# Social representations of gender as an educational function and integral development from the complex-existential analysis of everyday life

**Representaciones sociales del género como función educativa y del desarrollo integral desde el análisis complejo-existencial de la vida cotidiana**

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## ABSTRACT

The subject remains in a constant exchange and interaction between his experience, the confirmation he perceives from the other and the positions he assumes in the situation, taking into account the above, the subject will relate in this way to the world, creating roles and relational positions. Objective. To understand the social representations of early childhood educators about gender in their educational function and integral development. Materials and methods. The work is based on a qualitative methodology of social representations and a complex-existential analytical approach. Results. It is found that educators perceive conflicts around gender and how it is perceived, in addition to the fact that there should be an interaction for the integral development of students, as well as an openness towards knowledge for gender equality and equity. Conclusions. The relationships between teachers and the other roles present in the intersubjective field of education favor the educational function, integral development, as well as the dialogue of knowledge.

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## RESUMEN

El sujeto permanece en un intercambio e interacción de manera constante entre su experiencia, la confirmación que percibe del otro y las posiciones que asumen en la situación, teniendo en cuenta lo anterior el sujeto se relacionará de esta manera frente al mundo creando roles y posiciones relacionales. Objetivo. Comprender las representaciones sociales del educador infantil sobre el género en su función educativa y del desarrollo integral. Materiales y métodos. Se trabaja a partir de una metodología cualitativa de representaciones sociales y una aproximación analítico complejo-existencial. Resultados. Se encuentra que los educadores perciben conflictos en torno al género y cómo este se percibe, además que debe existir una interacción para el desarrollo integral de los estudiantes, además de una apertura hacia el conocimiento para la igualdad y equidad de género. Conclusiones. Las relaciones entre los docentes con los otros roles presentes en el campo intersubjetivo de la educación favorecen la función educativa, el desarrollo integral, así como el dialogo de saberes.

## Introduction

The following article is oriented to the research problem of the lack of data and current research referents in the Spanish-speaking world regarding gender in its educational function. Based on the above, the general objective of the research is to understand the social representations of early childhood educators about gender in their educational function and integral development from a qualitative methodology of social representations and a complex-existential analytical approach.

Based on the above, this article delves into the existential analytical look proposed by Längle (2013) and Frankl (2015), Mayorga-González (2020), among others, to later advance on gender in its educational function and integral development. Likewise, the analysis of the data

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obtained from 11 participants of legal age who collaborated in the application of in-depth interviews will be carried out.

The complex-existential analysis starts from the understanding of everyday life as the basic scenario of each person, so the complex proposal of Sotolongo and Delgado (2006) is used to understand the magnitude of the term and also supported by the contributions of Stolorow and Atwood (2014), Martuccelli (2015), Längle and Kwee (2013).

Everyday life has three characteristics, namely, indexicality or the structure of everyday life. In this structure, boundaries, functions, context and roles are presented, and for it to exist it must show the relationship between people and the structure of everyday life. For Stolorow and Atwood (2014), this structure can be understood as the construction of the intersubjective field of people's behavior. Martuccelli (2015) will also propose that the structure of everyday life will provide roles and functions for everyone, but remain within it. the scope of recognition and allow them to distinguish this field from other fields.

The structural characteristics and the reality of human existence are complementary, because Heidegger (2005) casts the subject into the world, a world that is not the earth, but a world where multiple worlds are intertwined. Stolorow and Atwood (2014), call these worlds intersubjective fields. Summarizing, this characteristic, three points of investigation are proposed in each field, namely, the sacred, the ritual and the logos.

The sacrum refers to the foundations and principles (family, work, friends, religion, etc.) that make the field a reality (Sotolongo, 2006), Lo ritus, specify actions, behaviors, roles, and the implementation of the subjects in the field through its function (Martuccelli, 2015). And logos, the subject in the designated field passes tests, confrontation and discovery of the problem and the meaning of life, these meanings have the content of existence in each case (Frankl, 2015). Each point requires continuous feedback from other points, because the interaction of the three maintains each intersubjective field.

Dynamics of Daily Life. Constant dialogic exchange.

The second feature of everyday life is reflexivity (Sotolongo 2006) or relational dynamics, which stipulates that the object cannot be understood independently of the subject, and vice versa. Furthermore,

the second feature of everyday life not only explains the subject, but the subject's relationship and mastery, both with himself, and with the other in the context of the relationship, this means that the subject understands himself only in the relationship with another person similar to him.

Therefore, once the intersubjective field in which the subject is located has been explored, it is also important to understand his relationship with others and with himself. As Laing (2015) said, the subject will eventually speak from his experience and produce a feeling and thinking based on his experience, as well as beliefs and needs (Munné and Codina, 2002), through a relational discourse based on confirmation and relational positions.

The personal discourse, according to Längle and Kwee (2013), is based on the experience built in the affectation with the intersubjective field, which manifests itself in emotions, as a guide of what is valuable (Weixel, 2017), in thinking, as Sotolongo and Atwood (2014) point out, the position of the subject before the intersubjective field, of what he assumes there and in the interaction with the other, as well as believing, as Munné and Codina (2002) state, are the biases or prejudices before the personal meanings of acting with the other, finally, wanting is oriented to the projection, the value and the risk that the subject has before the situations that occur in the interaction (Längle and Kwee, 2013).

In the subject's experience, he builds his story, changing it or sedimenting it (Spinelli, 2007), all this can occur in the constant dialogic exchange with the other, assuming roles, functions and interacting with his own and the other's behavior. But this necessary relationship presents confirmations and relational positions.

For Laing (2015) confirmation is the way in which the subject captures the response of the other to one's own behavior, in an action of evaluation according to one's own experience and expectation that one has in the situation, therefore two forms can be distinguished, the concordant or the discordant. For Honneth (2018) in these two forms that act as counteracts there are different spheres, at the level of social relations such as work, school, religion, the city, among others, there the subject seeks recognition, to achieve a status, a merit for his acts, that would be the concordance of the other in the confirmation, but discordance can be presented, when the subject perceives humiliation and rejection in front of what he is or performs.

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In closer relationships such as family, friends, among others, there is a constant search for trust to generate opportunity in the relationship, otherwise if this trust is not generated, exclusion will be generated or perceived (Honneth, 2018). On the other hand, in relationships with a fairly high degree of intimacy as would be the couple relationships, the care of that intimacy, the hidden and secret of the subject requires care, and if the opposite is presented with this information the subject will come to perceive it as mistreatment.

Finally, in relational discourse relational positions for Martinez (2019) are presented in three forms, the submissive or passive, in which one acts receiving direction from the active, the dominant or active, in which the subject or the other directs the relational situation or the dead position that as Längle and Kwee (2013) specify, the subject also feels like an instrument, losing himself. These positions in any relationship can be combined in competition or collaboration. It is competition when the subjects seek to assume equal positions (active-active or passive-passive) and it is collaborative when a synchrony is achieved (active-passive).

With the above, the subject remains in a constant exchange and interaction between their experience, the confirmation they perceive from the other and the positions they assume in the situation.

The third complex-existential characteristic of everyday life is the existential content, for Martínez (2019) is inherent to every subject the encounter, the confrontation and the questioning of dilemmas of existing such as death, freedom, loneliness or the question about the meaning of life. These dilemmas are revealed to every subject in relation to the world, with others and with himself in situation, when being questioned, this is how Mayorga-González (2019) proposes the expression of these dilemmas as fundamental needs in everyday life that are reflexive at the moment that an emerging situation arises.

For Martuccelli (2015), an emerging situation is the one that is perceived as a test, evaluation or risk that the world or the other makes before the attitude and behavior of the other and that will be sought to respond to achieve the permanence in the field, the position before the personal processes, the encounter with the other and the surrender to the value of the situation. Therefore, by experiencing the questioning of these needs to exist, the subject finds possibilities of change or meaning as Frankl (2015) pointed out through the enjoyment, support or acceptance of the situation.

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Based on the structure, dynamics and openness of the subject within daily life and according to the principles and foundations with which the subject arrives at daily life (be it his work, his family, his partner, among others), he can assume different modes of being that will allow him to avoid the existential content, but making his life more closed, or, on the contrary, a mode more open to reflection that will allow him to find possibilities of change.

The restrictive mode of being for Mayorga-González (2019), is presented by the interaction of the subject with the field, the others, his experience and the situation in an insecure and closed way, this in turn is produced by the perception of discordant confirmations, restrictive fundamental principles and the absence of a genuine and collaborative dialogue.

For Laing (2015), this mode of being is the most used in current times, where, as Chul-Han (2021) points out, in a society overloaded with information, the only way to assume life is to disconnect from it. Therefore, the interaction with the field is presented as selfish, i.e., seeking only the subjective welfare, with the other the subject perceives himself as an instrument, with himself a fragmentation, distancing from his own affectivity and with the situation consumption, all this is generating relationships based on the control of the other, personal ambivalence and avoidance of existential content.

On the contrary, the expansive way of being is presented in the reflection of the existential content, which allows the establishment of safe and open environments, as well as genuine and collaborative dialogues, achieving in the person the management and autonomy of their processes, the support and collaboration of relationships, the possibility of change, as well as responding to life from reflection.

To address the definition of gender it is necessary to mention that there have been many disputes and conflicts surrounding it, although in this document we will address the meanings contributed by two great exponents who are important today in the construction of this category, these are Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler, in addition to other authors who complement the above.

For Beauvoir (1928) and Butler (2016) gender is part of a cultural construction, this is expressed through the body and the relationship that one has with the other, it comes out in society depending on the freedom that each one can have and the role they fulfill in society,

although as mentioned by Butler (2017) this freedom can be limited by situations or sex, because gender can become an interpretation from the anatomy, or on the contrary be a way of existing for the body.

Although Beauvoir does not mention the word "gender" in her works and that it is born some time later, in her writing "The Second Sex" (2019) she states that what we can call today in this way, is limited by the masculine and that from there women seek the opposition, in this case it would be the feminine, as mentioned above, gender is constructed from what is socially and culturally already imposed, and as Carrillo (2021) argues, this differentiation in genders has allowed societies to be based on violence and discrimination.

For her part Butler (2017) proposes that there can be more than two genders as this is a construction of its own, a way of existing with a corporeality and a decision to act-in-the-world, this as mentioned helps to resignify what it is to be-in-the-world and act in it in accordance with what she wants to "be".

As mentioned by Connel and Pearse (2018), in educational life there are situations that lend themselves to gender differentiation, but there are other situations in which it does not occur, this because the interaction that people have mainly in their childhood make activities such as competition in games make their gender (a social construct) make them act in a certain way or that in the classroom they take a passive role, because all students are paying attention to the teacher and there the differentiation of the groups is of another type.

Continuing with the above, it is necessary to highlight that boys and girls enter and leave groups that are often governed or differentiated by gender issues, but it can be seen that on several occasions they break and go beyond these limits by assuming other roles and other activities within the game and interaction with others (Connel and Pearse, 2018).

Viotti and del Valle (2013) argue that school and education play an important role in the symbolic representations and meanings held about genders, since school is an ideal environment in which ideas, roles, activities and characteristics of these groups can be taught, so the role of the educator is fundamental in the context, since many practices and relational fields where they can interact and learn will start from him.

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Educators play a fundamental role and will be in charge of guiding and giving tools to students to be able to interact with the world and many times understand their gender roles, also as Rodriguez and Pease (2020) expose in their research, the beliefs that teachers have about gender and sexuality can interfere in the way they educate for the comprehensive sexual development of their students.

Likewise, teachers can empower their students so that education about gender is equitable and egalitarian, generating awareness, reflection and consideration about the realities that they live day by day and how they live in constant relationship with themselves, others and the world, creating environments of change that allow social interaction on the subject (Mayorga, 2018).

For an integral development there must be the gender category involved there, this because it cannot be denied that due to gender differentiation and gender stereotypes there is violence and discrimination, and to the extent that there is education for equality and equity, it will be possible to have a society with a full and integral development, in which people enjoy rights, responsibilities and opportunities (Parra and Medina, 2019).

Furthermore, as Massolo (2006) mentions, in order to achieve integral development, it should be taken into account that gender is not something isolated, since there are interpersonal relationships, inequalities, relational positions, among others, that will allow for development, not only on a personal level, but also in the community, in relationships, and in general in the context in which they are found and in which they are able to generate a reflection and awareness of gender.

## Materials and Methods

We proceeded to carry out the research from the qualitative method, since with the information obtained, the deficiency that exists on the part of the pedagogical professionals when teaching literature to children is determined with greater amplitude. Taylor and Bogdán (1984) point out that the objective of qualitative research is to provide a research methodology that allows understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of the people who live it.

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For authors such as Navarro and Tamayo (2009), social representations are presented as cognitive formations that occur in social groups; thus, they can be defined by the forms of interpretation that the group gives to a certain object, situation or common referent. Likewise, these representations can be defined as "social constructions of ordinary knowledge elaborated on the basis of values and beliefs shared by a social group, giving rise to a vision of the world that is manifested within social interactions" (Fischer, 1997 p. 36).

For the elaboration of this research, an in-depth interview was conducted with 11 teachers from educational institutions in Colombia, 4 of whom were men and 7 were women, on the subject of gender as an educational and integral development function. The information was codified, allowing the emergence of emerging categories. Subsequently, an analysis was made based on the existential analysis of daily life. The table with the emerging categories is presented below.

**Table 1.** *Emerging categories*

| CODES | EMERGING CATEGORIES |
|---|---|
| **In favor of the conflict** | Conflict |
| **Against the conflict** | |
| **Humiliation of the other** | |
| **Relationality in groups** | Interaction for development |
| **Peer-to-peer liaison** | |
| **Connections between groups** | |
| **Peer recognition** | |
| **Conceptualization of gender** | Openness to knowledge |
| **Ignorance of gender** | |
| **Orientation definition** | |
| **Orientation dispersion** | |
| **Cultural knowledge** | |
| **Cultural ignorance** | |
| **Gender differentiation** | |
| **Gender awareness** | |
| **Gender status** | Gender equality and equity |
| **Role acceptance** | |
| **Gender stereotyping** | |

**Roles assigned in the role**

**Inclusion of gender**

**Understanding the role**

**Contributing to change**

**Conditions for equity**

**Gender equality**

Author: Own elaboration (2021)

## Results

In order to respond to the proposed objective, we will work from the codes found in the 4 emerging categories in the in-depth interviews conducted, based on the representations, taking into account the proposed topic and based on the social representations.

In the day-to-day experience of educators in school contexts, various positions and ideas on the subject of gender can be evidenced, and this can generate conflicts in the interaction with others, as is specified in "many times my colleagues do not express the same opinion about gender or how to teach it in the classroom, although I try to teach from my profession and about what I think is right, these differences generate friction and we cannot all go in the same direction on this issue" (Teacher 3), in addition to "on the part of the institution also in everyday life the gender gaps are seen, an example can be that in my family they always thought that women were good for being housewives, when I wanted to study and not get married this generated problems in the dynamics that I had with my parents" (Teacher 3).

In the same line, the conflicts that are generated and the reality that these create create insecure and closed environments, where there is exclusion and humiliation based on these representations as stated "for me as a man it was much more difficult to enter as an educator, I first studied a degree and there the majority were women, I felt very strange the truth, but that was the profession I had chosen" (Teacher 11).

In spite of the above, it is often necessary to enter into interaction, recognition and differentiation of the other and of myself to generate an integral development, since this will help the existing groups in the classroom to learn to coexist and differentiate speaking of gender as the central axis on this occasion, "students learn to create groups and can also differentiate what they like or dislike, what activities they

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prefer or how they can work, often one realizes that depending on the gender they also connect or distance themselves more" (Teacher 6).

Likewise, the recognition they can find in their peers will allow them to identify themselves as similar or different, as mentioned "when students are young they begin to discover who they are and how they are in relation to others, girls begin to recognize themselves as such and realize that there are similarities and in relation to boys they realize the differences" (Teacher 9).

If we talk about the knowledge that can be found in classroom interactions, it is important to emphasize how gender contributes to an integral development, based on the fact that it helps self-knowledge "if we address the issue of gender as teachers in the classroom, we will be providing the basis for students to recognize themselves, orient themselves towards what they are and what they want to be, and find a light in the identity crisis" (Teacher 1).

It is also mentioned that "if we were to teach about gender, we could reduce cases of gender violence, it is all a chain that starts with education" (Teacher 1), gender awareness is considered important, since it is involved in several social problems that could be avoided or reduced through education.

Speaking from a perspective of gender equality, the representations that are held about gender and imposed roles, there are several perspectives of teachers "there can be gender equality, we should all have the same rights, duties and opportunities" (Teacher 5), on the contrary, it is specified "I do not believe in gender equality but in an equity, this baraca much more and take into account the particularities of each person, I think this could achieve much more in society" (Teacher 4).

For Beauvoir (1928) and Butler (2016) gender is presented as a cultural construct expressed in the relationship with others, from this point the results obtained effectively evidence that from the field of education, the intersubjective narratives of the relational dynamics around gender are framed in distortions resulting in conflicts, this likewise generates competitive loyalties (Laing, 2015) expressed in tendencies towards recognition and the feeling of humiliation by others. This conditions gender as a subject of dispute, struggle for freedom and the roles that are assumed from the beliefs of gender as an educational function and integral development.

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But the results presented showed representation in terms of interaction for development, as Connel and Perse (2018) specify by pointing out that there are spaces in education where gender differentiation occurs, as well as others in which it should not occur since gender takes a back seat, since the objective is an exercise as a community of learners.

Regarding the openness to knowledge, we reach a concordant result as proposed by Viotti and del Valle (2013), since by specifying that education plays a fundamental role in the symbolic representations, such as the meanings of gender, the conceptualization of gender, the definition of sexual orientations, knowledge and cultural beliefs and respect for gender awareness and difference are evidenced.

In the same way, the important role of the beliefs with which the teachers themselves arrive is corroborated, since this contributes to the interaction as understanding of gender by the complementary roles (students), as pointed out by Rodriguez and Pease (2020), given that they influence the status, stereotypes, inclusions and equality of gender, the acceptance and assignment of roles, the conditions for equity as well as the changes in the perspective of students, peers and the educational community.

## Conclusions

With the above, the emergent representations and the representations presented in this research in relation to a complex-existential view of gender as an educational function and integral development are presented in the constant feedback of the intersubjective field of education, the symmetrical, but not complementary relationship of gender roles and educational roles that are unraveled in the stories of teachers and the foundations and norms present in the field that open the conflict, as well as the search for gender equality.

Similarly, the relationships between teachers and the other roles present in the intersubjective field of education favor the educational function, integral development, as well as the dialogue of knowledge. In the educational function, teachers-students are nurtured in a dialogue of knowledge, although there is often a representation of conflict when seeking to achieve cooperation between genders, possibly due to the cognitive sedimentation of Latin American patriarchal cultures, however, there is a consolidation of blurred

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boundaries that allow integral development through the recognition of duties and rights as persons and citizens with responsibilities and freedoms.

In the symmetrical teacher-teacher relationship, the conflict in the most relevant functions, the search for recognition for the performance of these functions, are the most frequent causes of conflict, which are often portrayed as a gender struggle, but not as a struggle of functions, making the parties feel in competition, degrading the other for their gender, for their way of speaking or for their high or low level of authority, reflected in the complementary roles of teachers-students or teachers-parents. In view of the above, the representation of openness to knowledge becomes of utmost importance in order to transform the intersubjective narratives, achieving the distancing between what is properly of gender and what is of the functions of being teachers and symmetrical in doing.

Finally, the world of experience that is being transformed in the emergence of the intersubjective field and relational dynamics, which in this case is represented by the educational function of gender and the relationships of symmetrical and complementary roles, is forming representational dialogues around the feelings of humiliation, exclusion and mistreatment by peers, parents or students and how these feelings fail to mark the trends of change in relation to gender, although the students are coupling the story of gender that teachers manifest.

To conclude, when asked the question "What are the social representations of early childhood educators about gender in their educational function and integral development? It can be mentioned that the construction, assignment and response to social roles must be accompanied by the recognition of the norms (rights and duties) of the educational field, thus favoring gender not as an isolated construct, but as a high impact construct, since interpersonal relationships are maintained there, the basis for the development of individual virtues and strengths, Therefore, generating environments of openness and security for the dialogue of knowledge about gender in its educational and developmental function and integrating it from a complex-existential perspective allows confronting the possibilities of change for more harmonious, equitable and reflective communities.

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