



# Identity theories: from decentering to “self-invention”

## Las teorías de la identidad: del descentramiento a la “invención de sí”

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Received: April 11, 2024–Accepted: May 27, 2024–Published: July 1, 2025

### Cite this article in APA:

Zarta Rojas, F. A. (2025). Identity theories: from decentering to “self-invention”. *Revista Colombiana de Ciencias Sociales*, 16(2), 679-696. <https://doi.org/10.21501/22161201.4943>

### Abstract

In this reflection article we have attempted to explore the advance of sociological theories based on the concept of identity as a reflection and “invention of the self,” integrating and clarifying, little by little, the subject-context dialectic through Bourdieu’s approaches. and Kauffman, without attempting to cover all human and social disciplines. The text is developed in the following points: the ambiguity of the concept of identity; from the decentering of the subject to the “invention of oneself” and finally, the Ego and the “invention of oneself”: from reflection to reflection. An initial conclusion is reached in which identity ends up being a subjective representation, a fact that occurs due to the entry of man into the community; Thus, today, at the beginning of the 21st century, what is at stake is no longer a project but a construction of identity throughout life and the request for reflection, analysis and decision-making about oneself and about the context.

### Keywords

Epistemology; Identity; Philosophy; Reflection; Sociology; Invention of oneself; Subjective representation.

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## Resumen

En el presente artículo de reflexión se ha pretendido explorar el avance de las teorías sociológicas a partir del concepto de identidad como reflejo e “invención del yo” integrando y aclarando, poco a poco, la dialéctica sujeto-contexto a través de los planteamientos de Bourdieu y Kauffman, sin pretender abarcar todas las disciplinas de lo humano y lo social. El texto se desarrolla en los siguientes puntos: la ambigüedad del concepto de identidad; del descentramiento del sujeto a la “invención de sí mismo” y finalmente, el Ego y la “invención de sí”: del reflejo a la reflexión. Se arriba a una conclusión inicial en la que la identidad termina por ser una representación subjetiva, hecho que se da por la entrada del hombre en la colectividad; así las cosas, hoy, a principios del siglo XXI, lo que está en juego ya no es un proyecto, sino una construcción de identidad a lo largo de toda la vida y la solicitud de reflexión, analítica y de toma de decisiones, sobre uno mismo y sobre el contexto.

## Palabras clave

Epistemología; Filosofía; Identidad; Reflexión; Sociología; Invención de sí; Representación subjetiva.

# Introduction

*Since “cultural identity” entails so many accents of essential unity, primordial uniqueness, indivisibility, and sameness, how should we “think” about identities that are always inscribed in relations of power and constructed across lines of difference and disjunction?*  
(Hall, 2001 p. 479)

At the beginning of the 21st century, the globalization of trade, the technological explosion and the immediacy of information have disrupted modern economies, as well as the daily lives of individuals, lifestyles, family and social relationships, and ways of thinking and talking about oneself. For Anthony Giddens (2007), our “radical modernity”, which he also calls “reflexive modernity”, forces individuals to construct themselves throughout their lives through a continuous narrative about themselves, to master the anticipation of their future and the integration of their past in that self-narrative that constitutes their personal identity: neither tradition nor nature determines their lifestyle.

Identity is often understood in the human and social sciences as an interactive process with two inseparable sides: the *subjective* (an intimate definition of oneself for oneself called “self-identity”) and the *social* (a “legal” definition of oneself for and by others called “social identity”). Thus, the question of identity forces one to conceptualize this subject-context dialectic, to establish a “conceptual bridge” between these two levels (Brewer, 2001, p. 115). But “thinking the subject” was not something obvious and implied ruptures with classical sociology. However, identity, which was once considered a secondary or even irrelevant concept, has become a central category in contemporary human and social sciences. According to Jean-Claude Kaufmann (2007a), it is a social problem of considerable dimensions and undoubtedly the form in which the social question now tends to take hold (p. 52). Similarly, it can be said that the notion of “context” is still considered, in some disciplines, in a global, even syncretic way.

We will see how sociological theories evolve from a conception of identity as a simple reflection of *habitus*, in Pierre Bourdieu’s theory (2004), to a conception of identity as a reflection and “invention of the self” in Kaufmann’s (2015), integrating and clarifying, gradually, the subject-context dialectic through various authors, without pretending to cover all human-social disciplines. Why focus on Bourdieu and Kaufmann? Although both are French sociologists, their approaches and concerns differ, we nevertheless find certain points of connection that allow us to work from them: (a) both are interested in how social structures influence human behavior, but at the same time recognize the capacity of individuals to act within those structures in creative and sometimes subversive ways; (b) Bourdieu focuses on how everyday practices reflect and reproduce social inequalities; Kaufmann also focuses more on how such practices can be forms

of resistance or negotiation with dominant social norms; (c) both posit how bodily experiences are mediated by social structures and how they inform social practices (although Kaufmann has explored more explicitly issues such as sexuality, intimacy, and identity construction from bodily experience); and (d) both sociologists share an interest in understanding people's subjective experiences within broader social contexts and use qualitative methods, although in different ways (Bourdieu with ethnography and participant observation, while Kaufmann uses interviews and narrative analysis in his research). Relating their theories might help to explore how their complementary approaches facilitate a better understanding of specific social phenomena, such as the reproduction of inequality or forms of resistance and social change in everyday life. But before we dive into this, let us begin by performing an “onomastic” exercise with the concept of identity.

## Ambiguity of a complex concept

The word “identity” comes from the late Latin (13th century) *identitas* (from *idem*: sameness). Thus, its original use is linked to logic and mathematics, referring to an interrelation between elements that compose it (as when mothers say: “Son, you are unique and special... in the same way that your siblings are.”) For example, in Greece, the notion of individuality and identity was marked by a different cultural and philosophical context: they tended to define themselves in terms of their participation in the *polis* (city-state) in which they lived. Thus, Homer uses the term *panellenes* (all Hellenes) to refer to “all the Greek” (*Iliad*, II, 620), curiously associated with Greek matriarchal myths; but the term identity as such did not exist. The idea of “citizenship” was central, and an individual's identity was closely tied to their role in society and their civic duties.

The modern notion of *identity*, as a complex and multifaceted construct, is the result of a conceptual and philosophical development that has evolved over the centuries. The fact that this category today means the set of traits of an individual or a group that characterize them in relation to others or the awareness that a person or group has of being itself and different from others (RAE, 2022), thus designating individual and social realities, such as gender, ethnic or cultural, national, regional or local identity, is a rather recent usage. Before, concepts such as personality or national character were used to refer to it (Cardoso de Oliveira, 2006). Following Ferdinand de Saussure's work (1959), we can say that its original *signified* changed and other *signifiers* were assigned to it.

Zaira Navarrete (2015) points out that in classical philosophy, the term “identity” had a singular meaning rooted in its Latin origin, *identitas*, meaning “the same as oneself” or simply “being oneself.” This aligns with the metaphysical or ontological principle of identity ( $A = A$ ). At that

time, the concept was applied strictly to describe the inherent characteristics or attributes of an object—or of “man.” These traits were seen as the essence of the human being, distinguishing humans from other entities. In this tradition, the definition of man was understood as universal, fixed, unchanging, and static (pp. 464-465).

Then, some modern philosophers (René Descartes, Immanuel Kant) wondered about the problem of identity (what represents us): How to remain identical to oneself in spite of undergoing changes? They attempted, without entirely succeeding, to overcome the classic question of an essential, substantial, and univocal identity. Later, philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger questioned these temporal structures that we call identity, including that of being identical to oneself, immutable, immobile, eternal. The consideration of temporality and situated history will not only allow us to question the meaning of the metaphysical concept of identity but will also make it possible to assign different nuances (other signifiers) to the term “identity.” Today we say that the being “is being,” that identity is being constituted gradually. Manuel Castells (1999) points out that, as we are social actors, identity is the “construction of meaning” (prioritizing one or several cultural traits over other attributes) carried out by the individual by way of self-definition, but always knowing that this construction “is never altogether separable from claims to be known in specific ways by others” (Colhoun, 1994, p. 10).

In this sense, the concept of identity has become a common category for the social and human sciences for more than a century. However, it remains an issue that also involves other fields, such as cultural studies, psychoanalysis, etc. (Jenkins, 2004). Thus, the question of identity has been established as a unifying category since the 1990s and remains a focus of interest for various sciences (Jenkins, 2004). The term “identity” spread and multiplied in domains such as social sciences and cultural studies, as well as in psychology, linguistics, geography, and history, among many others, according to Bruebaker and Cooper (2000) in two ways: in a “hard” (essentialism) or “soft” (constructivism) sense.

It is understandable, then, that today *identity* can mean too much or almost nothing. The term “identity” reveals not only a great polysemy and heterogeneity but also a high opposition between approaches that highlight the existence of a fundamental or permanent similarity and others that reject that very idea. The concept of *identity* is considered to be complex because it encompasses a series of interconnected and multifaceted dimensions that may vary in different disciplinary contexts and over time:

- ▶ Identity is something that everyone (individuals and collectives) has, should have, or seek. Moreover, it is discovered and one can be wrong about it.
- ▶ Identity is not limited to a trait or attribute but encompasses a wide range of aspects interacting in identity formation, including cultural, gender, racial, ethnic, religious, sexual, and social identity, among others.

- ▶ Identity is not static, it evolves thanks to experiences, interactions, or changes in the environment.
- ▶ Identity does not refer only to an intimate trait of a subject, it is also something molded and constructed through interaction with society and culture. The perception and assignment of identities are mediated by social norms, cultural values, and media representations.
- ▶ Identities do not exist in isolation; they are intertwined and overlap. Thus, a person may have an ethnic identity and a sexual orientation, all of which interact to condition their experiences and perspectives.
- ▶ The various identity dimensions of a person or group may come into conflict or generate tensions, for example, between cultural identity and the social expectations they face in their environment.
- ▶ Identity is associated with significant emotional responses. For example, acceptance or denial of certain parts of identity can have a profound impact on well-being.
- ▶ Identities are also linked to issues of power and privilege in society; some may be socially valued and confer advantages, while others may be stigmatized and lead to discrimination (Goffman, 1990).

In summary, the complexity of the concept lies in the multifaceted nature of the dynamic and socially constructed identity, as well as in its capacity to interfere with how subjects (and groups) perceive themselves and are perceived by others in a diverse and changing society. If identity flows constantly and throughout an individual's life experience, could it signal a position rather than be a meaning-bearing word? What is the point of using the term "identity" in this way if one rejects its fundamental meaning as a certain "sameness" over time, something that remains similar while other things change? Does insisting too much that identities are multiple, malleable, fluid, etc., make the term so elastic that it becomes incapable of serving serious analytical work? The debate on the usefulness of the concept or the need to replace it will continue, precisely because of its relevance and its quality of constant mutation.

## From the decentering of the subject to the “invention of the self.”

### The initial assumptions: habitus and mismatches

To mark the current sociological path of identity, it is appropriate to begin by mentioning Pierre Bourdieu (2017), for the effectiveness of his theory of habitus as a first approach to the individual-context dialectic, and not so much because he has proposed a theory of identity, although it must be recognized that his short text *The Biographical Illusion* written in 1986, gives clues regarding personal identity, when he affirms that with the nomination that constitutes the proper name, a constant and lasting social identity is instituted and guarantees the biological identity of the individual in all the possible fields in which they intervene as an agent, that is, in all their possible life histories. (p. 212) <sup>1</sup>

The *habitus*, according to the first conceptualization of Bourdieu (1998), is the set of dispositions incorporated by the individual over time and determined by their positions in the various social fields, which are understood as structured sets of positions, hierarchies and historically constituted relations between individuals and social objects. The identity of the individual is thus granted by the social framework, that “structuring structure” in which they are inscribed. In any case, this is the reading that can be made of his first concept of *habitus*. In this sense, identity cannot be conceived as a process of autonomous reflection, but as the reflection of the incorporated habitus; an identification with a social position and with patterns of perception, appreciation, and action associated with it, which define behavior. Individuals are socialized, incorporating the ways of being and feeling-thinking or acting of a group, their bodily postures, their intimate beliefs, their worldview, and their intentions for the future in “an infra-conscious, corporeal complicity” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 46).

The concept of habitus, however, evolved in Bourdieu’s theorizing, leading Kaufmann (2007b) to say that there are two successive theories of habitus in Bourdieu. In fact, he changes his definition and considers that individuals can have a creative capacity and generate different forms of behavior:

Habitus is not the fate that some people read into it. Being the product of history, it is an *open system of dispositions* that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them . . . It is durable but not eternal. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 133).

<sup>1</sup> One could also cite his article “Identity and representation: elements for a critical reflection on the idea of region” (Bourdieu, 1991, pp. 220-228).

It is in the mismatches between social positions and personal dispositions, linked to social evolution and the dynamics of the fields, or generated by the multiplicity of affiliations or the proliferation of models of identification, that Bourdieu will situate the possibility of the emergence of a subject, not reducible to one's own habitus, and of an identity reflection on oneself. He will theorize these mismatches on the creative mode of opposition or emancipation in relation to existing conformisms, in his biography of *Flaubert* (in *The Rules of Art*), for example, or on the negative mode of frustrations and positional suffering when there is no cultural or economic capital to subvert the imposed configurations such as those of the protagonists of *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu, 1999). The contradictory mandates, feelings of injustice, disappointments, and renunciations suffered by individuals undermine the assumptions of unity and permanence of the habitus and are the opposite of the perfect connection between habitus and field that we see, for example, in *Distinction* (1984).

The development of the concept of habitus in Bourdieu cannot be reduced to the evolution between tradition and modernity, even if he observes that the homology between social positions and individual dispositions, almost perfect in traditional societies, leaves room in the plural societies of modernity, with displacements and adjustments. For him, the essential rupture is not situated between tradition and modernity, but between situations marked by the adequacy between positions and attitudes, and contexts marked by mismatches.

Thus, the actions of the human being and his link with the societal structure are and will remain a broad object of sociological debate, because of the importance given to reflexivity in the constitution of the individual's identity within the social circuit. Finally, reflexivity will be an essential point in understanding the subjects' capacity to think about themselves, what Bourdieu (1998) will call "practical reflection".

## Subjectivation: a critical activity of the subject ("Thinking the subject")

Now, for Alan Touraine (1995b), the gap between the subjective and objective dimensions is growing in our current societies; hence, his conceptual path is a shift from the social pole of the individual-society dialectic to the pole of the subject. As grand social narratives lose their hold, each existence strives to turn into personal stories, and this massified and globalized world is, above all, a world focused on the individual's desire to act as an agent of their own life, which is the definition of the subject (p. 27). And, furthermore, by 'subject,' he refers to the desire to become an individual, to construct a personal narrative, and to ascribe meaning to the full range of one's lived experiences (p. 29).

It is subjectivity itself that Touraine asks to analyze. As he puts it, understanding our society requires shifting from a sociology rooted in social determinisms to one centered on freedom—where the notion of the subject serves as a foundational concept (p. 45). In *Critique of Modernity* (1995a), he states that subjects can “shift”, that is, recognize the non-correspondence of social roles, of self-images given or imposed by society, and by doing so, assert themselves as the creators of their own existence. Therefore, subjectivation cannot be reduced to socialization, passive and internalized in a self, a sum of roles and self-images. It is a questioning of one’s own identity, that is, a real activity of the subject, a critical activity, and a distancing from oneself, from the various perceived selves and internalized models, a conscious desire to construct one’s own personal experience and relationships with others. Something not given, since it implies a conquest, an incessant work of determination and vigilance over oneself.

Close to Touraine’s theory, François Dubet’s (2010, 2017) integral sociology, also called “phenomenological sociology”, proposes to start from subjectivity to understand what he calls “experience.” This theory constitutes a critique of both the concept of habitus (which does not allow us to distinguish between the programmed action of a heritage bearer and the strategic action of the actor) and “role,” which is questionable as restrictive. Therefore, Dubet prefers the concept of “experience,” which is broader and more indeterminate, leaving room for something unfinished and opaque because there is no absolute correspondence between the actor’s subjectivity and the objectivity of the system (2010, p. 87).

In a social system that is no longer “one”, but is the co-presence of structured and autonomous systems, the experience of the subject is defined as a combination of three identity logics: that of *integration* into various groups of belonging, something not always conscious, but which emerges as a question when this integrative identity is threatened; that of *strategy*, when society is no longer an integrated system, but a competitive field in which the identity of each is a more or less favorable relative position that determines resources and interests; finally, that of *subjectivation*, which prevents the individual from fully occupying their position within the various groups of belonging or within competitive markets. The self is a distancing (2010, p. 129), a subjective self, and a critical look at the socialization frameworks and role expectations directed at the individual. The question of identity is linked, for Dubet, to the loss of adherence to the order of the world, to the logos (2010, p. 19), so it also implies displacement and decentering.

A practical application, specifically educational, of these concepts can be found in Dubet and Martuccelli (1997), when they ask themselves, “What does the school creates?”, going so far as to say that the school experience is dominated by the tension, even disjunction, among these three dimensions, integration (perhaps conflictive) into the youth and school community, a strategy within the “orientation market”, and subjectivation. The tension, at maximum among schoolchildren, is sometimes such that in terms of personal identity, the face is the way of managing these gaps (p. 180). The “face” is a kind of defensive moratorium on an identity too

fragile to be able to assert itself. Taking refuge in the face consists of doing as others do, even to the point of “showing off,” in an attempt to be oneself. In the end, the actor ends up being a “manager of uncertainty” (p. 438), with gloomy images of their future. The face and flaunting are very close to Erik Erikson’s (1956) “foreclosed identity” in referring to the diffusion of identity as the absence or loss of the normal capacity for self-definition, reflected in an emotional disorder in situations of physical intimacy, work decisions or competitions, and of a heightened urgency for psychosocial self-definition.

## Identity as a transaction

But it will be with Claude Dubar (1998, 2002, 2015) that the concept of identity becomes central in sociology, by showing that the union of the rationalization, liberation, and civilization processes has developed a new system of identity configuration. A reader of Freud and Erikson, this sociologist proposes to bring the two poles of the subjectivity-social contexts dialectic closer together, putting back-to-back a sociology that reduces the subject to their affiliations or their roles, and a psychology that forgets contexts. His project, in essence, aims to connect two forms of viewing individual trajectories: one that views them objectively as a sequence of positions within one or various social fields, and another that sees them subjectively as a personal story, whose narrative updates the interpretations of the world and oneself (1998, p. 73). It is therefore a matter of articulating subjectivity and objectivity, stability and trajectory, biography, and social structure. The strength of this model and its relevance lie in the operational definition of some key concepts and in the empirical observations that validate them.

The first concept that interests us then is that of “forms of identity.” Identity is made possible by socialization, but it is never given, it is always constructed and (re)constructed in a more or less large and lasting uncertainty. It is constructed through the narrative of oneself (Ricœur 1984, 1986, 1992) in “forms of identity”, those symbolic, and above all linguistic forms, as they appear hermeneutically treated in his work *Time and Narrative* (for both historical and fictional narrative) in which subjects tell their story, argue and explain themselves seeking a definition of self that is satisfactory to the subjects and validated by the institutions that frame and anchor them socially by categorizing them (Demazière & Dubar, 1997, p. 304). Forms that are, therefore, for Dubar (2002), socially relevant and subjectively significant. With this concept of forms of identity constructed by the subject, Dubar’s theory introduces the subjective, experienced, psychic dimension at the very heart of the sociological analysis.

Another important concept: “transaction.” Rejecting the easy solution which would be to distinguish individual identity from social identity, Dubar makes of it a “transaction” between identity for oneself and identity for others. Every exchange, even the briefest and most banal, is

filtered by these two images, that of oneself and that of others, which constitute a classification network for the production and understanding of exchanges. Both images are inseparable and linked in problematic ways: I can try to put myself in other people’s shoes, try to guess what they think of me or what they think of me and what I think of them, but, as he puts it, *I* can never be sure that my identity for myself matches my identity for the other (Dubar, 2015, p. 113). This does not occur without emotions, feelings (of injustice or anger), nor without problems for self-esteem if the gap between self-image and perceived image differs significantly.

The “identity for oneself” is an autobiographical process that links inherited or sought-after identities through self-narration, the story that subjects tell themselves or others about their own life (Dubar, 1998). As for the “identity for others,” it is the process that results from linking identities attributed by others or incorporated by identifying oneself with “others” prominent in a society or environment.

Continuing with our application to education, Héctor Rodríguez-Tomé (1977), a great connoisseur of adolescent psychology, in studying the transaction between the self and the other in adolescent consciousness, developed a psychological conceptualization quite close to Dubar’s and constructed a methodology for observing the interaction between “self-images” (identity of oneself) and “social images” attributed by “significant others” for the adolescent, as well as the “social images” perceived by the adolescent, which is even more so in this era of social networks when textual and visual rhetorical strategies emerge through which Internet users express and construct their personal and social identity. Social networks are “identity portals” (Escobar & Román, 2011), where users shape and express their “self” by publishing features of themselves, sharing their actions, and creating and maintaining links with others. As a result, even the lack of connection with others becomes problematic; there is no meaningful inner life to retreat into (Caro, 2012, p. 63).

## The Ego and the “invention of the self”: from the reflection to self-reflecting

For Jean-Claude Kaufmann (2015), while we have entered the “age of identities” and of the need to invent and narrate oneself, it is not because social structures have become less operative or determinant than in the past under the effect of the magical emancipation of the subject, but rather, because these social structures have become increasingly contradictory. Faced with these contradictions, the reflection can only become self-reflection (Kaufmann, 2007b, p. 291). The construction of identity thus results from an incessant work of “reflexivity” (self-understanding)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> It refers to “situated subjectivity”: one’s sense of who one is, of one’s social location, and how (given the first two) one is prepared to act” (Bruebaker & Cooper, 2000, p. 17). It encompasses both the cognitive and the affective, recalling Bourdieu’s (1998) notion of “practical sense”. Moreover, it is not only an individual concept, but also transactional or interactive.

The ego must now create (with the available social material) the ethical and cognitive network conditioning its behavior. The social construction of reality passes through individual identity filters (p. 291).

How does Kaufmann explain this process? First, he establishes the social prerequisite for reflexive activity. Personal thinking is daily, intimately, and systematically permeated by the social, both in its most intimate and sophisticated mechanisms, in its cognitive contents, as well as in its ethical judgments: social patterns of thinking are internalized in individual reflexivity. Having established this social prerequisite, individual reflexivity results from the always specific crossing of internalizations that install in each individual a particular cognitive architecture, an original network of perception and registration. No two people have the same cognitive architecture, which makes it possible to better understand the extent of the diversity of reception. Each person reads, listens, reflects, and judges, according to their personal architecture, the result of a social history (Kaufmann, 2007a, p. 210). The construction of each individual's identity thus results from the intersection of a multifaceted infinity of interventions and arbitrations, from an incessant critique of action, from analytical reflexivity and decision-making. It also comes from a "fictitious work" of the individuals: they can revisit their history, live it anew or embellish it, they can idealize certain images of themselves, assume imaginary roles, create a new intrigue, virtually try out new contexts of socialization or new realizations of themselves. The infinite potential diversity of the reflexive activity makes it possible to conceive both the synchronic dynamics of the management of the various identities of individuals and the evolution of the identity process in the life cycle, in an increasingly complex and interdependent world, where mobility will be present and for which we must prepare ourselves. Managing diverse identities in today's society, with or without social networks, can be a challenge, but it is also an opportunity to enrich personal life and contribute to diversity and inclusion. Recognizing one's own cultural, gender, ethnic, religious, sexual, and other identities, as well as reflecting on how they interconnect and affect personal and social experiences is key today. It is a personal process, within a collectivity, and there is no one right way to do it.

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## Conclusions

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Using François Dubet's terms, we can say that the personal project is the articulation between subjectivation and strategy within the "orientation market." Or, returning to Alan Touraine, the call to manage one's own orientation is a "modern" call in the face of institutional, incorporeal, and arbitrary mechanisms (1992). Juliao & Zarta (2021) state that, due to global trends, globalized cultures in which cultural identity is becoming homogenized (there are standardized

characteristics) as a result of individuals recognizing themselves in them are predominant. It is then a subjective representation: cultural identity as a subjective form occurring in the collectivity that makes individuals feel that they are part of a whole, with values and beliefs that are undoubtedly influenced by symbols introduced by globalization (pp. 80-81).

The ideality of the notion of project and the narrative fiction that results from it in the field of practices should counteract what Bourdieu calls the “causality of the probable,” to which Marie Duru-Bellat (1995) (to continue our application to education) testifies in *The mechanisms of orientation*. Today, at the beginning of the 21st century, what is at stake is no longer a project, but a life-long construction of identity and the request for reflection, analytics, and decision-making, on oneself and on the context.

We are aware that the reflection should be continued, deepening and turning towards narrative theories of personal identity because the current representations about it, in the social and human sciences, are nowadays narrative. That is why our reflection wants to open doors to continue thinking with other authors such as Alasdair MacIntyre (2007), who in *After Virtue* raises the bases of identity theories used today in the social sciences and humanities, such as those reflected in texts such as *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* by Donald Polkinghorne (1988), *Class Neurosis* by Vincent de Gaulejac (2013) and *The Life Stories* by Daniel Bertaux (2005).

Opening these doors also means broad work for social scientists, since they are the ones called to continue to generate not only depth on the theories of identity but also to provide a way for future generations to engage in creating their own theories, since both identity and the theory about it evolve over time (which is why a theory does not represent a generation) and therefore, theories of identity must be developed to account for the new categories that cross the current generations.

Another question that may remain for the reader of this article is: what are the practical applications of what has been reflected in this text? One possible answer is oriented toward the political implications that theories of identity have on a territory or collective. Many of the questions that emerge during the construction of both our own identity and the collective identity that occurs in everyday life are based on issues that have been discussed in this paper; but it also seems that reality surpasses theory, adding new elements that can be studied. Among others, the following can be highlighted: (a) As identity theories emphasize the importance of recognizing specific identities, this implies that the different social groups (ethnic, cultural, linguistic, etc.) must be recognized as an integral part of the social identity and have adequate political representation; (b) the promotion of cultural pluralism and the valuing of diversity, which can influence policies to preserve and promote different cultures, languages, and practices within a society, fostering multiculturalism and respect for difference; (c) for certain identity groups, such as those with distinctive ethnic or cultural traits, identity theories can legitimize demands for autonomy, which

could translate into political movements seeking greater territorial or cultural autonomy, such as recognition of Indigenous territories or regional autonomy; and (d) how identities can be used politically to mobilize support or to polarize public opinion. These theories can intensify conflicts if not properly managed, especially when diverse identities come into conflict over resources, power, or recognition.

It is at these points that social scientists can take the raw material to generate new reflections. That is why it can be said that practice creates theoretical movements and theoretical movements create practices, and this is what sustains the link between what scientists write and what society reads and practices. Thus, there is a long road of reflection to be explored by all those professionals, researchers, and writers who feel challenged by the theories of identity in the social and human sciences, but above all, there is a wealth of categories that are out there, in the cultural, that are still not sufficiently studied not only to understand them in their web of meanings, but also to understand the importance they have in society, for us as political subjects and for themselves in their natural environment.

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## Conflict of interests

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The author declares that he has no conflict of interest with any institution or commercial association of any kind.

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