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Children's Definitions of Otherness

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Children's Definitions of Otherness

Agnese Desideri

Abstract. The article explores how social categorisation works during childhood. More specifically it explores what happens when Italian children try to explain how their *practical sense* operates during the socialisation process to social categorisation. The empirical research on this issue remains little explored in childhood especially from a sociological perspective. The Bourdieu's notion of *practical sense* has been intersected with the neurological notions of *schemata* and *deliberate cognition*. Through the use of practical sense social agents collocate individuals in the social space. Schemata promote efficiency and enable *automatic cognition*. Instead deliberate cognition is used by social agents when social interaction requires it as well as when they are asked to justify their action. Ninety-six-first grades-children and their parents have been involved in an empirical study and interviewed using photo-elicitation. During the interview children and parents were asked to justify their action and use their deliberate cognition. Findings compare children with adults' answers and emphasize the importance of the 'body' in making membership of social categories visible. Hence, being socialized means also to recognize the 'symbolism of the bodies'. A significant outcome produced is that an anticipatory socialisation to the 'moral' and 'hierarchical' dimensions of social categorisation is underway.

Keywords: Children, Social categorisation, Body, Practical Sense, Deliberate Cognition

Introduction

There are a number of historical studies that focus on adult's social categorisation practices, in particular on the identification of social identities from a philosophical and psychological perspective (Cousineau, 2017; Jenkins, 2000), but, the empirical research of how categorisation practices work in childhood remains little explored, especially from a sociological perspective (Garnier, 2021; Ligner & Pagis, 2017; Rossi, 2019; Zarca, 1999).

Scholars have often examined how adults judge and evaluate others (Bourdieu, 1979; Friedman et al., 2015; Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Sølvsberg & Jarness, 2019). Instead, the empirical research on this issue that relates to childhood remains poorly investigated, especially in Italy (Garnier, 2021; Hakovirta & Kallio, 2016; Kustatscher, 2017; Zotian, 2014). Furthermore, the scientific field of childhood studies is still immature in Italy (Belotti & Mendola, 2010; Satta, 2017).

Social categories are groups of individuals based on characteristics that are considered similar (Kinzler, Shutts, & Correl, 2010) as well some aspects of someone's social identity: characteristics related to age (i.e., child, adult, elderly), geographical origin (i.e., Italian, African, Chinese), economic status (i.e., rich, poor), profession (i.e., policeman, teacher) and religion (i.e., Eastern Orthodox, Jewish).

During childhood, adults transfer to children "one (or more) way(s) to categorize individuals" (Lignier, Lomba & Renahy, 2012, p.13) that progressively enable them to think and act as individuals in the social world. Hence, children are no longer seen as 'little unusual objects' (Sirota, 2010 in Belotti & Mendola), but as social agents with their their own perspectives on social reality. These perspectives need to be studied and understood.

The way childhood is conceived by the new social studies of childhood determines the way adult interact with children and also the children's relationship with the social world (James & James, 2004). In this regard, children's confrontation with institutions such as the family, peers and new media also influences children's perspectives on social reality and children's representations of otherness (Azeem, & Ruffman, 2022; Ciofalo, Leonzi, Quercia, 2021; Fernandez & Menon, 2022, Thomson, Barriman & Bragg, 2018; Willet, 2013).

The current text draws on Bourdieu's (1980) theory of practice, in particular the notion of *practical sense*. The use of *practical sense* enables children to collocate people in the social space.

Intersection of social practice approach and neurological approach

Social categories are an extreme synthesis of the complexity inherent in what exists. At the cognitive level, social agents process the maximum amount of information with the minimum amount of cognitive effort when grouping peoples (Rosch, 1978). In achieving this form of ‘cognitive economy’ social agents do not attempt to identify every characteristic present in an individual, but - as in any operation of simplification - they “include [individuals] in the same meaningful set on the basis of the elements of similarity that unite them” (Castelli, 2009, para. 1.2.1).

The human need to find a way to better process a great amount of information stems from the cognitive limitation of how much information an individual can process simultaneously. The vast complexity of scenes, situations, actions, people or objects cannot be fully processed, stored and reproduced (Dijk, 2014). For this reason, there are ‘simpler structures’ called ‘experiential models’ that allow the selection of relevant information for a given situation and facilitate the everyday experience. In cognitive psychology, these experiential models are called *schemata*. They guide perception and memory allow interpretation of experience and generate inferences and expectations. As explained in Di Maggio:

They are “also mechanisms that simplify cognition. Highly *schematic cognition* is the realm of institutionalized culture, of typification, of the habitus, of the cognitive shortcuts that promote efficiency at the expense of synoptic accuracy” (Berger & Luckman 1967; Bourdieu 1980; quoted in Di Maggio, 1997, p. 269).

Thus, *schemata* enable and justify *automatic cognitive* reflection and action. Therefore, both *automatic cognition* processes and deeply internalised schematic processes (as well as deliberative cognition) serve as the basis for the cognitive activity of social agents (Kahneman, 2011, Vaisey, 2009). Automatic cognition has the characteristics of being implicit and non-verbal. It has been defined as ‘warm’ because it is both impulsive and spontaneous, whereas *deliberate cognition* is verbal, conscious, explicit and defined as ‘cold’ because it is more reflexive than the ‘automatic’ one (Di Maggio, 1997, Kahneman, 2011).

Deliberate cognition is used by social agents when the social interaction requires it. Social agents would typically use *deliberate cognition* in order to justify their actions on the basis of a personal interpretation of the action (Di Maggio, 1997).

Practical logic or *practical sense* are the names given to the automatic cognition in Pierre Bourdieu’s work (Bourdieu, 1980). The mechanism underlying social categorisation practices corresponds to the *practical sense*. Social

agents acquire the ability to categorize individuals through the acquisition of a practical sense. It is conceived as a kind of intuitive, basic, pre-logical and pre-reflective thinking that guides an individual's behaviour and enables him/her to make judgments about others (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Practical sense operates mostly without the individual being aware of this cognitive level and it becomes tangible when one is asked to exercise it.

Research background: Photo-elicitation interview submitted to first grade children in three Italian primary schools

The main research question is: What, as of yet, unidentified social categories are used by children in first grade? (Compared to the social categories used by adults).¹

A sub-question is: How do children justify their use of social categories? (Compared to the way in which adults justify their use of social categories). This paper focuses on the results of this sub-question, which are illustrated in the next paragraph.

Regarding the interview tool, the Photo-Elicitation Interview (PEI) was used in this study with both adults and children. This technique is particularly suited for interviewing children who have not acquired literacy skills and who base their understanding of the world largely on visual elements. Secondly, PEI reduces *linguistic-cognitive* and *cultural asymmetries* and the unequal distribution of power between interviewer and interviewee to which children are potentially more vulnerable than other populations (Einarsdóttir, 2007).

For the preparation phase, eighteen photos were selected after pre-testing the initial forty-eight. They depict existing people, either in full-length or half-length. The pictures were printed in colour in a format reminiscent of playing cards. The background was blurred and there were no references to known people or brands of objects in order to focus the respondent's attention solely on the figure depicted.

The sources from which the images were extracted correspond to the Google image archive as well as magazines and newspapers retrieved in January 2019. Pictures were selected applying the 'intersectionality approach' to the methodology. “

Each person declines to belong to several social categories, groups and communities, simultaneously and over time” (Lorettoni, 2010, p. 310). Thus, the selection criteria were: 'gender', 'geographical origin', 'economic status', 'age', 'religion' and 'profession'.²

¹ For results on the first question, see XXX (2023b).

² For more details concerning the pre-testing phase, image selection criteria see Desideri (2023a).

Concerning the interview process, the setting was either in a classroom dedicated to art or a computer room or, in other cases, the school library. A cafeteria outside the school was chosen to interview parents, otherwise the home was chosen. The same pictures were presented to both the children and the adults in the same order. The photos were arranged in a horseshoe shape, turned upside down, and the child or adult had to take one at a time. The children's and adults' responses were audio-recorded and later transcribed.

The empirical research was carried out in 2019 in the metropolitan area of a city in central Italy. Two first grade classes in three primary schools were selected. Children participating in the study were 96: forty-five males, fifty-one females. 136 adults also participated in the study: eighty-eight females (children's mothers) and forty-eight males (children's fathers).

The choice of first grade was dictated by the need to take a snapshot of a stage of cognitive and social development in which some categories are largely incorporated and others not yet fully so. Indeed, the relevant literature shows that subjects in the first grade can classify individuals - as adults do - according to gender, sex (Abbatecola & Stagi, 2017; Bhana, 2016) and in a still rudimentary way, according to age, socio-economic positioning of individuals (Garnier, 2021; Inagaki & Hatano, 2006; Kustatscher, 2017).

The sample was constructed through a non-probabilistic selection of three primary schools according to their ESCS level (Upper, Medium, Lower) (*Economic-Social and Cultural Status*). The ESCS index is based on the occupation of the parents and the nationality of the family. The main objective was to obtain a sample that covered a variety of experiences and had different socio-economic and socio-demographic characteristics.

Two interview questions were used:

1. Who do you think is the person in the photo? and 2. Why did you say that?

To answer the first question, participants used the *automatic cognition*.

For the second question, Interviewees were asked to explain their judgments and justifications about the people depicted using their *deliberate cognition*.

Semantic analysis was adopted in order to regroup children and adults' answers to the two interview questions.

Each word was included in a group of words with a similar meaning related to the same linguistic area (Gärdenfors, 2018). Categories (such as 'sex', 'age', 'family role' and so on) were assigned based on the main social classifications present in the scientific literature.

The following words were included in the categories of 'gender' and 'sex': 'lady, sir, man, woman, male, female'³. On the other hand, the words: 'young,

³ According to extensive literature in this area, gender and sex are not synonymous (Lips,

old, child' were included in the category related to 'age'. Within the category 'geographical origin', the words attributed by the children were: 'Chinese, African, Black, etc.' and for the adults: 'African, from the Asian continent'. For 'profession', the children used the words: 'fireman, farmer, policeman, etc.' and the adults 'lawyer, secretary, writer'. In the category relating to professions and also to the religious sphere the words: 'a priest, says of Jesus, in a church' 'one from the church' were used by children. While adults used the words: 'pope, orthodox priest, etc.'. In the 'family role' category the words 'mother, father, sister, brother, aunt, uncle' were used. Finally, adults used words such as: 'far-right, naziskin, skinhead'. These words were included in the category 'political affiliation'.

Evidences from the field: Children and adults' justifications of their use of gender and sex categories

Thanks to the semantic analysis of answers, it was possible to identify the recursive presence of two main elements used by the participants. Firstly, the interviewees use the *physical-somatic characteristics* (i.e., hair, height) and secondly the element of *material culture* (especially clothes).

To describe a picture (N° 15) depicting a standing male adult wearing jeans and a t-shirt, the children said: 'he has short hairs like men' or 'he has grey hairs like men' or 'he is tall' or 'a male with muscles'.

Some of them referred to his clothing: 'he is a sir...he has a t-shirt and jeans'.

The typology of justifications related to clothing was included in the analytical category of 'aesthetic modification of the body'. The aesthetic modification of the body is in fact based on the use of 'reflexive body techniques' (Crossley, 2005) that are adopted - by social agents - in order to communicate a certain image of oneself to others in a given social context (Goffman, 2022). In the photo N° 15 'jeans' are associated by some children with the masculine identity of the person depicted. This item of clothing seems to testify to the symbolic nature of clothing in communicating social identity (Wærdahl, 2005).

The same issue arises in the case of photo N° 14 which portrays a young Asian woman buying a luxury item of clothing. Again, the most emphasized elements by children are the characteristics related to gender representations of what it means to be a woman, and relate to corporeality as well as 'aesthetic changes to the body', such as her hairstyle and her clothes.

2020; Prince, 2005; Pryzgoda & Chrisler, 2000). Gender refers to socialised behaviour and sex refers to biological differences. Respondents often used the two terms synonymously, making it difficult to separate them during the coding phase.

The children (mainly girls, but not only) stated that the woman has: 'long hair, enamel' or 'a female, dress, long hair' or 'a young lady...with long hair, leopard shirt, enamel, lipstick'.

It is interesting to note that in the case of the Italian first grade children who were interviewed the link between clothing and gender is quite clear. The two pictures presented (N°15 and N°14) illustrate that children have a fairly good idea of the main stylistic traits that are highly gendered. Children's feminine and masculine representations are quite often based on material culture and aesthetic modification of the body. This result it is not surprising, as the literature shows that most of the clothing worn by children in the early stages of their lives remains sexually differentiated and differentiating (Fischer, 2006).

Only once children as well as adults had some difficulties in relating 'clothes' to 'sex' category. The photo N°11, depicting an elderly woman wearing a dark blue coat and a headscarf, raised uncertainties. Some respondents explained that the depicted person was a man rather than a woman because: 'he has white hairs and a headscarf' 'he has hairs like grandfathers', 'he has an old man's jacket'.

These elements raised doubts about the gender representation probably because the person depicted did not have highly representative gender stylistic features. In support of this claim, Fiske (2000) argues that older people are often seen as: 'unattractive', asexual, senile, slow, rigid, poor'.

Justifications of age and family role category

The photo N°11 was described by children and adults using some expressions related to the 'age' and 'family role' category.

First of all, it is interesting to underline that the kind of justifications given by children and adults referred mainly to the person's *physical-somatic characteristics* especially in the expressions used: 'she has wrinkles, she has white hair'. Adults also referred to the related adjectives, such as: 'wrinkled', 'skin drained, thick with wrinkles, sculpted by time'.

It is also possible to note, among the 'justifications' given by the adults, the presence of some characteristics linked to the stereotypical view of old age, such as some attributions linked to the health problems: 'knuckles deformed by arthrosis', or 'physical fatigue', such as: 'she has humble origins, she has worker's hands' 'hands which worked a lot'. This last sentence seems to reflect the importance given by the interviewed adults to the physical appearance as a fundamental indicator of an individual's social status (Bourdieu, 1977).

Secondly, both children and adults seemed to focus on 'aesthetic modification of the body', as they often referred to clothes and accessories worn by the person depicted (i.e., 'coat' 'headscarf', 'headgear').

The 'age' category was also used to describe the photo N°5, which shows presumably a 'middle-aged woman' with curly hair, sitting on a sofa and wearing a scarf and a jumper. In describing this picture, younger respondents often referred to the 'middle-aged' dimension (from a child's perspective), namely 'someone not very old' (i.e., 'not very old lady' or 'a lady with rough skin but little' a 'slightly old person').

In addition, some respondents, both children and adults, said that the person portrayed was an 'aunt'. Children 'justified' their answers in the following way: 'for her curly hairs, scarf and jumper' or 'she is younger than a mum and she has less cheerful clothes'. As remarked by Garnier, "objects assign ages to individuals" (Garnier, 2021, p. 218). In this particular case, children used clothing and accessories in order to infer both the age and the family role of the person depicted.

Justifications of socio-economic boundaries

The categories related to socio-economic boundaries are those associated to professional belonging and socio-economic positioning. The main justifications, given by respondents are again related to 'material culture' and to 'reflexive-body-techniques'.

Children referred to the 'helmet', the 'gloves', the 'dress', the 'harness' and the 'work glasses' to explain why the picture appeared to show a worker (photo N°17 representing a young woman worker)

Two children mentioned that the woman depicted had a 'helmet' like the animals in the cartoon 'Paw Patrol'. In this cartoon, the main characters are a ten-year-old boy who is the leader of the puppies that helps him in his rescue work. There is the police/spy puppy, the fire rescue puppy and the air rescue puppy. Each puppy has specific skills and abilities and wears a uniform and accessories appropriate to the professional role they play in the cartoon. As mentioned above, the reference to this cartoon by the children interviewed underlines the importance of the consumption of certain media products in the process of acquiring information about the domain of professions (Dawar & Anand, 2020; Solbes-Canales et al., 2020).

Regarding the category 'socio-economic positioning' both children and adults often referred to the 'dirtiness' of the person depicted in a photo (N°16) of an old man living in conditions of economic marginality and sitting in a square. One child said 'a poor man...shoes taken from the bin, all dirty', another said instead 'a tramp... he has dirty clothes, no wallet, empty pockets'.

These findings are consistent with the empirical results of a study carried out in a primary school in England. The results show that the expressions used to describe people living in conditions of economic deprivation by people who do not live in the same conditions contain many negative qualifications such as 'dirty, lazy' (Hakovirta & Kallio, 2016).

The presence of dirt and apparent neglect of the clothing correspond to two central elements used by the interviewed children as well as adults to justify the social position of the individual depicted in the photo-stimulus N°16. According to this interpretation, 'dirt' is not only a 'stigma' but also a classification scheme adopted by social actors to judge and evaluate otherness. Thus, personal hygiene represents a shared value and like any other symbolic boundary allows for the inclusion or exclusion of an individual within a social group.

As Douglas (2015) points out, the personal hygiene standard allows for the reduction of ambiguities and anomalies, as well as the exclusion of those who do not conform to the hygiene standards tolerated by the social group.

The shared social representations of personal hygiene show that the person portrayed in picture N°16 is described as someone 'anomalous' or 'deviant' and ultimately someone who is difficult to place in a social category.

These aspects testify that an anticipatory socialisation to the 'moral' and 'hierarchical' dimensions of classification and categorisation practices is underway.⁴ This anticipatory socialisation takes place in the family. Children are first taught the concept of personal hygiene in the family, where they experience the distinction between what is clean and what is dirty.

In this way, children learn to place this practice among socially appropriate behaviors to be held in a given community (Tudge, 2008).⁵

For the mentioned reasons, some adults insisted on the 'psycho-physical health' of the person portrayed. They said that person had a 'tired face' or that 'he has a suffering face' or 'he suffers both physically and mentally'. In particular, two people working in the health sector (a doctor, a general practitioner and a psychotherapist) explained during the interview that in their work time they have noticed that people experiencing economic and social exclusion often have some psychiatric and physical problems. All these answers show that the social representation of 'homelessness' (a condition often associated with social exclusion and marginality) can be linked to the physical and mental health problems.

Regarding the answers on the 'wealth' dimension, both children and adults referred quite often to the material culture as well as to the 'clothing' ('jacket', 'shirt, tie') or to luxury items ('luxury watch' and 'throne'). This was particularly the case when describing the picture N°18, which shows an adult male in a suit and a tie sitting on a luxurious chair.

⁴ For a theoretical reflection on this aspect cf. Costa, C. (2013). socialisation and sociability, *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education*.

⁵ For a reflection on the control on children's body see Zaltron, F. (2017). Children's Bodies and Construction of Parental Adequacy. A Qualitative Study of the Daily Hygiene Practices of Mothers and Fathers in Italy. *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education*, 9(3), 97-121.

Two adults stated: 'a politician, for the living room' or 'a lawyer, for the way he dresses'. Instead, one child said: 'a rich person, he is sitting on a throne', another stated: 'a very rich gentleman, he is dressed in black tie, he has a rich man's chair'.

Another girl said: 'an English gentleman on the throne of the Queen of England, he is the President of England and he has the airs of 'I have lots of money'. She justified her answers by saying: 'he has a huge office, a golden throne, gold embroidery, a tie and presidential collar'.

The mentioned girl highlighted not only the 'economic position dimension' but also the 'social prestige' of the depicted person. Two other children, describing the same picture, did the same: 'he is a president, he is rich, because he has a rich jacket, a tie, an antique chair and a watch' or 'he is the president of the United States, sitting on a throne' because 'he is wearing a tie, a jacket'.

It's interesting to note that these children were able to associate the 'social role' and 'prestige' of the depicted person with the style of clothing. On this subject, another girl said that the person in picture N°18 was a 'Baby Boss'. She later explained that she was talking about a cartoon of the same name, in which the main character has the same style of clothing as the person in the photo. As mentioned above, the children's recurrent reference to the media content underlines the relevant role played of new media in the process of children's acquisition of social categorisation practices.

Justifications of belonging to a subculture

In identifying sub-cultural affiliations adults often referred to the material culture to the gestures or to the aesthetic changes of the bodies (Crossley, 2005) of the people portrayed in the photographs.

Concerning a photo which shows a young man presumably during a Nazi-fascist political demonstration (picture N°4), adults identify the person portrayed mainly by observing his gestures, including the 'the Roman salute'. Other elements such as 'the shaved hair' provoked an immediate identification of the person portrayed within the political subculture of 'skinheads' (Marrone, 2001).

The younger interviewees responded by describing the person portrayed as being more likely to be a 'captain of a football team' or 'a trainer' alluding in particular to his 'sportswear'. They also alluded to the gesture, stating in this case that he was a 'urban policeman'.

Therefore, it is possible to notice that given the different experiences of children and adults the social representation of the skinhead is not yet present in the children's collective imagination. By analyzing these responses, it is possible to conclude that, as Lignier and Pagis (2017) showed for children

in France, politics is a dimension that is not very tangible in the daily lives of the children interviewed.

Finally, in relation to the use of religious subculture affiliation adults described picture N°8 (depicting a Pope of the Eastern Orthodox Church dressed in black) with the following expressions: 'He is a Pope of the Eastern Orthodox Church' or 'he is dressed in black with a long necklace and a typical hat'. To justify their answers, they mostly referred to 'accessories', as well as the 'necklace', 'hat' or 'dress' of the depicted person.

Otherwise, one children used the following expression: 'he is a pope in a church' and justified as follow: 'he has black jacket and Jesus's necklace, black hat, grey beard'. Another child stated: 'he is the son of Jesus, in a church, sitting and praying' and she justified saying: 'he has golden necklace, moustache and beard'.

The children often insisted on the 'social hierarchy' as well as the 'social importance' of the person portrayed. They recognized the 'importance' of the person in particular through the decoration and accessories (i.e., the necklace, the black jacket) .

Discussion and conclusion

In conclusion, following the presentation of all these justifications to categories, it is possible to remark that the 'body' contributes to the construction of the 'social sense', which is acquired and learned from childhood.

The term *social sense* is taken up by Bernard Zarca (1999) and used by him in surveys of primary school children in France concerning the classification of professions. This term is very similar to the meaning Bourdieu gives to the so-called *practical sense* (Bourdieu, 2005) and it corresponds to the mechanism underlying the choice of social categories that becomes tangible when the individual is called upon to exercise it. The *social sense* provides social agents with the 'coordinates' with which to evaluate and judge individuals.

This paper sought to explore how social categorisation practices work during childhood, especially how children justify their use of *practical sense* and how they use 'social sense'. Some findings were presented that focus on free associations of thought, comparing children's and adults' answers triggered by the images.

During the response mechanism, *automatic* cognitive processes were used as deeply internalised processes (well known as *schemata*) (Kahneman, 2011; Vaisey, 2009) to give an initial answer, and then respondents had to adopt the *deliberative cognition*, a colder cognition than the *automatic* one (Di Maggio, 1997; Kahneman, 2011), to justify their choice of words and verbal expressions.

The findings show that the main stylistic representations of gender are highly embedded in children's minds. Interviewed children used clothing to reconstruct gender identity (Abbatecola & Stagi, 2017). Only once did both children and adults had some difficulties in relating 'reflexive body-techniques' such as clothing to 'sex' category (photo N°11, which shows an elderly woman wearing a dark blue coat and a headscarf). This occurred probably because the person depicted could not easily be associated with the dominant interviewee's representations of female gender identity.

Every category mentioned, as well as gender, sex, age, family role, profession and religion, was linked to the '*corporeality*' (she/he old because of her/his 'wrinkles, white hair') and to the '*aesthetic modification of the body*' (Crossley, 2005; Garnier 2021) (i.e., 'she is an aunt, she is younger than a mum and she has less cheerful clothes').

In this regard, an interesting result corresponds to the consistent use by both children and adults of the 'dirtiness' dimension' as a classification scheme to judge and evaluate one's own social identity, especially in relation to the notion of 'poverty' (i.e. describing picture N°16, a child stated: 'he is a tramp... he has dirty clothes, no wallet, empty pockets').

As mentioned above, 'personal hygiene' corresponds to a shared value acquired during childhood through the socialisation process (Douglas, 2015; Tudge, 2008; Zaltron, 2017). This is why one children stated: 'a poor man... shoes taken from the bin, all dirty'. Children's use of this linguistic register during the interviews shows that an anticipatory socialisation to the 'moral', 'hierarchical' and symbolic dimensions of categorisation practices is underway.

At the same time, some children referred to socioeconomic dimension, making a link among the 'social prestige', 'reflexive body techniques' and 'wealth' dimensions (i.e., 'he is a president, he is rich because he has a jacket, a tie, an antique chair and a watch').

In conclusion, it is possible to state that the main reflection of this article is that being socialized means learning to think 'socially' and to recognise the symbolism within individuals, especially within 'social bodies'. The 'social body' makes membership of certain social categories visible (Court et al., 2014). As far as clothing or 'reflexive bodies techniques'(Crossley, 2005) are concerned, they are adopted to communicate a certain image of oneself to others in a given social context (Goffman, 2022).

As mentioned above, the children's reference to media content in their responses highlighted the relevant role it plays in children's social categorisation practices.

There were no major differences in the answers given according to the three socially and culturally different school contexts. A more extensive investigation (in space and time) might lead to a different set of results.

There is still a lot of research that is needed to be done on these aspects, especially on social categorisation practices in childhood and the reasoning that justifies their choices.

Recognizing children as producers of cultural meaning enables researchers to include them in scientific research. The involvement of children has many implications. On the one hand, it highlights the need to use appropriate research tools to facilitate children's participation and collaboration. On the other hand, researchers can try to see social reality through the eyes of children whose socialisation is not yet complete.

Another methodological tool could be used that is more inductive than the photo-elicitation, where the pictures are chosen by the researcher, such as photo-elicitation where children produce visual or audio-visual material themselves and then explain their own productions. Ethnographic observation in specific socio-educational contexts such as home related activities (i.e., sports, shopping time, birthday parties) or school activities (i.e., carnival, Halloween parties, school trips) could also be carried out in order to observe more deeply and inductively the connection between children's social practices and social body representation.

It is the intention that this article will encourage scholars to explore all these aspects in more detail.

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