

From Bodily Representations to Object Disinvestment: Analysis of The Narcissistic Withdrawal of Deaf Adolescents in Cameroon



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ABSTRACT: The puberty period for deaf adolescent requires psychic and physical reorganisation (body experienced, body spoken) as well as in their emotional relationships. The aim is to analyze the unconscious psychic processes in hearing impaired adolescents in order to better understand the issues of libidinal investments and the quality of bodily representations. Three clinical interviews and three Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) as a projective test were conducted with three adolescents met at the National Rehabilitation Center for Persons with Disabilities -Etoug-Ebe (CNRPH) in Yaoundé, Cameroon. The results show that bodily experiences and representations seem to function as vulnerabilities for these hearing-impaired adolescents. When interacting with family and peers, there is a disinvestment in objects in favour of an overinvestment in narcissism (narcissistic withdrawal).

KEYWORDS: Body representations, libidinal investments, adolescent, handicap, hearing loss.

1- INTRODUCTION

The sense organs play a vital role in the relational and emotional life of all individuals in general and disabled people in particular (Weygand, 2009). Disabled adolescents are confronted with affective and relational difficulties, so bodily representations and libidinal investments seem relevant in understanding sexuality and the representations they have of their bodies during this period of development. The approach here is based on the angle of juvenile friendships, affective relationships with those around them, particularly from the economic point of view of the distribution of sexual energy, which is the libido, and narcissistic representations (body) of these hearing-impaired adolescents.

As part of the activities of the psychosocial care service for disabled people at the CNRPH, it was observed that some hearing-impaired adolescents declared that they were frustrated by the question of sexuality, which created emotional disturbances in their relationships with their peers, family, and friends and in their representations of their bodies. Gaydard (2005) shows that the emotional problems faced by disabled adolescents have an impact on their self-image, as they feel the need to demonstrate a certain normality. In the same line of thought, it is important to highlight the extreme complexity of the reactions of those around disabled adolescents, particularly in relation to their sexuality.

A number of studies have highlighted the sexuality and self-esteem of adolescents with genital disabilities (Alvin, 2005 ; Gaydard, 2005 ; Marcelli, 2005). They did not take into account the affective relationships in juvenile friendships and those with the entourage in the economic sense.

However, the libido of hearing-impaired teenagers is also expressed in their relationships with peers and/or family, and their self-esteem also resides in the representations they have of their bodies. The study posits the problem of the mode of libidinal investment with regard to the quality of the bodily representations that the hearing-impaired adolescent makes of himself and as he might be perceived in the TAT examination. The question is therefore to know how the mode of libidinal investments is accompanied by the quality of bodily representations in hearing impaired adolescents through the TAT?

2- METHODOLOGY

The study is based on a qualitative approach and the clinical research method, which is centered on the study of the human subject in his or her uniqueness, personal history and experiences (Douville, 2006; Mucchielli, 2009). The projective approach is also used

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to understand the subject's psychic functioning, which favours the ability to rehearse interpersonal relationships that may reveal the intensity of a loss experience and oedipal structuring (Brelet- Foulard & Chabert, 2003; Anzieu & Chabert, 2011). This is a study of three cases of hearing-impaired adolescents seen at the CNRPH in Yaoundé, Cameroon. The participants are aged 19, 20 and 22 respectively. They were admitted to the CNRPH following complaints from their parents about their isolation from others. Participants were selected based on the inclusion criteria linked to their developmental period and their condition as hearing impaired. They were interviewed in the psychological center care room. In total, two sessions per participant were used to conduct an interview lasting about an hour and a session to complete the TAT charts. The semi-directed and projective approaches were adopted. The verbatim were recorded using a dictaphone and fully transcribed. To pass on the TAT plates, the instructions were as follows: 'Imagine a story based on the plates' (Brelet-Foulard & Chabert, 2003). The plates were successively shown to hearing-impaired teenagers, depending on their age and gender. The plates presented are numbers 1,2,3BM,4,5,6BM,7BM,6GF,7GF,12BG,19, and 16. These plates encourage the structuring of manifest content along with latent solicitations. Following the test, the data was analysed, the scores were assigned according to the register of each speech and, finally, the interpretations were made.

Pseudonyms (Kévin, Philomene, Jean) were assigned to participants to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Each participant agreed to take part in the study, so they signed an informed consent form after being informed that the aim of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of how they perceive their bodies and their emotional relationships with their peers and family.

III- RESULTS

A- Giving meaning to the disabled body and the object of representations

Mr Kevin is 19 years old, the first of five siblings, he was born with full hearing. He was admitted to the CNRPH after being diagnosed with hearing loss due to meningitis. He says he is very limited and cannot do everything as others. Kevin says that his parents understand and support his disability. But his relationship with his brothers and sisters is sometimes disrupted because of his hearing difficulties. Participant Philomène is 22 years old and the second of seven siblings. She has been admitted to the CNRPH for about ten years. She has been hearing impaired since childhood, and was diagnosed following an ear operation by a team of Italian doctors at Yaoundé General Hospital. At the age of 15, her hearing loss became more pronounced. Participant Jean is 20 years old and the third of four siblings. He has a hearing impairment as a result of otitis at the age of three. At the age of 12, his hearing difficulties became worse, which resulted to his admission at the CNRPH. He did not continue his studies and for the past two years he has been training to work in a welding workshop.

For the participants, the unpleasant experiences resulting from the messages and the gaze of others signal a feeling of disintegration, the body fragmenting and the sensation that the subject no longer recognizes himself in front of the mirror. For Kevin and Philomène, it appears to be the expression of a hindered body image accompanied by a feeling of abandonment of bodily care. Thus, the bodily effraction (stigma) experienced by the subjects would have induced an experience of agony on the subjects' capacity for symbolization, thus affecting the psyche (Tchokote, 2022)

This can be seen in the participants' comments: "But sometimes when I think that others are underestimating me because of my disability, I sometimes neglect myself and my clothes too, because girls don't see my beauty but rather my disability" (Kevin); "because of all that, sometimes I neglect myself, for example the old hairstyles and also the clothes, because a girl makes herself beautiful for the man who loves her" (Philomène). For the participant Jean, bodily representations are not concretely articulated in his speech, although certain elements are clearly stated. He expresses a feeling of guilt about his appearance, saying: '...I'm not very gallant, I don't know if I'm handsome [...]'. Jean expressed a lack of interest in the body image leading to a rejection of his body. Coping strategies are noticeable in Jean, as the comparison with other adolescents in his age group. existential questions are formulated 'what meaning do I give to my life?', which give rise to identity disorders 'who am I, the hearing-impaired man who has become a man?' and devaluing feelings. We can therefore observe a variability in the psychic work of accepting one's body.

This representation of the body gives an important place to questions linked to affectivity and to what the other person thinks of the disability (Anquetil, 2020). The body thus becomes the subject of perception, emotions and thoughts. The function of representation is underpinned by the perceptual experience of disability.

B- body and object investment, the disabled body in its relationship with others

The participants' psychic work is marked by a self-centeredness that indicates a narcissistic withdrawal. The partial withdrawal of object investments is observed in favour of narcissistic investments. When confronted with his brothers' regard for him, Kevin declares: "I sometimes prefer to keep quiet to avoid problems". These verbatim testify to an associative sequence, showing the impulsive constraint and narcissistic withdrawal in place. He says: 'Hearing people are free to choose, but hearing-impaired people are not free...'. This reveals a narcissistic reinvestment that turns into suffering. In the case of Jean, the narcissistic withdrawal is visible and he expresses it in his speech in the following terms: 'friendships are limited and that leads to loneliness, disappointment and frustration, I feel diminished'.

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For participants Philomene and Jean, the nature of the objectal relationships with the family environment seemed satisfactory and few affects are associated with it. Jean explains that 'our family is the only protective framework...it's the only place where we can easily forget our disability and it helps us a lot to overcome external problems'. This marks the objectal relationship with the parents and siblings, who play a supportive and socio-affective scaffolding role in relation to these adolescents. On the other hand, Kevin's feelings of discomfort and boredom reduced him to a position of withdrawal, unease and sometimes aggressive passivity.

On the social aspect, all the participants expressed difficulties in their relationships with peers, giving rise to feelings of shame, guilt, rejection and discrimination. Object investment seems to be marked by negative affects following disappointments and frustrations. Jean declares: 'I find it difficult to take part in a discussion with friends'. There is an expression of an ideal being pursued and of the forces that are an obstacle. A weakening of the internal psychic world is observed, with strong demands on both narcissistic bases and object investments (Jeammet & Corcas, 2001).

C- Body representations and echoes of disability from the TAT

The bodily representations in the participants' protocol are marked by the presence of processes of the "emergence of primary processes" (E) type, which refers to perceptions linked to sick and malformed personages (Kevin, Philomene and Jean), to the expression of a sexual and aggressive theme and of a false perception (Philomene and Jean), of a false perception and instability of objects (Philomene) and perception of strange details with or without arbitrary justification (Jean), a projection of the negative (Kevin and Philomene). On plates 8BM and 10 Kevin says respectively: 'the boy is dreaming, some time ago he was ill and he was being injected', 'mummy crying with a corpse on her hand'. On plate 12BG Philomène says: 'a pirogue abandoned on the edge of the forest'. On panel 8BM Jean says: 'a patient attacked by bandits is receiving treatment in hospital'. This reveals the participants' psychic integration of a bodily representation affected by disability into their identity foundation.

The narcissistic modes of investment are perceived in the participants' protocols through the processes linked to conflict avoidance (series C), in particular the process of narcissistic investment of the subject (CN). In Kevin's case, the emphasis is on the subjective experience or personal references, as there is a staging of the 'persona' that he over-invests in as a representation of himself in a negative way, emphasizing the subjective experience through a detailed description of affects. In Plate 3BM, he describes 'a young girl crouching down, she looks as if she's ashamed of something', and through personal references Kevin tells his own story, presupposing a representation of himself and a self-centeredness that momentarily excludes the other from sexualized investment. In the case of Philomene and Jean, we notice narcissistic details and an insistence on boundaries, contours and sensory qualities. The idealization of the negative representation of self and the representation of an object that is ideally less good and powerless. In Plate 4 Philomene says: 'the woman loves sincerely but the man doesn't love her', Jean specifies that 'the girl loves the man but he doesn't want her'. This process shows the investment of body envelopes and the reinforcement of the inside/outside boundary by delimiting the contours in the discourse of Philomene and Jean. In plate 12BG Jean says: 'A pirogue arrives at the water's edge of a forest', 'a pirogue abandoned at the edge of the forest'.

The object investment modes are perceptible through the processes that reflect the relational dynamics of the participants. Thus, we can observe a dominant presence of labile processes, in particular the emphasis on interpersonal relations, the expression of affects, contrasting representations and affects, representations of action associated with the disaster, narcissistic details with a seductive value (Kevin, Philomene and Jean), dramatization through exaggerated affects (Kevin), the introduction of characters not appearing in the image (Jean). The process linked to the participants' investment in the relationship involves an intrapsychic conflict in a libidinal register indicating an increase in representations that refer to speculative nature, to the idealization of the relationship, to the object's supporting function or involving movements of overflowing aggression. In Plate 4, Kevin explains that 'a man who doesn't want to listen to the woman, the girl insists but he doesn't want to'. In all the participants of the study, the object investments are impoverished, meaning that the relationship with the other is invested in, but in a precarious way. Also on plate 6BM Jean says 'a grandmother and her son are talking through the window'. On plate 6GF, Philomene says that 'the boy is studying and his dad is causing him problems and he's asking him why'. We can notice that Kevin and Jean manage to project a representation of a heterosexual couple in a relationship that is both loving and supportive. For Philomene, the relationship is one of dependence.

D- Confused representation of the body, instability of identity foundations and difficulty in appropriating the self-identity of the body

The protocol of Kevin reveals that in the rigidity register, investment in the perceptual framework is confirmed by the massive frequency of descriptive processes with attachment to detail, as well as recourse to the fictive and to dreams. This reflects intrapsychic conflict, with the emphasis on the back-and-forth between drive and defense. The confused representation of the body is thus present. Kevin tries to contain the expression of his impulses by holding back, using obsessional defense mechanisms. The representation of his body appears altered and poorly eroticized, with difficulty in managing the reactivation of aggressive impulses. The narcissistic dimension of her body image appears to have been affected, and bears the imprint of her interaction with this environment

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The protocol of Philomene shows the predominance of a mode of functioning centered on an object relationship in which the difference between the other and the self. There is a focus on the figures in the interpersonal relationships and the existence of a conflict in a libidinal register. In the Rigidity register, there is an increase in procedures referring to external reality. This marks the investment of the perceptual framework by the massive frequency of description with attachment to detail, and the subject's ability to give abstract formulation to conflicts and affects through intellectualization mechanisms. This is a problem linked to the instability of identity. Hence the need for reassurance of limits, which leads to a deficit in narcissistic investment. Her bodily representation seems to have been affected, with her body facing the other person's view, narcissistic investment in body image is lacking.

According to Jean, the protocol indicates an engagement in speech revealed by intense mobilization in front of the material. Affects are strongly invested in their conflicts, indicating a need to refer to others. In the Rigidity register, there was a significant frequency of the description process, with an attachment to detail, indicating a lack of fantasmaticization and an investment in perception as well as in internal reality. In the register of lability, we note a strong investment in the relationship with a focus on interpersonal and impulsive expression, as well as the existence of an intrapsychic conflict whose modalities are expressed in an interpersonal mode. There is also a representation of actions associated with emotional states of catastrophe, showing a strong investment in the action. The emergence register of primary processes shows a frequency of processes linked to altered perception, in particular rare and bizarre details, and illogical over-investment with sensory perception experienced as persecutory.

Jean expresses affect linked to sexual problems experienced as loss and a source of anxiety, a false perception falsified by the projection of the negative. Conflict avoidance involves an over-investment in external reality, a narcissistic over-investment in the self-image with a view to reinforcing the defective image, which is over-invested as a negative representation of himself, and an investment in the body envelope through the delimitation of a space reflecting the reinforcement between inside and outside. It is therefore a problematic linked to the difficulty of appropriating his desires and his own identity by which he positions himself in a quest for self-image. He would have recourse to the construction of a false-self to conceal his true self, which was tested and too fragile under the effect of the disability. Jean shows a deficient affective mentalization in his relational world, which indicates a movement of objectal disinvestment in favour of narcissistic investment.

IV-DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study analyzed the unconscious psychic processes of the hearing-impaired adolescent, with the aim of understanding the issues at stake in the mode of libidinal investment and the quality of his bodily representations. Body representations and libidinal investments also depend on the way in which the hearing-impaired adolescent invests his libidinal energy (narcissistic and objectal investment) and representations of his body as he perceives it in his psychic space, as Alvin (2005) states: 'A good quality narcissism is at the origin of a self-investment that makes it possible to feel good about oneself. This translates into self-esteem and a belief in the possibility of being loved as well as loving'.

The author was interested in the influence of the quality of narcissism on the representations that an individual would have of himself, which demonstrates his capacity to love and be loved. He thus overlooked the fact that an understanding of libidinal investments and bodily representations could shed light on the relational and affective aspects in disabled adolescents. In this sense, a projective analysis carried out reveals the unconscious psychic processes in narcissistic and objectal investments.

Thus, Chabert (1993) reveals the efficacy and importance of projective tests as instruments of investigation and evaluation in a diagnostic approach and as a meta-psychological tool in research in clinical psychology and psychopathology. The present study thus finds its echo in the understanding of the mode of libidinal investments and bodily representations in the hearing-impaired adolescent according to projective analysis by the TAT.

The hearing-impaired adolescents in this study present difficulties in modes of objectal relations. This makes it necessary to observe the particularities of disability through the possibility of narcissistic withdrawals and emotional protection reducing the nature of the link to the object. Objectal relations with the outside world also seem to be particularly affected by the weakening of narcissistic foundations. It also emerged that bodily experiences and representations seem to function as vulnerabilities for these hearing-impaired adolescents. When interacting with family and friends or peers, an objectal disinvestment is observed in favour of a narcissistic reinvestment.

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