

*The technique of image construction using fabrics in the psychodrama
with pubescent*

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Sou eu que vou ser seu amigo

Vou lhe dar abrigo

Se você quiser

Quando surgirem seus primeiros raios de mulher

A vida se abrirá num feroz carrossel

E você vai rasgar meu papel

O que está escrito em mim

Comigo ficará guardado

Se lhe dá prazer?

A vida segue sempre em frente

O que se há de fazer ?

(TOQUINHO, MUTINHO, O Caderno , In: Casa de Brinquedos, 1983)

Abstract

This paper proposes to approach the technique of image construction using fabrics, as proposed by Jaime G. Rojas-Bermúdez for Psychodrama work with pubescent. Clinical experience was taken as a means to evaluate this type of intervention. Among the researched literature there were no references found regarding the use of this technique in puberty. Some considerations on puberty have been taken up, bringing this conception in the light of the “Nucleus of the I” Theory. Other authors are cross-referenced to substantiate aspects of human development typical of this stage, following this, the technique of image construction and its theoretical foundation are presented, seeking to make a connection with puberty and finally the use of this technique will be illustrated through a clinical example, addressing favorable and unfavorable aspects of this form of

intervention with this type of client.

Keywords: Puberty, psychodrama, psychotherapy, image.

INTRODUCTION

The word “puberty” comes from the Latin: pubis, which means down, body hair. The Houaiss dictionary (2009) defines puberty as a “transition period between childhood and adolescence, in which the development of secondary sexual characteristics and the acceleration of growth occur, leading the onset of reproductive functions.”

For the psychiatrist and psycho-dramatist İçami Tiba (1986), puberty is the period that interposes between childhood and adolescence and announces its arrival, it comprises the periods of 9 to 12 years old among girls and from 10 to 13 years old in boys. At this time important phylogenetically programmed changes occur in physiological, psychic, bodily and social spheres. For David Levisky (1998), puberty is a process resulting from physiological changes, whereas adolescence is a psychosocial process.

This concept lacks discussion, since defining something is to establish its extent and limits. However, it is important to emphasize two aspects: the first one is that, in spite of being related to biological changes, both puberty and adolescence have their contours also defined by culture. Second, it is necessary to take into consideration phenomena such as precocious puberty¹ which should not be considered as an indication of adolescence itself, given the physiological and psycho-affective complexity of children under eight years of age.

The present study considered a relevant criterion to define puberty the state of confusion and incoherence between what was known and familiar (childhood, infantile body, social roles within family, school and other groups) and the pubertal change to which the subjects were submitted. According to the theoretical reference from Rojas Bermúdez (1997), the corporeal, mental and social (environment) experiences undergo the influences of this stage of life and, through the role scheme, foster new exchange relations with the environment.

In the body, the striking cenesthetic changes interfere in the corporeal scheme turning this area into a zone of tension, in other words, the child starts to feel strange, not only in the form, but, in the sensations by which she is overwhelmed, stimuli coming from endocrinal changes, sexual and aggressive impulses unknown until then begin to alter the sensoperception.

At the onset of puberty, changes in identity take place, the search for an image of one's own does not happen at once, because the childhood behavior patterns still present allow steps back to them and forward to the new standards required by the changes of puberty, the childish games give way to eroticized games, such as “a crush on” and “hanging out”. A period of confrontation with adults begins.

In the mental space subtle changes occur: emotions interfere in cognitive life (area/mind) and vice versa. Abstract thinking, introspection and reflection gain importance along with critical reasoning, the capacity for interpretation and judgment. According to Piaget (1994), after 11, 12 years of age, constructed thinking becomes possible, logical thinking leaves concrete manipulation and moves into the field of ideas communicated through language. Thinking is “hypothetic-deductive”, the subject is able to theorize about the world, this new way of thinking takes a great deal of mental work.

The environment is not perceived and felt as in the infantile universe, the subject's

action on it and vice versa creates changes that enable the perception of new experiences, because, in this stage which inaugurates adolescence, the use of autonomy and independence is increasingly required. The entry in 5th and 6th grades marks the change in school life, that demands greater responsibilities and in which group work in school is intensified.

Moyano (2006) highlights some aspects in the structuring of the “I nucleus” that are relevant to the socialization process and important to the comprehension of the child’s entry in this stage of development in which social demands intensify and put her in touch with diverse groups (environment area).

THE DEAMBULATION

It begins in the structuring of the defecator role with crawling. It culminates with the biped position and walking as the child starts to integrate her body by force of gravity during the structuring of the urinator role. At this stage the child explores the space, the mother’s and/or caregiver’s attitude and the affective climate that surrounds these relationships may or may not allow the child’s autonomy regarding their interest and the exploration of the environment.

THE INCIPIENT SELF

The experiences of this stage distinguish, from the sphincter control, the possibilities of opposition, control, pleasure, displeasure, exercising their will through sphincter control. Both anal and bladder sphincter control are related to the contents of the perception of their internal life, that is, as the significant environment represented by the social-affective network, and specially the mother-baby relationship, deals with these contents. Fecal content is directly related to the social manifestations around it, whereas urine is related to personal pleasure. Both are related to the possibility of how to show oneself to the world. Feces are products which have shape, smell, color, contents from ingested food and are a symbolic representation of their social, personal and other productions. The way the environment reacts to them origins emotions, feelings subjectively experienced by the child, especially in the mother-baby relationship, and with the affective network surrounding her. While the possessions of the Self start to be detailed and the process of dependency decreases the Self enriches itself and triangulation begins. The experience of triangulation involves unique socio-affective experiences that have a subjective meaning for each child, their vicissitudes provide the conditions that support future relationships, a door that opens to the entrance into the social.

THE STRUCTURING OF THE SELF AND SOCIAL ROLES

The structuring of the self and social roles takes the child out from her familiar environment and puts her in contact with new relational networks (school, groups of friends, etc.) and various social demands require new behavioral patterns. The relational standards experienced in the identity matrix, primary locus of affective learning, form the subjective repertoire which the individual carries to the new groups. For example: she may perceive the environment as threatening, nurturing, dangerous, reliable, she might

feel accepted, excluded, distrustful, frightened, etc.

THE TECHNIQUE OF IMAGE CONSTRUCTION WITH UNSTRUCTURED FABRICS FROM ROJAS-BERMÚDEZ

The definition of the term “image”, according to the Houaiss dictionary (2009), comes from the Latin: “imago, `image, representation, portrait (pictorial, sculptural, plastic, verbal); the representation of a person (usually the father, mother or a loved one) formed in the unconscious during childhood and preserved in an idealized manner in adult age, according to C. G. Jung theories.”

Khouri and Machado (2008) refer to Laplanche and Pontalis, in defining the term imago for psychoanalysis, which is very similar to the concept of identity matrix from J. L. Moreno:

[...] an unconscious prototype of characters which preferably guides the way the individual apprehends the other; it is drawn from the first real and phantasmatic intersubjective relations from the family environment. [...] it is seen in it, rather than an image, an acquired imaginary scheme, a static cliché through which the individual aims at the other. The image can, therefore be objectified, either in terms of feelings and behaviors or in images. (emphasis added)

The “Technique of Image Construction” was created by the Colombian psychiatrist and psychodramatist J. G. Rojas-Bermúdez, in the 1960s, based on neuroscience studies on mental image. Rojas-Bermúdez school is based upon the construction of images as one of the fundamental methodological approaches (methodology form/content). Its use is based on the idea that mental activity works through images.

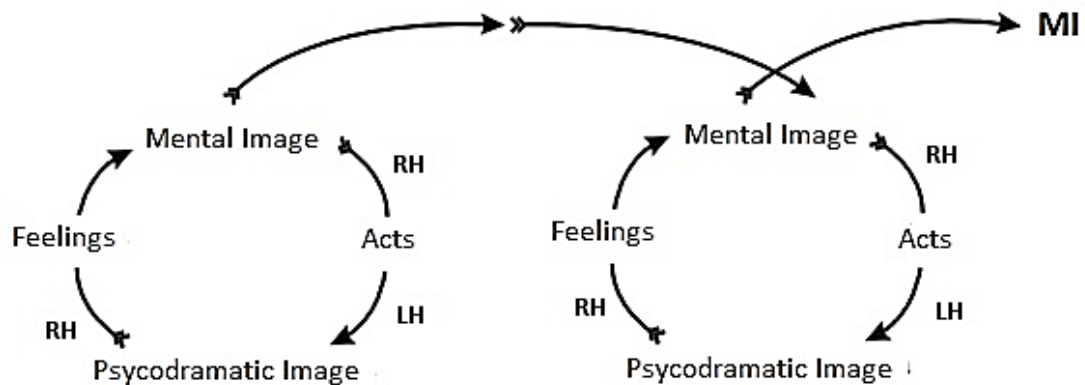
The emergence of the technique is related to questions raised by Bermúdez, from the classic psychodrama, the idea of catharsis and the intervention by dramatization. For this author, the gaps left by this form of intervention (the dramatization) led him to the form/content methodology (KHOURI and MACHADO, 2008, p. 89) and to the creation of the technique as a form of intervention that allows the expression of symbolic contents, of which mankind, semiotic animal, is the sole heir in the animal species.

The constructing of images is a form created by the patient and shows how he/she apprehends the internal reality, it’s a patrimony of those who produce it and must be respected without any interference from the psychodramatist; the image has its own content, which only the protagonist can interpret. Through the constructing of images, it is possible for the patient to objectify their internal contents and observe them from the outside, which effectively produces the comprehension about their subjectivity and enables connections and the production of senses and meanings.

Bermúdez (1999, p. 13) clarifies:

This technique favors objectifying parts of the individual’s inner world, at the same time gives way to the phenomenon of “reafference”², which triggers new reactions and experiences related to the material presented and emotional responses which originate from this internal mobilization are also frequent.

The phenomenon of re-ference mentioned by Bermúdez is the possibility of the image to be modified by the subject, both in the scenario with the unfolding in other images as in a cerebral level, that is, this way of intervention, psychotherapeutic experience, mobilizes in the subject a deepening of contents, and the new mental construct modifies the brain circuits. The following graphic illustrates this concept.



Khouri, G and Machado M.L, 2008, p. 100.

The record of images produced by the right hemisphere (RH) can be accessed through the technique of image construction, when constructing the psychodramatic images the patient doesn't have specific codes previously learned, such as words, for example, thus, needs to focus with attention and reflect on their own mental images, and hence create a way through which information can be transmitted.

The protagonist can observe the image from the outside of the scene, take its place and experience sensations evoked by the assumed body posture, the director can intervene from the start, can initiate a dramatization. When experiencing them, the integration between the motor and visual happens, which allows the reorganization of mental contents which the patient communicates with the word. Various possibilities favor the protagonist to re-ference the image: by making adjustments on the image (MI) observing it from the outside, they will be able to perceive the equivalents of their mental images records, which promotes the interhemispheric integration. The access to the patient's contents through images is free of social control, unlike the spoken language, the words elaborated in a linear and ordered manner are submitted to the control of the culture. (LH)³

The image is a metaphorical language, symbolic expression that allows the understanding of the world apprehended by the individual, it is not a sketch of reality, but, the result of dynamic processes experienced by the patient. It is the expression of their psychic reality.

It was Bermúdez (1997) clinical observations about the behavior of an introverted psychiatric patient, with whom he managed to communicate through large pieces of fabric, experimentally suggested, that led him to the creation of the technique. After having failed communicative attempts with puppets, Bermúdez experimentally used fabrics as a form of communication and observed that the referred patient tore the fabrics into strips and used them to communicate by creating forms.

These observations by Bermúdez (1997) led him to understand that the fabrics went from Intermediate to Intra-intermediate Object, that is, initially used as a means of communication with the environment, arises as a way in which the I divides attention, in a part that pays attention to itself and in another that pays attention to the object, in this

way, it diminishes the egoic surveillance over its contents and the production transferred to the object, puppet, fabric, etc. becomes more spontaneous. Bermúdez argues that the fabric technique is an egoic catalyst, and moreover an expression facilitator, which, used by the protagonist himself, establishes a connection with himself and secondarily with others.

From this moment on, fabrics started to be used for the patients to express their feelings and emotions and, ever since, have become a material resource for the image constructing technique:

The instruction is to express with the fabrics what one feels, thinks and believes to occur to them, or to symbolize some term or meaningful concept which they have used. [...] it is a similar procedure to the construction of images with people. The big difference is that with the fabrics, because they don't have a definite shape, the protagonist internally elaborates a form and expresses its internal contents. Forms that are, in general, symbolic and, therefore, allow us to approach the patient's capacity for abstraction and creative process. (same, p. 176).

The materials to be used are fabrics of varied colors, unstructured, smooth and very light, so as to facilitate the construction of two-dimensional images, thus avoiding the digit-thumb clamp (LH) movement to be used, but, rather, a more archaic movement, a gripping one (RH), which reveals more primitive images (RH).

METHODOLOGY

For this study, three cases were chosen and an image of each case was selected. The names used are all fictitious and the data will be treated anonymously and confidentially.

The technique of image construction with fabrics was used in bipersonal psychodrama with pubescents and their images were sometimes photographed by me, other times by the own patient and had the proper authorization from their guardians for their publication.

This work does not aim to describe the cases neither to deepen the results obtained in the process of each patient, but, rather, to approach the use of the technique with the clientele at puberty.

CLINICAL CASES

Emerald: 10 years old, 5th grade, in psychotherapy process for six months, refers to the anguish from the rapid and abrupt body change that comes from precocious puberty.

The construction of the image allowed Emerald to perceive how distorted her perception about her body was (sensoperception) and to talk about the anguish and sadness which she carried due to feeling different from the other mates and the direct relation with impulsive and aggressive behaviors that permeated her relationships with



her peers.

Jade: 11 years old, 6th grade, started psychotherapy after a bullying episode. Her psychotherapeutic process was experienced in an intense and committed way. She managed to understand subjective aspects, regarding the functioning of her inner world and, thus, it was possible to resize her social roles. She also learned to defend herself and to stand up for herself before the groups in which she was inserted.

Upon realizing her psychotherapeutic process had come to an end (in that moment of life), after a few sessions in which this theme was discussed (the discharge), I requested her to do the image of the beginning, middle and end of the psychotherapy process. Jade showed in images her evolution since the beginning until the moment in which she was. She revealed to be sure of her functioning, the creative alternatives she had found to conflicting situations and, thus, synthesizing her process, put an end to them, feeling ready to experience the challenges of her life.



Sapphira: 11 years old, 5th grade, she was referred to psychotherapy by her mother's psychoanalyst. She presented with separation anxiety since moving to a large school, comparatively much larger than the school where she had studied since kindergarten, which was a small school on the street where she lived and that reproduced the same protective family standard, especially from her relationship with her mother.

Upon facing the reality of 5th grade from this new school, larger and distant from her home, symptoms of separation anxiety broke out and it was necessary, furthermore, an intervention with the school. At a given moment of the treatment, Sapphira, who was in the process of autonomy discovery, represented, through images with fabrics, her relationship with her mother, since, the more she become independent from her, relational conflicts started to settle in a way that, in making the image of the "before" starting psychotherapy and the moment in which she was, she was able to become aware of her "becoming independent" process and of the conflicting relations with her mother facing this new form of relation, fruit from this process.



In this picture, both figures are united by an only piece of fabric representing the

arms of them both. In the second picture, below, they appear separated side by side.

CONSIDERATIONS

Given the universe of cognitive, biological, social and affective transformations of puberty, which heralds the advent of adolescence, the estrangement of the infantile universe starts to mark a new epoch: the make-believe and board games no longer interest. It is also observed that the use of dramatization in bipersonal psychodrama may be an inhibition factor, since the body becomes a tension zone. The factors of this stage of development put the psychodramatist before a limit in the clinical intervention with pubescent: how to intervene?

The technique of constructing images with fabric was used as an intervening resource and became possible because of the capacity of abstract thinking, of symbolizing, interpretation and associative capacity which develop in puberty.

The use of fabrics as Intra-intermediate Object offers little body interaction and produces a relaxed environment for feelings, thoughts and questions of their inner world. Through the image constructed outside of the body, the speech metaphor makes sense producing significant results in the psychotherapeutic process.

One issue arises: can the technique be considered an intervening resource for the psychodramatic psychotherapy in puberty? In view of this question, important considerations must be observed:

- Although puberty is marked by biological changes and by new cognitive abilities, the singularity of each subject should serve as the basis to decide whether the technique should be used. A client in a startled state, with the self dilated will be kept from turning their attention to the mind area.
- It is important to highlight that, both puberty as adolescence though related to biological changes, their contours are also defined by culture.
- It is necessary to consider that the phenomenon of precocious puberty is not properly an indicator to adolescence. The psychodramatist needs to have knowledge of the biopsychosocial development of this clientele, in order to be able to evaluate their client's condition for the use of this technique.

CONCLUSION

Although the technique has proven itself favorable in the use with adults and Bermúdez does not refer to its applicability with clients at puberty, this resource was used as a means of intervention and its results favored the protagonists in the elaboration of psychic contents and their reorganization. Though the technique was used without literally following the applicability protocol, that is, without the request to produce equivalent body images, the use of associative thinking about them, the hypothetical-deductive thinking led the clients to "reaffer" the image and to the consequent understanding of their contents.

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Notes:

¹ Recent studies show that there are variations regarding the age of onset of precocious puberty. The studied populations show variation between 6 and 8 years. For Endocrinology, however, the relevant criterion is the speed with which the secondary sexual characters manifest (CASTRO).

² We did not find any word in the Portuguese/English language to translate the term, however, the Houaiss Electronic Dictionary of the Portuguese Language (2009) defines the term “afference” as derived from “conducting afferent, which brings; physiology.: which drives an impulse to a nerve center (it is said of sensitive nerve fiber); physiology: that which leads from the periphery to an organ or to the inner part (it is said of vessel or nerve)”.

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