

Chapter 10

Epistemological and Methodological Issues Related to the New Challenges of a Cultural–Historical-Based Psychology

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Abstract In the last fifteen years, new theoretical topics developed by different Soviet psychology authors in different moments of its development have been elucidated. Among these topics, Vygotsky's concepts of *perezhivanie* and sense are particularly relevant because these signalled questions were not in focus in Soviet times; these concepts have remained in shadow for decades. These topics permit advancements in new psychological and complex systems, such as consciousness, personality and subjectivity, that are based on a new foundation. However, this advancement presupposes new epistemological and methodological challenges that, until today, have not been developed within this theoretical account. The present paper discusses the Qualitative Epistemology on which the basis of a constructive interpretative methodology is developed as a path for the study of subjectivity from a cultural–historical standpoint. This paper discusses one case study to make explicit the procedures that rule the construction of knowledge in this methodology.

10.1 Introduction

Until now, there has been no consensus among authors regarding how to classify the different psychological trends that are organised as Soviet psychology; all of these trends share the cultural, historical and social geneses of human psychology. Soviet psychology was founded as a psychology that is grounded on culture and social relationships that are historically placed. Thus, we consider all of the versions of Soviet psychology to be cultural–historical psychologies because, in addition to their theoretical differences, these versions understood psychology, in one manner or another, as being a cultural–historical science.

In the West, Soviet psychology has primarily been represented through Vygotsky, Leontiev and Luria (Bruner 1995; Cole 1998; Werscht 1985) and some of Vygotsky's disciples, such as Galperin, Zaporochets and Elkonin, who later

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joined around Leontiev in Kharkov. After a complex historical path that is beyond the scope of the present paper, this theoretical orientation was defined as cultural–historical activity theory in recent decades, despite the increasing level of criticism aimed at this definition (Zinchenko 1995, 2007, 2009; Yasnitsky 2010, 2012; Lektorsky 1999; González Rey 2011, 2014).

From our perspective, the richness of the legacy of Soviet psychology has yet to be explored in depth based on the numbers of authors and theoretical orientations that have remained unexplored in the West for decades, such as Lomov, Bozhovich, Bruschlinsky, Abuljanova, Chudnovsky and many others whose names have relatively recently entered into the lexicon of Western authors. Despite authors such as Lomov, Bozhovich appearing in some isolated papers were translated into English more than twenty years ago, the dominant representation of cultural–historical activity theory in the Western countries has not allowed for the perception of the relevancy of their positions. In recent years, a “Revisionism of Vygotsky’s interpretation” has openly been declared (Yasnitsky 2012). Even authors who have not explicitly referred to such revisionism have in fact begun to make new interpretations related to those that are dominant in the so-called “Vygotskian studies” (Miller 2011; Flear and Hammer 2013; González Rey 2011, 2014, among others).

The revisionism proclaimed by Yasnitsky brought to light some of the less known of Vygotsky’s concepts in Russian and Western literature. In this manner, the concepts such as *perezhivanie*, sense and social situation of development begin to be increasingly discussed and cited in the literature and in the Congresses that historically have centred their interest on the cultural–historical activity theory, such as ISCAR (Leontiev 1992; Yarochevsky 2007; Fakhрутdinova 2010; Gonzalez Rey 2009, 2011, 2014; Flear and Hammer 2013, among others). The discussion of these concepts has in turn been one of the factors contributing to the openness of the cultural–historical psychology to new topics such as consciousness, communication and subjectivity (Abuljanova 1973; Akopov 2009; Lomov 1984; Neliubin 2009; González Rey 2009, 2014; Zinchenko 2009).

The last concepts and problems raised by Vygotsky, such as sense, *perezhivanie* and their relation with psychological systems (personality and consciousness) began to be discussed in Soviet psychology in the 1970s. Only Bozhovich and her team advanced on the legacy of those concepts in relation to the development of personality. Despite the fact that these concepts continued their development in Russian psychology, their epistemological and methodological demands have been mostly overlooked until now.

Undoubtedly, the advancements in these new topics imply epistemological and methodological discussions; these topics always remained underground in Soviet times and have continued to receive little attention within the cultural–historical tradition in psychology. Only very recently, in the 2000s, Russian authors began to draw attention to the epistemological and methodological questions related to clinical psychology. These questions have been discovered in Western epistemological discussions, and attempts have been made to identify Vygotsky with the epistemological versions of complexity (Zinchenko and Pervichko 2013); however,

at the same time, these attempts have begun to advance the epistemological and methodological challenges of clinical practice.

Cultural–historical psychology should be divided into the positions that represent politically dominant versions of Soviet psychology in different moments of its development and the theories that have remained outside of the politically accepted versions. The dominant theories in different historical moments of Soviet psychology were as follows: Pavlov’s theory of conditioned reflexes, Bechterev’s reflexology, Kornilov’s reactology and Leontiev’s Activity theory. All of these theories have been defended in different manners by the objective and the natural character of psychology as central attributes that defend Marxist psychology. This chapter centres on one epistemological and methodological proposal developed in our research regarding subjectivity from the cultural–historical standpoint.

10.2 The Epistemological and Methodological Gap in Soviet Psychology

Despite the fact that Soviet psychology has progressed on important theoretical matters in its history, the attention has been given to the epistemological and methodological challenges implied by those theoretical advances that have been completely overlooked. Vygotsky, in his foundational work “The Psychology of Art”, introduced the concept of *perezhivanie* and the unity between emotions and imagination and provided a central place for emotions and creativity and advanced topics that, from 1928 onward, disappeared from his work and from the works of other relevant Soviet psychologists. In the “Psychology of Art”, Vygotsky made interesting epistemological observations that have been largely ignored by Soviet and Western psychology.

Against this proposal, I will frequently objected to what is often said in relation to the study of the unconscious: unconscious, by the meaning of this word is something not recognizing by us and therefore not clear for us and for this reason it could not become object of scientific research. Starting from this erroneous premise that “we can study only (and in general can know only) what we directly recognize. However this statement has not any support because we study and know many things that directly we don’t know, on which we only know with the support of analogies, constructions, hypotheses, conclusions, deductions and so on, in general by indirect ways” (Vygotsky 1965, p. 32–33; my translation from Russian).

In the quotation above, Vygotsky defended a very important epistemological principle for human sciences: the study of the unconscious processes that cannot be known by direct means. The emphasis on the need to produce knowledge via indirect means is a very important methodological principle for the study of those concepts introduced by him in “The Psychology of Art” and the concepts discussed at the final moment of his work between 1932 and 1934. In a different manner, as Soviet psychology relates to the methodology by default, Vygotsky thought the methodological demands from the new concepts introduced by him early in his career.

In another of his stigmatised works, “The diagnostics of development and the pedological clinic for difficult children”, Vygotsky also noted the relevance of advancing beyond the explicit empirical features in relation to the knowledge production. He stated

In practical pedological research, one must begin by absorbing a simple methodological truth: Often a scientific researcher’s primary task is to establish some facts which cannot be found directly in reality. The path of research leads from symptoms to that which lies behind them, from the constitution of the symptoms to developmental diagnostics (Vygotsky 1993, p. 276).

However, after Vygotsky to be part of Kornilov’s group in 1925, his position drastically reoriented to an objective natural psychology, as both a theoretical point of view and a methodological point of view. A clear example of his position in that time is the following: “Marxist psychology is a synonym for scientific psychology and in this sense the creation of a Marxist psychology is the culmination of the lengthy historical process of transforming psychology into a natural science” (Vygotsky 2012, p. 98).¹

This objectivistic, empirical and natural representation of psychology that Vygotsky explicitly defended above was the official position defended by Kornilov and his group as the basis for a Marxist psychology. That position was to some extent responsible for the type of problems related to the official tendencies within Soviet psychology including subjects matters as the study of the neurophysiology of higher forms of neurological processes and reflections and later, the study of cognitive functions, as understood by as internalised operations. In both cases, the use of experiments implicitly prevailed based on positivistic epistemological principles. As a result of this climate, the inquiries of the cognitive functions that have prevailed since the 1950s–1970s upon other positions have been oriented to the study of topics such as personality, motivation, creativity and consciousness. The more notable exception in this picture was L.I. Bozhovich and her group, which actively worked on new methodological devices for the study of personality and motivation using qualitative approaches. However, even as addressed by the qualitative research of Bozhovich and her team, the epistemological problems raised by their research were never discussed.

The experimental view has been the only legitimate path for the study of topics such as emotion, motivation and personality as rooted in Soviet psychology and one of its more relevant authors, A.V. Zaporochets, who was always interested in the study of emotion and stated: “This can be explained (the author referred to the problems of the study of emotions in Soviet psychology. My note, FGR) partially by considerable methodological difficulties that arise during attempts to simulate affective situations under experimental conditions” (Zaporochets 2002), p. 46.

¹This text originally was published by Vygotsky in 1928.

It was only in the 2000s when several relevant Russian psychologists focused on the study of consciousness that the matter of interpretation as a methodological device began to be shyly introduced into Russian psychology from a cultural–historical standpoint. In this regard, V.P. Zinchenko stated “Since the subject domain that is called consciousness is by far not always given directly, it must be defined and constructed” (2009, p. 53). The word “constructed” in psychology, was historically oriented towards experimentation and a search for objectivity. This was closely associated with an idealistic psychology during the Soviet times. This phenomenon is clear in Vygotsky’s statement during his more instrumental–behaviourist moment:

Dilthey draws a distinction between descriptive and explanatory psychology. Along similar lines, many authors have divided the field into analytical and inductive psychology. Munsterberg called one psychology teleological and intentional and the other causal. The former has also been called the psychology of spirit or “understanding” psychology, as opposed to physiological or explanatory psychology and so on. But whatever they are called, the meaning of the distinction remains the same; one is natural, scientific, materialistic, and objective psychology, and the other is metaphysical, idealistic, and subjective psychology (Vygotsky 2012, p. 87).

Dilthey and the other authors mentioned by Vygotsky in his paper, such as Brentano, were the first to emphasise the value of interpretation to understand processes that are beyond the consciousness. Despite the differences in the theoretical principles that sustained the positions of Dilthey, Brentano and Spranger with Vygotsky, those authors had much in common with the methodological positions that Vygotsky made explicit in “Psychology of Art” and in his writing devoted to pedagogy. It is paradoxical that a psychology such as Soviet psychology that has attributed so much relevance to language and speech omitted both as methodological devices for the construction of psychological knowledge.

10.3 An Epistemological and Methodological Proposal for the Study of Subjectivity from a Cultural–Historical Standpoint

Once we advanced the study of subjectivity based on my prior studies on personality, we became more aware than ever before about the epistemological and methodological challenges that this new moment implied. Writing my doctoral thesis in the laboratory headed by Bozhovich (González Rey 1979), my fieldwork was performed with qualitative procedures, a tendency that in the 1970s was widely utilised by Bozhovich and her collaborators including Slavina, Chudnovsky, Neimark and Konnikova, among others, who were highly influenced by the methodological positions developed by K. Lewin and his team. However, many epistemological questions arose during my doctoral studies, such as what should be considered a legitimised knowledge, what is the relationship between reality and knowledge, i.e., the limits of human interpretation, and how to discriminate one

interpretation as being better than others, which remained unanswered. The epistemological questions were to a great extent absent from Soviet psychology due to the philosophical implications that its discussion could bring to light.²

As a result of the absence of epistemological discussion in Soviet psychology, we decided to advance an epistemological proposal that was able to support our methodological experiences in the study of personality (González Rey 1983, González Rey and Mitjans Martínez 1989). In the 1980s, the first texts on qualitative research began to be known in Latin American countries (Bogdan and Biklen 1982; Denzin 1970; Glaser and Strauss 1967, among others). All of these texts originated in other theoretical fields of the social sciences. The majority of the authors were devoted to qualitative research in that period based on their work on a narrow phenomenological definition according to which one of the main characteristics of qualitative methodology was its inductive, i.e., descriptive character. However, that definition of phenomenology did not consider the complexities that each philosophy implies for its use as the basis of the methodologies developed by the sciences. As M. Ponty stated “What is phenomenology? It may seem strange that this question has still to be asked half a century after the first works of Husserl. The fact remains that it has by no means been answered” (Ponty 1962, p. 88).

There is a close relationship between theory, epistemology and methodology in science, such that a new theoretical creation often must involve new epistemological and methodological challenges. Based on the questions that emerge in our research, for which González Rey had not found suitable alternatives in the different versions of qualitative research that were dominant in the 1980s, he decided to formulate the Qualitative Epistemology (1997). This epistemology *defends a constructive–interpretative* definition of knowledge as the basis for our studies on subjectivity.

Our definition of subjectivity from the cultural–historical standpoint is centred on the symbolic-emotional units, processes and configurations that characterise human experience. The constellations of facts that emerge in each cultural context are infinite, but the subjective senses and subjective configurations³ through which those experiences take life for individuals, groups and institutions are limited by the histories of each of these instances as well as the decisions and options taken by individuals and social instances whose subjective effects are beyond their consciousness. The social and individual subjective processes in human experiences are integrated in such a manner that the subjective configurations of both levels

²In this paper, Epistemology is defined as the needs and qualities that theoretical construction demands for consideration as “valid” as knowledge. The Theory for us is a system that enables the generations of intelligibility about the studied subject of a question that has a cultural, subjective and historical character.

³Subjective senses are the symbolical emotional units within which one of these processes evokes the other without becoming its cause. These subjective senses represent the way in which the historical experiences of the person become present in a presently lived situation. The subjective configurations represent the organisation of these subjective senses that define the emotions and the general psychological states that are dominant in each human experience.

configured reciprocally through subjective senses evoke by the presence of one level into the other.

The study of the processes by which this constellation of facts converges in space and time in one human experience is subjectively configured and demands to go beyond conscious responses or reactions to external influences. All of the concepts through which we advance the study of subjectivity at this moment, such as social and individual subjectivities, subjective configuration, subjective senses, and social and individual subjects configured as a complex opening systems within which each of them is organised into the others⁴ without losing its relative autonomy.

In the Latin American psychology of the 1980s, qualitative research was used as an alternative to the empirical–quantitative paradigm that was dominant in psychology at that time. However, currently, the multiple types of qualitative methodologies make it necessary to specify which type of qualitative research we are referring to. The differences between qualitative and quantitative research are more closely related to the processes of the construction of information than by the instruments used by both types of research.

Many researchers who define themselves as conducting qualitative research are supported by descriptive inductive procedures that aim to legitimise their theoretical constructions through statistics. A prominent eclecticism characterised the qualitative research in psychology in the 1980s. As I. Parker noted,

Statistical knowledge is of existing regularities, of patterns that are open to reinterpretation and change. This means that if we take statistics seriously it is not possible to use those descriptions to make any claims about universal fixed qualities of human behavior and experience (Parker 2005, p. 9).

The definition of knowledge as a constructive–interpretative process, as the *first attribute* of Qualitative Epistemology, necessarily breaks down some theoretical principles that characterised the cultural–historical approach because of its foundation in Soviet psychology, including the comprehension of scientific knowledge as a reflection of reality and the concept of law that is so widespread in cultural–historical psychologies up to the present. Moving in the opposite direction, the constructive–interpretative approach is centred on the production of intelligibility on matters, which progressively lead to new concepts, new problems and new theoretical representations, and is sensitive to enrichment from new sources and problems that emerge during the research process. Such knowledge could be

⁴Despite the fact that those concepts have been widely defined in my other works, we would like to point out that the subjective senses are the flux of the symbolic-emotional process that defined the subjective character of any human experience; meanwhile, the subjective configurations are the organisations that emerge on the course of that flux in the course of human experiences through which are defined the main subjective states that characterise any human relation or performance in a particular moment of its development. The subjective configurations characterise both the social and individual subjective processes in such a manner that during any individual action within one concrete social space subjective senses configured, simultaneously, reciprocally and differently in social and individual subjectivity.

considered valid when it extends to new areas and issues that can be assembled into one theory as a production of intelligibility that extends the theories to new problems and practices in such a process that continuously leads to new concepts and new questions.

Theories are living systems that are in constant movement; when the production of thinking stops, these theories turn into dogma. Theories are not abstract truths; they should continuously enrich researcher's ideas and at the same time to be enriched by these ideas. As Koch stated,

More particularly, a meaningful thought or inquiry regards knowledge as the result of "processing" rather than of discovery; it presumes that knowledge is an almost automatic result of a gimmickry, an assembly line, a "methodology"; it assumes that inquiring behavior is so rigidly and fully regulated by *rule* that in its conception of inquiry it sometimes allows the rules totally to displace their human users. (Koch 1999, p. 234)

What this author defined as "a meaningful thought" is precisely the not consideration of the researcher's ideas regarding knowledge production. The "assembly line of procedures" never replaces the researcher as the producer of knowledge. The new spaces of intelligibility that are opened by one theory are never the last version of one studied issue. Theories never exhaust the question studied by them; they only represent one human version of knowledge about that question. Science is as subjective as other human productions in different areas of life; the differences between science and other areas of knowledge production are given by the employed methodology and by the historical character of their constructions, which succeed one another in generating new theoretical representations about the studied subject.

The second attribute of the Qualitative Epistemology involves considerations of the dialogical and opening characteristics of the process of knowledge production. This principle moves in an opposite direction as that of the extended principle of "data collection". It is not possible to "collect data" because data are not objective fragments of a given reality; they are not ready to be collected. Data always depend on human codes that antecede the process of their definition. The idea that existing objects can be grasped through our concepts is in itself an epistemological position that implies one definition of reality and knowledge.

The dialogical and opening character of the research based on the Qualitative Epistemology does not follow an instrumental logic that is oriented toward understanding research as a sequence of instruments to be applied. The comprehension of research as a dialogical process leads to focus on the creation of a dialogical climate that demands from the researcher the ability to engage, provoke and stimulate the reflections and interest of the participants in the investigation.

This dialogical definition implies that the wide spectrums of expressions of the participants during the research, including those that arise in informal moments of the research, are relevant for the construction of knowledge. What defines the value of the research material is not its instrumental provenance, if it results from validated, standardised and reliable instruments or not, but its relevance to the theoretical model developed by the researcher, whose ideas and hypotheses are the

cornerstone of the theoretical models. There is not a direct correlation between the researcher's ideas and the meaning of the empirical facts; the ideas should always be informed and based on the meanings constructed from the empirical material, but the ideas are always beyond of that empirical material; they are the source of meaning from which empirical material gets meaning

The dialogue is a spontaneous process in which the researcher and participants are engaged in such a manner that new processes of subjectivation emerge, which is an important condition for the subjective engagement of the researcher and the participants in the research course. The use of methodological tools is another dialogical resource that addresses the provocation of new moments, ruptures and contradictions during the dialogue.

The third characteristic of the Qualitative Epistemology is the consideration of the singular case, whether individual or social, as a relevant source for scientific knowledge. The value of the singular case is also given by its relevance to the theoretical model in development, so that the singular case is one more moment in the advancement of the theoretical constructions of the research. The theoretical models are based on general theories but do not represent an application of theory; they represent new theoretical constructions that are inspired by the main concepts offered by the general theory. These new constructions are specific to each piece of concrete research. Theories as sources of intelligibility cannot be applied; theories are devices for the construction of new theoretical advances in each piece of concrete research.

Knowledge is always a theoretical process—a meaningful process in which specific, singular theoretical constructions will appear. Empirical material is organised during the research process as meaningful constructions that are compatible with the theoretical model in development, a reason for which the empirical material is considered in this proposal as a moment of the theoretical process. The empirical material is a constellation of many facts within which theory is able to advance new routes of intelligibility through their categories based on relationships and through their correlations to new concepts that are inspired by the studied questions.

The concepts of subjective sense and subjective configuration simultaneously embody theoretical and epistemological aspects that could never be used as a priori concepts for the meaning of one problem; they are produced as results of the research. Their meanings always result from the theoretical constructions of the researcher, and these meanings are opened to the confrontation of the other psychological angles that are supported by themselves by the new meanings that are developed on the empirical material. They do not represent the type of categories that can be applied to any new information.

10.3.1 *Advancing Forward on a Constructive–Interpretative Methodology*

The epistemological principles enunciated by the Qualitative Epistemology allow for the advancement of a constructive–interpretative methodology. As K. Danziger noted as referred to by K. Lewin,

Working out the full implications of this insight depended on Lewin’s very intensive studies in the philosophy of Science (the insight referred by Danziger was the Lewin’s insight that merely phenomenal description of psychological events was therefore inadequate (My note FGR)). These convinced him of the necessity of making a general distinction between the surface pattern of events and an underlying causally effective reality (Danziger 1990, p. 177).

The study of subjectivity as a living system is sensitive to the actions and decisions of individuals or social instances in context. The context and the psychological configurations of persons and groups at the beginning of any human action become the subjective configurations of actions that represent a barrier for the study of subjectivity through the “surface pattern of events”, as noted by Lewin. The logic “question-answer” that lies behind the methodological tools that are traditionally used by psychology does not work for the study of subjectivity or for the study of other social issues as social discourses and social representations, as has been widely demonstrated in the psychological literature (Moscovici and Markova 2006; Gergen 2011 and others).

Individuals are never conscious of the complexity of the subjective configurations that emerge in their ongoing experience. Thus, subjectivity only appears indirectly through theoretical constructions based on chains of meanings that are theoretically constructed by the researcher in such a process in which the researcher’s ideas and the meanings produced from the empirical material are inseparable.

The first moment of our methodological proposal was the creation of the *social scenario of research*, which represents the manner in which the researcher establishes a frank and open relationship with the potential participants in the research. This *social scenario of research* must be organised through activities that facilitate the interest of the potential participants to participate in the planned research. The activity used to create the scenario should be sufficiently contradictory to provoke questions, discussions and the engagement of the participants. The *social scenario of the research* could be organised around many different activities, such as films, lectures, round tables and many other concepts, whose definitions depend on the focus of the research and the imagination of the researcher.

The idea of the *social scenario of research* appeared to us in Cuba when González Rey attempted to study the political values and positions of students from different faculties of the University of Havana in the 1990s. At that time, he was vice rector of the University of Havana and a member of the Cuban Communist Party, a situation that could create suspicion among the participants that would prevent them from expressing themselves freely regarding the topics of discussion.

In an attempt to overcome this obstacle, he organised a lecture entitled “Cuba today: Contradictions and possible paths for the future”. To this lecture, he invited the students of the faculties in which he intended to perform the study.

At the beginning of his lecture, many of the students explicitly expressed discomfort based on their prior experiences in topics like those under discussion, which were treated dogmatically based on the dominant political liturgy. However, when the students perceived the critical reflection that he was engaging in due to his experiences as a researcher, their attention began to increase. After finishing the lecture, an interesting, emotional and critical debate emerged, and the participants remained in the discussion until the moment at which we had to leave the auditorium. This was the moment that was used to make explicit the topics of the research and to invite them to participate in this research.

Nearly, all of the participants voluntarily decided to participate in the research. The social climate during the investigation was so positive that, when using the written methodological instruments with issues that we considered to be of high political sensitivity, González Rey offered the participants the option to express themselves anonymously before completing these instruments. Therefore, many of the participants wrote their names, phone numbers and addresses asking for being invited to other similar activities in the future. This experience led us to think about the concept of the *social scenario of research*, which is closely related to the dialogical nature of the knowledge production as defined by Qualitative Epistemology.

When this *social scenario of the research* functions, it represents the first step of the research because of the quality of the information that emerges from this process. There is no fixed system of rules for orienting researchers in the creation of such scenarios; these scenarios result from the imaginative capacity that is necessary to develop the professionals who are devoted to this type of research.

10.3.2 How Are the Methodological Tools in This Type of Research Defined?

The overcoming of the instrumentalist tradition in psychology in which the methodological tools are responsible for the validity and objectivity of the “collected data” implies the reconsideration of what the instrumental tools mean. These tools are devices utilised by the researcher during the constructive–interpretative process that are addressed to discuss materials on which the research is based. One of the characteristics of this approach is that the construction of information begins from the very start of the investigation and not at the time at which the data are being collected. The construction of information is a continuous process that begins with the creation of the *social scenario of research* and continues through the definition of indicators (hypothetical pieces of meaning that are constructed by the researcher based on the empirical elements). The indicators form chains of different

elements that converge according to their meanings. These chains of indicators lead to the formulation of hypotheses in movements that define the theoretical paths that rule the constructive–interpretative process throughout the investigation. Hypotheses are not used as a priori entities to be demonstrated but as intellectual tools for theoretical advances during the research process.

Fieldwork is defined as a dialogical scenario within which the different methodological tools are inserted as particular moments of the conversations that are planned as well as the informal conversations that rule the research. The instruments in this proposal never represent devices to be “applied”; they unfold in different forms in new instruments. For example, the use of free or directive writing in research always implies the return to this writing with the participants or between the participants with the aim of provoking new reflections and conversations through which new information relevant to the research material might emerge.

Research is an innovative process that advances according to the paths and options that the researcher him/herself assumes during this process. There is no fixed package of instruments that can be applied from this perspective. As Parker stated,

There is no overall set of criteria that would work to justify a specific study, (Emphasis of the author) for a new research question calls for a new rationale and combination of methodological resources to explore it, and the terms in which the research question is framed will entail particular methods. (Parker 2005, p. 135).

Methodological devices or tools are a creation of the researcher; they can be written, oral, experimental or based on different types of social or individual activities. We define a methodological tool as any device that is used to facilitate in depth the expressions of the participants. No instrument is a goal in itself; rather, all instruments are moments in the process of the construction and dialogue conducted by the researcher.

10.3.3 The Production of Theoretical Models During the Research Course

The theoretical character of this methodology is defined by its aim that addressed the production of theoretical constructions as the main result of the research. The place of the theory in this type of research is not to be applied to the “data” that is empirically collected. The theory is understood to be a source of theoretical categories and principles that support new theoretical constructions that are generated during the research. The theoretical models are the theoretical constructions, hypotheses, researcher’s ideas and insights that rule the path followed by the research. The empirical material is not anymore defined as an external and objective source that rules the investigation, as something given in reality; rather, it is viewed as empirical material that is only relevant to the research through the meanings through which it becomes part of the theoretical construction.

Our methodological proposal addressing the constructions of the subjective configurations and subjective senses of persons and social instances represents the main theoretical models of our inquiries; the construction of any subjective configuration is always a singular process that can only be defined at the end of the research. Subjectivity is only accessible through theoretical models that seek to generate intelligibility about the empirical material through the chains of indicators that allow the defense of the hypotheses that are generated by the investigation. Subjective senses and subjective configurations can never be defined by direct behaviours; behind each relevant individual and social instance behaviours, there are complex subjective configurations in development that organise and reorganise themselves in many ways during the course of any given experience.

As Prigogine stated,

Therefore, the contemporary physic of Einstein, and with bigger reason the generation of physics after Einstein, took a very different lesson from the achievement of the Theory of Relativity. For them, the relativity teaches that is not possible to describe the nature from outside: the physic is done by the human being for the human being (Prigogine 2004, p. 140; my translation from Portuguese).

For years, psychologists idealised paths for the measurement of psychical processes in an attempt to transform psychology into an objective science; this issue has been strongly criticised by classic authors of psychology such as Danziger (1990) and Koch (1999), who are among the few authors to have examined the historical foundations of psychology and its current practices from theoretical, epistemological and methodological perspectives.

The subjective senses and subjective configurations are theoretical models that are supported by constellations of elements, whose convergence in one hypothetical path results from the theoretical construction of the researcher and permits the integration of different elements into concepts that become paths of intelligibility of the studied question. The meanings that integrate the diversity of empirical elements are not intrinsic to them but are rather a researcher's theoretical construction that is based on the theoretical model developed during the research.

Now, we would like to exemplify in one case study some of the concepts explained above and to exemplify, above all, how a theoretical model can be produced during research. M is a woman who is 35 years old, a secretary, married for 15 years, and with 10- and 8-year-old daughters. She came to our team due to her obesity.⁵ In our first conversation, she stated the following:

I like so much to be at our home in the beach with my daughters, it is really very pleasant, listening to them speaking spontaneously about their fantasies and the way in which they perceive their daily life. The level of spontaneity of our conversations is something that I recreate in my mind many times during my complex journeys of work at the hospital. I changed a lot when I return from a period of holiday after enjoyed my daughters, even my sense of humor is quite different.

⁵The study of the subjective configuration of obesity is one of our lines of research and psychotherapy related to health.

Immediately after this reference to her daughters, the researcher asked the following: “And your husband these periods with you?” She answered as follows:

My husband and me are quite different from this point of view, may be because they are daughters, he does not find the best way to enter in communication with them. He centers on his interests on our holidays. He likes so much to read. Maybe he feels jealous of my relationships with our daughters, something that I tried to avoid all the time.

It is possible to perceive from the above moment of the conversation that M’s authentic emotions were compromised by their daughters and by the moments in which they were together in a very intimate relationship. In addition, her husband did not appear spontaneously in that first conversation, which was very relevant. The emotional, intimate expressions of M in relation to her daughters provide particular relevance to the absence of her husband from her story. This first conversation prompted the researcher to surmise that rose the indicator that the quality of her marriage was in trouble; rather, this indicator should be integrated with other indicators with similar meanings to become a hypothesis of the research. Our work with so-called “chronic diseases and disabilities” addresses the idea of transcending the universal idea of pathology via the study of the singular and changeable subjective configurations of those entities.

Every indicator is, in itself, a hypothetical construction that is limited in both its extension and its potential for generalisation. From our perspective, the generalisation always results from well-supported theoretical models; this is not an inductive process.

The process of the construction of information is a continuous flux of indicators and hypotheses within which the theoretical model in process acquires different theoretical meanings due to the confrontation between the hypotheses inside of the model. In one research, two or more different and contradictory hypotheses can coexist and advance simultaneously until the moment in which some indicators support the pertinence of some hypotheses relative to others. This is the only criteria of validity or legitimacy used in this type of research. There is no criterion external to the research that could be used from the outside to define the value of the theoretical construction in progress during the research. This situation is one of the reasons why the definition of indicators and hypotheses should be explicitly and carefully explained during the research report. It is the congruity between indicators, hypotheses and theoretical constructions that defines the legitimacy and viability of the theoretical models.

The meaning created by one indicator is never explicit in the stories or intentional responses of the participants in the research. In the case under discussion, the methodological tool of the “complement of phrases” is introduced by Rotter in the 1950s as a projective test. However, in contrast to Rotter’s proposal, its use as a methodological tool does not attribute a priori standardised meanings to participants’ constructions in the instrument; rather, the indicators defined from the instrument are closely related to the hypotheses under consideration at the moment in which the instrument is used.

M's complementation of phrases allows the researcher to formulate other indicators: two of which compatible with the first indicator that signalled difficulties in her marriage, and the other signalled a new path that addressed a new possible hypothesis

First She referred to, in 8 phrases from a total of 25 to her daughters, inductors that were both direct and indirect. For example, one direct inductor was "my daughters: my complete happiness". Here, she must say something about her daughters because the inductor directly referred to them. Of course the quality of the expression should vary from one participant to another. An example of an indirect inductor was as follows: "In the future: I will respect the choices of my daughters in their adult lives".

Second In all the complements of phrases devoted to her daughters, M was personally involved in her demonstration of affection toward them and recreated the past and the present through concrete experiences lived together. At the same time, M referred to plans for the future. However, her expressions related to her husband were extremely poor; the husband only appeared in two depersonalised phrases that were completely separated from the living experiences and without emotional engagement:

- The marriage: is sacred.
- My husband: a very good person.

She only referred to her husband prior to direct inductors. A good summary of the hypothesis in process was her spontaneous statement that her "husband is a good person"; she seems to want to say that "my husband is good as person but not as a husband". The path opened by the first indicator made it possible to define the new indicators constructed in the "complement of phrases". The available number of indicators regarding the same conjecture permits a hypothesis about the affections related to her marriage as the source of different subjective senses in her configuration of the obesity. The heuristic value of the concept of subjective configuration is the elucidation of elements from different relevant experiences of the individuals that are lived in different contexts and times of their histories as relevant to current experiences. Subjective configurations permit the advancement of different processes engaged in each human experience, which never result from a single cause.

The *new indicator* can be defined based on her statement that "In the future, I will respect the choices of my daughters in their adult life". This type of expression is frequently a self-biographical expression that has more to do with the person's own stories than with the imaginative situation that has not actually be lived, i.e., with her daughters in this case. This expression might signal M's experiences with her mother, who had strangely not appeared in her story after the first three meetings with the researcher. Altogether, both elements define this new indicator: the specific quality of her relationship with her mother, which also assembled the subjective configuration of depression. As with any indicator, this one was only relevant when other, complementary indicators appeared.

Based on the prior new indicator, the researcher decided to introduce a new methodological tool. The researcher asked M to expound upon the following statement: “My memories of childhood”. Tools such as this are excellent resources for generating indicators about intimate topics or experiences about which a person does not spontaneously speak. The dominant social discourses and social representations about topics of high social sensitivity, such as family, sexuality, drug consumption and others, should be explored in an indirect and open manner.

Using the statement “My memories of childhood” as an instrument for provoking a personal history of childhood allows for the advancement of indirect qualitative elements that are very important for this methodology. Thus, the following elements are relevant for the evaluation of the information acquired via this instrument: the moment of her life in which the story began, the order of the appearance of her closest affections, the quality of the experiences stated by her in relation to her closest affections, and the temporal dimensions used in the constructions of her speaking. For example, some individuals were referred to only in the past tense, and others were referred to in the past, present and future tenses, such as her daughters, etc. All of these elements are beyond the consciousness of the person, which make them excellent resources for inquiry into the topic under study. M stated the following about her childhood memories:

My early childhood was so great because I loved so much my grandfather who lived with us. He was very sweet with me and he took me to walk with great frequency. He sat me on his legs and tells me many stories; I enjoyed so much his company! My first great sadness was his death when I was ten years old. He practically occupied all my happiness and my time before he died. My parents worked a lot and I only saw them at night. He was my babysitter and my grandfather attended to me during the day. My brother wanted to play with my father at night. Our parents always were very concerned with scholarly results. After beginning school, my mother used to support us, my brother and me, with our school duties. This is a general picture of my childhood

Researcher: And what can you say about your friends in the neighbourhood and at school? This type of conversational initiative of the researcher is very important for this type of methodology.

M: “I was very shy at that time, and my best friend and playmate was my brother, who was two years younger than me. I began to have my own group of friends during my adolescence in school”.

Researcher: How was the position of your parents in that moment of your life?

M: “You know, my father was a good man but he was a little absent in our education, something that to some extent I explain today to myself by the strong character of my mother. My mother was so centered on our education; however, in that time, mothers usually did not speak to their sons and daughters about life and human existential challenges. For example, when I had my first menstruation, I was completely surprised and nervous because my mother never explained this process to me. Sexuality was completely omitted in my home. We were a very religious family”

Researcher: Was your mother an authoritarian person?

M: “My mother liked to impose her criteria. She only was different with my grandfather, whom she respected so much. My mother was extremely overprotective, and even in my decision to get married, she influenced me so much. Today, I think that I was very dependent on my mother until I got married as result of that situation in my home”.

First, we want to focus on the manner in which this methodology is conducted. The researcher is consistently in dialogue with the participants, regardless of whether a case study, such as this one, is being conducted or the work is being performed in a group. The researcher provokes and asks questions following the gaps in the stories of the participants and essentially advances the theoretical model in process based on the hypotheses.

M's story about childhood is relevant to the importance of her grandfather in her life. He was the closest familiar relation in that moment of her life. She had a very absent father, who was similar to her husband at that moment of her life. Her shyness and the authoritarian character of her mother were reflected in the difficulty she experienced making her own decisions during her adolescence and youth. Altogether, these elements led the researcher to define the following indicators: the first goes in the same direction of that mentioned before based on her expression "to respect the decisions of her daughters in the future"; the second relates to the possible late sexuality, which supports the position she referred to her mother as holding in regards to sexuality, i.e., her dependency on her mother and the high level of religiosity that prevailed in her home. Following this hypothetical course, it can be concluded that M got married due to the influence of her mother and with a very limited, if any, level of sexual experience. This group of elements can also be taken as one more indicator that was congruent with those raised previously regarding the quality of her marriage.

The growing intimacy between M and the researcher combined with the advances in M's reflections about her life during the research resulted in a climate of reflection and confidence that permitted M to discuss topics about her life about which she had never spoken before.

The theoretical model in this example is the progressive construction of the subjective configuration of M's obesity. As a result of the study, it was possible to construct a system of different indicators that converged in terms of their meanings related to her unpleasant relationship with her husband. Based on the information given by M in the progressive sessions of our work, it was possible to advance in depth about the quality of her marriage. She was married under pressure from her mother, who very much liked her husband. However, M never had an orgasm with him, which is something that she said based on another woman's reflection during a group session. She had never previously reflected on this question in depth due to her high religiosity and the level of brotherly affection she felt for her husband. This shift in her conception of herself as a woman led her to focus on her daughters, who greatly engaged her authentic affections that were designed to avoid sexual contact with her husband, who also accepted this as an implicit marriage contract. As she said in one moment of the research, "We decided to live together as great friends because this is what we are".

The concepts of subjective senses and subjective configurations highlight the manners in which the constellation of facts that intervene in one concrete experience can be raised and configured together not by their objective appearance but by the theoretical construction of the research. Each subjective configuration of obesity is

singular. The case of M could never have been modified without engaging her complex subjective configuration of the obesity.

The subjective configuration of her obesity integrated with her subjective senses that resulted in the simultaneous emergence of her religiosity, rigid concept of family, model of her own family and abandonment of sex combined with her frustrated sexual desires. Based on the subjective configuration in which the complex and diverse subjective senses integrate into one another, a set of highly interrelated behaviours emerges: her lack of interest in physical appearance was closely related to their renunciation of sex, which in turn was related to her disinterest in physical exercise and anxiety that led to overeating. The lack of affection for her husband was hidden by her religiosity, her model of family, her appreciation for the human qualities of her husband and her relationships with her daughters. This complex picture of her affective life was subjectively configured in such a manner that provokes highly contradictory feelings, such as guilt, depression, aggression and disinterest. She unconsciously did not want to face the reality of her affections because the above-mentioned subjective senses did not permit her to develop with regard to this issue.

The concept of subjective configuration is a hypothesis that concretizes itself by a set of indicators that theoretically permits the explanation of complex organisations of behaviours and symptoms whose geneses are beyond the person's conscious representations and beliefs.

This type of research leads to a level of intimacy and shared reflections that makes it a process of self-development associated with intrinsic therapeutic value. This type of research always creates social spaces of reflection as methodological tools that open new alternatives for dialogue with the participants. These activities are proposed as complementary to the research but are, in fact, very relevant to it.

Due to the limitation of a single chapter, the decision to focus on the manner in which the process of the construction of information took place from this methodological proposal was made. The heuristic value of this theoretical, epistemological and methodological approach is the highlighting of new elements that other theories have ignored or overlooked in relation to the studied questions.

10.4 Some Final Remarks

The interpretations presented in this article cannot be considered as an act; interpretation is a historical process that occurs through a sequence of indicators (micro-hypothetical constructions) whose convergence permits the opening of hypotheses as paths through which the researcher's theoretical model advances in knowledge construction. This methodological definition is crucial for legitimising the theoretical constructions proposed by the research.

Once the focus of the research cannot be studied by explicit behaviours and other types of the participants' intentional expressions, it is necessary to work with the individual and social constructions that are behind the intentional beliefs and

representations of the participants in the investigation. This chapter offers an alternative for producing material related to the subjective configuration of the research question—in this case the obesity. This material arose by indirect theoretical paths that were developed through the researcher’s ideas and hypotheses through the specifics of each of the singular theoretical models organised in each research.

This research perspective represents a progressive and complex process of communication within which different methodological tools can be used as resources to advance the depth of dialogue during the research. Therefore, in this proposal tools are never taken as a source of results; the instruments are provocative inductors for the expressions of the participants. The constructive process through which the theoretical meanings emerge results from the complex constructions that integrate indicators and hypotheses that are progressively produced during the research process

The cultural–historical approach demands new epistemological positions and methodologies that can successfully advance the complex theoretical questions that have appeared as central to this approach in the last two decades, such as *perezhivanie*, consciousness as a subjective system and the social situation of development and subjectivity.

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