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Suffering among adolescent girls in *13 reasons why*: A psychoanalytic study

Natália D. P. de Assis¹, Andreia de A. Schulte², Sueli Regina Gallo-Belluzzo³,
and Tânia M. J. Aiello-Vaisberg³

¹ Postgraduate Program in Psychology, Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas (PUC-Campinas)

² Clinical Department, Michigan School of Psychology

³ Department of Clinical Psychology, University of São Paulo (USP)

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Authors' notes

Natália D. P. de Assis  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4113-6049>

Andreia de A. Schulte  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5082-1438>

Sueli Regina Galo-Belluzzo  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0160-9152>

Tânia M. J. Aiello-Vaisberg  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3894-1300>

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Natália D. P. de Assis, Rua Padre Almeida, 515, cj. 22, Cambuí, Campinas, SP, Brazil. CEP 13025-250. E-mail: nataliadpassis@gmail.com

Abstract

This study's objective was to investigate suffering among adolescent girls from the concrete psychoanalytic psychology perspective, a theoretical framework that adopts the psychoanalytic method and theorizations from a relational perspective. It is a relevant endeavor considering evidence that adolescence among girls is a phase potentially vulnerable to sexism and violence, which may cause traumatic effects. It is methodologically organized in a psychoanalytic study of the television series *13 reasons why*, which manifestly addresses this research topic. The material was addressed in a free-floating-attention state, from which two affective-emotional meaning fields emerged: "sluts or prudes" and "I am a nobody without approval". In general, the plot reveals conservative and oppressive imaginaries, inciting female submission, attacking the basic human tendency to spontaneously express toward life, harmfully affecting the subjectivity of adolescent girls.

Keywords: adolescence, feminism, suffering, psychoanalysis – methodology, *13 reasons why*

SOFRIMENTO DE MENINAS ADOLESCENTES NA SÉRIE *13 REASONS WHY*: UM ESTUDO PSICANALÍTICO

Resumo

Objetiva-se investigar o sofrimento de meninas adolescentes na perspectiva da psicologia psicanalítica concreta, referencial que se define pelo uso do método psicanalítico e de teorizações de tipo relacional. Justifica-se na medida em que há indícios de que a adolescência feminina corresponde a uma fase potencialmente vulnerável ao sexismo e à violência, que geram efeitos traumáticos. Organiza-se metodologicamente por meio do estudo psicanalítico da série televisiva *13 reasons why*, que tematiza manifestamente a questão. Exposições ao material, em estado de atenção flutuante e associação livre de ideias, permitiram a interpretação de dois campos de sentido afetivo-emocional: "Vadias ou certinhas" e "Sem aprovação não sou ninguém". O quadro geral revela imaginários conservadores e opressores que, ao incitarem a submissão feminina, atacam a tendência humana básica de posicionar-se de modo espontâneo diante da própria existência, determinando efeitos nocivos sobre a subjetividade da menina adolescente.

Palavras-chave: adolescência, feminismo, sofrimento, psicanálise – metodologia, *13 reasons why*

SUFRIMIENTO DE LAS ADOLESCENTES EN *POR TRECE RAZONES*: UN ESTUDIO PSICOANALÍTICO

Resumen

El objetivo es investigar el sufrimiento de las adolescentes desde la perspectiva de la psicología psicoanalítica concreta, referencia que se define por el uso del método psicoanalítico y teorizaciones de tipo relacionales. Hay indicios de que la adolescencia femenina corresponde a una fase potencialmente vulnerable al sexismo y violencia, que pueden generar efectos traumáticos. Se organiza metodológicamente mediante el estudio psicoanalítico de la serie televisiva *Por trece razones*, que aborda claramente el tema. Las exposiciones al material, en estado de atención fluctuante y libre asociación de ideas,

permitieron la interpretación de dos campos del sentido afectivo-emocional: “Perras o comportadas” y “Sin aprobación no soy nadie”. El panorama general revela imaginarios conservadores y opresivos que, al incitar a la sumisión femenina, atacan la tendencia humana básica a posicionarse espontáneamente antes de su propia existencia, determinando los efectos nocivos en la subjetividad de la adolescente.

Palabras clave: adolescencia, feminismo, sufrimiento, psicoanálisis – metodología, *Por trece razones*

As it is currently configured, adolescence is a period when socially determined suffering is relevant, challenging health professionals and human sciences. It is even more complicated because contemporary society is a complex and multifaceted formation in constant change. Thus, it would be more accurate to refer to adolescence in the plural form, that is, adolescence is a passage from childhood to adulthood, but sometimes it lasts much longer than it is supposed to. Additionally, people experience it differently depending on one's gender and cultural, economic, geopolitical, and historical conditions.

Clinical observations arising from work in medical offices and health facilities focused on adolescents' emotional distress reveal impasses in the way adults currently care for young people. For example, teachers, families, physicians, psychologists, and other professionals ask about the limits of freedom that should be established and how much autonomy should be allowed, as well as how intense monitoring should be. These questions are directly linked to the fact that, from a civil and criminal perspective, adolescents are not entirely responsible for their actions; however, they have the means to act in ways that can affect their own lives and those of others, such as conceiving a child or severely hurting themselves or others.

In our view, we gain clarity when we understand female adolescence as an intersection of two dimensions, that of being an adolescent and a woman, which imposes considerable challenges. This situation can be understood as a specific form of intersectionality, a concept coined to highlight that Afro-descent women face overlapping and intensified oppression arising from sexism, racism, and poverty (Bello et al., 2016). Expanding this concept, due to its heuristic power, we argue it can be used to depict oppressive collectives in more than one way, even when racism, *per se*, is not on the agenda. The more intersections are considered, the better we understand a lived experience, because we believe that considering overlapping oppressions enables us to become as close as possible to the concreteness of the drama experienced, moving us away from abstractions and generalizations (Bleger, 1963/2007).

When producing knowledge on adolescent girls, it seems paramount to consider the specificity of individuals who do not exactly become sexually visible *people*; however, given macro-social conditions, they become sexually visible *bodies*, giving emergence to new dramas of life. We identified in the literature that many of the meanings socially assigned to the sexuality of adolescent girls, as noted by Almeida (2018), constitute what we may consider structured violence.

It seems that social practices encouraging girls to be more autonomous regarding their bodies are less emphatic, which, paradoxically, coexist with practices that encourage boys to have sexual relations increasingly earlier and with many partners. At the same time, girls tend to be constantly watched, censored, and driven to adopt submissive behaviors justified by imaginaries in which romantic love is idealized (Beauvoir, 1949/2009). In our view, a tendency persists in society to address the sexuality of adolescent girls according to conservative, moralistic, and prejudiced standards.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), sexual violence is currently widely acknowledged as a public health problem and a violation of human rights. Indeed, it has aroused the interest of researchers, and 8,824 studies are identified when the descriptor “sexual violence” is used in PubMed to track publications of the last five years. When “sexual violence” is combined with “adolescent girl”, 3,220 results are obtained. Hence, 36% of the studies focus on the occurrence of this phenomenon among younger women. Systematic bibliographic reviews found in the same database tend to focus on factors associated with the phenomenon, among which poverty, illegal drugs, and the existence of armed conflicts stand out, as reported by Mlouki et al. (2020). Nevertheless, studies seldom address the efficacy of victim treatment programs, as noted by Lomax and Meyrick (2020), who conclude that there is much to be done and investigated to obtain significant therapeutic benefits for victims of sexual violence.

Given the previous discussion, we consider that investigating the social suffering of adolescent girls from a psychoanalytical perspective can contribute significantly to knowledge regarding the subjective effects arising from gender issues. Therefore, this study is expected to broaden the discussion regarding female adolescence, recognizing it as a process in which female oppression and adult-centric ageism intersect. Finally, we hope that the knowledge produced here will support individual or collective psychotherapeutic and psychoprophylactic practices, according to the peculiarities of the patients, and provide important information for discussions, with a view to ethical-political-based transformations to meet the care needs that permeate the whole of human life but are especially significant in some phases, among which from childhood to adolescence (Biroli, 2018).

Method

This qualitative psychological research focuses on studying the affective-emotional meanings of human acts, which we understand as socially, contextualized phenomena based on bonds (Aiello-Vaisberg, 2017). As we know, qualitative research, a well-established method in human sciences, constitutes a means to produce comprehensive knowledge organized according to different theoretical-methodological approaches (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). For this reason, the methodological section of this type of investigation should present not only the procedures used but also a brief explanation of the framework adopted.

This study was conceived in the light of the concrete psychoanalytical psychology proposed by Bleger (1963/2007), based on Politzer (1928/1998), who showed the coexistence of two irreconcilable discourses in the heart of Freudian thought. One of which addresses peoples' symptoms and lived experiences, from a dramatic and bonding perspective, closely marked by phenomenological and existential theories. The other refers to metapsychology, a physicalist model that considers the human psyche an apparatus permeated by impersonal energies. Politzer (1928/1998) was very enthusiastic about valuing what was lived in conditions in which bonds are established, seeing it as the basis for the constitution of a “first-person”

science, but he vehemently recommended abandoning the metapsychological speculation in the context in which a person is reduced to an organism.

Currently, Politzer's work is well known in the French-speaking context and has elicited different responses from scholars. Lacan (1938), for instance, agreed with the philosopher, using his criticism to argue in favor of a revision that would purge psychoanalysis of its naturalism. Others, such as Ricoeur (1965/1977), considered that the tense and contradictory coexistence of meaning and energy should be tolerated. Finally, Bleger (1963/2007) opted for suppressing metapsychology, as many others who left the psychoanalytical field did to forge existential psychoanalysis.

As we are in line with Bleger (1963/2007), we chose the concrete psychoanalytical psychology as the framework. However, keeping in mind that it should be characterized as a perspective that uses the Freudian investigative method, which caused so much admiration in Politzer (1928/1994), to make interpretations according to a relational theory. By persisting on the psychoanalytical method, our framework follows a line of methodological loyalty that has been kept unchanged over the decades among the psychologists of different schools (Herrmann, 1979), which is quite understandable given its heuristic fecundity. Moreover, by rejecting the metapsychological theorizing, concrete psychoanalytic psychology coincides with other psychoanalytical trends that value the intersubjectivity of one's lived experiences, such as the intersubjective psychoanalysis by Stolorow and Atwood (1996) and relational psychoanalysis by Mitchell (1988).

Therefore, we choose a valid epistemological option by adopting the psychoanalytical method in qualitative research to support interpretation in the light of concrete psychoanalytical psychology. As noted by the Hungarian philosopher, this same method can be combined with instinctual or relational theorizations (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983/1994). Based on the systematization performed by Bleger (1963/2007), the framework adopted is supported by some psychological concepts – which is expected, considering that comprehensive psychology in psychoanalytical or phenomenological aspects, rather than metapsychology, is a field of knowledge that oppose the objectification of human phenomena. Two of these concepts are fundamental: conduct and psychological field – which, for the sake of clarity, we rename here as affective-emotional meaning fields, considering that other scientific disciplines are interested in other meanings, such as the economic, political, cultural, historical, among others. Furthermore, we add to the concepts of conduct and psychological field the notion of imaginary as conduct and field, for a matter of facilitating terminological specification.

Bleger (1963/2007) used the concept of conduct to denominate acts and the products of human acts whether performed by individuals or collectives. According to his epistemological understanding, based on a dialectical view of reality, all human sciences would share the same object of study: the conduct of concrete human beings, an inherently complex, multifaceted, and changing phenomenon.

The psychological approach to conduct focuses on it as drama or lived experience, recalling that Politzer (1928/1998) makes remarks about drama in its precise meaning to signify human act or action, that is, what constitutes human life in a biographical sense, without mistaking it for the biological idea of life. However, lived experiences correspond to human acts according to their affective-emotional meaning, which always has an inherently relational nature (Bleger, 1963/2007). Therefore, in the psychological field, it is relevant to make a distinction between the areas of expression of human acts: 1. mental/symbolic area, the area in which conducts, such as thoughts, fantasies, and beliefs, take place; 2. body area, the one in which bodily phenomena that can be perceived by oneself and others occur; and 3. performance in the external world, comprising both people's actions and what derives from their actions, that is, all kinds of objects, among which social phenomena, cultural productions, works of art, compositions, and others.

The affective-emotional meaning fields, which we produce interpretatively, correspond to something that occurs in social reality and is configured as experiential environments. That is why these meanings are created/found in qualitative research adopting a psychoanalytical method. Thus, these are paradoxically produced both by the interpretative act and inter-human interactions that occur in the coexistence space, organized around beliefs, values, or fantasies. Produced by human acts – rather than by superhuman entities or inhuman elements –, fields constitute sort of a producing background, from which new conducts emerge, maintaining or modifying themselves over time (Aiello-Vaisberg, 2017).

We clarify that affective-emotional meaning fields correspond to a peculiar way concrete psychoanalytical psychology conceives the unconscious, no longer as an intrapsychic instance but as an intersubjective field inserted in macrosocial contexts. Interpretatively producing affective-emotional meaning fields that constellate in social reality may shed light on ways of life that determine exclusion, discrimination, humiliation, and suffering.

It is important to note that there are no ontological differences between conduct and field, as both of them are constituted by human acts. Thus, we use the term conduct when we want to focus on a given manifestation as an act, such as action, and adopt the term affective-emotional meaning fields when we focus on experiential environments inhabited by individuals or groups, as a result of acts that last in time, constituting some sort of coexistence background from which new conducts emerge.

Finally, we clarify that the concept of imaginary as conduct and field was initially proposed to delimit a set of human acts and provide precision to studies that adopt the Thematic Drawing-and-Story Procedure (Aiello-Vaisberg, 2017), in which participants are invited to draw a particular image, relying only on imagination to create a story about what they drew. This procedure corresponds to the request of human acts, that is, drawing and creating stories, which are associated with the human ability to imagine. The adjective collective is used when we are interested in what is collectively imagined, i.e., in what personalities

believe and fantasize, such as fans of soccer teams, consumers, age or generational groups, the residents of the same place, among others. According to Rosa et al. (2021), the concept of collective imaginary is an important and promising Brazilian addition to the contemporary psychology vocabulary, considering the prolific production of knowledge that was conducted from the 2000s onwards. Furthermore, Rosa et al. (2021) suggest that new studies addressing collective imaginary may enable the identification of processes that motivate prejudice and stereotypes creation in Brazil, as well as the emergence of valuable discoveries related to a vast psychosocial theme regarding which we have not yet achieved a deeper understanding.

Next, we clarify how we operationalized the psychoanalytical method in this study as we proposed three investigative procedures: 1. selection of material; 2. finding and recording material; and 3. interpreting affective-emotional meaning fields.

Procedures

The investigative procedure for the selection of the material was based on a search for film productions that met the following criteria: 1. being available on the Netflix streaming platform under the teen tag; 2. being released in the 21st century; 3. clearly addressing social suffering experienced by female adolescents; and 4. having become somewhat popular. These criteria were established so that a current cultural production that impacted large populational groups would be addressed. After extensive research guided by the previously established criteria, we found the first season of the drama series *13 reasons why* (Yorkey, 2017–2020) satisfactory to our study's objectives. This TV show depicts the last days of the life of an adolescent girl, Hannah Baker, who commits suicide, leaving 13 cassette tapes in which she narrates the reasons why she decided to do it. In each cassette tape, the character blames someone for her distress. The reasons range from invasion of privacy, rumors, betrayals by friends, and feelings of inadequacy to extreme violence, such as rape, among others. It is important to note that using film material follows Freud's modality of studying cultural material, even if not to demonstrate its heuristic fecundity, as the methods' creator did, but to reveal fantasies and beliefs socially produced and shared.

The finding and recording investigative procedure occurred through transference narratives performed after successive exposures to each episode. This initial collection of narratives per episode enabled the development of a single transference narrative, which comprised the complete story conveyed by the TV series. This writing is named transference narrative because it is based on floating attention and the free association of ideas, including not only the recording of the plot but also the countertransference impacts experienced during exposure to the study material.

Regarding the interpretation investigative procedure, we collectively fulfilled the task of creating/finding the intersubjective affective-emotional meaning fields based on contact with the material within the scope of the research group, composed of researchers with

experience in the psychoanalytical method. We adopted this practice because we believe that multiple perspectives positively contribute to interpretative production. Hence, we used psychoanalytical premises, that is, floating attention and the free association of ideas, according to the methodological recommendations provided by Herrmann (1979). These recommendations guided the psychoanalytical interpretation, allowing it to emerge, consider, and complete the configuration of the emergent affective-emotional meaning. At this point, theoretical knowledge needs to be suspended to allow ourselves to be emotionally impacted as much as possible to produce interpretations that, without intending to exhaust the material, seem to be sufficiently interesting and relevant to discuss the social suffering of adolescent girls in the present time.

In qualitative studies that adopt the psychoanalytical method, the section usually known as discussion of results is named reflexive interlocutions. Then, we cease using the method and abandon floating attention and the free association of ideas to begin a reflexive work, referring to authors of human sciences who address the main issues related to the affective-emotional meaning fields. This stage's dialogical and reflexive nature is intended to produce comprehensive knowledge that allows considering contemporary problems from a psychosocial perspective and supporting psychotherapeutic and psychoprophylactic practices.

Results

Interpretive results

This section presents the affective-emotional meaning fields that we created/found based on an interpretation investigative procedure according to the guidelines proposed by Herrmann (1979). These fields should be considered intersubjectively and collectively produced and inhabited unconscious (Bleger, 1963/2007; Aiello-Vaisberg, 2017).

We believe that the drama series *13 reasons why* can be productively understood by the proposition from which two affective-emotional meaning fields emerge: “sluts or prudes” and “I am a nobody without approval”.

The first field, “sluts or prudes”, is organized around the belief that female manifestation of sexuality outside a romantic love context reveals an immoral personal constitution.

The second, “I am a nobody without approval”, is organized around the belief that morally well-bred girls modulate their behavior to gain social approval.

The comprehensive nature of the proposition of these two interpretations, considering they refer to a complex configuration regarding the lives of adolescent girls in the contemporary world, do not correspond to only two possible interpretations given the amplitude of the material. However, our objective using the psychoanalytical method is not to exhaust all potential meanings; instead, it is to address issues that favor the understanding and recognition of the emotional distress adolescent girls go through, which is indispensable to their recovery.

Reflective interlocations

It is important to highlight that field corresponds to the inter-subjective unconscious view characteristic of concrete psychoanalytical psychology. Thus, (it) underlies but does not literally coincides with the material itself, as it derives from an interpretive act. Nevertheless, we can rigorously state that it can be conceived as a background or substrate from which emerge the manifestations of conduct that constitute, in this case, the plot. Therefore, the fields, or imaginary-related unconscious, that the production expresses are a result of research on which we reflect. Only after creating/finding the affective-emotional meaning fields, we seek psychoanalytical and non-psychoanalytical theories to start a contextualized discussion of the drama under study. In this sense, we propose an approach that specifically takes into account suffering linked to attacks on female sexuality during adolescence and how the free expression of oneself tends to be hampered due to social fields in which we still currently find ourselves.

Various situations emerge from the “sluts or prudes” field. For example, rumors about the protagonist – an adolescent girl – having had sex outside a relationship immediately come to mind, as these led to prejudiced comments stating that she would be only a girl to have fun with and not to be taken seriously. Another example refers to conversations and judgments concerning sexually arousing female body parts, exalting her qualities while the girl is reduced to a sexual object.

From the “sluts or prudes” field, which supports an imaginary according to which adolescents should submit to specific gender standards and norms, numerous violent practices against women emerge – from the apparently mildest, such as rumors, laughter, and mockery, to more radical ones, such as physical and sexual violence. Moreover, we understand that the general judgmental nature of this experiential environment seems to compromise the way adolescents perceive their bodies, as we notice fantasies of having an attractive body, being sexually desired, and feeling attractive.

According to the affective-emotional logic of this field, a simple rumor can label a girl as a slut and cause her intense suffering, because, being considered as such, she would be treated with disrespect, and her moral integrity would be questioned. The girl considered slut is, therefore, discriminated against by everyone, even by those who attempt to seduce her sexually. In turn, being considered a prude is the same as being recognized as a girl who is worth dating, marrying, and having kids with. Even though it may seem like a compliment, it is, in reality, an attack on a girl's spontaneity, encouraging her to submit to socially established rules. According to this imaginary, in order to be worth marrying, a girl should be reserved, pure, obedient, well-behaved, and, of course, sexually inhibited. Hence, a girl is more likely to be seen as a prude if she represses her ability to live her sexuality spontaneously. This field, of a clearly conservative nature, indicates the issue already addressed by Beauvoir (1949/2009) in her pioneering work:

The girl is required to stay home; her outside activities are watched over: she is never encouraged to organize her own fun and pleasure. It is rare to see women organize a long hike on their own, a walking or biking trip, or take part in games such as billiards and bowling. Beyond a lack of initiative that comes from their education, customs make their independence difficult. If they wander the streets, they are stared at, accosted. I know some girls, far from shy, who get no enjoyment strolling through Paris alone because, incessantly bothered, they are incessantly on their guard: all their pleasure is ruined. If girl students run through the streets in happy groups as boys do, they attract attention; striding along, singing, talking, and laughing loudly or eating an apple are provocations, and they will be insulted or followed or approached. Lightheartedness immediately becomes a lack of decorum. This self-control imposed on the woman becomes second nature for “the well-bred girl” and kills spontaneity; lively exuberance is crushed. The result is tension and boredom (pp. 346–347).

Therefore, we infer that conducts emerging from the field “sluts or prudes” can generate psychological distress related to the difficulty of women in experiencing their sexuality spontaneously as a manifestation of life and health. What attacks spontaneity in general, and sexual spontaneity, in particular, consists of severe attacks against a person. Besides, according to Winnicott (1945/1982), spontaneity should not be mistaken for impulsiveness, insofar it takes someone else into consideration. In our society, boys seem to enjoy more freedom to have sex, regardless of being in a serious relationship or not. However, as boys are encouraged to have various partners, supposedly an acknowledgment of their masculinity, their spontaneity is also attacked, as impulsiveness is constantly cultivated in society. In this sense, a girl would be seen as a sexual object, which leads to sexual violence against women.

In this field, an ambiguously structured hostile environment emerges, as girls who are considered sluts are also sexually desirable, that is, they provide pleasure but are despicable at the same time. In turn, those considered prudes are valued and worthy of dating but would not arouse sexual desire in boys. Both are ambiguous objects suffering violence. The ones who arouse sexual desire in boys are vilified and treated like a slut, while the girlfriend is betrayed because the boyfriend has sex with girls considered sluts. It seems there is an experiential environment where there is a division between girls that are good for sex and girls that are good for marrying, that is, impure and pure adolescents, respectively. It would be significantly different living in a society that supported and favored the emergence of more spontaneous manifestations – rather than submissive ones – both in terms of sexuality and in other spheres of life, so that both boys and girls would establish creative and respectful bonds in their relationships.

Bartky (1990) considers that the constant violence perpetrated in interpersonal relationships would be internalized by the victims, who would overvalue attributes linked to the ability to make themselves erotically arousing. Thus, it is an imaginary operation that

results in traumatic effects and may harm adolescent girls' mental health and emotional and existential spheres. In this sense, this imaginary regarding adolescent girls is closely connected to what we see as processes of depersonalization/dehumanization, that is, veiled or explicit attacks against women (Aiello-Vaisberg, 2017). Therefore, we believe that female objectification is a dehumanizing resource through which women become target of actions intended to assign them the infrahuman condition of an erotic object.

Next, we move on to the affective-emotional meaning field "I am a nobody without approval", highlighting that much of the suffering experienced by the adolescents depicted in the TV series seems to be linked to a strong need to receive social approval. By the way, being a prude is also an attempt to obtain social approval. However, we believe that it is important to interpret the validity of this second field, precisely because it may broaden the view of what goes on in a specifically sexual record, a fact that should not come as a surprise if we consider that gender norms have a structural nature in society. Even though she had family approval, the TV show's protagonist suffers from beginning to end as she incessantly seeks approval from her peers, parents, and teachers. It is worth noting that she has just arrived in a new town and school, which puts her in a vulnerable situation in terms of being anxious about establishing new relationships.

The other female characters in the series also struggle in many situations to obtain approval. Consequently, they also feel compelled to hide certain information, such as their sexual orientation or involvement in traffic accidents. They do this to gain their parents' approval, as well as that of their peers and others.

Since we adopted the concrete psychoanalytic psychology perspective, these issues are treated from a dramatic and contextual standpoint. By reading Freud's work, we note that when he proposed the theory of the Oedipus complex (Freud, 1924/1976), he allowed a relational and dramatic thought to come into play, as it deals with the relationship of a child and their parents, involving love, conflicts, and penis envy. However, he did not neglect the drama lived in instinctual terms, appealing to sexual instincts and authentically feminine masochism, which would be expressed through fantasies of castrations, copulations, being gagged, and other humiliations of both sexes, yet considered typically female.

When we align ourselves with concrete psychoanalytical psychology, we conclude that the effort of these girls to obtain social approval is not directly related, as Freud (1924/1976) expected, to the anatomically existing differences between a boy and a girl, nor with how the latter experiences the Oedipus complex. As we know, from the Freudian perspective, the girl, perceiving herself castrated as her mother, would move away to get closer to her father, who would be taken as the model of the object. Accepting herself as castrated and seeking to unite with a man, other than her father, would be the healthiest exit to female life, which would be crowned when, becoming the mother of a boy, this one would symbolize the maternal phallus. Hence, from this perspective of women, receiving a man's approval, first from her father, then

from her partner, appears as a requirement that would allow the gratification of generating a boy/phallus.

This theorization based on the anatomical difference between sexes falls apart when we assume a relational psychoanalytical view that includes the macrosocial dimension: how female socialization from early childhood occurs in contemporary society. In this sense, we must acknowledge that girls are often encouraged to be beautiful, obedient, discreet, and well-behaved. Hence, it is remarkable that during adolescence, when sexuality becomes a matter of growing attention, their expressiveness is restricted.

However, deep social transformations that derived from feminist movements have allowed girls to be respected as otherness, maturing without conceiving the feminine as castrated and in a perpetual struggle to conquer a phallus to gain respect and recognition. Therefore, girls would develop an authentic and non-submissive relationship with the environment, enabling a creative living based on the true self instead of the submissive, defensive, dissociated, and false one (Winnicott, 1945/1982). In contrast, a field of affective-emotional meaning, which is governed by the belief that a girl should behave in a way to please others, in an attitude of submission, would prevent her from feeling alive and real, as well as from following a genuine maturation process, that is, based on authenticity, spontaneity, and with consideration and respect from others (Winnicott, 1945/1982).

Winnicott (1945/1982) does not think of sanity as a submissive adaptation to reality, but rather in terms of emotional development that leads to ethical maturation, causing individuals to consider someone else not out of paranoid fear, but out of sensitivity, compassion, and empathy. Thus, the development of an ethical ability occurs when conducts of respect and consideration for otherness can happen as a spontaneous gesture.

Final considerations

The general plot reveals conservative and oppressive imaginary, which, by inciting female submission, attacks the basic human tendency to spontaneously take a stand in the face of their existence, determining harmful effects on the subjectivity of adolescent girls. Our research findings lead to the conclusion that fundamental conditions of existence, which are dignified and favor emotional and ethical maturation, seem to be intensively denied to adolescent girls, manifested by dehumanizing attacks and difficulty in supporting authentic manifestations of living, whether these are linked to sexuality or not. This conclusion encourages the production of knowledge, through which we can, from a clinical perspective in psychoprophylactic and psychotherapeutic terms, deal with the suffering that motivates a search for broader social transformations, with which social movements and the whole civil society should become involved. Finally, we must remember that female oppression, generated by structural sexism, belongs to a broad spectrum of conditions, such as poverty and racism, which produces social suffering.

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