

## Becoming a subject. A sociological approach

Mar Venegas / mariter@ugr.es  
*Universidad de Granada, Spain*

**Abstract:** An overview of some milestones in sociological theory leads to the review of some key contributions of interest to the sociological discussion on the process of becoming a subject. This paper presents the results of such overview, guided by the two major micro-sociological processes involved in the formation of the subject, socialization and subjectivation, and tries to formulate a single theory that emphasises the complementarity of both processes in the formation of the subject within the frame of social structure and its macro-sociological processes of social reproduction and change. In doing so, the starting point is the thesis that a subject is produced between constriction and possibility. The overview is concretized in the field of Education. The paper concludes with the formulation a theory in which action, subject and structure are interconnected through processes of both maintaining and challenging social structures, in so far as the reflexivity of practice makes social change possible.

**Key words:** socialization, subjectivation, subject, action, structure.

**Resumen:** Un recorrido por algunos hitos en la teoría sociológica permite revisar algunas contribuciones de interés para una discusión sociológica sobre el proceso de devenir sujeto. Este artículo recoge los resultados de ese recorrido, guiado por los dos grandes procesos microsociológicos implicados en ello: socialización y subjetivación; y trata de formularlos en una propuesta única, sintetizadora y holística, que enfatiza la complementariedad de ambos procesos enmarcados en la estructura de la sociedad y sus procesos macrosociológicos de reproducción y cambios social. Para ello, parte de la tesis de que el sujeto se produce entre la constricción y la posibilidad. El recorrido se concreta en el ámbito de la educación. El artículo concluye formulando una teoría donde acción, sujeto y estructura quedan interconectadas en procesos de mantenimiento de las estructuras sociales, así como de desafío a las mismas, al introducir, mediante la reflexividad de la práctica, la posibilidad del cambio social.

**Palabras clave:** socialización, subjetivación, sujeto, acción, estructura.

## Introduction

The process of becoming a subject is a recurrent object of study for various disciplines encompassed in social sciences. In this interdisciplinary space for reflection, this article presents a theoretical outline of the two large processes implicated in becoming a subject: socialization and subjectivation, circumscribing the analysis to the sociology's sphere of knowledge,<sup>1</sup> in view of putting forward a theoretical proposal that chronologically gathers the most distinguished contributions for sociology on becoming a subject from the action theory, which incorporates poststructuralist contributions especially relevant to understand this phenomenon, in order to overcome the limitations of those previous relevant contributions, to produce a summarizing and holistic theoretical proposal.

The following quotation taken from Alain Touraine (2005: 129) establishes the limitations for the analysis intended in this article:

The subject shapes in the will to escape from the forces, rules and powers that prevent us from being ourselves, which try to reduce us to the state of a system and its control on everyone's activities, intentions and interactions. These struggles against what snatches our existence meaning from us are always uneven struggles against a power, against an order. There is no subject if there is not a rebel, divided between anger and hope.

From this quotation it is concluded that the subject "shapes" between constriction and possibility. Even though each theoretical trend approaches this fact in a different epistemological manner (as displayed in this article), the production of works that allow us to think this sociological phenomenon from this disjunctive that is the shaping of the subject simultaneously between constriction and possibility has been constant.

The works discussed in this article do not deplete the vast production of knowledge on this topic of social sciences,<sup>2</sup> but they indeed represent the contributions to the sociologic debate materialized in the educational sphere, i.e., the sociology of education. This way, the first part of the article presents the outline of the revised works to, later in part two, produce a rather holistic theoretical proposal with which this text aims at contributing to the analysis of becoming a subject.

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1 Indubitably, every discipline comprised in social sciences has important considerations for this debate, however, they are out of this articles' reach.

2 Some distinguishable examples are David (2006), Quintana and Manrique (2012), and Cervulle (2012).

## **First contributions: education, socialization and subjectivation (Part 1)**

Education has been the sphere of development and application of the concepts of socialization and subjectivation par excellence (Durkheim, 1975; Dubet and Martuccelli, 1996 and 1998b; David et al., 2006; Davies, 2006; Venegas, 2012 and 2013a; Youdell, 2006a, 2006b and 2010; Weiss, 2012).

Hence, the first referent considered here is Émile Durkheim (1975), as he was a pioneer to define education as a social phenomenon, differencing between its spiritual and material dimensions,<sup>3</sup> socio-historically contextualizing it: each society has its proper practices and institutions and imposes its members an educational system with a normative framework that causes structural constraint,<sup>4</sup> fruit of life together.

According to this author, changes in the system are possible, but only from the inside. Education is, for him, a means that sets in the children's spirits the conditions for their own existence, an action the adult generation exercises upon the younger one.<sup>5</sup> However, Durkheim's functionalist vision establishes the analysis limits: he only pays attention to the transmission from society to the individual. There are still many elements missing to complete the image this article tries to depict.

Regarding this functionalist vision started by Durkheim, Robert William Connell (1987: 30) states that by 1930 the idea of a social role had consolidated: "a script socially designed for individual behavior, first learnt, then represented";<sup>6</sup> being socialization the process that enables this learning, by means of which the individuals integrate into the social relationships of the various socialization agencies.

Connell (1987: 50) points at two reasons to discard this theory: 1) avoids the analysis of power relations, which are the one that allows explaining resistance to power; without them, the result is a static model of society, without possibilities for social change, as it ignores conflict. 2) It lacks voluntarism: "it introduces the problem where logically social theory

3 Also central dimensions in the later description of social construction of reality by Berger and Luckmann (2008).

4 In Durkheim the idea of structural constraint appears as a central force in the formation of the subject, still a key topic at present.

5 This conception is close to the later notion of socialization by Berger and Luckmann (2008).

6 The translation of the original quotations from English to Spanish was carried out by the author of this text.

begins, the relation between personal agency and social structure; but avoids it dissolving structure into agency”.

To overcome the weaknesses of the functionalist theory of socialization, Connell (1987 and 2002) states that subjectivity builds from the subject's practice, from a relational approach and heeding the structural bases of practice. This thesis holds a central place in this article's theoretical proposal, together with the feminist thesis that every social relationship is mediated by power, the principle that generates conflict and resistance, which opens the theoretical space for the analysis of possible processes of social change (Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1988 and 1995; Butler, 1997 and 2001; Esteban, 2001; Foucault, 1989; Gil, 2013; Maquieira, 2001; Narotzky, 1995; Ortner, 1993; Venegas, 2013a).<sup>7</sup>

In the 1960's, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (2008), describing reality's social construction, retake Durkheim's idea that social reality exists both objectively (at material level) and subjectively (at spiritual or human-conscience level). They are pioneers in offering a constructivist definition of primary socialization as a central mechanism that enables such social construction. Individual and society mutually build themselves in a dialectic process. The individual is not born as a social subject, but predisposed to be, and it is socialization what enables this belonging.

The starting point is *internalization*, by means of which the individual assumes the (objective) world that already exists and is subjectively significant for their peers: they interpret it and make it theirs, being “the adults those who set the game rules” (Berger and Luckmann, 2008: 168-169), a similar conception to that of Durkheim; and they add, “the individual becomes what other signifiers consider them to be” (Berger and Luckmann, 2008: 165), by means of a dialectic between objectively attributed identity and that subjectively assumed. This dialectic already pinpoints subjectivation, even if they do not consider it in this process yet.

François Dubet and Danilo Martuccelli (1996, 1998a, 1998b) will be the ones that pay attention to the relation between education, socialization and subjectivation from their sociology of experience. Without ignoring the school's reproduction functions, they focus on those of production. For them, two terms concur: socialization, referred to the training of social *actors* by means of interiorizing norms and models; and, subjectivation, which refers to the training of autonomous *subjects* through distancing with their socialization. Since Connell, Dubet and Martuccelli consider that actors

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7 Some references are mentioned here that openly show this thesis, virtually common to all the revised feminist works.

and social structures reciprocally build themselves, therefore they recognize a correlation between social positions and subjective dimensions (Bourdieu 2005; Skeggs 1997), which Connell does not fully agree with, nevertheless.

Summarizing the literature reviewed in this section, we have two nuclear theses for the theoretical proposal intended with this work:

Thesis 1: at the level of practice (micro-sociological) it is possible to find processes of dual nature that sketch the first central continuum:

- The internalization of the values and norms that prevail in a society, a consequence of socialization (Berger and Luckmann, 2008; Dubet and Martuccelli, 1996, 1998a, 1998b; Durkheim, 1975; Komarovski, 1946, 1950 and 1954 cited in Connell, 1987; Parsons, 1942 cited in Connell, 1987).
- Resistance to such values and norms, fruit of subjectivation (Dubet and Martuccelli, 1998b)

Thesis 2: at the level of social structure (macro-sociological), it is possible to find processes of dual nature that sketch the second central continuum: reproduction and social changes (Connell, 1987; Dubet and Martuccelli, 1998b; Ortner, 1993)

So far, the three classic theoretical paradigms of sociology have come into play in function of their object of study: social actor and subjectivity; social action (logic of action) and social structures. However, the 1970's critical perspectives and the tendency, as of the 1980's, to integrate the micro- (actor, action) and macrosocial (structures) analysis levels into the same theory (Adkins, 2002; Connell, 1987, 2002; Narotzky, 1995; Ortner, 1993) will open spaces so that, as of the 1990's the challenging to the binary logic and the emphasis on both the discursive dimension and possibilities of social change add, all of which makes the idea of subjectivation germinate, as it is shown in the following sections.

### **From socialization to resistance, agency and practice**

As of the 1980's decade, the feminist social theory introduces theoretical elements that lead the way toward a theoretical approach more discursive and less materialistic, more cultural and less social (Adkins, 2002; Barret, 1992; Touraine, 2005). Moreover, the thesis that practice is the ontological element that imbricates the micro- and macro-sociological levels is fiercely defended (Connell, 1987, 2002; Narotzky, 1995; Ortner, 1993).

If quotidian action (or practice) and interaction, together with social relationships (the fruits and facilitators of them), are at the base of the

social construction of social structures that, once crystalized as institutions, appear external and coercive (paraphrasing Durkheim), then sociology is in charge of giving an account of such processes, of the connection between them, to express how action and structures connect in the social processes of reproduction and change. This task is approached next.

Practice can describe two different micro-sociological processes (Ortner, 1993): socialization or resistance. Following the proposal by Ortner, we can classify the revised theories according to a schema that structures practice as a result of:

Two types of socialization:

a) Denude of social conflict, as stated by structural functionalism, as previously explained.

b) Or considering social conflict, as the structuralist theories of social and cultural reproduction do, as explained by Connell (1987, 2002) or Holland and Eisenhart (1990).

Resistance to structural impositions —the case of the theories of cultural reproduction or of resistance— which nevertheless, in like manner leads to structural reproduction (Holland and Eisenhart, 1990; McRobbie, 1987; Willis, 1988 and 2003).

If socialization enables social reproduction, and resistance as social production ends up reproducing social structures as well, there should be another mechanism that allows us to explain the historical processes of social change (as it has occurred in the sphere of gender and sexuality, for example).

The critical social theory shows two imperative trends on the concept of resistance:

- A materialistic interpretation of cultural reproduction, understood as resistance,<sup>8</sup> which takes practice as analysis unit (Bourdieu, 2005; Connell, 1987 and 2002; Holland and Eisenhart, 1990; McRobbie, 1978; Skeggs, 1997; Willis, 1988 and 2003). Thus defined, practice contains potential for social change (Connell, 1987 and 2002), even if from this approach, practice ends up defining social reproduction, as it exhibits various weaknesses (Holland and Eisenhart, 1990), it focuses on relationships between the privileged group and the one not privileged, overlooking the tensions inside each category, the internal policy of each and the production of subjectivities, in which

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8 Theories of cultural production or resistance, which come from the School of Birmingham in the 1970's and whose analyses focus mainly on disfavored social collectives such as working classes or ethnic minorities.

one finds the keys to define practice as the drive for social change, as does the theory of practice.

- A discursive interpretation of power, that allows, starting from Foucault's concept of microphysics of power (1989), understanding social processes as discursive practices of submission [constriction], at the same time they entail resistance [possibility] (Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1988 and 1995; Butler, 1997; Weeks, 2003;<sup>9</sup> Youdell, 2006a, 2006b and 2010), introducing a poststructuralist concept that enables us to think in resistance to social change. This resistance is understood, then, as contestation. The discursive power which Foucault talks about is not the organized, institutional, bureaucratic power (Connell, 2002), nor is it Law or domination/subordination relations (Bourdieu, 2005); but it implies a myriad of power relations, the game that transforms them, the support and contradictions present in these relations. Power, as imposition, and resistance, as a response to such imposition, are two dimensions of the same process, hence power has to be understood as generator of resistances and not from a binary logic of dialectical opposition, as it is the case in the Marxists vision of social conflict followed by the theories of reproduction and those of resistance. Thus, Foucault (1989) points out, power is everywhere, in such manner that where there is power, there is resistance to it (Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1988; Weeks, 2003), from which the idea of discursive agency comes (Butler, 1993; Davies, 2006; Youdell, 2006a).

This way, resistance, agency and social change are closely linked through practice.

To overcome the theoretical weaknesses of the theories of production and resistance, authors such as Connell (1987 and 2002), Holland and Eisenhart (1990), or Ortner (1993) opt for the theory of practice, which arises in the 1980's, in view of studying action and structure as two complementary dimensions to understand social reality and explain the processes of production, reproduction and change of the system from practice, which is defined as every form of human action conceived in political terms. Ortner (1993) gathers the fundamental foundation of the theory of practice in terms of Berger and Luckmann's (2008) social construction of reality: society is a system, the system is powerfully constrictive, but it can be assembled and disassembled by means of human action and interaction (Ortner, 1993).

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9 Originally, 1986.

It is possible to difference two large trends among the categories of practice heirs of structuralism:

- From practice to structure, giving change primacy. Connell (1987 and 2002) recognizes reproduction, but only as apparent, as he states that what occurs is a constant process of change derived from human practice and the “crisis tendencies”. He emphasizes agency as a subject of practices that conveys change from the historicist standpoint. The “social structure expresses the constraints that underlay any given social organization form” (Connell, 1987: 92), however “being present in quotidian practice renders the structure vulnerable before major changes in practice” (Connell, 1987: 93). Holland and Eisenhart (1990) take most of Connell’s theoretical suppositions in their development of the theory of practice.
- From structure to practice, giving reproduction priority. Bourdieu (2005) is closer to the idea of social structures’ immanence, which is shaped in the notion of habitus, whereas cognitive structures, configured from the material organization of the field, orient practice. The author does not totally deny the possibilities of social change, even if he states that the solution is possible by means of “a radical transformation of the social condition of production” (Bourdieu, 2005: 58) of such habitus.

For their part, the 1990’s and 2000’s will make way for a theoretical eclecticism which has some distinguishable features such as an emphasis on fragmentation, diversity and deconstruction (McRobbie, 1994). In the early 1990’s, postmodernity contests some pillars of occidental modernity such as identity as essence, history as linear and evolutionary, ethnocentrism, classist knowledge, or biologicism upon which binary logic sits (Nicholson, 1990). Barret (1992) retakes Foucault’s debate between “words and things”<sup>10</sup>; i.e., between the symbolical and the material, the cultural and the social, and affirms the change as of the 1980’s of the social disciplines to the cultural ones (Adkins, 2002; Touraine, 2005).

This change implies a central theoretical turn from the material (economy, labor) to agency and reflexivity. To this adds the questioning to the binary logics, the emphasis on the discourses’ fluency, contingency, subjectivity or centrality. This theoretical transition nourishes the poststructuralist trend’s contents. Adkins (2002) distinguishes the change from the macro-sociological analysis scale, more proper to modernity, to

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10 Paraphrasing Michel Foucault’s “The order of things” published in 1966 and it is quoted by Michèle Barret (1992).

the micro analysis of everyday life, detraditionalization and individuation (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001). Adkins (2003: 22) places reflexivity in its relation with social change, as stated by Bourdieu (2005) as he points out that “becoming aware” generates spaces for social change. Indeed, here underlies the concept of *reflexivity* regarding the subjectivation process and the ensuing social change potential.

Also in this poststructuralist context, *practice* is the ontological analysis element, closely linked to resistance and agency. An example is Jeffrey Weeks’ (2003) work, which takes a conflictual and constructivist standpoint, where agency is a concept bound to the social phenomenon of resistance. In the face of these functionalist proposals that emphasize the acceptance and representation of roles, Weeks emphasizes the role of human subjectivity and agency.

For her part, from her corporeal feminism, Elizabeth Grosz (1987) places agency in the body as a space of resistance and change. Barret (1992) points at the need to produce an idea of agency that overcomes the weaknesses of both anti-humanist poststructuralism and humanist modernism. Butler (1993: 15): defines: “agency as a reiterative or rearticulating practice, immanent to power instead of an external relation opposed to power”; this way, she speaks of “discursive agency” (Youdell, 2006a). Meanwhile, Allen (2005) emphasizes the need of a subject’s theory erected upon subjectivity.

From all this comes a poststructuralist concept of *subjectivation*, more systematized and complex than the one proposed by Dubet and Martuccelli (1996, 1998a and 1998b), and which is analyzed in the following section.

## Centrality of subject and subjectivation (part II)

In this sense, the first relevant reference is the work by Judith Butler (1997), who analyzes the “theories about subjection”, where she develops interesting ideas previously stated in Foucault’s thinking. For Butler, power has a psychical form that defines the subject’s identity. Butler describes the formation of subject from such dual process of subjection/resistance, following Foucault’s (1989) power discursive model, which makes her consider the psychical form of power as a discourse that substantiates subjection, which enables both subordination, which she refers to as “being subject”, and the formation of the subject “being a subject”: subordination establishes the subject’s conditions of possibility, since power generates resistance to that power.<sup>11</sup>

11 This simultaneity —being subject and a subject— is the starting point for the proposal

Butler follows Nietzsche's and Freud's thinking to refer to the formation of consciousness as an effect of the internalized prohibition, from which reflexivity emerges, as consciousness is the means through which the subject becomes an object of themselves. We notice such dual dimensionality once more, when referring to a subject that thinks (inwardly) and expresses (outwardly).

This way, Butler (1997) defines subjectivation as becoming a subject, both for *being subject* (subjection) and *being a subject*. She considers subjectivation a process, fruit of the discursive production of identities; and adds that the possibilities for resisting discursive updating are in the psyche, in the unconscious. Resistance is then an effect of power, the auto-subversion of power itself. Following Foucault, she locates such resistance always in the bosom of social relationships, which are indubitably power relations, as previously stated in this article.

However, the statement is relegated to the level of discourses and their effect on the subject's psyche; therefore, its weakness is to need a more sociological concretion, which we do find in some works on the sociology of education such as, in the first place, the one by Deborah Youdell (2006a), who analyzes the contributions from poststructuralist theories on power and subject to the comprehension of educational inequalities in the struggle for social justice. Her objective is to show why inequality and discrimination persist. To do so, she refers to the performative construction of the subject, arguing that the very act of designating constitutes the subject, this is to say that the subject can not be assumed as preexisting. In order to function, performativity has to make sense for that which it mentions. Thus emerges a political subject, implied in politics and resistance (Youdell, 2010), which can open spaces for social action and change. Then, subjectivation implies subjection to power and recognition as a subject.

In the second place, we find the work by Bronwyn Davies (2006), similar to Youdell's. She takes the subjectivation (subjectification or subjection) process as one by means of which one becomes the subject, following Butler's affirmation that control and submission occur simultaneously in the becoming of a subject. Davies points out that, in the educational sphere, students and professors are usually conceived in terms of liberal humanism, as autonomous individuals with certain liberty to choose the persons they want to be; however, Butler opts for subjectivation to emphasize the process by means of which we become who and what we are: "Control and

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we intend to put forward in this article, according to which power is external to the subject (constraining action), and at once, it is the subject's jurisdiction (enabling action).

submission are the condition of possibility for the very subject” (Butler quoted in Davies, 2006: 426).

The formation of the subject depends on powers external to them. The subject can either resist or agonize, but they do not preexist these processes. The conditions of possibility for the subject are in the discourse and in mutually constitutive social acts. For Davies, this subjection and control process, in the formation of the subject, shows mutual recognition acts through which subjects concede one another the status of subjects.

As noticed, these recent contributions are rather focused on subjectivation when analyzing the becoming of a subject. They emphasize the possibility starting from constriction, but leave the prior contributions related to socialization aside. The need to formulate a theoretical proposal that links both processes in complementary manner —intending to give an account of the becoming of a subject— is this works’ *raison d’être*. What follows is an attempt to offer a holistic and summarizing proposal on becoming a subject, which conveys the idea of this process as something open, unfinished, which moves between continuums: the search for the to-be-made subject, to be defined as becoming rather than producing.

### **Discussion and theoretical proposal: becoming a subject from a poststructuralist action theory**

The first social definition of education (Durkheim, 1975) lays the foundations for primary socialization from a constructivist standpoint (Berger and Luckmann, 2008), understood as the internalization of the social world in the subject’s conscience. Dubet and Martuccelli (1996, 1998b) are the first to point out the complementarity between “socialization, formation of social actors and subjectivation, the formation of autonomous subjects” (Dubet and Martuccelli, 1998b: 12), they assert the existence of a conflict between these two processes of becoming a subject, from which they understand comes resistance.

In the 1980’s, a new theoretical approach appears (Ortner, 1993): *the theory of action or practice* (Bourdieu, 2005; Connell, 1987; Giddens, 2004; Holland and Eisenhart, 1990), which allows studying social *action and structure* as two complementary elements in the comprehension of the social world, in view of explaining the production, reproduction and system change processes from social action. The system shapes practice, and for its part, practice shapes the system, from which two effects come out: the system *reproduction* of norms, values and conceptual schemas, and social structures

by means of the process of *socialization*; and, a *change* in the system as a result of asymmetrical social relationships or different social positions.

As of the 1990's, we find a series of *poststructuralist contributions* regarding *resistance, agency and change*, which open the idea of *subjectivation* from the feminist definition that every social relationship is mediated by power (Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1988 and 1995; Butler, 1997 and 2001; Connell, 1987 and 2002; Esteban, 2001; Foucault, 1989; Gil, 2013; Maquieira, 2001; Narotzky, 1995; Ortner, 1993; Venegas, 2013a). This way, the analysis of becoming a subject between socialization and subjectivation is stated in the light of the poststructuralist debate simultaneously on constriction and possibility (Butler, 1997; Davies, 2006; Foucault, 1989; Weeks, 2003; Youdell, 2006a).

This is to say, not only do socialization remit to constriction and subjectivation to possibility (as pointed out by Dubet and Martuccelli (1998b)), but subjectivation —thought from poststructuralist theories— allows us to observe constriction (fruit of socialization) and possibility (fruit of the subjectivation referred by these authors) as simultaneous in the quotidian construction of the subject by means of practicing them (discursively and materially). This is the thesis defended in this article and which we present below.

The defended proposal seeks to formulate a theory of becoming a subject that incorporates socialization and subjectivation as forms of one same mechanism of power between constriction and the possibility of action in the context of a structural framing. Figure 1<sup>12</sup> depicts this theory.

Socialization is a process of macro-sociological nature, however it takes place at micro-sociological level, relating structure and action. In its most original formulation, the individual internalizes the structural order —appropriates it— to reproduce it through action. Both structural functionalism (conservative), the theories of reproduction and resistance (critical) have incorporated the centrality of this process in their analysis. However, other later theoretical developments have evinced that socialization, while free from the mechanisms of power, turns out a hermetic process, partial and insufficient to give an account of micro-sociological processes that relate structure and action, focusing the analysis more on the subject and the possibility of social change.

This way, if submission is the sociological mechanism for social reproduction by means of socialization, and resistance ends up reproducing social structures in like manner (Holland and Eisenhart, 1990; McRobbie,

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12 This figure is at the end of the present article (Editors' note).

1978; Willis, 1988 and 2003), there has to be some other sociological mechanism that allow us to explain social change in history. Ortner (1993) introduces such possibility through action, however she does not pay attention to the subjectivation process that the reviewed literature links to the subject's agency (Butler, 2001; Davies, 2006; Esteban, 2000; Youdell, 2006a, 2006b and 2010).

The subject referred to in this article is the active and creative subject of resistance (Connell, 1987; Dubet and Martuccelli, 1998; Holland and Eisenhart, 1990); here resistance, understood as contestableness, as a space of conscience that activates the reflexivity (Adkins, 2002 and 2003; Butler, 1997) of practice, even if there can exist constraints over the latter. Therefore, the active subject, the one of practice, is the agent subject, the subject of social action.

In order to give an account of these processes, whose nature is social, an epistemological formulation by means of two phenomena is necessary: 1) social action, from a poststructuralist vision; and, 2) becoming a subject, a phenomenon ever occurring and consequent of such social action. Thus understood the subject is formed in the very unfolding of social action. With this, it is possible to give an account of practice integrating the micro- (action) and macro-sociological (structure) levels of analysis, as well as the material (material organization of social structure) and symbolical (discursive level) dimensions and the sociological processes of reproduction and change.

Every structural organization has two levels: macro- and meso-sociological. The macro level corresponds to society; meso, to institutions. In both cases we find a material dimension, marked by the material conditions of existence; and another discursive or symbolical that comprises values, ideas, beliefs, stereotypes, myths, etc.: the dominant social discourse and that of the immediate institutional environment, respectively.

In this framework, becoming a subject is activated by two complementary mechanisms of power by means of action: *being subject* to discourses (see black side of figure 1, on the left), and *being a subject* of practices (see gray side of figure 1, on the right). The idea of being subject and being a subject has been taken from Butler (1997), the rest of the argumentation is the author's. From a sociological approach, it is understood that subjection is *to discourses*, however being a sociological subject is to be an agent subject or a subject of action, the *subject of social practices*, which occur in the material environment of each institution, and society as a whole, from which such discourses come.

This way, practices relate the two structural levels; the material, which contextualizes them, and the symbolical, which orients them inside that

material context. The individual *is subject to dominant discourses*. Well now, as *subject to practices*, the agent subject can channel their practices over two different directions. By means of the socialization process, as proposed by the classic sociological theory, the individual subject to these discourses is a subject of *submission* practices, since *socialization* is the passive process by means of which the individual internalizes the sociostructural order and makes it subjectively theirs, they somewhat submit to it; this way, the practices that result from this submission to the dominant discourse are ultimately *reproduction* practices of the established social order, as they adhere to it.

Often, nevertheless, the subject of action has to face various contradictory discourses from a number of institutions which surround them and which they belong to (i.e., with which the individual has strong affective identification) such as family, friends or partner, for instance. Sometimes, discursive differences take place even inside one same institution. That contradiction between discourses activates the *reflexivity of practice*, setting into motion a process of *subjectivation* simultaneous to socialization. The practices of *resistance* are the resulting actions of resolution, at least particular, of such contradictions in the agent subject, even if it is not a process free from personal and structural controversies, for as pointed out by the sociological theory, practice is constrained by structure.

Nonetheless, the agent subject manages to release, not always consciously, such subjective contradictions and develop action. Resolution takes place between the confrontation with the dominant discourse and the rupture with it. While confrontation can eventually lead to submission or adherence, the practices of rupture with the dominant discourse introduce structural spaces for a possible *change* regarding the established social order.

When practices introduce changes in the material organization of an institution, or their addition makes so upon any given society, other changes also enter the structure of the symbolical; this is, in the dominant discourse that orients the subjects' practices in that society. This way, the materialistic interpretation of action is given poststructuralist elements, as it incorporates discursivity into the analysis; and the explanation to becoming a subject allows giving an account of the dynamic of society as well.

This proposal comes from a broader research, on the affective-sexual policy (Venegas, 2013a, 2013b), with the goal of *analyzing the values, norms and practices on gender, sexuality, affectivity and body in the affective-sexual regimes of neighborhood, family, school, group of friends and partner, in order to study the processes of socialization and subjectivation that occur during adolescence, as micro-sociological processes that correspond with macro-*

*sociological processes of reproduction and change, respectively, bearing in mind the comparative perspectives of social class, gender and ethnicity.*

To do so, a methodology of action research with a constructivist approach has been followed. A course of affective-sexual education was designed and set up for adolescents from 15 to 18 years of age from two class-groups in two schools in Granada, Spain. After the course a personal semi-structured, in-depth interview was held with each student, being in total 42 respondents.

One of the central axes of the analysis of the interviews has been becoming a subject. Due to space constraints, here only one of the in-depth interviews is analyzed, as a single case, to illustrate this theory. The interview with Raúl,<sup>13</sup> a 17-year-old heterosexual boy, is a 2-hour stroll through the meanders of his vital experience, of which the affective-sexual dimension is analyzed from the approach of class, gender and ethnicity.

In this case, the macro-level corresponds to the Spanish society; meso, to the institutions studies in this research: family, school, neighborhood, group of friends (or peers) and partner. At both structural levels, we will find a material dimension —the material conditions of existence in function of his (working) class, his gender model (patriarchal masculinity) and his ethnicity (between Romani and Castilian)— and a discursive or symbolical, consisting of ideas, norms, beliefs, stereotypes, myths, etc. which these three dimensions of class, gender and ethnicity carry in both the dominant discourses and the immediate ones in the institutional environment Raúl belongs to.

In such structural framework, the interview with Raúl gives an account of his becoming a subject by means of two complementary mechanisms of power: *being subject to* those dominant or immediate discourses —which constrain his actions— and at once, *being a subject of* practices —which enables his action—. From this work's sociological approach, it is noticed how the discourse Raúl builds in his interview gives an account of the structural framework where he lives; in like manner, the practices he narrates give an account of that simultaneous space of constriction and possibility that illustrates the processes of socialization and subjectivation in which his becoming a subject has been defined.

His life is full of ups and downs: his mother's disease (until her passing); his father's abandonment; his temporary decision of living with his father and leave her mother alone with her disease. His primary socialization takes place mainly at the bosom of his extended mother's family and one of his uncles appears as a masculine referent. However, the values (conservative and patriarchal) that his family possesses often clash with those of his group of

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13 To ensure anonymity his real name was changed.

friends (permeated by social change). The result is a discourse that speaks of subjectivity marked by contradictions.

Although they have been separated analytically in order to explain them, the two mechanisms (*being subject to and being a subject of*) simultaneously occur in the subject's discourse, even if they come from processes chronologically lived in his becoming a subject, for primary socialization occurs in childhood, while subjectivation is proper to adolescence. Now some fragment of Raúl's discourse are analyzed to illustrate all this.

The neighborhood in which Raúl's socialization has taken place is a *gendered* universe, which is the reference context of his subjectivation. This way, he has internalized the sexual division of labor that defines a class, gender and ethnicity model uncontestable for him:

"A decorous woman is the one that works at home not outside. It is as if a decorous woman, she is another step, d'you known what I mean? My grandfather worked and earned, my grandmother has never been allowed to work by my grandfather. He has never let her work at all. That means my grandfather has had the guts to support my grandmother and the whole family. That is noticeable at the houses. Look, a woman that works is not more or less decorous, but I don't know, she is less prestigious or whatever you call it".

The homophobia present in his context is another central element in his affective-sexual becoming a subject:

"My grandfather can't put up with sissies. He's closed [-minded]. He says that after having a druggie, having a sissy is... that. My uncle does not like them either, he is very very very macho. They make him sick".

In this universe, men are rough and women invest in body capital, as it returns as symbolical, social and economic capital in the "space of sexual auction" (Holland and Eisenhart, 1990).

Raúl becomes a masculine subject in the contradiction between the "hegemonic" masculinity (Connell, 1987), virile (Bourdieu, 2005), which constrains action forcing to publicly reject practices considered feminine, at the time that it has been socialized in his learning:

She says: "tidy up your room". Then I go with a rag, as I have been told all my life, I go with my rag, none should know, I feel ashamed, I told my grandmother not to tell anyone.

Meanwhile, the groups of friends is the space of formation of the affective-sexual adolescent subject par excellence (McRobbie, 1978; Holland and Eisenhart, 1990; Willis, 1988). In it social leadership processes are built in function of the sexual experience, imposing "virility as nobility" (Bourdieu, 2005), which once again forces publicly displaying it. This way,

Raúl recognizes that “the more you score, the better, you are more macho, you understand, don’t you? Or... you even have to make it up so that you’re not a loser. I’m feeling shameful”.

Some elements that emerge in his environment contain, however, a potential for intergenerational social change which offer referents to *resist (contest)* the dominant discourses that have defined his socialization. So, he recognizes that “the girls in his room, one will be a teacher, the other clerk...” thereby, the next generation of women does not have to stay at home to be decorous, as his grandmother’s generation had to.

This sign of change is fundamental in such working class context, with an important volume of Romani population, and is related to more micro-social structural changes that come from the access of women to formal education, labor market and social mobility as of the second half of XX century (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001; Bourdieu, 2005; Giddens, 2004; Venegas and Lozano, 2016).

However, his relationship with a girl from his classroom is the experience that causes the most conflicts for him:

I regret what I did [in the fieldtrip]. I’m not telling, because I’m ashamed. She put my hand in the girl’s forbidden parts [...] How can I tell you? The tits. Then I say “if she has let me touch that, she would let me touch some others”. There was touches and that’s it. Then what happened. I don’t know. Because I offered myself and she offered herself, that’s ok, right? They left us alone, but everything passes, uh? My first time was... [...] I can’t stop thinking about that. I don’t know what’s going on. I can’t study, I start doing... I can’t get it out of my head. [...] I believe that it was not her first time, uh? Because she didn’t bleed or else [...] then I felt dirty. [...] it is as if I felt I shouldn’t have done it, ‘cause I don’t love her. No... no, I know I won’t share my life with her [...] It was not like the couples, they get... [...] she wasn’t what I had thought [...] I would have never abused her, I am careful with it [...] it is filthy and I barely did something. [...] I didn’t feel pleasure, I felt that, I came, that’s it. But she didn’t have to feel anything either, no? she had to do nothing, right? [...] it is that when I’m with her I feel good and I like her, what happens to me? [...] I don’t love her, maybe, I have taken her dignity, and I don’t give back, you know? That’s why I feel dirty.

Raúl has internalized a model of affective-sexual relationship based on possession and jealousy, patriarchally legitimized in an implicit manner and where a double gender standard is imposed: “if I hug a girl, they are like my sisters. [...] she knows I feel angry. A boy is not the same as a girl. [...] and I know she doesn’t love me, because if she really loved me, she would think of what she does”.

As noticed over the discourse, *shame* is the vector that gives an account of the conflicts and contradictions Raúl faces in his becoming a subject,

amidst normative impositions where he has socialized as social actor and the alternative references he ponders searching for autonomy as an agent subject.

This fragment of the interview shows the continual clash in becoming an affective-sexual adolescent agent between the dominant discourses (social over virile masculinity; family over honor; group of friends over promiscuity; adolescence over sexual experience) and concrete practices, feelings, fears, taboos, stereotypes, prejudices, false beliefs.

His is a coming and going between submission to the discourses that surround him and the practices to contest those discourses, between the need to belong to the groups he is part of and the search for his individuality. Contesting those discourses activates the reflexivity of his practice, which oscillates between submission and contestation, closer to adolescent confrontation than to the rupture with the dominant models that define his social environment.

This way, the place he subjectively holds in this universe of class, gender and ethnicity presents contradictory elements, which are one of the pieces that he has to fit into his becoming a subject, between a socialization that follows a patriarchal, macho and homophobic model, and a subjectivation that distances him from such model, looking for his autonomy through more egalitarian ways of being an affective-sexual subject, which incorporate into the studied context some agents such as more egalitarian families in the neighborhood, school, or boys and girls who do not adhere to such patriarchal model. All of this is the object of study, even if it exceeds this article due to space limitations.

## Conclusions

The present work has made a chronological outline over sociological theory, from a feminist approach, paying attention to and debating some historical milestones relevant to understand the becoming of a subject, between socialization and subjectivation, constriction and possibility. With this, it has been sought to gather the main contributions in this respect and discuss weaknesses in order to overcome them by means of a summarizing and holistic proposal for becoming a subject, through a poststructuralist reading of the action theory.

This theory refers to becoming a subject, a fruit of a mechanism of power that unfolds by means of a dual and simultaneous process: being subject to and being a subject of practices. By means of the latter the subject becomes agent, i.e., the subject of action. An action that moves between constriction

and possibility, while the structurally situated action is a relational one, thereby, mediated by power, that is external to the subject and their own jurisdiction at once.

This way, action, subject and structure are interrelated in processes that maintain social structures through socialization and the consequential submission, which makes the subject adhere to that structural order; but also of challenge to those social structures, by means of subjectivation that makes resistance possible, understood as contestation that activates through the reflexivity of practice the possibility of social change.

To illustrate all these processes, the article showed the becoming of an affective-sexual subject of a 17-year-old heterosexual adolescent who lives in a working class neighborhood in the City of Granada, Spain, and whose family partly belongs to Romani people. The analysis shows a subject dynamics of a subject that oscillates between a class, gender and ethnicity universe, characterized by conflict and contradiction between socialization following a patriarchal, macho and homophobic model, and a subjectivation that intends to distance from such model in order to build personal autonomy by means of a more egalitarian way of becoming an affective-sexual subject.

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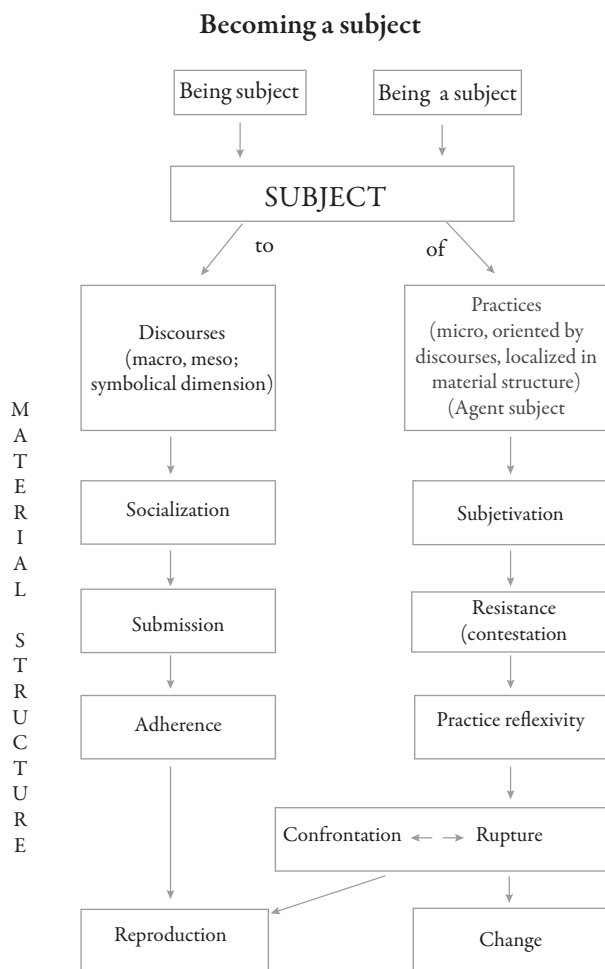
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## Annex

Figure 1



Source: Venegas (2013a)

**Mar Venegas.** Professor in the department of Sociology, University of Granada, Spain. Doctor in Sociology and Expert in Gender and Equal Opportunities from the same university. Research lines: gender studies and sexuality from the sociology of education and sociology of professors. Recent publications: Venegas, Mar, “El cuerpo en la escuela de las ausencias. La educación afectivosexual en la batalla entre coeducar o segregar”, in *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación / Revista Ibero-americana de Educação*, vol. 64/1, Madrid and Buenos Aires: Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura (OEI), Centro de Altos Estudios Universitarios (CAEU) (2014); Venegas, Mar, “Investigar las relaciones afectivosexuales: el diseño de un cuestionario abierto”, in *Empiria. Revista de Metodología en Ciencias Sociales*, vol. 28, Madrid: Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED) (2014); Venegas, Mar, “Segregar versus coeducar: Un marco para educar las relaciones afectivosexuales y prevenir la violencia de género en la adolescencia”, in *Ehquidad. International Welfare Policies and Social Work Journal*, no. 3, Logroño: Asociación Internacional de Ciencias Sociales y Trabajo Social (2015).

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