Wilfried Lignier et Julie Pagis, *L'Enfance de l'ordre.*
Comment les enfants perçoivent le monde social (Paris, Le Seuil, 2017)

How do children perceive the social order: as their parents, their peers, from their own individual experiences, or some combination thereof? Wilfried Lignier and Julie Pagis, two researchers at the CNRS in Paris, take up this fascinating topic in their book, *L'enfance de l'ordre. Comment les enfants perçoivent le monde social*. Both have previously published important works: Lignier, *La Petite Noblesse de l'intelligence* (Paris, La Decouverte, 2012) and Pagis, *Mai 68, un pavé dans leur historie* (Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2014). The authors contend that the way in which children understand the social order, their own and that of the world beyond, stems from early elementary admonitions, experienced in the family and at school, relative to bodily care and comportment, aesthetic distinctions, and appropriate social conduct. Children then recycle these admonitions into their own practical classifications that permit them to understand and navigate the social orders of peers and the world beyond.

The authors situate their work against two opposing viewpoints on childhood. A widely popular perspective stresses that each child is different, has particular experiences, needs, and aptitudes. Hence, it is very difficult to find common patterns among children. The other viewpoint stresses commonality, popular in certain psychological and educational theories of child development, that children advance through stages, cognitively, linguistically, and morally, where age and standards of normality are markers of individual development. Both viewpoints, the authors stress, miss the institutional, social, and cultural forces that shape children; the second approach also down-plays the degree of agency that children can display. The authors propose a framework that transcends these limitations by looking at how children themselves perceive, think, and classify in order to make sense of the social world.

Lignier and Pagis draw inspiration from Bourdieu's theory of practice and see their work as an elaboration of a key process in Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Habitus consists of sets of dispositions, or "structured structures" (incorporated through primary

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socialization) that also function as "structuring structures" (generators of practices). Individuals carry the imprint of their early socialization where the habitus has been formed through repeated experiences that inform individuals of what they can and cannot do, what is possible or impossible for them, and what they can and cannot access. But Bourdieu also sees in habitus a propensity to externalize, that is, a power that extrapolates, from those previous experiences, fundamental features that relay to some extent and in certain forms those early formative experiences. However, how exactly one moves from "structured structures" to "structuring structures" has been the object of considerable debate and criticism.

Bourdieu himself did not specify the process by which internalized dispositions from primary socialization in turn become externalizing dispositions that orient action. It is clear that in Bourdieu's thinking this transfer was seldom direct—as in the case of a child behaving exactly as she was instructed by her parents. Habitus is not an automatic response that directly reflects past experience. Children seldom ape their parents. Rather, Bourdieu speaks of "analogical transfers" and a practical character and orientation of action that leaves open a "creative" or practical implementation of the dispositions set up from previous socialization. Moreover, Bourdieu did not think of this transfer in rationalistic terms. The dispositions of habitus are bodily dispositions that mobilize corporal action and for the most part do not involve conscious reflection. But Bourdieu does little to specify the character of that process beyond what he says it is *not*—an intellectual operation. Some critics have referred to this as the "black box" of the habitus, the lack of specification of just how one moves from internalized dispositions to practical externalizations. Lignier and Pagis see their work as shedding some light on this black box: their concept of "recycling" is designed to offer a better account of the translation of habitus into practice.

Data and methods presentation

L'Enfance de l'ordre relies on a series of experiments and interviews that Lignier and Pagis completed with seven to ten year old school children from fall 2010 to spring 2012 in two Parisian elementary schools. The schools are located in the same socially diverse areas of Paris, but one has a larger proportion of children of working class (49 %) and immigrant (44 %) origins (African or Asian) than the other

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(with only 22 % working class and 29 % immigrant origins). The researchers focused on two classes of CP (first grade) and CM1 (fourth grade) in the first year of study, and CE1 (second grade) and CM2 (fifth grade) in the second year.

In each class, Lignier and Pagis organized pupils in small groups and asked each child to rank nine occupations appearing on labels. The individual rankings were collectively discussed and the discussions recorded and analyzed. Then the researchers did in-depth interviews with 100 pupils, two at a time. The interview material is the primary data source for this book. The interviews were structured around open-ended questions covering four areas: living conditions and everyday life activities in families, the ranking of occupations, peers they like and dislike, and views of political leaders, parties and ideas. Questionnaires covering similar areas were also administered to all the students. Because some of the youngest children did not yet write the researchers recorded their responses.

Unlike the kind of ethnographic observations collected by Annette Lareau (favorably referenced by the authors) during family visits, the insights into family life are filtered through the children's responses in the interviews and to the questionnaire. Nor do they offer ethnographic observations of pupil behaviors in the classrooms, corridors, or on the playgrounds. Their data analysis is confined to the language the pupils use in response to the questionnaires and interviews. Similarly, they do not measure the accuracy of children's reports against the real world. Obviously, some are imaginary or beside the point. The authors acknowledge these limitations but discount them because of their research focus: what matters in this study is the *manner* in which the children respond, the words and style of their verbal responses. The study is not a test of their "social realism."

Though wordy and marred by unnecessary qualifications, the argumentation and data analysis are nonetheless well-organized across four chapters, as well as an introduction and a conclusion. Each chapter concludes with a brief summary of how the demonstration has proceeded thus far. Unfortunately the book has no topic or name index. While the pupils interviewed are listed along with their key demographic characteristics (age, gender, parental occupations, and birthplace), there is no appendix showing the questionnaire or interview schedule. The tabular data are presented in simple percentages and the network analysis is presented in visual display only.

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Elementary forms of evaluating social order

Chapter 2 reports the results on occupations. The researchers gave each child nine occupational labels (architect, factory boss, professor, nurse, butcher, florist, toy salesperson in a large retail store, cleaning woman—i.e., three upper class occupations, three middle class occupations, and three lower class occupations) and asked them to first rank the occupations from high to low. They were then asked to classify the occupations in two columns labeled either "rich" or "poor." Once the classifications were finished, the researchers engaged the children in a group discussion of their classifications, which was recorded and transcribed.

The collective context permitted the researchers to assess not just the children's understanding of the occupations but also to observe their emotional reactions to comments by their peers. Some might object to the collective context, charging that it encourages conformism and does not allow children to voice an independent opinion. The researchers disagree: it is precisely how individuals respond in social situations that interests them, and thus their method, they argue, is well adapted to revealing how individuals respond to claims about social differentiation. Children use the words of others to signal delegation, disagreement or adoption of the views of others—this is not, incidentally, dissimilar to the way adults react to the words of others in social situations.

Many of the children, particularly the youngest, did not have a clear idea of what an occupation is. For example, many had difficulty understanding the term "worker." By contrast, all recognized the words "cleaning woman." To aid the process of recognition, the researchers used suggestive images of the nine occupations. This may have disadvantaged the occupation of "nursing," since the suggestive image was a syringe and several children noted that they did not like shots. Similarly, the fact that the image for "factory boss" was a building with smoke rising from a chimney may have elicited negative associations with someone who pollutes. But the principal objective of the researchers was not to measure how competent these youngsters were in their understanding of the various occupations. Rather, they were interested in seeing if the children would socially rank the occupations, how those rankings would vary by age, gender, class, and immigration status, and the manner in which the children talked face to face with their peers and with the adult researchers about the rankings. The length of this review does not permit

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a detailing of all the patterns found but variations there were; suffice to say that Lignier and Pagis build a credible empirical case for how young children are already starting to apprehend a socially differentiated world that they are just beginning to enter. I will highlight two illustrations and two surprises identified by the researchers.

First, the exercise reveals how class background influences the children's responses. By looking at the manner in which words are used (linguistic styles), the researchers note that children from socially privileged backgrounds were more likely to use "elaborated" rather than "restricted" codes, as conceptualized by Basil Bernstein. Children of the popular classes did not lack vocabulary. However, the interview situation was different from the familiarity of the family setting, where restricted language codes worked quite well.

Second, group discussions of the individual occupational rankings provoked emotional (indeed bodily) reactions: fear, intimidation, or anger if a parent's occupation was negatively classified, and self-satisfaction or assurance among those whose parents' occupations were ranked highly. Girls ranked the "cleaning woman" higher than boys, and those from higher social backgrounds ranked this category lower than those of less privileged families—including some children whose mothers worked as cleaners. As the researchers aptly point out: this was not just a knowledge game; it tapped into feelings that even young children have about where their families stand in the social order. To classify is to self-classify, a point already emphasized by Bourdieu.

Most interesting is the terminology children used in their rankings, and especially the role played by a limited number of binary oppositions: relative to body hygiene and care (clean/dirty, healthy/unhealthy), aesthetic evaluation (beautiful/ugly), and behavioral norms (good/bad). These oppositions function to organize the children's thinking about occupational differences. Thus the florist was ranked high, especially by girls, because flowers are beautiful, reflecting the beautiful/ugly binary. Butchers were ranked low for their dirty, bloody work, reflecting the application of the clean/dirty binary.

The researchers hypothesize that such classifications stem from early childhood socialization in families. In families, children incorporate cultural injunctions impinging directly on bodily comportment: "sit up straight," "chew with your mouth closed." Such early primary socialization of "dos" and "don'ts" relative to bodily posture become internalized as symbolic resources in the form of

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judgements relative to personal hygiene (healthy/unhealthy), attentiveness to how bodies look (clean/dirty, attractive/repulsive), and more broadly aesthetic distinctions (beautiful/ugly), as well as norms for bodily conduct and social interactions ("don't hit others", "play by the rules"). They become the symbolic tools for making elementary evaluative judgements. They set up fundamental oppositions, first applied to their own bodies but then "recycled" to apply to others they come into contact with—or even worlds beyond their immediate grasp. This is suggestive of the elementary forms of judgement (good/bad, dirty/clean, attractive/ugly, etc.) identified in the sociological/anthropological tradition by Durkheim and Mauss, and elaborated in the landmark work of Mary Douglas. (One also thinks of Levi-Strauss's binary oppositions in the analysis of myth.) Lignier and Pagis acknowledge this intellectual lineage but do not stress it.

"Recycling" is the process through which the internalized dispositions of habitus in the form of elementary moral, aesthetic, and hygienic categories are then externalized practically in response to the challenges of the external world. These elementary forms of bodily judgment are "recycled" as they are applied in practical ways by children while discussing their own social worlds and even the worlds beyond their direct reach (such as the occupational structure and the world of politics). Lignier and Pagis suggest that their idea of recycling is an important contribution toward a better understanding—both conceptually and empirically—of the "black box" of habitus.

The researchers were surprised to discover the substantial effects of secondary socialization in school on the children's responses. Many spontaneously ranked the occupations on a scale of 10 or 20, which reflects the grading scales widely employed in French schools. This illustrates how classifications that originate in the school system practically extend to non-academic settings and topics.

The researchers also administered a questionnaire that asked the children to identify their three best friends. The researchers used these responses for a network analysis in Chapter 3. Unsurprisingly, social networks were clustered along gender and social class dimensions: boys preferred boys, girls preferred girls, and the social classes hardly mixed. Few individuals bridged these separate clusters, and those who did were boys from middle and upper class backgrounds. Within the gendered clusters, sub-clusters formed around social origin and immigration status.

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More interesting is how children explained these gender, social class, and immigration distinctions in interviews. The researchers focused on who they disliked and why. This question yielded a rich array of responses that are among the most interesting findings of the chapter. In general the responses follow the same recycling logic as found in the ranking occupations, though with some variations. Children judge their peers in terms of personal hygiene admonitions: friends are attractive, outsiders "smell." The younger children tended to designate the bad behavior of their peers in terms of personal anecdotes relative to physical well being: "he hits me on the playground," or "he is naughty." The older children were somewhat more abstract in their assessments, referencing "insulting" or "disobedient" behavior.

A surprise to the researchers was the substantial extent to which school evaluation techniques informed the way in which children assessed their friends and enemies. The children recycled school evaluative criteria to demarcate the boundaries of friendship. Academic performance and behavior in class and on the playground separated out the desirable from the undesirable peers—even among children who themselves were rated less favorably according to the evaluative criteria of their school. There was little evidence of an incipient youth counter culture.

Here some cross-national comparisons would be instructive. One might imagine, for example, that US youth may be less inclined to employ school evaluative criteria; they may be relatively more influenced by the media. Moreover, some significant work on peer culture in the US, though admittedly on older youth, has shown evidence of the strong presence of street culture in classrooms, corridors, lunch rooms, and playgrounds.

The discussion of body color was particularly interesting. Unless prompted by the researchers, the children seldom employed explicitly racist epithets to categorize the peers they disliked. They were not insensitive to skin color but used the more nuanced term "marron" (roughly "brown" in English) rather than black to designate their peers of color. But upon exploration in the interviews, the researchers found that seemingly apparent negative references to skin color were often overlaid with negative bodily or school labels. It was therefore not at all clear that skin color was the important category of social differentiation for children. Moreover, body size rather than skin color was more salient in establishing social distance: overweight children were more stigmatized than children of color. Furthermore, those

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stigmatized because of their bodily weight tended to be from the lower social classes, showing the underlying significance of class socialization in shaping the children's sense of social hierarchies.

The researchers admit that the children develop some of their own classifications relatively independently from the adult world, and hence escape the recycling logic. Children do develop indigenous norms for proper behavior. "Don't tattle"—a rule that brings negative sanctions if broken—is suggestive of some autonomy of early youth culture. More ambiguous is "don't gossip" or "don't bad mouth" others behind their back. Further, gender is decisive. There are games boys play and games girls play with little crossover—an observation made by others, such as Barry Thorne. Boys that play with girls and girls that play with boys are negatively stigmatized. Moreover, there are gendered ways of playing. Boys play rough. A girl who plays like a boy is negatively stigmatized as a "tom boy"; a boy who plays like a girl is even more stigmatized (through the label "fag"). Bragging, hitting, insulting are considered masculine deviances, and gossip and tattling are considered feminine deviances.

Chapter 4 extends the recycling model to political personalities and ideas, a universe beyond the immediate experiences of family, school, and peers. The second year of the study occurred during the 2012 presidential campaign and election. The likelihood of the children hearing opinions about national politics from parents and the news media was probably greater than usual. Of particular interest are the findings on the significance of the left/right distinction. While a large number of the children in the interviews employed the left/right distinction, relatively few were able to provide an adequate or precise description of what it actually meant. More common was a response in normative and affective terms: "I like the left," "I hate the right," and "I am in the left camp," which was the position of a large majority. The researchers were surprised to find that about 20 % of the pupils who completed the questionnaire understood the left/right distinction in moral rather than descriptive terms (and this was true even among older children). While confusing the left/right political distinction with the bodily distinction (left hand/right hand) decreased with age, on the whole about one-third of these 7-10 year olds conflated the two. Again this shows evidence of recycling from early socialization.

School evaluative criteria also permeated political classifications. The children often recycled school evaluations into perceptions of leading political figures: "stupid," "loser," etc. Children liked or detested candidates, described them as nice or nasty, just as they

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would their peers. The children more likely to render politically specific evaluations—such as he favors the rich over the poor—were the older boys from privileged and non-immigrant social backgrounds. But the researchers hastened to add that this did not mean that these youth had a better idea of what it meant to be political; they simply had the relevant vocabulary. The point of the study was not to show that children do not really understand the vocabulary they use; rather, the focus was on the practical usage of terminology in the Bourdieusian sense of action as practice that constructs social distinctions and hierarchies.

Conclusion

Lignier and Pagis advance a plausible argument that children learn fundamental schemes of division and hierarchy in early socialization in families and schools, and then recycle these elementary classifications in evaluating their peers and the larger social order (occupations and political leadership). They hypothesize that the patterns they observe in the children's responses on the questionnaire and in interviews stem in large part from successful primary socialization in the family and then secondary socialization in the school. This is plausible of course, but a different study design would be required to actually determine the origins of the elementary categories the children express. The researchers acknowledge that what parents teach their children may not always fully sink in so there can be disjuncture between what children actually do and what they are taught. While the authors acknowledge this important consideration, they do not explore it further in this study. Lignier and Pagis do not have the data to actually measure the effectiveness of primary socialization.

Further, what the researchers do not tell us is whether certain early admonitions have more recycling power than others. For example, do injunctions relative to bodily hygiene extend further than, say, those of bodily etiquette (e.g., "don't belch at the table") or social norms (e.g., "don't hit others")? This is a study of the *effects* of socialization rather than the socialization process per se. It is suggestive of a deep learning process of incorporation of elementary structures of evaluation (with the binary oppositions reminiscent of Levi-Strauss's analysis of myth and the foundational thinking of Durkheim and

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Mauss on elementary forms of evaluation) that are applied broadly across various domains.

Most interesting, however, is Lignier and Pagis's "recycling" argument. Young children (5 to 10 years old) bring to the interview situations fundamental categories relative to bodily hygiene and moral character: clean/dirty, healthy/unhealthy, good/bad. These categories stemming, according to the authors, from family socialization relative to bodily care and appropriate behavior are then recycled into qualitative assessments of their peers: friends they like because they are clean, appropriate and good, and peers they dislike because they are ugly, smell, or do bad things. The researchers are not concerned with whether these assessments actually correspond to reality but with the manner in which these youth speak (reason) about this kind of order. In other words, in what terms do elementary school children apprehend and practically navigate the social order.

The researchers are careful to point out that other sources of social evaluation may well be operative in young children. They have limited their study to evaluations of peers, occupations, and political figures and ideas, and argue that early socialization in families and schools plays a significant role in providing the fundamental evaluative categories and classifications by which children classify social worlds. There may be others. The researchers do not find a strong "media effect" as has been suggested in some recent scholarship on the political socialization of youth in the United States.

While the study does not directly observe family and school socialization processes, it offers convincing evidence that the way children understand or evaluate the social world, whether it be the social world of their peers that they know well, or more removed worlds of occupations and political figures and ideas, recycles fundamental evaluative categories they have learned at home or in school. In the end, the authors makes a convincing case for the early employment by children of fundamental evaluative categories, suggesting that Bourdieu's concept of habitus and his theory of practical action are useful orienting frames for making sense of how elementary school age children construct their immediate social universe and make sense of the broader social order.

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