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THE TRIAD

**IN CONCEPTUALIZATION OF IDENTITY: CONSTRUCTION,
TRANSITION, AND IMAGINARIES**



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THE TRIAD

IN CONCEPTUALIZATION OF IDENTITY: CONSTRUCTION, TRANSITION, AND IMAGINARIES

LA TRIADA EN LA CONCEPTUALIZACIÓN DE LA IDENTIDAD: CONSTRUCCIÓN, TRANSICIÓN E IMAGINARIOS

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ABSTRACT

Identity constitutes a central concept for understanding the processes of subject formation and the transformations of contemporary societies. The aim of this study was to analyze the main theoretical perspectives that explain identity from a sociological approach, identifying the conceptual elements involved in its configuration and evolution. A theoretical documentary study was conducted based on the critical, comparative, and interpretative analysis of specialized scientific literature on identity, social representations, social imaginaries, biographical transitions, and individualization, incorporating contributions from both classical and contemporary sociology. The review identified a conceptual triad composed of construction, transition, and imaginaries as the key dimensions underlying identity, demonstrating that identity is shaped through continuous processes of socialization, interaction, recognition, and the production of shared meanings. Furthermore, the findings indicate that the transformations associated with modernization, globalization, and cultural change have fostered more dynamic, reflexive, and open forms of identification, moving beyond rigid or essentialist conceptions. The results also show that identity is closely linked to biographical trajectories, historical contexts, institutions, and social relationships that shape individual experiences. It is concluded that identity should be understood as a relational, dynamic, and multidimensional process, constructed through the ongoing interaction between social structures, personal experiences, and shared symbolic frameworks. This perspective overcomes deterministic approaches and provides a broader interpretative framework for analyzing identity transformations in contexts characterized by diversity, social mobility, and the continuous changes of contemporary societies.

Keywords:

Identity, gnoseology, social representations, individualization, social imaginaries.

RESUMEN

La identidad constituye una categoría central para comprender los procesos de construcción del sujeto y las transformaciones de las sociedades contemporáneas. El objetivo del estudio fue analizar las principales perspectivas teóricas que explican la identidad desde un enfoque sociológico, identificando los elementos conceptuales que intervienen en su configuración y evolución. Se desarrolló una investigación documental de carácter teórico sustentada en el análisis crítico, comparativo e interpretativo de literatura científica especializada sobre identidad, representaciones sociales, imaginarios, transiciones biográficas e individualización, incorporando contribuciones de la sociología clásica y contemporánea. La revisión permitió reconocer una tríada conceptual integrada por construcción, transición e imaginarios como ejes articuladores de la identidad, evidenciando que esta se configura mediante procesos continuos de socialización, interacción, reconocimiento y producción de significados compartidos. Asimismo, se identificó que las transformaciones derivadas de la modernización, la globalización y los cambios culturales han favorecido formas de identificación más dinámicas, reflexivas y abiertas, alejadas de concepciones rígidas o esencialistas. Los resultados muestran que la identidad se encuentra estrechamente vinculada con las trayectorias biográficas, los contextos históricos, las instituciones y las relaciones sociales que condicionan la experiencia de los individuos. Se concluye que la identidad debe comprenderse como un proceso relacional, dinámico y multidimensional, construido mediante la interacción permanente entre estructuras

sociales, experiencias personales y marcos simbólicos compartidos. Esta perspectiva permite superar enfoques deterministas y ofrece un marco interpretativo más amplio para analizar las transformaciones identitarias en contextos caracterizados por la diversidad, la movilidad social y los cambios propios de las sociedades contemporáneas.

Palabras clave:

Identidad, gnoseología, representaciones sociales, individualización, imaginarios sociales.

INTRODUCTION

Identity has become one of the most significant concepts in the Social and Human Sciences because it provides a framework for understanding how individuals construct themselves, establish social relationships, and respond to the profound transformations that characterize contemporary societies. Despite decades of theoretical development, there is still no universally accepted definition of identity, nor agreement regarding its conceptual boundaries, analytical dimensions, or methodological approaches (Camilleri, 1993; Castells, 1997). This conceptual plurality reflects the complexity of identity as a phenomenon that simultaneously encompasses psychological, sociological, cultural, historical, and educational dimensions (Tajfel, 1974; Yardley & Honess, 1987). Consequently, identity should not be understood as an isolated attribute of individuals but rather as a multidimensional and dynamic process shaped by continuous interactions between persons and their social environments.

The incorporation of identity into the social sciences is commonly associated with the work of Erikson (1977), who introduced the concept of ego identity to explain the developmental crises experienced during adolescence. Erikson (1977) defined identity as a sense of sameness and continuity through which individuals perceive themselves over time and answer the fundamental question, "Who am I?". Since then, the concept has progressively expanded beyond psychological explanations to include sociological and cultural perspectives that recognize identity as the product of historical, institutional, and symbolic processes. According to the *Dossier for Intercultural Education* (2002), the growing interest in identity since the second half of the twentieth century is closely associated with globalization, technological progress, economic integration, and the emergence of increasingly diverse societies, all of which have transformed traditional forms of belonging and social participation.

From this broader perspective, identity is inseparable from culture because individuals construct meanings about themselves through shared symbolic systems and collective representations. Larraín (2003) argues that culture provides the symbolic resources through which people interpret their experiences and define who they are in relation to others. Historically, the concept of culture

evolved from its original association with cultivation toward a broader conception linked to civilization, symbolic production, and collective ways of life. Identity therefore emerges through participation in cultural practices and social interactions, continuously adapting to changing historical circumstances.

Identity also involves an ongoing process of self-reflection through which individuals become aware of their abilities, values, aspirations, and social position. However, self-knowledge cannot be separated from social recognition because individuals define themselves as members of particular groups while simultaneously differentiating themselves from others. Consequently, identity develops through the interaction between personal experiences and collective affiliations, integrating both individual and social dimensions. Berger & Luckmann (1968) explain this relationship by emphasizing that identity is socially constructed through everyday interactions, whereas Dubar (2007, 2010) proposes that identity results from the articulation of two complementary processes: the biographical process, through which individuals negotiate inherited and projected identities, and the relational process, through which identities are assigned and recognized within institutions and social groups. These processes reinforce the idea that identity is neither static nor predetermined but rather the outcome of continuous negotiation between personal trajectories and social structures.

Socialization constitutes the principal mechanism through which identity is constructed. Beginning within the family and extending throughout educational institutions, professional environments, and community life, socialization enables individuals to internalize norms, values, beliefs, and symbolic references that guide their participation in society. Dubar (2010) distinguishes between primary socialization, developed mainly within the family, and secondary socialization, which continues throughout life as individuals participate in new institutional and professional contexts. Similarly, Berger & Luckmann (1968) argue that socialization connects biography, culture, and social structure, allowing individuals to construct meaningful identities while adapting to changing social realities.

Educational and cultural environments play a particularly significant role in this process because they transmit the symbolic resources through which individuals interpret reality. Dongo (2009) argues that educational traditions, cultural practices, language, and shared values constitute social factors that influence cognitive development and identity formation. Language, in particular, functions not only as a means of communication but also as a mechanism that organizes thought, shapes cognitive structures, and mediates the interpretation of social reality. Consequently, identity is built through the continuous appropriation, reinterpretation, or rejection of meanings acquired from family, school, university, professional practice, and other social institutions.

Identity is therefore characterized by several essential features. According to the *Dossier for Intercultural Education* (2002), identity is composite because it integrates multiple social affiliations, including family, profession, religion, gender, and social class; dynamic because it changes throughout life while maintaining a sense of continuity; and dialectical because it is permanently constructed through interaction with others. Bartolomé Pina (2002) similarly argues that identity preserves cultural heritage while simultaneously adapting to new social realities. Hernando (2002) further emphasizes that identity construction depends on cognitive mechanisms that organize experience through representations of time, space, and reality, enabling individuals to interpret the world coherently despite constant social change.

Contemporary sociological perspectives have further emphasized the fluid and unfinished character of identity. Gergen (1992) questions the existence of a stable and unified self, proposing instead that identity is continuously reconstructed through discourse and social interaction. Likewise, Bauman (2001, 2002) argues that the processes of globalization and individualization have transformed identity into an open and permanent project rather than a predetermined social condition. In liquid modernity, traditional structures of belonging have weakened, requiring individuals to construct and reconstruct their identities throughout their lives. Berger et al. (1979) similarly describe modern identity as increasingly open, differentiated, reflective, and individualized because contemporary biographies involve constant transitions across multiple social worlds.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives demonstrate that identity should be understood as a relational, dynamic, and multidimensional process resulting from the interaction between biography, culture, institutions, and historical circumstances. Rather than representing a fixed personal attribute, identity is continuously negotiated through processes of socialization, recognition, symbolic representation, and cultural participation. This theoretical framework provides the foundation for examining identity as a complex social phenomenon whose construction reflects the reciprocal influence of individuals and the changing societies in which they live.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted using a qualitative theoretical-documentary approach aimed at the critical analysis of the principal philosophical and sociological perspectives that have contributed to the conceptualization of identity. The research is grounded in the premise that identity constitutes a historical, social, and symbolic construct in continuous transformation; therefore, it requires an interpretative approach capable of capturing its multiple dimensions and meanings. A hermeneutic-documentary method was employed, understood as a strategy of

critical textual interpretation focused on examining conceptual categories, theoretical relationships, and historical processes embedded within academic production. From this perspective, the analysis was not intended to test empirical hypotheses but rather to reconstruct the meanings attributed to identity and to examine the diverse explanatory frameworks developed within contemporary social sciences. The corpus comprised both classical and contemporary works addressing identity, socialization, social imaginaries, individualization, and processes of recognition. The authors examined included Erikson, Berger and Luckmann, Dubar, Castells, Taylor, Bauman, Giddens, Girola, and Reguillo, whose contributions provide valuable insights into the psychological, sociological, cultural, and philosophical dimensions of identity.

The analytical process was carried out in three phases. The first phase consisted of a documentary review involving the identification and selection of specialized literature on identity, social imaginaries, social transitions, and individualization. The second phase focused on conceptual systematization through the identification of central categories recurring across the reviewed texts, including individual identity, collective identity, socialization, recognition, social imaginaries, and individuation. The final phase involved hermeneutic integration, aimed at identifying convergences, divergences, and articulations among the various theoretical perspectives. This process enabled the development of an analytical framework based on the triad of construction, transition, and imaginaries as key explanatory dimensions of contemporary identity (Girola, 2020).

The theoretical robustness of the study was ensured through the systematic contrast of classical and contemporary authors, the argumentative coherence of the interpretations advanced, and conceptual triangulation across different disciplinary traditions. This procedure strengthened the analytical validity of the conclusions and provided an integrative understanding of identity as a complex and multidimensional social phenomenon.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Firstly, identity will be addressed based on the work of Dubar (2010) in which he refers to three types of identities: individual identity, the identity of others, and collective identity. According to the author, identity is the product of successive socialization because socialization means listening to a series of transactions between the individual and social bodies that surround it, there is primary (family) socialization and secondary socialization.

Socialization can be defined as the internalization of norms and references that allow one to become a member of a social group, to see oneself as such, and to act appropriately in this group. Dubar (2010) talks about primary socialization, it is within the family unit, and it is the center of identity. Secondary socialization, which continues

throughout life, in different social origins that the subject passes through (professional circles). Early socialization has references to genetic psychology, with the stages of development that Piaget places that directly address the issue of relationships between sociological, psychological and biological explanations and develop, based on the facts of socialization, in a sexual way. These explanations of different orders, as Dubar (2010) emphasizes, refer to the developmental states through which the child needs the construction of identity.

Identity is formed from the processes of primary socialization and secondary socialization in adults, particularly in the context of working life. Dubar (2010) talks about a double identity: The identity of oneself and the identity of others. The identity of others is the result of the process of assigning identities by institutions or actors that interact with the individual. Identity for oneself refers to the work of internalization, of the identity traits of individuals for themselves.

When these two identities are at odds, the strategies for identity construction are situated in two aspects: first, the objective of dealing with the transactions of the individual with his environment assigned between an identity and the identity of the jobs require adjustment. by himself. The objective or external transaction is linked to the relational identity. It is the dependence between the desired identity of an individual and the identity assigned to it: the individual tends to adjust to the relational identity. Regarding the subjective or internal transaction, which is related to the biographical identity, the relationship between the individual's own professional identity and that which is assigned to him, arises from the subjective and objective operation that are components of the individual's identity that , through its action, will allow you to build your identity. Dubar's approach allows us to understand the concept of identity through its origin and socialization phenomena.

According to Larraín (2003) Personal identities cannot exist without social identities and vice versa. There is an analytical distinction, but that does not mean that they can occur only reciprocally. Furthermore, personal identities are formed by culturally defined collective identities, but these cannot exist separately from individuals; being that a first difference can be presented by saying that while individual identities have psychological contents, collective identities cannot be described in psychological terms and, a second difference consists of that while individual identities normally have a single more or less integrated identity relationship, the Collective identities normally have several identity discourses.

For Bauman (2001), identity and its theorization are not exhausted and, rather, his discourse, as he delves into the depths of the topic, aspires to "reveal to us more about the current situation of humanity. For the author, the process of individualization, coupled with modernity, is nothing other than the consequence of human liberation from their social

destinies and confronting the arduous and solitary task of constructing another human identity with the responsibilities and consequences of its realization. Modernity therefore replaces the pre-determination of a social position with a compulsive and obligatory self-determination. According to Bauman (2001), if the statements made about identity, more or less in terms homologous to those described by the classics of sociology, are valid for all periods and all social classes. Social class, on the one hand, and gender on the other - additionally, the ideology of the nation state formed a socio-territorial discourse on which they gravitated - determined individual choice, and they also seemed incredibly taken for granted, natural, so They were not questioned and "the task left to the individuals was none other than to fit in, to embed themselves in the assigned niche by behaving as its already established residents did".

In liquid modernity, not only individual placements but also the niches or spaces of socio/cultural identification to which individuals may have access and in which they may wish to establish themselves, are melting at full speed and can hardly be adapted to objectives of the type "life projects". In *The Individualized Society* Bauman (2001) insists on two ideas for greater precision regarding the nature of the identity issue. On the one hand, he takes up Beck and Castells, establishing his conviction that modern man is not in a position to give individual responses to a situation whose causes overwhelm him due to its high degree of abstraction and differentiation, creating the conditions for the possibility of void of content of democratic institutions and the privatization of the public sphere, so that only individual action, incapable of facing disintegrating and abstract forces, ceases to be a rational act.

On the other hand, perhaps rather than talking about identities it is better to talk about identification to account for its unfinished, incomplete or unfinished character in permanent construction and always open; Its validity must be assumed not as a residue of early modernity, nor as a creeping defect coming from the eternal questions about the meaning of man, but as a natural companion of globalization.

Wars of identification are not contrary to the globalizing trend nor do they stand in the way: they are a legitimate offspring and a natural companion of globalization and, far from stopping it, they grease its wheels. Berger et al. (1979), for whom identity ceases to be an objectively and subjectively given fact and becomes a difficult, unfinished project, in permanent crisis due to the forces that press on it at globalized rhythms. For Berger et al. (1979), modern identity is:

- Especially open: the biography of modern man is a constant migration of worlds of social life and, at the same time, it is the successive realization of a series of possible identities.

- Especially differentiated: the structures of each social lifeworld are experienced as unstable and unreliable.
- Especially reflective: reflexivity that occurs not only about the outside world, but particularly towards the subjectivity of the individual and especially about his or her identity and, especially, individuated.

Identity is the person's ability to be an object of oneself, this identity is forged in the course of daily life, it is the constant performance of roles; These roles we play, the experiences we live, the images we receive from others and even from ourselves are multiple and complex; Identity is what organizes and integrates a whole, it is an endless process and it is what gives meaning to the experience. Taylor (1993) states that Identity is designated as something equivalent to a person's interpretation of who they are and their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being; our identity is shaped in part by recognition or lack thereof; often also due to the false recognition of others.

Personal identity is a continuous situation and conservation of something, the form of itself and its content varies historically and culturally; It is a social construction of identity. This is how Bonfil Batalla & Valenzuela Arce(1992) handles it in his four identity configurations:

- Segregated identity, when the actor identifies and affirms his difference independent of all recognition by others
- Heterodirected identity, when the actor is identified and recognized as different by others, but he has a weak capacity for autonomous recognition
- Labeled identity, when the actor identifies himself autonomously, although his diversity has been established by others
- Deviant identity, in which case "there is a complete adherence to the norms and models of behavior that come from outside, from others: but the impossibility of putting them into practice leads to rejecting them through the exasperation of diversity."

Understanding who one is involves trying to understand, from the category of identity, how each person sees themselves, the interpretation they make of their person, shaped through the permanent dialogue between themselves and society. That is to say, the action and life of people is understood to be shaped daily as they see that their behavior is a reflection of the actions of those around them. For Taylor (1993) "identity is formed by social processes. Once crystallized, it is maintained, modified or even reformed by social relations... reciprocally, the identities produced by the interplay of the organism, individual consciousness, and social structure, react on the given social structure, maintaining it, modifying it or even reforming it.

Meaning, according to Berger & Luckmann (1968), is constituted within human consciousness: in the consciousness of the individual, who is individuated in a body

and has been socialized as a person. Consciousness, individuation, the specificity of the body, society and the historical-social constitution of personal identity are characteristics of our species. Consciousness in itself is nothing, it is always awareness of something, it exists only to the extent that it directs its attention towards an object, towards a purpose, consciousness does not exist independently and meaning is a more complex form of consciousness because there is a mutual dependence.

Identity is a social process of individual construction of personalities, where there must be respect for group membership, recognizing aspirations and potential within each social group and reinforcing cohesion and collective identity. Identity as such is formed personally, in dialogue of experiences with the social society, with the social groups of which the individual lives and feels part.

The notion of situational identity leads to the idea that there are spaces, scenarios, social places that introject each actor or subject and reflect an idea of who they are, who they have been and what their objective possibilities are. Thus, each and every one of the individuals who live together within a common society play very important roles and our way of getting involved in the development of the community is very decisive, because this has consequences, positive or negative, for those around us.

Sociocultural factors play a fundamental role in the construction of identity, as identity is shaped through a continuous process of socialization that unfolds throughout an individual's life. The family, school, university, profession, culture, society, and historical context constitute essential settings in which values, norms, knowledge, and ways of interpreting reality are transmitted, thereby contributing to the development of both personal and collective identity (Berger & Luckmann, 1968; Jolivet, 1956). From this perspective, identity does not emerge spontaneously nor does it represent a fixed attribute; rather, it is the result of the ongoing interaction between individual experiences and the social structures that shape them (Dubar, 2010; Giddens, 1991).

Identity construction also involves a selective process through which individuals adopt, reinterpret, negotiate, or reject the values, beliefs, and practices acquired from the different social groups to which they belong over the course of their lives. Family, educational, professional, and community experiences leave distinct imprints that influence how individuals perceive themselves and how they are recognized by others (Bauman, 2001; Castells, 1997). Consequently, identity can be understood as a dynamic synthesis between biographical continuity and the transformations produced by multiple social and cultural transitions.

According to Dongo (2009), social factors associated with educational and cultural transmission play a crucial role in

cognitive development and identity formation. These factors are expressed through educational traditions, cultural practices, shared values, and symbolic systems that vary across societies and historical contexts. Language, in particular, represents a privileged mechanism of cultural transmission because it not only facilitates communication but also organizes thought, structures cognitive processes, and shapes the ways individuals interpret and assign meaning to social reality. Therefore, cultural and educational differences generate diverse ways of understanding the world and constructing identity, demonstrating that identity is simultaneously an individual and a sociocultural process.

There are degrees of collective coherence where conscience acts in people with actions, which is why the most important condition for personal identity to develop without disturbance is the same group cohesion. If this requirement is not met, the probability of a crisis of sense of belonging to occur.

Crises of meaning are often subjective as well as intersubjective, which in turn lead to considerable consequences of structural characteristics within modern societies. To speak of identity crises, this is perfectly exemplified by the rising figures in divorce statistics, confirming the above. said, referring to this as a consequence of a crisis of meaning in marriage. Social identity is what Reguillo (1991) refers to, which is built in the interaction with other subjects who participate in common characteristics based on their social positioning, us women, us workers, us young people, etc. They are constructed cuts that attend to the modes of relationship in the social system of production and organization.

Due to the above, it is explainable that the structures of modern societies are based on the sense of belonging, values and conditions of the individuals who are immersed in them, for the same reason there is congruence between the subjects and the society in common. Socially, the formation of personal identity is guaranteed and there is a high percentage of shared meanings in communities of life.

For Dubet (2007), each actor within an institution then positions itself in a somewhat strategic logic in defending its objectives, which may be similar to those of others, the crisis would be situated institutionally in the power capacity, power influencing others and the clash of interests and powers of the group with similar status and role. Dubet (2007) already stated that the institution to which the actor joins or belongs precedes him, he does not choose the norms, nor the values, nor the roles that are assigned to him nor those that are thought of before arrival. Is the identity of the actors thought out, or preconceived? Is it a control factor built for appropriation? The social actor for this author is never a real subject but is defined by his desire to be the subject of his life, although he never fully

achieves it. In Dubar (2010) identity is none other than the result that is both stable and provisional, individual and collective, subjective and objective, biographical and structural, of the various socialization processes that, together, individuals build and define institutions.

CONCLUSIONS

Identity taken as the object of sociological analysis means the provisional, subjective and social, biographical and structural result originated in various socialization processes that allows reflection and problematization of the notion of identity. The author also proposes a theoretical and conceptual body that can be considered. as a basis for research into the processes of social identity construction and deconstruction.

The recognition of identity in the human being as a result of a hermeneutics of the self (sense of continuity and discontinuity / personal and social character), reveals the power it has over people's most intimate motivations (or demotivations). It is recognized that the configuration of a life occurs from character, circumstances, psychological constitution, beliefs, preferences, which are not restrictions, but materials to choose from, therefore, identity is an interpretive response to our talents and disabilities and the changing social context. It is a dialectic, because, in the end, those capacities and circumstances are also a product of what identity leads one to do.

Self-determination is the supremacy of individual freedom and autonomy free from all ties to forge your life project with your open horizon, but also with your loneliness, concern for identity refers to the process of socialization and individualization in parallel, affirming that the experience develops in three logics of interaction: socialization (explained as the internalization of norms or roles, in this case, etiquette), subjectivation (referring to the development of personal subjectivity: tastes, interests, desires, which leads the subjects to establish a line that separates their "I" from "we") and finally the instrumental performance, that is, meaning the usefulness of the investment with a vision for future projects, considering resources and experience.

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Conflicts of Interest:

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Author Contributions:

Jennifer Quiroz-Fragoso, Coralia Juana Pérez-Maya: Conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, supervision, validation, visualization, original draft writing, and writing, review, and editing.

Ethical statement:

The study was based on the analysis of documentary sources and publicly available data, and therefore did not involve the direct participation of human subjects. No personally identifiable information was handled.