

## ADOLESCENCE IN DEBATE: THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE HISTORICAL-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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**ABSTRACT.** In the studies about adolescence, it is noticeable that psychology has more and more been invited to give answers to questions pertaining this specific period of the human development. The historical-cultural perspective proposed by Lev Semenovich Vygotsky and his followers has represented an important theoretical approach to the comprehension of the human being. Thus, this study aims to offer contributions to the debate about adolescence as a social category and a particular stage of the cultural development of subjects. In this way, the main ideas of this Russian theorist are presented here, incorporating them into the discussion that is still incipient in the studies of the historical-cultural perspective: the role of the body in the constitution of subjects. With this starting point, we build arguments that reinforce the monolithic characteristic of the constitution of the human being, where the mind and the body are inseparable parts of the same gear, that develop together along the lifespan, through the social relations of the individuals with the environmental elements. As final considerations, it is pointed out that the role of the body in the process of developing a conceptual thought – a specific characteristic of adolescence – cannot be neglected when we propose the goal to understand the constitution of the totality of the human psyche.

**Keywords:** Adolescence; historical-Cultural Psychology; human development.

## ADOLESCÊNCIA EM DEBATE: CONTRIBUIÇÕES TEÓRICAS À LUZ DA PERSPECTIVA HISTÓRICO-CULTURAL

**RESUMO.** Nos estudos sobre adolescência, percebemos que, cada vez mais, a psicologia tem sido convocada a dar respostas a questões inerentes a esta fase específica do desenvolvimento. A perspectiva histórico-cultural, proposta por Lev Semenovich Vigotski e seus seguidores, tem se apresentado enquanto importante abordagem teórica para a compreensão do humano. Assim, o presente estudo objetiva oferecer contribuições ao debate da adolescência enquanto uma categoria social e uma etapa particular do desenvolvimento cultural dos sujeitos. Desta forma, apresentam-se aqui as principais ideias do pensador russo, aliando-as a uma discussão que ainda é incipiente nos estudos da perspectiva histórico-cultural: o papel do corpo na constituição dos sujeitos. Com este ponto de partida, constroem-se argumentos que reforçam o caráter monolítico da constituição do humano, no qual mente e corpo são partes indissociáveis de uma mesma engrenagem, que se desenvolvem conjuntamente ao longo da história do sujeito, por meio das relações sociais que os indivíduos estabelecem com os elementos do meio. Aponta-se, como considerações finais, que o papel do corpo no processo de desenvolvimento do pensamento em conceitos – característica peculiar da adolescência – não pode ser negligenciado quando se propõe a compreender a constituição do psiquismo em sua totalidade.

**Palavras-chave:** Adolescência; psicologia histórico-cultural; desenvolvimento humano.

## ADOLESCENCIA EN DEBATE: CONTRIBUCIONES TEÓRICAS BAJO LA PERSPECTIVA HISTÓRICO CULTURAL

**RESUMEN.** En los estudios acerca de la adolescencia, percibimos que, siempre más, la psicología es convocada a contestar a cuestiones que son inherentes a esta etapa específica del desarrollo. La perspectiva histórico cultural,

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propuesta por Lev Semenovich Vygotsky y sus seguidores, se ha presentado mientras un importante abordaje teórico en la comprensión del humano. Así, en el presente estudio se tiene por objetivo ofrecer contribuciones al debate de la adolescencia mientras una categoría social y una etapa particular del desarrollo cultural de las personas. De esta manera, presentamos aquí las principales ideas de este pensador ruso, asociándolas a una discusión que todavía es incipiente en los estudios de la perspectiva histórico cultural: el papel del cuerpo en la constitución de los sujetos. Desde este punto de partida, se formula argumentos que refuerzan el aspecto monolítico de la constitución del humano, donde la mente y el cuerpo son dos partes indisolubles de un mismo engranaje, que se desarrollan conjuntamente al largo del desarrollo, vía relaciones sociales que tienen los individuos con los elementos externos. Se apunta, como consideraciones finales, que el papel del cuerpo en el proceso de desarrollo del pensamiento en conceptos – característica particular de la adolescencia – no puede ser descuidado cuando nos proponemos a comprender la constitución del psiquismo humano en su totalidad.

**Palabras-clave:** Adolescencia; psicología Histórico Cultural; desarrollo humano.

## Introduction

The problem of adolescence permeates several social spheres: the State, public policies, private life, families and society as a whole (Souza & Paiva, 2012). Based on social, cultural, and economic factors, in the Western world, the age group that legally delimits adolescence comprises the development period between about ten and nineteen years, with variations according to regional specificities (UNICEF, 2011). In Brazil, the legal-normative framework defines as adolescents subjects between twelve and eighteen years of age (ECA, 1990).

However, an opportune question that emerges is: Is age the only delimiting factor of adolescence? What other aspects define the condition of being an adolescent? In what way and at what moment does the child's development begin to give way to a new social category? In the context of scientific knowledge, there are several theories that have studied this phenomenon. Thus, it does not seem enough to speak of age as a delimiting factor of adolescence. We understand the need to establish a delimited age group, especially for the purposes of implementation of public policies. However, the complex constitution of the human being requires a more in-depth analysis of this specific period of life, from the understanding of the wide range of experiences and social relations that constitute it.

The areas of knowledge that have been dedicated to the study of adolescence pervade anthropology, sociology, psychology, biology, etc. In the scope of psychology, theories have pointed, over the years, to the predominance of a maturational/biological approach in the analysis of the development of these subjects. Stanley Hall (1884-1924), early nineteenth-century theoretician, is considered the first psychologist to think about the problem of adolescence, defining it as a specific phase of the human development. His research was based on species development (phylogenesis) and human development (ontogenesis), defining adolescence as a transitional stage with characteristics of a universal nature (Hall, 1904). Hall's conception was supported by the maturational theory developed by Arnold Gesell (1880-1961) and, for a long time, was the base of several studies, reaffirming the central place of biological maturation as a determinant of the development process.

As we pointed out earlier, the approaches that seek to universalize and naturalize the adolescence are insufficient as a tool for analyzing the complexity of this phase of development. They are perspectives that, despite their contributions to biological maturation, sometimes end up reinforcing the propagation of common-sense *myths* and stigmas of *lack of emotional control*, *perturbation*, and *abhorrence* as biologically inherent conditions for these subjects. In order to deconstruct these myths, it is up to the *psi* knowledge to give answers to the issue of adolescence, taking into account historical-cultural factors to understand the phenomenon.

Contemporary authors (Dinis & Asinelli-Luz, 2007; Facci, 2010; Tomio & Facci, 2009; Souza, 2017 among others) who adopt the historical-cultural perspective as starting point have already presented great contributions in this sense, emphasizing the importance of the emergence of conceptual thinking in adolescence, cultural transformations, etc. However, there is an aspect that we consider extremely relevant and that has been little approached: the understanding of the body-subject unit in the process of cultural development of the adolescent.

According to Sawaia & Silva (2015), while criticizing the Cartesian dualist notion in its epistemological separatism, L.S.Vigotski (1896-1934) proposes to analyze the complexity of development as a totality. Undoubtedly, the concept of totality comes from the central influence of K. Marx (1818-1883) on the Vygotskian epistemological architecture, but we cannot deny the importance of the work of B. Espinosa (1632-1677) to consolidate the monist principle in its mind-body inseparability.

All these assumptions are fundamental for understanding the subjective processes taking place in adolescence, signaling in favor of a development that is complex, contradictory, dynamic and unique, but at the same time, historical, cultural and universal.

### **The problem of adolescence in Historical-Cultural Psychology**

Vygotsky, while developing the historical-cultural theory, adopted the investigation of how changes occur in our psyche throughout development, and especially how the higher psychological functions stem from social relations, as the central problem of his research. As a theoretical production of the nineteenth century, sometimes Vygotsky rescues elements of the maturational theory, and however he advances radically in his analyses, bringing contributions to think on the cultural aspects in the constitution of the subjects. Let us focus here on these contributions, especially in the context of adolescence.

Regarding this specific period of life, Vygotsky did not focus primarily on the investigation of how it is constituted. His studies were more focused on the quest to understand human development as a whole, often starting from research conducted with children. However, among the various themes studied by the author, adolescence was especially emphasized in his work entitled: *Paidology of the Adolescence* (Vigotski, 1984/2014), in which he brought a fundamental theoretical design for the understanding of how the cultural development of subjects takes place in this period of life. He analyzed research from a number of contemporary scholars, made criticisms, and developed his studies through genetic cuttings to arrive at important conclusions about the changes that occur in this period of development.

According to his arguments, the constitution of subjectivity, or of what makes us humans, is not only the fruit of biological evolution, as an internal process, but it is the result of a historically and culturally relationship built with the world, so that the development of the psyche follows the same laws that guide the historical development of mankind (Vigotski, 1984/2014). Here the meaning of history appears both in the phylogenetic (general history of human development) and ontogenetic (developmental history of each person) context. The understanding of development from these two dimensions is the central point in the historical-cultural perspective, which makes it possible to investigate human development from an episteme.

By breaking up with mechanistic and merely biological prescriptions about human development, the historical-cultural perspective starts from the assumption that consciousness is a social concept. In this sense, we can say that the psyche does not consist in a merely phenomenal (*fanei*) manifestation or is pre-existent to man, but it reflects/refracts the economic, social and cultural contexts in which he lives, as well as the historical process that produced him. In this way, it seems to us that it does not make sense to deal with the psychological phenomenon without seeking to understand the material conditions of the human production.

### **(Dis)Continuities of the body-subject unit in the transition from childhood to adolescence**

In his studies on adolescence, Vygotsky points out that the emergence of thinking in concepts constitutes the main differential in the cultural development of adolescents. For the author, the passage from thinking in complexes, typical of childhood, to thinking in concepts (intellectualization of development), as a rule, coincides with the stage of sexual maturation or puberty. If we analyze puberty only from a maturational perspective, we can define it as a period of hormonal and bodily changes that marks the transition from childhood to adolescence. But when we think of this body in transformation, we must take into account its historical and cultural dimension. After all, what is the qualitative (cultural

and historical) change that constitutes the life of adolescents? What is specific about this ontogenetic moment?

We have already pointed out that the body-subject unit does not consist only of a set of organs and senses that develop over time. The body-subject unit is culturally constructed, objectified in concrete social relations. As a locus for the production of meanings and senses, as Vygotsky would argue, there is no body without subjectivity. Even the dead are subjects of their bodies.

As Costa (2012) points out, it is in the body-subject unit that the discourses and ideologies of a given society are materialized. It is in this very contradictory unit that we become subjects of needs and desires. Subjects that are shaped by history, but also *(mis)aligned* with their own history.

In adolescence, the formation of a body qualitatively and quantitatively different from childhood results in new subjective configurations. It is not rare, for example, to hear the assertion that adolescence is an *inherently problematic* phase. We know that such an interpretation is based on prejudices and stereotypes that are inherited from the maturational theory. There is, in fact, a hegemonic thinking behind the idea that adolescents, being unable to cope with biological transformations, would come to blows and become prone to certain *inappropriate behaviors*, often inconsistent with what is socially accepted.

Vygotsky does not deny that adolescence is a critical period. But his assertion is sustained by an epistemological course radically different from the prevailing conceptions of his time. In fact, the Belarusian psychologist (1984/2014) criticizes some who defend this period as a crisis that evolves dramatically and negatively, and others who argue in favor of maturation based on positive and uniform aspects.

The historical-cultural theory overcomes this dichotomy, giving rise to a qualitatively revolutionary perspective. That is, Vygotsky does not understand adolescence as something for granted, or negative, but rather as a moment of development that gives rise to a completely new functioning of the psyche.

For this, Vygotsky starts from a critical theoretical construction on the periodization of ages, emphasizing historical-cultural criteria. In this context, he presents the existence of some *crises* during development, which involve the radical transformation of the psyche. Adolescence encompasses one of these *critical* periods, as we shall see later.

Crises, for Vygotsky, are not only an internal factor of the developing organism, but are determined by the social context in which this body conforms. There is, then, a permanent dialectic relationship in the period of transition to adolescence, between the processes of signification of this body-subject in the world, and the external elements that this body-subject interprets and also modifies.

Thus, periods of crisis are not determined by a fixed time interval. The line marking the beginning and end of the crisis is variable and indefinite. Critical periods are different for each child or adolescent, even if they present similar social positions (for the synthesis of the experiences of the subjects will never be the same for two people). In this way, external conditions determine the concrete character in which critical periods are manifested and take place.

Thus, adolescence is one of the critical periods of the development process, but not because of biological characteristics that make the behavior of these individuals endowed with peculiarities. It is rather a phenomenon related to the corporal changes that are directly linked to the processes of internalization of experiences, and that are integrated into the complexification of the possibilities of performance of the individual in the world.

The negative content attributed to such a period is nothing more than the inverse form of understanding the cultural development of higher psychological functions and their qualitative changes. The reconfiguration of thoughts and the development of a completely new way of functioning is the basic principle that runs through this stage of life.

Here, it is worth extending the discussion about the body-subject unit for understanding adolescence as a cultural (and also biological) phenomenon. We decided, then, to turn our focus to the period preceding adolescence, i.e. childhood.

We know that in childhood, the body-subject unit is central to the process of symbolizing the child. Several researchers of the historical-cultural perspective (Souza & Silva, 2010; Costa, 2012; Silva, Abreu & Costa, 2015, among others) have already discussed this issue and demonstrated the centrality of the body in the creation of playful, drawing and narrating activities, for example. For them, the

functioning of the psyche changes qualitatively throughout childhood and the body is central in this transformation.

Children want to play of 'being old'; 'being a wolf', creating movements, sounds and statements that give meaning to their character. Without this, the dramatic game becomes meaningless. They also want to perform actions that are not possible in their daily life; they want to '*ride a horse*', '*drive a car*', '*do a surgery*', or '*play an instrument*', things that they cannot do. Their psychic functioning has limitations that are *partially* overcome on the imaginative sphere.

Children share in the world and they access cultural experience through their imaginative resources, which are central to the ontogenetic development (Góes, 2000; Silva, 2006, among others). The objective world is a place where the desire-need unit gives rise to the child's creative action (Leontiev, 1992) but it is important to note that a considerable part of this objective world cannot be lived fully because children cannot objectively '*pilot an airplane*' or '*do a surgery*'. In fact, the daily statement expressed by children 'we want to play only if it's for real!' demonstrates the radicalism of their *anecdotal rhetoric* (from the Greek: *ad'ynaton*); the figure of speech for '*impossible things*'.

In adolescence, therefore, the process seems to reverse (or at least change qualitatively). From the readings of Vygotsky (1984/2014), we can affirm that in this phase, the relations between the real biological needs and their superior cultural needs are consolidated. Or, as Marx would say, the necessity of the man becomes a human need (Marx, 1846/2013).

While developing the concept of interests, Vygotsky differs from the other authors of his time: E. Thorndike (1874-1949) and W. McDougall (1871-1938). He deepens the discussion of necessity beyond habit, breaking up with the mechanistic idea of conduct. Diverting from the psychologists of his day, Vygotsky argues that habits are random, chaotic and associative actions and mechanisms and, therefore, do not have themselves a driving force in the development process. Interests, in turn, are integrated tendencies, subordinated to a general dynamic of functioning and that determine the direction of the actions of the individuals in such a way that the habits would be organized from this general structure of operation and would have a structural relation with the interests.

Vygotsky (1984/2014) then points to the existence of two mutually related processes in the formation of the content of interests: first, the emergence of new attractions which, due to the sexual maturation, form the organic basis of the new system of interests and, gradually, the maturation of this new system that is structured. These new attractions and needs (first moment) amplify the spectrum of external stimuli that drive the development of the adolescent, and in the process of reorganization of the psychic functioning, allow the reconstruction of these same forms of attraction, which are transformed into human interests.

Considering that Vygotsky's work dates back from the beginning of the twentieth century, the use of the term interest would be what we can now call cultural needs, resulting from the insertion in culture in a more complex and differentiated manner compared to the period of childhood. These emerge on the basis of biological needs and, although they have their own course of development (since they are completely new formations), they have similar mechanisms and act within the limits of maturation of the body, in certain cultural and historical contexts, *sewn* (if we may say so) by the objective conditions of existence.

With experimental clarity we have been able to observe how maturation and the emergence of new attractions and inner necessities infinitely expand the circle of objects that have an inciting force for adolescents, as whole spheres of activities, previously neutral to them, now become fundamental moments that determine their conduct, how, from the new internal world, a completely new external world emerges for the adolescent (Vygotsky, 1984/2014, p.11). - our translation.

Here, through the processes of conversion of the social approach into individual need-desire, the ideas that were apparently *outside the subject*, in the initial period of his process of corporal transformation, become the patrimony of his subjectivity.

In short, the shift of interests-needs from childhood to adolescence drives the radical transformation of behavioral mechanisms. The modes of functioning already formed continue to exist, but now rooted in a radically new basis, which is structured from the emergence of new cultural needs. In this sense, the dialectic relationship between objective and subjective, between the inciting force of the context -

which provokes the changes - and the internal system of needs becomes evident in the history of the development of cultural needs in the period of adolescence.

In view of this, we can say that the critical period of adolescence represents an essential moment in the constitution of the individual, since it is distinguished by the appearance of new cultural formations of the *psyche*. We have at the same time the transgression of the balance previously found in child development, and the incompleteness of the stability of an adult organism. In the pursuit of this stability, the psychic functions are reconfigured (Vygotsky, 2009).

However, this greater potential of access to culture, made possible by bodily transformations - and therefore, discursive, symbolic and of psychic functioning - is not complete. The teenager is able to '*drive a car*'; he wants *to drive a car*, but he cannot. This broader condition deserves more attention when we analyze the current model of society through the contradictions, limitations and rules imposed by contemporary capitalism. Different forms of expression of the body-subject and social functions are formed in this system..

In his time, as a theoretician grounded in dialectical-historical materialism, Vygotsky already introduced the implication of the class dimension in human development. In the case of adolescents, the author (1984/2014) argues that their maturational phase usually has a shorter period in the case of the development of those belonging to the working class, especially due to the harsh living conditions and the need for early insertion in the labor market.

Concerning the interests of proletarian-class adolescents, in his *Adolescent Pedology* published in *Selected Works* (Vygotsky, 1984/2006) that Vygotsky wrote in 1929, he puts the title "Structure of interests in the age of transition and interests of proletarian-class adolescents" as an integral part of his work. However, this essay is not available in any of his works published in the West and is probably part of the author's unpublished works. However, in the available chapters of the translation of the Volume IV into English and Spanish, Vygotsky argues that adolescents belonging to the working class have a qualitatively different development process from the bourgeois adolescents, since at this age these factors most strongly influence the development of the intellect, because the body acquires ways of acting that are product of the socialization of thought.

Vygotsky (2009) states that problem solving and emergence of demands are objective factors that stimulate the development of the intellect. Thus, since the social sphere does not provide access to these more complex contexts, the adolescent's thinking may experience a *kind of atrophy* (our term), not developing higher forms of thought in their potentiality, not reaching them completely, or reaching them with a long delay. Sawaia (2014) also points to this direction by stating that human potentialities may be constrained in the course of their development, depending on the material conditions of existence.

### **Cultural formation of the psychism in adolescence: emotion and imagination.**

Another important aspect that delimits the conception of historical-cultural psychology is the role of emotions in this new form of access to culture. The traditional perspective of psychology that attempts to explain adolescence considers emotions as the guiding thread of development in this period, as a counterpoint to rationality, which has no determining character in the actions of the individuals. Still trapped by the Cartesian conception, traditional psychology understands that the adolescents would be in a permanent conflict dominated by their emotions.

This perspective reinforces a negative and dichotomous view of emotions, as if they occupy a separate place in the functioning of the *psyche*, as discussed above. Vygotsky (1986/2014) deconstructs such a premise from the conception that emotions are not a separate block in psychic functioning. These act as mediators of human action and are directly associated with cultural needs. According to Sawaia (2009),

emotions, as well as desire and need, constitute a sphere of the *psyche* that is very valued by Vygotsky, the motivation, being the affective-volitional basis of our consciousness and thought and, therefore, has the last "why" of our needs and ideas (p.368).

In adolescence, what is new in this psychic structure is its intellectualization, from the formation of thinking in concepts. The playful of childhood turns into fantasy in adolescence and, although its basis remains concrete, fantasy gradually consolidates itself in an increasingly abstract way. At the same time, and contradictorily, we can also observe during this phase the objectification of the imagination, in the sense that it adapts to rational conditions, and there is a decline of only subjective moments (Vygotsky, 1984/2014).

For Vygotsky (2009), the productive activity, now within the reach of the adolescent due to the corporal and psychic transformations, is associated with the redefinition of the creative imagination, which happens to be objectified in the transforming action of these subjects in the world. To exemplify, the author uses the example of writing: the objective and subjective traits of writing can be found in adolescence, as they are a reflection of the rupture that the creative imagination suffers at this time, passing from the subjective to the objective type. Verbal thinking is initially objective and then subjective. This means that, in a first moment, it appears in itself, and then constitutes itself as a function for itself. Vygotsky (1984/2014) then makes the following synthesis: children first act and then think, where as in adolescence the individuals first think and then take a certain action.

In this sense, only when going through the transformations that characterize adolescence, the internal language can reach a new type of relationship with the other psychic functions. This capacity provides the development of self-awareness and volitional aspects. The transformations that occur in this period, in the form and content of psychic functions, consist in the transformation of the subject *in himself* into a subject *for himself*.

For Vygotsky (1984/2014), all things initially exist *in themselves*, but during the process of development there is the conversion of the thing *to itself*, in such a way that the human *itself* would be a child that is still *not formed – not complete* as a social being and, due to the process of cultural development, he becomes a free and rational being *for himself*, when it reaches the formation of the thinking in concepts. Thus, the recognition of his own internal reality takes place in this psychic restructuring, so that the adolescent becomes aware not only of others, but of himself. From there, he becomes a subject capable of transforming the reality.

This definition is aligned with the Marxist concept of class consciousness. Iasi (2006) takes on this idea when affirming that, in the process of class struggles, the class *itself* would be determined by its relation with other classes. That is, the proletariat is defined only by its dialectical relationship with the bourgeoisie; while the class *for itself*, besides being a constituent class of capital, would be the recognition of the class as such. In short, it is a process that involves *self-consciousness*, which may result in collective organization and political resistance. In the same way, in the individual sphere, self-consciousness is not a granted phenomenon, but it is rather developed to the extent that the subjects understand themselves through the social relations they experience.

Considering that the formation of consciousness of the subjects is also social and that they are inserted in a certain class, this process does not take place in a compartmentalized and individualized way in each person, but it is part of a macro sphere of class consciousness and it is defined based on the dialectical movement between the constitution of oneself and of the world, interlinked to social relations (Souza, 2017). In the same way, class consciousness is supported by the social being (and by the bodies that constitute it and come into action along with this consciousness).

Thus, in a society divided into classes, the performance of this body-subject is limited only to a part of this social whole, so that the way in which the division of labor takes place (and, consequently, the material support for the establishment of social relations) is the social basis on which the process of formation of each subject takes place. As a consequence, this is the basis on which this body-subject unit is built and incorporated into society itself (Almeida, Abreu & Rossler, 2011).

### **The consolidation of thinking in concepts in adolescence**

By showing that there are transformations in the form and content of thought, Vygotsky (1984/2014) breaks up with traditional theorists who, while agreeing with an evolution of the content of thought, deny the emergence of new intellectual forms in adolescence. For the author, superior psychic functioning is not only a continuation of elementary functions, but a qualitatively new psychic formation, not only in

content, but also in the form in which it is constituted. Such functioning is governed by specific laws which are connected with the general organic development of the adolescent, but which are the product of the historical development of mankind.

Always seeking to understand the mechanisms that make possible the genesis of higher psychological functions, the author makes this ontogenetic path starting from the premise that these functions do not evolve separately. The intellectual life of the adolescent develops as a single and integral system, synthesized and materialized in the body, whose parts are subject to the connection with the central axis: the function of forming concepts. Thus, perception, memory, attention, imagination and the very constitution of subjectivity permeate this axis, having the word as the link of its sustenance.

In this direction, we know that the period of puberty means an important milestone in human development. It is a period of reconfiguration of the body in the world, which is linked to the emergence of new cultural needs and that prompts the emergence of a new form of thought, which consists of specific and original means, both with respect to form and content.

Until reaching the stage of thinking in concepts, the action of the body is conditioned to other phases of transformation in thought which differ qualitatively from one another. Faroh (2007) points out that such paths can be categorized in the following evolutionary line: a) formation of disorganized accumulations: grouping of figures without sufficient relation between their elements, without having completely defined the meaning of the word; b) complex thinking: the child begins to categorize objects by means of their concrete characteristics, through the real and objective relations of its components; c) thinking in concepts: in its climax, the capacity for abstraction and isolation of the constituent elements of the concept is consolidated.

Several contemporary authors point to the importance of thinking in concepts during this phase of development (Tomio & Facci, 2009; Koshino, 2011; Freitas, 2007; Basmage, 2010). Tomio and Facci (2009), for example, indicate that higher psychological functions stem collectively from the appropriation of concepts by the individual, so that the greater complexity in conceptual management configures the nodal point of adolescence. The psychic functions during this period undergo a process of revolutionary transformation, in which new cognitive syntheses emerge.

Koshino (2011), in turn, explains that this revolutionary process, which consolidates the higher psychological functions in adolescence, happens through changes in its connections that enable the formulation of thinking from concepts. In this way, adolescents establish new ways of functioning of the intellectual, emotional and behavioral activity that, at their root, turn the development process even more complex.

Thus, the operation in concepts allows the assimilation of science, art and the various spheres of culture, as well as the active participation in the cultural life that surrounds the adolescents (Basmage, 2010). With this, we do not mean here that children do not participate in cultural life, for the process of symbolization starts to exist in this phase of life. However, it is in adolescence that the role of the body in the process of symbolization acquires this new form of organization that allows greater access to such elements.

Changes in the process of language, the complexification of emotions and imagination (as well as other higher psychological functions) brought about by cultural development allow adolescents to embrace the relationships and interdependencies of phenomena based on logical thinking - which is the concept in action -, provoking in the subjects a more complex and in-depth reflection of reality. Therefore, we consider the importance of the role of the body-subject unit in this period of life, in which the cultural field is no longer inaccessible in biological terms.

In general terms, we defend the idea that categorical thinking integrates a body-subject unit that also begins to act in a completely new way. Insofar as there is a break with concrete/visual-direct thinking, it becomes possible to abstract objects in all their generality and specificity (Vygotsky, 1984/2014). Thus, the adolescents' imagination begins to rely on concepts, and this is not unrelated to the biological transformations arising from puberty. In general terms, it means to say that thinking in concepts reconfigures the way the imagination develops during this period:

What is essentially new in the development of fantasy in the transitional age is precisely that the imagination of the adolescent maintains a close relation with the thought of concepts, becomes intellectualized, integrated into the system of intellectual activity, and begins to play a totally new role in a new structure of the adolescent's personality. (Vygotsky, 1984/2014, p. 142). – our translation.

The concept is, then, the fundamental way of knowing and systematizing the outside world, and its formation in adolescence provides conditions for the adolescent to understand himself and others. Thus, the cornerstone of this moment of life, which aggregates all the transformations produced in the thought of the adolescent, is this new form of intellectual activity, since there is a renewal and restructuring of the content of this thought through the formation of concepts (Freitas, 2007).

Vygotsky (2000) further states that the functional use of the word is the means that enables the process of concept formation. It is through words that the adolescent establishes the mastery of his thoughts and is led to activities, with a view to solving problems. Facci(2004) points out that the concepts contain the intellectual structure of the word, which involves the whole system of generalizations and social relations determined by culture in the historical process.

Thought finds the culmination of its verbalization in the period of adolescence. Since verbal thinking means to concatenate individual and social thought, we can say that this psychic formation achieves socialization in its fullness when the formation of concepts takes place. In this sense, the meaning of words and the formation of concepts in adolescence will depend on the cultural context in which the subject grows.

It is worth emphasizing that the concept itself represents all the complexity of the objective thing, the knowledge of its nexuses and relations, as well as the verbal synthesis of this diversity, in a total, integrated and multi-determined image. Dialectically, the concept refers not only to the knowledge of the general, but also of the singular and the particular and, therefore, "is a prolonged activity that contains a whole series of acts of thought" (Vygotsky, 1984/2014, p. 52).

Language composes this system of concepts and is the founding element of its constitution. Through the verbalization of thought, we are able to isolate, abstract, generalize and analyze objects and, consequently, become aware that there is an objective world outside ourselves and a subjective inner world (Almeida, Abreu & Rossler, 2011). Thus, language is not the way in which a certain idea is expressed, but the means by which it is created; it is not a reflection of a conception of the world, but the action that constructs it. In the work of Vygotsky (2009) commented by Ana L. Smolka, the author emphasizes the double function that has the word as a human production: 1) an element capable of making feasible the communicative relationship with the world; 2) a unit responsible for the modes of functioning of mental operations, guiding actions and building practical activities.

In view of these considerations, we see that the formation of concepts is an extremely complex process, which is at the center of the development of thought and represents the authentic and revolutionary changes in the content and form of thought. Thus, these two elements (form and content) are not fortuitous, but constitute the same integrated process, which binds them together through a historical causal nexus.

The consolidation of training in concepts has direct implications for the way adolescents interpret and behave in the world. In contrast, the greater capacity for analysis of reality and access to new cultural elements is confronted with the limits and expectations imposed on the adolescent, as previously explored.

From now on, it is possible for adolescents to perform more complex activities, to be inserted into more diverse spaces of sociability, and signify social relations in a radically different way when compared to their infantile universe. However, their performances are shaped by cultural elements that often circumscribe *to become*. If the challenges posed to them before were related to the learning and internalization of aspects that favored full physical and psychic development, now they assume a new characteristic: participation in the world as a body-subject in an explicitly ethical-political dimension. If the interdict was previously (in childhood) characterized by an *objective biological impossibility*, now it assumes a *prohibition of subjective cultural order*. That is, *'I can drive the car, I want to drive the car, but I should not drive the car!'*

With the passage to thinking in concepts, the world of objective social consciousness - that is, of social ideology - unravels before the adolescent. From the development of a consciousness for oneself,

acultural need for a more effective action in social life emerges. However, such attitude is also determined by the cultural historical limits and possibilities allowed by the social class.

Thus it is precisely at this stage that class ideology develops intensively; the identification with a given class is not the fruit of a mere imitation of external elements, but of a communion of life and a sense of belonging, through activities and interests (Silva & Souza, 2015). Hence, we argue that self-consciousness is nothing more than the social consciousness contradictorily (and dramatically) transmuted to the subject and in the subject.

In the context of a consumerist society, a culture of adolescence in which the ideal model of life becomes increasingly endowed with meanings of freedom, autonomy and other characteristics that would be expressed in the social category of adolescence, is forged. At the same time, this culture also imposes the limits of effective action of these subjects in the various spaces of participation in society.

In light of what we have discussed about the diffusion of the adolescent experience as a complex condition - associated with rebellion and values that define it as a stage where these subjects would not yet be *sufficiently prepared* -, the supposed appreciation of adolescence is contradictorily related to a depreciation of the experience (something smaller or of less importance). In this way, social life is experienced by them in an ambiguous way: at the same time that they are better able to integrate with it - due to the consolidation of thinking in concepts - they are directed to a mass consumption model that does not lead the cultural needs of experience.

The consequences of the consolidation of this ideal of adolescence are present in the demands imposed on adolescents for their adaptation to the changes of the current society. There is space for a profound contradiction in subjective experience, bringing peculiarities to its process of identity construction and contributing to the (non-natural) socio-cultural crisis. Poor adolescents, for example, deal daily with a hegemonic synthesis that proclaims (and manipulates) the ideals of autonomy, freedom and vigor, but they see rather limitations and impossibilities in their objective conditions of life.

## Final considerations

The synthesis that is imposed is the understanding that the social vicissitudes that materialize in the life of adolescents are of a historical, cultural and (not only) organic order. This implies that not only do maturational elements conform to the peculiar characteristics of psychic functioning during this period, but a particular society constructs a particular historically determined conception of adolescence. Finally, adolescence: "is created historically by man as a representation and as a social and psychological fact; it is constructed as meaning in the culture and language that permeate social relations" (Ozella & Aguiar, 2008, p. 99).

Radical transformation of psychological functioning (especially of emotion and imagination) and the transition to thinking in concepts enables a radical and original form of action of this body-subject in the world. The limits of the infant universe give rise to ethical and political choices; from *'I cannot do something'* to *'I should not do something'*. We have, therefore, a complex functional system that brings about reflections to the field of Psychology and Pedagogy, as well as on the policies aimed at this public.

Beyond this epistemic displacement, we sought to problematize throughout this article that adolescence, as a historical-cultural phenomenon, is permeated by the contradiction and ambiguity that constitute modern capitalist society. Between deprivation and freedom; consumption and knowledge; we have a specific and numerous group of adolescents who, given the class issue, have their development pervaded by perverse processes of exclusion/inclusion (Sawaia, 2014) that mark their cultural development. There is, therefore, much to be yet investigated.

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