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AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH TO THE BIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE SELF AND IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT. Self and identity are psychosocial constructs studied under different theoretical and methodological perspectives in the neurology and psychology fields without highlighting the continuities and convergences that enable an integrative view of their construction and functioning. Although these concepts are often used interchangeably, several studies have delimited their distinctions and defined identity as a mature and more elaborate configuration of the self, which emerges in early adolescence. With a theoretical focus, the present study aims to present an integrative approach to the biological and psychosocial processes of self and identity construction. To do so, it begins by conceptualizing the self and tracing a path that explores the biological, cognitive-affective, sociocultural and moral components that interact with self and identity construction. Different perspectives based on Piagetian epistemology and Erik Erikson's theory of identity (status and narrative identity) are put into dialogue, highlighting their convergences and complementarities, resulting in an integrative view of identity construction processes.

Keywords: *Self*; self-representation; identity.

UMA ABORDAGEM INTEGRADORA DA CONSTRUÇÃO BIOLÓGICA E PSICOSSOCIAL DO *SELF* E DA IDENTIDADE

RESUMO. *Self* (si mesmo) e identidade são constructos psicossociais que têm sido estudados sob diferentes perspectivas teóricas e metodológicas nos campos da neurologia e da psicologia cognitiva, sem, no entanto, que sejam evidenciadas as continuidades e convergências que possibilitam uma visão integradora de sua construção e funcionamento. Apesar de muitas vezes esses conceitos serem empregados como sinônimos, diversos estudos têm delimitado suas distinções e definido a identidade como uma configuração madura e mais elaborada do *self,* que emerge no início da adolescência. O presente estudo, de enfoque teórico, tem como objetivo apresentar uma abordagem integradora dos processos biológicos e psicossociais de construção do *self* e da identidade. Para tanto, inicia conceituando *self* e traçando um percurso que explora os componentes biológico, cognitivo-afetivo, sociocultural e moral que interatuam na construção do *self* e da identidade. Diferentes perspectivas tributárias da epistemologia piagetiana e da teoria da identidade de Erik Erikson (status da identidade e identidade narrativa) são postas em diálogo, evidenciando suas convergências e complementariedades, do que se desdobra uma visão integradora dos processos de construção da identidade.

Palavras-chave: *Self*; representação de si; identidade.

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UN ENFOQUE INTEGRADOR DE LA CONSTRUCCIÓN BIOLÓGICA Y PSICOSOCIAL DEL SÍ MISMO Y DE LA IDENTIDAD

RESUMEN. *Self* (si mismo) e identidad son constructos psicosociales que han sido estudiados bajo diferentes perspectivas teóricas y metodológicas en los campos de la neurología y la psicología cognitiva, sin destacar, sin embargo, las continuidades y convergencias que permiten una visión integradora de su construcción y funcionamiento. Aunque estos conceptos sean usados a menudo como sinónimos, varios estudios han delimitado sus distinciones y definido la identidad como una configuración madura y más elaborada del yo, que surge en el comienzo de la adolescencia. El presente estudio, de enfoque teórico, tiene como objetivo enseñar un abordaje integrativo de los procesos biológicos y psicosociales de construcción del self y de la identidad. Con este fin, comienza por conceptualizar el yo y trazar un camino que explora los componentes biológico-filogenético, cognitivo-afectivo, sociocultural y moral que interactúan en la construcción del *self* y la identidad. Diferentes perspectivas tributarias de la epistemología de Piaget y de la teoría de la identidad de Erik Erikson (status de identidad e identidad narrativa) se ponen en diálogo, mostrando sus convergencias y complementariedades, a partir de las cuales se desarrolla una visión integradora de los procesos de construcción de la identidad.

Palabras clave: *Self*; representación de si mismo; identidad.

Introduction

The self and personal identity are psychosocial constructs whose nature and functioning have been thematized by scholars from different knowledge areas interested in understanding the ability of the human species to elaborate representations about themselves and regulate, actively and consciously, thoughts, feelings and actions (Piaget, 1996; Erikson, 1976; Damon & Hart, 1988; Taylor, 1994; Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Moshman, 2011; Harter, 2012; Damásio, 2013; Ricoeur, 2014).

Terms such as self-knowledge, self-concept or self-representation make up the universe of studies that orbit around the concepts of self and identity, revealing how these have been defined and investigated. Such concepts are commonly used interchangeably, but several studies have highlighted their differences and warned about demarcating them (Erikson, 1976; Damon & Hart, 1988; Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Moshman, 2011; Harter, 2012).

Studies in the neurology fields (Damásio, 2013) and developmental psychology-above all tributaries of Piaget's epistemology and Erikson's identity theory - (Marcia, 1966; Piaget, 1996; Erikson, 1976; Damon & Hart; 1988; Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Moshman, 2011; Harter, 2012; Schwartz, Luyckx, & Crocetti, 2015; Berzonsky, 2016; Fadjukoff, Pulkkinen, & Kokko, 2016; McAdams, 2018) have proposed definitions and revealed, from different approaches and perspectives, multiple aspects about self and identity construction and functioning. However, Harter (2012) and Schwartz et al. (2015) warn that it is necessary to establish a dialogue and articulate different theories and research to highlight their continuities regarding the construction and functioning of these constructs.

With a theoretical focus, the present study aims to present an integrative approach to the biological and psychosocial processes of the self and identity construction. Based on the assumption that identity is a more elaborate configuration of the self, which emerges in early

adolescence[4], we will begin by conceptualizing the self and then explore it and identity construction through an approach that integrates the biological, cognitive-affective and sociocultural components by putting different perspectives on this phenomenon into dialogue.

The self as self-representation system

Our starting point for the definition of self is the theoretical formulation of psychologist William James (1961), who uses the linguistic proposition 'myself' to denote the fundamentally reflexive and dialectical character of the self, which simultaneously admits a knowing subject (I) and an object of knowledge (me). The personal pronoun 'I' represents the subjective dimension of the self (subjective self), which translates into the consciousness of a set of individuation traits that are coordinated, with profound consequences for the creation of a sense of personal identity, namely: I) the awareness of one's own activity in life events, in other words, that one is an agent with autonomy; II) the consciousness that one is unique and distinct from others, which leads to the perception of individuality; III) the perception of one's continuity in time; and IV) self-consciousness, which designs the meanings of personal identity for oneself. The reflexive pronoun 'me' represents the objective dimension of the self (objective self), that which is accessed as an object of subject knowledge. James refers to this dimension as the self-concept and states that only it can be known and investigated empirically.

Although several authors agree that the set of individuation traits that constitute the subjective self are not completely conscious and, therefore, cannot be empirically apprehended in their entirety, they advocate that it is possible to access them to a certain extent through the objective self (Damon & Hart, 1988; Harter, 2012). Thus, they consider it is more pertinent to use terms such as self-understanding, self-concept or self-representation to refer to the conscious manifestation of the self they adopt as a unit of empirical analysis.

In this paper, we adopted the term self-representation because it is more recurrent in the literature and to highlight the concept of representation, commonly used to define self-concept (Markus & Wurf, 1987) or self-understanding (Damon & Hart, 1988), as it consists of a procedure cognitive tool used by subjects to create a substitute for objects on a mental level, which enables to recognize, interpret, describe and conceptualize oneself through symbolic resources (Piaget, 2014, 1996; Markus & Wurf, 1987; Harter, 2012; Damásio, 2013).

We define self-representation as a system of cognitive representations individuals build to organize their life experiences. It integrates knowledge of their physical, social, and psychological attributes, philosophical beliefs or ideological affiliations, allowing them to identify their unique position in the social world, being the basis for the constitution of personal identity (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Damon & Hart, 1988; Harter, 2012; Silva, 2020). We use the concept of 'system' because we recognize the existence of multiple self-representations that interact and coordinate in the configuration of a broader system – the global or complete self-representation, as defined by Markus and Wurf (1987) and Harter (2012). In the same individual, positive and negative representations about his image can

[4] The term adolescence is widely used in psychology literature to refer to the age period between childhood and adulthood, marked by biological (such as puberty) and psychosocial transformations. There is no consensus on the age group that defines adolescence. Some researchers indicate the range of 11 to 19 years of age (Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Moshman, 2011), while for others adolescence can begin at ten and extend until the age of 18 (Damon & Hart, 1988; Harter, 2012), to name just a few examples. In this study, we will be considering the limit between ten and 19 , too include variations in the reference used.

coexist (which shape his self-esteem); representations of oneself in the past, present and future; representations about who one is at the current moment (current self) and who one wants to be (ideal self) (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Damon & Hart, 1988; Kristjánsson, 2009; Harter, 2012; Silva, 2020).

Furthermore, there are self-representations that are central to self-definition, being chronically activated and exerting great influence on interpreting information, judgments, feelings and actions. Others, however, may be of less importance and occupy a more peripheral position in the self-system, with their accessibility being more subject to fluctuations due to the social context and individual mood, among other variables (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Lapsley, 2010; Silva, 2020). This aspect means that the system of self-representation is dynamic and that not all systems that make up a global self-representation will be activated at any given time.

Still, on the systemic character of self-representation, it is worth adding that it is made up of a plurality of contents, such as images, theories, objectives, principles and prototypes of conduct, which, for Markus and Wurf (1987), configure a space of multidimensional meanings. Such contents are not only expressed in the form of linguistic propositions or strictly cognitive operations about oneself but also through emotions and feelings through which the subject knows, defines, evaluates and regulates himself/herself (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Blasi, 1995; Kristjánsson, 2009; Moshman, 2011; Harter, 2012; Damásio, 2013; Silva, 2020). Kristjànsson (2009), for example, opposes the rationalist paradigm, which states that rational mechanisms and emotions fundamentally operate the self and play a tacit and secondary role. For the author, emotions play an equal role in the constitution and functioning of the self, as with moral emotions that define us (for example, empathy and compassion) and regulate our self-esteem and actions (for example, guilt and shame).

In the subsequent section, we will dedicate ourselves to addressing self-construction, emphasizing its genesis in childhood and its development until adolescence. We will highlight the phylogenetic-biological, cognitive-affective, social and moral that shape the self.

The biological and psychosocial construction of the self

Self-construction presupposes the awareness of one's individuality, the notion that one is an individual who is distinct from other objects that inhabit the world. Although the development of improved forms of consciousness depends on interactions between the subject and the environment - including sociocultural contents - the ability to develop it has its embryo in a biological structure that we inherited as a result of a long phylogenetic journey. In *O sentimento de si: corpo, emoção e consciência* (2013) work, neurologist António Damásio states that consciousness is a device of the organism that developed in the course of phylogenesis, enabling more efficient adaptation and management of life in the environment. In this perspective, "[…] consciousness consists of constructing knowledge about two facts: that the organism is involved in relating to some object, and that the object in the relations causes a change in the organism" (Damásio, 2013, p. 39).

For Damásio (2013), the biological precursor of consciousness is the non-conscious (thus, non-symbolic) and continuous representation of the organism's state in its various dimensions in the form of a model whose objective is the automated management of life. This model, which he calls proto-self, consists of a coherent collection of neural patterns which map the state of the physical structure of the organism. From the proto-self originates, phylogenetically, consciousness in its most elementary form, called 'core consciousness', which arises when the neural patterns that map the state of the organism and the

sensorimotor patterns that map the object coordinate, resulting in an imagistic, non-verbal account of the causal relationship between organism and object in second-order maps, which manifest themselves in the body in the form of feelings and cause the object to be highlighted, leaving it prominent. The subject now realizes that the image belongs to him and can act on it.

It is worth highlighting that, according to Damásio (2013), self-perception is essentially about one's emotions in the form of a feeling at this first level of consciousness[5] that accompanies producing non-verbal images. Such images are a mental pattern in any sensory modality (sound, tactile, of a state of well-being etc.). Its primary purpose is to inform the organism of what is happening and produce the feeling of knowing. The second use is to produce the sense of potential action, 'These images are mine, and I can act on the object that caused them'. This reaction could result in the possibility of selecting, choosing or planning responses that go beyond biological programming, giving one freedom. The third utility is that core consciousness produces more wakefulness and directed attention, which improves image processing and optimizes the organism's reactions to the object and action planning.

According to Damásio (2013), core consciousness gives the organism a sense of self in the here and now. A core self optimizes the organism's adaptation to the environment but is incapable of projecting the future and referring to the past, as it is transitory and constantly recreated to deal with situations. A self that is not exclusive to the human being, does not depend on memory, reasoning or language. Despite this, it is continuously activated and, therefore, ensures the individual's stability over long periods to meet the need for continuity of self-reference.

On the other hand, 'extended consciousness' is, according to Damásio (2013), more elaborate, configured by representational thinking and memory. It is built on core consciousness but beyond its structural and functional simplicity. It allows the organism to learn and retain records and reactivate them in symbolic representations – such as language. It, therefore, enables the definition of oneself through linguistic statements and provides the sense of an autobiographical self, situating it historically and informing it about the past and future.

As a result of its evolutionary history, the human species encompasses and puts into operation the three levels of feeling (or consciousness) mentioned above – proto-self, core self and an autobiographical self. In the latter, however, that consciousness stops being just a temporary perception of one's emotions to become a cognitive representation that provides the self with a sense of permanence in time, of individuation and autonomy, allowing the subject to qualify his physical and psychological attributes and assimilate the cultural references that permeate his socialization process (Damásio, 2013).

Nonetheless, the self-construction is conditioned *a priori* by a biological structure constituting its foundation (neuroendocrine system). This structure only provides us with a field of possibilities on which cognitive-affective structures and procedures, knowledge and meanings will be constructed, which will form a particular arrangement in the representation that each individual creates about themselves as a result of their active interaction with the social world (Piaget, 1996; Markus & Wurf, 1987; Damon & Hart, 1988; Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Harter, 2012; Dunn, 2017; Silva, 2020).

[5] It is worth highlighting the conceptual difference between emotions and feelings. According to Damásio (2013), emotions are bodily reactions, produced by the neuroendocrine system, depending on situations or stimuli coming from outside or from our own organism. Feeling, in turn, concerns the conscious perception of one or more emotions.

While for Damasio, the characteristics that define core consciousness are sufficient to affirm the existence of a self in its most elementary expression. Scholars of developmental and cognitive psychology agree with the Swiss epistemologist Jean Piaget (1996) that it is only with the advent of cognitive representation (which for Damasio characterizes the expanded consciousness) that the construction of the self occurs (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Damon & Hart, 1988; Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Harter, 2012).

From Piaget's perspective (1996), oneself construction (a term that in this article is synonymous with self) depends on cognitive representation – the ability to produce mental images (meanings) to 'imitate' or replace an object or situation (signifier). This ability arises around two years old. Before that, the child establishes boundaries between the self and the world but still does not completely dissociate them because, given the lack of representation capacity, he is unable to evoke the existence of objects (which includes himself)) as something permanent, regardless of its presence, action or immediate material perception. For Piaget (1996), self-construction occurs simultaneously with the construction of a permanent object notion, that is, of an object I) independent of the subject's action, II) subject to the causality laws, III) that occupies a location and order in space and IV) with defined space and constant dimensions that are preserved over time.

According to Piaget(1996), in the first months of life, the child, in an absolute state of egocentrism, is incapable of conceiving the phenomenal world that surrounds him as different from himself. The existence and movements of objects are not recognized by evoking a mental image, but by a perception of his action, that is, as an extension of his action. With the representative function construction, the child will finally overcome radical egocentrism and conceive the objective existence of himself and the world. It is worth highlighting that the construction of the notion of an object is not just a consequence of the maturation of neurological structures but results from the accumulation of experiences of active interaction between the subject and the object. The child begins to construct representational images of imbalance generated by the absence of the object, which engenders the need to (and the active search for) 'maintain' the object to better adapt to reality. At this moment, 'cognitive decentering' is combined with 'affective decentering', which reveals itself in the interest in sources of pleasure conceived as distinct from the action (Piaget, 2014, 1996).

Although the emergence of the representative function allows the subject to recognize himself as distinct from the outside world, before having developed reversible thinking[6] (around the age of 7), this distinction occurs only on the physical plane, as he still retains egocentrism, now related to his points of view (thoughts, judgments or feelings). In this case, the child is incapable of recognizing the existence of two different points of view on the same phenomenon and coordinating them as equally as possible. At the same time, she has difficulty adapting her thinking to that of others and judging only from her point of view, she imitates others. Thanks to reversible thinking, she will be able to relate her point of view to that of another or several points of view to each other (Piaget, 1996; Inhelder & Piaget, 1976).

The acquisition of reversible thinking has profound implications for the self-constitution. With it, the subject can differentiate his thoughts, feelings and opinions from those others express and recognize their idiosyncrasy. The subject will be able to dissociate the assessment he makes about himself from the opinion of others about him, which represents an important step in the autonomy construction (Piaget, 1996; Harter, 2012).

[6] Refers to the ability to execute, on a representative plane, an action in both directions of a route (going and coming), knowing that it is the same action. It enables the differentiation of variables and coordinates them (Inhelder & Piaget, 1976).

Another important turning point in the development of the self is the acquisition of language, a sophisticated type of symbolic representation. With language, the child begins to organize reality through intersubjectively and socially constructed concepts. This acquisition enables her to assimilate cultural constructs, elaborate meanings about social reality and guide her conduct concerning linguistically codified conventions and norms. Consequently, the child acquires the ability to describe, explain and evaluate both sociocultural practices and her physical and mental activity (Piaget, 2014, 1996; Harter, 2012). Thus, she acquires the ability to conceptualize herself. Furthermore, concepts give greater duration to her thoughts and feelings, which is extremely important for the notion of herself as a continuous entity in time and space (Piaget, 1970/1996). For these and other reasons, Markus and Wurf (1987) and Harter (2012) consider language to be the tool par excellence for self-representation.

The emergence of language will also play an important role in overcoming egocentrism and becoming aware of individuality, as the discourse of others about themselves, the plurality of narratives about the same phenomenon and personal pronouns will help to delimit objective and subjective boundaries between the self and the other (Piaget, 2014, 1996).

Language, finally, will play a crucial role in the organization of autobiographical memory, an important component of self and the basis for formulating the life narrative and identity in late adolescence (Dunn, 2017; McAdams, 2018).

Autobiographical memory consists of a vast array of information and events that help locate and anchor the self in an ongoing life story structure, preserve the experience, establish causal links between events, helping to organize it. However, as McAdams (2018) warns, in childhood and early adolescence (12 years), autobiographical memory has not yet been organized as a life narrative. Unlike autobiographical memory, the life narrative consists of a delimited set of temporal and thematically organized scenes and scripts, which coherently connect past, present and future, giving unity and purpose to identity in its most elaborate version.

The records of events and the meanings that make up the autobiographical memory and the life narrative are constructed under the influence of the other's narrative, which adds to the signs and the very conception of the life story of a given culture. Thus, culture and interpersonal relationships provide the content and condition of the interpretation of events and the causal links that structure autobiographical memory and life narrative. Therefore, from this perspective, they are also fundamental for constructing self (Dunn, 2017; McAdams, 2018).

In addition to the construction of the aforementioned cognitive structures and language, the self is configured by a particular arrangement of contents that, since childhood, the subject recognizes as belonging to him/herself, that is, contents that integrate into its conceptual system. The content type and the way in which such content is integrated into the representation of oneself result from socialization experiences and will vary throughout development (Damon & Hart, 1988; Harter, 2012; Silva, 2020).

Damon and Hart (1988) present a multidimensional model on the development of self-understanding from childhood (up to 10 years old) to late adolescence (up to 18 years of age) as a result of longitudinal research. The authors point out that from childhood to the end of adolescence, there is a tendency for the subject to highlight one dimension of the self over others, starting with a focus on physical characteristics, passing through material actions, roles and social relationships, and, finally, gives emphasis to psychological attributes (beliefs, philosophies, perception of psychic dynamics etc.). Thus, individuals

under the age of 12 approximately center their definitions of themselves on physical characteristics (e.g., “I'm a tall person”) and action (e.g., “I like playing video games”). When they mention aspects related to the social dimension of the self, they are restricted to belonging to a group (e.g., “I'm part of the basketball team”) and the activities they carry out with others (e.g., “I like playing with my friends”). The mention of the psychological dimension, in turn, is limited to internal states (e.g., “I tend to be happy”) and capabilities (e.g., “I am intelligent”). The emphasis on personality characteristics linked to social relationships (e.g., “I am a faithful friend”) becomes more recurrent only in adolescence. At the same time, the reference to a belief system and the psychic dynamics itself (e.g., “I'm an anxious and sensitive person”) is highlighted only in late adolescence (between 16 and 18 years old, approximately). It is during this period that moral contents begin to appear, explicitly and spontaneously, as part of self-representations.

Harter (2012) reviews a series of studies that endorse these results and adds that, within each of these dimensions, we will find variations in the contents and in the value and valence that the individual attributes to them, which are deeply influenced by the standards and values expressed in culture and the speeches and actions of people valued by the child.

The identity construction

Self and identity are concepts commonly used as synonyms. Despite being overlapping constructs from the point of view of psychic structure and functioning, several authors have highlighted the conceptual distinction between them, converging on the conception that identity is a more elaborate configuration of the self marked by a sense of unity and purpose and the commitment to certain social roles, values and ideologies, considered central to the self-representation (Marcia, 1966; Erikson, 1976; Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Moshman, 2011; Carlsson, Wängqvist, & Frisén, 2015; Schwartz et al., 2015; Fadjukoff et al., 2016; McAdams, 2018). Identity, according to these authors, will begin to manifest itself in early adolescence (around 12 years of age). Still, it is only at the end of this period and the beginning of young adulthood that it will be more actively elaborated and acquire more defined contours.

This conception has its genesis in the prominent work of psychoanalyst Erik Erikson (1976) on the development of identity in adolescence. According to Blasi and Glodis (1995), we can think about the identity constitution in Erikson through three complementary perspectives: I) Estructural perspective: reorganization, most of the time unconscious, of needs, motivations and identifications; II) Social perspective: assimilation and commitment to social roles and values of a given culture, as well as greater integration into one's society and culture; and III) Phenomenological perspective: a new way of experiencing the self, characterized by a sense of unity and individuality and a feeling of purpose.

According to Erikson (1976), the process of identity formation results from the need to integrate (in the sense of synthesizing) the elements of individuality that were formed throughout childhood and confer unity on it, but now with adult society as a privileged unit of reference, which demands the assumption of social roles and encourages attachment to values and ideologies capable of conferring belonging and purpose to identity. In this sense, identity in Erikson is characterized by the exploration of axiological options, beliefs and occupations available in society, with the aim of consolidating them into a personal ideology, establishing commitments to life plans that will allow the young people to situate themselves in a new societal niche – nominally, the adult world.

As a tributary of Erikson's theory, Marcia (1966) developed a widely used theoretical-methodological model (Moshman, 2011; Carlsson et al., 2015; Schwartz et al., 2015;

Fadjukoff et al., 2016), which synthesizes identity formation into two processes: the establishment of commitments to certain content domains (career, religion, sexuality, political ideology, friendships and family) that will constitute the conception of oneself and the active exploration of alternatives regarding these domains. The author found four different ways of experiencing these two processes of identity formation (identity status). They are I) identity achievement: the subject has defined commitments through an active exploration process; II) moratorium: there are no defined commitments, but there is an active search to achieve them; III) closed identity: commitment established without autonomous personal exploration, but through the reproduction of the values and beliefs of reference figures; IV) diffuse identity: there is no commitment and no exploratory process.

Thus, for Marcia (1966), a mature identity has to do with strong, self-conscious, and self-chosen commitments, which are marked by deep personal investment in relation to the domains above. The exploration and establishment of these commitments as part of one's identity will begin to occur with a gradual level of intensity from mid-adolescence onwards (Carlsson et al., 2015; Schwartz et al., 2015; Fadjukoff et al., 2016).

Despite agreeing with most of the theoretical formulations of the Erikson and Marcia tradition, Blasi and collaborators (Blasi, 1995; Blasi & Glodis, 1995) consider that the phenomenological dimension of identity has not received due attention from scholars affiliated with this tradition. Invested in this criticism, the authors undertook a series of investigations into the development of the self in adolescence, seeking to understand how subjects experience this psychosocial construct. As a result, they identified the existence of four ways of experiencing the self. What we are interested in highlighting about their studies is that, at the beginning of adolescence, the self is a diffuse entity, marked by multiple attributes that the subject has not yet articulated in the sense of seeking unity and identity. It focuses on physical characteristics, actions that one likes to perform, social relationships, and feelings and traits that are associated with social approval. Still, there is nothing that indicates the recognition of a core self endowed with attributes, beliefs, emotions and opinions that make him unique and give him integrity. As adolescence progresses, the tendency is for the subject to begin to recognize the existence of characteristics that are genuinely part of the self, in contrast to superficial and external factors, feeling them as essentially important to who he is as a person and committing to be loyal to himself. He will also begin, especially in the final stage of this age period, to assert himself as an agent responsible for his construction and not a mere observer of an inherent identity.

Similarly, Berzonsky (2016) identified that subjects whose identity is the result of a construction of which they are agents showed greater correlation with indicators for purpose in life, commitment to their own identity, and self-regulation.

From these authors point of view, to talk about identity it is not enough for there to be a set of contents (whether religion or political ideology) that appear as part of the representation that the subject creates about himself. The subject must recognize these contents as central to his most basic sense of self and coherently unify them. In this sense, Blasi (1995) summarizes identity as a mature self-representation, which constitutes what is most important to the self, characterized by a strong sense of unity and agency, by its prominence in the person's consciousness and by its ability to anchor a sense of personal stability and purpose.

From this perspective, Moshman (2011) and Berzonsky (2016) argue that the existence of self-concept or self-representation is not enough to talk about identity, as even a child has it. In the authors' conception, identity is a sophisticated representation of oneself, more precisely, ‘a theory about oneself’. Moshman (2011) defends this idea by considering

that identity brings together characteristics analogous to scientific theories, being, in general, a conceptual structure composed of postulates, assumptions, and constructs that are considered relevant to organizing and experiencing the self in the world.

According to Moshman (2011), two characteristics authorize this proposition to be stated: I) theories are organized and, ideally, coherent. Affirming identity as a theory about oneself means saying that it is not a collection of beliefs but an organized and integrated conception; II) theories are explanatory. Identity is an attempt 'to explain' oneself based on an understanding of oneself and not just an effort to describe characteristics and behaviors. It is a consideration of beliefs, values and central purposes that the person builds and chooses to explain his thoughts and behaviors. From this unfolds, the idea that identity is an 'explicit' theory about the self, in which implicit assumptions, unconscious dispositions and emotions that constitute the self need to be considered as part of the identity in order to be so.

Besides these characteristics, Moshman (2011) aligns himself with Blasi and Glodis (1995), as well as Erikson (1976) and Marcia (1966), by claiming that the construction of theories about oneself occurs around certain domains with which individuals commit. The author highlights those identified by the tradition founded by Erikson and Marcia (career, religion, sexuality, political ideology, friendships and family) and adds, based on the review of several studies, the moral, ethnic and gender domains. Thus, he concludes that having an identity presupposes committing the domains that the person considers central to himself and having a self-theory that coordinates such commitments.

In light of this theoretical framework, we can synthesize identity as the notion of oneself as an agent that unifies a set of contents (traits, objectives, principles, beliefs, feelings etc.) recognized as belonging to the self core, which places the subject in a psychosocial niche, give him unity and purpose and are mobilized as central in the subject's explanation of the thoughts, feelings and actions that characterize him.

The construction of this particular self-configuration may occur thanks to the conjunction between cognitive-affective transformations that characterize the period of adolescence and the subject's insertion into the adult world.

From a cognitive point of view, adolescence is the period in which formal thinking develops, the most prominent expression of which is hypothetical-deductive reasoning. With formal thinking, the teenager acquires the ability to perform representations about representations, to think about possibilities on an abstract level, to conjecture about the real and the possible, extracting deductions regardless of his relationship with observable reality. The adolescent becomes capable of coordinating multiple possibilities of choosing who he wants to be, testing hypotheses about himself, and understanding, assimilating, and constructing ideologies and theories about himself and the world. This occurs precisely because he becomes capable of operating his thoughts in the direction of the possible and the abstract. Therefore, it is also as a result of this cognitive acquisition that the adolescent will become capable of designing his future (Inhelder & Piaget, 1976; Moshman, 2011; Danza, 2019).

According to Harter (2012), it is by using this intellectual tool that adolescents start to coherently coordinate or integrate different apparently contradictory traits or self-representations into the same more global trait or high order self-representation - for example, when they synthesize the fact that they are skilled in arts, mathematics and languages into the attribute 'I am intelligent'. The author demonstrates how, in early adolescence, this capacity has not yet been fully developed, as many individuals have

difficulties coordinating attributes and think of them in isolation, which often generates conflicts about the self and doubts about the existence of a self core.

The acquisition of formal thinking will depend both on the maturation of the nervous system, sociocultural conditions and the active role of the subject in the construction of cognitive structures and procedures as a result of his interaction with the environment. However, although formal thinking is indispensable for identity construction, it depends as much or even more on social factors, which will provide the contents and conditions for its construction (Inhelder & Piaget, 1976).

The adolescent's approach to the adult world and society's expectations about who he will become impose the need to integrate roles, objectives, values, beliefs, group belonging, etc. into a coherent pattern that specifies how the emerging adult will live, love, work, fit into the world and what he will believe within a complex and changing world (Inhelder & Piaget, 1976; Erikson, 1976; Carlsson et al., 2015; McAdams, 2018; Danza, 2019; Silva, 2020). As the adolescent approaches adulthood, he begins to explore, actively and with increasing intensity, this process of identity construction, a moment in which he stablishs affective bonds with ways of life, social groups, ideologies and/or moral principles (Marcia, 1966; Erikson, 1976; Moshman, 2011; Schwartz et al., 2015; Carlsson et al., 2015; Berzonsky, 2016; Fadjukoff et al., 2016), links that constitute the functional mechanism for integrating such identification objects as values into personal identity (Blasi, 1995; Silva, 2020). Social identities (ethnic, class or gender), in that regard, result from the subject's emotional attachment and sense of belonging to a specific social group, which becomes part of his identity (Moshman, 2011; Chandler & Dunlop, 2015; Schwartz et al., 2015).

According to longitudinal studies, it is at this stage of life that moral contents will appear as part of the representation that individuals create to describe and explain their attributes, thoughts, feelings and actions (Damon & Hart, 1988; Pratt, Hunsberger, Pancer, & Alisat, 2003; Silva, 2020). Since morality is a fundamental domain of human relations and that insertion into the adult world demands the assumption of personal criteria for regulating one's conduct and a sense of personal responsibility, the adolescent seeks references and identifications with ways of life, principles norms, models of conduct and ideologies that express moral values, integrating them into their representation of themselves. For some of them, such values may become central to the person they are and want to be. In this case, there is the formation of moral identity, a concept used to define individuals who integrate moral values into their identities and who usually demonstrate great commitment to moral conduct (Blasi, 1995; Pratt et al., 2003; Frimer, Walker, Dunlop, Lee, & Riches, 2011; Lepsley, 2015; Hertz & Krettenauer, 2016; Silva, 2020).

It is, at the end of adolescence and the beginning of adulthood, that the individual begins to synthesize past, present and future to confer a sense of continuity and coherence between the child he is saying goodbye to and the adult he is announcing. At this moment, it converts the vast collection of autobiographical memories into a life narrative, which encompasses a delimited set of temporally and thematically organized scenes and scripts, whose function and consequence is to provide unity, coherence and purpose to identity (McAdams, 2018). Reviews on the Narrative Identity Perspective (Schwartz et al., 2015; McAdams, 2018) point out that a mature identity can be recognized by the subject's ability to recognize and give meaning to the events of his life, coherently connect them and identify them as significant for the self-construction in the present.

Although many authors agree that late adolescence is the most active period and a critical time for identity construction (1966; Inhelder & Piaget, 1976; Erikson, 1976; Damon & Hart, 1988; Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Harter, 2012; Schwartz et al., 2015; McAdams, 2018),

studies indicate that identity formation will only acquire a mature, consistent and more consolidated arrangement in early adulthood – what is conventionally called young adults (19 to 25 years of age) (Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Harter, 2012; McAdams, 2018). Furthermore, several studies have demonstrated that identity is not something consolidated and static but an open and dynamic system, capable of changing the way the subject experiences it and the contents that make up the self-representation core (Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Pratt et al., 2003; Carlsson et al., 2015; Schwartz et al., 2015; Fadjukoff et al., 2016; Silva, 2020).

Final considerations

From the review and articulation of different theoretical perspectives and empirical studies on self and identity, we define the self as a system of self-representations whose construction results from a process in which biological, cognitive-affective and sociocultural factors interact. It starts from a phylogenetic inheritance, which provides the biological basis for its development so that, in active interaction with the social environment, it develops cognitive structures and assimilates sociocultural references, creating the conditions for identity construction from adolescence onwards.

Identity, in turn, consists of a mature configuration of the self, being defined as the unification of a set of contents recognized as belonging to the self core, which places the subject in a psychosocial niche, gives him unity and purpose and mobilizes as central in the subject's explanation of the thoughts, feelings and actions that characterize him. This psychosocial construct begins to be defined consciously and systematically in early adolescence, under the subject's need, as he approaches the adult world, to define who he will be and how he will act in the world. However, it is not a construction that is consolidated and preserved over time, as it is an open system that is built in the active interaction of the subject with the environment and that, therefore, despite maintaining certain temporal stability, is subject to transformations.

If, throughout this paper, it was possible to conceptualize and integrate different structural and functional components of the identity construction, on the other hand, it is necessary to recognize its limitations regarding the possibility of covering the wide spectrum of studies on this construct, especially those included in other epistemological domains - such as psychoanalysis. Also, the focus restricted to psychology ends up subsuming the understanding of other facets of the object in its insertion in a social world in constant change, whose cultural exchanges arising from digital globalization and the multiple existential possibilities that present themselves (Guichard & Puvaud, 2015) make the identity construction a psychosocial phenomenon of even greater complexity, whose understanding demands dialogue among different knowledge areas.

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