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**GENDER AND WOMEN'S STUDIES '20 / V. International Interdisciplinary Conference on
Gender and Women's Studies**

**REFUGEES AND FORCED IMMIGRATION '20 / V. International Interdisciplinary
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**GENDER AND WOMEN'S STUDIES '20 / V.
INTERNATIONAL
INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE ON
GENDER AND WOMEN'S STUDIES**

FAMILY REPRESENTATIONS AND GENDER STEREOTYPES IN PRIMARY SCHOOL: A COMMUNICATION DESIGN POINT OF VIEW

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ABSTRACT

Placed in the areas of Communication Design and Gender studies, with a focus on elementary school kids and visual pluralism, this paper investigates the role that visual representation have in the development and education of children taking under examination images featured in the school books most commonly used in Italian public schools. As it emerges from the ONU Agenda 2030, two crucial points for a sustainable future are *“eliminate gender disparities in education”* (4.5) and *“end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere”* (5.1). This contribution wants to reflect on long term influences that a teaching system based on commonplaces regarding gender can have on the growth of a person.

Families are the primary socialization agency, the first environment in which boys and girls discover themselves and others and begin to develop their personal identity. There are different types of families that differ in composition, ethnicity, sexual orientation, culture and parental ties; the familiar forms are plural and multiform. The school, the second socialization agency with which one usually comes into contact, proposes a familiar imaginary that does not seem to reflect this multiplicity that is instead present in today's society (Adichie, C., *The danger of a single story*. Ted Global, 2009). The visual imagery shared by the school system has a primary role in a kid's personal growth and primary school textbooks exert a strong influence on the development of critical thinking skills in the period of childhood (Biemmi, *Educazione sessista: stereotipi di genere nei libri delle elementari*. Rosenberg & Sellier, Torino, 2017).

This abstract shows the results of a research that examines illustrations and photographic images from a communication design point of view. The observation, whose coordinates have been defined through an empirical exploration, consists in a qualitative and quantitative analysis with a focus on visual pluralism and stereotypic recurrences paying special attention to gender roles, gender stereotypes and standardizations.

The recurring visual codes in the representations under analysis were brought to light in order to understand how the school communicates families and their plural nature. A fixed and not very dynamic family imaginary emerges, full of stereotypes and repetitions that standardize a unique type of family, ignoring or criticizing the other possible ones. The models proposed by the images of the textbooks take for granted only one possible vision of reality in contrast with the directives of the Italian Ministry of Education on the theme of inclusive education. It therefore appears necessary to find new additional and parallel paths that can support a multi-gaze that gives us the opportunity to look at

things from multiple points of view, taking into account the complexity of reality (Gianini Belotti, E., *Sessismo nei libri per bambini*. Ed. dalla parte delle bambine, Milano, 1978). The use of specific visual codes brings with it meanings that act on people, their thoughts, roles and behaviors, for this reason, the communication design discipline is called to reflect on the impact of images and act to build a more inclusive imagery for kids to grow.

INTRODUCTION – COMMUNICATION DESIGN AND PLURAL REPRESENTATIONS

This paper faces the issues of gender stereotypes and gender roles in children's scholastic experience starting from a communication design point of view, proposing a dissenting point of view compared to today's scenario. Placing the main focus on visual pluralism and diverse representations, this contribution partakes in the conversation on how fixed models and recurrent stereotypes can affect the perception of reality starting from an early age. It starts acknowledging the responsibility of the communication designers role, them being the creators of stereotypical images and so ones of the possible game-changers in this unbending scenario, they can self-correct and look at their own design process to avoid falling back into a default design mode (Robichaud, 2018).

The stories that surround our daily life appear, to an attentive eye, as the repetition of the exact same story, in different ways and through different artifacts; this then becomes the basis for creating other narratives that follow its key characteristics. This tale is an act of violence that transforms and exploits emotions, thus depriving the intellectual and symbolic means to create new stories, new ideas and new images (Salmon, 2008). In this vicious circle of representations the necessary role of the stereotype is recognized, it is in itself a functional tool, it is useful in order to decode a very complex reality which, as such, requires a division into meaning groups. Although the idea of designing artifacts without stereotypes is impossible, one must be aware of their semantic rigidity, they are in fact extremely difficult to modify (Zingale, 2012) and for this reason, they require critical and reasoned management. Therefore, new additional and parallel paths that can support a multi-gaze can offer an opportunity to look at things from multiple points of view, taking into account the complexity of reality.

Approaching and decoding diversity are not simple tasks and they raise constant challenges from multi-disciplinary points of view. In this discourse, visual culture appears to have a strong power of change and a channel through which open a dialogue. The discipline of communication design is called upon to reflect on the expressive registers, the rhetorical models, the tools of directorial construction and staging used (Baule and Bucchetti, 2012). Referring to the media culture within which communication design acts, we can take for granted the impossibility of creating a representation that is completely free of stereotypes: *"when it comes to stereotypes, models, classification of the existing, in this area of communication we, therefore, speak of an absolute necessity"* (Pallotta, 2012: 123). In the same way, it is impossible to always make everyone feel represented, it is not a question of representing everyone, but of normalizing diversity and not taking anything for granted and of *"breaking the stereotype to make the image dynamic and no longer immobile which encloses it"* (Zingale, 2012: 113). If we stopped representing the average person but diversified the individual attributes of the subjects represented (Robichaud, 2018) and the recipients who benefit from the projected communication, we would already reach plural results unrelated to the usual stereotypes. De Lucchi states in an article entitled *Diversity* in Domus Magazine: *"It is the diversity that produces diversity, and there is no alternative to diversity, if not uniformity and a process of continuous reduction that, little by little, would lead to the most sterile void"* (De Lucchi, 2018: 35).

Not wanting to give all the responsibility to the sensibility of the designers, one could refer to the possibility

of innovation that the term diversity brings with it, continuing to re-propose the same stereotypes, artifact after artifact and designer after designer, is equivalent to not growing anymore. Not only is today's reality ignored but any possibility of progress for the future is blocked by reiterating stereotyped and harmful contents (Salmon, 2008). It is precisely the diversified society to which the communication project is aimed that needs this leap towards a plural and constantly growing design, as De Lucchi affirms again: *"the drive towards differentiation becomes an extraordinary engine of development wanted by the user, the one who defines with greater authority the true value of things and objects, that is, ourselves"* (De Lucchi, 2018: 35).

THE PARADIGM OF NORMALITY: FROM FAMILY TO FAMILIES

Society presents itself as a formation of individuals in constant transformation, it is modeled by responding to differentiated and shared logic and with them also family units and the idea of the family is constantly changing. Throughout history, the family assumes various characteristics, assumes and loses tasks and functions, expands and shrinks, is stable or less stable (Campanini, 2004). Biological and symbolic links are articulated in always different ways, giving life to new plots and concatenations of individuals without canceling or replacing what was there before. Here, therefore, the changing character of the family is taken into consideration, recognizing in it a socio-cultural artifact that as such participates in all respects in the historical and political changes of the society in which it is inserted (Campanini, 2004). It is also noted that families in Italy, and in the whole all World, are today experiencing a lively moment of visibility and that this is a reason for controversy. *"Stereotypes and prejudices, whether positive or negative, are precisely what can stubbornly prevent us from seeing the face of the other, to tune in to his messages, to approach gradually and respectfully"* (Contini, 2012: 136).

Taking into observation the Italian demographic (2017, ISTAT and EUROSTAT) appears clear how the institution of the family in Italy has undergone in the last ten years what Contini defines as real and their own *"anthropological revolutions"*, there have been many and evident transformations in family structures both as regards the morphological-structural characteristics and as regards the relational plan (Contini, 2012). The family bond has gone from being a formal necessity deriving from the expectations of the extended family, where the marriage was considered a sort of compulsory and necessary stage, to a subjective bond deriving from one's own choices based more on personal life projects and emotional and expressive reasons (Campanini, 2004). In this regard, there is a strong contradiction between the perceived situation and the statistic one, while the cultural models remain unchanged, in practice, there are strong changes in the morphological organization of Italian society (Gigli, 2017).

We have seen how each family is part of a socio-cultural community and it is the set of different families that create society as a whole. We are faced with a population made up of different people who, as such, form different families, they are not exceptions or deviant forms compared to the traditional family, but they are only different forms from each other and each of them should be given equal dignity. It can therefore be affirmed that today it is opportune not to speak of the family anymore, but of families, *"assuming a pluralist perspective which has its point of reference in the multiplicity of family specificities"* (Campanini, 2004: 18). The traditional family is often considered a natural ideal, the only correct family form and the starting point determining what is or is not definable as a family (Contini, 2012). for an objective vision of today's socio-cultural situation, but also from the relational and affective dimension, we do not stop therefore at descent and biological ties. The family is in the ability to take care of the other, in supporting and respecting each other, in the ability to support the other in his life path, in educating and defending. The need, therefore, emerges to adopt new terminologies

that represent the multiplicity of family groups, without necessarily having a defined number of structural possibilities but opening up to their transformative nature (Struening, 1999), passing from the singular term family to the plural and inclusive term families. It is important to underline that this change in terminology and thought, does not lead to any kind of annulment or threat against the “traditional family” but it is an extension that provides new dignity to the different kind of families, without taking away from anyone (Campanini, 2004).

From a gender studies point of view, the fixity of the families’ situation is to research not only in the structure but also in the roles: the figure of the woman as mother, housewife and caretaker and the figure of the father as a worker, playmate and aloof. The first way to lighten this gender differentiation of female and male roles could be to accept the presence of different situations as real and give them equal respect (Biemmi, 2017), for this reason, a working mother should be considered equal in her role as a stay-at-home mother, so a stay-at-home father as a worker one. Looking at this subject matter from a visual communication point of view, we can observe the reiteration of fixed images that led to the creation of a shared visual and symbolic imaginary in which the ideal family corresponds to the nuclear heterosexual family made up of a mother, a father and two children. Media contents are influenced by the society and influencers of the society in which they are broadcasted, it can take different forms over time but they remain present and active in the production of meanings. Strongly stereotyped representations are having a strong impact on the perception of the family not taking into account social changes and demographics.

TEXTBOOKS AND STEREOTYPES

One of the first training and education environments with which one comes into contact during childhood is school, to be considered also the main socialization agency and the starting point for acquiring critical thinking and the ability to analyze codes and messages (Biemmi, 2017). In this context, power, identity and knowledge intersect, giving life to ways of thinking, ideologies and lifestyles. The school is also the fulcrum of the first intergenerational relationships in two very different but connected ways: children enter into direct relationship with adults not belonging to the family sphere, such as teachers, principals and school collaborators and they are part of a system managed and influenced by adults. Education and the school system can be considered hot topics in today's socio-political debates. As Biemmi points out (2017: 10), *“the school has once again become the ideological construction field of the nation and boys and girls are the subjects - the bodies - on which power struggles and affirmations of the rights of others are structurally played out, in their name but without their voice”*. The class environment can be seen as a real ensemble of diversities where different types of specificity and fragility find their space. Over the years, various self-regulation codes have been published on issues inherent to the approach to diversity, among these, we mention: the Polite Code (1999), on equal opportunities in textbooks, the Provisions for the prevention of bullying and cyberbullying (2017), the Salamanca Declaration (1994), on special educational needs and other various reports of the European Council on issues such as ethnic diversity, sexual orientation and gender. Nevertheless, the responsibility for applying the rules proposed in these and other provisions remain at the discretion of the schools and teachers. A very complex picture emerges, which puts in dialogue different pedagogical, cultural and social sensitivities in dealing with the delicate issue of enhancing differences in the school environment, as reported in the Polite Code (1999). The set of protected freedoms clearly does not admit rules that specifically manage neither the adoption of textbooks nor the choice of teaching methodologies.

The role of the book is very strong as an *“agent of cultural transmission of the values to which we all respond”* (Gianini Belotti, 1978: 8) and even more *“the textbooks, especially those of primary school,*

have a decisive influence in the formation of the identities of the subjects: their images and their contents can be fixed in the minds of children with the force of irrefutable models” (Biemmi, 2017: 40). The book of text is an authority that over time assumes a binding and constricting role in the formation of thought, it is not an instrument open to criticism or interpretation, but rather a sort of collector of absolute truths. Here we want to bring to light how boys and girls are educated about gender even in an unconscious way by receiving external stimuli. Learning through the use of images is important and supports learning as a whole compared to a method based solely on verbal forms, the illustrations convey concepts, help to memorize and make it easier to understand. The visual representations, when placed side by side with the written text, should not be considered as a mere accompaniment as they produce meanings and act actively on the learning process. It is important to remember that we are talking about illustration in the school context on the textbook which is perceived as an expression of reality and manual of concreteness and truth (Biemmi, 2017), for this reason, the image is processed as representative of the truth. If in fact it can be said that the text leaves more and more space for images in textbooks, there is also the need for teaching that takes into account images as critical content and accompany pupils in their discovery and analysis. The image in the textbook can be seen as an imaginative proposal that the child can read in his own way, so the importance of a visual literacy-oriented approach emerges that accompanies a dialogic and interpretative reading of the image (Campagnaro 2011).

Representation plays an extremely important role in educational media (Biemmi, 2017), the more I will be used to seeing something in my daily environment, even without having the opportunity to meet it in person, the more this will enter my experience and the less hostile I will be if and when I come in contact with it. The school, as it is known, has the role of a socialization and experimentation agency (Abbatecola and Stagi, 2017) and therefore a potential place of welcome, inclusion, knowledge and friendship. Girls and boys build their individuality also thanks to academic training they receive at school, despite being in the childhood period, are not to be considered neutral subjects, and like their teachers, in fact, they carry with them connoted ideas and knowledge, never impersonal and objective (Biemmi, 2017). Primary school students should therefore not be viewed as a clean slate but rather as subjects in growth and transformation who actively participate in the development of themselves by making external stimuli their own (Belotti, 2010). Even the contents with which they come into contact at school, the culture that is transmitted to them today, can be considered flawed from the start, in what starts from a male, Caucasian, neurotypical and heterosexual imprint that tends *“to exalt man and relegate to margins women”* (Biemmi, 2017: 13).

GENDER STEREOTYPES IN ITALIAN TEXTBOOKS

Reviewing literature published in Italy regarding sexism and school textbooks it emerges how gender stereotypes seem to be fixed in time. In 1973 Gianni Gallino observe how characters were mainly male, especially when it comes to protagonists, in fact only 10% of the analyzed texts had a female character as the protagonist, how the woman is always seen in the position of care of the home e the family, while men were portrayed with commitments and responsibilities outside the family, the man was a hero, he was competitive and working to become the best version of himself (Gianni Gallino, 1973). Thirteen years later Pace publishes a research about characters and gender roles highlighting the fixity problem and the oversimplification of the personalities of women characters in the stories. From her observation it emerges how the number of male children characters was 44% higher than female children and 30% higher for adults; it was not only the number that appeared to be the problem but also how the role of these characters in the narrative: 86% of boys were placed in external context against 14% of girls which were usually static and occupied in quiet activities that do not involve physical movement. The adult man emerged as an idol, a dedicated worker and a nice father, while the woman

was a grandmother, a wife and a fairy (Pace, 1986). In 2010 Biemmi conducts the most updated and broadest research ever carried out in Italy. This is the only action in which the images of the books, and not just the texts, were taken into consideration, even if only briefly, the author goes to analyze the anthological passages in the reading volumes and also the images that accompany them. The male characters remain the majority, even if the percentages are close, are 59% for men and boys and 37% for women and girls. Biemmi brings to light several issues, among these we find both the presence of well-defined and identifying parental roles, for which the woman is a mother or grandmother or carries out occupations that deal with care such as nurses or teachers and fathers are absent but extremely overrated figures. It then emerges that women and men have different evaluation scales, for the female gender it is a scale of beauty while for the male one of strength and skill, this leads to having extremely boys adventurous and vain and affected little girls. Two issues that were absent in the two previous publications also come to light, the female gender does not exist in past eras, all historical passages or linked to past events do not see female characters present, male roles are more static than female ones, girls come close to masculine ideals but the reverse does not happen (Biemmi, 2010).

Looking at these observations, one of the themes that emerge most is the importance of family roles, while families are changed over the years, the narratives have not changed. The family image with which children come into contact would seem to be only one, where stereotypes play an extremely influential role in gender perception (Adichie, 2009). The reiterated stereotypes all seem to be related to family roles: mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers and grandmothers and grandfathers. Moreover, Family appears to be a recurring topic for female characters, the main focus of their aspirations and responsibilities, having a family as the dream of every little girl (Biemmi, 2017 and Gianini Belotti, 1973). Being a woman equals being a mother, these two characteristics usually exist together, and if not, it is told like a negative trait. Stories from textbooks tell the story of the heterosexual white family where the woman is only a mother and she will have to depend on a man for house, money and protection (Gianini Belotti, 1973). The dad is therefore an ambitious person who works all over the day and comes home in the evening, despite his active role, he is passive in family dynamics. Grandparents and grandmothers instead reincarnate the same stereotypes, with a little more wisdom, but bringing back the image of the housewife woman, good at cooking that takes care of the grandchildren while the grandfather has a past full of adventures and now lives on his sofa. Genders are depicted as opposites, creating completely static and stereotyped characters (Bucchetti, 2012), any kind of contamination between the roles is highlighted as an exception to the rule and must have an explanation.

The image of the family and the concepts linked to it are very important during childhood. First of all, family is the thing a child knows better than any other because it is the one with which he spent the most time in his life. The family is the first nucleus of socialization, it is the baggage that a child has and brings with them the first day of elementary school (Belotti, 2010), it is also a reason for debate and comparison between peers, it is the environment where everyone has had experiences that they can share on a common theme. But what if illustrations, texts, images, videos lead to confrontation always with the same family? It disappears the idea of equal comparison and it strengthens the right and wrong dichotomy. Families are part of a person's identity, is where they start building themselves, and recognize themselves among others, is culture and origin (Contini, 2012). The considerations made until now focus on the verbal narrative part, none of them in fact it goes deep into visual representations, used mostly as control elements. Since the textbook represents a tool that exposes boys and girls to a repetition of visual and verbal inputs that mirror social stereotypes, it is believed to be useful to investigate it from a Communication design point of view to highlight the visual aspects that support and reiterate stereotypes about families and gender roles.

AN INVESTIGATION OF VISUAL STEREOTYPES: TOOLS AND METHODS

Starting from the theoretical knowledge and the previous researches resumed in the last paragraphs, it was decided to carry out an observation taking images and visual elements as the focus of analysis.

The research was divided into five phases, (a) the definition of the analysis sample, (b) an initial exploration in order to define the point of view of the observation, (c) the construction of an analysis grid, (d) the filing of the observed cases and finally (e) the critical re-reading of the data.

4(a) Definition of the analysis sample

Given the vastness of textbooks in primary school, to begin the investigation it was needed to find a specific

research environment. First years of school are essential for the development of critical thinking: not only pupils between six and eight years of age assimilate the contents transmitted to them, but they learn to learn, they become familiar with the textbook and learn how to move into an educational organized environment made up of rules and tools. The first years of primary school represent also the first step into sociality, as one enters in contact with a new social space composed of different people wherewith collaborate. Considering then that kindergarten is not mandatory in Italy, elementary school is the first moment in which it is necessary to shared space with others for a long number of hours whether you like it or not. Taking into consideration what has been said until now, it was decided to observe the Italian national indications from MIUR (The Ministry of Education, University and Research), which sets the first learning objectives of the educational path at the end of the third grade to understand what the specific objectives are set for socialization, knowledge of self and active citizenship.

“It is the particular task of this school cycle to lay the foundations for the exercise of active citizenship, strengthening and expanding the learning promoted in kindergarten. Citizenship education is promoted through meaningful experiences that make it possible to learn the concrete taking care of oneself, others and the environment and that foster forms of cooperation and solidarity. This phase of the training process is the favorable ground for the development of a conscious adherence to shared values and cooperative and collaborative attitudes that constitute the condition to practice civil coexistence [...] It is through the word and the dialogue between interlocutors that mutually respect each other, in fact, who build shared meanings and work to heal differences, to acquire new points of view, to negotiate and give a positive sense to differences as well as to prevent and regulate conflicts.”
(Translation from Indicazioni Nazionali, Miur)

For the reasons cited above, taking as a starting point the objectives given by MIUR and following the timing given to achieve the first national formative objectives, it was decided to analyze the textbooks of the first three years of elementary school, in order to observe how the pupils are introduced in a path that leads them to reach the aforementioned goals understand if family pluralities are taken into consideration. On the basis of these assumptions, a sample analysis was carried out on the most widespread publishing houses in Italy as far as concerns primary school textbooks, looking at two types of books: Subsidiaries and English books. The final research pool on which the observation was carried out is made up of 13 books belonging to 8 different publishing houses.

4(b) Preliminary exploration

In order to define the focus of the research and identify the best methodologies to be applied for the construction of analysis sheets, a first analysis was carried out exploratory action: the research diary. You have chosen to carry out this first exploration through a diary, as it is an immediate tool for data collection and has a low level of structuring, allowing a free and spontaneous observation. Through the use of the diary one also has the possibility to note down information about the moment, without method barriers or organization, but keeping track to be then reused and reworked. This tool is in fact used in different disciplines to carry out action research. In cultural anthropology, for example, there is a strong use of the Field diary, the first pass of anthropological observation in which the researcher notes his or her own impressions and useful moments for research but unstructured that do not necessarily fall into the following categories defined and systematized. Talking about the importance of the instrument in the field of anthropology, Malinowski defines its role by stating that it serves to collect the minimum facts, the ephemeral, instinctive, nameless facts that the

ethnographic practice struggles to grasp and measure and also escapes the common observation of the social actor (Malinowski in Sorbero, 2009).

The idea of starting this path of observation by means of a research diary therefore takes its cue from ethnographic studies. The tool has been reworked for use in the field of communication design for the analysis of editorial artifacts. The exploratory experiment was carried out on the book *Nuvola de La Spiga Edizioni* for the second grade and took place in four phases:

Overall observation: the book of text has been browsed through in its entirety to check for images of families and have a first idea of the content structure.

Identification of useful pages: all pages have been identified in which appeared, in written or visual form, a family or the indicated characters for their family role. Of these contents have been photocopied in black and white.

Analysis: for each piece or exercise the contents have been highlighted concerning families and noted stereotypes and anti-stereotypes with comments writings or graphic signs.

Definition of the research focus and survey setting: after having read the research diary complete, it has been used as a cue to steer the research in a direction more useful and coherent with respect to the theme and the nature of the contents.

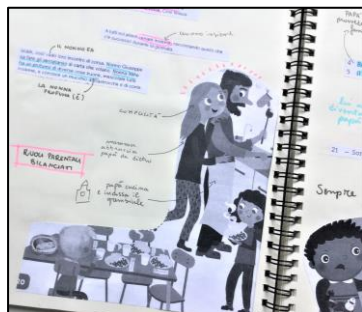


Figure 2. Field diary - detail

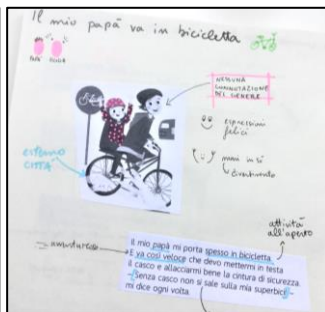


Figure 3. Field diary - detail

From this initial exploration emerge interesting results useful to set the textbook observation. First what emerges is the importance of investigating parental roles compared to gender stereotypes; in fact, often each character of the family comes associates certain related behaviors the role it plays within the family nucleus. Another element interesting is the composition of these nuclei, which seem to remain fixed or which see the main representation parental in the figure of the mother or in the traditional family, formed by mother, father, daughter and son. Therefore, it is necessary to check how they how families are composed and how this influences the characterization of parental roles. Finally, some visual characteristics common to each character: to each familiar role would in fact seem to be associated with certain types of clothing, places and

objects. It is therefore interesting to verify which are the visual elements that identify a certain role or a certain character, and in what way these are elements that support gender stereotypes. These observations lead to

the definition of the research focus which is therefore based on these four key points: - Family nucleus composition - Parental roles - Visual characteristics - Gender stereotypes. The aim is to investigate family representations in order to observe how visual elements create and support gender stereotypes in family roles and whether there is an openness to plural representations in family roles. roles and in the composition of the families.

4(c,d) Construction of an analysis grid

To define the search parameters and the organization of the analysis sheets, the method was partly take up by *Educazione Sessista* by Irene Biemmi, from all the research and more specifically from her qualitative analysis. As Biemmi states in the introduction to qualitative analysis, *"in order to be able to state that males and females are represented in a "fair" and "equal" way in a school text [...] it is necessary to verify real equality in the way the two genders are represented"* (Biemmi, 2017: 139). Biemmi divides sexist stereotypes into two clusters: stereotypes related to the attribution of psychological characteristics and behavioral differentiated according to gender and relative stereotypes the rigid division of roles in the socio-professional and family sphere (Biemmi, 2017). These two types of stereotyping turn out to be very useful to apply in the field of family roles and their link with gender stereotypes, and have therefore been taken as a basis for the analysis. In fact, it was decided to carry out a mainly qualitative analysis, focusing on the modalities with which the representations act and what emerges from them.

Another useful text in the construction of the analysis was *Grammatica Della Fantasia* by Gianni Rodari, because is particularly interesting the way in which the boys to break down the pieces, the words and the characters. Specifically to the *analisi della befana* or fantastic analysis: it is a method to decompose fairy tale characters prime factors. The analysis starts from the question *"what makes this hag a hag? witch? One answer could be the broom, sack and broken shoes"* (Rodari, 2013: 99-101). In this area, however, the decomposition of the elements shifts from text to images. It has been decided therefore to observe the images and understand which features are connected or character identifiers, a role or the whole family group. Yes, a new question is therefore built: What visual elements make this a family a family? And so on for all the familiar roles. What makes this daddy a dad and this grandmother a grandmother? Even if the analysis is set for its large part in a qualitative way, one is decided to add some essential data to verify the compositional plurality of the families represented, so as to add few quantitative data, but essential to identify the composition of households. It is important to also highlight that, unlike Biemmi and Rodari, the observation of this thesis takes place by focusing on visual representations. The subject of the research is therefore illustrations and photographs representing

families or characters identified as components of family (e.g. Uncle Alex). However, the text is not ignored, but used as an element of control; therefore, its coherence or inconsistency with the illustration, but no analysis will be carried out specifications on the verbal component.

After the definition of the theoretical investigation tools above, we have moved on to the structuring of a grid of analysis consistent with the research question and suitable for the material under observation, in the form of record cards (Figure 4).

Title - The name of the piece or exercise from which the image is taken or, in the case of if there is no title, the words Untitled exercise.

Type of image - The technique of image production. For example, photographs, digital and mixed illustrations.

Description - A brief explanation of what you see in the image and/or of useful information to insert it in a wider context. This happens for example when an illustrated family reappears several times in the book.

Colours - Main colours present in the image.

Text/audio consistency - Acronyms that identify consistency or inconsistency of the text. The acronym T/C: is defined as coherent when image and text tell the same story with a similar tone of voice and the same characters. With the acronym T/I: it is defined incoherent when image and text have inconsistencies in the plot, tone of voice or characters present. The acronym T/N identifies the non-presence of a text or the presence of a purely descriptive text.

Stereotype/anti-stereotype - A phrase that identifies, in case there is one, the stereotype or anti-stereotype present in the image. There are no predefined phrases, it can vary freely; its purpose is to bring out points of reflection and not to catalog images.

Environment – Where the scene took place. Differentiating between outside, inside and abstract environments.

Characters – Typology of the represented characters. They can be defined as human, fantasy creatures and anthropomorphic animals.

Composition – All the characters that appear in the image and compose the family unit.

Narrative role - The role is defined as primary when the concept of family is at the basis of the narrative, it is defined as secondary in all cases where a family is present but it does not represent the focus of the narrative. For example, the role of the family in a family tree exercise is considered primary and in the fairy tale of Little Red Riding Hood, it is considered secondary.

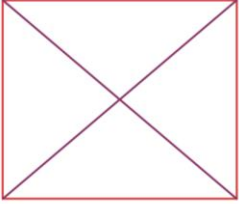
Characterizing aspects - Information on the type of family, the number of parental figures, ethnicities and sexual orientation of parents/guardians.

Visual elements - Objects, facial expressions, body positions and clothing that are used to identify the whole family or specific family roles.

Final comment - A free comment that describes more specifically the symbolism present in the image. In this section, there can be different types of information with the common aim to highlight valuable aspects.

50.00 Titolo
Tipologia d'immagine

Descrizione



Coerenza testo

Stereotipo/Antistereotipo

Ambiente /
Personaggi /
Composizione /
Ruolo narrativo /
Caratteristiche /

Elementi visivi 0

Commento finale.

51.01 Che bello l'autunno!
Illustrazione - pittura/pastelli

La mamma passeggia tenendo per mano il figlio, le vola via il cappello e i due si voltano a guardarlo.



T/C

Mamma e casalinga

Ambiente / esterno, strada
Personaggi / animali antropomorfi
Composizione / mamma, figlio
Ruolo narrativo / secondario
Caratteristiche / monogenitoriale, monoetnica

Busta della spesa (M)
Mano nella mano (M/BO)
Bocca aperta (M)

La mamma è l'unica figura parentale presente.
Si prende cura del bambino e della casa.

Figure 4 – Record card structure

Figure 5 – Record card example

Overall, the record cards are organized into three sections, one for each grade; within each section, the cards are divided by book. Every book has its own information sheet introductory cover and basic indications: title, year, house publisher, authors and graphic designers. They are then there are two items, one for accessibility, where reference is made to the platform digital to be used for the fruition of the book, and one for adherence projects in to which they are reported, when present, the social or integration projects to which the book adheres.

4(a) Critical re-reading of data

The qualitative and quantitative data emerging from the research bring to light the visual and symbolic codes that identify and characterize familiar roles and gender stereotypes. As a premise, it is observed that there is a general lack of attention in the choice and use of images, one is often faced with stock photos and illustrations with little attention to social issues in general. Probably following the adhesion of the Polite code, it can be observed that the number of male and female figures represented is similar, the gap is no longer numerical but more symbolic. More specifically, as far as the representations of family units are concerned, it can be seen that family is for the woman and this shows how to different genders are assigned different stereotyped characteristics that can be seen in all aspects of the representations under analysis: from clothing to the gestures, from colours to activities.

From the number of images analyzed, it is evident how the family theme can be considered a major theme in the textbooks, it can be observed that, with the exception of only one English book, all the books show between 10 and 30 family representations, not counting all those families that are repeated several times inside the book. Half of the books analyzed in fact use the method of the guiding

family, there are characters who, with their family, guide kids into the learning experience for the whole textbook. This type of reiterate representation of the same characters in different scenes and environments allows understanding better the characters from a different point of view in their more or less complex personality. In this reiterate representations it is seen how the use of low-quality images has an impact on the content transmitted to the readers, illustrations are usually used more than once on different pages so the characters are seen doing the same activities, having the same expressions and attitudes along with the whole book. This use of the images itself implies a repetition of stereotyped figures, supporting and strengthening all kinds of stereotypes and among them gender ones.

In the images taken for analysis, the so-called traditional family model is repeated in 90% of the cases (Figure 6), reference is made to a white heterosexual family. No cases were found showing an LGBTQ+ family and only in the 2% of cases we see multi-ethnic households. Concerning the composition and the role of the characters presented, appear to be problematic also the presumed presence of mono-parental families, what can look like the representation fo a single parent, usually is not. It is infact taken for granted that the mother is taking care of the children and the house waiting for the husband to come back home. This is not explicit in itself, but emerges from the way the figure of the mother is described and the activities that are associated with her. Reading, as a control element, the texts placed alongside the images in analysis it is noted that often, even if only through a small hint, the other parental figure, missing in the image, it is nominated as if a reassurance is needed to give sense to the narrative.



Figure 6. Selection of images representing the most common family composition in the books analysed

Within this stereotypical image of the family in its composition we can find gender stereotypes linked to the family role of the character, it is therefore possible to reconstruct typical figures based on repeated stereotypes. A specific analysis by family role is therefore reported here, taking into consideration the six main roles identified through the observation made: mum, dad, daughter, son, grandmother and grandfather.

The figure of the mother proves to be the most widespread of all, appearing in the 80% of the images taken for analysis, and in 40% of cases as the only parental figure present. The woman identifies with the mother's role, this is and always will be the its main role. The mother is, in the most cases,

represented in a domestic environment, in the kitchen or in bedroom and is much less thick outdoors, when it is outdoors it is still occupying either the house or of children. The gestures that are made more frequently by mothers are about care and affection, you can see it cooking, serving at table, accompanying or take their children back to school or take them to the park. Interesting, in this regard, the moment outside the school, it's a scene which is often repeated in almost all the books and they are always and only mothers, there are not illustrations or photographs in which you can see a male figure to take back the children at school. The mother is also the symbol of love, it is the only character to appear in abstract scenes surrounded by hearts and flowers to represent themes like love or loving each other. Observing the images under analysis we then tried to synthesize the visual elements that specifically make it clear that that person identifies himself as the mother. The mother is an extremely stereotypical character, as far as her clothing is concerned, we can observe that the most used accessories are earrings, collars and lace sleeves, kitchen apron, little dresses, handbags and heeled shoes. I more frequented places, on the other hand, are linked to the house, as mentioned above, and the gestures are those of care. The mother results easily identifiable as it is she who passes the broom or serves the dinner, if she were sitting at the table she would become, almost automatically, a guest. In none of the analysed images, the mother is in a situation of idleness or rest, is always taking care of a few things or keeping an eye on the child.

The figure of the father appears to be a bit forgotten, the fathers are numerically at the opposite extreme to the mothers, he appears in 45% of the family images under analysis and is the only parental figure in only 10% of them. The father in fact has some tasks, but none of them would seem to being in the family, the dad is a worker by nature. Despite he in the family seems to do nothing, everyone consider him a hero because when there's nice, bubbly, jokes and play. Starting from the assumption that the meal is used symbolically as a family moment, it is useful to note the gestures of the father and mother at comparison: Daddy often finds himself in the same position as the children, sitting at wait to be served while, as we saw in the previous paragraph, the mum serves at the table. Interesting is underline how, in the few cases where the father is at the cooker or set the table the table, the mother remains in feet to do something useful. The idea would seem to be that of the father helps out but doesn't have household related responsibilities. He is the hero of the house, always doing the right thing and he is never criticized because he is far from home and it is done with the mother figure when she has to work. Looking at the images under analysis you are then tried to synthesize the elements visual that specifically make it clear that that person identifies himself as Dad. Daddy is strongly stereotyped, often has a moustache or beard, and in the 85% of cases wear a shirt also if he is not at work. There are two positions and the gestures that the father makes: sitting down, on the sofa, on the armchair, on the chair or on a means of transport and play; dynamic positions involving often male children. With regard to objects related to the figure of the father, we find the work bag, tools and work uniforms and means of transport like the car or the bicycle. Interesting also turns out to be his relationship with technology, daddy is in fact tied to also to technological objects, which are they for work or entertainment, look the TV and send emails. They are almost never present symbols or expressions that refer to affection or love but there are many images that daddy sees very smiling and dynamic.

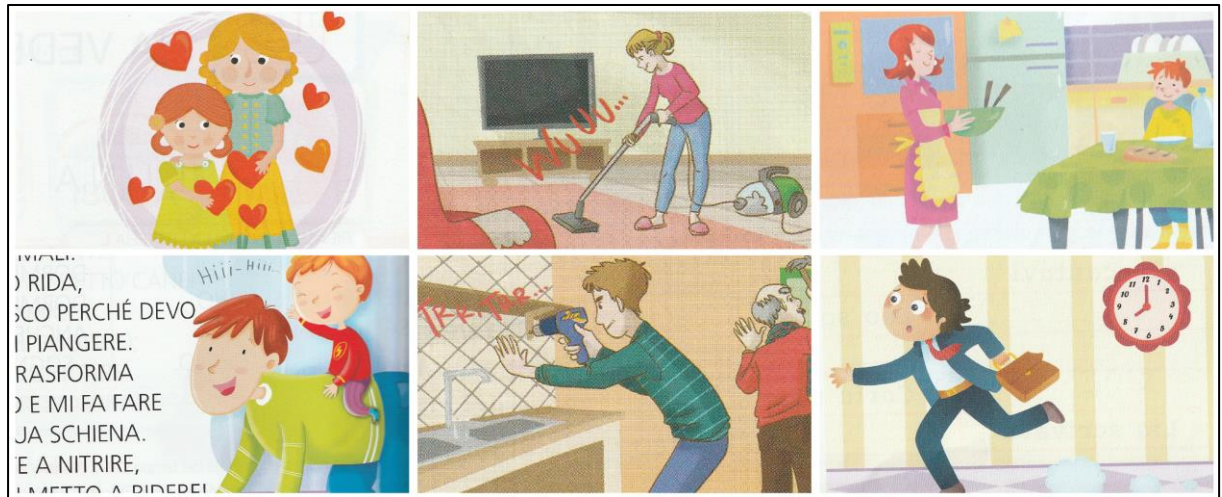


Figure 7. Selection of images representing mothers and fathers

The images representing brothers and sister are usually placed in direct comparison with each other within the family environment. The first thing you notice when looking at family images is the chromatic difference, children are associated with the colour blue and girls with the colour pink, this chromatic differentiation amplifies when families are not composed of human characters but of anthropomorphic animals where pink clearly identifies the girl while blue clearly identifies the child. This chromatic identification is stronger for girls than for boys who can wear or have accessories even in colours such as green or orange. Interesting is the age most frequently chosen to represent siblings, often the brother is the older one and the sister the younger one. This has a strong symbolic weight and generates evident differences in behaviour linked to both gender and age, the male gender children are given more responsibility than their daughters. It is also interesting to note how girls emulate their mothers' behaviour, help set and clear the table, learn how to cook and take care of dolls and stuffed animals, children on the other hand are less involved in family life and are usually disruptive. For example, they do mischief by dropping their mother or grandmother, or run around disturbing their father who reads the newspaper, and so on. It is clear that girls are often in more static and sedentary positions while children are represented dynamically. Note the bond with the parents, towards the mother they are both very affectionate, just as the mother is with them, while towards the father the girls are affectionate and the children are playful and playful. The girls are often the protagonists of illustrations that talk about the superdad and look at him dreamily as if he were a great hero. Although the representations, as has emerged until now, are strongly stereotyped, it is recognized that compared to mothers, fathers, grandparents and grandmothers, boys and girls are more often the protagonists of antistereotypical representations. , for example there are several images where girls and boys play sports together and are represented in the same way, as sometimes there are girls interested in science and children emotional. The problems arising from these contronarrations are two, these are usually represented as something special that needs to be explained and is therefore not normal. The girls are more easily inserted in these representations antistereotypical, recurs more often a sporty little girl from a child hugging a soft toy. This always leads to building an idea more positive than those features that identify themselves as male and always more negative than the feminine ones continuing, even if in a different way, to promote a culture that puts the man in the middle and the woman on the side.



Figure 8. Selection of images representing brothers and sisters

A last brief observation concerns the figures of grandparents. It can therefore be argued that grandparents and grandmothers reflect the gender stereotypes linked to father and mother figures, but it is useful to point out that often, in the images where they appear, they are not in active positions. In most cases, in fact, grandparents and grandmothers are represented in family portraits or family trees for which their role is not active. Visually characterised with grey hair and glasses, grandparents are not much of a figure per se present, appear in about 20% of the familiar images. Interesting is to see like the one observed for the parents is extremely amplified for grandparents. The grandmothers are in fact the queens of the kitchen, they are almost always behind the cooker with their aprons to prepare delicious food for the grandchildren, grandparents on the contrary are men serious but wise, they tell stories and yes make bearers of an interesting past.

CONCLUSIONS – ARISING ISSUES

The analysis of the data collected during this research brings to light a problematic situation which manifests itself in the images present in the textbooks and which strongly influences the strengthening of gender stereotypes and propose a fixed imagery to boys and girls.

Taking into account the results of the research carried out on textbooks emerges a wide space of intervention in the context of the inclusive representation related to elementary school. It can be said that boys and girls, through the textbook, come very often into contact with fixed and stereotyped familiar representations without receiving the critical tools to analyze them and the context in which they are located. The school therefore appears to be a useful place to intervene in this regard, not only because the textbook is clearly linked to the school experience, but also because from the school, as from the books, one expects to have the right informations and to learn what is real (Biemmi, 2017).

There are several possible interventions of interest in the discipline of communication design, but it is necessary to take into account their feasibility, the limits of intervention and different capabilities. Here we report the three possibilities that have been identified, of which we will briefly analyze limits and insights:

(1) a complete re-design of the textbook, rethinking its visual contents eliminating harmful and stereotypical images and redesigning the visual narration in its entirety, allowing an inclusive and open to diversity school experience. This appears to be the most immediate action, in fact, starting from a book already on the market, one could imagine an initial experimental action in which the graphic and illustrative structure of a volume is redesigned from scratch. Starting from this one-off experimentation, it could be brought to the attention of authors and publishers and start an active path of anti-stereotypical translation of already existing content. (2) Until this translation takes place, in practice, the communication designer should act as a mediator, supporting educators and students in the use of existing editorial materials. In this regard, they can imagine an intervention from educational point of view, raising awareness and proposing moments of study in the field of gender and visual representation to teachers, and equip the classes with tools for critical analysis of the book and its images. This would allow a more conscious and less harmful use of the textbook in the form in which we see it today. (3) It can be seen, however, that there is a more general problem on a national scale in the field of visual culture. In fact, the strongest and most resolute imaginable step would be to involve experts from different disciplines, designers, illustrators, pedagogues, educators and the whole complex system that takes charge of visual culture in order to go towards a sort of “visual culture revolution” in order to produce and share a diverse and inclusive imagery and provide society all the tools to read them critically and consciously. We are aware that this path is difficult, complex and, in some way, utopian, but in this context it seems necessary to highlight the problem, at least on a national scale, of the lack of a generalized visual education and the need for its introduction in society as a whole.

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