

# Narratives about the deprivation of freedom and the development of the adolescent *self*\*

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## **Abstract**

A review is presented of the theoretical trajectory of the concepts of self and identity in Psychology, situating the socio-cultural-historical theoretical-methodological perspective, with an emphasis on the narrativist-dialogical version. The latter is taken as a contribution to the interpretation of processes of development of the self in the adolescent within the specific context of the deprivation of freedom to which teenage offenders are submitted. The narrativist-dialogical perspective conceives the self as a complex unity, the integrated system of culture and personal affections constructed through the social interaction that takes place in concrete socio-institutional contexts, having the human language as its key means of organization. The situations that disorganize one's sense of self, like the events associated to delinquency, activate subjective mechanisms of reorganization of the self, which promote development. Qualitative analyses of the narrative sequences produced by teenagers deprived of their freedom are presented, obtained from interactions with the researcher in structured situations. The objective is to extend the understanding of the formation of the narrative identity of the teenagers to specific contexts such as those involving violence and deprivation of freedom. The analysis of the narratives produced along the selected sequence of verbal interaction, performed under a micro-genetic perspective, reveals the dynamics of the processes of creation of new significations by the participants about themselves, the context, and the social processes associated to the detention procedure, pointing towards new lines of development of the self.

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Although there is no consensus about the temporal boundaries that define contemporaneity, there is certain accord that outlining the contemporary landscape involves the interweaving of factors such as the transformation of the social space into a predominantly urban organization (Wigley, 1996); the emergence of new family configurations transforming the organization of the social and affective life of the family (Pretto, 1994); the crisis of social institutions that used to play a central role in the transmission of beliefs and values between generations; the hegemonic presence of the medias taking up the time at work, at home, and in leisure; the cultural interpenetration (Hall, 2003); the banalization of violence in daily life; and the imperative of consumption (Castro, 1998; Campos; Souza, 2003).

These factors do not compete evenly in the formation of the adolescent self, and they keep between them complex relationships. Campos and Souza (2003) highlight the fact that the consumption is now mediating social practices and relationships as a result of the hegemony of the capitalist mode of production, whose logic has become particularly perverse in its current phase. Thus, they see consumption as the large umbrella under which the other aspects of the configuration of contemporaneity align themselves. Specifically in the case of the adolescent self, we see that consumption exceeds the status of a social practice, and presents itself as one of the central elements in the definition of the self-image and identity, characterized by authors such as Mafesolli (2000) and Hall (2002; 2003) as the consumption identity. Studies such as those collected in Cardia (1999) give indications that among offending adolescents the satisfaction of basic needs does not appear among the main determinants of criminality, losing in importance to purchasing drugs and consumer goods, non-essential from the point of view of necessity, but fundamental in terms of the logic that dominates contemporaneity.

Our viewpoint is that this group of factors redefines the semiotic and cultural systems, producing new orders of signification and engendering social practices. It promotes among the subjects the modeling of certain images of self at the cost of others, and those images then define specific conditions for their development. These conditions must be investigated if we want to contribute to the epistemological development of the paradigm of human development in context, thereby improving the available knowledge about the processes and conditions of human development in the contemporary Western urban context.

### **Formation of the narrative self and the adolescence**

Bhabha (1990), interested in the category of identity, and considering the chaotic and diasporic context of worldwide capitalism, departs from two guidelines present in the tradition of the identity studies:

[...] the philosophical tradition, as a process of self-reflection in the mirror of (human) nature; and the anthropological vision that situates in identity the Nature/Culture divide. (p. 95)

Considering the theme of identity as a dominant part of the reflection about the contemporary man, Bhabha argues that it cannot be thought today with focus exclusively on the subject. The approach to identity has to point necessarily to the alterity, to the other, and to the processes of identification, constituting a third path to understanding, divergent from the previous paths.

The field of Psychology reproduces in different theoretical models the three trends mentioned above. We can say that the notion of self, along with others, such as ego, personality and identity, and subjectivity has been present for a long time in the theorization of this field,

although restricted to certain theoretical models, in which it was understood under different meanings. In general, the systems that adopted notions like these were seeking an integrated view of the psychological processes (Rey, 2004), taking an acutely different view from current visions, marked by strong reductionism. The author identifies reductionist trends both in the perspectives in which the psychological phenomenon was reduced to behaviors separated from their material conditions of production, and in those views in which it was equated to the mental, internal, immaterial and inaccessible phenomena.

The predominant vision in the studies of the self in Psychology points to the first tradition identified by Bhabha (1990). In it, the self is defined as the sense of oneself, the becoming aware of the fact that one is an entity independent and autonomous from the other (Goolishian; Anderson, 1996). The development of the self coincides with that of the consciousness, characterizing a process of a cognitive nature, which is fitting to the rationalist attitude towards the psyche. This attitude, and the individualistic and self-contained conception of the self that it exposes, are subject to criticism by Sinha (2005), Lopes de Oliveira (2003 a and b), and Nelson (2000). The criticism they offer stresses that such attitude steers away from the complexity of the phenomenon of the formation of the self, leaving out of the analysis fundamental aspects such as the relation between the role played by the subject himself, who organizes himself internally and externally in his relation with the other and with the culture (Rey, 2004) and the cultural context, which regulates the social conditions for human development (Lerner; Castellino, 2002). Another equally neglected aspect is the importance of the narratives as an instrument of organization of the subjective and social experience and, consequently, of the mental life (Bamberg, 2004 a and b; Chandler, 2000, Bruner, 1997). Similarly, it ignores the plural

and polyphonic nature of subjectivity as a replacement for an individuated and self-contained self (Lopes de Oliveira, 2003 a and b; Hermans 2001). Finally, only a timid emphasis is placed on the affective dimension of the relations, neglecting its impact on the intersubjective and intra-subjective processes by virtue of the fact that affections are important instruments of social cohesion. By regulating affections, culture defines the quality of intersubjective processes, with consequences to the subjective aspects (Valsiner, 2005).

We endorse a critical view of the metaphysical perspectives about the subjectivity and the self (Lopes de Oliveira, 2003a), and we espouse the understanding of the self interdependent of the other, of the social interaction that takes place in concrete socio-institutional contexts, having the human language as its principal means of organization.

According to Valsiner (1989):

[...] the self can be defined as the integrated system of the personal culture constructed according to social suggestions that affect its idiosyncratic style. The personal culture includes the unity of affections and rationality. In the self, every rational idea has its affective context, and every feeling is intrinsically linked to some form of thought about the person or the world. (p. 366)

It is possible to characterize the self as the private synthesis of the subjective and the social, as the singular meeting of aspects peculiar to the subject with the various socio-institutional dimensions in which his activity is inserted. This approach finds its roots in the perspectives of Vygotsky (2000; 2001; 2002) and Bakhtin (1988; 1997), although, paradoxically, in the first author the notion of self is present neither in an objective manner nor as a proposed category.

According to Sinha (2005), in Vygotsky's work, as in Mead's, the notion of subjectivity

does not go beyond the recognition of its condition as “a consequence of intersubjectivity” (p. 201), emphasizing the social basis of the formation of the psychological whole. According to him, more enlightening clues to Vygotsky’s vision about the self are to be found by indirect ways in the holistic approach to human psyche presented by him; in the discussion of sense and meaning that he develops; in his proposal of the law of double formation; and also in his emphasis on the role of culture in human development. It is beyond the scope of the present discussion to detail each of these lines of reflection, which can be followed in the contributions of the author himself (Vygotsky, 2000; 2001; 2002), as in those by Van der Veer and Valsiner (1996), Vasconcellos and Valsiner (1995), and Daniels (2002), amongst others.

Bakhtin (1997), on the other hand, dedicates part of his conceptual account to the category the self, reaffirming its plural reality as represented in three integrated categories: the *I-for-myself*, the *I-for-the-other*, and the *other-for-me*. These dimensions coexist as facets of subjectivity, and they express themselves in polyphonic manner, supported by the notions of voice and dialogism. Voice is the activity in which the mind is actualized in enunciation against the backdrop of other minds and of the social environment. Voices carry the marks of the different social groups, in which the enunciations emerge and acquire meaning. The dialogism, which marks not only the verbal interactions but also the individual thought, always implies the existence of at least two voices (Bakhtin, 1981; 1997; Hermans, 2001).

It is important to identify the contribution that such perspective makes to the narrative view of the self, that is, the understanding that the self expresses an open, unfinished, multifaceted structure under development, organizing and transforming itself in the narrative practices that take place in social situations (Roth, 2003). The narratives constitute the micro-genetic context in which

the subjects present themselves publicly, and constitute, against the background given by the socio-institutional context in which the interaction is inserted, a sense of self intersubjectively supported (Koborov; Bamberg, 2004a; 2004b).

In the context of the discursive interactions, the subjects perfect rhetoric strategies that supply the narrative support to the constitution of a sense of self, at one time imaginary (supported by images) and discursive. These strategies aim at guaranteeing that the other interprets intersubjectively the subject in a manner coherent with its own subjective project (Bamberg, 2004 a e b): as the macho, the “chicken”, the good man, the community leader, the youngest son, the *femme fatale*, the politicized, the executive woman, the punk etc. The autobiographical coherence, namely, the notion that one is the same person despite the profound changes that take place throughout one’s life, is also constructed upon the foundations of the narrative practices. Chandler (2000) identifies the need for preservation of autobiographical coherence as of the essential human characteristics, independent of context. Nelson (2000) analyzes the way in which this characteristic of self is developed already at the first years of childhood, when the child begins to create the notion of self through the action and interaction with parents and peers. She says in that work that her studies about

the construction of personal memories by the child [...] indicates that children learn about themselves and construct their own histories through the narrative experience with the other. To engage in the narrative experience is to assume an externalist perspective about the experience. (p. 191-192)

Indeed, the sense of self is constituted in a dialectical game between permanence and change (Lerner; Castellino, 2002). Habermas (1991) proposes that maintaining coherence with oneself is a condition for the very existence of the self.

Chandler (2000) reaffirms the need for the studies of the self to incorporate the dimension of time, in opposition to the view of a self identical to itself, by accepting the paradox between “change and personal permanence” p. 210). His criticism is turned against the metaphysical perspectives about the self that have dominated the psychological scenario, and begins to investigate what he has called practices of sustaining of the self, dedicated to the search for the narrative coherence of the self along time. The practices of sustaining of the self give support to the subject in establishing an image of him/herself that remains, protecting him/her from the fear of disintegration that comes in times of crises or of rapid transformations, such as in adolescence. These practices carry the mark of the historical-cultural space-time, and contribute, in a given context, to the constitution of the narrative identity of the subject. Typically adolescent examples of such practices are the idolization, and the identification with stereotypes and ideologies.

It is possible to suppose that in times like the present ones, in which the speed of social transformations has become vertiginous, the subjects have a still greater need of devices of sustaining of the self that supply a foothold to the different postures of the self (the I-positions in the perspective of Hermans, 2001), adopted according to the system of activity under focus.

Based on Flanagan (1996), Chandler (2000) defines that

[...] the problem of personal permanence becomes the hermeneutic problem of finding or creating a chain of shared meanings that weaves diachronically in the shape of a coherent history the several episodes occurred during the existence of the subject. (p. 215)

Roth (2003) has analyzed the countless imaginary and discursive devices activated to support the project of maintaining the continuity of oneself, confronting the

contradiction of being eternally subjected to change, as each of us is exposed in the social game to the differentiation from oneself and from the other. Being in the world is to be affected. The construction of identity is the “irreducible experience, the open meeting with the social and material world, denser than the densest description that one can make of it, and from which emerges the biographical experience of being affected” (Roth, 2003). Along the same lines, Adams and Marshall (1996) point out that

the process of formation of the identity is influenced by processes of a dialectical type, which involve conflict, incompatibility, inconsistency, and contradiction, followed by synthesis and/or resolution. (p. 435)

Thus, human transactions are contexts, par excellence, of the transformation of the self in the negotiation of meanings with the other. We consider that factors such as the strategies adopted in this negotiation; the devices utilized to institute the context of exchanges; the role of the communicative, metacommunicative, and extralinguistic contexts; as well as the degree of dependency from the other as a semiotic matrix, from which the subject himself engenders his personal meanings, concur to the configuration of the self modifying along the line of time, which characterizes the development.

### **Development of the self in deprivation of freedom**

We focus the contemporary context, with its own socializing practices, as a context of human development. Special emphasis has been given in our research to the contexts that combine poverty and violence, with emphasis on the issue of the development of adolescents who have committed serious offences, and who find themselves under socio-educative measure

(SEM) of deprivation of freedom (Lopes de Oliveira, 2004; 2003b; Lopes de Oliveira et al., 2004). In a perspective that has as a central aspect the mediation of the cultural context in the development of the self, the understanding of the condition of deprivation of freedom as a context of development of adolescents requires the analysis of the socio-historical formation of the culture of the juridical and of the notion of offending adolescent as part of this system.

Historiographic studies – such as those by Foucault (1979; 2000) and Castel (1978) – and empirical ones – among which Oliveira (2002) – point to the fact that the basis of the current juridical system is embedded in the practices that occurred since the 14th century in Europe of management of the poor and of all deviant identitary forms. Such social practices have contributed to the creation of devices dedicated to segregate the poor from within society, sometimes with the purpose of promoting their adjustment, sometimes to protect society from those who refused to adapt to a society in transformation, which became more and more dominated by the instrumental rationality.

According to Kolker (2004), between the 14th and the 18th centuries the penitentiary juridical model was outlined. This system associates in a same social device the punishment and the exclusion/isolation. At first, madmen, indigents, the ill, and the delinquent were all indistinctly confined into the same institutional spaces. In the 18th century takes place the “process of specialization of the institutions in charge of sequestering the marginalized populations” (p. 163), leading to the perfecting of the instruments of social control.

With the consolidation of the modern capitalist society, a change occurred in the logic that presided over the correctional system. The latter moved progressively from the punishment of the offense to its prevention, leading to what Foucault (2000) calls the disciplinary society. The social discipline

operates through devices and techniques that seek to turn the subjectivities docile and subservient. They are put in practice in all social institutions, so as to traverse the social fabric through and through. They are subtle and painless mechanisms utilized to transform people into productive subjects, adapted to the social system. It is the case of the military discipline, of the time clock at the industry, of the school routines, among other, less perceptible ones, such as the gender inscription devices (Gilligan, 1982), the professional identity devices among youngsters, and of silent conversion of children into consumption subjects (Campos; Souza, 2003).

In this new model based on prevention, the notion of delict or infringement, that is, of the act that causes damage against the other or against property, was converted into that of delinquency, whose meaning is that of a violation of the social contract. This means that any transgression was then understood as an attack to the whole of society. Delinquency is related to moral deviation, irrationality, and tendency to act criminally, and its punishment “must take into account the profound nature of the criminal himself, the presumable degree of his wickedness, the intrinsic quality of his will” (Foucault, 2000, p. 90).

It is possible to notice in these developments by Foucault the way in which crime was gradually moved from the moral setting to the psychological, from dealing with the observable actions to the internal, subjective dimension of the criminal. It is in the context of this transition that emerges an important juridical concept: that of danger, which involves treating the infringement not in its materiality (what happened? how it happened?), but as virtuality (what is the social risk that X, in social risk, would break the law or that the offender Y would relapse into crime?). Danger is a forecast that materializes something that has not taken place. This notion justified the creation by criminology of a whole technical apparatus for evaluation, with the

purpose of gauging the social danger that the criminal represents. Perspectives such as that of danger, and to a certain extent that of prevention, adopt as a principle the naturalist and determinist conception of the self, along the lines we have been criticizing. It takes as a rule that the author of an infringement is of a bad character, immoral, untrustworthy. It reinforces the association between criminality and poverty outlined since the dawn of the constitution of the juridical, attributing to the subject the responsibility for his violent acts. In doing so, it does not admit the social co-responsibility for the production and banalization of violence.

It is important to note that the view of delinquency as following from an intrinsic tendency of the subject to criminality marks to this day the penal practices, resulting in wrong penalties and in low expectations by the institutional actors as to the potential for subjective change of those incurring in correctional measures (Silva, 2003).

The new narratives about human rights that have multiplied throughout the 20th century, and the proliferation of scientific evidence contrary to the naturalization of subjectivity and crime were not enough to alter the scenario. And neither were successful the international treaties established to eliminate the eugenic practices, the torture and inhumane treatments in altering the nature of the socio-educative measures aimed at punishing infringements, which continue to be oriented by the punishment-repression-discipline triad instituted for centuries as part of the juridical practices. This picture was not affected even by the Child and Adolescent Statute – CAS – (Act No 8069/1990), a device that aims at guaranteeing the protection of the rights of children and adolescents.

The CAS represents the practice of an infringement as a situation of conflict with the law, conditioned by various aspects such as the infringer's developmental, socio-cultural, and contextual factors. This scenario must be

changed by a socio-educative process that allows the adolescent to understand and situate him/herself before the phenomenon, promoting new life options (Volpi, 2000; 2001). The idea was to produce significant changes in the social service and representations of children and adolescents. According to Leite (apud Cury; Amaral; Mendez, 2000, p. 282), “the bodies responsible for this service had as their basic assumption to ‘reform’ the individual, shaping him/her to become a model citizen” through repression and violence, neglecting the schooling and professionalization of those under SEM. Such measures are applied according to the nature of the violation, to socio-familiar situation, and to existing state, municipal or regional programs and services.

According to Article 112 of the CAS, once verified the practice of an infringement, and being the latter described in Article 103 as crime or penal violation, the competent authority can apply to the adolescent socio-educative measures, which are divided in two groups: those with no deprivation of freedom (reprimand; obligation to remedy the damage; community service; and assisted freedom) and those with deprivation of freedom (regime of semi-freedom, and commitment to educational establishment).

Committal must be the last resort used with adolescents who have practiced serious offenses, and, if applied, should be periodically reassessed. It constitutes a measure that deprives the individual of the freedom to come and go, but does not remove his/her constitutional rights, such as education and professional qualification, and should not exceed the period of three years or the twenty-one years of age.

The life trajectory of the young offender committed to institutions in deprivation of freedom is marked by experiences of pain, suffering, humiliations, bad treatment, rebellions, escapes, and corruption. Marcilio (2001) summarizes the history of this measure telling that the idea of isolating delinquent

juveniles in total institutions with the purpose of recuperating them and returning them to society appeared at the end to the imperial period, repeating a trend common in Western European countries and in the USA. In the republican period, the growth of the cities led to the multiplication of this kind of institution. The reformatories, as they were called, accumulated the functions of correction and social hygiene. They isolated the “deviants from the order” to “prevent contamination” and teach them the need of behaviors and disciplines. Physical punishments were adopted as a means of obtaining obedience, discipline and order, with arduous daily routines starting at daybreak being imposed upon the interns.

Having these reflections in mind, how can we conceive of the contexts of deprivation of freedom as contexts of development, considering the possibility that the subject will live there for most of his/her adolescence? What does the micro-genetic focus on this context reveal?

It is legitimate to assume that the adolescent self formed in deprivation of freedom emerges through relations produced at the interface between the formal and non-formal semiotic systems of the institution. Among the former are its norms of operation, hierarchies, and devices of technical evaluation. Among the non-formal semiotic systems – and as active as the formal ones – we find the values and beliefs about criminality disseminated there, the subtle discipline mechanisms, the organizational culture, and the aspects of the juvenile culture of the interns. The human development in such contexts is also marked by the intercrossing of several institutional temporalities (the commitment period, the period of adolescence, the time of daily routines, the “time that does not pass” etc).

The interaction between these various aspects collaborates to the regulation of the conditions of self enunciation and expression among adolescents, defining limits to the development of the narrative self, with an

impact on the subjective unfolding of the measure. Understanding the specificity of these processes starting from the adolescents’ narratives, trying to turn the research into a context of promotion and reconfiguration of the self, and allowing the reflection of the institutional actors about the subjective effects of the forms of penalty adopted are guiding aspects of the work.

## **Method**

The adoption of the narrativist and dialogical perspective involves the commitment to the project in which the narratives investigated and their interpretation can offer reliable clues about the process of formation of the self of those that are in the position of subjects of the enunciation. The analysis of the narrative that we implement in our work is coherent with the qualitative research, incorporating elements of discursive psychology (Potter, 2003; Linnel, 1998), of the analysis of conversation, and of ethnomethodology (Coulon, 1993; Heritage, n/d), in an approximation to micro-genetics analysis. The perspectives focused here approach the narratives as part of social practices, having as common principles: (1) the focus on the interaction, that is, on meanings produced in the encounter of interlocutors and, at the same time, on each particular segment of the enunciation. It is assumed that the researcher is a privileged mediator in the resignification of the self of the interviewees, and that the setting of the research promotes reconfigurations in the interactive context and in the institutional relations, engendering the experience of alterity among the participants, and promoting conditions for the global development (Kraus, 2000); and (2) the vision that the discursive practices are oriented towards action, organized rhetorically, and expressing the institutional insertion of the contexts in which they are produced. Every enunciation produces effects upon those who speak, those who listen, and upon the



interactional context itself, translating simultaneously those who speak and that which is spoken through specific discursive and meta-communicative devices (Lopes de Oliveira, 2002).

In the ongoing research, the records are objects of our analysis, narratives produced in the researcher-adolescents interaction, as well as by the adolescents in peer groups. They are records obtained in sessions of direct observation and video recording of institutional routines in centers of internment of offending adolescents. Emphasis has been given to reports produced basically in three situations: (a) semi-structured interviews; (b) interactions in situations of psychopedagogical intervention; and (c) spontaneous interactions in the institutional context. Each of these systems of elaboration of information presents its own conditions and possibilities of production of narratives, offering clues to the understanding of the identity processes at play.

Take part in the study adolescents between the ages of 14 and 21, of both sexes, with predominance of the male, interns of two institutions of deprivation of freedom in the Brazilian Midwest in consequence of serious offenses associated to involvement in drug abuse and/or traffic.

## Results and discussion

The dialogical sequence depicted here took place between one of the participants and the researcher during a psychopedagogical intervention. At the time, the group studied was preparing a newsletter with the use of tools of educative informatics. In the text he produces while dialoguing with the researcher, Jorge<sup>1</sup> discusses the relations between family, police, drugs, and delinquency in the process of his own subjective formation. The issues intentionally presented by the researcher serve as a context for him to initiate a process of reflection about his life history prior to his internment.

We present the sequence in two parts, expressing moments of the process of

resignification of the self, of the delinquent acts, and of the social others. It is noticed that in the development of the interaction, the adolescent assumes a more and more central subjective position in his narrative. For the purposes of the analysis, we point out this movement with respect to the family figures, and then with respect to the other figures more closely related to criminality (corruption, drug dealers, police, and partners in the offenses):

(S1) Researcher: *“So, are you going to suggest a solution in your text?”*

(S2) Jorge: *“I’ll drop it, it’s too hard. It’s all corruption, ain’t it man?”*

(S3) Researcher: *“But, then, how do you think it can be changed? It’s difficult, but how could it be changed?”*

(S4) Jorge: *“Well, I think people are well aware of it, at least most of them, but it’s no good because people can’t do anything against drug dealers; they are stronger. So...”*  
*[does not finish]*

(S5) Researcher: *“This issue of ‘awareness’: people talk so much about this. How do you see this?”*

(S6) Jorge: *“I have it to me that it has to come from the education that the father shows to his children as they grow up and so on. Explain to them, to teach them what is right and what is wrong, what is the drug, where it takes, so that the person can choose the right way. Although many people have this idea, but don’t follow it... like me...”*

(S7) Researcher: *“Your father gave you this education?”*

(S8) Jorge: *“Oh, and then some! If education did it... but I wanted to have money, to have the finest things, and so I began to steal. How many times I got home with CD and players, and my father would say ‘you’re gonna get a beating, boy’, and he would still go after the*

**1.** Fictitious name of an 18 year-old who at the time of the research data-collecting had been for five months under socio-educative internment measure as a result of his taking part in a robbery.

owner to return it.”

(S9) Researcher: “Wow, he was probably very upset, no?”

(S10) Jorge: “Uh, a lot. I still regret it”.

The questions posed by the researcher at the beginning of the interactive sequence (S1 and S3) invite the adolescent to reflect on the processes of change in general. When answering, Jorge speaks of ‘the other’, a generic and little defined alterity: “*It’s all corruption*”, “*people are well aware of it*”, “*the father shows to his children*”. He refers to themes in which he is deeply implicated, but he does it in the third person, as if they did not involve aspects of his own history. This is obtained with the help of enunciative devices that keep him away from the signification processes engendered in the text. In (S6), at last, Jorge seems to move to the center of the narrative: “*many people have this idea, but don’t follow it... like me...*”. The long pauses between these words and the emotional tone revealed in his speech from this point onwards suggest the moment of becoming aware and identifying with the position of author and protagonist of the history narrated.

By accepting the theme of ‘awareness’ (S6) picked from his text by the researcher, Jorge refers to the emotion-loaded experience that was his delinquency trajectory, and to the conflicts faced in the family relationships on account of it: “*How many times I got home with CD and players, and my father...*”. The emotional manner in which he here recollects and narrates offers an indication that those were foundational events in the formation of his current self-image, something stressed by the repeated use of interjections such as “*Oh*”, “*Wow*”, and “*Uh*” (S8, S9, S10), and also by the guilt and regret brought to the narrative scene amidst the taking conscience of the error. To Rey (2003), this taking conscience is an essential moment in the redefinition of the subjectivity, because it reveals the intentionality and the quality of the experience in the relation between the subject and his/her complex psychological

world. By investigating narratively his own history, Jorge takes a stance with respect to facts that express his double condition as an active subject determined by the space-time in which his action is inserted: “*...I wanted to have money, to have the finest things, and so I began to steal*”; and at the same time a product of a consumer society that imposes the wish for “*the finest things*” and author of a personal trajectory in which consumption is mediated by the practice of offenses.

Taking this stance is not, however, a linear process. In the process of constructions of significations, Jorge’s narrative is filled with contradictory meanings and affections, all of them extracted from the socio-historical matrix. Examples of this contradiction are: “*people are well aware of it*” / “*but it’s no good because people can’t do anything against drug dealers*”; in (S2) and (S4): “*[awareness] has to come from the education*” / “*If education did it...*”; and in (S2): “*many people have this idea*” / “*but don’t follow it*”. Rossetti-Ferreira (2004) stresses the importance of contradiction and of reflection for the development, as they favor the construction of new senses. In the final part of the narrative, Jorge presents a narrative synthesis of the subjective processes engendered by the interactive situation: “*I still regret it*”. This last enunciation seems to establish a link between the subjective meaning and the meaning attributed by the family to the offenses he committed, as the theme of the narrative migrates from the education of the population to the familiar education and thence to Jorge’s relationship with his father. This is noticed by the researcher, who then continues the dialogue:

(S11) Researcher: “*And if it was your son, how would you educate him?*”

(S12) Jorge: “*With the experience I’m having, I wouldn’t beat him. It’s not that I think it was wrong for my father to beat me; each person has his type of education. Sometimes he thought that would help, but it didn’t,*

with somebody else it might help, but not with me. The first time he told me 'Do you want to steal, punk? Then go on'. Then he took me to the DPJ. I think this is important, the father wants to show to the son where the world of crime really takes you, he asks authorization and takes the son on a tour, showing him the CIP, the CIA, the CPP<sup>2</sup>. I would take my son and leave him there for a while, and if I saw that he was still doing it and hadn't changed I would take him to the judge before he did it again. Eventually he would learn."

(S13) Researcher: "You would do this yourself to your son?"

(S14) Jorge: "I would."

(S15): Researcher: "Your father would do this?"

(S16): Jorge: "After I left the provisional, I continued to hang around with a certain element my father didn't want me to. I was at the door of the house, working with a car stereo or something, and he called the police because he saw us working with a stereo and said: 'Look, my son is in the car theft business, disassembling cars.' I got home and found my mother crying. Then she said 'Your father called the police.' I asked her 'Why?'. She said 'He saw that you're still stealing cars.' I went to have a shower. Didn't make much of it. Then I was going to go out with some friends, when someone banged at the door, almost broke it, and went to see what it was. The guys asked who was Jorge, and I said 'It's me'. They already handcuffed me, asked where the car was, and started beating me. I said there was no car. My father felt it; he saw that it was not what he expected. What he wanted was for somebody to go there and talk to me. He saw that the thing was rough. He said to the cops that it was exactly like that, that I was just beginning to get involved again with the boys. The cop chewed him out 'Hey, this is no playground here. This is a shock troop; it's not to educate your children.' My father said 'I don't know what I

do with this boy'. Then the cops told me 'You punk, your father is an old man, are you not ashamed?' They beat me and my father saying 'Don't hit him'. The cops would say 'You called us, now shut up'."

(S17) Researcher: "They beat you a lot?"

(S18) Jorge: "My goodness. The neighbors were all car thieves; they saw three ROTAM<sup>3</sup> vehicles at the door of my house, they went crazy. My father felt sick, and we didn't speak for a week, me and him."

(S19) Researcher: "And how were your feelings towards your father after that?"

(S20) Jorge: "I was not angry at him. Right at the time I didn't know if I felt sorry for him, pity, or... love too. Man, he is my old man, and he didn't know what to do anymore, the guy was not aware of what he was doing anymore, he was going mad with me. My father was getting old, all white haired. But it's that thing, the friends, isn't it."

The direction given to the conversation by the researcher through the questions presented in (S11): "And if it was your son?"; in (S13): "You would do this yourself to your son?" and in (S15): "Your father would do this?", engender an exercise of reversibility in which Jorge alternates between the positions of son and father, furnishing a context for the evaluation, criticism, and understanding of the attitudes taken by his progenitor in his attempt to prevent the irreversible involvement of his son with a career in crime.

In (S12), when he says: "With the experience I'm having,..." and "Eventually he would learn.", and also in (S10), when stating that he regrets to this day not having answered his father's calls for not going back to delinquency, Jorge marks discursively the importance of the present moment – which involves the socio-educative measure, the

**2.** These are all acronyms of juridical and penal institutions of the region.

**3.** ROTAM (from the Portuguese *Metropolitan Tactical Ostensive Patrol*) is the division of the Military Police that deals with large situations and highly dangerous cases.

opportunity for professionalization in informatics, and the participation in the research – in the possibility of taking up new positions of self with respect to his father, his family, society or the institution where he carries out socio-educative measure. In this same discursive stretch, his speeches are characterized by contradictory significations. At times he identifies with his father (*Then he took me to the DPJ. I think this is important, the father wants to show to the son where the world of crime really takes you,...*); at times he criticizes him (*[if I had a son] I wouldn't beat him*), although he seems to respect his father's motivations (*It's not that I think it was wrong for my father to beat me; each person has his type of education.*). In certain passages, Jorge shows himself as a more severe father than his own: *I would take my son and leave him there for a while, and if I saw that he was still doing it and hadn't changed I would take him to the judge before he did it again. Eventually he would learn.*

Despite recognizing the specificity of the activity system in which Jorge makes this last statement, in which the adolescent seeks coherence with the image of someone “who now respects the law and order, and recognizes the need for limits”, we must consider this enunciation as part of a chain of previous sequences in which he was passing judgments of value about the role of the father: “Everybody blames also the parents, but it's not always them” (extracted from another episode of the same session) or in (S6): “[the father must] *explain to them, to teach them what is right and what is wrong, what is the drug, where it takes, so that the person can choose the right way*”.

Stretch (S16) marks the moment when Jorge synthesizes narratively the restored image of his father amidst his reminiscences about the episode that marked the loss of his freedom. They are vivid, intense reminiscences that bring back dramatically, in direct discourse, the voices of his father, mother, of the police and his own

voice; and indirectly the voices of the neighbors, of the ‘element’ and of ‘the boys’ with whom he practice delinquency, configuring the climax of the narrative. In it, amidst the game of identification with the positions of the son ‘that doesn't make much of it’, and of the father who tries to transmit values of conduct and orientation to his children, Jorge moves from the passive condition (of the person who offends because he hangs around with offenders) to the active one (of the person that is capable of understanding his father's motives); or to put it in another way, from the person who saw himself as a car stereo thief to the person who identifies the need to guide the son and that, if failing to fulfill his role, must ask the judge for help, as he revealed he would do (S12) or to the police, as the father did (S16): “*he didn't know what to do anymore, the guy was not aware of what he was doing anymore, he was going mad with me; “What he wanted was for somebody to go there and talk to me.”*”

When seeing himself in this double condition, Jorge becomes capable of forgiving his father (S20): “*I was not angry at him. Right at the time I didn't know if I felt sorry for him, pity, or... love too. Man, he is my old man.*”

If on one hand the family, and especially the father, participates in Jorge's narrative as characters that measured the constructions of new significations around delinquency, on the other hand it is important to consider the role played there by the institutions directly linked to criminality. Right at the start of the sequence, he brings up the themes of corruption and drug dealers to state both the population's lack of power with respect to the latter (S4), and the power of education in the prevention of the involvement with drugs (S6). In (S12) also enter his narrative the juridical institutions that he thinks should be better known by the teenagers in an attempt to prevent delinquency, although the strategy did not work in his own case. Up to this point the approach to these issues is essentially generic, where Jorge's own self does not seem to be

implied, although expressing clearly the contradictions from which he can engender new significations about the themes under focus.

It is, however, exactly in (S16) that the topic becomes more full of meaning, when the social subjectivity of the police emerges. His father calls the police in a last attempt to get the son away from delinquency, but what comes is a repressive police that beats up, handcuffs, and acts violently towards both the adolescent and his family, patronizing them (*The cop chewed him out 'Hey, this is no playground here...'*) and threatening them (*'This is a shock troop; it's not to educate your children', 'You called us, now shut up'*). This brings us back to the socio-juridical devices that historically led to the approach to poverty as a form of social deviation and to the close association between poverty and violence, as Foucault (1979; 2000) and Kolker (2004), amongst others, point out.

Still, one must admit that the mediation of the police – and the reminiscence of the events and their resignification in the context of the interview – was an important element in the process of overcoming the resentment towards the father, as Jorge expressed in (S15). Bringing the police in, his father contributed to determine Jorge's commitment, since that was not his first offense. On the other hand, the behavior of the police allowed Jorge to recognize his father's vulnerability, for although the latter had not committed any crime, he became a victim of the repressive police attitude, a condition in which he begins to identify with his son. This is a clear example of a situation of crisis that ends up promoting a subjective development and the development of the social system of those involved.

### **Final considerations**

We have tried to make clear in the analyses above the importance of the dialogical exchanges between researcher and participant, by opening opportunities for Jorge to reflect, reconsider, and

rebuild meanings about specific events of his life. As an eminently dialogical context, the verbal interactions present the interlocutors with opportunities of expression of themselves, and engender processes of resignification of the self and of its internal and external reorganization as part of the dialectical game between permanence and change in time.

The permanence of oneself, supported by practices of sustaining of the self (Chandler, 2000), reflects the need for narrative coherence of the self in time. The devices of sustaining of the self are activated especially when changes occur which are perceived as threatening, that is, when the flux of development begins to cause suffering and the present needs to be persevered at any cost. The self remains as if frozen in an eternal present. In this case, and in order that subjective changes can take place, the role of the emotions – an intrinsic part of the intersubjective processes – is essential, constituting important factor to mediate the transformations of the self. Everything points to the fact that the emotion acts in a direction opposite to the devices of sustaining of the self, that is, as an element of rupture of the coherence of the self in time, producing contradiction in the structure of the self, that narrow crack through which change becomes possible. The episode related here is charged with opportunities of this type, as the emotional expressions (pauses, cry, excitation, and sadness) that appeared in stretches (S4), (S6), (S12), (S16), and (S20) make clear.

Considering that the narratives constitute the micro-genetic context in which the subjects build, against the backdrop given by the socio-institutional context, a sense of self intersubjectively sustained, lasting events such as those narrated by Jorge usually have special impact upon development.

By converting these events into narratives and in objects of negotiation of meanings in the dialogical situation, they are resignified, with the possibility of promoting changes in the subject, as we could observe in the case narrated here.

The significations constructed by Jorge express a balance between the self-image of a delinquent and that of a citizen conscious of his mistakes and in process of change.

Considering the nature of the systems of social signification in which delinquency is inserted, it is not an easy task, for Jorge or for anyone, to succeed in such resignification. According to Foucault (2000; p. 90), the social production of delinquency has led to the representation of offenses as forms of “moral deviation, irrationality, and tendency to act criminally”, through discourses of naturalization and attribution to the perpetrator of the sole

responsibility for his acts, which influences directly the social practices through which delinquency is approached. If we can summarize the success of the socio-educative measures, and among them of those of deprivation of freedom, as the possibility of the adolescent recognizing him/herself through different images of self, giving up devices of preservation of the self-image of an offender in favor of new alternatives of self, identified with the creation, production and new agendas of social and political insertion, we have to reflect upon and transform the semiotic practices and systems that restrict such possibility.

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