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Opening the black box of socialization: Emotions, practices and (biographical) identities

Pedro Abrantes
CIES-IUL, Edifício ISCTE, Av. Forças Armadas, 1649-026 Lisboa, Portugal.

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This article aims to improve both theoretically and empirically our understanding of the socialization process, a key topic in Social Sciences, but currently subject to scarce research. Firstly, the concept of socialization is discussed, drawing upon major sociological and anthropological traditions, contributions from emerging research streams, as well as relevant findings from Educational Sciences, Psychology and Neurosciences. Recognizing that all life experiences are meaningful to individuals' socialization, the author argues that not all of them hold the same value. Secondly, the biographical approach to socialization used in this study is outlined. Thirdly, the main results of the project on the socialization of the working class in Portugal are presented. Finally, in the discussion section, the project findings are confronted with the results of other recent studies, focusing on three major (interconnected) catalysts of the socialization process: emotions, practices and (biographical) identities.

Key words: Sociology, life-history, dispositions, learning, education.

INTRODUCTION

Socialization is a paramount concept in Social Sciences from its roots. It was inscribed in Aristotle’s notion of man as a zoon politikón (political animal); and the radical versions of rational choice theory aside, the sociological approach has always relied on a more or less implicit notion of socialization. However, its adoption as a “catch-all” concept — a hardly explained mechanism useful to explain virtually any social phenomenon — has often faced criticism (Di Renzo, 1977). As Hendel et al. (2007: 83) recently pointed out: “a unified and comprehensive theory of socialization ps yet to be reached”. Surprisingly, although socialization is included in the analytical framework of many works in Sociology, scarce research is currently focused on this basic social mechanism.

A review of 17 top international journals shows that socialization was a vibrant issue during the 60s and 70s, almost disappearing from the agenda of Sociology during the 80s and 90s (except political or work/organizational socialization). Despite its development under a vast array of theories, the notion was associated to the structural-functionalist “over-socialized conception of man” (Wrong, 1961), and avoided under the “the actor’s return” movement (Touraine 1984). Interestingly, our bibliographic analysis detects an upsurge, from 2001 on, associated with an increase of articles regarding the effects of institutions (school, family, church, peers, ethnic communities, etc.) on personal values, identities, dispositions and practices. These works are often sectorial and hardly focus on socialization itself; nonetheless, they ratify its centrality in the sociological venture and include valuable hints to update our understanding of this process.1

Moreover, while sociologists were evading issues related with (human) nature (Leahi, 2012), essential advances in other scientific fields such as Psychology, Genetics and Neurosciences have partially occupied this “no man's
land", at times attempting explanations of the social by non-social factors (Lahire, 2005). Some findings from these fields, when combined with social theories, are actually valuable to tackle sociological dilemmas and to improve socialization theory.

Briefly, a renewal of research on socialization is taking place; its integration and theoretical reinforcement appear to be useful for Sociology development and particularly an antidote against the "fragmentation risk" (Scott, 2004). Based on a theoretical and empirical study, including a biographical approach to 52 Portuguese low-skilled workers, the present article aims to contribute to fill this gap. Our initial statement is that research on socialization has to focus on how life experiences are selected, interpreted and used in later stages of life, in order to move beyond a reified use of this concept, hindering systematic (theoretical and empirical) examination. While the common option of emphasizing experiences from childhood is justified, it is far from exhausting the debate. In the first section, classic theoretical streams are revised and bonded to emerging fields of Social Sciences, as well as to key findings from other scientific areas, such as Education, Psychology, and Neurosciences. Secondly, our biographical approach is outlined. Thirdly, main results are presented. Finally, theories and empirical data are combined to present a framework to study socialization focusing three dimensions: emotions, practices and (biographical) identities. Note that such an exploratory and encompassing perspective of the socialization process does not allow a detailed analysis of each of its mechanisms, at least considering the size required of journal articles, but some heuristic advantages may arise from such integrated view.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Socialization was a cornerstone concept for structural-functionalist theories from the start. Durkheim's (1973) emphasis on intergenerational transmission of cultural patterns as a way to promote social integration and to prevent anomie played a major role in discipline consolidation. Under such perspective, education was conceived as the intentional and systematic segment of a broader process of socialization. During the 50s and 60s, this view was expanded, especially by Parsons and Bales (1955), stressing the role of family structure as a basis for children's development and social integration. Inkeles (1969) explored afterwards the relation between biologic, psychological, social and cultural systems during the life-course. A concern with order guided this approach, conceiving deviance and conflict as a result of socialization contradictions or impairments. Not surprisingly, it was especially prolific in political research (Niemi and Sobieszek, 1977).

Although such functional, passive and normative conception was highly criticized by the end of the 20th century leading to a decline of research on this topic; alternative notions of socialization were previously in use, especially drawing upon Simmel's legacy. For instance, socialization was a crucial concept in the School of Chicago's prolific ethnographic (and biographical) studies on urban life, migrations and marginality. Howard Becker's (1963) researches on contrasting life pathways, as well as Goffman's (1959) preeminent studies on self and stigma production within social interaction frames were major contributions to enlarge our understanding of (adult) socialization.

Meanwhile, Elias (1991a,b) developed a remarkable insight on socialization, exploring the nature-culture overlap. Three major features of Elias' theory shall be stressed: (1) the linkage to the civilizational process, as the continuous development of incorporated sensibility, self-control and codes; (2) the intimate relation with rationalization and individualization processes; (3) the creative role of social actors, in the way they reinterpret, use and thus upgrade cultural heritage. And Berger and Luckmann's (1966) constructivist masterpiece provided a view of socialization as the simultaneous introduction of individuals to objective and subjective worlds through "exteriorization", "objectivation" and "interiorization". Their distinction of primary and secondary socialization became common in textbooks worldwide, though the role of schooling, media or adult life transitions appears to be largely mistreated.

This perspective was a major influence in studies on the way our stock of experience and knowledge is continuously updated by life experiences and biographically articulated (Hoerning and Alheit, 1995). Following a similar idea, Dubar (2000) elaborated a theory of (professional) socialization strongly attached to identity development process, entailing two distinct dimensions: an interactional, based on the current actor's social position and status; and a biographical, drawing upon life careers and prospects.

Other important stream related socialization with class structure, often emphasizing social reproduction through education. Kerckhoff (1972) provides a clear discussion of studies developed under such perspective during the 60s. In the meantime, Bourdieu (1984, 1998) became probably the most influential and sophisticated theorist in this field, through the intertwined concepts of habitus – a product of objective life paths in the "social space" and generator of subjective conceptions, expectations and tastes – and practices – activities socially codified and reproduced over time, promoting both social structuration and the actors' incorporation of adjusted mental, corporal and emotional dispositions. Educational systems were conceived, under this approach, as symbolic violence agents, performing and legitimizing intergenerational reproduction.

Such works do not avoid the "over-socialized" pitfall. For instance, Meyer (1977) argues that such socialization approach has to be tempered with an allocation theory,
recognizing that social classifications simultaneously are produced, allocate individuals and socialize them (in modernity, this triple role being predominantly played by education). Removing some determinism of (primary) socialization, Lahire (2002) has recently revised Bourdieu’s theoretical framework, focusing on the multiplicity of contexts where agents are involved and socialized, implying a continuous work of binding different dispositions, statuses and relations, in order to produce a coherent self. Three socialization mechanisms working in each social context (not necessarily in a coherent way) are identified: training or practice; situational organization; ideological-symbolic incultation.

Emerging fields of Sociology are also generating valuable knowledge to tackle the socialization process. One is obviously sociology of childhood. Although its upsurge implied a refusal of socialization in order to emphasize the active role of children – the ingenious replacement by “interpretative reproduction” (Corsaro, 2000) being emblematic – recent works tend to invigorate the study of socialization (Handel et al., 2007; Zeiher, 2010). Other area is economic sociology, which consolidation relied precisely on a claim for a sensible balance between over- and under-socialized theoretical accounts against the economists’ reduction of economy (and society) to an amalgam of individual rational actions (Granovetter, 1985). A third relevant field is sociology of emotions. Drawing on classic works on rituals, interactions or incorporated dispositions, an increasing number of sociologists are studying as emotional patterns are conditioned by social contexts and life pathways (Turner and Stets, 2006). A forth meaningful stream is focused on socialization values, using large surveys in order to identify and explain cross-cultural variations (Inglehart, 2006; Fjellvang, 2011). This perspective is connected with an increasing interest in “socialization styles”, discussing the effects of schools’ or families’ orientations towards children’s well-being and academic performance (Pellerin, 2005).

Moreover, if specific theoretical-oriented research on socialization declined during the last decades, it was partially offset by an exponential growth of studies on learning processes and informal education, especially within schooling and organizational environments. Learning, informal education and socialization are by no means synonymous, but they are closely intertwined processes. For our purposes here, Lave and Wenger’s (1995) perspective on situated learning as the result of “legitimate peripheral participation” and identity formation in “community of practices” – recently developed within organizational theory (Fox, 2006) and consumption studies (Shankar et al., 2009) – shall be underscored, including due to its ability to merge practice and identity approaches. Other relevant researching line is exploring the ubiquitous relation between education (focusing on its informal dimension) and life histories, in contemporary (learning) societies (Antikainen et al., 1996; Biesta et al., 2008). Finally, if classic notions of socialization were influenced by psychological theories, the fact that socialization and learning are crucial concepts in current Psychology and Neurosciences shall be taken into account. If a discussion may arise vis-a-vis the weight of each factor, a broad consensus emerges around the idea that human behaviour is a complex combination of genetic heritage and life experiences (Eaves et al., 2008). Within a vast range of knowledge, some trends appear to be pivotal to our discussion. A large researching stream is focused on parental socialization, including the identification of universal patterns, variations across cultural contexts and consequences to child development (Keller and Otto, 2009; Grusec, 2011). Inspired by Vigotsky’s foundational works, other set of inquiries addresses “social cognition” as the process of learning from others, including implicit and explicit “mentalizing” (Destrebecqz and Cleermans, 2005; Gelman, 2009; Frith and Frith, 2012). Emotions are the subject of increasing research as well (Niedenthal and Brauer, 2012), including neurological investigations on conscience multileveled development, entailing body, identity and autobiographical mapping (Laureys and Tononi, 2008; Damasio, 2010).

Based on theories from these different traditions, a socialization definition arose as the enduring process of individuals’ participation in society and concomitant development of the self, composed by adjusted dispositions, values, ideologies, codes and information, which enables and fosters such participation. Common concepts as “integration” and “incorporation” are avoided in this definition, in order to emphasize a “double-way” process. However, opportunity fields are finite and vary according to social position and life stage. An apparent tautology is sustained since initial participation occurs in very simplified interactional frames and from a peripheral position, then the actor progressively engages in more complex settings and occupies a more central position within.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

If all life experiences are relevant to socialization, the amount of information produced is too much and often contradictory; therefore, a major concern is how people select, interpret and use such information (including incorporated skills, values and dispositions). The biographical method was chosen to guide our empirical research, in order to understand how knowledge, values and dispositions were appropriated and organized by actors, combining experiences from different contexts and throughout their life course. The fertility of linking socialization and biography was pointed out by Hoerning and Alheit (1995), and it draws upon a well-known researching stream on life-histories (Bertaux, 1981). As noted by Ferrarotti (2000), the actor is a process and his/her life history is bonded to Social History; thus, the biographical method is useful to investigate the relations between agency and structure, especially paying attention to institutions and mechanisms of mediation (and socialization).

In order to operationalize the concept and to elude the “catch-all”
pitfall our research was based on the premise that society is by no means wholly incorporated by agents. This premise leads to three assumptions: (1) any individual’s life repertoire of experiences is a singular fraction of “the social” (objective principle); (2) enrolment in each of those experiences partially depends on individual’s abilities and motivations at each moment (subjective principle); (3) the information produced by such experiences cannot be fully stored and used, implying (inter-subjective) processes of selection, generalization and analogy (constructivist principle). A major goal of our research was to discover how these three principles operate and especially how they are interconnected during the life-course.

One must be aware that any biography is a symbolic construction: an organization of memories produced in a specific time, under particular interactional circumstances and influenced by cultural guidelines regarding how a biography (and a life) should be. As Brian Roberts (2002: 142) put it, “lives and memories are ‘stored’ rather than stored”. Socialization entails a huge array of (objective and subjective) processes, so we must rely not only in a mix of theories but also in group sessions with methodological procedures. Key findings from quantitative, ethnographic and experimental researches are used to complement our fieldwork. Still, if biographical narratives provide a hazardous combination of individual experiences and collective myths, scripts and interpretations, such cultural elements are by all means relevant products of socialization and shall be investigated. Therefore, autobiographical discourses are not mere descriptors of socialization pathways; although they do display many useful elements to analyse it, precisely because they are simultaneously sophisticated products of socialization and shall be studied like that.

In this research, it is analysed the life histories of 52 individuals, supported by colleagues working on related fields (see acknowledgments). From 2005 to 2011, more than 400,000 people attended the New Opportunities program – a major adult education national system launched by the Portuguese government – in order to complete elementary and/or secondary education (CNE, 2011). During the first months, supported by individual interviews and group sessions, participants were expected to elaborate an extensive autobiographical essay and to orally present it, stressing significant knowledge, skills and values acquired during their life-course. Within the program, the goal was to provide a preliminary diagnosis of the adults’ profile and competences (including literacy and technological abilities), and thus to delineate an individualized training course to accomplish the elementary or secondary degree. Besides, to value life histories and “embedded learning” has proven an effective tool to motivate and to enrol participants. For Sociology, such work meant an outstanding investment of the working class in the organization of autobiographical data precisely stressing learning patterns. Four offices were selected across the Lisbon area, located in different social and organizational environments: a business association in the city centre; a training office at an industrial suburb; a secondary school in a rural town and a local development association in a small town. Training monitores conducted in group sessions were methodological in order to establish a first contact with participants and to observe the working methodologies. Then, a stratified sample of 80 individuals was elaborated, privileging the more extended and consistent works but assuring a balanced distribution by location, age, sex and occupation. Finally, 52 adults accepted to take part in our research, providing their autobiographical essays and being interviewed afterwards. Comparing with recent quantitative accounts of the Portuguese society (Almeida et al., 2006), our definitive sample may be considered a broad picture of the Portuguese current working class.¹

Biographical data were analysed under a three-step procedure: (1) construction of a database classifying chapters, sections, paragraphs and images, which provides important indicators of priorities, causalities and breaks in life and learning narratives; (2) elaboration of a “bio-map” of each case, locating themes according to dimension and position in the document (vertical axis), as well as position across the life span (horizontal axis); (3) brief description of major socialization processes documented in each autobiographical essay, in four dimensions (family, education, work and community) according to life stage. Autobiographical essays were detailed documents (longer than 50 pages), so that around 3.900 pages of text and images were included in our database. Still, telephonic interviews to agents were carried out, in order to validate and elucidate information, as well as to explore meanings and purposes.

The fact that autobiographical essays were written within an official adult education and certification program has implications for research, regarding both sample definition (see note 2) and data analysis. It meant a strong motivation and professional support to develop such work (usually, it takes from 3 to 9 months, and more than 50 hours), but it introduced a purpose and some external influences obviously with impacts on narratives. This is why interviews with adults and training monitors, as well as direct observation and program’s standards are important to interpret data.

**MAIN RESULTS**

The 52 collected autobiographical essays are apparently diverse, plenty of unique skills, events and interpretations. Nonetheless, clear patterns arose from our analysis pointing out a number of key experiences, contexts and relations in the long-term socialization process, as well as incorporated representations on how to depict (and conceive) one’s own life.

Although neither official guidelines nor the coaching of training monitors prescribed a standard structure for the written texts to be presented, almost all of the autobiographical accounts are organized in a chronological order, lineal during childhood, and then ramified in different areas – work, family, and some leisure or communitarian activities (described in distinct chapters) – during adulthood.

Experiences and competences acquired during childhood are strongly attached to residential location, living conditions, community practices, parental occupations and family ties. Some of them are included in order to explain enduring personality characteristics, vocations and values. Although most of the participants have changed their residential location during the life span, the community where they have grown is usually described in greater detail, including in comparison to the

¹ The sample has the following characteristics: (1) location: Lisbon-13, Barreiro-15, Torres Vedras-13 and Entroncamento-12; (2) generation: 21 born in 1946-1959; 17 born in 1960-1974; 15 born in 1975-1984; (3) sex: 33 men, 20 women; (4) occupation: 12 salespersons; 22 service employees and clerk assistants; 12 industrial workers; 6 military, police or security agents; 1 domestic (the unemployed ones were classified according to their former occupation). The absence of rural workers is significant, although they represent less than 5% of the working population, according to recent surveys. The fact that many of them are old and illiterate workers has constraint their participation in an adult education program relying on basic writing abilities.
current place of residence. Many of them participated in the labour activities of their parents, especially in agriculture or in small business ventures, and such participation is also pointed out as the basis for value formation. While this is an evidence of a life stage when the individual and the environment are intimately intertwined, such overlap is also used as a strategy to report personal traumatic experiences. This is the case in common expressions such as: "in those times, people who lived in rural areas were often hungry" or "domestic violence was common".

Schooling is usually/typically presented in a specific chapter (between childhood and youth/adult life) as an experience in a distant and odd universe (especially in secondary education), confirming its disconnection vis-à-vis the working class’ cultures. While in the older generation school failure and dropout is explained by poor living conditions and by policies followed by the authoritarian regime (before 1974); the younger workers (with longer experiences in the educational system) justify their dropout by a persistent sense of boredom, personal inability and/or irresponsibility, especially during adolescence. In both cases, school curricula and organization are taken for granted and rarely addressed in a critical manner.

In many cases, work and family responsibilities started at an early age and were central elements since adolescence, a feature associated with poor living conditions. Still, religion, military service, sports, friendships and street life are often included between the two stages in many narratives to justify upcoming pathways and identities. Especially among those growing up during the 60s and 70s, particular experiences in such institutions (namely, rituals) appear to generate highly emotional narratives, as means of releasing the local, traditional, family-based socialization and being incorporated in a modern, urban, national-based (or cosmopolitan, in some cases) emerging society. Among men, such feeling is commonly described by the proud expression “to become a man”. Labour skills and competences appear to be mainly attached to adult experiences, especially during the first years of the main (or longer) occupation. Few participants followed the same occupation as their parents. Consonantly, competences developed in political and leisure domains are often explained by personal initiative during youth or adult life. Remarkably, domestic and family competences are also usually related with adult experiences, often acquired during the early stage of marriage and parenthood. Healthy lifestyles, security practices, leisure activities, citizen’s rights and duties, pedagogical concerns to childcare are included in many autobiographical essays, frequently in contrast with personal experiences during childhood.

One may argue that the primary socialization is naturalized and remains unconscious, while the major changes and achievements are over-estimated in life-stories – for instance, references to mothers are surprisingly scarce considering their central role attributed in many studies on socialization. Still, it is undeniable that adult socialization had a major impact, including in the way childhood experiences are reinterpreted, at least in the case of the Portuguese working class, due to pervasive changes in the economic, cultural and political structures of the Portuguese society during the last decades. Even if most of the participants still hold a low occupational status and poor living conditions, their lives passed through tremendous changes and their narratives – included in their strategy of taking part in adult education – reflect a wish of being recognized as part of a modern urban middle-class.

Although political democratization, economic growth, public services, cultural openness, freedom of expression are positively emphasized, as a major asset – especially by those who already lived in the authoritarian regime (before 1974) – a major scepticism emerges concerning the future, linked with a common criticism concerning current (national and European) politicians and policies. Not only unemployment and declining living conditions became objectively more common during the last years for these workers, as also the fear of such phenomena is spread among almost all autobiographical essays, undermining future projects and perspectives. Massively announced by the media, economic stagnation of the last decade echoes in these discourses, fuelling nostalgia.

DISCUSSION

The remaining pages are devoted to discuss our data based on a three-level framework: emotions, practices and (biographical) identities. Although far from comprising the whole socialization, these dimensions was found key catalysts in the way experiences are selected, interpreted and used in the long-run, structuring an autobiographical (only partially conscious) sense of the self.

Emotions

The content analysis of autobiographical essays has stressed the leading role of emotions, particularly in the way experiences are selected, interpreted and used in following life stages. Such link between emotions, memories and the construction of an autobiographical self is illustrated by the common statement, usually in the introduction/conclusion, that remembering (and narrating) crucial past events and life stages engendered strong emotions, often marked by crying interruptions.

Learning patterns appear in autobiographical essays frequently attached to strong and enduring ties with
The acquisition of knowledge, values and dispositions appear also fostered by key changes in everyday life and status. Such transitions tend to produce strong emotions (excitement, fear, etc.), concomitant with the intense work of achieving an inter-subjective “definition of the situation” and to adjust internal dispositions to available frames and roles (Goffman, 1959; Berger and Luckmann, 1966), later on crystallized as a way to promote “ontological security” (Giddens, 1991).

My wedding was a very nice party, with all our friends and family around, one could feel happiness in the air, and the expectation of a perfect life was the sentiment” (Bricklayer, man, 40 years old).

Such shifts in life tend to be regulated through rituals. As Durkheim (1973) stated, rituals are able to generate acute emotional discharges through “collective effervescency” as a way to sublimate norms and to attest individuals’ commitment to them (integration). Thus, a document meant to relate skills, values and knowledge with life history often included extensive descriptions of marriage, child’s birth, national exams, religious and army initiation rites. As noted by other study also based on the biographical method (Biesta et al., 2008), unexpected events (unemployment, divorce, partner’s death, involvement in leisure activities, etc.) also foster informal education, producing “turning points” in life histories and opening individuals to re-socialization.

Some learning processes are justified by a strong involvement in specific activities and contexts, oriented by strong positive feelings. This is the case of the involvement in leisure activities or the constitution of a new family, but it is also mentioned by some actors to describe their dedication and choices in specific occupations. In fact, in his study on individual dispositions, Lahire (2002) has distinguished passions as singular combinations of dispositions with strong appetency.

I won’t talk about the most aggressive facts of that war, because they are occasions to forget, although it is impossible (…) They are recorded, memorised, in our sub-conscience, as I use to say: they are stored in our hard disk and not even a reinstallation would remove them, it is like those things had happen yesterday, that is, every night, when I turn out the lights, they come back. And the question is always the same: what was I doing in such a place with 20 years old?" (Railway officer, man, 61 years old). In those times, there were no toys or food, as they exist now, but even if they already existed, we couldn’t afford to buy them. Children and their parents were living under a tremendous poverty; many children died because parents couldn’t afford to take them to a doctor. I went to many funerals in my childhood and it is one of the most decisive facts of my life. (Owner of a local shop, woman, 63 years old).

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Our focus on emotions does not neglect the role of social structures in socialization; emotions often function as mediators, including in the way the whole life is conceived. As claimed by Turner and Stets (2006), our analysis has shown that upward mobility pathways lead to secure and optimistic autobiographical accounts, emphasising the positive aspects of each experience, while downward mobility generates life histories leaning on criticism, anger or resentment. In a similar way, Kupferberg (1996) analysed how nostalgia and rejection emerged in East Germany after unification, attached to life chances erosion, and holding back the learning process entailed in transitions from a socialist to a capitalist society.

Briefly, emotions provide relevant criteria for selection and hierarchy, considering the premise that neither all experiences nor resulting information hold the same value over socialization. Emotions constitute a key dimension, particularly in defining hierarchical criteria concerning what experiences – and what elements within each experience – shall be embraced, memorized and reproduced. This idea is in line with neurosciences’ standard that, if a situation is considered valuable to generate sufficient emotion, our brain is able to apprehend multimedia information and to restore it in a similar or analogic situation (Damásio, 2010); although a Sociologist would add that socio-cultural factors are entailed both in the interpretation of situations and in value-attribution.

**Practices**

Autobiographical essays also included extensive information on learning processes generated by the enrolment in particular practices, especially at work, but also in family, community and leisure domains. Despite being a neglected issue in popular notions of biography, observant participation and interviews have shown how New Opportunities’ participants were encouraged to reflect upon the role of knowledge, skills and values developed by enduring practices.

Those who grew up in rural environments usually dedicate some pages to expose important lessons from the peripheral participation in family work, usually in agriculture. Confirming the central role of childhood socialization, not only techniques and tools abandoned many time ago are precisely restored, but also specific values and life conceptions emerged from those practices and allegedly preserved during the life span. Intimate experiences are then combined with socially constructed conceptions of a past era.

“I already remember the traditional songs sung by women while they were working in the fields (...) these people left the village harmony, where the key was always left in the door and prices were bargained with the hawker who weekly passed in front of our house”. (Highway officer, man, 56 years old)

Narratives from those grown up apart from production activities do not include similar reflections on childhood socialization, although a systematic biographical account of “child-rearing practices” (Keller and Otto, 2009) and “socialization styles” (Pellerin, 2005) would implicate additional work with caregivers. Besides, it is important to stress that our research focused on a low-educated population, so results shall be different studying privileged classes’ biographies. Actually, specialized literature points out a significant effect of schooling practices, for instance, on cosmopolitanism and on public participation (Dill, 2009; Ishio, 2010). Meanwhile, in the working class, socialization through educational practices may indeed be dominated by the incorporation of a sense of inability and thus of an unprivileged status (Meyer, 1977; Bourdieu, 1984)

Besides, while working practices were expected to play a leading role in these autobiographies, it was unexpected to find substantial fragments of autobiographies devoted to experiences on sports, religion and army, especially during youth. All these institutions are able to generate dramatic events, while they are also structured by strictly regulated practices, hosting “initiation communities” where social actors start forging an autonomous life path with generational peers. Meanwhile, their participation was often supported by family and community, since such institutions promote social integration and partially cultural reproduction (Durkheim, 1915; Levy and Sasson-Levy, 2008), inclusively in times of wild change.

“Now I see it [adolescence] wasn’t easy. I counted on sports to forget problems (...) I played football in the youth team of my town. In doing so, I learned to listen, to define priorities, to be optimistic, to be self-confident and to rely on my team mates. Team work values each individual and enables that all of them take part in the same action. Lastly, it provides knowledge and experience interchange” (Concrete salesman, 37 years old).

Other urban practices with peers – from hanging around to illegal activities – are more controversial in autobiographies. On the one hand, they are described as important sources of enjoyment, of “learning life”, of finding an “own path”, of getting a job or a spouse, of fitting in new places and new times. On the other hand, they are used to justify school failure and drop-out, as well as to indorse in dangerous, anti-social or unproductive activities, and thus to undermine life careers. As Harding’s (2009) recently found out, participation in sociability and violence practices in disadvantaged areas is often fostered by extended opportunities of street interaction with older peers and
scarce opportunities to take part in other kind of practices and communities, playing a “snow-ball” effect on adolescents’ socialization. Still, identity factors – within neighbourhood and in its relation with other urban settings – were also found relevant (see following section).

If all experiences contribute to socialization, practices appear to enhance the development of knowledge, values, dispositions and identities (Giddens, 1984; Bourdieu, 1998; Lave and Wenger, 1995). Practices hold an “internal logic”, including specific codes, procedures and group definitions, (re)produced in space and time, and thus linking individual actions to social structures. Therefore, the regular participation in practices entails to accept and to incorporate at least temporarily such logic, developing specific physical, emotional and cognitive dispositions. Besides, it contributes to forge a sense of community, as well as a particular view of the world and of the self.²

The relation between practices and emotions is complex. As mentioned, passions may enhance participation in some practices, while routinely participation in practices contributes to “ontological security” (Giddens, 1991) reducing unpleasant emotional discharges. Besides, practices are not mere routines, in the way they open a space for continuous improvement, self-expression and social distinction. Therefore, actors often invest such emotional economy in improving their performances, in order to move to peripheral to central positions in “communities of practice” (Lave and Wenger, 1995). Such move may lead to social rewards and upward mobility, simultaneously producing positive emotions, as optimism, happiness and enjoyment. Meanwhile, (emotional) memories are also revitalized and reshaped by practices. This is the case of weddings revival through photo albums and family talks, as well as occupational socialization based on dramatic and comic tales repeated by supervisors to young salesmen (Schweiniruber and Berns, 2005).

(Biographical) Identities

The leading role of reflexivity and identity development in socialization guidance was also evident in our data analysis, confirming contemporary theories in this field (Lave and Wenger, 1995; Dubar, 2000; Handel et al., 2007). Learning processes described in autobiographies are usually attached to identity formation and recognition. Work experiences and skills presented in a more detailed way are usually the decisive ones for identity development; typically, the first years in the most important or larger occupation. And even though such descriptions are much more consistent among workers with long-term and stable employment relations (Dubar, 2000), those with just precarious and sparse work relations also emphasize the biographical relevance of some occupational experiences to the development of their skills, values and identities.

“This [first job, at the post office, at age 16] was the thing that humanized me” (Domestic worker, female, 53 years old).

“Finally, I learned an occupation that I really enjoy. It is a somehow dirty occupation, but we are so fully immersed in what we are doing that we hardly notice it” (Mechanic, man, 36 years old).

Meanwhile, some identity categories – as working class, rural/urban or agriculture/industry/services – were not as influential as expected in autobiographical accounts. Notably, these are paramount categories in narratives regarding experiences before the 80s, but hardly useful to explain recent events or future prospects. Obviously, the importance of identity on socialization goes beyond actors’ consciousness. Although the working class socialization is analysed in other article (Author, 2013), for our discussion here it is relevant the central role in autobiographies of collective experiences, such as school failure and dropout, early involvement in work activities, the military incorporation, a rural family background and the move to the suburbs, the influence of television, as well as some dominant conceptions, as the (moral) apology of nuclear family and of paid work or the disaffection regarding the political and economic powers. Within this working class’ identity, important borderlines were observed regarding other identity categories. While male narratives emphasize street and work experiences during childhood, as well as a mix of family, work, leisure and community practices during adult life, female life histories are focused on family and work; leisure and community affairs are reduced to sparse and minor events, usually during adolescence or elderly life. This contrast may be explained by gender objective asymmetries regarding life chances, as well as by the differential (socialized) value attributed to experiences as identity markers. Due to long-term socialization processes, domestic work is largely assumed by women, while men, even when participating, hardly include it in autobiographical accounts.

Besides, a generational divide was also evident. While class factors are implicit in life histories from the older generation – for instance, in order to justify early school dropout, family poverty, labour participation since childhood or scarce leisure opportunities – young workers’ narratives rely on individualized life interpretations, conceiving those experiences as a product of personal profiles, decisions and failures. As

² Neurosciences research has found that involvement in cultural practices not only (re)produce social structures, also shape individuals’ dispositions that precede conscience, and may generate variations in the genetic codes (Damasio, 2010).
Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) noted, classes preserve their objective impact on inequalities (re)production but they appear notably diluted in subjective experiences. Capitalist ideology, massively spread by the media, is obviously a significant element to understand such apparent paradox, but so are formal education, civil rights, economic growth and consumption practices. For example, to buy a flat, to travel in vacations or to have children in higher education arose in Portuguese workers’ narratives as key elements for a sense of integration and of entitlement, even when social position was maintained during the life-course. Such development was partially blocked during the last decade, being threatened by the current economic crisis, and therefore impacts on young people’s socialization shall be examined in the future.

“In our times, society was modernized; almost everyone has his own house, and has a life within society, with a house, an employment and a salary to face life daily difficulties. This is the great change in society [comparing with the 50s, when he was a child]” (Railway supervisor, man, 64 years old).

Recognizing the role of immediate socialization, for instance, provided by the media (La Rocca, 2011), its biographical dimension shall not be forgotten. Identities are negotiated in each interaction frame, but they are also anchored to life paths (experiential socialization) and projects (anticipatory socialization) in order to generate consistent narratives (Dubar, 2000). This idea is detailed by Hoerning and Alheit (1995) and reinforced by recent findings from neurosciences on the biographical dimension of consciousness, specific of human beings (Damásio, 2010). As clarified in studies on such different subjects as national identity and immigration (Golden 2002) or college students’ class sentiments (Brimeyer et al., 2006), a complex combination of past experiences, present situations and future prospects is expressed (actually, forged) in identity narratives.

“One, I guess I was nine years old or something, I was going with my grandparents to a fair in a nearby town and I saw a policewoman. I was astonished, I couldn’t imagine it was possible. I remember to think, during our way back, ‘I know what I’m going to be, when I grow older’. It was the beginning of a dream that I’ve been working on; what helped me to uphold the hard days of my first job in a workshop; it was my dream that one day I would join the police force and my life would change for better” (Policewoman, 32 years old).

Thus, while identity is framed by socialization, socialization becomes identity-guided. Personal dreams and mythicized versions of one’s own history are by no means absent from this process. Not only identities define the experiences required and accessible to each individual at each moment, but facing the huge amount of available information the individual’s limited attention and memory are oriented towards those elements attached to the identity one is developing. Still, the role of reflexivity and identity on socialization shall not be overstimated: individuals’ thought and identity opportunities are framed by biologic profile and stage, social position and cultural context. Not being reducible to it, reflexivity, rationality and choice ability rely on previous socialization.

Last remarks

Socialization became a black box routinely carried out by sociologists but seldom opened. Classic theories are under strong criticism, but novel theoretical approaches are scarce and empirical research is fragmented by different subareas. By confronting different theories with the main results from our own research on working-class’ autobiographies, the article aims to fill this gap, through an innovative framework focused on emotions, practices and identities as catalysts of the socialization process.

It is interesting that a recent review on family socialization (Bengtson et al., 2009) identifies three theories to explain the link between individuals’ and parents’ values/beliefs, with an obvious correspondence with our dimensions: status inheritance (identity), social learning and role modelling (practices), and affective solidarity (emotions). However, this does not exclude the existence of other meaningful dimensions.

Other paper focused on working-class’ life-histories is forthcoming, while this one addresses the socialization concept, tackling some theoretical exposures in current Sociology. Nonetheless, much more research is obviously required on such a huge and complex issue, rather reinforcing an interdisciplinary approach. To merge sociological perspectives on socialization with research on early childhood and cognitive development is urgently in need. Besides, for a broader understanding of socialization, it is crucial to enlarge our analysis to other world locations and to other social classes.

Some implications may be outlined, especially for formal, intentional and systematic socialization. Emotions, practices and identity management appear to be key dimensions to be taken into consideration, especially by educators committed with long-term learning patterns. It seems a very vague statement, but it is worthwhile since such dimensions are far from central in current educational debates.

Finally, our biographical approach to socialization simplifies many processes. This is why we included references of other recent empirical studies focused on given socialization institutions (school, family, work, etc.), as well as on particular socialization “contents” (specific values, practices, dispositions, skills, identities). Still,
under the threat of disciplinary fragmentation and concomitant analytical weakening, a holistic view of the process appears to hold some heuristic value.

REFERENCES


1 This bibliographic analysis included all articles published (from 1951 to 2012) in 17 journals, indexed to ISI/SSCI and devoted to Sociology, excluding specific subareas (e.g. Sociology of Education). From thousands of articles, none is dedicated to examine and to improve a definition of socialization. Most articles (58%) with the word “socialization” in its title or keywords were published in the 60s and 70s. From 1981 to 2000, this percentage was only 22%, although new journals were created. Considering all published papers, it meant a reduction from 0.8% to 0.2%. Remarkably, the number in 2001-2010 is higher than in the precedent decade, and articles published in 2011 and 2012 suggest a recent return to the rates observed in the 60s and 70s.