



# Subjectivity and discourse: Complementary topics for a critical psychology

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**Fernando L González Rey**

University Center of Brasília/University of Brasília, Brazil

## Abstract

This paper aims to discuss the rejection of subjectivity by psychologists dominantly oriented towards concepts like discourse and deconstruction, as well as communicative and relational activities. The recognition of the symbolic character of human phenomena by psychology occurred relatively late in relation to philosophy, linguistics and anthropology. Nonetheless, this entrance was so radical that it led psychologists to deny most of the concepts that have traditionally been used by psychology. This paper departs from theoretical traditions that advanced a step further in the comprehension of the human psyche as a cultural-historically engendered phenomenon. On this basis, a new definition of subjectivity is advanced as a phenomenon that emerges as a result of the symbolical forms which are socially and historically situated, from which concepts like discourse, deconstruction and dialogical-communicative systems also appeared. Subjectivity, as treated in this paper, is oriented toward specifying human processes that are not exhausted in these concepts, being complementary to them in a broader and complex approach to the study of human realities.

## Keywords

Subjectivity, subjective senses, subjective configurations, social subjectivity, social symbolic productions, discourse

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## Corresponding author:

Fernando L González Rey, Professor at the University Center of Brasília/University of Brasília, SEP, 707/907, Via W5 Norte – Asa Norte, Brazil.

Email: [gonzalez\\_rey49@hotmail.com](mailto:gonzalez_rey49@hotmail.com)

## **Introduction**

I aim in this paper to discuss how the concept of subjectivity within a cultural-historical approach, far from being opposed to the concept of discourse, is complementary to it for advancing a new theoretical system capable of generating new knowledge and practices related to specific human phenomena, whether social or individual. Subjectivity is intermingled with discourse, forming a new system, the epicenter of which is the symbolic forms, processes and realities that characterize human existence as such. The human cultural world is formed and developed through symbolical realities and processes, interrelated by a cosmos of symbolical constructions, discourses, social representations, as the universe of concepts, myths and prejudices that characterize human existence. On the basis of this, a discursive psychology emerged (Harre, 1995; Gergen, 1985; Parker, 2015; Parker & Shotter, 1990; Shotter, 1995, among others), making discourse the absolute ontological definition of human phenomena.

Nonetheless, the Anglo-Saxon discursive tradition to some extent considered discourse basically in linguistic terms, being influenced in a certain way by the cognitive traditions of American psychology. As Harre stated: "The second cognitive revolution is nothing other than the advent of discursive psychology!" (Harre, 1995, p. 144). This pioneering statement was a precursor of the path taken by the movement, making emotions, imagination and fantasy mere epiphenomena of dominant discourses and detaching from individuals the capacity for agency and creativity.

The definition of subjectivity discussed in this paper departs from the need to integrate symbolical processes and emotions as dynamic units, which characterize the ontological definition of subjectivity as a qualitative level of human phenomena, both social and individual. Subjectivity is a specific quality of human phenomena within culture, and its functioning involves individual and social instances as agents who have active, generative and creative character. The comprehension of human realities as cultural made symbolical processes the basis on which a new conception of subjectivity can be proposed. Nonetheless, subjectivity does not reduce to discourse nor to language; it always involves emotions, which are based on the imaginary character of subjective processes. Subjectivity functions on the basis of subjective senses and subjective configuration, which are not conducted by intellectual meanings and constructions. A black person, historically discriminated against by society, may be made to feel offended by a completely inoffensive detail within a communicative act. At the same time, another person of the same race can perceive a deliberate act of racism as a challenge to be coped with from a position of self-conviction and resolution.

Their unity with symbolical processes emerges within the networks of social symbolical constructions as a new ontological definition of human phenomena, inseparable from discourse, but having a different quality. Meanwhile, discourses are living systems of symbolical constructions and processes, which taken together, define social realities as they are organized in human communicative activities.

Subjectivity is the quality of human phenomena that allows individual and social instances to generate specific subjective senses and configurations within those human communicative activities. In such processes, singular individual and social alternatives can emerge within the shared social symbolic constructions.

All human alternatives facing dominant institutional orders, such as political regimes, and other normative systems like those that can be developed inside any human institution require strong individual and collective motivations capable of sustaining projects and avenues, essentially different to the dominant normative social order. Motivation, as it has been treated in psychology, appears as specific entities or functions that drive behaviors and actions that correspond to them by their content (Elkonin, 1971; McClelland, 1987; Maslow, 1954; Murray, 1938; Leontiev, 1975). Nonetheless, motivation, rather than being a punctual function, is one of the distinctive characteristics of subjectivity as a system. Motivation can never be reduced to one specific motive; it always implies complex subjective configurations, which appear as a “microcosm” of social and individual life. In such a condition, motivation is always generated by social and individual agents within the context of their lives, a topic that will be discussed in the second part of this paper. Nor do discourse, representation nor any symbolical social construction in themselves carry any motivational character. Motivation always results from the generative subjective production of individual and groups within those social symbolical constructions (González Rey, 2014).

The advancements of some current tendencies in the study of subjectivity have embraced the role of culture and social relations as closely intermingled in the genesis and development of subjectivity. Subjectivity is no longer understood as a system of static intra-psychical and universal entities. It is conceived in movement but, at the same time, has a relative stability defined by its resistance throughout living experiences (Elliot, 1992; Frosh, 2002, 2010; González Rey, 1997, 2002, 2005, 2007, 2014, 2015).

### **Subjectivity and the need for a more inclusive place for discourse within a cultural-historical psychology**

Cultural-historical psychology firstly appeared in those trends of Soviet psychology that highlighted the cultural, social and historical genesis of individual psychological phenomena. Nevertheless, most Soviet and Russian psychologists, as well as Western authors, have used the term only to define Vygotsky's work between 1927 and 1931, defined as his instrumental period (González Rey, 2011; Leontiev, 1984, 1992; 2015; Yasnitsky, 2009, 2012; Zavershneva, 2010, 2016). From my point of view, it is important to extend such a definition to other trends in Soviet psychology. In doing so, the study of these authors' relations would be possible, beyond the mere opposition between them, as historically presented by the official versions of the history of Soviet psychology. Actually, they complemented each other in many ways (González Rey, 2014, 2017).

Despite their cultural, social and historical comprehension of the genesis and development of human psychology, Soviet psychologists shared a very narrow comprehension of culture and social environment. Social environment was understood as immediate external influences that come from the outside, keeping the dichotomy between external and internal operations. At the same time, culture mainly referred to language, mainly by the use of signs as mediators of the higher psychological in Vygotsky (Zinchenko, 1993). Signs were used by Vygotsky in an instrumental sense with no implication for the communicative act. The other was taken as support for the action rather than as a communicative partner. A wider representation of symbolical realities has not been achieved, symbolical realities such as institutions, social constructions like gender, race, social class, pathologies and others, organized as social discourses that include a system of belief, moral codes and different types of institutionalized orders. Furthermore, these social symbolical constructions, in their intermingled relations with politics, education, health systems, religions, science and other institutionalized forms of social life, have mostly been overlooked by the cultural-historical approach.

It is true that cultural-historical psychology has been mainly an individual psychology up until the present day. However, human actions do not emerge as a direct consequence or reflection of social networks' facts and processes within which human activities take place, because human actions are not merely symbolical phenomena. They are subjectively configured actions that appear as individual and social subjective productions. Once emotions acquire a symbolical character, a new kind of human process emerges; the subjective one.

Our proposal on subjectivity, which has been developed in detail elsewhere (González Rey, 2002, 2005, 2015, 2015, 2016a, 2017), is ontologically defined by units that integrate emotions and symbolic processes as new qualitative kinds of processes. Through this integration, emotions acquire a generative capacity, as they are beyond the intentions and control of individuals and groups in their current actions.

These symbolic-emotional units are conceptualized as subjective senses. Subjective senses are articulated to each other in endless unfolding chains through which human experiences are subjectively lived, forming in their development the subjective configurations. Subjective configurations are dynamic systems capable of generating subjective senses closely related to each other, through which human behavior is subjectively experienced. Therefore, for example, the subjective configuration of the learning process in one student generates, in a constant interweaving movement, subjective senses related to physical appearance, expressed as embarrassment for being small, which attached together with other senses generated in family life, where an authoritarian father made him constantly feel embarrassed in relation to his young brother, generating such a process that subjectively interferes with his capacity for knowledge, becoming an important subjective process of his learning difficulties.

Subjectivity appears as a new quality of human processes and realities, whether social or individual. From this theoretical definition, subjectivity is a system that,

instead of being organized around some static principles or entities, is formed by configurations that are closely interrelated with one another, in which social and individual subjectivities are continuously interwoven with each other. All social symbolical productions appear at the subjective level through the constant intertwining movement between subjective senses and subjective configurations.

Any human condition, such as race, age, illness, is experienced by the subjective senses that result from how those social constructions have been lived through individual life histories and how those experiences appear as subjective senses associated with a current experience. Therefore, for example, one young woman, 27 years old, who takes part in our line of research related to how cancer is subjectively configured, never emerged as victim in her stories and in the way she lives her daily life. It is not the dominant social discourses about, and representations of, cancer that define her experience of illness, but a subjective configuration formed from subjective senses that allow her to live her illness as an experience of life. Rather than internalization, this case expresses a subjective production; the way in which she was loved during her life, her active position as an athlete, her interest in reading, her philosophy of life and death were all sources of subjective senses which configured the way she has experienced her cancer

Subjectivity is always in process through individual and social agents, whose actions and decisions are sources of new subjective senses, through which new windows are opened on ongoing experiences. However, subjective configurations in their movement are always beyond the conscious representations of social and individual actors. The constellation of social facts, processes and realities, within which social and individual agents are engaged in communicative networks, are experienced through subjective senses that emerge from the subjective configurations of those processes in both individuals and social scenarios. Subjective configurations are always singular subjective productions, and they can only be constructed through a constructive–interpretative methodology (González Rey, 2005, 2011; González Rey & Mitjans, 2016, 2017).

The school and its different dynamics, including learning processes, are singularly and subjectively configured in each student, as is any individual subjective process within social institutions. The microcosm of the lives of students emerges through many different subjective senses within school activities. Race, gender, physical characteristics, social status and many other social symbolical constructions, within which students have generated their own subjective configurations in different areas of their lives, appear through different subjective senses. Such subjective senses become configured together with others that emerge from the ongoing school experiences, forming many different subjective configurations related to school and its activities. Some of those subjective configurations will facilitate a student's integration and results, while others will represent serious obstacles that must be overcome through educational work. This side of the educational process demands going beyond the immediate concrete behaviors of a student in order to construct the possible subjective configurations through which the student's

dominant behaviors and subjective states appear at school (González Rey, Mitjás, Rossato, & Goulart, 2017).

### **The constant interweaving of social and individual subjectivities**

Individuals and social institutions are not external to each other. Both of these systems have their own subjective configurations but, at the same time, constitute each other, not as a result of the external influence of one upon the other, but through the subjective senses generated by each of these configurations during a specific experience. Subjective senses simultaneously produced by social and individual configurations are generated within the same symbolical social realities, but they constitute a different type of phenomenon. Such production of subjective senses carries historical social experiences, not as a reproductive memory but as subjective constructions that have no one-way relationship with what happened objectively in a past experience. Therefore, for example, in Goulart's (2017) research, conducted in a mental health assistance center, the social configuration of the institutional order was organized around depersonalized practices, addressed toward a routine of procedures to be applied to patients, even to the administration of their "free time." Professionals shared these practices without adopting critical positions. Nonetheless, once the researcher advanced in his encounter with the professional leading to a new social climate, by which particular engagements over particular matters began to emerge, many different positions emerged making clear how being subordinated to one routine that became naturalized, the individual subjectivities were living those processes through important subjective differences. Once these differences engaged in different communicative sets and relations, the social configuration of the service began to change.

Subjective senses continuously renew themselves through newly emerging subjective configurations. It is precisely the generative capacity of subjective phenomena, whether social or individual, that explains their unpredictable paths. The quality of experience that characterizes these types of unpredictable singular human behaviors, feeling and imaginative creation is what defines subjectivity as a new ontological human reality.<sup>1</sup>

Subjectivity emerges from symbolical social networks that integrate multiple social instances. However, subjective sense and configuration are not constrained by the dominant symbolical forms and realities that are hegemonic within these social networks. Within these social symbolical networks, different subjective senses emerge from a wide range of individuals and social subjective configurations, defining the multiple ways in which these social symbolical realities are lived by different individual and social instances. Subjective senses are the link between the wide constellations of social and individual configurations. In this sense, the subjective character of social and individual phenomena allows the overcoming of the dichotomy between social facts and individual subjective processes. Social realities and individual psychological processes are replaced by a new type of

human reality, the subjective one, which integrates both into a new qualitative level.

Maybe Vygotsky was the first to propose psychological concepts oriented towards such integration: *perezhivanie* and sense. Nevertheless, as a result of the prevailing place of intellectual-emotional units given by Vygotsky, together with his narrow comprehension of symbolical realities, he did not advance toward a new representation of human mind. It was impossible for him to explain how symbolical social productions could be subjectively produced in so many ways.

The intermingled relationship between subjectivity and social symbolical productions, in such a way that neither is reduced to the other, allows a different psychology, in which discourse becomes an important part of the theory for the assembly of concepts that simultaneously advance new constructions relating to individuals and social realities. However, discourse in itself does not exhaust the wide range of complex phenomena engendered by human realities.

Discourses are experienced in different ways as a result of singular subjective productions, whether individual or social. Sometimes, learning difficulties are explained as a result of dominant discourses of learning failure, overlooking the complex network of different processes engaged in the learning failure, among which are the subjective ones. The same has occurred in studies oriented toward mental distress, maternity, violent behaviors, and so on. The emphasis on discourse has sometimes led to the omission of many other important processes involved in human processes. This is one of the strengths of the concept of subjective configuration: the integration of different subjective senses, coming from different lived experiences and times, as inseparable from the way in which any current situation is subjectively experienced. Such quality is an important theoretical device to replace standardized and universal notions, such as psychopathy, schizophrenia, depression and many others, due to the one-sided explanation of the genesis of the symptoms and behaviors on which these labels are usually based.

This is why subjectivity, as defined in this paper, should be considered as part of the critical theoretical repertory in relation to traditional psychology. It opens a space to explain individual human creations as inseparable from social life. The concepts assembled in this proposal on subjectivity are oriented toward transcending static, individual and non-variable concepts used to classify complex human phenomena within universal entities, such as those of traditional psychopathology. At the same time, this proposal on subjectivity goes in the opposite direction to the hypertrophy of discourse, deconstruction or communication as absolute concepts, highlighting a new psychology, as it was signaled by the following statement by Shotter at the height of his identification with the social constructivist position. He claimed:

A central methodological assumption of social constructionism is that – instead of the inner dynamics of the individual psyche (romanticism), or the already determined

characteristics of the external world (modernism) (Gergen, 1991; Taylor, 1989) – we must study the continuous everyday flow of contingent communicative activity occurring between people. (Shotter, 1995, p. 160)

Although our proposal has common points with Shotter's statement, unlike social constructionism, our focus transcends "contingent communicative activity," because we understand communication as a new space for subjectivation, inseparable from the way in which such contingent communicative activity is subjectively configured in its agents. The contingent process, in which individuals subjectively do not engage, is mostly deleted after the moment of its occurrence. Therefore, it is difficult to share such understanding of human processes which depart from a psychology that has an important strength in the historical character of human phenomena.

The "everyday flow of contingent communicative activity occurring between people" is not independent from the active positions taken by the subjects in communication, which means most communicative activities are not independent flows in themselves, but moments of emergence of complex subjective networks within which the active positions of the partners in communication and the communicative processes in themselves become inseparable. Both partners in communication and communication as such generate a system in process capable of integrating individuals and their communicative activity within a certain social subjective configuration.

Subjectivity from a cultural-historical standpoint cannot be identified with individual psyche, since very early in childhood human beings develop affective patterns in their communication with adults who become a source of subjective senses. In such a process, emotions turn into new units with symbolical processes, configuring the child's first subjective productions. We have explained elsewhere the differences between subjective development and psychological development (González Rey & Mitjans, 2017; González Rey et al., 2017).

Although subjective development is not completely independent of psychological development, it maintains a relative independence in relation to it. Subjectivity, as a new qualitative phenomenon, does not replace nor abolish human psyche, the processes of maturation and the proper cultural operation on which psychological development takes place. It advances, not as the basis of, but in parallel with, a subjective development that also begins very early and in relation to many psychological processes of development. However, this is mainly the case in communicative engagements with others, within which the first subjective inclinations, or configurations, begin to be organized as sources of subjective sense about the child's experience. Due to the omission of subjectivity as a phenomenon engendered within historical, social and cultural networks of experiences, discourse, deconstruction and contingent communicative activities replaced the concepts of traditional psychology, omitting the complex processes of individual and social subjectivity.



## Subjectivity, motivation and emotions

Emotions and motivation have been treated as two separated and secondary topics in most of the dominant theoretical accounts throughout the history of psychology. Psychoanalysis has focused on these topics, however, treating them in their genesis and development as dependent on universal somatic drives, or related to universal concepts, such as the lack and its relation to the mirror stage by Lacan and his followers. Even authors who do not follow orthodox psychoanalysis, giving an important place to culture, have treated emotions and motivation as associated with early sexual drives (Castoriadis, 1995; Elliot, 1992; Frosh, 2002, 2010, among others). Due to this reason, psychoanalytical authors have not advanced significantly towards a comprehension of motivation as inseparable from emotions and culture.

Vygotsky took an important step forward, integrating emotions with other psychological processes and functions at the beginning of his career. In “The Psychology of Art”, he wrote:

This means that, in essence, all our fantastic experiences take place on a completely real emotional basis. We see, therefore, that emotion and imagination are not two separate processes; on the contrary, they are the same process. We can regard a fantasy as the central expression of an emotional reaction. (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 210)

Such a relation between emotion, imagination and fantasy opens a new path to advance with respect to topics that, instead of being predictable, controllable, rational, intellectual and conscious, are unpredictable, uncontrollable, emotional and unconscious. A new theoretical domain seemed to be taking its first steps, transcending a psychology mostly dominated by a rational-intellectual reductionism. In more recent times, such reductionism was replaced by a discursive-relational reductionism that also rejects emotion, fantasy and imagination as metaphysical constructions to be referred to individual psyches.

The path taken by Vygotsky in the first period of his work, which was interrupted during his instrumental period, was retaken by him later in a work entitled “On the questions of the psychology of the creative artist”. In that work Vygotsky returned to some important topics developed by him in “The Psychology of Art”:

In the process of societal life . . . emotions come into a new relationship with the other elements of psychical life, new systems appear, new blending of psychical functions; units of a higher order emerge, governed by special laws, mutual dependencies, and special forms of connections and motion. (Vygotsky, 1984, p. 328)

The above generative capacity attributed to emotions, recognizing that they “come into a new relationship with the other elements of psychical life” in a process from which new systems appear, and units of a higher order emerge, has led to the consideration of emotions as self-generative processes. That generative character

of emotions allows them to be understood as inseparable from new psychological units and systems of a higher order. However, what does it mean to recognize emotions as having an active role in the emergence of systems of a higher order, among which they are also included? Unfortunately, this important idea remained unfinished in Vygotsky's work, as well as some other concepts during his last period, such as senses and *perezhivanie*. Each of these concepts could represent units of a higher order, as defined above.

The concepts of sense and *perezhivanie*, in fact, represented two units of a higher order in relation to concepts previously developed by him. However, the psychological nature of those integrative concepts was not clearly defined by Vygotsky, as discussed by me elsewhere (González Rey, 2009, 2011, 2014, 2016a, 2016b). In these works, I argued that these concepts were relevant to advancing on the topic of subjectivity on a new basis, because both of them opened up space for advancing in terms of self-generative psychological units, overcoming the social determinism that prevailed in Soviet psychology, which left no alternative for study other than its own explicit advance. Nevertheless, the advance in subjectivity required a new ontological definition capable of specifying its relevance for the study of a range of new phenomena, as is attempted above. The ontological vagueness of Vygotsky's final concept did not allow an advance on that possible option within Soviet psychology. Nonetheless, the rejection of psychology as an individualistic and conservative system (Gergen, 1985; Rose, 1990) led to a "theoretical wave" that not only ignored new paths for the study of individuals intermingled with social realities but also engulfed individuals and all the psychological concepts related to them.

Departing from a completely different position, this paper highlights a definition of subjectivity that integrates social realities and individuals through a new dimension of both: their subjective configurations. Such an integration implies considering emotions and motivations as the main criteria for distinguishing subjectivity from discourse, as phenomena of two different orders. While discourses are constituents of social orders, subjective senses and configurations are singular social and individual subjective productions that do not restrict themselves by any external orders. Social and individual changes have their main source in the tensions that will always result from the contradictions between social order and some individuals, groups and institutions.

The dichotomy between social orders and individual psychological processes demands advancement on a new level in the theoretical construction of both, a level that allows the explanation of the cultural, historical and social character of individuals and, at the same time, the individual active and generative character of the social networks they live within. By doing this, it is possible to maintain the relative autonomy of both levels and, at the same time, their reciprocal integration. Subjectivity represents an alternative for advancement in the comprehension of the functioning of this intermingled dialectic between social realities and individuals, because both levels share a subjective side. In social and individual subjective

configurations, both levels are represented through specific subjective senses which, being generated by each of them, carry subjective senses from the other.

Due to the emotional character of subjective senses and configurations, any psychical operation subjectively configured turns into a self-motivated operation. Motivation does not result from individual entities, whether from need, motives, sexual drives or other specific contents, whose function is to drive other psychological functions. Imagination and fantasy are subjective qualities associated with any psychological process or function that emerge within a subjective configured activity or relationship. Once psychological functions become subjective, their motivation is defined by the different subjective senses intermingled within the subjective configuration of their own function. Subjective functions and processes emerging as moments of subjective configured experiences express the system of subjectivity in those experiences. Subjectivity from this point of view does not represent a whole that flows over their particular expression; it exists through dynamic subjective configurations that embed its dominant network of subjective configurations, social and individual, in the ongoing agent's experiences.

Subjective senses are "snapshots" of symbolic emotional flashes that unfold in a chaotic movement, from which subjective configurations emerge as a self-regulative and self-generative organization of subjective senses. Subjective senses emerge in individuals and groups when they actively engage in their systems of communications and activities, which are closely interrelated to each other. Precisely as a result of such malleability, speed and dynamic character of subjective senses, their generative character is not apprehensible by conscious operations.

The aforementioned quality of the subjective senses is what makes possible their emergence carrying social symbolical constructions, such as gender, race, social status, religion and many others, as simultaneously configured at the present moment of one experience. Once symbolical social constructions appear as social or individual subjective senses, they do not follow the logic of discursive realities that organize the social order; as subjective senses they answer to the subjective configurations within which they emerge. The way in which one experience is felt and lived by individuals and groups does not depend on the "objectivized discourses" that form social realities; it will depend on the subjective resources that one individual, group or institution can generate while living a specific experience.

The main attribute of subjectivity as a human phenomenon is its generative character, its capacity to generate feelings and actions that correspond neither to the objective conditions of social reality nor to the objective conditions of the same individuals. Vygotsky, for example, clearly noted such a quality of the human phenomenon, writing:

They didn't understand [referring to psychologists at the time] that a handicap is not just an impoverished psychological state, but also a source of wealth, not just a weakness but a strength. They thought that the development of a blind child centers

on his blindness. The psychology of blindness is essentially the psychology of victory over blindness. (Vygotsky, 1993, p. 57)

A weakness or strength of any human condition is not determined by its “objectiveness,” but by the subjective senses that result from the positions of individuals and groups living the experience through their own subjective repertoires. Freud also recognized the subjective character of human processes but, unlike Vygotsky, without theorizing them as subjective. Therefore, for example, what he conceptualized as transference, in my understanding, could be defined as the subjective creation of the other. Nonetheless, instead of taking this path, he understood it as the transfer of impulses associated with repressed individual representation from early childhood to another individual long afterwards. The appeal to universal labels to explain complex human processes, deleting their singular, historical, cultural and social character, is the best evidence that subjectivity as such was not in Freud’s focus.

Once subjective senses emerge in a process that is subjective rather than rational, it is possible to understand that conscious intentions never exhaust their complex subjective configurations. The self-generative character of such configurations results from emotions embedded within them. Motivation here is understood as being a self-generative emotional arousal intrinsic to the functioning of subjective senses and configurations. Motives do not relate directly to any given object; the “object” of human motivation is an idealized fiction actively generated by the subject, who is subjectively engaged in one experience through its subjective configuration. Therefore, I prefer referring to subjective configurations as motivational systems than referring to motives as isolated entities oriented towards an object; motivation is an integrative expression of subjectivity as a system that expresses itself in multiple subjective configurations.

No matter how suggestive Vygotsky’s concepts of sense and *perezhivanie* were in the thinking behind new units capable of integrating intellectual operations and emotions, the fact is that emotions have never integrated intellectual operations as processes external to them, as Vygotsky aimed to focus on the unity of intellectual operations and emotions. Emotions are integrated in new units, subjective senses, which are generated together with intellectual functions by subjective configurations. Intellectual processes become subjective ones due to the subjective senses attached to their emergence within a subjective configuration of ongoing performances and actions. As a result, intellectual operations represent one side of the coin and subjective senses the other. Within subjective configuration, imagination, fantasy and creativity, which are inseparable from emotions, appear embedded within this complex subjective intellectual process. When intellectual operations mobilize themselves to engage in one subjective configuration, the units from which they emerge are the subjective configurations, provoking a process such that intellectual operations carry motivational character through the subjective senses that are part of them as subjective operations.

Emotions within this proposal of subjectivity are no longer isolated dynamic impulses referring to needs or oriented to one concrete object, but are a dynamic quality of subjectivity; we are subjective beings. Emotions become constituents of the subjectivity. Imagination and fantasy are subjective processes, not rational ones, and they are dominant in human creation, no matter in what area this creation takes place. Fantasy and imagination are engendered by subjective configurations through which individuals, groups and institutions create their own worlds.

It is quite astonishing that critical theories focused on the social symbolic productions, mainly on discourse, have left human motivation out of their constructions; emotions as subjective senses are on the basis of the processes of resistance, creation and critique that might be considered to be at the center of any critical psychology. In this regard, I give a reminder that Ignacio Martín Baró, the main figure in Latin American critical social psychology in the 80s, defended the idea that most of the concepts of psychology could be useful for a critical psychology within a new theoretical framework (Martín Baró & Dobles, 1986). Therefore, critical psychologists should not deny psychology itself in order to solve its problems, but address them through new theoretical avenues.

Subjectivity, as discussed in this paper, is not just another psychological concept; it represents a theoretical system oriented towards explaining the specific generative imaginary capacity of human beings from which new human realities are created, appearing as a given objective world from one generation to the other. The fact that human beings are part of such different worlds, characterized as different cultures, is supported by the subjective character of both humans and culture. Subjectivity simultaneously represents a new alternative for understanding human mind, social life and culture. These three concepts do not reduce themselves to their subjective sides, but subjectivity represents a theoretical alternative for understanding them as reciprocally configured, allowing an understanding of phenomena whose explication are not exhausted by any of those instances *per se*.

Subjectivity assembles different concepts, in the relations of which can be understood different and interrelated topics that historically have remained separated by the different branches of psychology. The concepts of subjective configuration and subjective senses allow the articulation of different spheres of life, overcoming the long-existing trend to consider some psychological functions or phenomena as intrinsic to a specific psychological branch. It is impossible to study school failure separated from the subjective functioning of the classroom, which in turn is inseparable from the social subjective functioning of the school, in whose configuration emerge subjective senses that embed social subjective configurations engendered in other areas of social subjectivity. At the same time, these endless processes of social subjectivity are not external to the social functioning of the family within which the child with learning difficulties lives.

However, the aforementioned networks of social subjective processes configured in different instances of social life do not exhaust the explanation of learning difficulties in a student. His/her difficulty does not result directly from such

constellation of social subjective processes and configurations. Each student has a singular history within which different social networks of his/her own life are organized in individual subjective configurations, which in one way or another cross his/her different current existential spaces. The fact that subjectivity is a production and not a reflection implies that each individual, group or institution, is capable of generating options within the immediate broader social systems within which they emerge.

## **General conclusions**

The proposal on subjectivity discussed in this paper is not opposed to the concepts addressed towards understanding the complex symbolic social networks within which social and individual subjectivities emerge. Discourse is a symbolic system that articulates many different symbolic social constructions forming a living system within which particular symbolic social constructions such as gender, race, sex and illnesses are embedded. These specific symbolic constructions, in their intermingled relations with social symbolic institutional realities like religion, morals, science, and policy, form the social dominant order.

All social symbolic constructions organized as discourses, social representations and other social theoretical constructions do not directly activate human behaviors. It is necessary that those symbolical realities are turned into subjective senses and configurations in order to function as human motivations. Subjectivity is a motivated system within which imagination emerges as the corner stone of all human creations. These creations are the basis on which culture and social order are continuously renewed, having a historical course.

The recognition of subjectivity as embedded in all human phenomena allows a transcending of the split between social political order and individuals, because both of them are subjectively configured. Social political order is configured within a social subjectivity and is inseparable from other subjective productions like myth, national histories, race and many other social symbolic constructions that are inseparable from any social political order. In turn, social political order is configured in individuals by singular subjective senses and configurations, through which individual experiences are differentiated from this social order; such differentiated subjective productions configured within a dominant social order are the basis of the possibility of the subversion of this social order.

Subjectivity is not formed by isolating elements and functions, as psyche has historically been treated by psychology. Subjectivity functions as part of symbolical discursive fields within which individuals are actively engaged through multiple and simultaneous networks of communication. These different phenomena are configured into one another through specific subjective productions. The symbolical discursive field is inseparable from the subjective configurations of social and individual subjectivities.

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## Note

1. I consider as ontological the specific theoretical representation through which one system of facts becomes a signified system susceptible to certain methodological procedures, a process in which an empirical field is created, whereby a theory is founded. In my use of the term ontology, there is no objective intention to define reality as it is. Knowledge represents a process through which intelligibility regarding an imaginary representation through empirical “pieces” is produced.

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### Author biography

**Fernando L González Rey** is full time professor of the Faculty of Education and Health Sciences of the University Centre of Brasília (Brazil) and senior associate professor of the Faculty of Education of the University of Brasília (Brazil). His research interests focus on subjectivity, education, health, and psychology from a cultural–historical approach. Key recent publications are: González Rey F. (2016). Advancing the topics of social reality, culture, and subjectivity from a cultural-historical standpoint: Moments, paths, and contradictions. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 36, pp. 175–189; González Rey, F. (2016). Vygotsky's Concept of perezhivane in the beginning and at the Final Moment of His Work: Advancing His Legacy. *Mind, Culture and Activity*, 17, pp. 1–10; González Rey, F. (2015). A new path for the discussion of Social Representations: advancing the topic of subjectivity from a cultural-historical standpoint. *Theory & Psychology*, 3, pp. 1–19.