

Social Ties, Emotions, and Subjectivity in the School, from Norbert Elias

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ABSTRACT – Social Ties, Emotions, and Subjectivity in the School, from Norbert Elias. The objective of the article is to think about the relationships of meaning between social ties, emotional experiences, and the constitution of subjectivities in the school plot based on the Figurational Sociology of Norbert Elias. From a socio-educational point of view, part of the results of a qualitative investigation are shared in which young people from secondary schools in the province of Buenos Aires were interviewed. The recovered statements are analyzed in the light of categories such as figurations, affective valences, established and outsiders relationships, in order to identify how trajectories marked by social pain are at the basis of the constitution of denied subjectivities.

Keywords: Feelings. Emotions. Secondary School. Figurational Sociology. Argentina.

RESUMEN – Lazos Sociales, Emotividades y Subjetividad en la Escuela, desde Norbert Elias. El artículo tiene como propósito pensar las relaciones de significado entre los lazos sociales, las experiencias emocionales y la constitución de subjetividades en la trama escolar a partir de la sociología figuracional de Norbert Elias. Desde una perspectiva socioeducativa, se comparten parte de los resultados de una investigación cualitativa en la que se entrevistaron a jóvenes de escuelas secundarias de la Provincia de Buenos Aires. Los testimonios recuperados son analizados a la luz de categorías como figuraciones, valencias afectivas, establecidos y marginados, a los fines de identificar el modo en que las trayectorias signadas por el dolor social se encuentran en la base de la constitución de subjetividades negadas.

Palabras clave: Sentimientos. Emociones. Escuela Secundaria. Sociología Figuracional. Argentina.

Introduction

Emotional bonds occupy a central place in the subjectivity of every human being. When referring specifically to young people, who are in a period of consolidating their identity traits, inter- and intragenerational relationships become vitally important. In the school space, the bonds that students establish structure an emotional fabric that gives rise to subjectivizing or desubjectivizing experiences. The purpose of this writing is to reflect on the relationships between social ties, emotions, and subjective constitution based on the contributions of Norbert Elias's figurational sociology.

To this end, a series of key concepts from Eliasian theory are taken up: figurations, interdependence, affective valences, established and marginalized, among others. These categories, beyond representing the author's thinking, pave the way for a greater understanding of phenomena and situations that currently affect educational trajectories.

The empirical material consists of a series of interviews and focus groups that capture the voices of young students from secondary schools located in socially vulnerable areas of the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina. The collected testimonies are analyzed based on the categories proposed by Norbert Elias's figurational sociology, focusing mainly on the importance of establishing significant emotional ties for the constitution of youth subjectivities.

Theoretical Framework

Elias, in the introduction of his work *Sociología Fundamental* (2008, p. 13), writes the following sentence: "Sociology deals with the problems of society, and there is no doubt that anyone who reflects on society and studies it is part of it". This statement may seem simple; however, the author proposes from it a completely different model of society than the one commonly used in the Social Sciences.

In his work, he warns about the need to modify the language and the terms that are used to explain social phenomena under the argument that the existing vocabulary is limiting and comes, to a greater or lesser extent, from the hard sciences. It also warns that this task cannot be carried out from one day to the next, but requires hard work and the passage of generations to achieve the necessary consensus. It is therefore necessary to pause in the description of certain concepts and, in turn, the incorporation of categories proposed by the author himself is relevant.

The links between social ties, emotions, and subjectivity in school cannot be understood without first considering the dialectical relationship proposed by Eliasian thought regarding the dyad between the individual and society. Both in the previously cited work and in *El proceso de la civilización* (1987) and *La sociedad de los individuos* (1990), the division that falls upon these concepts in traditional social

theory is called into question, where they are considered as watertight and independent compartments from one another.

Concepts such as “individual” and “society” do not refer to two objects with separate existence, but to distinct yet inseparable aspects of the same human beings, and that both aspects, human beings in general, in a state of normality, can only be understood immersed in a structural change (Elias, 1987, p. 16).

Given the procedural nature of your approach, social relations are thought of in terms of the intertwining that occurs over time between the subjective and the objective, as well as between the individual and the social.

Both concepts have the character of processes, and it is not possible at all to abstract this character of process in a theoretical construction that refers to human beings. On the contrary, it is essential to include this procedural character in sociological theory and in others that refer to human beings (Elias, 1987, p. 37).

This positioning regarding the relationship between the individual and society does not fit the prevailing model in the Social Sciences, which has been transferred to common sense and is shaped by an “ego-centric self” that forms the vertex of a series of concentric circles in which the family is placed first, then the school, followed by industry and then the State (see Elias, 2008, p. 14). In this way, society is objectified (just like the circles that make it up), while the subject seems to remain outside of these configurations.

Based on your proposal for progress in defining categories that enable a greater level of understanding of social phenomena, Elias introduces a new explanatory model of society (see Elias, 2008, p. 15). Its graphic representation includes a series of small circles that symbolize semi-autonomous individuals, connected by lines that represent the affective valences (the bond that exists between them) and always identifying a more or less unstable balance of power between both.

The characterization of the individual as semi-autonomous refers to the need of every man or woman to establish connections with others. It is not possible to understand the actions and behaviors of an individual if it is not in their interaction with other individuals. Man is by nature a social being and cannot subsist without the existence of another. Individuals are grouped into networks of interdependence that together form *figurations* (Elias, 2008) such as a family, a school, or two teams facing each other in a soccer match. In his own words: The concept of “figuration” serves to provide a simple conceptual tool with which to flexibly address the social pressure that induces one to speak and think as if “individual” and “society” were not only two distinct figures but also, moreover, antagonistic.” (Elias, 2008, p. 154). In this sense, young people recover in their testimonies different representations of the ones they are part of, such as their family, their class, or a subgroup within the classroom, in which they describe various types of relationships.

The existence of human beings is tied to their social condition and their daily interactions. Only by accepting this idea will it be possible to understand the origin and development of certain human functions and properties.

Humans have evolved in a world that harbors other existences apart from their own. Consequently, every man is by nature constituted for life in company, that is, for a life in relation to a great variety of existences, some friendly, others hostile, some inanimate, others living, and some of the latter, human. According to this, most of the attributes and properties of the human being have functions that can only be understood if considered in relation to other existences (Elias, 1998, p. 316).

Following this need to live alongside others, human beings connect with one another, establishing affective valences that form groupings of various characteristics (or figurations in the author's own terms), which are always mediated by power relations.

To provide an example of the analytical potential that this model proposes, it is possible to revisit the study on the formation of two antagonistic groups, although structurally similar (sharing class, nationality, and ethnicity), from a small community called Winston Parva that was developed by Elias and Scotson in their work *Establecidos y marginados. Una investigación sociológica sobre problemas comunitarios* (2016). There they describe the way in which one of the figurations (which they refer to as established), tends to erect itself as a human group of higher order with respect to the others (which is named as *outsiders, excluded, or marginalized* according to the different translations). They argue that, to a large extent, the power superiority of one group over another is due to the cohesion that the members of the former maintain among themselves. Based on this power differential, a bond marked by feelings of contempt, inferiority, and exclusion of some over others is established. In the accounts recovered from the students, various groups that confront each other are mentioned. In some cases, they may refer to broader configurations such as young-adults or black-white, and in others to smaller groups that are formed within each school. However, what remains constant is that in all these pairs, one of the groups is established as superior to the other inferior, generating feelings of stigmatization and self-stigmatization in the latter.

These emotions, which are based on a process of differentiation (understood in terms of distinction), remain current through mechanisms such as rumors, collective fantasy, and humiliations.

An established group tends to attribute to its marginalized group as a whole the 'bad' characteristics of the 'worst' section of the group: of its anomic minority. In comparison, the image that the established group has of itself tends to be shaped by its exemplary section, the most 'normative' or regulatory; about the minority of its 'best' members (Elias; Scotson, 2016, p. 32).

It is possible to notice that internal identification and relationship are determinants of power relations that affect the interaction between various groups, as well as the way emotional experiences are intertwined with the establishment of bonds and the role one occupies within one or more figurations.

Although Elias does not make a sharp distinction between emotions and affections throughout his work, he provides different clues that allow us to understand the meaning he assigns to these categories. Emotions (as well as other functions of the human being such as language) combine biological and social aspects, unlearned and learned. They are not found a priori in the individual, but rather he carries biological dispositions that enable his learning.

No emotion of an adult person is completely unlearned or, in other words, a genetically fixed reaction model. Like language, human emotions result from a process that combines learned and unlearned elements (Elias, 1998, p. 314).

Like Elias and following his relational perspective, his most prominent disciples position the social as the central receptacle of the production of emotional experience (Dunning, 1993; Goudsblom, 2008; Wouters, 2008). Emotivity cannot be understood unless it is seen as the result of a long-term cultural transformation process (Honorato; Gebara, 2012). Social contexts are conditioning factors of the affective structure of individuals, making it impossible to address them without considering the figurational nature of human relationships (Kemper, 1990; Weiler, 1998). In this way, feelings make sense as a cultural, social, individual, and collective experience manifesting or hiding through bodies (Kaplan; Szapu, 2020).

In his text *Sobre los seres humanos y sus emociones: un ensayo sociológico procesual* (1998), Elias argues that emotion has three components (An idea that is taken up by Goudsblom, 2008, in his work on Violence as Social Pain). The first is the *somatic*, which refers to the physical manifestation of emotion, what happens inside the organism. The following is the *behavior*, which embodies the way the individual reacts, the actions they display in response to a certain emotion. Finally, the component of *feelings*, represented by the decoding of emotion that prepares the subject for a specific type of reaction.

This last component reflects the significance that the author gives to the learning ability of human beings, which provides the possibility to choose between different possible actions to publicly act in response to an emotion. This is what leads Elias to question the “expression of emotions”.

The term generally used 'expression of emotions' invites reflection. What possible functions can living beings have in expressing emotions? And what is really being expressed? (Elias, 1998, p. 319-320).

What this question suggests is that emotions not only have a social origin, but also serve a social function depending on the context in

which they take shape. To explain the process of *civilization*, Elias describes how the transformations of Western societies in Modernity are accompanied by changes in social behavior and the emotional structure of individuals (Zabludovsky, 2007; Honorato, 2009; Linklater; Mennell, 2010). With the formation of modern states, there is a monopolization of physical violence and an increase in the differentiation of social functions, which leads to the establishment of personality structures with increasing self-regulation and predictability. The described theory positions social institutions, among which is the school, as fundamental bastions in the production and cultural circulation of basic knowledge (Honorato, 2011; 2016), including those related to emotional and bodily self-control. In this sense, it is possible to affirm that the sociogenesis of the State represents one of the engines of the *civilization of emotions* (Wouters, 2008) or the *civilization of affections* (Mutchinick; Kaplan, 2016).

Along with this tendential pacification of social space, there is a transfer to individual psychological life of the conflicts and tensions that were previously externalized in confrontation with others. Following this journey, the “expression of emotions” undergoes modifications over time, and increasingly, behaviors will be mediated by the calculation of how a reaction will be interpreted in the eyes of others.

It is necessary to dose accurately the attitudes of approach and distancing in relation to others; every greeting, every conversation has consequences that transcend what has been said and what has been done; and that reveal the worth of each human being (Elias, 1987, p. 483).

The externalization of emotions serves a communicative function aimed primarily at pleasing others, managing a common code, and being accepted. We can affirm, based on the testimonies collected, that young people hide feelings such as fear or shame in their daily interactions in the pursuit of recognition. To do this, it becomes necessary to internalize certain behaviors such as looking down while walking through the school hallways or speaking with an accent that is not their own. The individual faces the need to learn to “tame” their impulses and control their reactions when faced with another.

The regulation of behaviors and emotions also acquired a more decisive criterion for status and reputation. People pressured each other to become more aware of social and individual options and restrictions, and this led to a greater demand for social knowledge and self-knowledge [...]. Respect and respectable behavior became more dependent on self-regulation (Wouters, 2008, p. 92)

Goudsblom (2008), when addressing the feeling of shame, explains how emotional self-regulation involves a strategy to be valued by others in a given context and is simultaneously internalized, generating consequences for self-esteem. His work deepens the analysis of a particular emotion in order to illustrate its social character. We feel ashamed to believe that we have damaged the respect or affection that

another may have towards us. Through a determined action, an individual puts their social position at risk and, as a consequence, feels that they deserve the resulting humiliation or exclusion.

The process in which the judgments of others are internalized or made one's own can be thought of in the relationship between the established and the marginalized previously mentioned:

When the abyss of power is very wide, marginalized groups evaluate themselves by the criteria of their oppressors. [...] Just as established groups actually view their superior power as a sign of their superior human worth, marginalized groups, as long as the power differential is large and submission is inevitable, emotionally experience their power inferiority as a sign of human inferiority (Elias; Scotson, 2016, p. 229).

A student confesses that she speaks disparagingly based on people's skin color, even though it hurts her when her family calls her "black" since, in her own words, *"I'm not that white either."*

In summary, we can affirm that, first of all, emotionality is a result of the nature of the networks of interdependence that an individual establishes. Secondly, the affective plot has consequences for self-esteem and self-worth. Both statements are of interest when reflecting on the testimonies of young people, considering that their emotional experiences are intertwined with their subjective constitution. To illustrate this, fragments are retrieved from the collected testimonies in which the social character of the emotions they experience can be read, as well as the appropriation they make of them. Experiences of shame, disgust, fear, or anger are mentioned as situations that are often lived in silence and gradually form an emotional network marked by a social pain from which it seems impossible to escape. Both the categories and the developments of figurational sociology pave the way for a reflection on the relationships between social ties, emotionalities, and subjective constitution in secondary school.

Methodology

The proposed analyses recover part of the results of a socio-educational study whose general purpose is to understand and interpret the emotional experiences of young students as narratives of social pain.

The adopted constructivist perspective allows one to assert the assumption that it is necessary to overcome, in the practice of socio-educational research, the split between objectivist and subjectivist conceptions (Elias, 1987; 1990; 2008; Bourdieu, 1988; Baranger, 2004; Gutiérrez, 2005; Kaplan, 2008). In the analysis of emotional experiences in the socio-dynamics of stigmatization, it is essential to account for the dialectic between objective conditions and the meanings constructed by the actors in their interaction. In opposition to a substantialist view, a relational matrix is proposed that accounts for the constitution of individuals and groups in particular social configurations (Bourdieu, 1988; Elias, 1990; Kaplan, 2016). The aim is to understand

the actions of the subjects embedded in a plot that involves their history and their environment (Sirvent, 2006).

From qualitative research, coinciding with Vasilachis de Gialdino (2006), the interest was based on understanding how the complexity of social interactions is expressed in everyday life, while interpreting the meaning that the actors attribute to them. In this way, it makes sense to refer to the processes of socialization and subjectivation in the singularity of school institutions.

The starting assumption is that there exists a symbolic-subjective dimension of inequality and violence in the school. From a qualitative approach (Porta; Silva, 2003) with an interpretative design (Gómez-Gómez, 1995; Gutiérrez, 1999), we assume that it is necessary to oppose empiricism, which reduces research to data collection independent of theorization, and to theoricism understood as a conceptual elaboration outside of empirical inquiry (Bourdieu; Chamboredon; Passeron, 2002).

For the data collection, 40 in-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured guide (Yuni; Urbano, 2014) and 4 focus groups with young people attending public secondary schools managed by the state in the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina. To this end, a non-representative intentional sampling (Marradi; Archenti; Piovani, 2018) was established of students from schools located in peripheral urban areas of the province, which are attended by populations with socio-economic and cultural characteristics of vulnerability. The selection of students for in-depth interviews was carried out following the criteria of accessibility, heterogeneity, and theoretical saturation (Glaser; Strauss, 2009). They were carried out with informed consent and with signed authorization from the father, mother, or guardian of each student, in addition to having prior approval from the school authorities.

The analysis was conducted within the framework of grounded theory. Marradi, Archenti, and Piovani (2018) place this current within qualitative studies, which aims to generate theory from empirical data, seeking a kind of dialogue between theory and empiricism.

The qualitative information obtained was processed using software for unstructured data (Atlas Ti), following the strategies of Glaser and Strauss's grounded theory (2009), regarding categorization procedures in order to initially carry out the preliminary categorization of the data, then advancing in the identification of its properties and relationships between categories.

Given that a theoretical framework is established, the work with the empirical dimensions of the study was primarily aimed at deepening the analysis based on the hypotheses/conjectures. It is important to evaluate its relevance regarding the understanding of the social construction of emotions in the socio-dynamics of stigmatization in school life and more particularly, its relationship with social ties and the construction of subjectivity in secondary school.

Testimonials: results and analysis

Through the voice of the students, we aim to characterize the social ties and emotional experiences that take place in the school environment in order to establish their relationship with the process of subjective constitution. To do this, various fragments of the interviews are retrieved that allow us to describe the nature of inter- and intragenerational links and the emotions that emerge from them. From there, we are in a position to affirm that the emotional network woven into the school plot has its correlate in the representations of young people about others and about themselves.

One striking issue is the responses obtained when asking them how they perceive today's youth in general terms.

Nowadays, not all young people, but a lot are already consuming drugs, 'porro' (marijuana cigarettes). And they drink a lot. These are things that have been happening a lot lately with young people (Male - 5th year).

It seems like everything is a bit lost. Because there is no longer respect (Woman - 2nd year).

Young people now dedicate themselves to stealing every day. And you can't do anything (Male - 2nd year).

Some rebels. Others... There are quite a few that I know who say they are going to come to school, but they don't. I mean, they come and don't enter. Some of them ran away from school with the boyfriend (Woman - 2nd year).

Youth is associated with crime, substance abuse, absenteeism, or school dropout. Disrespect and the constant possibility of conflict seem to be the order of the day in the shared representations in the interviews. A perspective prevails in which the trajectories of the past are exalted (beyond not having been witnesses to them) over the attitudes and behaviors assigned to contemporary youth, as is hinted at in the following fragment.

It used to be quieter, you could be with a friend, you could go out calmly to the street, you would go to eat an ice cream, and then you would come back. Now you don't know if you're coming back. The boys are all excited (Boy - 5th year).

This reading seems to come from a distant place, as if they themselves do not belong to the social group they are stigmatizing. It is interesting to associate this type of representations with the statement by Elias mentioned at the beginning of this article, in which he argues that anyone who reflects on society is part of it (Elias, 2008). In this case, it is the young people themselves who share their theories regarding youth, excluding themselves from that human group.

The characterization reproduced in the interviews tends to lead towards the formation of two antagonistic groups to which various qualities are assigned. On one hand, there is the group of those who are considered "bad" (which represents the majority of young people associating them with problematic consumption, criminal activities, abandonment, or little interest in studies) and, secondly, the "good" (where

the interviewee is usually included and is positioned in opposition to the values of the other group).

I think about the future, what can I do. Upon finishing my degree, having my permanent job, and completing my studies... My house, everything. But there are others who think about having fun, about the joke. There are some who only come together to drink. There are fourteen, thirteen-year-old boys on a corner, doing drugs, smoking, drinking, getting drunk. And that is the future I don't understand (Male - 2nd year).

There are those who are not interested in finishing high school and whatever comes next, comes, and those who are there committed. Like me, who wants to finish high school and already has something planned afterwards. And there are those who don't care about anything, they aren't even interested in finishing high school and they drop out, and they think about living for the day, they don't think about a future (Woman - 5th year).

This perspective regarding the way of defining oneself as an age group and the dichotomous group classification can also be analyzed in light of the categories of established and marginalized. The differentiation between an "us" and a "them" materializes in a typification where the group of "blacks" (also referred to as "turros", "chorros", "villeros") is pitted against the group of "chetos" (or "caretas").

Interviewer: If you want to include yourself in a group of friends, can you?

Interviewee: No, it depends there because... It depends on the group you want to join as well. Because, it seems like now it's divided between the posh and the rough...

Interviewer: Where is it divided like this?

Interviewee: Outside, at school, everywhere (Boy - 5th year).

The present dialogue suggests that it is not a division specific or exclusive to the school environment, but rather transcends to other spaces, it also belongs to the "outside". It is possible to distinguish that the discourses and judgments circulating in the current common sense penetrate the walls of the school and are reproduced in the voices of young people.

At the same time, the insinuation regarding the difficulty of entering these groups (or at least one of them) allows us to notice that their members hold a certain power that gives them the authority to "let in" or not a candidate. Each configuration has a greater or lesser level of cohesion, which can facilitate or hinder the integration of new individuals. To understand this differential feature, it is pertinent to recall that each of the mentioned figurations corresponds to a certain description or recurring typification in the obtained narratives. Whether they are physical aspects, attitudinal aspects, related to tastes, to the places they frequent, or others, a differentiation is established between an "us" and a "them", marking a barrier that, at times, seems insurmountable.

Interviewee: And are skin color also linked to these groups?

Interviewee: Yes, the dark-skinned ones like that, very dark-skinned, are from the group of the *villeros*. And those with skin, white complexion, are the masks. I say it because it's what I see. Because I see little groups of fake people who have such white skin. And then the group of the *villeros* who are, I don't know, they are dark-skinned (Male - 5th year).

One of the most mentioned physical characteristics in the testimonies is the skin tone. Those who have a darker tone are identified with one of the groups, and vice versa. This quality is also associated with other aspects of the physical appearance, such as clothing, hairstyle, the use of tattoos and/or piercings, as well as the combination of several of them.

The masks are generally the ones that come with boots, jeans, shirt... they are elegant... And the *turros* are the ones who are all dressed in sportswear. (Male - 5th year).

Interviewer: And what about the haircut?

Interviewee: Yes. Careta is a weird hairstyle, that strange one they have. And in black, black, black is the little helmet and the zero that passed by here (Woman - 5th year).

Beyond highlighting certain features of the physical appearance, the following fragments reflect the way elegance and the use of expensive objects are associated with the group of “*caretas*,” while cheap, exaggerated, and vulgar things are linked to the “*turros*.” When referring to the latter, references to characteristics such as untidiness, dirtiness, or exaggeration are often detected in speeches.

It's not that a way of dressing is right or wrong, but that most come with dirty clothes. No, I'm telling you like this, as if they dress like black people from the neighborhood (Varón - 5th year).

The *caretas* are dressed very well, so to speak. They pretend to have money, that they can buy brand-name sneakers... And the *turros* buy cheaper sneakers... The *turros* have many piercings, or they have a cut eyebrow, and they generally wear a visor. And the *caretas*, no, they brag about everything they have. If they have a cell phone, they show it off; if they have money, they show it off. Whichever school you are from (Woman - 2nd year).

Look, the *villeros* wear big clothes, sports shoes with elastic, those are the things they use. Hoodies, caps, and jackets like those from football clubs. Everything big, that is, big clothes. And the *caretas* wear brand sneakers, all nice clothes, you understand? The clothing that shows the brand, what brand is it. It seems that sometimes there is a difference in school. They want to make a difference with what they have. More than anything this little group, because it's like they flaunt (Woman - 2nd year).

As described by Elias and Scoton (2016) in their research on the *established* and the *marginalized*, physical appearance operates as a means of stigmatization from one group to another in a manner of *collective fantasy*, in which a trait of appearance determines the person in their entirety, associating them with the group of lesser power.

In this sense, this association with characteristics considered negative is not limited to physical appearance, but extends to ways of acting or speaking, dedication to studies, and ways of resolving conflicts. This establishes a typification of “negros” (blacks) as the bearers of everything that represents the “malo” (bad), generating fear and rejection from others.

Interviewer: Have you ever felt scared on the street?

Interviewee: Yes, when I run into those that I tell you gather on the corner, smoking a *porro*. Or sometimes they are bigger and then it makes me more uneasy.

Interviewer: And what are they, are they like *caretas* or are they like *negros* (Resuming categories already used by the interviewee)?

Interviewee: No, yes, like *negrada* (laughs). If they were *caretas*, they wouldn't scare me so much.

Interviewer: Why?

Interviewee: Because not, because you see them calmer. A kid who is darker you say is out stealing.

Interviewer: Blacker skin?

Interviewee: No, no. Black of soul (laughs) (Woman - 5th year).

These modes of grouping bring with them a series of value judgments towards those who occupy the place of the marginalized, which operates as symbolic violence, producing emotions linked to feelings such as shame, fear, loneliness, among others. An example of this can be interpreted from the following fragment, where a young woman describes how, inside a shopping mall, the security staff of the clothing store where she was with her brother was chasing both of them.

Once when I went shopping with my brother to buy clothes, they didn't let us in, or they come and two of them stand next to us... And we said, 'now my mom is coming and we are going to buy with the card.' We were choosing and my mom was going to pay the bill while we were going to choose the clothes. You know what a shame they made us go through, they would stand next to us. One time my brother got really heated because there were like three next to him. Then my brother says to him, 'friend, we are not going to rob you' (Woman - 5th year).

These types of emotional experiences that are experienced in rather informal or impersonal situations also occur in more formal or personal contexts such as family relationships or within the school setting.

The only thing I could have felt bad about is when they call me black. They were talking about other people. For example, my stepmother, who is the person with my dad, used to say 'That's a piece of shit nigga.' Sometimes it hits you a little, because if it says that... I'm not that white either. Or my cousin calls me 'nigga', that really annoys me. I say it too, but when they say it to me it still hurts (Woman - 5th year).

The different feelings that emerge in this type of experiences shape in young people an emotional network marked by what we call *social pain*. A suffering that cannot be analyzed unless it is in relation to the everyday relationships and social ties that young people establish. Beyond their bodily manifestation, emotions translate into actions and leave subjective marks that interfere with identity constitution. In this process, the respect and recognition obtained from others occupies a central place, thus being demanded in interviews.

Interviewee: I have also had run-ins with teachers where they were angry and raised their voices at me, and I made them quiet. It's a hot flash but... To not make them right, because sometimes they are not right... They are older, they deserve respect, but you should respect me too if you want respect. It is mutual.

Interviewer: Did you feel like you weren't being heard?

Interviewee: Yes, they don't listen to you. They seem to be talking to themselves because they are in nothingness (Man - 5th year).

The subject is constituted as such from the *network of interdependencies* it generates with other individuals in social interrelations, where the external observation of behaviors is internalized in what

Elias calls a mode of psychological observation: This is about the beginnings of that method of observation which would later be known by the name of “psychological” (Elias, 1987, p. 123). The integration is governed by the gaze of the other that becomes one's own and is internalized, giving rise to self-coercions that regulate actions and behaviors, even in the absence of others. The experiences and exchanges between subjects determine the ways of acting (and even of speaking as illustrated in the fragment presented below) and of expressing the emotions of each individual.

If you are not ordinary, if you do not speak like others do, if you do not dress like others dress, then you would already be different from how other people are. You would be set apart from the room, you would be there in a corner, alone. For example, if you are Paraguayan you don't want to say it because they are going to mess with you (make fun of you). So you imitate the Argentine accent because you lived here. Now if they find out that you are Paraguayan, Bolivian, that you don't speak like them, they will always mess with you about that. When they are angry, no matter how you are (Second year woman).

The way feelings are expressed in public is closely linked to the perception of actions aimed at gaining acceptance and recognition from others. This is how young people internalize different ways of acting or, in the words of the author himself, self-regulation of behavior (Elias, 1987).

At this point, it is worth asking the following questions: How does someone who stigmatizes their own group construct subjectivity? How do these types of perceptions impact the identity of young students? What is the nature of the social ties they establish and what emotional experiences do they evoke?

A possible hypothesis to think about these issues is that stigmatizing discourses, as well as the impossibility of establishing affective valences marked by respect and recognition, translate into a self-stigmatizing gaze affecting self-esteem. Students rate and classify youth based on how they feel perceived. And this type of value judgment acts not only on their representations of others but also on their own.

Interviewee: Sometimes I look at myself in the mirror and I don't like it very much.

Interviewer: Don't you like...?

Interviewee: As I am.

Interviewer: Your appearance?

Interviewee: Yes. Sometimes my character too.

Interviewer: Don't you like what you see?

Interviewee: Sometimes yes, and sometimes no. Sometimes I look at myself and say “How ugly” and other times I look at myself and say “Wow.” What was happening to me at home made me feel this way.

Interviewer: At your house?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Why?

Interviewee: I had a lot of problems with my dad, and the way he looked at me made me feel like I was that way. It made me feel like I wasn't, I mean that I was ugly, or a bunch of things, I was characterized by being things that I didn't feel I was, and it made me feel very bad how he saw me (Focus 1 - 4th and 5th year).

The gaze of the other becomes internalized, influencing not only the ways of acting and expressing emotions but also to the point of affecting

one's own ways of feeling. Situations of contempt and mistreatment are experienced by young people as experiences of social pain that affect their identity constitution by producing denied subjectivities.

Final Words

After a journey in which we recovered the voices of the students to reflect on their experiences in light of the categories and approaches of figurational sociology, we are in a position to affirm that there is a relationship between social ties, emotional experiences, and subjective constitution.

In the impossibility of establishing emotional bonds marked by trust, respect, and recognition, a sentimental network is built around the subject that ultimately affects their self-esteem. The gaze of the other, being imbued with contempt and fear, replicates that contempt in the one who is the object of it, producing a deteriorated self-worth. In this regard, young people tend to hide their identity traits, to silence their feelings, out of fear of the shame and humiliation that this may represent in their interaction with their peers.

Those young people who do not find support in their transition through the school institution nor in their family, find themselves in a position of emotional vulnerability that ultimately undermines their identity constitution. The trajectories crossed by experiences of social pain are destined to the construction of denied subjectivities.

The school, as a founding institution of social ties and emotional experiences, has the ability to twist these destinies. Through dialogue and the establishment of meaningful connections, one can collaborate in processing the suffering in a quest to heal the wounds left by an unjust and unequal society. Breaking with the discourses of doxa that tend to dichotomize into "good" and "bad", projecting a view of the other that accepts differences instead of retreating into differentiation, and providing spaces to address the emotional dimension in the school context are some of the tasks ahead. It is essential that the school can serve as a support for educational trajectories¹.

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