violent street culture are therefore rather exceptions. This paper addresses this shortcoming by presenting and discussing some original empirical data.

In order to consider such a broad concept of street culture, we refer to Ross' new definition which rather demonstrates the large variation of relevant aspects than to concentrate on certain behavior:²

“Street culture is a complex phenomenon and involves a variety of beliefs, dispositions, ideologies, informal rules, practices, styles, symbols, and values associated with, adopted by, and engaged in by individuals and organizations that spend a disproportionate amount of time on the streets of large urban centers”.³

Inspired by Ross' dynamic process model⁴ and based on empirical data gathered in Germany, this paper firstly addresses rough, but non-violent practices among youths of establishing street reputation and the corresponding self-image. This serves to demonstrate the broad range of street cultural behavior which is often merely discussed in respect of violent encounters. Secondly, this paper addresses the modification of certain practices of non-violent players in adult life. Thirdly, within the extant body of academic literature, scholars neglect to discuss the issue of crumbling ethnic barriers. Regardless of whether ethnicity is understood in terms of one's race or the distinction of migrants and non-migrants, street culture research still mainly examines ethnic peculiarities. In contrast, this paper provides at least a glimpse on partly crumbling ethnic barriers among youth in Germany and its impact on street culture practice. As such, local players modify street culture, for instance, by mixing and creating their own language and a “non-ethnic” culture instead of distinguishing between the origins.

All in all, the empirical section of this paper begins with an introduction to the peculiarities of non-violent street culture practices. Based in that, it

1 E. Anderson, *Streetwise: Race, Class, And Change In An Urban Community* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

2 This new approach already receives considerable attention. For instance, it serves as an overarching framework for an upcoming International Handbook on Street Culture which is edited by Jeffrey Ian Ross and will be published by Routledge.

3 J.I. Ross, 'Reframing urban street culture: Towards a dynamic and heuristic process model', 15 *City, Culture and Society* (2018) p. 8.

4 J.I. Ross, *loc.cit.*

proceeds with demonstrating two major issues of the fluid nature of street culture: firstly, alterations of these practices with increasing age; secondly, the meaning of crumbling ethnic barriers in this milieu in Germany.

2 Background – Theoretical Positions

2.1 *Reputation and the Self-Image in Street Culture in Adult Life*

The core of the street culture concept is an explanation of specific attitudes and behaviors that are mainly practiced in the streets or urban neighborhoods. Anderson⁵ describes the situation of concentrated disadvantages, social isolation, and discrimination in specific districts.⁶ He claims that this spawns an oppositional culture specifically among young men whose norms and values are alienated to mainstream society.⁷ In this culture, the interpersonal relationship is governed by the street code as “a set of informal rules governing interpersonal public behavior, particularly violence. The rules prescribe both proper comportment and the proper way to respond if challenged”.⁸

In contrast to such a narrow definition, streetwise behavior and the competition for reputation is neither just about violence nor merely a domain of young people. It is rather widespread and common in certain locations⁹ and practiced in various ways. Firstly, even violent participants do not use physical force all the time in order to achieve their goals. MacYoung, for instance, stressed that it is perceived a proof of the power of established violent players (veterans) if reputation protects them from challengers.¹⁰ These young men

5 E. Anderson, *loc.cit.*

6 Ilan's understanding of street culture strongly links to these aspects, describing it as a “product of social, economic and cultural exclusion (...) a process of attempts to remain viable, thriving and include within a specific street milieu”. J. Ilan, *Understanding street Culture: Poverty, crime, youth and cool* (London, UK: Palgrave, 2015) p. 3.

7 The oppositional character of street culture is also emphasized by Bourgois. E.g. P. Bourgois, *In search of Respect: Selling crack in El barrio* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

8 E. Anderson, *Code of the street. Decency, violence, and the moral life of the inner city* (New York, NY: Norton, 1999) p. 61.

9 While Ross – as already cited above – locates street culture to “the streets of large urban centers” – based on the situation in the US –, it is, for instance, more common in segregated urban areas of suburbs in Germany and other European countries. Many inhabitants “spend a disproportionate amount of time” merely in the streets where they are living, especially young people, and seldom go to the urban centers.

10 M. MacYoung, *Violence, blunders, and fractured jaws. Advanced awareness techniques and street etiquette* (Boulder, CO: Paladin, 1992). See also D. Silverman, ‘Street crime and street culture’, 45 *International Economic Review* (2004).

even tend to avoid conflicts and to make use of their experience, for example, by talking moderately to ensure that situations with conflict potential do not escalate in the first place. In contrast, MacYoung's "wannabes"¹¹ have yet to rise in the hierarchy of their milieu (i.e., still have to make a name for themselves) and strive for reputation. Although they might consciously more likely accept the risk of injury and imprisonment, it is also more common in everyday practice regulating public interactions non-violently. This is not just caused by the fact that individuals cannot fight about everything, it is also triggered by the social necessity of maintaining a positive self-image. The latter might include aspects of toughness but also contains moral aspects and avoidance strategies.¹²

That being said, this paper is not dedicated to non-violent behavior of violent players, but especially to non-violent behavior of (rather) non-violent players who have to cope with the same little sources of recognition. Typical ways of talking among each other as well as ways of using language are addressed. At least from mainstream society's perspective, many interactions show pretty rough ways of talking that might even seem aggressive. Interestingly, such public displays of street culture affiliation occur not only among violent players, but also among the majority of youth in this milieu: the non-violent individuals.

There is a fine distinction between an offensive public appearance and one's readiness and likelihood of engaging in fights. One might even argue that those rough interactions are the real display of street cultural aggressive behavior, while the actual use of physical force is an exception and just the domain of certain players who thereby mainly contribute to the bad image of such locations and the people living there. In terms of the self-image, such rough interactions, moreover, provide the option of perceiving oneself a nice and decent person that is just responding to external attempts in a competition for reputation. However, even rather harmless struggles among each other might also be experienced as a constant stress factor, even if they are particularly practiced in a playful manner among mates.¹³

Additionally, street culture is much more than merely juvenile temporary behavior; it is a way of living. Despite Anderson's focus on young people, a broad understanding of street culture includes alterations of its practice with increasing age. Anderson himself merely addresses the life course indirectly

11 M. MacYoung, *loc.cit.*

12 E.g. x.

13 E.g. x.

by explaining his distinction of decent and street-orientated families.¹⁴ Thereby he indicates an intergenerational socialization of the street code; i.e., it is partly learnt in the family. Although the very practices of street culture by parents are neither described, nor specific modifications in adult life, it is at least suggested that they still stick to the street code, although they do not engage (regularly) in violence anymore. At most, his concept of code switching (i.e., altering one's behavior in different settings) indicates that adults might change street culture practice in certain domains in life in order to avoid trouble for instance with state officials and employers.

The majority of rather narrow approaches to the concept just distinguish between juvenile street cultural and adult behavior. Thus, for instance, Stewart and Simons conclude “that involvement in oppositional street cultures can undermine prosocial adult trajectories throughout the life course.”¹⁵ From our point of view, however, most youth of such neighborhoods are involved in street culture – merely in different ways. When they grow up, they just modify its practice. We demonstrated, for example, that desistance from delinquent behavior among young players is not just about developing prosocial adult trajectories.¹⁶ It is rather about modifying one's ways of gaining reputation which might still include public displays of responding to any kind of challenge, although such experiences decrease in adulthood.¹⁷

The literature on the development of delinquency through the life course is closely linked to the street culture discourse, examining alterations in corresponding behavior and attitudes among young people, partly pursuing them into old age.¹⁸ Such studies demonstrate that especially violent behavior often decreases in adult life and is rather prevalent among young people. However,

14 He claims that decent families would instill middle-class values and counteract the influence of street code, while children of street families are cultured with street etiquette to survive on the streets. E.g. E. Anderson (1999), *loc. cit.*

15 E.A. Stewart & R.L. Simons, ‘Race, code of the street, and violent delinquency: A multi-level investigation of neighborhood street culture and individual norms of violence’, 48 *Criminology* (2010) p. 589.

16 E.g. x.

17 See also D, Silverman, *loc.cit.*

18 E.g. D. Farrington, ‘The Development of Offending and Antisocial Behaviour from Childhood: Key Findings from the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development’, 360 *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines* (1995). T. Moffitt, A. Caspi, H. Harrington & B. Milne, ‘Males on the life-course-persistent and adolescence-limited antisocial pathways: Follow up at age 26 years’, 14 *Development and Psychopathology* (2002). R. Sampson & J. Laub, ‘Life-course desisters? Trajectories of crime among delinquent boys followed to age 70’, 41 *Criminology* (2003).

aggressive attitudes and partly even antisocial non-violent behavior seem to remain relevant even among adults.

2.2 *Ethnic Barriers in Street Culture?*

Most street culture research originates in the USA and focuses on ethnic/racial minorities, especially African Americans.¹⁹ The ethnic/racial dimension mainly refers to a higher likelihood of being engaged in street culture. Ethnic comparisons also often serve the goal of demonstrating the peculiarities/deficits of certain populations.²⁰

Probably based in the strong ethnic segregation in USA neighborhoods and the large amount of USA academic contributions to this field, interethnic contacts and interrelations in such districts are rather neglected. At most, they are perceived a field of conflicts which are explained by economic and social deprivation.²¹ Even in broader fields of research, such as sociology and criminology, interethnic relations are usually just examined in the context of conflicts and lasting ethnic segregation, neglecting the impact of crumbling ethnic barriers.²² The latter are also dominant in the operationalization of ethnic/racial identity scales such as the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure²³ and the Cross Racial Identity Scale²⁴ that might at first glance appear as tools for measuring interethnic attachment.

An exception is Reinders' concept of criss-crossing which explains the criteria of selecting friends rather by sharing similar problems in life and the personal identity development than by one's ethnic origin.²⁵ This approach even stresses the option of cultural delimitation from the family of origin.

19 E.g. E. Anderson (1990), *loc.cit.* E. Anderson (1999), *loc.cit.* E.A. Stewart & R.L. Simons, *loc.cit.*

20 E.g. x.

21 E.g. N. Shelton, J. Richeson & V. Vorauer, 'Threatened identities and interethnic interactions', 17 *European Review of Social Psychology* (2006).

22 Although he rather concentrates on the very mechanisms of improving intergroup relations and less on lasting interrelations, Allport's contact hypothesis is an exception. E.g. G.W. Allport, *The nature of prejudice* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus, 1954).

23 E.g. S.D. Brown, K.A. Unger Hu, A.A. Mevi, M.M. Hedderson, J. Shan, C.P. Quesenberry & A. Ferrara, 'The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised: Measurement invariance across racial and ethnic groups', 61 *Journal of Counseling Psychology* (2015).

24 E.g. F.C. Worrell, R. Mendoza-Denton, J. Telesford, C. Simmons & J.F. Martin, 'Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS) Scores: Stability and Relationships With Psychological Adjustment', 93 *Journal of Personality Assessment* (2011).

25 H. Reinders, 'Interethnische Peer- und Freundschaftsbeziehungen', in S.-M. Köhler, H.-H. Krüger & N. Pfaff, eds., *Handbuch Peerforschung* (Opladen: Budrich, 2016).

Translated to street culture, young participants might preferably make friends with those who share not merely typical adolescent problems but also similar obstacles due to the limitations of their social environment. Based in different levels of such challenges, it may be expected that several peer networks exist parallel that are quite heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity but share homogeneous living conditions.

Thus, the ethnic dimension/migrant-status of individuals might become rather obsolete in street culture contexts. Former ethnic barriers might crumble. This matters firstly in the context of conflicts because it should not be confused with an elimination of interpersonal conflicts; it might rather contribute to challenges of the juvenile identity development and the demarcation of conflict lines in urban areas. Those were – at least in Germany – largely defined by ethnic differences in the past. Although the competition for reputation stays intact, the fact of fading ethnic barriers leads to the question of how young people deal with this diversity and whether it leads to new street culture practices. Crumbling ethnic/racial barriers might secondly cause a necessity for mixing different beliefs, dispositions, ideologies, informal rules, practices, styles, symbols, and values. This paper aims to provide a first glimpse on the impact of both aspects of crumbling ethnic barriers on street culture.

3 Data and Methods

The aforementioned aspects are not just theoretically discussed but based on field work that was conducted in Germany from 2014 until 2018. The findings originate from three research projects that dealt with street culture. These employed the same methodological approach. 105 young people were qualitatively interviewed who were twelve to twenty-one years old. All of them lived in neighborhoods in which street culture defined everyday interactions.²⁶ Fifty-eight interviewees regularly engaged in violent encounters, forty-six were (rather) non-violent; the data analysis concentrates on the latter. Moreover, field reports were written documenting interactions of the interviewees and their mates.

26 The selection of these neighborhoods was based in the researcher's knowledge of the actual situation in these localities. Based in prior field experience and structural conditions those can be described as disadvantaged urban areas in which individuals actually spend most of their spare time in the public sphere.

Interviews were conducted in various large cities in different federal states of Germany.²⁷ The professionals were asked to bring the researchers into contact with young people that matched the sampling criteria and agreed to participate in anonymous interviews. The researchers selected randomly individuals from the pool of provided youth.²⁸ Interviews lasting between one and two hours were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Open coding was performed to identify units of meaning and content categories. Subsequently, cross-case analysis was performed to identify themes that cut across interviews.²⁹

In general, these studies have several limitations that must be considered. Due to their qualitative nature, the samples are non-representative. So, our findings and interpretations should be viewed with caution. In addition, the samples only comprised cases of young men; interviews of females might have provided further insights. As aforementioned, street culture is not just relevant among young people and modifies in adulthood; however, our findings just refer to the narrations of young participants. The data is also retrospective. Such data bears a large risk of bias. As is well known in long-term research, narrations might be biased by various factors, such as personal characteristics, ongoing developments and experiences in life, as well as cognitive developments, fading memory of life events, and changing interpretation of experiences during the life course.³⁰ Longitudinal data might be useful to overcome this problem. Finally, the findings only comprise German data and its questionable in how far they can be transferred to other contexts.³¹ Overall, it would be interesting to investigate our insights in other samples, including different age groups, women, and other countries. This topic awaits further empirical scrutiny and theory development and will require more research to investigate the differences in different samples.

27 The main insights are valid for all locations, showing no regional peculiarities. The interviews were conducted in German and not entirely translated to English. Just relevant statements have been translated to English for this and other publications.

28 This procedure was used in order to minimize the sampling bias. Nevertheless, the readiness of relevant youth to participate in the interviews was uncontrollable as well as possible selection bias by the professionals. This procedure was chosen due to our research experience but also in awareness of its shortcomings.

29 A.C. Strauss & J. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1990).

30 E.g. A. Bottoms, 'Desistance, social bonds, and human agency: A theoretical exploration', in P. O. Wikström R. Sampson, eds., *The explanation of crime* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

31 See x.

4 Results

The presentation of the findings starts with insights into street culture practices of non-violent youth, especially conflict behavior. While most street culture literature addresses violent youth, we demonstrate their behavior to provide a broader view and explain some similarities and differences in comparison to violent players. In this sense, it proceeds with demonstrating the self-image of non-violent youth, particularly addressing aspects of toughness as well as styles and behavior. Secondly, results are shown on modifications of street culture practice in adulthood. While street culture literature largely ignores adult life, the young people provide information on this topic describing their adult social environment. Thirdly, data is presented on the impact of crumbling ethnic barriers on street culture practice. At least a glimpse is provided on the innovative potential of these alterations which affect the conflict behavior and ways of communication.

4.1 *Non-Violent Street Culture Practices*

As mentioned above, a rough way of talking and behaving even among friends is common among non-violent and violent participants. Hence, those might not be distinguishable (for outsiders). Due to the huge relevance of maintaining reputation, tough interacting is also a non-violent street culture practice demonstrating rigor and defense readiness. Participants are often so used to this strategy and play this game so well that these interactions might even become quite aggressive, but without risking to cross the boundary of actually engaging in physical violence.

In our data, such interactions are well documented in several field reports that addressed the communication of interviewees and their friends.³² One quite telling example was about the order in which interviews should be conducted. An argument arose about who is first which was instrumentalized to coincide with determining the pecking order of the group. Three youths disputed loudly, even gesturing aggressively and making threats, although it was plain that they would be all interviewed that day.³³ It seemed that they might even fight about it in front of the interviewer or later on. Nevertheless, they

32 We are aware that those had at least partly in mind being observed by an outsider. This might have a bias on their behavior; however, the “flow” in which they acted partly demonstrated authenticity and was often driven by impulsivity.

33 This conflict was also based in the prospect of receiving a monetary incentive (20€) which made this an “existential issue” emphasizing the everyday struggle for money in such locations.

all stated in the interviews being close mates and that this is just their way of talking when asserting their interests. As an example of this behavior is the following:

Q: Did you feel provoked and have you actually been angry?

Y56: It just seemed so. But this also allows for letting of some steam without harming others.

Q: So, this is a strategy of appearing to be aggressive to the outside while you stay calm inside?

Y56: Yes, it is useful to have an aggressive image, although you are rather calm and not interested in fighting. We wouldn't fight about things like that. This is just how we handle this.

Interestingly, this dispute was finally settled in a streetwise manner by one interviewee taking the opportunity of sneaking into the interview room while the others were still discussing the interview order. He even got credit for this move by subsequent approval when the others realized that he took advantage of this. Overall, it seems essential that all participants leave such conflicts with heads held high. Moreover, they live by the motto: The next competition for reputation will surely come. Similar scenarios occurred several times before, at times even during, and after interviews in front of me. They were just solved in different non-violent ways.

Another rather non-violent pattern of negotiating reputation in street culture is playful battling with words or scuffles. Although this might include quite mean provocations, such as "son of a bitch" or "bastard",³⁴ and gets even physical in the case of skirmishes, it is just about the permanent competition of demonstrating toughness, cleverness, repartee, and physical strength. Another telling example was observing a male youth insulting a female peer as a "daughter of a bitch". Grounded in street culture expectations, she reacted immediately and even got furious. She ran behind the guy, caught him, jumped on him, yelled at him, but hit him not in a severe way. Meanwhile, their mates explained the background of this. Her mother died some time ago which caused her fury. She was an otherwise rather non-violent youth and therefore just reacted out of impulsivity which she even controlled by not becoming really violent. Her mates stressed that she could not let such an insult pass and the expectation at least to confront the guy. The final act of this incident was his apology to her conveying that he just insulted her to be funny but was totally

34 Both are perceived intolerable in German street culture due to the inclined insult of the family.

unaware of her mother's death. Thereby he did not only clean his reputation for being mean but also stabilize her reputation by claiming that no one shall repeat this insult towards her.

Similar playful interactions among mates can be observed in such districts on a daily basis. Interestingly, although the participants play their role in aggressive ways, it is at least at second glance usually possible distinguishing the behavior and used force from severe fights. Hence, it is plain to all parties that these are just demonstrations, (i.e., they are resolving conflicts in a "soft mode" that would become much harder among violent players). The typical manners of achieving reputation of violent players are instrumentalized in a softer way which enables non-violent players to engage in quite similar street culture practices. However, thereby they demonstrate and reinforce the omnipresence of severe provocations and the use of physical force in public. It is noticeable that both playful verbal and physical battles are banned from the youth clubs for this reason. Moreover, it is stressed by social workers that even playful battles might become severe in rare occasions, even among friends:

Eg: They don't get why we intervene so quickly in such battles. They aren't cautious at times and one might get a black eye or broken bones. It starts harmless but one might just hit in the wrong way or things might just escalate. However, I see why they need this. They feel so much pressure and have to let off steam. Moreover, such playful fights are used to distinguish oneself in the group. It isn't just for fun; it has a social component.

A third non-violent way of self-presenting and of contributing to one's reputation is attributing oneself to a certain style. Usually, different (sub)cultural styles exist parallel in the same location so that the youth have to choose what they like. Close mates might share one style including the outfit, hair style, music taste, and the behavior in the public sphere. Popular archetypes often refer to the hip hop universe. Respective youth cultural and behavior patterns exist globally and do therefore neither serve for distinguishing between non-violent and violent participants nor necessarily even between street culture and mainstream society. Ironically, this indistinctiveness even causes trouble for non-violent participants at times because they often face the same control practice by the police as violent players.³⁵

35 Scholars such as Keitzel stress that this might even happen so frequently that it is perceived annoying but also normal. E.g. S. Keitzel, *Kontrollierter Alltag. Erfahrungen von Jugendlichen mit der Polizei im Gefahrengbiet St. Pauli* (Frankfurt: University Press, 2015).

Y87: I and my friends get controlled by the police all the time. We aren't doing anything wrong. Especially in the evening or at night, we all look suspicious to them just because we are outside. Of course, it has also to do with our outfit; we like this gangster-style.

All in all, non-violent and violent participants in street culture might appear quite similar at first glance, particularly due to sharing some practices. It requires a closer look observing the fine nuances in which non-violent participants distinguish themselves.

4.2 *Self-Image of Non-Violent Street Culture Participants*

Narrations on the self-image of non-violent players often address two issues: a) toughness, b) styles and behavior; both might be interlinked. Based in the aforementioned everyday practices, non-violent participants are in the paradox situation of acting in a tough and partly even aggressive manner, whilst rather rejecting the use of violence. This fine line between tough appearance and severe conflict escalation determines their everyday balancing act of negotiating reputation. Importantly, neither they nor others perceive them some kind of fake actors in street culture. Quite in contrary, this practice of maneuvering and their success in daily competitions even defines their self-image of being streetwise. It provides a more clear-cut distinction from other participants and thereby contributes to the identity, as shown in these examples:

Q: Is it necessary to be violent in your neighborhood to be accepted?

Y43: As I told you, I am not engaging in fights. Does this make me soft? No. I and most of my friends are not interested in violence. Of course, some guys want to have the image of being the hardest fighter. But they are stupid and very impulsive. They are crazy.

Y71: Of course, I am tough. No one would question this. We are avoiding fights but that's our strength. We handle conflicts in a different manner and demonstrate that no one can push us around just by words and appearance.

Other narrations deal with local mobility. While for instance strangers might face trouble in their neighborhood, they are known and accepted as they are. They usually do not have to prove themselves in fights and are just provoked in terms of competition.

Y21: I can go wherever I want. No one will attack me. Everyone knows me and my family, we are accepted. When you are younger, you might have some fights; this is normal and they aren't so hard. But when you get

older, the thugs fight among each other or with crews from other places. We don't get involved. You might just have to take care in other notorious neighborhoods. But why I should go there?

In so far, established non-violent participants can even perceive themselves veterans in street culture. On the other hand, their self-image partly contains another aspect of differentiation from violent players. They cherish the impression of acting in a more moral way. Although street culture is often described an oppositional culture, rejection of violence is not a unique feature of mainstream society. Typical rationales of rejecting violence among those youths are often formulated in contrast to violent players: control of one's impulsivity, higher moral standards, better socialization in the family, and better understanding of the uselessness of solving conflicts violently.

Y34: Of course, we feel superior to thugs. They just don't get what is obvious to us. (...) I guess most of them just cannot control themselves and think that it's okay crossing boundaries in fights.

Y17: This is so absurd; you cannot beat up someone merely for an insult. Don't they learn this at home? And why they have to go so far at times?

Furthermore, non-violent participants engage in certain styles, not least ones contributing to an image of toughness. The overall result is a rather stringent outward appearance and behavior. It must be borne in mind once again that these youth identify themselves with this and do not perceive it a fake. The widespread hip hop styles are for instance an expression and processing strategy of coping with the living situation and external discrimination. Hence, these styles are not just about liking outfits and music but also demonstrate the (perceived) unity with disadvantaged neighborhoods in the US. Thereby they are rather no statement of defiance or social criticism but symbols of attachment and belonging to "the streets":

Y98: I like this style because it is cool. I and my friends share it; we have it in common. We feel like the guys from the movies and songs from ghettos in America. No one wants us. We get no shot.

Y26: In the beginning, we just liked the sounds and the lyrics because they told our stories. Later on, we dressed like these guys. They are like us; we have so much in common.

Some young people even write lyrics themselves, perform, or produce music. This is not – at least seriously – seen as a means of a future profession; it is

rather a hobby that allows for addressing everyday issues and partly even an additional source for recognition and reputation.

4.3 *Modifications of Street Culture Practices in Adult Life*

The issue of altering street culture practices in adult life is very broad and can be merely addressed in extracts here. Nevertheless, we have some interesting results, even about adults when interviewees talked about parents and other grown-ups. Our data includes alterations in street culture practice among non-violent participants. While some modifications already occur during adolescence, the following focusses on changes in (young) adulthood. One of those is grounded in the changing basic condition that adults become usually not severely provoked after leaving the public arena of everyday competition for reputation. Interestingly, tough appearance does not become obsolete and seems rather to switch to other settings.

Adults join, for instance, the workforce. It is a widespread wish engaging in jobs without bossy superiors and lack of external control, preferably even self-employment. The adults do not want to get pushed around because this might harm their reputation and self-image:³⁶

Y25: I wouldn't be able to stand a boss who tells me what to do.

Y48: I need freedom. I hated control by teachers and don't want this anymore. Thus, I will open my own shop or work in a family business.

Another option is proactive handling of bossy behavior by superiors. However, it is common knowledge that rough talking is usually just acceptable among adults of the same milieu:

Y76: My father and some others work for guys in the neighborhood. It's astonishing how rough they talk to each other. I know that this is just possible because they know each other well and have a common ground. Out there, this wouldn't be possible. I would like working in such a place.

Although it is questionable how many grown-ups actually have jobs in which tough appearance is tolerable or in which they are not ridiculed by bossy superiors, narrations of degradation and a weak appearance in work life happen to be rather uncommon. Such aspects of life are rather hidden or merely discussed publicly in order to demonstrate toughness by describing one's reactions to such experiences. Although adults usually spent less time with friends

³⁶ Another avoidance strategy is hiding one's occupation from others if it might be shameful.

and mates, especially peers seem to provide the social space in which grown-ups may tell stories of current streetwise behavior and success in everyday life. Exemplary narrations are:

Y74: The adults are not just telling stories in a hard way, they also stress in an obvious way that they still act by the street code.

Y96: Sometimes it is interesting just to hang out with grown-ups. They are boasting with their achievements all the time. Even if you know that they have a hard life and might just invent some stories, it's funny listening to them. This is how adults demonstrate that they are still real men.

In contrast, tough appearance in the family is rather based in maintaining traditional role behavior. Wives and children should particularly respect fathers due to being the breadwinners. This is partly demanded through tough language and harsh reactions to infringements; however, the men are not necessarily acting in dictatorial manners:

Y15: Fathers are the heads of the family. They decide. If I do something wrong, my father usually grounds me, yells at me, or punishes me.

Y68: Although, I guess, my mother gets involved in decisions and can convince my father at times, he has the final word. We should respect him.

Furthermore, there is an intergenerational link of street culture. While some practices might be overcome through time, basic patterns are transferred by intergenerational learning processes. It is just not always the parents who pass on certain aspects. This is for instance demonstrated by the following quotes:

A26: You learn standing your ground and the rough talking at home. Although violence isn't common in my family, we have conflicts. When you are young, you see how your parents argue about issues. When you get older, you get involved and have to prevail.

A92: You learn the basic attitudes and patterns of conversation at home but the actual behavior is copied from older peers, brothers, or cousins in the streets.

4.4 *Street Culture and Crumbling Ethnic Barriers*

As aforementioned, the personal identity is interwoven with street culture practice. Fading ethnic barriers might matter in this context for instance by implying the loss of a relevant source of identity (development). Moreover,

it is crucial how young people deal with such diversity in the peer-network. First of all, it is noteworthy that all interviewees (non-violent and violent players) agreed that their circle of friends basically included peers from all ethnic origins that were present in their social environment. Ethnic homogeneity appeared to be a relic from the past.

Regardless of whether this alteration is even noticed by young people growing up with a different attitude towards ethnicity than former generations, the question is how this gap of a common denominator is filled. Young men describe this situation like that:

Y15: It's strange to imagine that the last generation largely avoided other ethnic groups. We live in the same places and share the same problems. Why should we be enemies? We rather define ourselves about having the same problems and about liking each other.

Apart from the typical common ground of friends (i.e., mutual understanding and attachment), the connecting element of such youth often become a joint awareness/discourse of deficits; especially widespread obstacles in life and shortcomings in coping with them. It might be argued that this negatively affects the self-image while ethnic attachment might rather serve as a source of pride. However, the data indicates benefits of a playful competition between ethnic groups in contrast to prior rivalry. Former stereotypes and prejudices might be reduced. The innovative potential of these interactions is that former severe insults are transformed into a non-violent street culture competition for reputation and way of communication; even a multilingual mix of expressions occurs.

Y63: We relate to the multiethnic mix by making fun of each other. Traditional stereotypes are just perfect to do so. We try to invent new jokes all the time. It's about having the best idea and clever ways of mixing the languages. The common language is German but we know a lot of insults and funny words in other languages.

However, crumbling ethnic barriers are no synonym for lack of interpersonal conflicts in the public sphere. Opponents are just defined and chosen in a different manner lacking the ethnic component. The scope is often merely broadened to a wider range of players in street culture, i.e., individuals that react in a similar way on provocations.

Y47: Some battles for reputation occur among friends, others with outsiders; in our cases most of them are non-violently. However, you recognize other guy from the hood that match to the game and outsiders by their

appearance or at least by their reaction to a challenge. The weak and shy guys just look away and try to escape; they are no match and might even call the police. So you seek for the right guys. Ethnicity doesn't matter.

Another innovative element and alteration in verbal interactions is increasing rejection of politics. While the youths might use various insults, political provocations, even political discussions are avoided in order to exclude problems that divided former generations and are partly still active in the countries of origin, such as the conflict between Turks and Kurds.

Y102: The only exception is politics. You don't make jokes dealing with political tensions. I guess it's easier to like each other if you neglect those. There are too many problems out there. We don't want to get involved and let them destroy our friendships.

This neglecting is rather no tool to overcome interethnic conflicts and just serves avoiding them in everyday interactions. However, it allows the youths being capable of creating and maintaining multiethnic peer-networks which distinguishes them from former generations and huge parts of mainstream society. Although this is seldom in everyday life, it is partly a source for pride and contributes to a positive self-image.

Y72: This is so normal for us that you just think about it if you are reminded. But it's true, it's special and powerful. While others share right-wing tendencies or get radicalized, we are living in a multiethnic way.

Finally, some participants even stress an interest in a cosmopolitical future. They can even imagine living in other countries to achieve their goals in life and to maintain multiethnic contacts in adult life.

Y98: I and my friends want to move to the US after leaving school. Maybe we need jobs before; however, we love this culture and way of life.

It is noteworthy that comparable attitudes were quite rare in prior generations in Germany and might be a result of this ethnical shift.

5 Discussion

This paper addresses some rather neglected issues of street culture research. While non-violent and violent participants might appear quite similar at first

glance, for instance due to sharing some practices and styles, fine nuances can be observed how non-violent players distinguish themselves. It is especially the non-violent and successful maneuvering through everyday competitions for recognition that defines their (self-)image of being streetwise. They become accepted members of the community and might even feel morally superior and being socialized in a better way than violent players. Their use of street styles and behavior is mainly a way of living and an adaptation to their social environment. It is rather no statement of defiance or social criticism but a demonstration of attachment and belonging to "the streets". This expands for instance Anderson's understanding of street culture as an oppositional culture which he perceives alienated to mainstream society.³⁷ Further findings are in line with Anderson's claim that participants should act in a "proper way to respond if challenged".³⁸ This insight can be applied to non-violent players who demonstrate their assertiveness in public life and is not just valid among violent youths.

Even male grown-ups maintain streetwise behavior and a tough appearance. They just do not participate in the daily competition for recognition any longer which is rather perceived a juvenile behavior. They more likely tend to demonstrate not being controlled for instance by others at work and in the family; they are keen to show that they remain being decision-makers. Especially peers provide the social space for assuring each other's toughness. In other words, they do not become members of mainstream society; they just alter street culture practices.³⁹ This suits well to Bourgois argument on the veterans' vanishing necessity of constantly showing off (violently);⁴⁰ it even expands it by demonstrating that adults usually just rely on tough appearance.

Finally, there are not just the above mentioned changes of street culture practice in adult life. The young people even show some significant innovations. One of those are crumbling ethnic barriers in urban areas, at least in Germany. While these barriers had been quite important to prior generations, they are not even perceived a loss in the context of the juvenile's identity. In contrary, the lacking barriers rather unfold an innovative potential in interethnic interactions. Former interethnic prejudices and conflicts regarding one's origin might even become an option of non-violently competing for reputation by including the ethnic differences in the ways of communication. This partly even includes a multilingual mix of expressions. Not the everyday competition

37 E.g. E. Anderson (1990), *loc.cit.*

38 E. Anderson (1999), *loc.cit.*, p. 61.

39 See also x.

40 E.g. P. Bourgois, *loc. cit.*

vanishes, but the selection criteria of opponents are changing. Proper rivals are chosen less by one's origin but rather by similarities in conflict behavior, i.e., non-violent participants chose other non-violent participants. This also relates to Anderson's⁴¹ notion on proper responses to challenges and expands it by demonstrating that not only proper responses are chosen but also proper opponents which might serve to avoid unnecessary trouble with the police and justice system.

Finally, it is worth considering and discussing that the presented findings just comprise German data. This is particularly the case since our results in another cross-national study on street culture demonstrate that Anderson's original concept of the street code⁴² seems to function just in some aspects universally, while the local/national context matters in others.⁴³ Thus, the abovementioned findings might show some variations and peculiarities in other countries, for instance, the very conduction of non-violent and adult practices of street culture. In contrast, crumbling race/ethnic barriers might be still uncommon in other countries, similar to Germany, or even further developed than in Germany. It can be expected that this contributes to a large variation, for example, in terms of selecting enemies in different street cultures and of local multicultural innovations.

41 E.g. E. Anderson (1999), *loc. cit.*

42 E. Anderson (1990), *loc. cit.*

43 E.g. x.