SUBJETIVIDADES
e-ISSN: 2359-0777
Universidade de Fortaleza
Dossier: Psychosocial Interventions in Contexts of Vulnerability

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Adolescence et football en cause : La mise en place d'un dispositif psychanalytique dans un territoire de vulnérabilité sociale

10.5020/23590777.rs.v25iEsp.e17019

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Abstract

This article is grounded in psychoanalytic clinical practice within socially critical contexts and proposes new configurations of listening and intervention in settings marked by vulnerability and abandonment. In such contexts, adolescents may be confronted with the impasses of invisibility, given the need for recognition by the Other in the construction of self-image that characterizes adolescence. To address these impasses, a clinical device was developed with adolescents in a territory of intense social vulnerability, creating a space in which young people could be seen in their singularities. The device was established on a sports court, where football played a central role. This space became the site in which listening to the subjects took place. There, several adolescents shared their stories, anxieties, and desires. The sports court became a stage for conflict as well as for the creation of bonds, demonstrating its potential as a powerful space for the elaboration of adolescents' anxieties arising from the violence and vulnerabilities of the territory, as well as from the experience of adolescence itself.

Keywords: adolescence, vulnerability, device, soccer, psychoanalysis.

Resumo

A escrita deste artigo parte da clínica da psicanálise nas situações sociais críticas, propondo novas configurações de escuta e intervenção em cenários marcados pela vulnerabilidade e pelo desamparo. Nesses contextos, os adolescentes podem se defrontar com os impasses da invisibilidade, diante da necessidade do olhar do Outro para a construção da imagem de si, que permeia o adolescer. Para o enfrentamento desses impasses, desenvolveu-se um dispositivo clínico com adolescentes, em um território de intensa vulnerabilidade social, que possibilitou um espaço onde os jovens pudessem ser vistos em suas singularidades. O dispositivo se constituiu em uma quadra de esportes, onde o futebol apresentou uma importante função. Aquele espaço se tornou o lugar onde ocorreram as escutas dos sujeitos. Lá, diversos adolescentes compartilharam suas histórias, suas angústias e seus desejos. A quadra de esportes foi palco de conflitos e também da criação de laços, demonstrando, assim, ser um potente espaço de elaboração para as angústias dos jovens, oriundas das violências e vulnerabilidades do território, bem como do próprio adolescer.

Palavras-chave: *adolescência, vulnerabilidade, dispositivo, futebol, psicanálise.*

Resumen

La escritura de este artículo parte de la clínica del psicoanálisis en situaciones sociales críticas, proponiendo nuevas configuraciones de escucha e intervención en escenarios marcados por la vulnerabilidad y el desamparo. En dichos contextos, los adolescentes pueden enfrentarse a los impasses de la invisibilidad, ante la necesidad de la mirada del Otro para la construcción de la propia imagen, que atraviesa el proceso de adolescer. Para afrontar tales impasses, se desarrolló un dispositivo clínico con adolescentes en un territorio de intensa vulnerabilidad social, que posibilitó un espacio donde los jóvenes pudieran ser vistos en sus singularidades. El dispositivo se constituyó en una cancha deportiva, donde el fútbol desempeñó una función relevante. Aquel espacio se convirtió en el lugar donde tuvieron lugar las escuchas de los sujetos. Allí, diversos adolescentes compartieron sus historias, sus angustias y sus deseos. La cancha deportiva fue escenario de conflictos y también de la creación de lazos, demostrando ser un potente espacio de elaboración de las angustias juveniles, derivadas tanto de las violencias y vulnerabilidades del territorio como del propio proceso de adolescer.

Palabras clave: *adolescencia, vulnerabilidad, dispositivo, fútbol, psicoanálisis.*

Résumé

La rédaction de cet article s'appuie sur la pratique clinique de la psychanalyse dans des situations sociales critiques, en proposant de nouvelles modalités d'écoute et d'intervention dans des contextes caractérisés par la vulnérabilité et le dénuement. Dans ces contextes, les adolescents peuvent être confrontés aux impasses de l'invisibilité, face à la nécessité du regard de l'Autre pour la construction de l'image de soi, qui imprègne le processus de devenir adolescent. Pour faire face à ces impasses, un dispositif clinique a été élaboré avec des adolescents, au sein d'un territoire marqué par une intense vulnérabilité sociale, offrant ainsi un espace permettant aux jeunes d'être reconnus dans leurs singularités. Le dispositif a été mis en place sur un terrain de sport, où le football a joué un rôle important. Cet espace est devenu le lieu où se sont déroulées les écoutes des sujets. Là-bas, plusieurs adolescents ont partagé leurs histoires, leurs angoisses et leurs désirs. Le terrain de sport a été le théâtre de conflits, mais aussi de la création de liens, révélant ainsi sa puissance en tant qu'espace d'élaboration des angoisses des jeunes, issues des violences et des vulnérabilités du territoire, ainsi que de l'adolescence elle-même.

Mots-clés : *adolescence, vulnérabilité, dispositif, football, psychanalyse.*

Social vulnerability and exclusion affect a substantial portion of the Brazilian population and have significant repercussions for psychic constitution. In the face of the urgencies inherent to socially critical situations (Broide & Broide, 2015), psychoanalysis is ethically called upon to function as a listening device for socially excluded subjects. Within this framework, the present study addresses the listening to the process of adolescence in territories marked by invisibility, violence, and social vulnerability.

Adolescence represents a crucial moment in psychic development and constitutes a transitional passage during which the adolescent subject seeks new meanings for the self. This process is supported by elements offered by culture and the social environment, which contribute to the construction of a new psychic position, a new identity, and a re-inscription within the social bond (Rassial, 1997). Considering the irreducibility between social bonds and psychic constitution, this study aims to analyze how social dynamics affect adolescents' psychic constitution, with particular attention to how care for adolescence is being developed in territories characterized by social vulnerability.

Although adolescence is legally defined as a period in which individuals are entitled to all fundamental rights ensuring, by law or by other means, all opportunities and facilities that enable physical, mental, moral, spiritual, and social development, under conditions of freedom and dignity (Law No. 8,069/1990, art. 3), this legally guaranteed right does not reflect the lived reality of many Brazilian adolescents. A review of the literature indicates that peripheral territories are marked by social inequality, which may result in violence, substance abuse, school dropout, and a lack of academic and professional prospects (Traverso-Yépez & Pinheiro, 2002). In addition to living under conditions of extreme poverty and being deprived of incentives and protection, these young people also face multiple forms of prejudice. The persistence of such violations can restrict their possibilities, desires, and opportunities, thereby reproducing cycles of poverty, exclusion, and heightened risk.

Nevertheless, it is essential to emphasize the transitory nature of vulnerability. As stated, people are not vulnerable; they are vulnerable in relation to a specific situation and at a given point in time and space (Gama et al., 2014, p. 78). It is from the perspective of the possibility of transition out of this condition that the central premise of this study emerges. Accordingly, the objective of this article is to describe the construction of a clinical device that took shape through the initial listening processes and that, in line with the methodology proposed by Broide (2015), enables listening and intervention with subjects living in territories affected by violence and social vulnerability. The article begins with a contextualization of the territory, encompassing the listening to the vulnerabilities experienced by residents and adolescents, followed by a discussion of the unfolding of the device and, finally, an account of the functions it fulfilled.

Methodological Pathway

The present study was inspired by the methodology of *Psychoanalysis in Socially Critical Situations*, developed by Broide and Broide (2015), which addresses social urgencies marked by abandonment, malaise, and traumatic dimensions. Such situations demand the ethical responsibility of the analyst and raise questions for both psychoanalytic theory and clinical practice. Thus, we employed territorial listening, a research method that prioritizes listening to subjects, their relationships with the territory, and the social manifestations that occur within it. Individual and group listening encounters were conducted in streets, homes, and institutional spaces with adolescents, residents, and local workers. Listening is fundamental, as psychoanalytic practice operates through speech, and it is through the signifiers that emerge in narratives that understandings of the subject and possible interventions are anchored.

Through the method of social intervention, we sought to develop a clinical device (Broide & Broide, 2015), understood as a resource that enables the emergence of the subject of the unconscious, constituted through language as an effect of the signifiers that traverse it. According to Broide and Broide (2015), the concept of a clinical device refers to an ethical and technical construction that emerges from the specific demands of a territory or social context. Unlike traditional methods, the device is configured through encounters with subjects and territories, creating conditions for something new to emerge in the field of care and listening. It is characterized by its capacity to allow the emergence of the subject of the unconscious, enabling the construction of meaning. Thus, the clinical device constitutes a space that operates within transference, making possible listening to and working with the unconscious in ways that differ from those typical of conventional consulting rooms.

Through this device, we sought to understand how the adolescent passage unfolds in contexts of vulnerability. We understand that the device promotes the circulation of speech and functions as a space for reflection on community life, which in turn enables the creation of ways of coping with the issues that traverse the territory (Broide & Broide, 2015). In the context of this experience, the sports court came to function as a device, as it was there that adolescents were able to express themselves freely, share their distress, uncertainties, and feelings, and find, through speech, a symbolic space of recognition. By opening space for their narratives, these young people ceased to occupy a position of invisibility and came to be seen in their singularity.

The research, as well as the development of the device, took place over a 4-month period, between August and December 2022, in a neighborhood located in the region with the highest vulnerability indices in the city of Santa Maria, in the interior of the state of Rio Grande do Sul. Criteria guiding this choice were significant since the territorial listening methodology is also interested in dialogue with other forms of knowledge that may contribute to understanding the territory. Finally, all analyses were recorded in an experience diary (Pires & Gurski, 2020), a tool for documentation and investigation in which the researcher registers impressions arising from listening and transference. For the writing of this article, excerpts from the experience diaries were included, on the basis of which the analyses are conducted. To preserve participants' confidentiality, names were replaced with pseudonyms, and all identifying details were omitted.

Invisibility in the Nova Santa Marta Neighborhood: "The Hill that Overlooks a City that Does Not See Us"

Nova Santa Marta is a neighborhood established through an occupation that began more than 30 years ago. Numerous families, abandoned by the State, continue to seek in this territory a place to build a home. As a result, the neighborhood

has become one of the largest in Latin America, housing more than 35,000 residents. Regrettably, as a destination for individuals segregated from society, the area emerged through what is referred to as an invasion, where residents survive in housing that lacks investment in basic infrastructure, including sanitation, running water, electricity, sewage systems, and structural renovations to ensure safety.

Located at the top of a hill that, in the words of one resident, overlooks a city that does not see them, the territory reveals a position that marks the invisibility of its subjects. The neighborhood is divided into seven villages, each bearing a name that symbolizes part of its history, such as *7 de Dezembro*, referring to the date of its occupation, and *Pôr do Sol* or *Alto da Boa Vista*, which evoke the beauty of the surrounding landscape. Community leadership is present in the neighborhood, and through collective action and struggle, residents have achieved improvements in local infrastructure. This sense of collectivity has also sustained many residents through the establishment of an association of recyclable material collectors, which not only provides income for several families but also transforms what is socially considered disposable into a source of value and labor. This practice, which gives new meaning to what is excluded, reveals a movement of resistance in the face of imposed adversities. Just as waste pickers work with what remains, psychoanalysis also turns to what is commonly left aside, such as fragments of speech, slips, and residues of discourse, recognizing in them the potential for the revelation of unconscious meanings.

Nevertheless, the absence of the State in Nova Santa Marta produces significant harm, as the fissures it leaves open space for drug trafficking, including the emergence of a criminal faction originating in the territory. Despite the many difficulties they face, residents of Nova Santa Marta are generally welcoming and kind. Some speak with great pride about the history of the occupation and the other potentialities present in the neighborhood. From the very first visits, people greeted the researchers, engaged in conversation, and offered assistance.

As we circulated through the streets, we attempted to encounter adolescents. Curiously, during the initial visits, they were not visible. To understand the community's relationship with young people, listening initially focused on residents and professionals working in the area. Along this path, a space was identified that included a sports court, skate park, playground, theater, and library. Surprisingly, despite being open to the public, few people made use of the space, according to a professional who worked nearby.

> Near her workplace, on the sports court, a shootout between rival factions had occurred a few months earlier, during which a stray bullet was fired close to a teacher and his group of students. She also reported that, on another occasion, a boy had occupied this same community socialization space while carrying a weapon (Diário de Experiência, 2022, p. 2).

Following this incident, the program of socialization and strengthening of bonds, carried out through sports workshops, was discontinued, as the teacher responsible for the activities withdrew out of fear of further gunfire.

Listening throughout the neighborhood continued in order to understand how social bonds were established within the territory. Walking through the streets, it became evident that the farther one moved from the central area of the neighborhood, the more precarious the houses and streets became. These areas were marked by a strong odor resulting from the absence of sewage systems and the accumulation of garbage on street corners. Upon reaching an unpaved street, we encountered a long gray wall, through which a gap in the metal bars revealed that the place was a school. Upon entering the school, a pedagogue agreed to participate in the study and shared her impressions of adolescence in contexts of vulnerability. In her account, she highlighted cases of violence suffered by young people in their homes, which they later reproduced against themselves through self-harm or against others through fights. She also mentioned child labor, teenage pregnancy, involvement in drug trafficking, school dropout, and learning gaps. Although it was not possible to listen directly to adolescents within the school, upon leaving the building an unexpected encounter with a young person occurred.

> Leaving the school, I headed back toward the central area when, at a bus stop, I saw an adolescent who appeared to be about 13 years old, adjusting his backpack. I asked whether the bus took long to arrive, and he replied that it did, around 30 minutes. I took the opportunity to talk with him, and he was very receptive. The conversation was soon interrupted when he noticed a female adolescent and asked whether she had found what she was looking for. She replied that she had not, and he told her that he would take her to a place where she could get it. He said goodbye to me and walked off with the girl. I then continued toward the central area to catch my bus, following behind the two adolescents. They stopped at a street corner and began talking to a man, who handed them something. Based on the cautious movements, I assumed it was a drug transaction (Diário de Experiência, 2022, p. 3).

Drug trafficking is a recurring scene in the Nova Santa Marta neighborhood. Although it is a veiled topic, expressed through subjects' fear of speaking openly about it, everyone knew where the points of sale, known as *bocas de fumo*, were located or who could be found there. Narratives about drugs were accompanied by reports of shootouts, executions linked to trafficking, and fear of going out after nightfall. Although involvement with drugs is dangerous, particularly for young people in peripheral areas who are well aware of its costs, drug use can also be highly appealing during adolescence. Amid the anxieties inherent to this stage of life, combined with the conflicts of growing up in adverse conditions, drugs

may offer an option of immediate enjoyment. However, as a means of escaping suffering, they may come to capture the subject, imprisoning them in addiction (Torossian, 2003).

The lack of economic prospects is another factor that may lead adolescents to engage in illegal activities to meet their financial needs. However, as Broide (2015) notes, trafficking represents more than material gain, since illicit activities do not offer only higher income; they offer what the adolescent most desires: adrenaline and an escape from invisibility. Involvement in trafficking removes the adolescent from the erasure produced by social abandonment. It also constitutes a form of recognition since it allows access to goods such as branded clothing, weapons, and cash in hand, which signify access to sexuality, status, and peer respect, while capturing the young person in the imaginary of potency (Broide, 2015, p. 70). This position, however, comes at a very high cost, often exacting the price of freedom or even life itself.

Adolescence in Invisibility: Impasses in the Need for the Other's Gaze in the Construction of Self-image

The multiple forms of vulnerability faced by adolescents in the Nova Santa Marta neighborhood portray the structural neglect of the State toward those who most depend on it. In this context, adolescents are particularly affected because they are living through a crucial developmental stage in which they seek identity and belonging. Cast into traumatic conditions, their narratives reveal repetitions of indifference and of the denial of recognition as human beings, often mediated through experiences of violence.

> While walking through the neighborhood in search of adolescents, I encountered 4 boys on the sports court. Sitting and watching their game, the ball was soon kicked out toward me. I joked about the boys' aim and asked whether I could play with them. Smiling, they said yes, and we played football for approximately 1 hour. After the game, I began talking with them, explained the study, and the adolescents began to share their stories (...).
>
> Marcelo, 13 years old, was the one who most requested a space for listening. While the younger boys played, he sat beside me and said that he hated living in the neighborhood because it was where his father had been killed 1.5 years earlier, during the pandemic, at a bus stop. His father was robbed, reacted, and the assailant retaliated, stabbing him. Marcelo said that since then he has lived with his mother, grandmother, and younger siblings. He reported that he does not feel well there and that he is not as close to his mother as he had been to his father. Because his mother spends the day working outside the home, he and his siblings are cared for by their grandmother, who treats Marcelo differently from the younger children, giving them whatever they ask for while denying Marcelo affection and even food. As a result, he does not feel welcomed and wishes to live with his paternal grandmother, who gives him more attention, especially as he continues to work through his father's death. Football appears to be a key means through which Marcelo elaborates his loss, as his father always encouraged him and invested in him through the sport. Marcelo trains at a center, plays in tournaments, and remains committed to school. His dream is to become a professional player (Diário de Experiência, 2022, p. 5).

Marcelo's account is marked by erasure and indifference, evident both in how he is treated within his maternal family and in his father's violent death, which represents an extreme expression of life's perceived banality. Such killings are sometimes committed by individuals who, deprived of investment and care, are unable to recognize their own lives as valuable, and consequently fail to recognize the value of others. We understand social invisibility and indifference as forms of violence against the subject: when repeatedly exposed to such experiences, adolescents are confronted with traumatic dimensions. As Freud (2021/1914) argues, when trauma is not symbolized, it may be repeated in action — in this setting, as we observed, through other forms of violence.

However, abandonment and invisibility do not appear only in extreme forms; they also emerge in subtler ways that are socially normalized. In another listening encounter following a game on the court, the boys described situations that expose State neglect.

> Sitting on the ground, I explained the study and asked whether I could take notes on what they shared. They agreed, but Kevin — the youngest, 9 years old — looked visibly uneasy and asked whether anything I wrote down would go to the police. Since the beginning of the pandemic, he had not returned to school. He was in 4th grade and still had not learned to read. The other boys then spoke to him about the importance of attending school, which left Kevin thoughtful. He looked at me and said he could not go now because there were no available places, but I assured him that education is his right and that he would have a place in some school.
>
> Mateus, 15 years old, said that he lives with his mother and 3 siblings. His father is in prison for failing to pay child support. He has 22 children, and Mateus reported that on the day his father tried to get money to pay the support, he went down the neighborhood street robbing every house along the way. By the time he reached the end of the road, the police were already waiting for him. Mateus has 21 paternal half-siblings and three maternal half-siblings. When I asked about his relationship with his father, he said it was indifferent. Regarding his mother, he reported having a good relationship, although the other

boys said she hits him. Mateus stated that she does so only when he misbehaves, as a way of educating him, and that despite this she is very loving and supportive. Mateus checked the time and said he would soon have to leave. When I asked why, he explained that he was going to meet his brother-in-law to pick up his 17-year-old sister, who was pregnant.

I asked whether they came to the court often and whether I would find them there again. They said they did, but not frequently. Mateus helps his mother at home; Paulo, 13 years old, works informally on construction sites installing drywall; and they are also afraid of some boys who play there because they are violent. They described a fight that had occurred on the court and the shootouts that take place at night near the *bocas de fumo*. When the topic of drugs emerged, all emphasized that they keep their distance, saying that boys who use drugs have no future, and that some of their friends were already in prison because of it.

When I asked about their futures, Natan, 12 years old, said that he was training to become a player and would soon try out. He and Paulo play for a team called *Novo Horizonte*, a name that seems to symbolize other possible paths. Natan then showed me his ankle bracelet: a chain with a metal resembling silver, interwoven with colored ribbons. He explained that his mother had made it to help him "keep his steps steady" toward his dreams and to protect him. The bracelet is a *guia* blessed by an orixá in Candomblé (...). At the end of the afternoon, I thought about how many dangers adolescents in the neighborhood face — a neighborhood that Pedro, 11 years old, described as "trash," a place of vulnerability that society treats as waste. In the absence of professionals to ensure public safety, parents are left to keep their children off the streets or rely on spiritual protections to keep them safe (Diário de experiência, 2022, p. 8).

Kevin's learning delays, Paulo's early entry into informal labor, the involvement of other boys in drug trafficking, and the presence of policing as a threatening force—which, in other narratives, appears through aggressive and prejudiced approaches—indicate that the State, which should guarantee collective well-being, social order, and national development, as provided for in the Federal Constitution (Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil, 2021), also perpetuates violence. Nova Santa Marta does have public services for the population, including nongovernmental organizations that assist with local demands. Although professionals within the service network — such as those working at the local Social Assistance Reference Center (CRAS for short, in Portuguese) and Specialized Social Assistance Reference Centers (CREAS for short, in Portuguese) — report good relationships with residents and are committed to their work, these actions remain insufficient in the face of the neighborhood's profound deprivation, as observed during the study. This mismatch between population needs and available resources exposes structural inequalities. Although the Federal Constitution states that all are equal before the law (Constituição da República Federativa do Brasil, 2021, art. 5), Rosa (2022) notes that while one portion of the population receives protection and privilege, another is exploited, abandoned, and exiled into suffering.

Violence and vulnerability also profoundly affect family bonds, often resulting in ruptures and undermining families' capacity to care for their children, as observed in the adolescents' accounts. It becomes extremely difficult to offer what one has not received, and to fill the material and symbolic gaps produced by poverty. Nevertheless, such families are stigmatized and blamed by social discourses that disregard State abandonment and the difficulties they face. In this scenario, negligence, violence, and rights violations are naturalized, and power-laden discourses continue to blame subjects for their pluridetermined social condition — i.e., a condition shaped by multiple historical, economic, cultural, and political factors that exceed individual will (Rosa, 2022). The narratives suggest that adolescents internalize this blame. Kevin, for instance, believes that he is responsible for not attending school and fears being punished by the police. Mateus likewise legitimizes the violence he experiences from his mother by attributing it to his own behavior.

Adolescence is a constitutively turbulent period, particularly when young people face rejection or family loss, coexist with drugs and alcohol, experience prejudice, and live in a society that segregates them (Kostulski et al., 2019). In such contexts, identity formation becomes even more complex, as it is shaped by how caregivers within the family dynamics see the adolescent and by how the adolescent is positioned within relationships and interactions in the territory where social life unfolds. Through these relationships and interactions — both within the immediate family environment and in institutional and community spaces — the adolescent constructs self-image and a sense of value. How the adolescent is seen becomes fundamental, as it names and demarcates the subject not only for others, but also for the self. When adolescents are exposed to a lack of care and to limited affective, material, and social investment, their desiring possibilities are constrained. As Broide (2015) and Rosa and Vicentin (2012) emphasize, in the face of erasure and of a lack of recognition in the inscription within the social bond, identity references and creative possibilities of existence become compromised.

As a result, many young people come to lack references through which to constitute themselves and organize their futures. Yet, in the absence of familial references — or when family discourse is erased — Rosa (1999) argues that social discourse prevails. When this discourse is not overtly marked by stigma and prejudice, it still produces invisibility, leading the subject to abandonment and silencing. Thus, creating spaces that mobilize adolescents' narratives becomes essential, because it is through speech that subjects encounter their own desire and can thus disentangle themselves from stigmatized

signifiers imposed as absolute truths. In psychoanalysis, alienation refers to the process by which the subject is constituted as a subject of desire through the signifiers of the Other, initially being subjected to a place and identity assigned to them. Disalienation, in turn, implies the possibility of separating from these determinations and reinventing oneself more autonomously in relation to the desire of the Other, without dispensing with it entirely (Lacan, 1985).

The Device and its Unfolding

The sports court, which adolescents had stopped using after the turmoil of gunfire, was gradually reoccupied and became a space for listening to young people. In that setting, several adolescents shared their stories, anxieties, and desires. The court became a stage for conflict as well as for the creation of bonds, and, in this subtle process, it gradually came to function as a device. Following Broide and Broide (2015), we understand the device as a clinical operator that guides work in socially critical situations. Within the authors' conceptualization, it is the device that enables the emergence of the subject of the unconscious. Like the Möbius strip, a topological figure with only one surface and one side, it allows what is exposed and what is hidden to be apprehended simultaneously, highlighting the inseparability between the visible and the invisible, the said and the unsaid.

In thinking through a device capable of sustaining clinical listening outside the traditional setting of the consulting room, and of responding to the vulnerabilities faced by adolescents, we argue that the sports court became a space for listening and for the circulation of speech. There, adolescents could express themselves, discuss their distress and uncertainties, and share their feelings, allowing themselves to be seen in their singularity. Initially empty, the space was gradually occupied, enabling the emergence of aspects that revealed meanings that had previously remained concealed, such as the abandonment reflected in the lack of investment in adolescents' use of the court. "Together with Kevin, Mateus, Paulo, and Natan, we played football for more than an hour with a ball provided by the institution that had lost its panels and was deflated. I kept thinking about how little had been invested in those boys, since not even a proper ball had been made available."

Figure 1

Image of the ball used by the adolescents.



In this way, the sports court device created conditions for the manifestations of the unconscious, revealing how they were updated within the territory, as illustrated below.

> I arrive at the court, and the boys are already there playing football. Mateus (15 years old), Edenilson (14 years old), and Paulo (13 years old) greet me with smiles and invite me to join them. More adolescents soon begin to arrive, and I invite them to join us and form new teams. However, some of the boys did not yet know one another. During 1 match, a foul occurred that Mateus interpreted as intentional, and to defend his friend he kicked the boy who had committed the foul in the stomach. The boy was startled, and the others reprimanded Mateus, telling him that even if it had been a foul, it was not a reason to attack someone, and that if he continued complaining and behaving violently, they would no longer play with him.
>
> I spoke with Mateus about the incident, and he seemed to understand the others. He apologized to the boy he had kicked, and after that there were no further disputes. Some time later, more adolescents arrived, and the guard approached me and said he would like to talk. He told me that an adult's authorization was required — someone who would take responsibility for the adolescents while they used the court. I was surprised, because until then this had not been required. I agreed to take responsibility so the boys could use the space, and the guard explained that this was for their safety, in case someone was injured while playing and needed referrals.

> I explained my study to the guard, and we continued talking. I mentioned the poor condition of the balls and the lack of a drinking fountain. He then told me that there were new balls, but they could not be used because they were deflated, and that a drinking fountain had been there for some time but had not yet been installed due to the lack of a pipe.
>
> I returned to the court and asked the boys whether they had previously been asked for a responsible adult. Paulo told me that earlier that week they had come to play, but another guard on duty had said they could only use the space if they brought someone over 18 years old along with an ID card to sign as responsible. After a few hours, they returned with an adult so they could play. Edenilson said that in one of these approaches he was told that he and the other boys should stay at home rather than "being out there causing trouble." I felt deeply unsettled when I learned about this situation (Diário de Experiência, 2022, p. 10).

This excerpt illustrates how the territory's transferential dynamics were updated within the device. As Freud (2021/1914) teaches, transference is a phenomenon in which the subject projects affects, desires, conflicts, and unconscious fantasies onto the relationship with another. It repeats earlier relations, updated in the analytic relation as well as in the subject's other relationships. Freud (2021/1914) and Lacan (1985) maintain that transference is a pathway to unconscious material and is crucial for treatment, as it allows conflicts to be worked through and new ways of relating to be elaborated.

From this perspective, we understand that the fear hovering over the territory was reactivated in transferential relations. It appeared in the boys' expressions when they saw a guard, reflecting the fear many felt toward the police, and it intensified when other adolescents arrived, because they feared possible violence. This fear also symbolized the lack of protection to which young people were subjected, given the abandonment of the State that should have protected them.

As a space open to expression and affects, the device also allowed conflicts to emerge, as evidenced in adolescents' fights and in their interaction with the guard. These fights, and the guard's repressive posture — stating that the boys should not be there — repeat forms of violence that constitute the territory's reality. Such dynamics reiterate the movement of social exclusion affecting adolescents. As Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1975) argue, this type of discourse reinforces a social hierarchy that excludes and devalues certain groups, thereby perpetuating inequality.

Regarding Mateus's aggression, we understand it in relation to the concept of repetition, associated with traumatic situations. Assuming violence is traumatic, repetition may emerge as an unconscious attempt to elaborate it (Freud, 2021/1914). However, elaboration occurs only when trauma traverses the symbolic register. In this sense, the boys' conflict was resolved when, through language, the adolescents themselves spoke about the violence and established limits to it.

We understand that adolescents' fights can also be read as manifestations of aggressive drives. According to Freud (2013/1915), drives refer to forces that propel behavior and mental processes and thus underlie the ways in which subjects love, desire, and suffer. Freud also described the death drive, or *Thanatos*, as an expression of energy oriented toward destruction, aggression, and a return to an inanimate state. This drive is associated with the search for absolute rest, the absence of stimulation, and the cessation of pain. Freud argued that although the death drive is inherent to human beings, the life drive, *Eros*, is responsible for containing it and redirecting these destructive forces. In this sense, the two drives operate together. In *Drives and Their Vicissitudes*, Freud (2013/1915) further emphasized that a drive may follow 4 possible pathways: reversal into its opposite, turning back upon the self, sublimation, or repression. Accordingly, the drives circulated through the device in multiple ways. At times, the death drive appeared sublimated in play, as adolescents transformed experienced anger into sporting practices or socially valued skills. At other moments, it exceeded limits, manifesting as physical confrontations, intense rivalries, and aggression. On the sports court, however, through relations with others, this drive appeared to be framed—that is, limits were established, enabling new forms of relating. From this framing, the drive also emerged in other configurations, as illustrated below.

> At the end of November, the country paused to watch and support the national team during the World Cup matches. Upon arriving at the court, I noticed 3 boys sweeping the space. This caught my attention, as it was the first time I had seen them there. The boys, aged 16-17 years, studied at a nearby school and told me they had recently begun attending the court. A few minutes later, to my surprise, a group of 6 girls arrived to play football as well. They were friends of the boys, though more reserved, and told me they usually played there in the mornings.
>
> That afternoon, many other boys arrived. It was the day with the largest number of adolescents present — so many that I could not even count them. As I observed boys and girls playing football, volleyball, and basketball, I noticed the presence of an adult among them. This man, over 30 years old, short in stature and youthful in appearance, was Maurício, the brother of one of the boys. He explained that, due to the institution's requirement, he had come to act as the responsible adult for the adolescents and also to enjoy his day off by playing football. While I observed the adolescents, the worker responsible for cleaning approached me and commented on how good it was to see so many boys playing football there, saying that this way they were not on the streets. After the listening encounters and walks through the territory, I came to understand what this meant, since the street is the space where drug trafficking and drug use circulate (Diário de Experiência, 2022, p. 25).

From this excerpt, we observe that the life drive (*Eros*) (Freud, 2013/1915) emerges within the device through the establishment of bonds. This drive operates by promoting preservation, development, and the creation of social ties. Thus, the fear that had previously permeated the court was disrupted through narrative, allowing adolescents to meet one another and form new friendships. They began inviting friends and peers to the court, enabling the arrival of new adolescents to the space.

In addition, a transference relationship gradually developed with the researcher, and adolescents began to express demands, such as for listening, conflict mediation, and material resources, including a ball and a drinking fountain. Rosa (2022) explains that care within political-clinical settings differs from that in private practice, since individuals in these contexts often do not present a demand for psychoanalytic or psychological intervention per se, but rather apparently objective demands related to material deprivation. Thus, listening must go beyond the concrete and objective request, as demands should be heard in their polysemy. In this sense, requests for listening, conflict mediation, adult responsibility on the court, and access to balls and drinking water may signify appeals for care, protection, hospitality, social inscription, and inclusion within the desire of the Other.

Accordingly, contact was made with both the square's coordinator and the city's mayor to address the adolescents' demands, which included an air pump for inflating balls — since new balls were available on site but unusable due to being deflated. Both officials stated that they would forward the request to another municipal department.

Another intervention occurred following an incident in which a guard harshly told the adolescents that they could not use the court unless accompanied by a responsible adult. His tone frightened the adolescents, who, despite having the researcher present as a responsible adult, felt uncomfortable and left the space. At that moment, the guard's posture was questioned, emphasizing the importance of the court for the adolescents as a place for socialization and for elaborating the violence they experience within their families and in the territory — through sport and the construction of bonds. Moreover, the space represented the dream of many who envision a future as professional football players.

Following these exchanges, the guard explained that he himself had contacted the site coordinator to discuss the need for a responsible adult to accompany the adolescents on the court. With the increasing number of young people using the space, he had realized that injuries could occur during play. Although this new rule had initially been perceived as problematic — raising concerns that it would drive adolescents away — it became clear, upon reflection, that there is a cultural tendency to naturalize the idea that adolescents require less care. While there is strong mobilization around the protection of children, attention often diminishes as they grow into adolescence and youth, a process that may amount to abandonment (Abramo, 1997). This occurs both due to the search for independence characteristic of this developmental stage and to a form of "premature adultization" imposed by social vulnerability. In this sense, requiring a responsible adult to watch over these adolescents works to remind the community and the broader social environment that they still need care and protection and cannot be left to their own devices.

Over time, an increasing number of adolescents began to use the court. In addition to boys, girls also started to frequent the space to play, talk, and drink *chimarrão*. The court thus came to fulfill a function as a space of socialization and protection for young people. After 4 months, the research came to an end. On the final day, however, a highly significant act occurred, revealing another unfolding of the device.

> The guard who, weeks earlier, had been rigid with the adolescents brought equipment to inflate the balls and began assisting with their demands. He brought a small motor that made it possible to inflate the institution's new balls, which had remained unused for months because they were deflated.
>
> Volleyballs, basketballs, futsal balls, and footballs were inflated and distributed to the adolescents. The court was once again full: some boys played inside the court, others gathered in small groups around it, and the girls practiced volleyball.
>
> I wondered what had led the guard to recognize the importance of that space for the adolescents. Perhaps it was learning that becoming a football player is the dream of many boys there and that they see the sport as a pathway to a better life. Or perhaps it was the realization that, in that space, adolescents could be protected from the violence and vulnerabilities present in the territory. In any case, I thanked him and emphasized the importance of his gesture.
>
> I returned to the court and told the adolescents that it had been the guard who inflated the balls, advising them that if they needed to inflate them again, they could seek him out, as I would no longer be present. We agreed that they would continue to bring responsible adults to accompany them. I said goodbye to the adolescents and to the institution's staff, feeling satisfied to see the space filled with boys and girls playing and talking together. The fear that had previously hindered socialization among the young people themselves and between them and the guards was disrupted through speech. The court, which had been nearly empty when I first arrived, became a powerful space for elaborating adolescents' anxieties arising from the violence and vulnerabilities of the territory as well as from the experience of adolescence itself (Diário de Experiência, 2022, p. 31).

Within the device, not only adolescents' dreams and conflicts emerged, but also the ways in which adults in the territory viewed them. The guard's relationship with the adolescents had a significant transferential dimension, representing a lack of care toward young people. Initially, care was either absent or expressed through authoritarianism and fear in the guard's conduct. Adolescents also reported fear related to the territory itself, describing the street as dangerous — particularly at night — due to drug trafficking as well as fear stemming from certain parental practices, such as those of Mateus's mother. However, this form of protection through fear and authoritarianism can itself be considered a form of violence.

Calling upon a responsible adult to accompany adolescents establishes, albeit subtly, a new form of care within the territory, one grounded in investment in adolescents' desires and in the strengthening of bonds. In this process, the guard's own mode of care toward the adolescents also changed. Although the demand was not formally addressed to him but to representatives of the State, it was the guard who listened to and responded to the adolescents' needs by inflating the balls so they could play with adequate equipment. In this way, relations of care and protection were gradually transformed within the territory.

We understand that the device promoted a means of confronting vulnerabilities, including exposure to violence and the lack of protection to which adolescents were subjected. There was a process of reappropriation of the sports court that enabled socialization, an essential element in the process of adolescence. Nevertheless, the device also revealed another crucial aspect, related to the direction of adolescents' desire, which will be addressed in the following section.

Adolescence and Football at Play: New Horizons

Football is widely recognized in Brazil as a national passion. A source of pride, associated with the country's status as the most successful nation in World Cup history and as the homeland of Pelé, Brazil rightfully bears the title of the "country of football." Sporting achievements are celebrated enthusiastically and often symbolize the nation's capacity to overcome adversity and achieve success. This unifying potential is one of the reasons football holds such a central place in Brazilian culture. It transcends social, economic, and cultural barriers, bringing together people from diverse backgrounds around a shared practice.

When the 2022 World Cup took place, the research was underway, and the clinical device was centered precisely on football. Long before the tournament became the focus of national attention, adolescents already expressed strong enthusiasm for the sport. Some articulated the desire to pursue a professional career in football. During this period, identification with professional players intensified, often expressed through attempts to reproduce specific kicks, passes, and dribbles as well as through hairstyles inspired by well-known athletes. Football players are admired and idolized figures who frequently become sources of inspiration for young people dreaming of following similar paths. Many Brazilian players achieve national idol status and international recognition. It is within this symbolic field that the fascination of so many adolescents emerges, as they envision football as a pathway to social and economic mobility.

Becoming a professional football player constitutes the dream of many adolescents living in vulnerable regions. This aspiration is shaped not only by the scarcity of opportunities offered by their social environment, but also by identification with the life stories of players who have faced similar hardships. In this sense, the presence within the Brazilian national team of more than 11 players whose trajectories were marked by social vulnerability fulfills an important symbolic function, as it offers a possible point of identification. The stories of Neymar, Richarlison, Vinícius Júnior, Gabriel Jesus, Antony, Casemiro, Thiago Silva, Marquinhos, Fred, among others, become symbolic references for adolescents from peripheral regions, demonstrating that these athletes were also able to "dribble" hunger, poverty, and daily violence through sport.

During adolescence, what is fundamentally at stake is the construction of identity, which shapes the young person's existence through recognition and belonging within the social bond (Corso & Corso, 2018). It is therefore natural that adolescents seek spaces of recognition, since such recognition demarcates and names the subject, not only for others, but also for themselves (Kostulski et al., 2019, p. 165).

One of the primary sources of symbolic transmission is the family. However, when adolescents are surrounded by devalued figures who fail to escape vulnerability and exclusion, they seek references elsewhere that can provide a sense of existence and direction. It is within this vacuum of references that young people in Nova Santa Marta find, in drugs or in football, possible routes out of vulnerability and social erasure. Accordingly, many adolescent narratives pointed to the desire to be recognized as football players.

Football can also be understood as an extension of play, which holds an important function for children and adolescents by enabling the elaboration of conflicts they experience. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud (2020/1920) showed that through the *Fort–Da* game, his grandson repeated the anguish of separation from his mother, thereby working through this traumatic experience. Football, like other sports practiced by adolescents, allows for a similar elaborative process, as it can channel or sublimate suffering. That is, it can transform psychic impulses and anxieties into socially accepted and creative expressions, favoring coexistence and symbolic articulation (Freud, 2010/1905). Football also holds particular significance

as a team sport, since collectivity fosters belonging, a feeling of central importance during adolescence and in the process of emerging from invisibility. In this sense, we understand that through the device, aspects of desire were partially satisfied when adolescents gained recognition among peers, formed bonds, and experienced acknowledgment of their need for care.

Among the few perceived alternatives to escape erasure and vulnerability, as João, 16 years old, stated, to stay out of the drug world, only football (Diário de Experiência, 2022, p. 26). It is thus through this sport that adolescents encounter a possibility of existence and recognition. However, beyond talent alone, such a dream requires sustained attention and investment, both affective and financial, if it is to be pursued. This is precisely the role played by the Novo Horizonte club, a nonprofit organization that supports children and adolescents in situations of social vulnerability through sports activities offered during after-school hours. Initiatives of this kind are fundamental for social inclusion and cultural promotion. Adolescents involved in this project enthusiastically describe their participation in competitions, through which they seek to build a future in sport. In this way, the name of the sports association indeed evokes other possible horizons for these young people, becoming a meaningful reference and standing in opposition to the notion of a neighborhood unseen on the horizon, thus resisting invisibility.

Conclusion

Part of our identity, if not its entirety, is shaped by the relationships we establish. During adolescence, relationships with the Other have an even greater impact on how individuals perceive themselves. In this regard, this study also demonstrated the effects produced by social context on the experience of adolescence, particularly when young people live in conditions of exclusion and their existences are rendered invisible.

It is therefore necessary to acknowledge that persistent social inequalities deeply affect adolescent subjectivity. Yet, importantly, symbolic transmission is not constituted solely through symptoms. Despite the many difficulties faced by residents of the Nova Santa Marta neighborhood, a living historical thread persists — one that sustains a certain potency and enables transformation. Although socially relegated to the position of waste, as suggested by the odors of the streets and the lack of sanitation in many homes, residents do not seem to identify with this signifier. Instead, they transform adversity through practices such as recycling. Materials once discarded by society acquire new value. Thus, even when positioned as residue, psychoanalysis reminds us that what remains is precisely what resists. Is it not from residues, from the fragments brought by the subject, that psychoanalysis itself takes shape?

Drawing on Benjamin's (1991) reinterpretation of the *ragpicker*, as discussed by Gurski and Strzykalski (2018) — a figure who wandered in search of trash, scraps, crumbs, and all that society deemed useless, yet which, in the ragpicker's gaze, carried latent potential — we understand the ragpicker as one who enables encounters with new meanings for what has been discarded. In this sense, the work of psychologists and psychoanalysts in contexts of intense social vulnerability, much like that of the ragpicker, lies precisely in finding this remainder — what resists, what appears insignificant, yet contains the driving force for transformation. These remnants emerge as signifiers within silenced narratives.

It was through such subtleties, captured in the listening to adolescents' narratives, that the development of the device unfolded, culminating in the reoccupation of the sports court, previously marked by the traumatic violence of the territory: gunfire between rival groups, fights, and symbolic violence, all permeated by fear and malaise, which had led to its abandonment. Through the disruption of silence and the circulation of speech, the space was resignified, enabling the reappropriation of the court. In this action lies the potency transmitted by residents and their histories, echoing the very occupation of the territory itself. For this reason, peripheral territories should not be viewed solely through the lens of vulnerability, but also through their potentialities. It is through recognition of residents' demands and of the community's strengths that the transformations desired by subjects can be set in motion.

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How to cite:

Schröpfer, L. C., Zappe, J. G., & Costa, A. O. (2025). Adolescence and football at play: Constructing a psychoanalytic device in a context of social vulnerability. *Revista Subjetividades, 25*(Esp.), e17019. https://doi.org/10.5020/23590777.rs.v25iEsp.e17019

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Received on: *01/18/2024.*
Accepted on: *07/14/2025.*