

YOUNG PEOPLE IN PSYCHOSOCIAL VULNERABILITIES: THE GROUP AS A DEVICE FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT AND POLITICAL SUBJECTIVATION

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ABSTRACT. This article aimed to report an experience developed at a Service of Coexistence and Strengthening of Bonds (SCSB) with young people from outskirts of the city of Florianópolis (SC) problematizing the possibilities and challenges of the use of the group as a psychosocial intervention device. This service, linked to the Basic Social Protection of the National Social Assistance Policy, aims to prevent situations of risks and vulnerabilities, as well as strengthen family and community bonds. Through group intervention, we sought, along with these young people, to create a space of psychic and political elaboration on themes that are significant for their lives and for the current society. We believe that the workshops allowed the construction of a collective space that served as support for the ethical-political suffering of these young people, and also served as a catalyst for the processes of political subjectification fighting the social inequities that permeate the daily lives of these young people. In this work, we brought reflections about the potential that the group device can trigger in the constitution of the subject, understanding it as a useful tool for psychosocial intervention of listening, support, community strengthening and political protagonism.

Keywords: Youngers; vulnerability; groups.

JOVENS EM VULNERABILIDADES PSICOSSOCIAIS: GRUPO COMO LUGAR DE ACOLHIMENTO E SUBJETIVAÇÃO POLÍTICA

RESUMO. Este artigo visa relatar uma experiência de estágio realizado em um Serviço de Convivência e Fortalecimento de Vínculos (SCFV) junto a jovens de periferias da cidade de Florianópolis (SC), de modo a problematizar as possibilidades e desafios do uso do dispositivo grupal como instrumento de intervenção psicossocial. Este serviço, vinculado à Proteção Social Básica da Política Nacional de Assistência Social (PNAS), tem como

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objetivo prevenir as situações de riscos e vulnerabilidades, bem como fortalecer os laços familiares e comunitários. Por meio da intervenção grupal, buscamos, junto com estes(as) jovens, criar um espaço de elaboração psíquica e política sobre temas significativos para suas vidas e para a atual sociedade. Apostamos na ideia de que as oficinas propiciaram a construção de um espaço coletivo que servisse de acolhimento ao sofrimento ético-político destes(as) jovens, subsidiando um afago às dores da vida e, também, servindo de catalisador aos processos de subjetivação política frente às iniquidades sociais que atravessam, sistematicamente, o cotidiano destes(as) jovens. Neste trabalho, trazemos reflexões em torno das potencialidades que o dispositivo grupal pode desencadear na constituição do sujeito, compreendendo-o como uma profícua ferramenta de intervenção psicossocial de escuta, acolhimento, fortalecimento comunitário e protagonismo político.

Palavras-chave: Jovens; vulnerabilidade; grupos.

JÓVENES EN VULNERABILIDADES PSICOSOCIALES: GRUPO COMO UN SITIO DE RECEPCIÓN E SUBJETIVACIÓN POLÍTICA

RESUME. Este artículo tiene por objeto relatar una experiencia realizada en un Servicio de Convivencia y Fortalecimiento de Vínculos (SCFV) junto a jóvenes de periferias de la ciudad de Florianópolis (SC), de modo a problematizar las posibilidades y desafíos del uso del dispositivo grupal como instrumento intervención psicossocial. Este servicio, vinculado a la Protección Social Básica de la Política Nacional de Asistencia Social (PNAS), tiene como objetivo prevenir las situaciones de riesgos y vulnerabilidades, así como fortalecer los lazos familiares y comunitarios. Por medio de la intervención grupal, buscamos, junto con estos jóvenes, crear un espacio de elaboración psíquica y política sobre temas significativos para sus vidas y para la actual sociedad. Apostamos en la idea de que los encuentros propiciaron la construcción de un espacio colectivo que sirviera de acogida al sufrimiento ético-político de estos jóvenes, subsidiando un ahogo a los dolores de la vida y, también, sirviendo de catalizador a los procesos de subjetivación política frente a las iniquidades sociales que atraviesan sistemáticamente el cotidiano de estos jóvenes. En este trabajo, traemos reflexiones en torno a las potencialidades que el dispositivo grupal puede desencadenar en la constitución del sujeto, comprendiéndolo como una útil herramienta de intervención psicossocial de escucha, acogida, fortalecimiento comunitario y protagonismo político.

Palabras clave: Jóvenes; vulnerabilidad; grupos.

Introduction

This article aimed to report the experience of a professional internship in psychology held in two Service of Coexistence and Strengthening of Bonds (SCFV) – institutions linked to the Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS) - aimed at young people in the city of Florianópolis included in this policy as inserted in “situations of social risks and vulnerabilities” (PNAS, 2004).

In general terms, the concept of “social vulnerability” is understood by the National Social Assistance Policy as situations that make families and individuals unable to access any social right, having compromised the guarantee of their citizenship status. In summary, as pointed out by Cruz and Guareschi (2012), the notion of vulnerability intends to, at the

same time, incorporate and overcome the concept of poverty, understanding it as a process with precarious economic factors that favor the triggering of social risks.

We will start from the notion of social risk as indicated by the National Social Assistance Policy, which comprises the situation of vulnerability and social risk in the micro and macro-social dimension, including economic, institutional and psychosocial aspects. Situations of social vulnerabilities and risks are historical productions that generate inequalities in conditions and opportunities for different social groups, perpetuating an unequal and oppressive system for certain social strata. The so-called "social risk" groups are productions inherent to the capitalist system that needs relations of exploitation and oppression to be perpetuated. Thus, we understand poverty in its multidimensionality and heterogeneity where subjective and objective, singular and collective aspects intersect and are constituted.

Because we understand that the subjective and social dimensions cannot be dichotomized, although they are distinct spheres in which one does not succumb to the other, we will use in this article the term "psychosocial vulnerabilities" understood as the psychic frailties resulting from unfair and oppressive social situations that generate helplessness, suffering and violation of rights.

Based on this experience, our aim was to discuss the possibilities and challenges related to the use of the group resource as a psychosocial intervention device within the scope of this Policy³. In this article, we bring some reflections arising from this year and a half of group work with these young people who are systematically reified and violated by the neoliberal system, being perversely included in the capital-consumption logic. Setting up as the target audience of PNAS, more than providing answers, this study sought to elucidate issues around the objectives, possibilities and challenges of the work carried out by psychology in this public policy.

In this manuscript, initially, we present the intervention method and procedures, characterizing the dynamism and functioning of the group; then, we start the discussion of the results, which was divided into 2 main axes of analysis: the group as an intervention device for (dis)encounter with alterity; the group as a device for acceptance and political subjectivation. Finally, we raise questions and challenges that deserve to be objects of reflection in future studies.

Intervention method and procedures

The groups took place in two different neighborhoods of the city of Florianópolis during the periods from May to December 2015 and from April to July 2016. Several strategies were used to compose the groups: active search, referral from other institutions and telephone contacts with the families served by CRAS.⁴ On average, the groups were composed of 23 young people, mostly black, poor and residents of the outskirts. In general terms, we highlight the following characteristics of the groups: young people who were out of school or with school delays; from families belonging to the Bolsa Família program; served

³ SCFV is located in Basic Social Protection, therefore, it acts in a preventive logic based on coexistence and the strengthening of family and community bonds. The reference team for the SCFV should be composed of the reference technician, social advisor and/or social educator. The reference technician is a higher education professional who is part of the CRAS team that advises the social advisor - a position occupied by one of the authors of this article (MDS, 2015).

⁴ In those years in which the project was carried out - 2015 and 2016 - Florianópolis had 12 CRAS, all of which, as well as the CREAS, have tenured technical teams and are managed exclusively by the Municipal Department of Social Assistance without the participation of Social Organizations. This is a scenario that has been changing, especially after the approval of Law 10372/2018, which regulates the participation of Social Organizations in the execution of SUAS services.

by CREAS; PETI (Child Labor Eradication Program) graduates and young people with disabilities whose families were users of the Continuous Cash Benefit.

We start from the notion of device of Deleuze (1996) to understand the group as an intervention device, that is, an operator that produces enunciative clippings, a machine to make people see and make people talk. In other words, a device is what makes possible modes of singularization and subjectivation, producing new aesthetics of existence. Thus, the notion of device is linked to forms of creation, mutation, enunciative drifts, the unusual, the “lines that establish the coming and going between saying and seeing” (p.83).

Based on this notion that the group is not a product, but a constant process, each activity was proposed based on the demands, desires, conflicts and impacts that occurred in the previous meeting. We elaborated the project in a procedural perspective in which we carried out a horizontal analysis (reflections on intragroup relations) and vertical (analysis of the subjective and unique impacts of each participant). Understanding the group as a receptacle of (dis)identifications, projections, affections, conflicts, negotiations and tensions, we carried out a chain of group meetings in order to map advances, setbacks, repetitions and changes (Moreira, 2015; Castanho, 2018).

Through the use of the field diary, we tracked the meanings, acts, affections, narratives and testimonies to elaborate which themes and resources we would use in the next meeting. These choices and definitions were made together with the young people, as they increasingly became protagonists of group processes and we, on the other hand, increasingly occupied a supporting role in the decisions of the group. The debate on the use of the group as a working tool and its powerful subjective and political impacts are debated in the discussion of the results.

Discussion of results

The group as an intervention device between the intimate and the public: alterity and subject constitution

We start from the understanding that the group can be characterized as a useful intervention instrument for working in the PNAS by acting in the interstice of the singular/collective and the intimate/private. Depending on how it is managed, the group can be a device to “make see and make people talk”, working as a symbolic operator that allows the circulation of the speech, opening up the processes of singularization of the subject (Broide & Broide, 2015).

Under this logic, we sought to inscribe a space so that these young people, who are daily made invisible and delegitimized by the hegemonic culture⁵, could have a place of speech and authorship about their experiences off/in life. We bet on the idea of Broide and Broide (2015) that “*narratives, when removed from invisibility and silence, are capable of inciting reflection on the reasons for their suffocation, thus becoming a political and subjective action of great magnitude*” (p.15).

Inversely to the punitive, moralistic and judicializing logic that supports many of the actions developed in SUAS (Oliveira, 2017), we sought to build a proposal in which the group is configured as a device for summoning the word, causing the encounter and estrangement with alterity. Through these subjective (dis)encounters, we bet on the idea that the group would serve as a space to access memories and affections, enabling these

⁵ On the notion of ideology and hegemony, see Chauí (2016).

subjects to create new sign references, producing new senses and subjective positions for their lives (Gomes, et.al., 2019).

Recurrently, the use of the group as a working tool in public policies is guided in a corrective, moralistic and judgmental way. Especially in services linked to social assistance, this posture becomes very present because the focus is on the impoverished segments of the population that, as Silva (2004) points out, when they emerged as a surplus that had no access to work, in the shift from the feudal system to the capitalist mode of production, they became the focus of control and surveillance by the State (Silva, 2004; Prado, 2012; Lima & Silveira, 2016).

The judicialization and criminalization of poverty have remnants to this day, especially in SUAS, where one of the biggest challenges is to overcome clientelistic practices and make this public policy an instrument for overcoming social inequalities and not merely a form of poverty compensation (Cruz & Guareschi, 2012; Oliveira, 2017).

In an attempt to escape the ideology that criminalizes, judges and rejects poor youths and those from the outskirts, we tried to open a space for these youths to have legitimated their place of rights and desires. To the extent that a group device moves away from an orthopedic posture, it can produce affections in the body, in the Spinoza sense, which increase the power to exist and expand (Sawaia, 1995, 2009), serving as a space for psychic elaboration and circulation of the desire that unties the subject from experiences that produce suffering (Broide & Broide, 2015).

We believe that the subjective stance taken by the coordinator who sought, at all times – not without stumbling and slips – to be there for whatever came to light, in a supporting and non-punitive way, enabled the construction of a solid and deep bond that served as substrate for young people to put themselves in an open and engaged posture in this collective. Qualified listening in SUAS can be understood, as Susin and Poli (2012) point out, as a device that gives way to the speech, based on ethics and commitment to the subject who speaks it as a singularity and not as a user in generic terms; that is, it is a work that seeks to include citizenship without excluding the subject. As suggested by Broide and Broide (2015), the ethics of listening to the subject in contexts of social vulnerabilities needs to break with the posture of guardianship, discipline and obedience to bureaucratic procedure and be guided by the search for the anchor lines that maintain the vitality of this subject, what makes them persist in living even in the face of so much pain and critical social situations.

Some situations such as threats from a young participant addressed to the intern, fights, disappearance of a cell phone – among other challenging situations that could easily have been conducted through a punitive and moralistic logic – were handled in order to strengthen, not break, the bond that was being built between the advisor and the group. These situations were crucial for them to seize that space as a place where they could bring their most intimate and difficult issues, without fear of being rejected, evaluated and judged.

Over time, we noticed that the intragroup relationship was strengthened and expanded beyond the time they were in the project, showing that this collective became a depository of affection and companionship (Broide & Broide, 2015). The group was, more and more, building a certain intersubjective corporeality (Sawaia, 1995; 2009) in which it assumed, more and more, the processes of choice and decision about the different directions that presented themselves as possibilities.

A fact that deserves to be highlighted and that, perhaps, represents an indicator of the self-management process and of collective protagonism – critical aspects for a group

process (Rivière, 2005; Castanho, 2018) – was when the intern would be absent for three weeks to enjoy their vacation period and, as directed by the Service, the project would continue, however, without the “psychology workshops”. Upon knowing about the intern’s vacation, one of the young people showed interest in being responsible for the group and for delivering the transportation voucher to other colleagues; then two other young women made themselves available to assist in the organization and monitoring of the collective during that period. At this point, they began to negotiate and share the roles and functions they would play in the absence of the intern. It was evident that it was difficult to negotiate this authorization with the management, but we managed and the group continued to meet systematically even without the presence of the intern. For us, this was one of the most significant achievements of this work: the group did not need us and self-existed through its affections, roles, responsibilities and desires.

This experience, like so many others, revealed the degree of importance that that collective space was taking shape in the lives of these young people. Evidently, we had flaws, gaps and difficulties, however, it is possible to notice how this space brought important subjective impacts in the lives of some of these young people. This was remarkable when, recently, a young man who was very involved in the project, approached the now former social advisor to talk about his current dilemmas and said “*that group saved lives and I didn’t even know it*”.

The group as a psychosocial intervention strategy: the group device as a place of acceptance and political subjectivation.

When group work starts, it is not known which paths this collective will take and how this intersubjective field will be configured. We were betting on work that had both a subjective and a political character; we thought of trying to set up a space that would bring listening and support to pain and suffering, enabling more aesthetic and creative actions (Sawaia, 2009) in their own lives; in the same way, we also wanted this collective to be the propellant of critical reflections on the scaffolding of the neoliberal system and its inexorable social inequities.

We were inspired by the concept of ethical-political suffering of Sawaia (2009), understood as the pain and sadness triggered by social injustices since “social inequality is characterized by a permanent threat to existence. It restricts experience, mobility, will and imposes different forms of humiliation” (p.369). In other words, we sought to implement work that was, at the same time, a promoter of mental health and citizenship, where supporting the speech could bring caress to the sorrows and reflections on the relations of domination inherent in the logic of the neoliberal system.

Thus, issues such as racism, gender relations, civil and military dictatorship, social movements, the multiple forms of violence (intra-family, sexual, State, police) and other key issues to be debated for the construction of a more democratic society were being elected by the group and becoming the guide of our interventions. Our group management tried to capture the most subtle symbolic expressions that emerged in group meetings, whether those that promoted protagonism and empowerment, or those that (re)produced the relations of oppression and subjugation.

One of the young, Renato (16 years old)⁶ was able to be the spokesperson (Rivière, 2005) of the collective and singular processes that were weaving and crisscrossing in the

⁶ All names used in this article are fictitious to preserve the anonymity of the subjects.

course of this project. Renato suffered numerous homophobic attacks on the part of several members of the group, especially the young Amanda (13 years old). At various times when homo-affective relationships were seen “as a sin” or as something “horrible, wrong and that should be prohibited” by some members, we sought to interrogate these fixed and crystallized oppressive models of heteronormative culture, stimulating debate through films, reports, images and dynamics. All the time, we questioned the places of speeches (Ribeiro, 2017) in which these discursive productions were woven, both in relation to issues of class, race, ethnicity and gender.

Initially, Renato behaved in the group from a subjective stance that promoted his heterosexuality and culturally stimulated virility in men. In the group context, he told how he “picked up the girls”, “kissed his friends”, among other stories, while, singularly, he sought the intern to vent about his crises, doubts and anxieties regarding his sexual desires for men. Renato was one of the most participative members of the group and showed how that space was being socially and psychologically important to his life.

During the course of the project, Renato asked for less and less the intern in individual spaces and was authorized to talk about his affective and sexual issues in the collective sphere, abandoning his old position of reiterating his heterosexuality and bringing his romantic adventures with a man for whom fell in love during the project period, even assuming to be homosexual for the whole group during a dynamic.

The group makes it possible for stories to meet and mismatch, inscribing important cracks that open up the processes of singularization. The identifications and differentiations that occur in the collective space make it possible for the history of one to become, at the same time, the history of everyone and no one, serving as a semblance so that each one can glue and detach in/from it what is possible at any given time.

Amanda, at first, entered into an extremely intense and repugnant relationship with Renato’s sexual and affective experiences; little by little, her hateful defense of homosexuality gave way to her desire for women. At the end of the project, Amanda was already openly telling the whole group that she “kissed a friend” and that she was “dating a girl from her school”.

The examples of Renato and Amanda reveal the strength that a group device can operate in the lives of its members, representing a space for subjective and political action, for mobilizing affections and memories, and also for fissures with oppressive logics and violator discursive.

We start from the notion of politics in Rancière (2006; 2010), who understands it as a sensitive way of thinking, apprehending and feeling social reality, having as a basis the aesthetic sharing that will constitute certain sensitive experiences, as well as make many others invisible. Thus, thinking about political acts implies including the subjective dimension in this process, as the aesthetic experience says about our “capacities and incapacities to decipher signs, give meaning to landscapes that impress us, being affected by what we live in our flesh. It is the texture of the aesthetic experience that defines a political transformation in the sharing of the sensitive” (Marques & Prado, 2018, p.67).

In the sharing of the sensitive, which is, by condition, unequal, there is a production of a “partless”, which are the groups made invisible in collective life (Rancière, 2006). The movements of political subjectivation are these events that deregulate and subvert places, functions and identities. In other words, politics occurs when certain devices cause disidentifications, a shuffling in the articulation of bodies, functions and norms, causing

ruptures in the hegemonic interpretive grammatical models, making subjects and voices emerge that did not have their place in the sharing of the sensitive.

In this way, we think that this group could represent a device of political subjectivation as, at times, it provoked “a disturbance in the sensitive, a singular modification of what is visible, sayable, countable” (Ranciere, 2006, p. 372), being a catalyzing space for processes of symbolic disidentification with its own identity places, in a movement towards the other, a heterological movement, producing precarious acts of dissent. Such a process can deregulate the sharing of the sensitive in the hierarchies of class, race, gender, and so many other naturalized articulations of certain normativities and social functions.

We think that the group device can serve as an instrument for expanding reflective horizons, awareness of the problems faced; as a space to collectivize singular demands; an encounter with alterity that enhances the process of creating strategies to face crises, vulnerabilities and social injustices. It also serves as a place for collective listening to tensions, suffering and traumatic situations, as the group becomes a support and a buffer for the various conflicts experienced by its members, serving as a space for new symbolic elaborations and meanings for the experiences, whether through identifications, negotiations and/or tensions.

Final considerations

In this work, we developed some reflections on the use of the group as a possibility of psychosocial intervention that can assume both a subjective and a political character. From a group intervention with young people from the outskirts, we brought some excerpts from this experience in order to raise questions about the place of psychology within a Service of Coexistence and Strengthening of Bonds.

We bet on the idea that a supporting group listening allows subjects to talk about the unspeakable that permeated their daily lives, providing a place to speak for their situations of social and subjective helplessness. Interventions like this can operate as a microspace that favors the production of subtle and important differences for the production of a more satisfying, pleasurable and politicized life, both in singular and collective terms. It is up to psychology to reinvent intervention strategies that focus on the ethical-political suffering generated by social injustices, building breaches of resistance to the multiple forms of oppression of contemporary society, acting in the promotion of desires and human rights. But, also, in the capacity of disidentification with social places of privileges and powers, in the displacement of subjects towards the other, in a movement of alterity capable of producing new identifications and life projects.

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