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Exploring subjectivity in everyday living

Juhl, Pernille

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Pernille Juhl

Roskilde University

Abstract

This article theoretically refines the rendering of a conceptual framework suitable for including preverbal subjects, i.e., infants, in research. It is argued that the theoretical framework “psychology from the standpoint of the subject” is useful, as its conceptualization of the human–world relationship is a dialectical one that emphasizes how children are active subjects in their own lives. Nevertheless, key concepts such as subjective reasons for action and first-person perspective, do not sufficiently encompass bodily and emotional activity. The article discusses the framework’s inadequacies and, by extension, proposes the notion of *Befindlichkeit*, a German word translated here as embodied orientation, as a key concept that allows the inclusion of infants and toddlers as co-researchers. *Befindlichkeit* contributes to the analysis of the human–world relationship by situating bodily and emotional activities in processes of orientating in social practice.

Keywords

Befindlichkeit, conduct of everyday life, preverbal children, psychology from the standpoint of the subject, subjectivity

The overall aim of this article is to address how researchers can understand preverbal children. This issue is widely discussed in various fields, for instance, developmental psychology and infant research and philosophy, and in different types of studies, e.g., ethnographically inspired childhood studies. The present article examines the matter in relation to a specific research interest that involves understanding the child in the world rather than the child’s inner world. My goal of exploring the child in the world is anchored in a specific empirical interest in the everyday life situations of infants and toddlers (0–3 years of age), categorized as being at risk of marginalization and therefore involved in early preventive interventions. I pursued this interest in a qualitative study involving

Corresponding author:

Pernille Juhl, Associate Professor, Department of People & Technology (Psychology), Roskilde University, Universitetsvej 1, Postboks 260, Roskilde, 4000, Denmark.

Email: peju@ruc.dk

participant observations in the everyday life contexts of five children categorized as marginalized (Juhl, 2015, 2016). The focus of the study was children's ways of participating in everyday life contexts, what the children engaged in, what they tried to accomplish, and what kind of opportunities and issues they faced in common everyday life situations. Due to concerns about the parents' ability to take proper care of their children, the families were involved in various early preventive interventions (e.g., home-visits and support from a health visitor and social workers, respite care). The reason for my specific interest in learning about the "child in the world" (children's participation in concrete everyday life situations) is that the concerns about children's well-being that prompt early preventive interventions is often not related to the children's particular everyday life situation but to the circumstances¹ in the parents' lives that are categorized as risk factors (Juhl, 2016; Mercieca & Mercieca, 2013). Preventive interventions are designed to provide appropriate support "before problems become entrenched" (Robinson & Dunsmuir, 2010, p. 11), which is why they are most commonly initiated early, with regard to both the child's age and the level of complexity. The professionals in my study worked to provide the children and their families with adequate help, but often the parents found that the support was inappropriate, since it was based on abstract risk factors, such as being a young single mother. In other words, the early interventions did not necessarily take the concrete everyday lives of the children and parents as their starting point for understanding their difficulties and designing the interventions. Consequently, an issue of common relevance for the children, the parents, the professionals, and the researcher is gaining insight into the subjective meanings of children's complex everyday lives across various contexts (e.g., family, daycare, respite care) and with various co-participants, such as parents, professionals, and other children. According to philosopher Juul Jensen (1999), knowledge develops through engaging in the world and from learning about specific circumstances in social practice. Hence, exploring children's concrete everyday lives is an important source for developing a concept of subjectivity.

Analytical framework

Taking children's everyday lives as the starting point for understanding subjectivity is theoretically anchored in the analytical framework of "psychology from the standpoint of the subject" (Dreier, 2008; Holzkamp, 2013a, 2013b, 2016; Tolman, 2009). This framework is grounded in cultural-historical research traditions emphasizing the dialectical relationship between the individual and the social as the analytical starting point (Juul Jensen, 1999; Rogoff, 2003). A basic assumption about subjectivity in this framework, according to Holzkamp (2013a), is that

human beings not only live under conditions, but also need to control the conditions of their lives. Producing the conditions under which we live means that every single individual is, in one way or another, participating in the production, transformation, affirmation, and reproduction of the circumstances under which we live. (p. 20)

In this regard, the framework offers concepts fruitful for highlighting the exploratory, active, and creative processes involved in living a complex everyday life across different

contexts. These active processes of everyday living are conceptualized in the conduct of everyday life, which is, according to Holzkamp (2013b), “the elementary form of human existence: there is no human being who is not situated within a scene of everyday life conduct” (p. 314). Human beings develop social self-understanding in relation to the way they conduct their everyday lives and the possibilities available to them for gaining control over their life conditions (Holzkamp, 2013b). Thus, the ways in which life conditions become subjective premises for action in everyday living shape the way children understand themselves as active participants who co-produce the conditions under which they live.

In continuation hereof, the activity of exploration is not only for the researcher to engage in; on the contrary, exploring (and learning) is regarded as a fundamental part of a human being’s life-sustaining activities (Tolman, 2009). Kousholt (2016) argues, “to live our lives we must explore our life conditions and how to develop influence on matters important to us in our different life contexts” (p. 246). Within this framework, research must be relevant for those involved (Tolman, 2009), implying two premises: first, that the child must no longer be looked at from an artificially detached researcher position, and second, that the research process must be designed to make it possible to look with the child rather than at the child (Chimirri, 2015; Kousholt, 2011, 2016). Thus, children and other participants—irrespective of their age—are not research objects but co-researchers in the processes of exploring a relevant problem in relation to the concrete everyday situations the child participates in. Hence, research must be organized as a collaborative effort on a shared issue of relevance for the involved children and the researcher (Kousholt, 2016). Tolman (2009), who emphasized the importance of including people in research as participants, stated that,

if the subjectivity of the subject is going to be preserved, the subject obviously cannot be treated as an object. Subjectivity is not private but shared ... the aim is to have [the subjects participating in research] share with us, their subjective point of view. (pp. 157–158)

How is it possible, however, to have preverbal children share their subjective points of view and to learn about their subjectivity?

Engaging in joint exploration with children as co-researchers

The purpose of learning about children’s subjectivity is to provide analyses that help increase possibilities for action for children in their everyday lives and that also expand opportunities for children to be included as active subjects in the professional work being undertaken, hence enabling professionals to include even very young children in a shared exploration of concrete possibilities for action and of problems in the children’s everyday lives. Consequently, I designed a qualitative participatory study capable of exploring the complexity of children’s activities and engagements in different contexts of children’s everyday lives (Juhl, 2015, 2016). In the study, I participated with the children across various contexts, with their families, in daycare and respite care, for one year, employing a variety of methods, for example, ethnographically inspired participant

observation (e.g., Kousholt, 2011). I also conducted qualitative interviews with the parents, child minders, and other professionals about the children's everyday life routines and asked about what kind of concerns for the children served as substantiation for the early preventive interventions. Observing the children in their daily contexts allowed me to gain in-depth insight into their daily routines, engagements, and favorite activities in a variety of situations across time and space. I also became familiar with the children and their various caretakers. Most of the time, I participated actively in the ongoing activities in assorted places; for instance, I would sit next to the children on the floor and play with them. As a result, I have also drawn on knowledge from cultural-historical approaches to developmental psychology, which consider children as active subjects in their own development (Haavind, 2011; Hedegaard, 1994/2013; Hviid, 2008; Højholt, 2012; Rogoff, 2003). Hedegaard (1994/2013) emphasized that "interacting and engaging with the child in everyday activities is the best way to learn about the child's intentions" (p. 8, author's translation). In this regard, Hedegaard presents an approach that takes everyday life into consideration, and thus, the child's life conditions as the appropriate context for research for understanding children in the world. In the following, I will describe the theoretical foundation that forms the basis for how to understand children in the world and how to explore problems in their lives.

Theoretical foundation

Participatory methods are widely used in ethnographically inspired childhood studies in order to make the research accessible to children's contributions (cf. Christensen, 2004; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). As various investigations point out, studies that endeavor to include children in participatory research mainly involve children over three years of age (Elwick, Bradley, & Sumsion, 2014b) but that an increasing number of studies have begun including the perspectives of very young children (Clark, 2003; Clark & Moss, 2001; Elwick, Bradley, & Sumsion, 2014a; Røn Larsen & Stanek, 2015). In several of these studies, researchers have put a substantial amount of effort into developing methods capable of including multimodalities in the attempt to listen to children in various ways. For instance, Clark and Moss (2001) emphasize that "listening must not wait until children are able to join in adult conversations" (p. 41). Such efforts have extended the variety of approaches and contributed to the development of research designs appropriate for young children. Meanwhile, these efforts mainly focused on developing techniques capable of accessing and revealing children's experiences. Elwick et al. (2014b) put forward the assessment that, even though including infants in research is pivotal, it is a pitfall when researchers (a) position infants "epistemologically as entities knowable through the study of their non-verbal expressions and behavior" (p. 197) and (b) subordinate the experiences and behavior of infants into adult categories of understanding (p. 206). Although in agreement with their critique, I argue that it is crucial for psychological research to find ways to share subjectivity, which is why I argue that, rather than focusing on techniques, there is a need to continue carrying out conceptual work in order to develop and refine concepts for supporting the process of engaging collaboratively with preverbal children.

In infant research and strands of developmental psychology, the research object is infants and their behavior. These traditions have shed light on early skills and have provided important stepping stones for designing studies, such as my own, based on the assumption that children are capable of actively engaging in relationships with (various) other people in the earliest stages of life, an assertion multiple studies document (Reddy & Trevarthen, 2004; Selby & Bradley, 2003; Stern, 1985). In this way, experimental designs have contributed with invaluable insights into the skills and functions of human beings from the beginning of life by developing a variety of designs and technologies aimed at describing and explaining infant behavior in experimental settings. Examples of technological advances include, for instance, eye trackers for recording eye movements (Sonne, Kingo, & Krøgaard, 2016) and video recordings of head movements and pointing gestures (Mumford & Kita, 2016). The aim of these strands of research is, for example, to interpret children's behavior and to describe their cognitive capacities (Legerstee, 1992; Sirois & Mareschal, 2002). Computational models, an example of a tool for assessing cognitive capacities, are used to interpret infant behavior in relation to habituation, for instance, by examining looking time on known and new objects to gauge whether infants possess early and possibly innate conceptual understandings (Sirois & Mareschal, 2002). In this way, descriptions of the activities of infants and toddlers are associated with the development of various functions in children regarding, for example, associations between variables like behavior (pointing gestures) and language development (Mumford & Kita, 2016). I share an overall interest in understanding preverbal children with the traditions of infant research. Nevertheless, as accounted for, I approach the question of how to understand preverbal children as related to their participation in everyday life across time and place. Hence, the object of my research is the compound and complex everyday living of children. I do not aim to study certain isolated functions in children, such as child perception and cognitive or social skills.

The above approaches are dominant in research focusing on assessing problems in children's lives, for instance by associating variables such as child behavior and parental resources/deficits and prospective outcome. One study examined the association between reduced gaze activity in infants, maternal postpartum depression, and long-term negative consequences for future development (Væver, Krogh, Smith-Nielsen, Christensen, & Tharner, 2015). In this way, children's behavioral problems and deviances have been linked to risk factors (Love et al., 2002) and protective factors (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Rutter, 2000).

There is much to learn from these types of studies concerning how they explain and describe early skills and processes, in addition to how they develop under various determinants. It is necessary, however, to learn about the child in the world in order to access the creativity and transformativity related to children's way of living their lives across different contexts. Hence, this approach provides knowledge on how children's subjectivity changes in relation to concrete life conditions and on what children are trying to accomplish.

From cultural-historical approaches to developmental psychology, Hedegaard (1994/2013) argued that, "methods employed in most experiments, observations and tests are tools for objective descriptions of functions in children" (p. 5, author's translation),

further stating that “the child will be objectified and become artificial ... when the child’s relationship to the surroundings is omitted” (p. 3, author’s translation). In an attempt to break away from understanding children’s problems in terms of risk factors the children are exposed to, my analytical starting point is psychology from the standpoint of the subject and will illuminate how children as active subjects in their own lives contribute to changing and co-producing their own life conditions. Hence, this study is inspired by theoretical and methodological efforts to bring psychology out of the laboratory and to make it a more “worldly psychology” (Dreier, 2008). At this point, the analysis will elucidate the theoretical and methodological aims of the present study in three steps by: (a) presenting everyday life as the context for exploring subjectivity; (b) accounting for limitations embedded in key concepts, i.e., the language problem; and (c) discussing implications of conceptual expansion.

Everyday life as the context for exploring subjectivity

This section provides examples of empirical data derived from research involving infants and toddlers. The data consists of written records from participant observations with an 11-month-old boy, Oscar, in the nursery, one of his everyday life contexts. Oscar, who had recently started attending the nursery, was the youngest child among 12 children. Oscar and his mother were part of an early preventive intervention that involved regular supervision from a social worker and a health visitor because Oscar’s mother was young, single, and had no family network. Physically, Oscar was small for his age, which was why the health visitor and social worker believed that his mother allowed him to drink too much milk from a bottle, preventing him from eating enough solids. The health visitor monitored Oscar’s weight weekly and advised the nursery caretaker to give Oscar additional meals in an attempt to urge him to eat more during the day. The following observation took place when I was sitting at a table with Oscar, who was in a highchair, before his morning nap at the nursery. Two older girls were playing on the floor while the rest of the children were in the coatroom getting ready to go to the playground.

Oscar and I are sitting at the table, Oscar with a bib on. Behind us, two girls are playing with toy blocks on the floor. Oscar turns his face towards the girls to look at them and points with one finger. He struggles to turn his upper body. One of the girls points at him, saying loudly, “Oscar! Oscar!” Holding a block in her hand, the other girl stops what she is doing. She walks over to Oscar and hands him the block. He grabs it and puts it up to his mouth. The girls laugh and go back to playing with their blocks. A caretaker enters the room and puts down a plate of porridge. She sits down beside Oscar, takes the block he is holding and puts it away before trying to entice him with the porridge. Oscar rejects the spoon whenever the caretaker offers him porridge, turning his face and upper body towards the girls. The caretaker says to Oscar, “Oh, you want to look at Fiona and Anna! That’s okay, you can do that.” The caretaker moves Oscar and his chair to the other side of the table so he can watch the girls’ activities. Oscar looks from the girls to the caretaker, eagerly pointing and making happy sounds. She smiles at him and tries to give him some food. He still seems uninterested in the porridge and, after a while, she lifts Oscar out of the chair and carries him to the napping area. He starts to cry and wrenches his body in her arms.

This glimpse of Oscar's daily life showed how he turned his attention towards the two girls. The caretaker articulated her perception of Oscar's intentions ("Oh, you want to look at Fiona and Anna!"). In an interview, the caretaker talked in detail about how her experience with children had made her aware of how much, from a very young age, they were interested in one another. Based on this experience, it seemed easy for the caretaker to understand what Oscar was engaged in in the specific situation, even though she did not back up his engagement. But, what can be learned from Oscar's participation in the situation? Why did Oscar not want to eat? Is it because he is full from the milk his mother apparently gives him? Or is it because other things were more important to him? My aim is not to address these questions specifically, but rather to illustrate the need for relevant concepts capable of analyzing children's situated contributions in relation to the social situations they are part of. An analysis of Oscar's activities showed that he did not pay much attention to the food being offered. At first glance, based on insights from studies on children's engagements and abilities concerning "group activity," the attention Oscar paid to the other children's activities may have not seemed conspicuous (Selby & Bradley, 2003). Another factor that should be taken into consideration is the fact that, until recently, Oscar's mother had been on maternity leave since birth. In this regard, being part of a nursery group with many other children and three child minders was a new aspect of his daily life. He had not yet participated in many activities with the other children, since he slept twice a day. When he was awake, he spent most of his time sitting at the table to eat, while looking intensively at the other children. Until now, the other children had not taken much notice of him. A turning point occurred for Oscar when the two girls called him by his name and included him in their activity by handing him one of their blocks; for the first time, he was part of a shared activity with his peers.

Based on Oscar's way of acting (turning, looking, pointing, wrenching), and especially due to insights based on long-term participant observations, I understood that this situation and the emerging opportunity to participate in the girls' activity was significant for Oscar. It was the first time he appeared to be excited about being in the nursery. Meanwhile, because his lack of interest in food had been designated as the reason to intervene, Oscar's curiosity and attempts to become part of the other children's activities were not prioritized. It could be argued that my engagement with Oscar in various situations across time and places became a pivotal basis for understanding the situation that he was participating in. Within the framework of psychology from the standpoint of the subject, Holzkamp (2013b) suggested the concept "subjective reasons" for actions as a key concept for analyzing human beings' ways of acting as reasoned in their living conditions, hence the concept involves basic assumptions about human subjectivity.

While conducting empirical research with preverbal children like Oscar, descriptions of the children's bodily and emotional activities dominated my written records. In the above excerpt, Oscar did not appear interested in eating, which was what the professionals understood to be the problem. His actions instead showed that he seemed to be interested in how he could become part of the surrounding social activities. From this perspective, how can Oscar's participation in the situation be analyzed in terms of reasons for action?

In my attempt to analyze the situation, I found that prevailing conceptualizations of subjectivity within the framework of psychology from the standpoint of the subject were

inadequate due to an emphasis on conversation, notwithstanding the importance of activity in the theoretical tradition of the framework. Consequently, in the following, I undertake an in-depth examination of theoretical inadequacies and conceptual refinements useful for exploring preverbal children's subjectivity based on their various bodily activities.

Limitations embedded in key concepts, i.e., the language problem

The main argument as to why theoretical elaborations on the concept of subjective reasons for action are important is that the concept is a valuable resource in the effort to go beyond decontextualized knowledge about children's wellbeing. Within the tradition of psychology from the standpoint of the subject, however, communication is primarily presented as verbal; hence, other kinds of bodily activities and non-verbal communication are not given much attention (Teo, 2016), which is why the prevailing conceptualization of subjective reasons for action is inadequate for including very young children in research. For example, Holzkamp (2013b) argued that a conversation is the premise for getting to know anything about another person's reasons and states that, "it has to be emphasized that without communicating with the partner I will learn absolutely nothing about her/his reasons. ... I will have to ask her/him and s/he will have to be willing to answer me" (p. 287). He continues, "We are presupposing that verbal communication between human beings always and necessarily occurs in terms of premises, interest-related ('good') reasons, intentions to act and actions" (p. 289). Non-verbal activities are not given enough attention, making it necessary to consider how to support intersubjective understandings in other modalities besides language.

One presupposition is that people "must have had 'good' reasons for realizing just that option chosen and no other" (Holzkamp, 2013b, p. 285). This assumption can give the impression that having reasons for an action is the same as every person being rational, but, as Holzkamp (2013b) emphasized, this is not the case as, "the formula 'reasonably' has nothing to do with 'reason' in some generalized philosophical sense" (p. 287). However, the notion subjective reasons for action might connote a rational process. As Teo (2016) argued, the concept of subjective reasons for action "is focused on the mind" (p. 115).

Another issue that is not entirely clear in the notion subjective reasons for action is that outlining or definitively identifying the reasons behind someone's actions is not always possible because subjective reasons for actions are articulated and change in relation to the subject's ongoing participation in situated social practices. Accordingly, subjective reasons for action are often complex and messy, developing in common processes and interactions with co-participants in their shared everyday lives, rather than being fixed and explainable. The point, then, is not to empirically identify what the person's exact reasons are in this or that context, but rather, to draw attention to the fact that subjects act with reason in relation to their life conditions (as opposed to being determined by them). Thus, it is necessary to establish basic assumptions about the human-world relationship that allow a closer exploration of how the world is experienced and lived in everyday life and how people's actions are grounded in a given everyday life based on a given set of premises. In this way, the concept of subjective reasons for action draws

attention to the fact that very young children have reasons for their actions, even though they cannot verbalize them, which consequently draws attention to the importance of continuous co-exploration of these reasons.

As a result of the conceptual shortcomings listed above, my main focus in the rest of this section on limitations embedded in key concepts is to expand the analytical basis for studying infants and toddlers by centering on how they act in situations as a link between subject and world. This approach makes it possible to transcend the confining definition of subjective reasons for action as being primarily verbally accessible. Sommer, Samuelsson, and Hundeide (2010) stated that children's intentions

can be observed through frequently occurring social practices – realized through action as endeavors. ... An intention is not immediately visible to an observer, as it is an inner, psychological urge – a purpose, a goal. In social practice, however, intentions are made visible as purposes in social interactions, i.e. as endeavors. (p. 62)

These accounts of intentions are similar to reasons for action. Meanwhile, intentions, Sommer et al. (2010) asserted, are an “inner, psychological, urge” and they become visible as “intentional acts as ‘purposeful activities’ ... materialized in behavior” (p. 74). I agree that through children's actions, their endeavors become understandable for others taking part in the concrete situation. We can understand each other through an exploration of the situation's specific circumstances. At this point, reasons and intentions seem to share some features. Sommer et al. (2010) emphasized, however, that through the child's intentional act, the researcher can gain insight into the child's inner world. This is different from the concept of reasons for action, which sheds light on the child in the world. As a result, the purpose of exploring children's reasoned actions is not to gain access to something internal, as the child's actions are not understood inwards, but rather to determine what connects the child to the world.

First-person perspective. In the analytical framework of psychology from the standpoint of the subject, a basic assumption is that, “including subjectivity necessarily engages the first-person perspective” (Schraube, 2013, p. 13) and further, “If we look at human subjectivity more closely, it becomes apparent that its psychological dimensions, such as experience, emotionality, thought and action, are present in a specific form of existence – the first-person mode” (Schraube, 2013, p. 20).

A study by Elwick et al. (2014b) questioned whether “infants do or do not possess well-worked out ‘perspectives’ on their experiences” (p. 204) but did not specifically define what “well-worked out ‘perspectives’” meant, other than its implying a “well-worked out ‘view’ that it would take more than a yawn to articulate” (p. 204). As a result, the authors presented an understanding of the first-person perspective as something that requires other kinds of communication than infants and toddlers are capable of. In accordance with Schraube (2013), I argue that subjectivity engages the first-person perspective on one's participation in the world in the form of a social self-understanding in relation to this participation. Consequently, it does not make sense to talk about subjectivity without acknowledging that everyone in the world participates in the world from his or her subjective standpoint and hence has a first-person perspective, though it is not always articulated.

Schraube (2013) used the term “ontological symmetry in human relations” (p. 25) to emphasize the subject–subject relationship between the researcher and the co-researchers. Further, Schraube argued that human beings need one another’s insight into a given problem in order to develop social self-understanding and expand possibilities for action. Schraube suggested the term “epistemic asymmetry” (p. 25) in order to emphasize the fact that only I, from my first-person perspective, can know what I think, feel, experience, and so forth. Accordingly, this is also the case for the other person I interact with and involves a “symmetrical reciprocity between first-person perspectives” (Schraube, 2013, p. 25). Hence, the “other” remains the “other,” but not in an alienating way, since our lives are connected through our engagement in a shared world. For this reason, “the other” is “the other” in the sense of living different but entangled lives.

My goal is not to determine what other people—including infants—are experiencing or to claim to have developed an epistemological solution capable of knowing how to interpret with certainty infants’ non-verbal activities. This is implicit in the epistemic asymmetry. Through shared social practice, however, a person’s perspective is connected to other participants’ perspectives. Through a shared life anchored in social practice structures, people have the possibility to engage in the shared exploration of each other’s subjective reasons for action. However, subjective reasons for action are complex and alternating, which is why people develop their reasons by interacting with the world and the other people in it—for instance, through the process of collaborative research. The relevance of this for children, and me as a researcher, is that, through a joint exploration of children’s subjectivity, it becomes possible to attain a greater understanding of oneself in relation to the world and to develop social self-understanding (Holzkamp, 2013b). Holzkamp termed the process of gaining knowledge about subjective reasons for action as “intersubjective understanding” (2013b, p. 287), which will be looked at more closely in the next section.

Multimodalities. The mode of intersubjective understanding calls for a broader understanding of communication, including movements, gestures, and posture as a part of a person’s activities. The field of phenomenology of embodiment takes this approach, arguing that the body is “the visible forms of our intentions” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 15). Holzkamp’s conceptual work on the first-person perspective is profoundly inspired by phenomenology and Schraube has developed this approach further by systematically analyzing its foundations based on, for example, Husserl (1913/2001), Merleau-Ponty (1964), Searle (2002), and Zahavi and Overgaard (2013).

A basic assumption in the phenomenology of embodiment is that people constantly express themselves, thereby making themselves understandable to others (Gallagher, 2005). When co-participants very often succeed in understanding one another, it is a result of the fact that they share intersubjective situations, and experiencing these situations provides access to understanding each other’s intentions. Gallagher (2005) stated,

the basic claim that I will defend is that in most intersubjective situations we have a direct understanding of another person’s intentions because their intentions are explicitly expressed in their embodied actions, and mirrored in our own capabilities for action. (p. 224)

According to phenomenology of embodiment, sharing social situations with other human beings makes it possible to access the intentions of others (Csordas, 2008). This can, on the one hand, seem obvious since human beings live together in the same world, allowing us to imagine how others experience given situations. Hence, first-person perspectives are subjective and personal, but at the same time, connected through our shared conditions and premises for action (Schraube & Osterkamp, 2013). On the other hand, I argue that participating in a shared practice has various meanings to different participants, which is why we have diverse perspectives on the shared practices that we participate in. For instance, the two older girls had other possibilities for taking part in social activities compared to Oscar, even though they were participating in the same situation. The situation entailed distinct positions for them to take part from, and thus, also different possibilities for contributing to changing and developing the shared activity. The risk of blurring the differences by concluding that others experience the same as oneself is that we neglect to explore how shared conditions have assorted personal meanings and become premises and reasons for acting in different ways. A significant difference between the phenomenology of embodiment and the tradition of psychology from the standpoint of the subject seems to be that the focus of the former is mainly on people's experiences and philosophical theorizing on experiential structures, whereas the latter focuses on how and why they act in a specific social (societal) context. However, body phenomenology contributes importantly with expanded modalities for communicating with regard to intersubjective understanding. Insisting on not separating emotions and subjective experiences from social situation (i.e., embedded in historically and societally developed social practices) led me to look more carefully at the concepts within the framework of psychology from the standpoint of the subject.

The necessity of including the body when exploring subjectivity. Notwithstanding the fact that Holzkamp (2013b) described other feasible sources besides voiced reasons, stating that reasons for action “are not to be confined to voiced reasons for action, but have to view the entirety and interrelatedness of the externalized aspects of these reasons” (p. 293), he did not specify how the term “externalized aspects of reasons” (p. 293) can be concretized. In this section, I will discuss in more detail how the concept of subjective reasons for action can be expanded by considering the notion of *Befindlichkeit*² (Osterkamp-Holzkamp, 1991) as a key concept.

Osterkamp-Holzkamp (1991) defined *Befindlichkeit* as a situated emotional evaluation of how one feels in relation to the concrete situation one is participating in, stating, “emotions function as subjective evaluations of environmental possibilities for acting as they are apprehended cognitively” (p. 103). She also pointed out that an emotional reaction, “generally [is] a more or less diffuse feeling of ‘ease’ or ‘unease’ evoked by the complex situation” (1991, p. 105).

Osterkamp-Holzkamp (1991) translated the original German notion of *Befindlichkeit* into English as “subjective situation,” going on to extend this translation to “the subjective quality of our existential orientation” in Schraube and Osterkamp (2013, p. 20) in order to underline agency. Thus, the existential orientation is a situated emotional

evaluation of how one feels in relation to the concrete situation one is participating in. I agree on the emphasis and importance of linking emotions to agency in order to understand (children's) subjectivity. Schraube and Osterkamp (2013) described agency as "the human capacity to gain, in cooperation with others, control over each individual's own life conditions" (p. 20). This process of striving to gain control is a process of orientation that is an existential way of being in the world. Schraube and Osterkamp elaborated on the subjective quality of this orientation process as the "subjective aspect of the type and degree of her/his agency—that is, opportunities to act and constraints on those opportunities" (2013, p. 20). Hence, agency is more than a capacity to consciously relate to oneself, others, and the world; agency involves the ability to change the world. According to Osterkamp-Holzkamp (1991), emotions help people evaluate and take stock of the situations they are in. In the following, I will account for why the concept of *Befindlichkeit* emphasizes agency as a profound part of subjectivity, making it the best concept currently available when the aim is to include children as subjects in their own lives. I do not find that the notion of the subjective quality of our existential orientation sufficiently emphasizes that it is an immediate, pre-reflective way of orientating oneself in social situations. This caused me to wonder how this fruitful concept could be translated into English without losing the emphasis on the quality of the subject's emotions and the concrete situation in which those emotions emerged.

If Bourdieu's (2000) concept of *habitus* is considered, the challenge of focusing on emotions and the body and everyday life apparently can be overcome, since *habitus* turns attention towards the practical comprehension of our world as something else besides our intellectual comprehension of the world. Meanwhile, the structural is emphasized at the expense of developing concepts capable of grasping the dynamic aspect in which children, by acting, contribute to the changing and creation of their conditions. Shotter (2011) called for a realm of inquiry capable of finding (or sensing) "a best way of acting in the moment in the midst of a complex but unique situation" (p. 455). Shotter also argued that human beings have what he terms, "orientational understanding" (p. 440), which is "a much more immediate and unreflective, bodily way of being related to our surroundings than the ways that become conspicuous to us in our more cognitive reflections, a way of relating or orienting toward our surroundings" (p. 439).

This orientational understanding, according to Shotter (2011), enables human beings to know "what to do next" (p. 440) in a situation. In this way, the term orientational understanding is very similar to the concept of *Befindlichkeit*. Shotter (2011) concluded that there is a need for "bodily enacted preparing (not cognitive, planning) activities" (p. 454) in order to engage in a new realm of inquiry that can give professionals working with people a "sense of where we are now—that is, of the context we are in and what it requires of us—in order to get ourselves ready for what we might do next within the future" (p. 454). In this way, Shotter is on the same page when it comes to linking the action possibilities in a concrete situation and embodied, emotional sensing as action guiding. Inspired by Shotter, I suggest embodied orientation as a more adequate translation of *Befindlichkeit* than subjective situation. Orientating, according to Osterkamp-Holzkamp (1991), is substantial in relation to sustaining one's possibilities for action; hence, the process of orientating is the nonverbal link between the acting subject and the situation.

Implications of conceptual expansions

In this last section, I will discuss the implications of the suggested conceptual expansions. In the discussion, I will center on how embodied orientation contributes to understanding (a) the epistemological consequences in terms of researcher subjectivity and (b) how the conceptual expansions contribute to analyzing children's situated contribution to the social situations they are part of and, most importantly, how this contributes to theorizing child subjectivity.

Researcher subjectivity. As argued, *Befindlichkeit*, or embodied orientation, reminds us to include the body and emotions as part of reasoned actions situated in concrete contexts. Though a fruitful concept, *Befindlichkeit* has not been employed to any great extent as a key concept within the framework of psychology from the standpoint of the subject. However, I contend that embodied orientation provides an important contribution to the conceptual analytical work of the first-person perspective and subjective reasons for action by systematically including a greater diversity of modalities to the processes of co-researching with the child in the world, and by doing so, considering multiple modalities valuable in contributing to the creation of knowledge. By including my own embodied orientation as a researcher when orientating in the research process across contexts and over time, my starting point was to engage in a shared exploration of the situations children acted in.

The following extract from my field notes describes an observation of Oscar and his mother in their home late in the afternoon and serves to demonstrate why embodied orientation yields a fruitful analysis. Oscar's mother had recently picked Oscar and me up from the daycare center. The three of us are now in the kitchen and I am sitting on the floor close to Oscar:

Oscar's mother is anxious to get dinner ready before Oscar is too tired to eat anything. Oscar is sitting on the floor crying. Oscar's mother puts him in a highchair so she can peel the potatoes. Oscar squirms and cries again. Soon the crying turns into screaming while Oscar hurls himself to one side of the chair. The mother sighs, leaves the potatoes and asks Oscar if he wants to help her with some laundry. Oscar immediately stops screaming as his mother lifts him out of the chair. As we walk to the bathroom he laughs delightedly to his mother and me.

Oscar's crying made me become aware that he did not feel at ease. I looked at how he moved his body in an attempt to get out of the highchair. The concept of embodied orientation illuminates the analytical link between Oscar's bodily and emotional activities and his possibilities for orientating in the situation. When seated in the highchair, it is obvious how Oscar could neither move around nor take part in what his mother was doing in the kitchen. Watching how he squirmed and cried is a starting point for me and his mother in the exploration of what Oscar wants and what various situations mean to him. In a later interview, his mother told me that Oscar usually liked to sit in the chair while she prepared dinner but sometimes, like that day, she could tell that he did not want to sit there based on how he was squirming and crying. She also explained that Oscar liked to help her with the laundry. She knew this based on their shared conduct of everyday life. Oscar's bodily activity (crying) entailed a social meaning, inducing his mother to find out why he was

crying and how to relieve his discomfort. This did not mean that crying was Oscar's reason. However, his action, i.e., the crying, was an occasion for shared exploration of the link between Oscar and the situation he participated in. Thus, through the exploration, Oscar also learned about the situation, its limitations, and new possibilities for action. Through our own embodied orientation, Oscar's mother and I were able to get an idea of what Oscar was trying to accomplish, and his mother tried to find different solutions jointly with Oscar. His crying was explored as an indicator of how he understood himself in the situation and was not interpreted as a sign of problems categorized in abstract ways (as the apparent eating problem was in the daycare). Oscar's crying caused his mother to lift him up out of the highchair and put him down on the floor. Hence, Oscar co-created and changed his own (and his mother's and the researcher's) subjective possibilities for action in the concrete situation by contributing to the intersubjective understanding between the involved participants, including me as a researcher.

Elwick et al. (2014a), drawing on the theoretical framework of Merleau-Ponty, propose that researchers "attend to their own embodied responses to infants during the research encounter" (p. 873). I would assert that, by including a concept of emotions, the most interesting aspect is not the researcher's feelings or embodied responses as such, but rather how the researcher's feelings and broader experiences can serve as a starting point for identifying which issues to pursue, where to go, and what to look for in the empirical data (Kousholt, 2016), i.e., how to orient one's emotions as a researcher. In this understanding, emotions are not isolated, inner processes but part of the intersubjective processes of participating in a social life together with other co-participants, all of whom contribute to the development of the shared life conditions. Consequently, emotions are an important requisition for intersubjective exploration and understanding acting as indicators of how people orient and understand themselves when situated in the conduct of everyday life. This implies that the subjectivity of the researcher and his or her embodied orientation is a pivotal part of such intersubjective cooperation on learning about problematics of shared interest. Moreover, it implies that the subjectivity of the co-researcher and the researcher is interrelated. This argument is specifically substantiated through the empirical studies of preverbal children like Oscar because looking at bodily activities and trying to understand the situation through one's own embodied orientation comprises the intersubjective understanding. Based on this specific study of preverbal children's ways of embodying acting and orientating in the world, it is possible to include the researcher's embodied orientation as pivotal, also in studies of subjectivity in general, including studies of adults. In continuation of this, I would argue that the study of preverbal children helps in transcending differences epistemologically between children and adults as co-researchers. Thus, embodied orientation invites expanding modalities in studies across age thresholds.

Child subjectivity. Based on the above glimpse of Oscar's everyday life, the suggested theoretical refinements involve conceptualizing child subjectivity as embodied, and at the same time, focusing on the agency of the acting subject in the world. This implicates child subjectivity as embodied acting striving to gain control over the life conditions situated in the profoundly social processes of conducting an everyday life together with other co-participants. Processes of embodied orientating hence constitute the non-verbal

link between the subject and the situation, and between the subjective and objective aspects of the world. Including conceptualization of bodily and emotional activities in studies of the reasoned acting subject expands the modalities and sources for intersubjective understanding, inviting a discussion of concrete epistemological and methodological consequences in designing studies that examine children's subjectivity as the embodied and pre-reflective ways of co-creating and changing the world.

As accounted for above, engaging with Oscar and his emotions, I, as a researcher, along with Oscar's mother, through our own embodied orientation, tried to understand what was at stake for Oscar in the situation. The mother understood the crying as Oscar's immediate evaluation of the possibilities and restrictions the situation entailed; in this way, Oscar was understood as a subject whose actions were reasoned in the concrete situation. The actions were not expressed verbally but as an embodied acting and orientation that others could try to relate to through their own embodied orientation. Elwick et al. (2014b) stressed that it is pivotal to approach infants as "others," in order to keep in mind that they are unknowable for researchers. They further stressed research as an "ethical rather than epistemological practice" (p. 208). But how can it only be an ethical practice and not also a theoretical and epistemological one? I agree that working with infants, regardless of the techniques and methodologies applied, can never result in knowing, with certainty, what infants (or any other person) experience, and that co-researchers remain "others," but others whose subjectivity can be explored through intersubjective understanding. Notwithstanding, I argue that the researcher needs to engage in epistemological and theoretical work in a continuous effort to develop this intersubjective understanding. Hence, working with the question solely as an ethical issue is not enough, since the researcher inevitably becomes involved in the child's life and is thereby already contributing to the change and creation of the current as well as future life conditions of the child. This is an ethical as well as a methodological issue. Research is, therefore, very much a political matter since all participants are involved in the creation and changing of their own and other's action possibilities and self-understanding. Where does this lead to regarding understanding the nature of child subjectivity?

I argue that this leads to epistemological as well as conceptual consequences. The child feels and experiences the world subjectively in first-person mode and so does the researcher. Emotions emerge and are felt by someone in concrete situations. Given these emotions, we can learn about the world from our perspective. However, to act in the world, we need to cooperate with co-participants and learn about how they perceive the shared situation from their perspectives. In this regard, emotions are not considered a private phenomenon. Psychological processes are mediated by the world and by other people, and the first-person perspective transcends the dualistic division of world and person, which also implies a radical, epistemological change of research perspective. Taking this type of "I" and "we" standpoint, in accordance with the "epistemic asymmetry" (Schraube, 2013, p. 25) as the point of departure for exploring (through subjective experiences) what life situations mean for different subjects, contributes to transcending subjectivity as determined by external stimuli. The person-world relationship is not about how the world affects the child but about how the child collaborates with co-participants to gain control over shared life conditions. Consequently, child subjectivity involves processes of embodied acting towards a subjectively better world.

As suggested by the phenomenology of embodiment, subjectivity is immediately accessible for others through the body. This implies that subjectivity presupposes intersubjectivity. Further, I would argue, subjectivity changes and develops through (embodied) participation in social practice, which is why subjectivity continually must be explored through processes of intersubjective understanding. For this reason, I argue that including embodied orientation means that all participants can be taken more seriously as acting subjects, exploring (new) possibilities for action.

The concept of subjectivity needs to grasp the dialectical process of changing the life situation and, at the same time, of changing one's social self-understanding. This way of understanding subjectivity allows for a broader understanding of the infant as a person in the world, instead of focusing on isolated functions in the child from a third-person perspective. No matter how detailed various functions are described, this cannot replace an understanding of the acting child in the world, since the child's acting provides an idea of how the child perceives his or her action possibilities. Mere descriptions of functions do not grasp how the child creates meaning in concrete situations, where not only the child acts, but numerous others do as well (Hviid, 2008). I argue that including the embodied acting and orientating as part of inquiries on subjectivity for all human beings—regardless of age—can contribute to strengthening the framework of psychology from the standpoint of the subject, making it even more relevant and sustainable for engaging all kinds of co-researchers in future collaborative exploration.

Methodological implications

Tolman (2009) stated that,

problems of subjectivity rarely, if ever, are confined to the subject; they exist in the relations of the subject to other subjects and the world; they involve understandings of the objective premises for action and the reasons of others for their actions. (p. 158)

Based on Tolman, it is possible to point at some of the methodological implications of including embodied orientation in understanding subjectivity by challenging (a) terms such as resilience and vulnerability as related to individual traits or innate characteristics and (b) the understanding of conditions as determinants. Individual subjects (and the problems they experience) must instead be understood as interrelated with their social and material life conditions.

The researcher and the children involved in the research shared experiences and situations in their everyday lives, and through the interrelated conduct of our everyday lives, we could relate to the embodied orientation of each other and use the shared situation as a starting point for posing questions, not as a means to ascertain what children feel or experience but rather as a reminder of not knowing in advance, and as an invitation, to collaborative exploration. As a result, *Befindlichkeit*, or embodied orientation, reminds us to explore children's activities and wellbeing, or the lack thereof, as related to concrete social (societal) situations, and to jointly explore, with the child, how to change situations to enhance the possibilities for action for all participants.

The current political focus in Western societies on how to prevent risk in early childhood (Burman, 2016) manifests itself in preventive and compensatory intervention programs based on research documenting the impact of risk factors (Love et al., 2002) and protective factors (Luthar et al., 2000; Rutter, 2000). This is why, particularly in the field of marginalization and inclusion, there is much to gain from employing theoretical frameworks and concepts capable of comprehending children's subjectivity as intentional subjects who always already co-produce their life conditions. Broadening the diversifying forms of communication gives rise to new possibilities for including young children as active subjects in their own lives, in research and in professional practice aimed at enhancing children's possibilities in life, but also in early preventive interventions and in other everyday life contexts where children and professionals interact.

Even though the concept of embodied orientation does not offer an unambiguous assessment of what situations mean to people and why they act as they do, it does provide an incentive to further engage children, regardless of their age, in a shared exploration of their concrete possibilities in everyday life. Embodied orientation offers analytical possibilities for situating embodied ways of acting in the conduct of everyday life, contributing not only to theoretical development but to understanding how theorizing child subjectivity is interrelated with epistemological, methodological, and political consequences.

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Notes

1. Circumstances are related to, for example, the parents being young and not having a family network, maternal postpartum depression, unemployment, parents' personal life story of experiencing neglect as children.
2. Despite the fact that Osterkamp-Holzkamp (1991) never refers to Heidegger's work, their conceptualizations of *Befindlichkeit* share numerous similarities. A significant distinction is that Heidegger mainly focuses on the existential experiences related to being in the world, whereas Osterkamp-Holzkamp focuses on emotions as related to the possibilities for acting in the world.

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Author biography

Pernille Juhl, PhD, is associate professor in the research programme Social Psychology of Everyday Life, Department of People & Technology, Roskilde University. Her research fields are social psychology and developmental psychology focusing on children's everyday lives in and across families, day-care (0–6 years), and other everyday life contexts. Another research interest is marginalized children and families and professional practices in relation to organizing social interventions. Dr Juhl's work is theoretically anchored in social practice theory and Danish–German critical psychology.