

Perspectives in Cultural-Historical Research 5

Fernando González Rey  
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Daniel Magalhães Goulart *Editors*

# Subjectivity within Cultural-Historical Approach

Theory, Methodology and Research

 Springer

# **Perspectives in Cultural-Historical Research**

Volume 5

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# Foreword

This book has very much to offer. It makes an important contribution to the development of a cultural-historical approach in psychology, first of all, by introducing the concept of subjectivity as a core concept in its theoretical vocabulary. The presented theory offers a very original conception of subjectivity as a specifically human phenomenon emerging and developing on a cultural-historical basis. The book is, therefore, not only of interest to scholars working within a cultural-historical approach but to everybody looking for new ways ahead for psychology—in theory and practice because this is not only a theoretical volume. Besides chapters on the development of the theoretical and methodological conception, other chapters show how it may be used in diverse fields of research and practice and how these fields may benefit from this theory and contribute to its elaboration.

This theory of subjectivity is the result of over 20 years of work, primarily by the first editor. As a part of this work, the editors established two closely collaborating research groups at the University of Brasília. The research group “Subjectivity in health and in education” is coordinated by the first editor and the research group “Creativity and innovation from a cultural-historical theory of subjectivity” by the second editor. Work from these research groups is presented in the book. Even so, it is written by an international group of authors. While most are from Brazil, some from Cuba, Columbia, Guatemala, Australia and Russia.

In psychology, a cultural-historical approach was first developed in the Soviet Union. Here, we see another advantage of the presented theory. The first editor studied and worked extensively with important figures in this tradition. The development of the theory is, thus, rooted in comprehensive knowledge of this tradition, notably in theoretical ideas and deliberations by Vygotsky, Rubinstein, Bozhovich, Abuljanova, Chudnovsky and many others. The theory is grounded in an analysis of the conceptual strengths and problems in the history of this cultural-historical tradition. Besides throwing new light on the history of cultural-historical psychology, this—unfortunately quite rare—way of grounding theory in psychology enables a deeply informed creative move forward. The

presentation of the historical lines of development of cultural-historical psychology is also fascinating and inspiring in itself because much is not widely known.

While the book as a whole presents a sub-tradition in the current cultural-historical approach in psychology, three chapters are written by scholars affiliated with other sub-traditions. They present their research and discuss similarities and differences with the theory of this book. They even use some concepts from this theory in their work in pursuing the joint goal of developing the cultural-historical approach. These chapters make the reasons for particular conceptual and methodological choices in the theory of this book stand out more clearly.

Inspirations from other sources beyond cultural-historical psychology are also reinterpreted and integrated into this theory of subjectivity. Most important is the work of Lewin's group in Berlin, the late Foucault's work on the self and the art of living, discourse theory and social constructionism, branches of psychoanalysis and dialogues with Latin American critical social psychology and social representation theory.

The book is divided into four parts. The first part presents the theory, epistemology and methodology in the study of subjectivity.

Subjectivity is not theorized much in cultural-historical psychology or in psychology as a whole. There are three main reasons for introducing subjectivity as a core concept in the theory presented here. First, subjectivity can foster an integrated grasp of the human mind. In this respect, it resembles the concepts of personality and consciousness traditionally preferred in delivering an integrated view of the human mind. But these concepts generally offer a too individual-bound conception of the human psyche.

This brings us to the second reason. The concept of subjectivity enables us to grasp the human mind as a culturally, historically and socially engendered phenomenon. Due to the historical and social genesis of the human mind as well as our sociocultural forms of life, both have a subjective quality. In sociocultural life, the complex symbolic networks of discourses and the social symbolic institutional realities of gender, religion, morals, science and policy hold a subjective character. These symbolic social constructions constitute sociocultural subjective realities. Their social subjective senses appear as living subjective processes in social networks and serve as a link in the emergence of individual subjective senses depending on how individuals and groups experience them. Individual subjectivity is conceived as an integration of symbolic processes and emotions forming new qualitative units as subjective senses. Constellations of such fleeting, symbolic-emotional, individual subjective senses are assembled in individual subjective configurations. These individual configurations establish a self-regulative and self-generative organization of individual subjective senses. Social symbolic realities of gender, religion and moral values are thus involved in the individual subjective senses of these configurations. The subjective senses and configurations also function as human motivation. In contrast to most cultural-historical psychology, the theory highlights the role of emotion, motivation and imagination. This is inspired by Vygotsky's argument, in writing about the psychology of art, that

emotion and imagination are inseparable processes. It leads to the conclusion that subjectivity is a motivated system in which imagination is the cornerstone of human creations.

The third reason for introducing subjectivity as a core concept in this theory is that imagination gives individual subjectivity a generative character enabling individuals to transform the environment and themselves. The theory considers individual subjectivity as a counterforce against adaptation and it is opposed to the predominant notion of individual adaptation in psychology.

As mentioned above, the theory rests on a notion of a systemic functioning of the mind. It insists that subjectivity does not replace psyche but integrates psychical processes of emotions, thoughts, etc., in a new system as subjectively configured processes. Psychic processes are then not separate entities or functions and subjectivity is not grasped as a separate element in a set of fragmented concepts.

Such a theory of subjectivity calls for a concordant methodology. The book presents an original and bold response to this challenge. It is called a constructive-interpretative methodology and rests on a qualitative epistemology. Knowledge production is seen as advancing in and through dialogue and leading to participant development. In a dialogue, participants are subjectively engaged and its sequence is not under the control of any individual participant, e.g., the researcher. The constructive-interpretative process advances through joint discussions and reflections with the researcher playing an active, dialogic and analytic role. Methodological instruments, such as narratives, participatory observation, sentence completion, imagination-focused tasks, essay writings, drawings and photographs, are used to promote the constructive-interpretative dialogue.

Theoretical constructions and methodological actions advance hand in hand in the process. Through the dialogue, the researcher's use and development of theory make new phenomena intelligible. But the results are neither simply derived from empirical data or a direct application of a preexisting theory. Theory is, rather, an analytic device for constructing knowledge about singular phenomena and unexpected and unknown research questions. In his or her interpretations, the researcher first explicates conjectures as reflections, doubts and ideas. They are questioned and scrutinized through further dialogue and interpretations into indicators which are gradually assembled in advancing toward a more general and precise hypothesis. The researcher gradually integrates indicators and hypotheses into a new qualitative level of knowledge where they are combined with theoretical speculations based on a more embracing theory. Hypothetical, partial meanings, thus, obtain coherence in a more embracing theoretical hypothetical construction which opens a more consistent theoretical avenue to be followed in the course of research. The researcher gradually proposes a theoretical model of the studied phenomenon. This methodology transcends the split between data collection and analysis by combining dialogue and theoretical construction rather than seeing them as a sequence of steps.

In this methodology, theory is a conceptual resource to be used creatively in guiding the theoretical construction of the topic toward a more stable, general theoretical model. Concepts allow processes so far not captured to become intelligible. For instance, the theoretical concept of subjective configuration only comes



to life when it is constructed theoretically during a concrete piece of research. Theoretical concepts are malleable and appear in different ways in the wide range of human experiences in social networks and practices. Theories are also historical constructions which never exhaust the real character of the subject. Their non-exhaustive character is also due to the essential singularity of the phenomena and subject matter of a cultural-historical psychology. Subjective senses and configurations are singular phenomena of singular subjects. The methodology must grasp their singular and changeable organization resulting from the rich, malleable and dynamic character of complex systems. Case studies can capture complex phenomena which always are different from others of the same kind. The singular functioning of individuals and social arenas lets us access the qualitative characteristics of such complex systems in the process. But the singular gains meaning in a theoretical model in which its specific character is coherently assembled. Each piece of research thus contributes to a wider theoretical representation in which the singular loses its uniqueness.

The other three parts of the book contain ten chapters written by members of the two research groups about concrete research projects using the presented theory and methodology. Four chapters address subjectivity in school practices in studies of subjectivity in school innovation, sexual diversity and subjectivity in school and subjectivity in teacher development. Three chapters address subjectivity and learning processes in studies of creative learning, overcoming learning difficulties and subjectivity at various levels of education. And three chapters address subjectivity, psychotherapy and health in studies of subjectivity in psychotherapy, health and performance in physical education and sports and the development of practice in a community service center.

In these chapters, the authors show why using the basic theory and methodology matters in their field and study. Their studies are able to address aspects of their topics overlooked by other theories and methodologies. They do not apply concepts and methodology as a fixed, general framework adhered to in precisely the same way in every concrete study. Depending on their diverse fields and topics of research, they use the theory and methodology in different ways, highlight different aspects and promote a more differentiated understanding of them. The chapters demonstrate the fruitfulness of the theory and methodology and how the studies/fields contribute to elaborate them. Their different topics lead to different elaborations, concretizations, enrichments and relations to the work of others in various fields. These chapters, finally, present studies in areas frequently omitted by cultural-historical psychology, such as social subjectivities of institutions, teacher training and innovation, learning as a subjective process, sexual education, psychotherapy and mental health.

In the chapters on education and learning, the mainstream technical and instrumental view on education and learning is replaced by considering learning as a personal process of a learning subject. This brings other, usually overlooked aspect of education and learning to the fore. Learning is captured as a process of producing subjective senses with different affective states instead of as centered on intellectual, logical and cognitive operations. In this process, the learner changes as

a subject by bringing about other, complex configurations of subjective senses. This personal, creative and dynamic view of knowledge integrates imagination and reflection in the process and even includes a constructive view on mistakes. Imagination, fantasy and human emotions are, thus, seen as inseparable from intellectual operations. And motivation is constituted in the subjective configuration of learning and grounded in the subjectivity of each student during learning. These characteristics are even demonstrated in learning topics such as learning to read and write. Creativity is seen as central in learning due to the centrality of imagination and the generative capacity of subjectivity. It is related to the learner's subjectivity and his or her personalizing of information from his or her perspective. Subjects' singular modes of involving themselves in learning are, thus, not disregarded. The bringing about of subjective senses in subjects' learning trajectories are also studied, such as learning music in a trajectory leading to becoming a professional musician and appreciating other things in life, including the richness afforded by processes of development. Subjective learning processes directed at supporting learning by others are also studied in a school principal's learning to develop an institutional social subjectivity in a process of school innovation. Likewise, teachers' subjective development in teacher training and in the emergence of new pedagogical practices is analyzed.

The chapters on subjectivity, psychotherapy and health studies present work along similar lines. They show that new theories and practices are needed which, e.g., include the concepts of subjectivity and learning in sport's training and practice. The theory of subjectivity also enables a new approach to psychotherapy which has not been studied much in cultural-historical psychology. This new approach is illuminated in a case study of subjectivity in psychotherapy. It paves the way for new practices recognizing individual participants as subjects of the process. Mental disorders are grasped as centered on how the person produces subjective senses in living his or her experiences. The main goal of mental health care is seen as considering the subjective development of the afflicted person related to his or her dialogues and relevant social subjectivities. The new approach promotes an ethics of the subject and a logic of transformation instead of mental illness and social exclusion. Likewise, a chapter studies the professional team of a mental healthcare center in times of reform. It focuses on the team in meetings with joint discussions and reflections on current challenges and cases. In doing so, it addresses individual and social subjective development in an institution in the process of transformation of its service. This process is analyzed as a conflictual process unfolding into different, still conflicting new positions as a basis for further changes.

All chapters on empirical studies in this book address their research subjects as individual agents engaged in changes. The singularity of the other is the permanent reference for research and practice instead of opting for standard interventions in solving standard problems. The chapters stress that subject development and the development of new social practices are inseparable. Research is considered a resource for developing social practices and their participants. And the theory may simultaneously advance subject development, professional practice in a field and research.

As a whole, the book offers a unique chance of coming to know a current, creative and important line of work on developing cultural-historical psychology which is keenly aware of and critically scrutinizes its historical lines of inspiration. There is a strong sense of cohesion across the different topics, fields and levels of abstraction in the book which should be of special interest to scholars seeking to combine the development of theory, methodology and social practices. At the same time, the work aspires to make topics and phenomena intelligible which have not been visible in other theoretical frameworks. And it is carried by the anti-dogmatic ethos of viewing theory as a system in permanent development which feeds and is fed by new research and new practice.

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# Chapter 3

## The Constructive-Interpretative Methodological Approach: Orienting Research and Practice on the Basis of Subjectivity



Fernando González Rey and Albertina Mitjás Martínez

**Abstract** This chapter aims to make explicit the different processes, moments, resources, and challenges for advancing a constructive-interpretative methodological approach. Dialogue, as a subjective process in which the participants are subjectively engaged, represents a privileged path for the study of subjectivity. Subjectivity cannot be studied through partial instrumental procedures addressed toward concrete results. Human expressions are not a sequence of isolated acts. Gestures, speech, postures, and silences are emotionally interrelated during dialogue. This sequence is not under the control of the individuals in dialogue and becomes the main source of participants' subjective engagement. This methodology simultaneously combines professional practice and research, since the intense and permanent relations established between researcher and participants, and among participants themselves, become an important path along which the participants' development occurs throughout the research process. The chapter is illustrated with examples taken from different research studies in order to explain the processes involved in knowledge construction, as well as the resources that have to be introduced and improvised by the researcher in such a living form of research. The researcher is an active subject of this process, in which theoretical constructions and methodological actions advance hand in hand.

### 3.1 Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, the topic of subjectivity opens a new ontological domain within cultural-historical psychology. This ontological domain allows the overcoming of the wide taxonomy of concepts which historically has been used

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by psychology and which has been indiscriminately embedded in a very general and unspecified label of the psychological phenomenon. This definition of subjectivity opens a new ontological domain in the study of human phenomena, whether social or individual, which characterizes the cultural, social, and historical human existence. Unlike psyche, subjectivity is not a reaction, nor a system addressed toward adaptation to an external environment. Subjectivity has a generative character; it is a human imaginative and motivated production within historically located social-cultural scenarios. Its emergence is mainly based on the unit of symbolical and emotional processes, which leads to an imaginative, creative system, within which society, culture, and individuals become inseparable.

Cultural-historical psychology represented the first historical attempt to advance with respect to the specific character of the human psyche on the basis of its cultural, social, and historical genesis, despite the narrow comprehension of both cultural and social realities in Soviet psychology (Zinchenko 1993, 2002). The fact of the matter is the difficulty in advancing a new ontological definition capable of leading to new theoretical constructions, allowing generation of intelligibility about phenomena that can no longer be defined in terms of the psychological. The human psychological processes, organized within cultural, social, and historical realities, become processes of a different order—the subjective ones. The relative autonomy of subjectivity from immediate external circumstances is precisely what has made possible new, unexpected, and creative avenues on which the human world has been historically constructed and developed as a cultural creation.

This theoretical turn toward subjectivity has to do, not only with psychology, but also with other social sciences, since subjectivity does not replace psyche, but integrates psychical processes within a new qualitative system in which those processes will no longer appear as separated entities, but as subjectively configured processes. Subjectivity, as mentioned in the first chapter, also characterizes social functioning in its different levels and instances, contributing to a representation of society as a system of very different intermingled processes.

While traditional psychology has separated psychological phenomena from social and cultural realities, reducing human phenomena to individual psychological nature or behavior, an emergent social psychology has reacted against such a natural and individualistic psychology through different theoretical constructions since the 1960s, beginning with social representation, and continuing with discourse, deconstruction, social construction, discursive-self, dialogical realities, communication, and ideology. This movement has been progressively separated from psyche and also from psychology. Despite their differences, all of these approaches had in common an effort to overcome individual and natural reductionism within psychology.

Our definition of subjectivity, unlike the aforementioned theories, being grounded in a cultural-historical approach, as inaugurated by Soviet psychology, moves forward the comprehension of how the social and the individual can be integrated as realities that share a subjective character, without one being engulfed by the other. Subjectivity, in this proposal, emancipates individuals from any social and biological determinism; it is defined not as external to social, cultural, or biological realities, but

as a new phenomenon that integrates these realities into a new qualitative definition of human realities.

Cultural-historical psychology has taken new steps toward a new psychology. However, it has failed to propose a new theoretical system capable of explaining specific human processes and realities, which, to a great extent, results from its ontological vagueness (González Rey 2014, 2016, 2017). This proposal on subjectivity emphasizes emotions as constitutive elements of subjective processes; they form a unity with symbolical processes that characterizes a new ontological definition of subjectivity. This new ontological definition acquires “theoretical life” in the concepts of subjective senses and subjective configurations.

Psychology, throughout its existence, has been organized through topics and concepts treated as separate from each other. Thus, concepts like behavior, cognition, emotion, imagination, creativity, fantasy, personality, and many others have been treated as separate entities or functions, on which have been founded psychological theories and specific areas of psychological work and research. On the other hand, subjective senses do not have static borders that can be studied through descriptive procedures. They represent an endless chain that organizes itself into a new qualitative level through subjective configurations as self-generative units of multiple interrelated subjective senses. The movement of subjective senses and configurations is ruled not by cause-and-effect relationships, but by a configurational order that is impossible to capture through specific instrumental acts of knowledge.

Subjective configurations generate subjective senses that are simultaneously related to different activities, relationships, performances, and other possible human experiences. They are singularly lived by individuals and social instances on the basis of social symbolical constructions, such as race, gender, physical appearance, social status, and many other social constructions. Such social symbolical constructions only became subjective senses through current social networks within which individual and social subjectivities emerge as carriers of their own histories. Different moments and contexts of a single human existence, whether social or individual, turn into a new qualitative and inextricable order through subjective configurations.

The question that this chapter is aimed to advance is: How to study subjective senses and configurations in their complex functioning? Once emotions are no longer considered isolated reactions or feelings, being intrinsic to subjective senses and configurations, they are embedded in all subjective productions, from the word to thinking and behaviors. Zinchenko, after his turn toward consciousness as the focus of his interest, stressed very important ideas closely related to this definition of subjectivity and the ways it could be studied. He wrote: “When word is ‘born’ and takes an external form, a person becomes a complete voice and enters into an interminable dialogue. The person participates in it not only with one’s thoughts, but also desires, destiny and all of one’s individuality” (Zinchenko 2012, p. 72).

Subjectivity, senses, and configurations embody that complex core of words, thoughts, desires, and destiny as different expressions of one’s individuality, as mentioned by Zinchenko. The emergence of subjective configurations related to concrete experiences in any sphere of life integrates thoughts, emotions, imaginations, and fantasy as constitutive of any psychological function related to that experience. Such

integration occurs through different subjective senses generated by the subjective configuration of the current experience. Departing from this definition of subjectivity, its study cannot be conducted on the basis of what individuals, groups, media, governments, and other social instances make explicit in their intentional communication. All direct and conscious speech is intentionally guided by a certain position and intention that mostly expresses “politically and morally correct principles” within each concrete social instance.

Subjective senses are never explicit in individual beliefs or intentional statements; they are embedded in some beliefs and words, but they do not appear explicitly in the meaning intentionally addressed toward others. Subjective senses always appear through the intrinsic qualitative organization of human expression, which is always beyond individuals’ and groups’ conscious intentions.

Most conscious intentional positions represent attempts to keep oneself, whether individuals or social instances, within the rational institutionalized principles on which the social order is instituted. Subjective senses and configurations escape any logical attempt to deduce them. Any psychological function only achieves motivational character when it is configured as a subjective function within some subjective configuration; motivation never results from one specific drive, but always represents a subjective configuration (González Rey 2014). Thus, the study of subjectivity is only possible by advancing through indirect pathways on the basis of complex systems of expression, which articulate postures, gestures, speech, emotions, and thoughts in one imperceptible order that can only be accessed through intellectual constructions capable of generating intelligibility throughout a sequence of human expressions.

In this chapter, we attempt to explain moments and processes closely intermingled within the definition of the constructive-interpretative methodology, which, despite being oriented toward the demands imposed by the study of subjectivity, can also be used for the study of other complex human issues. Advancement in such a methodology demands a new definition of knowledge to be made explicit, which must be based upon the epistemological principles in which this methodology is grounded. Qualitative Epistemology (González Rey 1997) is the epistemological basis on which this constructive-interpretative methodology stands.

Qualitative Epistemology represents an attempt to justify our methodological approach to the study of subjectivity, on which we have been advancing forward, departing from our studies on personality. These epistemological reflections started with the methodological challenges associated with our studies of personality from a cultural-historical standpoint. In those studies, we advanced with respect to qualitative research in such a way that it does not follow the dominant premises that ruled this kind of research at that time (González Rey 1982, 1983, 1993; González Rey and Mitjás 1989). The transit from personality to subjectivity was not only theoretical, but also epistemological and methodological. In the absence of epistemological positions that would be capable of responding to the demands of the study of subjectivity at the time, the term Qualitative Epistemology was introduced in order to make explicit the epistemological principles on which our methodological proposal for the study of subjectivity relies.

The “epistemological umbrellas” in fashion in psychology in the 1990s did not allow our methodological work to be sustained. The articulation between these epistemological and methodological proposals, according to the demands of the study of subjectivity, is the main proposal of this chapter. Moreover, the chapter intends to explain, through concrete examples taken from research, the main methodological procedures and processes that sustain this proposal.

As for every new path in science, the appropriation of this epistemological-methodological framework is a hard process, because of its deep differences regarding the hegemonic institutionalized ways of doing psychological research that are mostly based on a crude empirical-instrumental distortion of what positivism as a philosophy was. Such an empirical tradition emphasizes responses over constructions, instruments over dialogue, the result over the search, confirmation over hypothetical paths, collection over theoretical constructions. Our proposal moves completely in the opposite direction.

### **3.2 Advancing on a Constructive-Interpretative Methodology**

Instead of being focused on instruments, the constructive-interpretative methodology has dialogue as its main methodological device. Dialogue is understood as a conversational flux that is organized progressively through many symbolical devices, which assemble with each other within a dialogical “corpus.” Dialogue is a subjective system, not a pure relational system, as it frequently appears in the literature (Shotter 1995; Gergen 1982; Anderson 1996; Giorgi 1995). Dialogue is a subjective living system the functioning and development of which depend to a great extent on the active agency of the individuals in dialogue. The individuals, as agents or subjects in a dialogue, are inseparable from the subjective configuration of the dialogue as an interactive process. Individual subjective configurations of the agents in dialogue and the social subjective configuration of the dialogical interaction intertwine with each other in such a way that one configuration is configured within the other through the specific subjective senses generated by the other. A dialogue and the agents involved in it are subjectively configured to each other; the subjective configuration of the dialogue implies subjective senses and processes that have resulted from the active positions of individuals in dialogue and their subjective configurations.

The functioning of a dialogue is inseparable from the active positions and decisions of individuals involved in it. Dialogue, as with all human subjectively configured realities, takes unpredictable paths, generating processes that are beyond the participants’ control. Many unexpected subjective productions emerge, leading constantly to new dialogical paths and contradictions. Among those paths taken by dialogue, only the actions and positions assumed by its participants can keep the process alive.

Dialogue, as a subjective process in which the participants are subjectively engaged, represents a privileged path for the study of subjectivity. Subjectivity cannot be studied through partial instrumental procedures addressed toward concrete results. Human expressions are not a sequence of isolated acts. Gestures, speech, postures, and silences are emotionally interrelated during the dialogue. This sequence is not under the control of the individuals in dialogue and becomes the main source of participants' subjective engagement. The emerging subjective processes in the dialogue become intelligible only through the researcher's constructed meanings. These meanings, given their non-regular and changing sequences, allow the emergence of hypotheses which would be impossible to formulate through abstract, and presumably objective, data collection.

The hypothetical and partial meanings constructed by the researcher obtain coherence within a more embracing theoretical hypothetical construction, through which a consistent theoretical avenue is opened up, to be followed in the course of research. These partial meanings, which are gradually integrated with each other by the researcher, are named indicators in our methodological proposal.

Such meanings constructed by the researcher gain theoretical relevance through a sequence which generates continuity and visibility to a set of elements. Taken by themselves, such isolated elements have no meanings. Dialogue is the best way to advance in this constructive process; dialogue implies provocations, reflections, and criticism as important devices to advance in depth the subjective engagement of the participants in the research. Any dialogical action could imply new subjective engagements of individuals in dialogue, opening a new avenue to continue our hypotheses during the process of conducting research. The dialogue should be profound and long-lasting, both being important requirements in advancing theoretical constructions in relation to subjectivity. For this reason, individuals in dialogue, rather than looking for definitive answers, are oriented toward sharing reflections, which are frequently contradictory. These contradictions are excellent resources to compromise the subjectivity of participants. Methodological instruments within this methodological proposal are understood as dialogical devices.

Our society does not characterize itself by dialogical functioning, which creates difficulties for researchers, many of whom, instead of entering into dialogue, passively follow the intentional speech of research participants. In doing so, they fail to move forward in their communications with others, making a constructive-interpretative process impossible. The passive researchers' positions are contrary to the active engagement that is necessary to advance the dialogue. Research as a dialogical process demands intermingled relationships between theoretical constructions and dialogical operations, in a process such that one is based on the other, opening up new paths in the dialogue-theoretical construction relation.

Both dialogue and theoretical constructions are in permanent feedback with one another through the positions of the active researcher, who must conduct both processes simultaneously. Gradually, the researcher takes an important step forward by proposing a theoretical model of the studied phenomenon, supported by the hypotheses generated through different sequences of indicators. The theoretical model is a construction capable of integrating different avenues advanced by different and

simultaneous hypotheses throughout the research. The theoretical model allows the researcher's process to be assembled within a given theoretical account.

Theoretical models combine indicators and other theoretical speculations in an attempt to get the best picture to explain and to represent the topic that is being studied. Subjective configurations are a good example of a theoretical model being constructed in the research process. Theoretical models make the studied topic intelligible in terms of theory. In fact, the researcher's passive position turns the open dialogical method of doing research into a new way of collecting material; instead of collecting data, such a position, in this new way of doing research, allows the researcher to passively collect fragments of conversations.

As the epicenter of dialogue, researchers continuously open new focuses and paths in research, with respect to which they advance progressively through conjectures and indicators. The hypothetical advance of knowledge as a methodological demand for the study of complex systems has been noted by sociologists regarding social realities (Bourdieu 2003; Touraine and Khosrokhavar 2002; Elias 2001, among others). Touraine stated: "The point is not to enclose in discourses or make an "objective" study of acts and practices. Sociology has advanced on a contrary form of social organization, attempting to find the social self-productive movement of society that can only be discovered through a system of hypotheses" (Touraine and Khosrokhavar 2002, p. 231; my translation from Spanish).

Constructive-interpretative methodology considers theoretical hypothetical constructions and interpretations (indicators and hypotheses) as processes that advance together within dialogue, integrating the whole methodological arsenal employed during research. Dialogue and other methodological devices must not be regarded as different procedures; any methodological device only becomes a source for the study of subjectivity when it provokes expressions that are useful for formulating indicators and hypotheses on the topic studied. Methodological instruments are means oriented toward new dialogical moments, which must represent the beginnings of new avenues of conversation. Based on this assumption, this methodological proposal transcends the traditional split between "data collection" and "data analysis." The entire course of research is a theoretical process, during which one theoretical model is advanced. Elucidating this construction process is what legitimizes this type of research.

Unlike the position of "not knowing" that characterizes the researcher's/professional's position, as proclaimed by social constructionism (Anderson and Goolishian 1996), indicators and hypotheses make it evident how the knowledge produced during research is an important device for advancing in terms of the topic studied in the research. This combination of dialogue and theoretical construction also makes an important difference in relation to other methodologies used in psychology under different theoretical umbrellas, such as phenomenology, discursive analysis, narrative analysis.

It is important to characterize briefly the differences between a constructive-interpretative methodology and phenomenology, since within cultural-historical psychology the use of interpretation has been frequently associated with phenomenology. One of the main representatives of phenomenology, A. Giorgi, argued:

It is research based upon description of experiences as they occur in everyday life by persons from all walks of life. These descriptions can be written by the participants initially or the data could be obtained by means of an interview and then transcribed [...] These descriptions are then systematically and methodically analyzed so that implicit or explicit psychological meaning contained in them can be identified or made explicit and organized to reveal the underlying psychological structures. (Giorgi 1995, p. 39)

The main differences between this summarized picture of phenomenological research drawn by Giorgi and the methodological proposal defended in this chapter are:

- (1) Phenomenology departed from the explicit conscious retelling by individuals of their own lived experiences; our proposal advances the idea that it is only through the researcher's constructions that knowledge can be gained of subjective processes, which are always beyond any conscious individual capacity of being directly reported.
- (2) In phenomenology, written or oral stories are taken as they are described. The main methodological means of working on this material is through analysis. Through the researcher's analysis, an attempt is made to highlight the essential psychological structures of lived experiences, using the procedure of phenomenological reduction of the narrated elements that hinder the understanding of those essential structures. Researchers must suspend their own beliefs in order to maintain the capacity to grasp objectively the experience as it has been consciously retold by the person during the research. In this sense, phenomenological analysis is guided by descriptive-inductive procedures. Our proposal, on the contrary, is guided by the constructions and interpretations of researchers, based on indirect indicators of the ways those individuals and groups structure and organize their different expressions, instead of taking the direct meanings of those expressions. Rather than the retelling of an experience, our material, upon which the constructive-interpretative process is taking place, consists of indirect qualitative elements embedded in individual and group expressions.

The aforementioned phenomenological research is based upon the definition of phenomenon, which guides the research goal. The phenomenon is understood in Giorgi's words as follows: "A phenomenon is the way in which a human subject attributes meaning to certain aspects of the world." The constructive-interpretative proposal is oriented by a completely different theoretical representation; its focus is how the unconscious and inaccessible flux of subjective senses generated by a subjective configuration defines the ways by which one experience is felt and developed by individuals and groups. The attribution of meanings to one experience cannot be treated as synonymous with the way in which the experience is lived by individuals. The attribution of meaning does not represent a pure individual conscious act; it expresses a complex plot of social symbolical constructions that is not exhausted in the meanings attributed by individuals to the experience. Moreover, the focus on meaning overlooks the way in which emotions qualify different human expressions.

Once the split between theoretical and empirical is overcome, theory cannot be considered as a "package" of knowledge to be applied, but as the basis of the general

theoretical model that emerges during the research, guiding the theoretical construction of the topic being studied. As argued before, the researcher moves forward long uncertain hypothetical paths that only become theoretical models through his/her own theoretical constructions. The concepts of subjective sense and subjective configuration are not concepts to be applied on a mass of collected data; they should be constructed simultaneously with the chaotic and unexpected range of information provided by the research. The more stable theoretical core around which the research is organized is defined here as the theoretical model. Subjective configuration represents an important theoretical concept, but it only comes to “life” when it is theoretically constructed during a concrete piece of research.

Based on these considerations, the assertion of the intrinsic unity between a constructive-interpretative process and dialogue becomes possible. A constructive-interpretative process can only advance through the progressively deepening process of the dialogue. Dialogue is a living process that gradually advances in breadth and depth, a process within which the participants are provoked by the researcher to be reflexive, authentic, and critical with each other. Dialogue, as the methodological ground of this proposal, is the only guarantee of integrating conversations with the multiple non-dialogical subjective expressions in their intermingled and continuous relationship. Subjective senses and configurations are theoretical devices to generate intelligibility about those processes, which is not an empirical integration, but a theoretical one.

Dialogue cannot be understood as a series of discontinuous acts and moments; dialogue requires time to be arranged. It implies contradictions, unexpected unfolding paths, new decisions and thoughts, intense emotions, which taken together could lead to its consolidation or interruption. Keeping the dialogue alive is the main challenge of the researcher in this methodological framework. An important capacity to be developed by researchers that aspire to work with this methodology is to be active in conducting the dialogue through their theoretical conjectures, simultaneously advancing the dialogue and the theoretical construction.

As an example of the unexpected decisions that researchers must make during a dialogue, Bezerra (2014) wrote the following about the experience working with Alan, an eight-year-old boy, participating in her research. The researcher invited Alan to solve a problem based upon the prior knowledge that Alan supposedly should have had from his previous classes. Alan’s emotional discomfort before the task was evident. He brought up different topics during the conversation with the researcher, avoiding focusing on the task. Suddenly, he asked the researcher: “Is it true that you are also working with Thiago<sup>1</sup>? He is a donkey and you will never make him advance.” The researcher firstly ignored the comment, repeating that it was important for him to be focused on the task. Then, Alan, defiantly and sarcastically, looked at her and said he did not know how to solve the problem. So, the researcher, also sarcastically, asked him: “hmm, so Thiago is the donkey?”

Alan did not expect this sarcastic reaction by the researcher, who took the initiative in reacting with the same communicational device used by Alan. This was really

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<sup>1</sup>Thiago was another child participating in the research.



effective in taking Alan out of his position as provocateur and challenger in his conversations with the researcher. Alan's reaction was immediate, and he asked the researcher: "Do you want to see how easy this task is for me?" He took a piece of paper and worked through the exercise from beginning to end. Alan felt challenged and actively reacted by facing the researcher's provocation.

Alan's reaction not only allowed the researcher to advance in her work with him, but also opened up the opportunity to construct some indicators on the basis of his reactions, to advance further regarding the theoretical construction related to his learning difficulties. This example allows us to take the description presented by Bezerra further. Two intermingled indicators relate to Alan's affective emptiness and social discomfort in his social involvement. On the one hand, his negativistic reaction may be constructed as a defense against what he felt to be the result of his social position in the school, which is closely associated with his learning difficulties, contributing to a representation of him by the others that is unconsciously reinforced by the teacher's behavior toward Alan. On the other hand, Alan's effort to solve the exercise may be constructed as an indicator of his need to be accepted by the researcher. Such an indicator becomes stronger with his accusation toward Thiago of being a "donkey," which, among other things, could be an expression of jealousy in relation to the researcher. The representation of Alan's unique affective social space at that point in his life, which was that of his relationship with the researcher, is fundamental for such theoretical construction.

The aforementioned indicators may be interrelated within a more comprehensive construction that could become a hypothesis to be followed during the research. This hypothesis can be explicit in the following terms: Alan does not enjoy the social spaces within which his social life occurs. Other aspects constructed by the researcher at previous points contribute to this hypothesis: the rejection that Alan experienced from his father and the explicit rejection of him by the teacher. Both factors provoke fear, insecurity, and rejection of him by the others.

That first formulation of a hypothesis represents the first step in a process through which new indicators must appear in order to continue, change, or reject this theoretical path. In this process, previous hypotheses may be integrated within a wider theoretical model or may simply be abandoned, taking into consideration new constructions that will emerge throughout the research. The prior example is evidence of how indicators are constructions that evoke wider theoretical constructions that cannot be reduced to the sum of these indicators. In this methodological proposal, indicators represent a path to legitimize broader theoretical constructions, not because they are harmoniously expressed by these constructions, but because theoretical models assemble indicators in such a way that they end up being the best fit for generating intelligibility about the topic under study. Departing from the same indicators, the scientific community cannot propose a better model than the one presented by the researcher at some point in his work.

The capacity to imagine and float upon the objective facts of a specific situation must characterize the researcher's position within constructive-interpretative research. As was discussed in Alan's case, from one particular behavior, several indicators can be constructed, which can lead immediately to the formulation of more

and more comprehensive hypotheses. Taken as isolated and discontinuous statements, indicators do not mean anything. They must be constructed upon different expressions, reflections, stares, gestures, postural changes, and emotions that can be used separately or in combination as new sources for the construction of further indicators.

Concepts such subjective senses and subjective configurations are based on the other concepts, which taken together define this theoretical proposal. Theoretical categories allow a new theoretical representation of specific human phenomena. Once a theory has assembled its categories in a way that highlights the domain of new phenomena, it acquires ontological relevance. Human subjectivity represents one of the main attributes of the cultural character of human existence and realities.

One of the principles formulated within Qualitative Epistemology that we would like to comment on in relation to this methodological proposal is the value of the singular for scientific research on subjectivity. In the hegemonic scientific psychological tradition, based on inductive principles as the main resource for the legitimization and the generalization of knowledge, the singular is completely ignored in terms of its scientific value. However, based on our theoretical definition of subjectivity, scientific research is always oriented toward singular phenomena, a reason by which methodological procedures should be sensitive to this quality of the phenomenon being studied. As the objects of scientific study become more complex, their singular and changeable organization has to be seriously considered by the methodology.

Only case studies allow in-depth advance on interrelated and simultaneous singular processes. Case studies are frequently and mistakenly referred to as the study of individuals. However, case studies characterize research and professional practices addressed toward units of complex phenomena that are always different from others within the same kind of phenomena. For example, two different schools formed two different social subjective units, even though both of them share the same social subjectivity in the wider understanding of the term. Both of them are singularly socially subjectively configured, generating many different social dynamics and individual positions in each case. As a result of this, the case study becomes an excellent means to study their different social dynamics and the different issues of the wider social subjectivity within which both are embedded. The singular functioning of individuals and social arenas is a privileged way to access qualitative characteristics of the complex systems in process.

One of the objections to the singular as a source of scientific production is the erroneous identification of the singular with the unique. The singular is not unique, due to the theoretical model within which it assumes meaning, thanks to the prior constructions of the researcher. As such, the singular is always compatible, within the theoretical level, with prior hypotheses already in the process of development. The singular results from the richness, malleability, and dynamic character of complex systems, which, as with subjectivity, express themselves through malleable organization capable of being singularly configured within the different contexts through which these systems develop their trajectories. The uniqueness of the singular is always an empirical expression.

Most methodological instruments that have been used historically by psychology have been focused on behavioral definitions, which can be measured, compared, and generalized through quantitative procedures, because their qualitative nature does not change. With such a research topic, theoretical construction has a distorted and secondary place.

The aforementioned methodological features were responsible for the split between theory and empirical research. The psychological research field has, for a long time, been defined through instrumental-methodological lenses, with the omission of theory. This tendency has been well captured through concepts like “methodolatry” (Danzinger 1990) and “methodological fetishism” (Koch 1999). Until the present day, most methodologies proposed in psychology, no matter their declared epistemological affiliation, continue an understanding of psychological research as empirical. From our methodological assumption, research is the most important process of theoretical construction.

It is through research that theories are developed as living systems, opening up new spaces for intelligibility about different subject matters. As living systems, theories constantly improve and advance their own concepts, according to the demands of the research and of practice. The importance of the singular as a means for the study of subjectivity is due to its qualitative character; subjective senses and configurations cannot be standardized by any quantitative criterion.

The singular attains meaning within a theoretical model, within which its specific character is coherently assembled within the demands of the theoretical model in process. Within a theoretical model, the singular loses its uniqueness, because of its compatibility with the theoretical constructions advanced by the model. The construction of information, according to this methodological proposal, is highly singular, but each piece of research, oriented by a similar research matter, constantly advances toward a wider theoretical representation of that matter, and this is a long-lasting process. This is one of the reasons why different research studies within this theoretical account are not “acts of research,” enclosed in some specific results. Every good piece of research within the constructive-interpretative methodology opens up a research line that might be advanced by a research team.

This constructive-interpretative model has important antecedents and current expressions in natural sciences (Prigogine 2004; Prigogine and Stengers 2004; Heisenberg 1995). Heisenberg, one of the pioneers of Quantum Mechanics noted: “[...] the subject of scientific research is never directly known from observations, i.e., from experimentation, but by theoretical construction (or axiomatic postulate) speculatively proposed, and indirectly and experimentally evaluated” (1995, p.12, our translation from Portuguese). However, due to traditional formation in psychology, the construction of speculative devices, such as indicators and hypotheses, is very difficult for psychologists to understand as a means for guiding theoretical constructions, and not as a priori ornaments to be stated or demonstrated.

The capacity to follow a constructive-interpretative research model is only possible through a long-lasting and deep “immersion” of researchers in fieldwork. This process should happen under permanent supervision by an experienced researcher. No matter how explicitly these principles are written, or explained, they can only

be appropriated by young researchers through active engagement with a supervisor, step by step, via constructive processes (González Rey and Mitjás Martínez 2017).

A frequent problem in some researches, explicitly identified with such a constructive-interpretative path, is that instruments are used as isolated sequences, separated from theoretical constructions, as well as from a dialogical plot. These processes, as argued before, advance hand in hand in this methodological proposal. When the research process advances separately from the researcher's constructions, the research, in fact, reproduces the collection-analysis scheme, as is still characteristic today in psychological research.

### 3.3 Constructive-Interpretative Research: Difficulties and Advances

Any new proposal in science gains space in the scientific community gradually. Regarding this proposal, in which theory, epistemology, and methodology are closely intermingled, the difficulties in opening up a path in psychology are harder still because of the relatively little importance that these three topics have historically had in psychology, as well as the rejection that they have suffered in the so-called critical psychologies, the Anglo-Saxon versions of which have been strongly influenced by French poststructuralist philosophers. Moreover, this way of conducting research and professional practice requires an intensive training process for researchers, who have mostly been trained by the positivistic and empirical tradition. Such a requirement has been stressed elsewhere (Mitjás Martínez 2014) along with other requirements that we will address below.

One of the main requirements of this methodological proposal is that fieldwork should take as much time as possible. Fieldwork is not understood as a sequence of intermittent moments defined by the application of instruments, but as a social space that integrates within itself different dialogues between the researcher and participants, as well as between participants. Such dialogues take place both during research sessions and in more informal moments that emerge spontaneously during the research. Research becomes a social interactive space, within which many subjective processes that characterize any social space may emerge, such as envy, competitiveness, conflicts. For this reason, the researcher's "submersion" in fieldwork is highly recommended, because his/her presence is important for advancing the research as a continuous dialogical plot.

To illustrate some of the aforementioned characteristics of constructive-interpretative methodology, we will present a case studied by an undergraduate student under our supervision. We will advance on what has been done by the student, making recommendations for actions and strategies in order to didactically present what should be done from a constructive-interpretative perspective. The undergraduate student, JP, focused her research on the subjective configurations of different women in relation to the births of their children. We select one of those case studies to make

explicit the processes described below that must characterize the construction of information during the research.

BR, as the participant was identified to preserve her real identity, is a 38-year-old woman. She was interviewed in relation to the births of her first son, when she was 17 years old, and of her younger daughter from a second marriage, when she was 37 years old. The research with BR took two years, during which several conversations took place alongside some methodological devices, such as the complement of phrases.<sup>2</sup> In this research study, this instrument was used following the same principles that rule the use of any instrument within this methodological account. It was used as a dialogical device that may or may not provide new information on the research matter. This information provided by the instruments is used as a source for advancing new indicators and hypotheses during the research, not as a source of conclusive results.

In the first conversation with BR related to the birth of her first son, she said:

I have bad memories in relation to the first moments with my baby. Everyone looked at me as if to say “Wow, so young!” [...] I wanted so much to show everyone that I was capable of being a mother, and paid attention to every detail regarding my son. But being so concentrated on these details and responsibilities, I forgot to enjoy that nice time with him.

It strikes us that in the first retrospective conversation, the focus of BR was not the affective relation with the baby, but her concerns about what others could be thinking of her. By doing this, BR seems to be more centered on the opinion of others than on her enjoyment of her son. It is also interesting that, in her story, she omits other affections, like her husband at the time and her family, in what supposedly should be an important moment in her life. The way that BR constructs her memories about her first son’s birth allows us to make some conjectures that must be followed in order to formulate the first indicator in relation to the subjective configurations related to her babies’ births. No conjecture can be immediately taken as an indicator because, as researchers, we have suspicions that cannot be immediately transformed into meaning. Before BR’s previous statement, some alternatives come to our minds as researchers: (1) Why is she so dependent on the opinion of others? (2) How were her familial relations when her first son was born? (3) Is she religious or does she have other beliefs that made her so sensitive to the fact of being a very young mother?

Following these conjectures will support the construction of the first indicators, based on which subjective senses configured her early experiences with her babies’ births can be formulated. Unlike indicators, conjectures are reflections, doubts, and ideas, to which a well-formulated hypothetical meaning cannot yet be attributed.

The limitation on the length of this chapter compels us to synthesize the participants’ expressions, allowing readers to follow how a constructive-interpretative construction happens.

Following the focus of the first conversation, in the second one, BR said: “My concern about the way in which the others perceive me accompanies me up until

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<sup>2</sup>The complement of phrases is used according to our definition of methodological tools (González Rey, 1993, 2005; González Rey & Mitjans, 1989). The tools within this methodological framework, instead of being addressed toward offering results, are a means to provoke the expression of others.

today. Thus, for example, when people look at me and my son I feel embarrassed thinking that they must be calculating my age at the moment I became a mother.” This second emphatic reference to the same point referred to by her during the first conversation led us, as researchers, to the conviction that her concerns in relation to her age at the time she became a mother are present in other areas of her life, being an aspect of her personality rather than a specific event in her motherhood. An important element that supports such construction is the perseverance of this emotional experience even today, almost twenty years after having her first son.

The fact that her concern remains so vivid after twenty years turns her memory into a very relevant element to be elucidated in exploring the subjective configurations of her motherhood. All aforementioned conjectures should not be confounded with indicators; the conjectures help us to focus on certain topics, while the indicators are constructed meanings from which the avenues of intelligibility toward the theoretical model are advanced.

As the presentation of this case also has a didactic objective, we want to stress that, rather than new fragments of information being picked up from what was said by the participant, it would be necessary, at this point in the conversation, to advance the dialogue around the topic on which the attention of the researcher was focused. Advancing a dialogue in relation to these first impressions in the case would demand contributions like: “Tell me a bit more about your concern with your age when you became a mother”; “Which elements, in your opinion, dealt with your concern related to your age at that moment?”; “Please, tell me your three best and worst memories of those first moments of your first motherhood.” These are only examples of where the course of the conversation could have led, motivated, and provoked in order to enter into an in-depth and authentic dialogue. If these inductors or others had been used in that second conversation, some indicators would possibly have been constructed at that point.

Although the researcher did not actively advance a dialogical dynamic, she followed her research topics in several conversations. She took, for example, a good initiative in asking BR to comment on each of the phrases with which she responded for the complements of phrases. Before such methodological action, BR showed her excellent motivation to communicate with the researcher, which is a key feature for the subjective engagement of the participant in the research. In order to progress toward indicators that will allow us to construct the first hypotheses to be conducted throughout the research, some phrases were presented by the researcher, followed by comments from fragments of other conversations.

Based on the “complement of phrases” and BR’s comments on her responses, it was possible to construct the first indicators to be followed in her case study.

Phrase 4: The happiest moment: was to see the faces of my son and daughter for the first time, and being together with them forever.

Her comment on this phrase was:

My son and my daughter are my life. Nevertheless, up until today, when I meet my son and his friends, I feel a little constrained; they are 21 years old! The way our small age difference is perceived by others frightens me so much! That may be a prejudice of mine, but I cannot avoid it. I love saying that at this moment I am close to my 40 s; ‘wow, what a relief.’ I am

one of the few persons that like to look like older; it means that I have the maturity to take care of my son and my daughter.

She continues to be focused on her children, leaving other affections out of her comments, but, even in relation to her children, BR is not focused on her emotions and affective enjoyment together with them, reiterating her prevailing concern with her own age. Moreover, her husband and her marriage do not appear, neither in her first conversations, nor in her first comments related to the first phrases that she elaborated upon. Based on this way of treating her affections, and particularly regarding her relationship with her husband, we can affirm that she is not centered on love and affection as the basis of her relationships, neither with her husband nor with her children. On which subjective configuration is this relationship pattern to be configured? At this point in the construction of information, it is important to go back to some of the first conjectures previously defined in relation to the fragments of the first conversations. These conjectures guide the construction of possible new indicators to be assembled with the first ones.

Among the first conjectures to be considered again are: (1) her possible ideological beliefs or dogmas, (2) her relationship within her original familial core, and (3) her other current interests. In order to advance these conjectures, we will continue presenting her phrases along with her comments on them. An important methodological feature to be stressed regarding the complement of phrase instrument is that each phrase is, in fact, an inductor of expressions that could be subjectively engaged with different areas of the participants' life. This makes the comments related to the phrases good material to be used in the constructive process.

Phrase 5: To be a mother: is the best thing in the world. This is what brings sense to my life.

Comment on phrase 5:

When I had my daughter, I was 38 years old. I always think that when she is the age I am now, I will be nearly eighty years old. I won't have the opportunity to enjoy my relation with her as much as I enjoyed the one with my son. I also don't expect to enjoy much of my first grandchildren. For me, there is nothing as good as enjoying my children in the family. I love other parts of my life, such as my profession, but for me to be in a family, with my family, my mother, my children, is the best part of my life. I love making plans with my family!

The previously defined indicator, which related to the lack of affection in BR's pattern of relations within the family, becomes stronger with the omission of her husband from her statement about the family. Until this point, her unique references to love and pleasure are in relation to her children and her original family. However, these declared preferences never appear personalized through concrete experiences lived together with her children and her husband. In the previous comment, she mentions her mother, but her husband continued to be absent. This reinforces the indicator regarding his secondary role in her life. BR even talks about her interests in her profession, but does not mention her husband. The indicator that she is not centered on affections as the main element of her relations is reinforced by the previous comment.

In a fragment taken from her fourth conversation with the researcher, BR said:

I think that I am responsible for the integration of my family, as my mother and my grandmother had such a role before me. I feel that when I am not focused on my family, because of my involvement at work or any other reason, things begin to destabilize the family unity. I feel responsible for generating programs to be done by all members of the family together.

Once again, her husband does not appear in such an important reflection about her family. However, the way she constructs her comments on her family allows us to bring new elements into view. She considers herself as the center of her family, and once again she refers to the family in terms of tasks to be done. Her identification with female figures in her original family allows us to think that her distance from her husband qualifies not only her marriage, but also her life. Taken together, her explicit identification with female figures in her family, the omission of male figures, as well as the way she assumes the role that she referred to as formerly being her mother's and her grandmother's, allow us to define a new indicator that opens up a new path in the construction of information: She feels the family to be a duty that must be complied with. This indicator is closely related to the prior one that defined the lack of affection in her pattern of relationships in her family. However, it adds the sense of duty as an important subjective production to be considered. At the same time, from the previous paragraph, we can construct a conjecture related to the importance of the female figures in her life. Is this importance given by a matter of gender? Gender has not appeared as relevant up to now. It is important to continue taking the research material forward in order to define new indicators that may allow the construction of a hypothesis about the subjective configuration that the researcher is looking for.

At this point in the research, it would have been very important to deepen the basis on which BR's relationship with her mother was subjectively configured. However, the fact that the researcher did not advance the construction of information and her fieldwork simultaneously, with one being part of the other, did not allow her to have a strategy to advance in depth on this topic. In any case, as BR was so convinced of her position in life, her spontaneous expressions during the research allow us to take new information to advance new indicators which, in fact, changed the previous course of the process. If the previous indicators had not been constructed, these new ones would not have appeared. On the basis of the previous fragments of the conversation, the researcher could have developed new paths in her construction. Nonetheless, up to this point, the indicators formulated do not permit an advance in terms of subjective senses through which BR's experiences with her original family, with the female members of her family, with her recent experiences in creating new families, articulated with other aspects of her life, are related to the way that she has subjectively configured her relationships with her children. This configuration is inseparable from the constellation of her lived experiences.

Going deeper into this part of the theoretical construction, it seems important to us to know more about BR's relationship with her mother. The next statement from one of the conversations allows new theoretical avenues to be advanced about this relationship:

My mother is my safe harbor. I know that if I am not capable of obtaining something, her support is guaranteed. She is always ready to support me; for example, when I participate in



the affairs of the Church where I used to go at night, I could always leave my children with her. My mother is the person I can count on for everything.

BR brings relevant new elements into her story. First, one prior conjecture can be constructed now as an indicator: Religion is a source of subjective senses that crosses all spheres of her life. The absence of passion, marital love, pleasure, and affective expressions in relation to her family might be related to the subjective senses through which she experiences her religious values, from which she generates subjective senses that might be related to the special affection for female figures in her family. As for all indicators, this one has to be followed by others to advance an important hypothesis on BR's subjective configurations. It is important to note how the process of constructing information has advanced from the first indicator, integrating possible new subjective senses that have changed the orientation of the whole process of construction, leading to new paths toward answering the initial question formulated by the researcher as her research focus. The current subjective plot is far from BR's early descriptions about her motherhood experience, being mainly related to subjective senses resulting from other spheres of her life.

The rigidity, surveillance, and control that she imposes on her actions and on the actions of others are strong elements that support the previous indicator relating to how her affection for her mother and her religious values are two inseparable sources of subjective senses, that become relevant to the way she has subjectively configured her affective relations. These subjective senses have configured the relevance of duty as the subjective core around which her different affective relationships are organized.

If, at the first point in the theoretical construction, we were willing to consider that the troubles in her marriage were the main sources of subjective senses configuring the way she has experienced the births and lives of her children, we would have thought that her rigidity and tendency to control, and her sense of duty, were more related to the pattern of relationships that characterized her mother and grandmother, which are crossed by her religious values. There is a strong identification with her female relatives in which affection, gender, and religious values seem to be closely articulated as part of the subjective configuration that characterizes not only her relationship with her husband, but also with her children and father, who she completely omits.

In order to advance the first hypothesis, on which the theoretical model depends, there are other elements that reaffirm the later indicators. The next complement of phrase response and its respective comments have a particular relevance at this point in the process:

Phrase: 12. My place: is where I could be happy, and/or where I can learn something to make me better. I love when these places are related to my family, my profession and God.

The comment referring to this phrase is the following:

As I have a strong faith, I always believe that there are some things that express messages for me in all the stars of life. Thus, in all situations, I try to find the answer to the question: What am I doing here? I think that everything has a purpose that is beyond ourselves; thus, I relax going to where I must go. I don't like to be in places where I don't perceive any of these feelings; to feel and find myself spontaneously and to find a sense of myself.

Her comment is an explicit expression of how strong her religious beliefs are, and also about how they function. They are not constructed on a rational basis but as a faith sustained by special personal prerogatives and feelings that allow her a special relationship with transcendence. The way in which her religious beliefs unfold into different subjective senses deserves deeper study, because on this question we do not have any further material available in order to advance. Constructive-interpretative research only advances theoretical constructions as a process, through which some statements are advanced while others remain open. At this point in the work, it would be necessary for a new round of conversation on the basis of the last indicators that were raised, especially those related to BR's religious values and to her own family history. In this process, it could be very useful to use photographs from different times and events during her family life and to ask her to comment on those moments in the family. The creation of instruments should be continuous throughout the research, as it is highly useful in deepening the dialogue, opening new zones of conversation oriented by already defined indicators.

According to the theoretical account that guides the research, it would be impossible to think that BR's relations with her children since they were born could be explained only by her experience of motherhood. From this theoretical account, no experience can be subjectively defined within its own borders; any experience involves a constellation of other experiences that appear at the present moment as subjective senses generated by subjective configuration of those experiences.

A well-defined indicator is related to BR's husband and marriage. The place of both in her life can be synthesized by the following elements: (1) Her husband only indirectly appears in the fifth conversation with the researcher; (2) in the complement of phrase instrument, he appeared for the first time in the penultimate phrase, as a result of a direct inductor, "My husband..." The way that BR constructs her relationship with the husband is decisive in advancing the indicator of how little presence he has in BR's life. Her marriage looks like a compromise by BR for a good partner, for a father to her daughter. She follows, at least apparently, the order and values imposed by her in the family. On this basis, a hypothesis could be formulated that her husband is secondary in her life, which was only stated as indicator before. The convergence of new indicators on this matter can be further reaffirmed by the next fragment taken from the conversation:

My husband is my great friend. He has a lot of things that I don't like, indeed I don't like. To be married is a daily battle. I have a complete comprehension that marriage is not an easy thing, but we both share the same values. We have moments of crisis like everyone, difficulties, but both of us have a will to solve problems together. He is a good father, which allows me to invest in other areas of my life that I like. I am not saying that he is perfect, but he is a great partner, my best friend. Thanks to God.

She has a good marriage, but one based on a friendship contract. The way in which BR constructs her husband offers strong elements to reaffirm how secondary he is to her. Since the very beginning of this case study, indicators related to her husband have appeared. As part of the picture drawn before, her duty, her rigidity, and the secondary place she gives to affection in her relationships are part of the subjective configuration of her relationships, and her relationships with her children

have not been conceived as an expression of love, but as something that had to be done. Her husband is tolerant and clearly subordinated to the order imposed by BR in the family. In her statement about the husband, no personal expressions related to their relationship appear—nothing about having shared a project or happy memories they have lived together. There is nothing that refers to their common life. This indicator becomes stronger after BR's statement that her mother is the person that supports her most. The way in which BR has constructed her speech and expressions in relation to her main affective figures is quite different. This is a process that is beyond consciousness and beyond any intentional control. For this reason, it is so important for this kind of research that the researcher provokes engaged expressions from the participants.

Subjective configurations and senses are powerful theoretical devices to be constructed as theoretical models capable to explain how a constellation of past life experiences are configured through different subjective senses in the way that a current experience is lived. In this case study, it was possible to advance the first step in BR's subjective configuration related to her family relationships. She expresses directly a strong affection for her children. However, she never makes explicit the enjoyment of joint experiences with them. The situation is the same in her references to her husband. Her strong faith and the way she lives this faith could be an important source of subjective senses that are central in her relationship with her children and her two husbands, from both marriages. The main core of her affective life is her mother. Duty, order, responsibilities, and norms are the principles that rule her life, and, to some extent, explain her concern in relation to her age compared with her son's. This core of subjective senses is very important in her subjective configuration of her affections, including her children's births.

The main goal of the presentation of this case has been to discuss the details of the construction of information, as conducted by following the constructive-interpretative proposal's principles. The fact that the case study was conducted by a student taking her first steps as a researcher allows commentary about possible paths and actions which, although they were not used, did not constitute an obstacle for the student in advancing in terms of knowledge about the matter being studied. The transit, from her first representation of the question to be posed at the beginning of her research, up until her final constructions, which allowed the perception of how an apparently punctual question is configured in a very complex way from a subjective point of view, was a very fruitful path for a researcher familiarizing herself with this way to conduct research on subjectivity.

The discussion of this case study has also allowed us to show possible actions and instruments that could have been used at different points in the research study. This process should be taught and discussed with students, whose prior training processes are frequently oriented by a comprehension of research as the collection of data that are later processed in instrumental ways. The understanding of scientific research as a long-lasting process, course of which is actively guided and oriented by the researcher's theoretical constructions, is maybe the most important aspect of the training process for young researchers.

The construction advanced in the case study is inserted into a line of research that has been opened up by our group, in which some work has been done on subjective configurations of postpartum depression and postpartum subjective experiences of women, such as those commented on in this chapter (Arrais 2005; Cesario 2016). One of the most interesting results of these research studies is the creation of alternatives to the notion of pathology, understanding postpartum depression not as a punctual experience, but as an expression of the complex way in which the constellation of facts of a unique life is intermingled in subjective individual configurations, through which social subjectivity appears in the most diverse ways in individual expressions.

### 3.4 Some Final Comments

The methodological proposal discussed in this chapter, unlike the way in which methodology has been commonly treated in psychology, specifies and explains why methodology is at the same time an avenue of the theory in which the subject matter is highlighted, making explicit the epistemological basis of this process, due to the different comprehension on which the knowledge of subjectivity is based. The three attributes of Qualitative Epistemology, upon which this methodological proposal is founded, cannot be understood as isolated principles, but as principles that imply theory, epistemology, and methodology as three parts of the same system. Dialogue, constructive-interpretative operations, and the relevance of the singular are closely articulated to each other, simultaneously having consequences for the advancement of theory, epistemology, and methodology.

The proposal drawn in this chapter departs not from what others say, but from how they construct and elaborate what they say. It is not the language or speech used in what is directly consciously made explicit by individuals and groups that is the focus of this type of research, but the indirect issues that qualify what is being said or written, and these are only accessible through theoretical models capable of generating intelligibility on this matter.

The constructive-interpretative methodology presented in this chapter and the epistemology upon which it rests are far from intending to exhaust the problem studied in one concrete piece of research. The study of subjectivity must be developed through different research lines, within which the same problem can be studied and discussed through different research fields. As exemplified in this chapter, we understand research as a long-lasting process, course of which allows the formulation of a theoretical model through which the knowledge about a problem progressively advances through several acts of research.

The flux of subjective senses cannot be grasped by a single act of knowledge. Its heuristic value is related to the opportunity opened up by concepts like subjective senses to advance in terms of how a certain constellation of facts about a single life, whether of social instances or individuals, appears together within a subjective unit, the subjective configuration, through a current concrete experience. It allows current experiences to be understood, not as a sum of lived events, but through a flux of

subjective senses, within which senses unfold, one into others, forming the flow of generative processes that characterizes subjective configurations.

Subjective configurations will never be completely understood by any research, but their construction contributes to providing meanings for processes and facts that are overlooked by other theories. Fieldwork and the construction of information in this approach are co-developed activities, one being a part of the other. Knowledge, from this epistemological perspective, is never a final result, which is a reason why the concept of research lines is emphasized in this chapter as the only way to study such a complex system as subjectivity.

Research in itself is understood as a theoretical process. The split between data collection and data analysis belongs to a descriptive and instrumental way of doing research. The theory of subjectivity assembles different interrelated concepts, giving visibility to a phenomenon that up to now has been overlooked in other theoretical lenses. The departure of a new theoretical representation of subjectivity has demanded that we reframe methodology in relation to how it has been used in psychological research so far. This reframing process implies a different use of theory as part of the active conduct of research and, at the same time, the transcending of the idea of the application of theory within the research. Theories, from our point of view, cannot be applied; they are devices for constructing knowledge on unexpected and unknown research questions.

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