



Doing the right thing: Young people’s legal consciousness and pandemic risk management

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Abstract

The study explores the legal consciousness of young people in the context of COVID-19 pandemic, concerning the management of personal relationships vis-à-vis the legal regulation enacted by the Italian government. We aim to account for the forms of legality that have granted to sustain, criticize, engage, and resist the law, and to understand the mechanisms that contributed to shaping specific experiences of legality. We refer to a theoretical framework based on legal consciousness, the Neo-Bourdieuian approach to moral judgment and Douglas’s theory of risks. Based on the analysis of 70 narratives, our findings show different ways of experiencing the law by young people. Different recurring narratives can be identified: individual translation, trust in procedure, fatalistic claims, and cooperative criticism. These narratives are not fixed attributes of individuals but recurring repertoires of perceptions and practices that emerge from specific interaction contexts where pre-reflective dispositions and conscious deliberation intersect.

Key words

Legal consciousness; everyday morality; risk management; SARS-CoV-2 pandemic; young people

Resumen

El estudio explora la conciencia jurídica de los jóvenes en el contexto de la pandemia de COVID-19, en relación con la gestión de las relaciones personales frente a la regulación jurídica promulgada por el gobierno italiano. Pretendemos dar cuenta de las formas de legalidad que han concedido para sostener, criticar, comprometerse y

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resistirse a la ley, y comprender los mecanismos que contribuyeron a dar forma a experiencias específicas de legalidad. Nos referimos a un marco teórico basado en la conciencia jurídica, el enfoque neobourdieusiano del juicio moral y la teoría de los riesgos de Douglas. A partir del análisis de 70 narrativas, nuestros resultados muestran diferentes formas en las que los jóvenes experimentan la ley. Se pueden identificar diferentes narrativas recurrentes: traducción individual, confianza en el procedimiento, afirmaciones fatalistas y crítica cooperativa. Estas narrativas no son atributos fijos de los individuos, sino repertorios recurrentes de percepciones y prácticas que surgen de contextos de interacción concretos en los que se cruzan disposiciones prerreflexivas y deliberación consciente.

Palabras clave

Conciencia jurídica; moralidad cotidiana; gestión del riesgo; pandemia de SARS-CoV-2; jóvenes

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1. Introduction

This work explores the legal consciousness of young people in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, concerning the management of personal relationships vis-à-vis the legal regulation enacted to limit the spread of the virus.

Legal consciousness concerns the experience of the law by ordinary citizens in everyday life. To situate the study of legal consciousness in the context of the pandemic offers a unique opportunity to analyze the social mechanisms that allowed the reproduction of social order in such difficult circumstances and the role played by the law, both in its institutional and symbolic dimensions (Ewick and Silbey 1998).

Research on legal consciousness has scarcely focused on young people.¹ However, the pandemic has had a particularly negative impact on their well-being, social opportunities and relationships. Legal norms enacted by the Italian government had a severe effect on young people's relationships: in the initial phase by closing down schools, universities and other socialization facilities, and later on by failing to include young people's typical relationships, such as friendship and dating, in the rules that permitted contacts with people outside the family. In this context, young people can be considered a marginalized group that navigated social fields during the pandemic, facing more significant uncertainty than other social categories. (e.g. workers, parents). Relationships are one of the most significant sources of meaning in life for young people (O'Rourke *et al.* 2019). Friendship provides recognition, affection, support and care (Blatterer 2015). Psychological findings show that friendship – based both on offline and online interactions – is fundamental for young people's wellbeing (Scott *et al.* 2021, Alsarrani *et al.* 2022) and the quality of friendship networks impacts on young people's positive adjustment in life course transitions (Boute *et al.* 2007). This positive role was found also in the adjustment to the pandemic crisis, where larger and better-quality friendship networks contributed to reducing feelings of loneliness (Juvonen *et al.* 2022). During the pandemic, young people have maintained and nurtured relationships with friends in various ways. However, cultivating relationships was particularly complex in such difficult circumstances. Research findings show that while managing their relationships people experienced a real process of risk management as they had to balance different needs and requests: their well-being, that of their friends and loved ones, the concern for family and relatives' health, medical anti-contagion rules and legal norms (Trnka *et al.* 2021).

These circumstances make investigating young people's legal consciousness particularly relevant to understanding the reproduction of the law's hegemonic power in daily life. Research has highlighted the processual, dynamic character of legal consciousness and has found differences in attitudes, beliefs and experiences about the law of ordinary citizens (Ewick and Silbey 1998). Recently, scholars have stressed that legal consciousness is a relational phenomenon, shaped by collective meanings and beliefs as well as by individual cognitive processes (Young 2014, Chua and Engel 2019) and have explored the social mechanisms that allow its formation and reproduction in relation to actors' social position and material resources (Young and Billings 2020). Moreover, researchers have shown that the production of legality is mediated by and intertwined

¹ Some examples are: Abrego 2019, Galli 2020, Gonzalez 2023.

with other fields of normativity (Cowan 2004, Woodlock 2022, Liu 2023), including those governed by rules oriented by the concern for other peoples' wellbeing (Sayer 2011, Trnka *et al.* 2021).

Our study builds on these findings and intends to explore how young people experienced the law during the pandemic in their encounters in everyday life with a set of formal legal norms regulating social relationships, with legal institutions and their representatives. We aim to account for the forms of legality emerging from specific interactions, to show how they have allowed to sustain, criticize, engage, and resist the law, and to understand the mechanisms that contributed to shaping specific experiences of legality.

To answering those questions, we refer to a theoretical framework that consider and connect the Bourdieusian perspective on moral judgment and Douglas theory of risks. The interaction between these two theoretical perspectives has already been developed in some studies on risk perceptions and the social stratification of value orientations. The specificity of our contribution consists in creating a dialogue among these interpretative keys in the light of the theory of legal consciousness, which constitutes the main theoretical reference.

In the following sections, after presenting the theoretical framework and the methodology employed, we focus on the findings deriving from the analysis of 70 narratives of young people's experiences in managing friendships and other relevant personal relationships during the pandemic.

2. The heterogeneous field of legal consciousness research

Legal consciousness refers to the perception, experience and use of law by ordinary people in everyday contexts. One of the most quoted definitions considers legal consciousness as "the ways in which law is experienced and interpreted by specific individuals as they engage, avoid, or resist the law and legal meanings" (Silbey 2001, 8626).

The study of legal consciousness developed in the United States in the 1980s from the work of scholars from different disciplines who recognised themselves in the tradition of Critical Legal Studies, a heterogeneous field which emerged in the 1970s and was united by the aim of highlighting the ideological character of law. Central to this tradition has been the seminal work by Ewick and Silbey, *The common place of law* (1998). The objective of their analysis is to understand the cultural foundation of law and the social mechanisms that allow the hegemonic power of legal institutions despite the inconsistencies between the principles proclaimed and the concrete determinations of legal praxis. To understand how law is experienced in everyday interactions the authors investigate legality, that is "the meanings, sources of authority, and cultural practices that are commonly recognized as legal, regardless of who employs them or for what ends" (Ewick and Silbey 1998, 231). Legality is considered a structure emerging from social interactions. Ewick and Silbey's work documents the range of cultural material with which ordinary people construct their experience of legality. According to these scholars, legal consciousness arises from the process of participation in the construction of legality. There are three main accounts: "Before the law" in which law is perceived as remote, objective and impartial, something that transcends the partiality of individual

lives; “With the law” in which legality is perceived as something concrete, a game of skills, resources and negotiations, an arena where people can pursue their interests legitimately; “Against the law”, characterised by the experience of law as an arbitrary power toward which people feel incapacitated and that they try to resist with subterfuges and evasions. These accounts can coexist in one individual’s experience. The first two constitute the hegemonic power of law, as they encompass the abstract, ahistorical, general dimension of law and the concrete and particular character of the regulative power; the third allows the possibility of resistance. The simultaneous co-existence of these different experiences sustains “legality as a durable structure of social action” (Silbey 2001, 8628).

Since the 1980s the concept of legal consciousness has proved very valuable in fostering empirical research among law and society scholars interested in exploring the “law in action”. While the influence of Ewick and Silbey’s work has been quite pervasive, the field of study has differentiated and expanded beyond the initial theoretical and methodological premises (Halliday 2019). This field of research is now very heterogeneous regarding objectives, theoretical perspectives and methodologies (Chua and Engel 2019, Halliday 2019, Ewick and Silbey 2020).

3. New directions in legal consciousness research

In recent works, three main aspects of legal consciousness have received specific attention: the production of legality as a relational process (Young 2014, Abrego 2019, Chua and Engel 2020); the interplay of different normative orders in everyday life (Hertogh 2018, Silbey 2018, Halliday 2019) and the investigation of the mechanisms that explain how subjective experiences of law are related to individuals’ material and cultural resources and social positions (Berrey and Nielsen 2007, Young and Billings 2020).

Chua and Engel highlight that a common finding by legal consciousness scholars is the relational character of legal consciousness, that is, its formation is always the result of the interplay between individuals and their socio-cultural context. However, in these studies, relationality is defined differently: at one end of a continuum, external factors are considered constitutive of individual identities and experiences, and, at the other one, the genesis of consciousness is situated within the relationship between two or more minds (Chua and Engel 2019). Young’s work on cockfight players (2013) exemplifies the latter view by illustrating how interactional contexts contribute to producing legal consciousness. She postulates a second-order layer of legal consciousness based on people’s perception of others’ ideas about the law in specific interactional contexts. These perceptions are fundamental for people’s understanding of central aspects of legality such as what is legitimate or illegal and what constitutes order. So legal consciousness is not primarily a production of individual cognitive processes but is constructed through the integration of the perceptions of others.

The question of the salience of law as normative order in everyday life has been raised by various legal consciousness scholars (Nielsen 2000, Cowan 2004) and has received greater attention through Hertogh’s research on legal alienation (Hertogh 2018). He claimed that ordinary citizens are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with State law, and they are turning away from it to embrace other forms of normativity. Hertogh’s analysis

has received much attention but also critical considerations, especially regarding the methodological framework and the conclusions derived from the data which, although highlighting forms of dissatisfaction with the law, do not seem to support the thesis of the progressive irrelevance of the law (Halliday 2019). However, Hertogh's thesis appears relevant for the consideration of normative orders different from State law in shaping citizens' experiences with legality. The turn to pluralism has become predominant in current socio-legal theorizing (Santos 1987, Merry 1988, Melissaris 2004, Ferrari 2022). With this respect, the intersection with studies on legal and normative pluralism is becoming more frequent in the field of legal consciousness research (Woodlock 2022, Liu 2023). Ewick and Silbey (2020) reiterate in their most recent works the importance of considering how law collaborates with other social structures to generate meanings and shape social action. The law can present itself in different ways, even subordinated to other normative systems. However, law's durability derives from its ideological availability and its overlay with other fields of meaning (Ewick and Silbey 2020).

Sayer's work on moral and ethical practices in everyday life (2011) is concerned with non-legal normative orders and precisely with *lay normativity*. He departs from the statement that people's relation to the world is one of concern; things matter to people and their approach to everyday life is intrinsically evaluative – and therefore normative. In his analysis, morality is deeply embedded in social relationships and is a matter of practical reasoning. To acknowledge that means that social science should reconsider key concepts such as “rationality” and “agency” to include emotions and values as constitutive parts of them.

In the pandemic context, research shows that the law “constructed” specific, and legitimate kinds of relationships and defined opportunities and limits for face-to-face contact. People interviewed by Trnka and colleagues (2021) compared, weighed and negotiated these legally supported constraints and possibilities with interpersonal obligations and responsibilities toward loved ones. Legality and morality, therefore, emerge from local contexts and are embedded in social practices. Both the fields of research on everyday moral reasoning and legal consciousness are taking on a Bourdieusian perspective to explore the link between people's experiences and practices, social positions and material resources (Skeggs 2004, Sayer 2005).

Berrey and Nielsen (2007) assume that legal consciousness is not fixed but continually questioned, revised and reinterpreted; at the same time social circumstances – organizational and institutional contexts – constrain or enable people's access to resources, both material and symbolic. They argue that Bourdieu's theory of social capital offers a framework for analyzing how the material and institutional conditions matter for the production of legality. Bourdieu lists three main forms of capital: economic, social and cultural, which are mutually constitutive. Cultural capital pertains to cultural competence that can be in the embodied state (long-lasting disposition of the mind and body), in the objectified state (cultural goods) and the institutionalized state (educational qualifications). Cultural capital is reinforced by economic and social capital as they allow time, resources and contacts that can increase cultural capital; at the same time, cultural capital can be converted into economic and relational resources (Bourdieu 1986).

Young and Billings (2020) used Bourdieu's concepts to explore differences in attitudes, orientations and ability to navigate the legal field. Their results show that a high level of cultural capital fosters a greater sense of self-efficacy in citizen-police interactions compared to groups with less cultural resources. Cultural capital is one of the mechanisms, along with others, such as discrimination practices, that can accentuate and reproduce existing inequalities in mobilizing rights.

Bourdieu's intellectual initiative is overall oriented towards overcoming the dichotomy between objectivism and subjectivism in social theory. He departs from the idea that people's expectations and goals are not defined anew, in a social vacuum, but they are in tune with the environment in which they grew up. His work is an attempt to account for the dialectical relationship between subjective sense-making, scopes and goals, and given constraints. The habitus is the analytical device to go beyond the contraposition between subjectivism and objectivism (Jenkins 1992). Habitus is a system of generative schemas objectively adjusted to the conditions in which they are created. Habitus, like legal consciousness, pertains to orientations, expectations and dispositions acquired through a socially constructed experience, but it also includes structural elements. It is a durable, transposable, set of schemas of perceptions (Bourdieu 1998).

Individuals' position within a field, that is a social space governed by specific regulative principles and subjected to power struggles, is based on habitus and capital resources (Edgerton and Roberts 2014).

Bourdieu's perspective has received much attention as well as critical appraisals. Especially the concept of habitus has been defined as incoherent, vague and incomplete (Ravaioli 2002, Sullivan 2002, Sayer 2005). However, Bourdieu's perspective offers a way of linking different levels of analysis – micro and macro – and can help legal consciousness research by providing a framework for understanding how people in different social positions experience the law and through their daily practices contribute to (re)produce, contest or resist its power.

4. Legality, morality and risks

The interviewees' narratives on experiences of coping reveal some moral visions on the sense of self and the common good that relate to the experience of law. To explain them, a specific re-reading of the Ewick and Silbey's theory (1998) is proposed, through reference to other analytical perspectives. We consider the relational perspective of Bourdieusian derivation (Bourdieu 1984, Sayer 2005, 2011) and Mary Douglas's cultural theory of risk (Douglas 1966, 1970, 2007, Douglas and Wildavsky 1982).

Preliminarily, it is necessary to clarify how an in-depth analysis of the points of contact and reciprocal references between these perspectives goes beyond our objectives (Verweij 2007). Here, we only intend to adopt some specific analytical tools of the two theoretical frames mentioned above for the interpretation of the forms of risk-taking and experiences of law.

4.1. *Relational logics and ethics evaluations*

A first theoretical frame moves from the Bourdieusian approach to moral judgments. It questions how socio-economic and cultural structural differences continue to act in a highly individualized society.

Several scholars (Lareau 2000, Savage *et al.* 2001, Skeggs 2004, Reay 2005, Jarness and Friedman 2016) have highlighted how today social class mostly acts in a tacit, implicit way and, above all, refers to differences in dispositions, in the pre-reflective ways of acting, perceiving and evaluating. The differences in the forms of economic and cultural capital structure multiple and different ways of living everyday life. The works of Skeggs (2004, 2011) and Sayer (2005) allow to reflect on how individuals' moral judgments reflect positional differences in social space.

In this direction, De Keere (2020) proposes a key study on people's moral visions about a plurality of domains of daily life (e.g. school, sport, climate change, migration, economy). His quantitative research constitutes an interesting interpretation of value orientations. It convincingly combines Douglas's theory of risk with the relational Bourdieusian perspective, to show a moral space, structured in relational terms and defined by the individuals' cultural and economic resources.

Boudieu's theory has received some critical appraisals because of its excessive determinism and for the incompleteness of the habitus as a social mechanism explaining social action. According to an interpretative line (Sayer 2005, Mouzelis 2007, Elder-Vass 2007, Adams 2016), reflexivity – alongside incorporation – is a constitutive and not “exceptional” dimension of social action; that is, dynamics of rationalization and “justification” of action permeate our everyday life, even beyond the experiences of habitus clivé. The consideration of conscious deliberation requires a moderation of the explanatory power of habitus in favour of concrete circumstances where processes of resistance, monitoring and learning play a fundamental role in shaping perceptions and actions (Sayer 2005). In the revision of the habitus, he also underlies the role of actors' normative orientations, emotions and commitments.

Emotions and values are constitutive elements of rationality and agency (Sayer 2011) and their role should be considered either in the formation of pre-reflective dispositions and in the contingent context where action takes place.

4.2. *Risk cultures*

A second theoretical reference concerns Douglas's work on risk (Douglas 1970, Douglas and Wildavsky 1982). The cultural perspective on risk is based on the tension between the self and the community in the shaping of individual beliefs and values. The analysis is thus structured on the identification of two key dimensions: the grid and the group. The intertwining of these analytical elements makes it possible to account for the different ways in which individuals manage a multiplicity of risks and explain their actions. This heuristic model has been applied in different contexts and has been slightly modified during the intellectual production of the anthropologist (Douglas 1970, Spickard 1989).

The grid dimension refers to the constraints of norms. The group dimension indicates the strength of community boundaries. The two dimensions refer, respectively, to

external and other-directed forms of social control and to internal and self-directed ones. As Schwarz and Thompson (1990, 6) explain, they can be summarized in two questions. “Who am I?”, where the concept of group allows us to reflect on the identity and relational dynamics through which individuals give meaning to their actions. Secondly: “How should I act?” that allows us to focus on how a sense of institutional imposition of the rules that bind action is perceived, or not. The intertwining of these dimensions has been analytically represented by two-dimensional matrices, whose polarities identify, in relational terms, ideal types of attitudes. This configuration of basic combinations makes it possible to identify and synthesize four different cultural orientations: individualistic, fatalistic, hierarchical and egalitarian. A high degree of the grid and the group identifies the hierarchical orientation, emblematically represented by the Weberian bureaucrat. A low degree of grid and group refers to typical attitudes of individualistic entrepreneurs. A high degree of grid and a low degree of the group outlines fatalistic attitudes, marked by an aversion to stringent external impositions and representative of social marginalities. A low degree of grid and a high degree of group defines the egalitarian attitudes, centered on the sense of belonging and solidarity towards the community, characteristic of social movements.

This elaboration has fuelled numerous research on risk, from climate change to COVID-19 (McNeeley and Lazrus 2014, Maleki and Hendriks 2015, Docter *et al.* 2011), alongside distancing and critical analysis (Alexander 1996, Lupton 1999, Caulkins 1999).

4.3. Open dialogue: legal consciousness, relational perspective and risk cultures

Douglas’s work has fuelled a line of studies about the forms of confrontation with law, which also includes research on legal consciousness. Halliday and Morgan (2013) argue that Douglas’s heuristic model allows to specify the forms of legal consciousness, identifying more accurately some positions of dissent. A situated and contextualized attention to the forms of legal consciousness can be useful in the analysis of the multiple experiences of law; experiences that it would seem difficult to consider free from the structure of opportunities and social divisions.

The critical reference to the Bourdieusian relational perspective allows to reflect on the relationships between social structure and action, between dispositions and situations. It is observed how the intrinsically situated character of the actions put into practice by the interviewees – in “emergency” and atypical contexts – is linked to deeper structural dispositions in the ways of thinking and evaluating the spheres of law and medical and scientific knowledge, as well as shaped by processes of conscious deliberation which include rational and affective elements.

The chosen theoretical frame, therefore, offers a lens that allows us to problematize the uses that young people can make of the narratives circulating on the law.

5. The empirical research

We adopted a qualitative perspective aimed at grasping the meaning, and the related identity and value references, that young people have given to their actions. Subsequently, qualitative coding represented the starting point for the statistical analysis of the relationship between different narratives and socio-cultural resources. Seventy discursive interviews with photo stimuli were conducted with young adult people

(Spanò 2018) aged between 18 and 25. We selected men and women; both of Italian nationality and second-generation foreigners; both students and workers (and working students), and of different Italian regions (northern, central and southern Italy).

TABLE 1

	Number of interviewees	%
Female	30	43
Male	40	57
TOTAL	70	100
Northern Italy	50	71
Central Italy	13	19
Southern Italy	7	10
TOTAL	70	100
Student	45	64
Worker	19	27
Student and worker	4	6
Unemployed	2	3
TOTAL	70	100
Both parents born in Italy	57	81
At least one parent born abroad	13	19
TOTAL	70	100

Table 1. Gender, origin, residence and occupation of interviewees.

The discursive interviews were conducted in May-September 2021. They were carried out both face-to-face and online, depending on the preference expressed by the interviewee, given the peculiarity of the transition situation towards the post-pandemic period.

The decision to use discursive interviews with photo stimuli is to collect narratives and, above all, to be able to get into the universe of meanings of youngsters overcoming a mere linguistic description of situations and events. The photographs covered some crucial semantic areas through an iconic representation of social situations and institutional messages.

In order not to limit the frames of meaning, the photographs were proposed in the introductory phase and the interviewee was left free to choose the order of the photographs. For each photograph, corresponding to a thematic area (family, friends and intimate relationships, education/work), a series of subsequent open questions were also prepared. A unique photograph, relating to the violation of legal dispositions, was prepared as an introductory prompt for the final part of the interview. Following Ewick and Silbey’s methods (1998), law and legal topics were not explicitly introduced in the first part of the interview, leaving to the interviewee the possibility to refer to these aspects. In the final part, legal norms, institutions and actors were mentioned and we explored young people’s attitudes toward the main regulatory normative dispositions-

We will focus on the analysis of the interview narratives that refer to two areas relating to peer and intimate relationships and anti-COVID legislation. One of the photos shows three young people greeting each other by touching their feet to avoid hands contact; the

second one shows a street gathering involving young people, without face masks and social distancing.

Social research on practices related to value orientations and attitudes is complicated by the irreducible tension between “visceral and honorable selves” (Jarness and Friedman 2016) that each interviewee is involved in. The decision to use the projective photo elicitation responds to the need to limit circumstantial reflections and narrations, linked to a play of representations and management of impressions. An attempt was therefore made to stress the interviewees towards a free expression of their emotions and experiences during the pandemic time, to bring out narratives that are as much as possible in harmony with their “visceral selves”.

The interviews, lasting between 45 and 90 minutes, were recorded and transcribed by the authors. The content analysis of the empirical material was conducted using the MAXQDA software, through a process of coding and categorizing of the narratives. The theoretical framework of legal consciousness has guided the identification of interpretative categories that have been implemented and tested on the empirical documentation.

The interviewees were classified based on family cultural capital, understood in its institutionalized form, relating to educational qualifications. Cultural capital was operationalized as the sum of educational qualification of the parents.

6. Results

6.1. *Different narratives on daily practices and pandemic risk management*

The interview narratives reveal different ways of acting and attributing meaning to law and legal norms. Various recurring narratives can be identified and categorised into four analytical groups: individual translation; trust in procedure; fatalistic claims; cooperative criticism. These profiles consider the principal differences found in the youngsters interviewed.² Individualistic translation and Cooperative criticism are the most widespread forms expressed by young people: they occur in at least one coded segment respectively in 50,7% and 46,5% of documents. Procedural and fatalistic narratives are less frequent: they occur, at least once, respectively in over a third of cases (33,8%) and in 31% of documents.

6.1.1. Cooperative criticism

The strategy of cooperative criticism identifies some narratives distinguished by the importance attributed to a faithful respect for anti-COVID regulations and a rationality founded on a set of solidarity values, that is a tacit and implicit distinction between an “individualistic I” that is subordinate to a “collective we”. Practices are structured which, following Silbey and Ewick (1998), can be classified in the “before the law” scheme.

Complying with the law does not have a mere inherent value but is part of a broader moral logic. Adherence to regulatory provisions is only a fragment; the most explicit

² All youngsters’ names are pseudonyms.

aspect of a way of living daily life that is guided by an ethic of “we”, of everyone’s participation in the collective well-being.

/it makes me sick/ [laughing] to see people without a mask! (...) There have been, unfortunately I am aware of marriages made illegally, in the sense of thirty guests... I saw from Instagram stories, half the world... (...) we need to follow the few rules they gave, for a while, distancing, and wearing masks. (...) they didn’t ask us to stop living (Zineb, int. 9)

Anyway, there are people like that, but I think, many too, right? That they don’t give a damn. I know of many young people who, being young, they say, still have an idea of these, don’t they? Let it be only the elderly and the sick who are affected (...) and also as a matter of selfishness and even a little ignorance they went out to hold these gatherings without worrying in the least about the virus. (Eloisa, int. 1)

The law appears as a necessary but insufficient tool. It is an exact way of understanding the “before the law” paradigm, one based on the rejection of individuals’ selfish interests in favor of an idea of the collective good. Interviewees also criticized rather harshly, individualistic attitudes. The ethical necessity of everyone’s commitment is recalled, for example:

people didn’t care enough and thought about their interests... going out, seeing friends, futile things rather than the common good. And /while there were people dying in hospitals/ [laughing slightly, in an ironic tone], they thought about the Spritz. (Giada, int. 5)

The essence of the interviewees’ statements is that “everything depends on us”, even the outcome of an event as difficult to manage as the pandemic. A distinct perception of primarily self-directed control over risk can be observed. The actions of institutions must be partnered by individuals’ daily micro-actions.

In the Douglasian lexicon, there is the coexistence of the group’s strong identity dimension and a more circumscribed sense of the grid, that is of a hierarchy and external impositions. This leads to a collectivist perception of risk in which self-protection necessarily also implies the protection of the health of others.

6.1.2. Fatalistic claim

The fatalistic claim strategy has contrasting attitudes towards the law. Further, the daily practices enacted by this group of youngsters seem to be based on feelings of distance from institutions.

In this strategy of rejection and conflict, anti-COVID legislation is essentially considered as a limitation of individual needs. These sets of ways of living and assigning meaning to the pandemic experience can be interpreted analytically through the “against the law” category. The rejection of anti-COVID legislation, perceived as overly restrictive, stringent and unfair, refers to a specific interpretation of risk. What is underlined is the needs of adolescents and, above all, the drawing of attention to the deafness of institutions and the “adult world” in general towards them.

There was a lot of... a lot of inconsistencies, (...) we weren’t able to go to the university to... to study, however, on Friday morning in my city there is a market... and elderly people go there (...) all together. (Maia, int. 15)

There is a little village up here, full of these elderly gentlemen who were outside the cafe and these elderly ladies who, sitting on the benches, all ten centimetres from each other (...) nothing was told to them [by the police], while with the youngsters there was a real iron fist (...) Instead, I saw these gentlemen doing exactly what they wanted. (Francesco, int. 30)

This perceived injustice thus motivates the group's "individualistic" actions to preserve its well-being. The risk of contagion is itself included within a "cost-benefit" calculation in which the chance of catching COVID is subordinated to the perceived essential need for mental and relational well-being. The impossibility of controlling something that escapes us all – and for which even expert opinions appear inadequate – legitimizes the very decision to abandon any concrete preventive measures. In these interviewees, therefore, there is a tendency to connote the risk of contagion in "fatalistic" terms, for example:

I had been locked up at home, perhaps because very few of the young people respected them, almost none. Uhm... I was pretty reckless about this. I was lucky because I never really got sick. Now I wouldn't [laughing]. (Maia, int. 15)

What emerges are narratives characterized by contemptuous and anti-conformist tones towards safety concerns that are perceived as hypocritical and barely reliable. According to Douglas's typology, there is little sense of the "group", i.e., of interdependence and belonging, and from a high "grid", a clear sense of external imposition. At times, within a discursive construction of "outsiders", a particular collective sense of an oppositional "we" also emerges. The world of youngsters is, in fact, discursively opposed to that of adults and institutions.

6.1.3. Individualistic translation

This narrative is characterized by an opportunistic base. It approaches the "with the law" means of relating to rights and the law. Here, attitudes and practices are geared towards the manipulation of regulatory provisions, in line with one's needs. In this sense, the law is perceived as both a limitation and an opportunity: it is neutral in nature. From these narratives, what emerges are attempts to translate rules, perceived as abstract and vague, into the practicality and indexicality of their daily contexts of action. The youngsters affirm the necessary character of the norms' semantic malleability rather than stating a need or wish to oppose them. The idea of re-reading regulatory provisions is common and this may be based both on one's own needs or on mere practical contingencies.

So mainly [I stayed] with my mum and with my boyfriend... two houses and then I went to visit my grandparents, two or three times a week, for a few hours, in their house (...) They live a two-minute walk from my house (...). And, instead, my boyfriend lives half an hour by car (...) if I take the car and always see the same two people (...) I have no other contacts with the outside world, so I don't harm anyone (...) and it doesn't harm me. So this reasoning made me transgress a bit, here (...) the definition of domicile and it is not, let's say, controllable by... by the police or... there is no regulation of what domicile is (...) So let's say that I allowed myself to use it precisely because there was this... this mist over its definition. (Arianna, int. 12)

In this rationale, semantic modeling is considered as a reasonable and, above all, a required practice. What often emerges is a reflective and critical attitude of symmetrical confrontation "on a par" with the representatives of the order. These strategies seem to

echo a typically bourgeois mastery and sense of entitlement that, in literature, has been highlighted by Bourdieu and by other scholars following his theoretical orientation (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970, Reay 2005).

It is the implicit and explicit recognition of one's abilities that lies at the foundation of the opportunistic strategy. A specific interpretation of risk forms, one which refers to one's resources of action and forecasting. Thus, an emphasis on individual agency is on show, one founded on a high sense of individualistic self-efficacy and a low feeling of interdependence. Adopting Douglas's approach, here we can identify a weak sense of the group and a low sense of the grid where what predominates is both the articulation of individual needs and the perception of being able to control prescriptions from outside.

6.1.4. Trust in procedure

This narrative delimits ways of giving sense to anti-COVID regulations that are characterized by a procedural orientation and a certain bureaucratic rationality.

In the youngsters' narratives, a formalist adherence to the law is thus outlined: it is, in essence, considered as necessary and sufficient. This narrative approaches the "before the law" scheme. The law is perceived as inherently neutral, "just" and correct.

In the narratives, what emerges is a form of procedural deference, that is the belief that legal and scientific and medical authorities possess superior skills and exclusive decision-making competencies. Consequently, there is a deep sense of trust placed in "expert knowledge". This faith thus legitimizes an unconditional adherence to the rules.

Reopening means that (...) it was really something important and I think it was done in all of them, with all the necessary rules, with all the necessary safety (...) people obviously thought that, in reality, what little could be done, it could be done, but in safety. And, consequently, if the little that could be done was done with the head on your shoulder, I don't see why to be afraid. (Chiara, int. 3)

Weirded out, but not too worried. That is, since the lockdown, I have always had the idea that, if I respect the rules at all, I can go quietly. (...) And therefore also maybe it was this, which from a rational point of view, made me say: you can do whatever you want, if you respect some rules; so, in peace, the rules, without pulling your hair out, that's it, that's all. (Andrea, int. 26)

Further, there is a specific focus on the centrality of "being led" by institutions and their representatives. In these narratives, a common idea is that institutions have a responsibility to ensure that we can live through the pandemic period. The slight criticism aimed at those who do not respect the laws echoes a specific "institutional" vision. According to these youngsters, managing the pandemic is an issue that has to be carried out by institutions and cannot be considered a matter of individual responsibility. Trust in institutions is counterbalanced by a distrust of other individuals who are perceived as being guided solely by private and egotistical interests and who are systematically unfit to make complex decisions on collective risks. This approach seems to "naturalise" and consider individuals' pursuit of private interests as obvious. Unlike the "collectivist" strategy, the mere observation of the majority's tendency to disregard the norms

does not lead to a need to criticize; instead, it results in a positive assessment of institutions' control over the life of everyone. The dimension of the group, from Douglas's perspective, refers to the subordination of one's interests/to community rules, to a sense of belonging to a state. The dimension of the grid can be observed in the tendency to put the will of institutions before the interests of individuals. Regulating everyone's behaviour is perceived as necessary given the pandemic risk.

6.2. Context, relations, opportunities

In line with Ewick and Silbey's findings (1998), young people's accounts were mostly characterized by the simultaneous occurrence of more than one form of experience of legality within each case.

The code map³ shows the frequency of co-occurrences of the codes referring to the different profiles in the documents and their mutual relationships.

FIGURE 1



Figure 1. Code map: frequency of co-occurrences of codes in the documents.

(Legend: numbers near the lines indicate the n. of documents where the codes co-occur; the size of circles indicates the overall frequency of codes; the size of the character indicates the numbers of segments coded [exact number in brackets]).

The Individualistic profile is placed at the center of the net. It visually represents that this specific experience of law occurs in combination with other accounts more often than other narratives of legality. The Individualistic translation occurs most frequently with the Procedural one. It is also associated with the Fatalistic and less frequently with the Cooperative criticism. On the other hand, Cooperative criticism is quite frequent and is less linked with other codes; therefore, it is used in narratives whose content is more

³. For analytical purposes, we show only the four codes referring to the experience of legality on the map. Other codes were used to identify the interaction context and other relevant aspects.

consistent regarding young people's perception and experience of law and risk management.

Case 51 shows how individualistic and procedural forms can co-exist in one individual experience. Gianni is 23 years old and has a secondary school diploma; at the time of the interview, he was doing a traineeship at an Architectural Studio and had a part-time job as a waiter. Both his parents have secondary school diplomas; her mother is a clerk, and his father works in his own ice cream shop. During the interview he has acknowledged on many occasions that he considers the anti-COVID legislation as just: he thinks that the norm on face masks is fair as well as the fines for those who don't follow the rules. Toward the end of the interview, he stated that he would adapt in the future to the new norms that will be enacted. However, he defines himself as someone who doesn't care about the "common good", he doesn't criticize people that don't obey the law. Gianni perceives a sense of control over the situation: he is sure that he can adapt even to future circumstances. In his everyday life, he experienced law as something concrete: he felt a sense of control over legal norms, and he used them to pursue his objectives. During the lockdown, he took advantage of the norm that allowed people to leave their homes to do sports or buy necessary goods to meet his girlfriend, who lived nearby.

Fortunately, my girlfriend and I live near each other, so even in the first phase, when norms were more restrictive, we could see each other. She didn't sleep at my place, I didn't want to... well, my mother didn't... she was afraid of the virus... And she respects the established rules quite a bit. (Gianni, int. 51)

He often did not wear a face mask, especially when he was spending time with friends. He considers face masks very annoying when engaging in informal conversations.

Well, [I didn't wear a mask] on several occasions, basically every time I was with people who weren't interested in wearing it. (Gianni, int. 51)

In his account, he constantly oscillates between the perception of the law as fair and necessary and the pursuit of his personal needs and interests. That included maintaining good relationships with his mother and taking into account her feelings, and adapting to friends' definitions of risks. So sometimes he obeyed legal rules, and, in other circumstances, he creatively interpreted them to stretch their meaning and adapt them to his needs. Gianni's account highlights the processual and relational character of legal consciousness and moral reasoning. It shows how the contextual and indicative levels are relevant in shaping specific experiences of law as well as the mediation operated by social groups (such as peers, friends and family). However, such experiences are rooted within a definite pattern of perceptions and dispositions characterized by a sense of mastery over external circumstances that appear as deeply rooted in the way he typically approaches everyday life.

Another case exemplifies the connection between fatalistic and individualistic narratives. Martina (int. 47) is 21 years old; at the time of the interview is attending first-year courses at the University. Her parents are both teachers. She has experienced most of the anti-COVID norms as limiting her freedom. On many occasions she has not respected norms on social distancing and has joined street parties and gatherings; she also perceives legal norms as arbitrary: for instance, she says that is tired of wearing a face mask because most of the population is now vaccinated. She fiercely expresses her negative feelings toward state authorities:

I hope there won't be another lockdown, I hope they don't close us down again because if it happens, I won't respect the rules, I'm fed up! (Martina, int. 47)

However, she favors the anti-COVID vaccine and would like the State to make it compulsory for everybody. So, whether she considered arbitrary the norm on social distancing, she would sustain the State obligation to vaccination. What may seem like a contradiction, finds a justification in the instrumental, strategic approach to law. For Martina, the law is not legitimate as such but can be useful if it allows her to pursue her goals, which are to cultivate relationships with friends and to have fun. She sometimes feels scarce control over the situation and experiences the law as an arbitrary imposition and a limit to young people's agency; on the other hand, the norm on vaccination gives her a feeling of control and power over the uncertain future.

Again, Martina's experience shows how legal consciousness is not a static individual attribute but a process that can incorporate internal tensions and paradoxical elements (Ewick and Silbey 1998). And it is precisely the contextual and paradoxical character of legality that can explain why, although people may resist the law, they rarely reject it altogether.

6.3. Narratives and cultural capital

In this section, we present the descriptive statistical analysis results on the coded segments of the interviews' transcripts and the ordinal variable, which refers to cultural capital. For our analytical purposes, we consider the institutional dimension of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) and have operationalized it as the sum of young people's parent's educational credentials. This is considered a proxy of the "family resources" (Nash 2002) which influences the socialization process by equipping children with specific competencies and attitudes for navigating institutional requests and for promoting a strategic conception of agency (Edgerton and Roberts 2014).

To analyze the relationship between cultural capital and narratives, we used the text segments labelled with codes referring to the four narratives highlighted in the previous section. To avoid biases based on the different number of coded segments in each document, we considered the occurrence of at least one code for each form of narrative in each document.

Data show a relationship between the different narratives and cultural capital (Table 2).

TABLE 2

	Cultural capital = high	Cultural capital = medium-high	Cultural capital = medium	Cultural capital = medium-low	Cultural capital = low	Total
Fatalistic claim	0 0%	2 (18,20% *)	3 (14,30%)	7 (43,80%)	6 (42,90%)	30,30%
Individualistic translation	0 0%	6 (54,50%)	11 (52,40%)	8 (50,00%)	4 (28,60%)	49,20%
Trust in procedures	0 0%	6 (54,50%)	6 (28,60%)	7 (43,80%)	0 0%	32,60%
Cooperative criticism	0 0%	6 (54,50%)	8 (38,10%)	9 (56,30%)	10 (71,40%)	50,00%
N documents	0 0,00	11 (17,7%)	21 (33,9%)	16 (25,8%)	14 (22,6%)	62 (100%)

Table 2. Narratives by cultural capital (Column percentages).

The Cooperative criticism narratives occur more frequently in interviews with youngsters from low and medium-low cultural capital backgrounds although it is quite frequent also among those with medium-high cultural resources. Among these respondents, some are experiencing upward educational mobility, as they are in a university or high school study program. This group also includes second-generation youngsters from migrant families with various educational qualifications not recognized in Italy.

The individualistic approach to legality is the least frequent among the accounts of young people with low cultural capital. The partial questioning of law based on a feeling of personal control and high autonomy is therefore typically experienced by those socialized in contexts with more cultural resources.

Also, narratives based on trust in procedures are more spread among respondents with medium-high cultural capital. Finally, the fatalistic narrative is expressed more frequently by individuals with medium-low and low cultural capital. The weaker amount of perceived autonomy and control and the lower importance attributed to the collective, which are features linked to this kind of accounts, are therefore related to family environments with lower amounts of cultural resources. The group is, for the most part, enrolled in secondary school courses in which difficulties emerge, as do feelings of estrangement from the world of education.

7. Discussion

Young people’s narratives conveyed a complex experience of legality, where legal norms were perceived as just, necessary, neutral or arbitrary and experiences of law were shaped by individual positioning with respect to collective needs and wellbeing. In this relationship with moral reasoning, law, in some accounts, sustains decisions taken with regards to one’s own or others’ wellbeing and sometimes emerges as subordinated to a moral framed line of reasoning. However, in the majority of narratives law retains its symbolic power. These results are in line with other studies on the experience of law during the pandemic (Trnka *et al.* 2021). Ewick and Silbey’s broad shapes of legal consciousness and Douglas’s grid and group frame were useful empirical tools that allowed us to focus better on the core elements on which specific experiences of law in

the context of pandemic risk management rest. Young people's narratives recall the cultural schemas found by Ewick and Silbey (1998). Douglas's group and grid framework allowed us to articulate better such schemes. In particular, the Before the law one, by highlighting how the experience of law as objective, remote and inherently necessary and just, can be embedded in a broader frame referring to the way individuals perceive themselves in relation to others and then prioritise collective needs and interests or individual ones. The Before the law scheme in the context of pandemic risk management was articulated into a "collective criticism" frame and into an individualistic "procedural" frame. So, while in the study by Halliday and Morgan (2013) the use of Douglas's framework helped to better frame some positions of dissent, in our case it allows to articulate positions of adherence to the law.

In line with Ewick and Silbey (2020) such schemes emerge as not bounded and fixed categories. As in previous works (Ewick and Silbey 1998), we found multiple elements pertaining to different schemes in most of the respondents' accounts. Our results confirm that legal consciousness can be better understood if considered as a process rather than a fixed attribute, that is as the participation by individuals in the process of constructing legality, a process which produces configurations of meaning that are highly dependent on contexts, situational and relational factors, changing over time and characterized by "polyvocality" and internal tensions (Ewick and Silbey 2020).

We observe the intersection between dynamics of signification, the indexicality and contingency of interactive and relational situations and embodied repertoires of action, Following the Neo-Bourdieuian literature (Reay 1995, 2004, Nash 2002, Lizardo 2004, Robbins 2005, Edgerton and Roberts 2014) – we considered cultural capital and habitus "as two sides of the same socialization process" (Edgerton and Roberts 2014, 206) of the internalization of cultural schemas. As heuristic tools, the concept of habitus is able to bring out that classified and classifying set of "propensity to fatalism, ambivalence, resilience, resentment, entitlement or even anger" and to capture the "lived, embodied and affective experiences of inequalities in the contemporary world" (Reay 2015, 10). From this perspective, habitus becomes a tool for questioning some silent dimensions that support daily practices. Moreover, cultural capital is used in a broader meaning that includes not only familiarity with highbrow culture but also with expectations, norms and vocabulary of institutions and a more strategic conception of agency (Lareau and Weininger 2003).

The individualistic narrative would seem to refer to that sense of entitlement and self-confidence characteristic of the upper classes. In the interviewees' accounts, the neoliberal values of individualism, independence and the pursuit of one's interests echo (Threadgold and Nilan 2009, Skeggs 2011, Maxwell and Aggleton 2013, Threadgold 2020). The idea that "everything is in one's hands and under one's control" recurs; the risk of contagion itself would thus seem to depend on one's ability to manage and shape constraints and opportunities. In relation to this, a certain practical "mastery" of situations can also be recognized in these youths; that is, a "bourgeois practical sense" (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970) which would seem to help them even for relational dynamics with institutions. It leads to the ability to act through an active interpretation of the rules and a propensity to deal as equals with the representatives of the institutions.

The sense of affinity and profound sharing of normative, value and identity orders leads other culturally privileged youths towards the development of representations with a more “procedural” vein; in these young people, we also find that orientation towards rigorism which would seem, following De Keere (2020) and Bourdieu (1984), characteristic of some typically “bourgeois” ways of living.

The order of “fatalistic” discourse is based on a set of dispositions relating to a sense of extraneousness and distance towards the institutional world. The features of a specific “subaltern” habitus can be observed, where a tacit dimension of distrust and mistrust towards, both legal and scholastic, institutions can be observed (Willis 1981, Dolby and Dimitriadis 2004, Weis 2004, Archer et al. 2007, Reay 2009, Sayer 2011, Skeggs and Loveday 2012). The “fatalist” narratives would also seem to intertwine, at a discursive level, with dynamics of demarcation of symbolic boundaries. They are linked to the ways of living and giving meaning to one’s group identity, that is, of defining oneself as a young person “on the margins” of society. What emerges, therefore, is a continuous reconstruction of a boundary between an “us”, the peer group, and a “them”, represented by the institutions, perceived as distant. This distinction is experienced according to a typically adolescent sense of conflict.

Finally, the narratives of cooperative criticism would seem to constitute a small declination of that sense of communality and related values of collective belonging, characteristic of the disadvantaged classes (Skeggs 1997, Sayer 2005, Reay 2009). Some fragments of a specific “subaltern” habitus can be traced, marked by typically “worker” values and the primacy of a “collective we” over an “individualistic self” (Charlesworth 2000, De Keere 2020).

Although the traces of socially situated habitus emerged from the narratives, what is evident from the interviewees’ accounts is a complex interweaving between tacit dispositions and conscious reflexivity, which sometimes takes the form of rational instrumental action and strategic choice. Procedural attitudes fostered by family socialization may leave the floor to individualistic translation of norms when they allow the pursuit of personal objectives. The constitutive reflexivity of the action dynamics of the young people interviewed, in relation with the normative sphere, would not, however, seem to be linked only to the exceptional nature of the pandemic situation. These action strategies also recall “habitual” and incorporated ways of living the regulatory and institutional world and ethical sphere, in defining what is considered “right” for their wellbeing and that of collectivity. Moral action (Sayer 2005) is characterized by an emotional component. This form of action and, specifically, the emotional dimension, has been substantially neglected in Bourdieu’s work. This emotional dimension is not devoid of cognitive and evaluative registers but rather constituted by these same elements (Sayer 2005). The interview narratives demonstrate how, when faced with both “ordinary” and “extra-ordinary” ethical dilemmas, evaluations regarding individual and collective good function in a complex and ambivalent way: the automatism of dispositions is accompanied by feelings, reasoning and processes of conscious deliberation.

Therefore, following Sayer, we observe how, in our analysis, the incompleteness of the habitus – in its Bourdieu’s original meaning – refers to three aspects. First, to its same way of functioning in giving shape to social action, in continuous tension with the

rational and deliberative dimension. In this process, experiential contingency and relational dynamics also come into play (Mouzelis 2007). Second, to the emotional and therefore also intrinsically cognitive constitution of ethical action, oriented towards the “right thing”. Third, to the consequences in the sociological interpretation of social action and, in particular, ethical one: in which we do not observe a linear and simple reproduction of social stratification in the different forms of action, but a complex intersection between contingencies, relational dynamics, dispositions incorporated, feelings and reflexive reasoning.

8. Conclusions

We tried to answer our initial question about the experience of law by young people – a marginalized group in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic legal regulation of social relationships – by the definition of a theoretical framework, based on legal consciousness studies, the Bourdiesian perspective on moral judgement and Douglas’ theory of risk. This theoretical framework allowed us to highlight the main cultural schemas underlying specific experiences of legality and how they were differently mobilized by young people in the process of reproduction of law and social order during the health crisis.

Our findings show that young people’s experience of legality was mainly oriented toward reproducing the hegemonic power of law. In this process, the majority of them engaged actively with the law, either by adopting an individualistic and instrumental approach that allowed them to translate and adapt norms to their needs and objectives or by exhibiting a procedural orientation based on trust on institutional knowledge or by committing themselves to the pursuit of the common good, that included following legal rules. Positions of dissent were also registered, albeit they didn’t lead to a total rejection of the law as an institution. Such experiences of law emerge in relation to different ways of perceiving and managing risks, as a result of the interviewees’ different positioning along the group and grid dimensions in the model provided by Douglas. So, the tendency to prioritize the collective well-being or individual needs and goals, internalization of institutional constraints, or the perception of external imposition are fundamental dimensions of young people’s experience of legality. Feelings, commitments, values and concerns emerge as constitutive ingredients of the process of legal consciousness formation.

Following the Neo-Bourdiesian literature, these findings open up to further reflections on the social mechanisms that can explain differences in the experience of legality. Our data show a relationship between specific narratives of law and the amount of young people’s family cultural resources. Thus, law experiences are consistent with social stratification in that trust in institutions and mastery over legal norms are more spread among upper, better-educated classes, while distrust and feelings of injustice are prevalent among marginalized groups. However, a significant part of young people with fewer cultural resources experienced a high degree of commitment to pursuing the collective good. According to Bourdieu, the pre-reflexive dispositions of the socially situated habitus may explain such variations. However, our data also highlight how processes of conscious deliberation play a fundamental role in orienting young people’s perceptions and practices. The processual character of legal consciousness, its being contingent upon social and relational contexts and therefore variant over time and across

spaces, shows the relevance of reflexivity as a constitutive aspect of experiences and practices. That highlights the limitations in the explanatory power of a conceptualization of the habitus that does not adequately address the relationship between dispositions and reflexivity and does not stress the possibility of the gradual adaptation to new circumstances.

Overall, our findings support the idea that legal consciousness can be understood as the process of constructing legality in everyday interactions through a complex intertwining of tacit and pre-reflexive ways of addressing, evaluating and confronting institutions and of perceiving one's position in relation to the collectivity, and reflexive deliberation which consider the constraints and opportunities of contingent situations, personal feelings, needs and desires as well as those of relevant others, and aspirations and reasoned forecasting for the future. The extent to which tacit dispositions or active reflexivity prevail in shaping specific experiences and practices can only be assessed through empirical investigation. Moreover, other factors may play a relevant role in forming legal consciousness. For instance, in our study, people socialized in family contexts with fewer cultural resources experienced legality in different ways. One of the discriminant factors was their previous experience with other institutional contexts, specifically with the educational one. Feelings of estrangement from educational institutions were common in accounts in which young people experienced legality in ways that resembled the "against the law" narrative documented by Ewick and Silbey (1998).

The theoretical framework employed proved to be useful in explaining a complex social phenomenon, such as young people's experience of law in a situation characterized by uncertainty and risks. This study addresses the social mechanism that generates different experiences of legality and adds on previous research (Young and Billings 2020) by specifying the operation of the habitus in the relationship with reflexive deliberation and social and relational contexts.

Our analysis presents some limits. We considered only the relationship between institutionalized cultural capital and habitus to focus on specific dynamics. We aimed to understand some aspects of the youths' ways of experiencing legal restrictions. An extensive exploration of the social and cultural differences in the everyday life of the Italian youths wasn't our research goal. We used these heuristic tools to gain a deeper understanding of the interview data. Moreover, the cross-sectional design of the research allowed a reconstruction of events that occurred over time based on interviewees' descriptions. A longitudinal design would have permitted a better understanding of persistence and variation in young people's dispositions and adjustments to situations.

The research also shows potentialities: further investigation could explore how other kinds of social divisions, such as gender and ethnicity, may lead to different experiences of law.

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