

The image and schema of the body in anorexia

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In our society, we have two ways easily differentiated – and in a certain way antagonistic – to give significance to the body. In one hand, it is shown an anatomical/biological body which requires satisfaction to its necessities, on the other hand we have a subjective/imaginary/symbolic body, which requires satisfaction of its demands and desires (Lacan, 1998). Within this context it is found the Eating Disorder of Anorexia.

We observe that to the anorexic person, the body acquires an importance similar to a flag to a nation. The body is taken as a maximal representative of a subject, whose anthem is unknown. Object of passion and a kind trophy, this body almost disembodied is showed with pride.

In this way, the anorexic symptoms can be comprehended as a kind of communication that can only be said unconsciously, through complex attitudes, synthesized under the refusal to eat. Having the body that emphasized importance in this disorder, it is useful to comprehend its uniqueness in the process of understanding this clinical profile.

This abstract presents a fragment of the master's thesis entitled "Um corpo: a queixa da anoréxica" ("One body: the complain of the anorexic") (Mouraria, 2005) and a proposal of analysis of the relationship between the body image and the body schema as a predictor of the relationship health-illness. The thesis aforementioned had as central aim to investigate the body as a significant, using the methodology of the Analysis of the Speech, from the french line and from the Lacanian Psychoanalysis.

The methodology followed in the present study is from a non-exhaustive review, formed from referentials of the lacanian psychoanalysis and some other authors. We looked for the main concepts of this reference and tried to articulate them in a theoretical comprehension of the body image and body schema in anorexic people. The results found in this review are presented below.

From the assumption that the process of structuration of the subject occurs through the articulation of the Real (of the organism as mass without form and indistinct) in symbolic and imaginary, when we talk about body we do not refer any longer to flesh, muscles and tendons. We talk about a subject immersed in a language, that is, of a subject which is constantly escaping from and confusing itself with the self and/or the body.

In this way, the founding alienation of the human being, which constitutes its identity (me/moi) from the unity of his body image, point us to the subjugation that the body schema occupy in our constitution (Lacan, 1986).

According to Lacan (1986), the moment of founding alienation (The Mirror Stage) refers to the moment in which the child recognizes its own image, resulting in the beginning of the process of construction of its identity or of the self. Such moment may be understood as an identification, i.e, as the moment "of transformation produced in the subject when he assumes an image" (Lacan, 1986, p. 97).

It is worth noting that the body image is constructed, initially, by the subjective 'mirroring' which the first caregivers do to the baby, such as the capability to interpret the physical reactions and the subjective sensations, which naturally could not be comprehended without that intervention. According to Jerusalinsky (2004), "the organization of the muscular tonus does not depend only of synergies and neurophysiological automatisms, but also of the type of the treatment that the big Other, in the maternal position, confer to the internal stimuli which beset the child." (p.24)

The image is conceptualized by Lacan (1999) as anything that has the property of being a captivating signal, which attracts and captures certain libido of the subject and of a certain numbers of references that allow to the living being to organize its behaviour.

Thus, the notion of identity results, in this way, from the construction of a self without autonomy and alienated by the narrative of the big Other. For being a fake, made-present by the ignorance from which it is made, the self and the body image bring in its essence the human paxion and the conflit. Come from there the thesis that the self is a symptom and resists to the cure (Lacan, 1999). The anorexic clinical profile points us right to that question, when we observe all the strength with which the body image insists in presenting itself 'distorted' and

the lucidity that the subject conserves on the apprehension of the reality to beyond its own body.

The clinical profile of anorexia also demonstrates to us how much the body schema may be splitted from its body image. In this way, it rises the hypothesis of a co-relationship between the body image and the body schema in the determination of the relationship health-illness. We believe that the study of such relationship can broader the investigation of the health – pathology and/or constitutive structure – pathology continuum. Le Boulch (1987) affirms enfatically that the level of organization of the several steps of the psicomotor development is in constant interaction with the development of the body image, through the maternal investment, and also determiates the way of construction of the self.

Françoise Dolto (2004;1990) also presented the development of the body image, jointly with the neurological maturation and with the development of the body schema.

Another apointment brought by Le Boulch (1988), that can be of great importance to the understanding of the anorexia, is that the capability of visual perception of the body could not be misunderstood as a synonym of the body image.

Altough patients with anorexia think they are fat, what could indicate the change in the perception of the visual image of the body, in the clinical segment, many of them reveal that this perception is above all in the way they feel. It is worth noting that the concept of body image refers to the way the subject see/perceive himself subjectively and not to its capability of visual perception.

Returning to the question of the body image in the anorexia, according to Bruschi (Campana & Tavares, 2007) in the eating disorders there is a disorder in the experience of the body or an intrceptive disorder.

In this way, the hypothesis which I propose about the perception/experience of the own body in the anorexia is that there would be a kind of 'hypertrophy' of the body image (in a functional sense) and a funcional 'hypotrophy' of the body schema, in which refers to the perception of the image of the own body. In this way, the body 'seen' in the mirror would reflect a perception almost exclusively of a subjective/imaginary composition, where the

body schema would occupy a secondary position in relation to the constitution of the perception of the image of the own body, although other functions of the body schema are preserved.

As mentioned previously, the mechanism of self-perception, originated from components in its majority imaginary, occurs in the beginning of our lives because of a question of age and maturity. We believe that in the anorexia there would be a similar functioning, without any type of degenerative cause. In this way, we reinforce the hypothesis of a co-relationship between the body image and the body schema in the determination of the relationship health-illness.

To conclude, we could say that the initial justification that the comprehension of the body as a significant to the anorexic subject is of great value to the understanding of the anorexic clinical profile. We conclude that the body in the anorexic profile, like the significant "weight" and "feeding" appear under the context of the "only thing which I can control in my life." In this way, the "body", the "weight" and the "feeding" constitute the order of identity and alterity of the subject, under the aegis of feeding (dis)control. Through anorexic the symptom, the subject have found a way to the conquest of its otherness, from the imaginary point of the beginning and at the edge of its being as such, i.e. of its body. (Mouraria, 2005)

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