

Multifaces of the body: perceptions about body image throughout life cycles

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Abstract

The meanings attributed to the body are commonly related to its limitation of being born, living and dying. Given this, these conceptions cross all the individual's generational cycles, from before birth, in the symbiosis of the mother-child binomial, until death. Therefore, there is a limitation of bodily understanding in its entirety and the perpetuation of misinformation. In this sense, the study aims to assimilate perceptions about body image throughout life cycles. The qualitative approach of a comparative and narrative study of multiple cases was adopted, the research setting was a basic health unit in the municipality of Aracati/CE, located on the east coast. The population was stratified into four groups: childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age. Next, the sample was selected by choosing two individuals, a male and a female, from each age group. The implementation of the four workshops took place between September and November 2021, based on the dynamics of sensitivity and creativity of the sensitive creative method, based on the ideas of problematizing education by Paulo Freire. The analysis was carried out using the Pêcheux Discourse Analysis technique. During this study, it was noticed that the body undergoes changing representations of signs and symbols over the generations. Throughout the research, the identification of body image was reflected in the recent and stored experiences of each individual. Therefore, the contribution of this investigation to the performance of health professionals refers to the fact that communication is fundamental in the relationship between professional and client.

Keywords: Nursing Care. Body Image. Health Personnel. Interpersonal Relationships.

INTRODUCTION

The meanings attributed to the body are commonly related to its limitation of being born, living and dying, in a way that these conceptions cross all the individual's generational cycles, from before birth, in the symbiosis of the mother-child binomial, until death¹.

The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), with the collaboration of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, prepared the National School Health Sur-

vey (PeNSE), which analyzes information that allows the assessment of risk and protective factors for adolescent health. In the edition held in 2015, body image was characterized as very important by more than 80% of students between 13 and 17 years old².

In verbal communication, it is necessary to analyze what is being transmitted and the other's understanding of attitudes. Therefore, when in groups, people express vigilance and insecurity

ties in interpersonal behavior. In this context, the body, as an active mediator between man and the world, appears to be polysemic³.

Considering this parallel between body and communication, the author Ray Birdwhistell was the anthropologist who developed research on kinesics. According to Birdwhistell³, between two people, about 2,500 to 5,000, and sometimes up to 10,000 "bits", of informative signals flow per second. This includes all changes, to a minimum degree, that can be evidenced by change recording devices.

The body, understood until this very moment as a mediator, needs to be seen with more autonomy and singularity, becoming a "body-rubric". If an individual were to write the same word on a sheet of paper throughout their life cycles, a change in handwriting would possibly be observed. The child who is still learning to read and write, the teenager who uses pens of different colors, the adult in the rush of everyday life and the elderly person with impaired coordination. This is the body, which changes its signature over time⁴.

The approach to the topics of the body, body image and sexuality in childhood is full of taboos and prejudices. According to Guimaraes⁵, body image goes through several concept differences, from the age of two, when the child perceives his image when faced with the mirror, to adolescence, with the increase in social concern related to body changes.

Childhood is not an empty territory. It is necessary to educate and discipline based on individual experiences already built. Informed children will be able to enjoy a planned sex life and follow their own moral values. The body can be seen as a product of education⁶.

Regarding body appreciation among ado-

lescents and young women, age did not prove to be a significant variable^{5,7}. But, when analyzed linearly, it indicated that the older the age, the greater the body esteem⁷. In disagreement with what was presented previously, Elousa⁸ states that concern and dissatisfaction with body image seem to increase with age, especially among females.

Understanding the construction of the meaning of body in old age presents difficulties due to the very definition of terms. Concepts such as old age, sex and body image are stigmatized by society and the elderly themselves. As well as understanding the expression of sexuality in its complexity of encompassing the way of feeling, thoughts, emotions and interactions in the world. The desired symbolic body, a result of social constructions, is that of beauty and health associated with youth. Therefore, the way of dressing and body care are highlighted as stimuli for continued sexuality at this stage^{9,10}.

Thus, there are some limitations found throughout the stages of life, regarding the perception of sexuality, which come from mistaken views of previous experiences. These factors limit bodily understanding in its entirety and contribute to the perpetuation of misinformation. It's a vicious circle that needs to be broken^{9,11}. Based on this assumption, the question was: what are the perceptions regarding body image in different life cycles? Thus, the objective is to: assimilate perceptions about body image throughout life cycles.

It is believed, therefore, that there is a diversity of conceptions regarding body image in different life cycles, which is influenced by multiple aspects, such as gender, as well as sociocultural aspects.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a comparative and narrative study of multiple cases with a qualitative approach, which presents a universe of meanings, beliefs,

values and attitudes that is not based on numerical criteria to guarantee its representativeness¹². The comparative study is portrayed by

Marconi and Lakatos¹³ as a method to investigate and explain similarities and divergences between phenomena and/or facts.

Narrative study serves as a site for exploring culture and social and personal experiences. It is a form of mediation between researcher and researched, which helps in understanding stories lived and told in a dynamic process between living and telling, reliving and retelling¹⁴.

The research setting is the Basic Health Unit (BHU) in the municipality of Aracati/CE, located on the east coast. The target population consisted of four generational groups – namely: childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age¹⁵. The sample is characterized by the choice of two individuals, a male and a female, from each generational population, on whom the measure of interest was observed.

The groups were stratified into the following categories: Generational Group 1 (G1) - Children, characterized by the Child and Teenager Statute (1990) as a person up to twelve years of age; Generational Group 2 (G2) - Adolescents, characterized by the Child and Adolescent Statute (1990) as people between twelve and eighteen years old; Generational Group 3 (G3) - Young adults, characterized by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a person between 25 and 44 years old and Generational Group 4 (G4) - Elderly people, characterized by the WHO as a person over 60 years old. In addition to the inclusion by age groups, the members were patients and were duly registered at the research BHU. As an exclusion criterion, it was limited to people who presented cognitive changes.

The workshops took place between September and November 2021, lasting an average of one hour per meeting, with different times and days for each of the eight participants. The necessary protective measures against COVID-19 and a space suited to the uniqueness of each individual were considered. There was an interventionist and the instrument used for data collection was a script with four workshops based on the Creative and Sensi-

tive Method (CSM), based on Paulo Freire's ideas of problematizing education, from which it is possible to allow the appreciation of multiplicity of voices of individuals. There is a greater possibility of freedom of thought provided by multiple perspectives, of manifestation of creativity, using the different senses of the body and sensitivity¹⁶.

Based on Cabral and Groleau¹⁷, the meeting was divided into five moments: organization of the environment and reception, presentation of group components, explanation and production of the proposed activity, exhibition of products and collective analysis. However, for better understanding, these stages were renamed: reception, presentation, action, debate and collectivization. Participant observation was part of the moment as a complement to data collection.

The workshops addressed themes originating from the Dynamics of Creativity and Sensitivity (DCS) of the CSM. These were methodologically based on the dynamics Body Knowledge and Almanac¹⁸. The workshop That's me and that's what I am! (based on the DCS "Body Knowledge"), generated debate about the representation of the body, where the individual drew their body in a silhouette, with felt-tip pens and colored pencils being made available. Then, any object that would represent his drawing was chosen. The use of a codename for the scribble was advised. The workshop Listen to what my body is talking about! (based on the DCS "Almanac"), guided the dialogue of the body. Each participant chose three representative molds of body parts. They were then directed to create collages of engravings on the selected pieces, in a way that promoted non-verbal communication.

The data was recorded in audio format, transcribed, organized and analyzed following these steps: exploratory, preparing the material to go into the field; field work, the theoretical basis is put into practice; analysis of the material, use of techniques to analyze the data obtained¹².

Pêcheux's Discourse Analysis (DA) technique was used¹⁹. With this approach, discourse

is understood as a set of signs and elements within a system, as they appear historically. The same words can mean different things because they are inscribed in different discursive spaces, no longer being interpreted as a limited and stable sequence, varying from one discourse to another. Consequently, the subject brings a discussion of unique representations about themselves, the researcher and the subject addressed.

The analysis took place at three levels: linguistic surface, discursive object and discursive process. The discussion took place through the relationships of the texts, where the author used the notions of representation of the archi-

ve obtained as a framework for understanding the discursivity. Following this proposal, each meeting was examined separately, seeking to conduct the actions perceived by each person and how each scene is configured¹⁹.

The research was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee of Faculdade do Vale do Jaguaribe and approved under opinion No. 4,954,707, thus being in line with the resolutions that discuss ethical issues involving human beings. Participants signed the Free and Informed Consent Form (FICF), Free and Informed Assent Form (FI AF) and voice recording form, guaranteeing secrecy and confidentiality of information.

RESULTS

All data obtained went through the organization process, considering what was proposed in the study methodology. The results were divided into two points: presentation of research participants and categorization of results.

If the analysis of the images had been constructed separately, that is, without the

speeches, the author would have had his own vision of each scribble. In this way, with the socialization of the workshop products, an analysis of the subject's speech in its entirety, design and speech, was encouraged.

Participants were introduced based on the generational group to which they belong, age, gender and codename.





Table 1 - Presentation of research participants and socialization of codenames. Aracati, Ceará, 2021.

GENERATIONAL GROUP	AGE	SEX	CODENAME	SOCIALIZATION
G1	09	Female	Maria Alice	"I like the name Maria Alice!"
G1	06	Male	Léo Léo	"I think the name Léo Léo is beautiful!"
G2	14	Female	Anna	"I like that name, I think it's beautiful! I know the health agent here with that name."
G2	18	Male	Gabriel	"Gabriel would be my name, one of the options my parents chose."
G3	25	Female	Isa	No answer.
G3	39	Male	Tyrone	"Tyrone would be the name of a child I would have when my wife was pregnant."
G4	72	Female	Aloan	No answer.
G4	61	Male	Joel	"Put my grandson's name, Joel."

As illustrated, the activities enabled the establishment of bonds, a dynamic look and sensitive listening conducted to each protagonist. In this way, codes and designs were converted into experiences that permeate the

collective space. The construction of tables contributes to a panoramic view of the repercussions of the socialization of results. Table 2 depicts the representations and symbols of body self-perception.

Tabela 2 - Representações e simbologias da autopercepção corporal. Aracati, Ceará 2021.

NAME	VERBAL REPRESENTATION	REPRESENTATION BY IMAGE
G1 Maria Alice	Object: Doll <i>"Because she looks a lot like a doll!"</i>	
G1 Léo Léo	Object: Ball <i>"It reminds me that playing ball is having fun, reminds me of imagination."</i>	
G2 Anna	Object: Glasses <i>"There's not much relationship between the object and the drawing, I think. But it was the first object that came to mind."</i>	
G2 Gabriel	Object: Ball <i>"The ball is an object that I really like and because of the more rounded face shape, I think it would go well with this object. This drawing represents me a little, the hair and the smile too."</i>	

to be continued...

... continuation Table 02








NAME	VERBAL REPRESENTATION	REPRESENTATION BY IMAGE
G3 Isa	Object: Shelf <i>"This doll would represent me, beyond sex, right? because it's feminine, because of the hair, the body maybe and the shelf was because it was the first object that came to my mind."</i>	
G3 Tyrone	Object: Xbox one <i>"Xbox one, because I really like videogames!"</i>	
G4 Aloan	Object: Doll <i>"I made a lot of cloth dolls, I made lots and lots of little dolls like that. I look and remember my childhood, I never had those childhoods where girls would go to parties, buy this and buy that, no."</i>	
G4 Joel	Object: Sloth <i>"If it could be an animal, the animal that it looks like is a sloth because I think that head looks like a sloth, it was the animal that resembled the shape of the face to me."</i>	

Table 3 - Interactions between body and subject in body language. Aracati, Ceará 2021.

NAME	VERBAL REPRESENTATION	REPRESENTATION BY IMAGE
G1 Maria Alice	<i>"I chose pants, because we need to be dressed. I chose a ring, because the ring is an accessory for us to wear and a joyful one for us to always be happy."</i>	
G1 Léo Léo	<i>"The tractor is in the mouth because it swallows, if it swallows it's over, it chokes and dies. That nose thing is a hand trapped in a cage. Communicating is the mouth that speaks, the nose is for air and the eye is for seeing things."</i>	
G2 Anna	<i>"So, the shouting here, right? In the mouth. We can't scream and everything. The candy? I don't even know why I'm pasting it here. I'm interested in this kind of thing, I like watching things about judges, I think it's interesting. To communicate? Hands work, I don't think ears, mouths we can communicate by speaking, looking sometimes depends on the person and we understand each other, right? The nose I don't think so."</i>	
G2 Gabriel	<i>"I think communication starts with the way a person not only pronounces words, but also the way they use their gestures. I think that as I said here on the face, the way a person expresses their joy, you understand how to communicate, whether the person is well or not. I chose the figure of the horse with the look because of the battles and challenges. I found the issue of orality to be one of the ways you can achieve your goals quite relatable."</i>	
G3 Isa	<i>"With the mouth, I think I try to keep control of what I'm going to say, whether it will offend the other person or not and how the other person might react to it. The ear, I try more to listen to what people have to say, listen to a lot of advice and filter what will work for me and what won't. I use my eyes a lot to observe what happens around me, how people act, you know? And record the moments."</i>	

to be continued...

... continuation Table 03

NAME	VERBAL REPRESENTATION	REPRESENTATION BY IMAGE
G3 Tyrone	<i>"Everything you look at is stored in your head, so we have to be careful. Newspapers with ears, with ears, is why we should listen more and talk less. The mouth even though it is a small organ, but if you use it incorrectly, you can cause a great calamity. Sometimes a person always says something that they misinterpret and then have a fight, disastrous consequences."</i>	
G4 Aloan	<i>"Without that mouth, no one can't live, we have to have a mouth. The ear, without this ear we live, without the ear, but for me it is a very important thing, to listen. I chose the duckling because when I was a little girl I made earrings out of everything. Today I don't use it anymore, not because I'm evangelical, we don't use these things. This tree reminds me of my games at the mango tree."</i>	
G4 Joel	<i>"A cap on your head is a way to protect from the sun. The mouth on the head to express joy. The boot on the foot, because standing barefoot, right? It's to cover the foot (laughs). The glasses, because what most resembles to protect your vision. The body also communicates. In my opinion, the eyes communicate, right? The legs, in my opinion, yes."</i>	

DISCUSSION

In order to present the discussion in a more systematic way, three categories were organized: similarities and divergences between the women under study; similarities and differences between the men under study; and similarities and divergences between women and men in the same generational cycle.

Similarities and divergences between the women under study

When asked about the objects, the child and the elderly woman alluded to a doll. The details scribbled by Maria Alice (9 years old), such as clothes, hair and face shape, have characteristics similar to hers at the time of the

research. Aloan (72 years old) returns to the memories of her childhood and the cloth dolls she used to make, distancing herself from her current appearance.

Anna (14 years old) and Isa (25 years old) draw details that match their particularities, but report that the objects were chosen randomly, with no direct relationship with the drawing they made. Even though it was related to a pair of glasses, the teenager did not draw the object in silhouette and did not use it, possibly not having an inherent connection.

Exploring symbols is complex and, normally, inconclusive. Symbolizing is the act of representing through symbols, therefore, com-

parisons are made with familiar objects, offering a tangible meaning. In another aspect, it is possible to make associations considering the imaginary and attributing a logical relationship with the ideas²⁰.

The collages of Maria Alice (9 years old), Isa (25 years old) and Anna (14 years old) support the discussion about dressing. The clothed body mediates a connection between the person and society, and can be created and recreated at different stages of life¹. Lopes, Mendes and Sousa²¹ debate about these artifacts and attitudes associated with “being a woman”, converging with the construction of Maria Alice (9 years old) and Aloan (72 years old) when using accessories to decorate the body.

In addition to gender, age proved to be relevant when the elderly woman designs a pleated dress full of ruffles as a mark of her childhood. When asked about the design of the dress at the current stage, she says that this is how she finds herself, old, wearing long clothes. The dresses from the two stages, childhood and old age, have different characteristics in details and sizes.

The elderly woman's view of her body image is based on current perceptions that one should be ashamed of the aging body, as it does not have the same functionality and beauty as it once did. In this way, clothes are used to protect an aging body full of imperfections. The same clothing used to show beauty and youth, hides what is already worn out¹⁰.

Another point noticed corresponds to the impacts of religion present in Aloan's narration (72 years old). In this situation, clothing establishes belonging and acceptance in a group. Other factors are determining, such as: values linked to decency, category of religion followed and the subject's level of commitment to religiosity²².

While for the others, the elements used refer to the external body, Isa's choices (25 years old) are directly linked to behavior. Speaking, listening and observing as an interaction resource require a communicator's attitude. The adult

shows a sentinel relationship with the entire process of gesturing in front of a group. In the behavioral aspect, Anna (14 years old), in turn, emphasizes shouting as an inappropriate and disrespectful attitude.

During a conversation, verbal communication is triggered by conscious speech. Consequently, there is a meticulousness in the words expressed. Simultaneously with this, non-verbal language is projected subconsciously. The information contained in non-verbal behavior favors a more reliable analysis, as it can hardly be corrupted²³.

Similarities and divergences between the men under study

For Léo Léo (6 years old) and Gabriel (18 years old), the ball is chosen as a symbol, differing in meanings, since, while for the first it is associated with playing, for the second it is related to the physiognomy of the face. Tyrone (39 years old) resembles Léo Léo's (6 years old) motivation when choosing video games.

With this, the boy insinuates the concept of symbolic play, as a construction of the child's significant mental exposures. It is the way of playing that symbolizes and offers meaning to the representations of the subject's own reality²⁴.

Similarly, Tyrone (39 years old) recounts his childhood in a solitary space, in which he was unable to establish relationships with other children, attributing life to Fen-Hir, his imaginary friend. It is the way of playing that symbolizes and offers meaning to the representations of reality itself²⁵. In adolescence, he reflects the joy of having a friend and expresses stories that he experienced with him, including about when his body developed and matured.

For the child, choosing the tractor placed in the mouth implies knowledge and communication with the world, experiencing pleasure for the first time²⁶. Although the age disagrees with the oral phase, which lasts up to two years, the experiences possibly originated at this stage. Similarly, for Gabriel (18 years old), speaking is

closely linked to personal satisfaction and his goals. Léo Léo (6 years old) is in the phallic phase, where the sexual organs are discovered. This becomes explicit as soon as he is asked about the drawing and narrates pointing to his genitals: "He's wearing shorts to cover up here, I can't talk about that with you."

Tyrone (39 years old) triggers another discussion about the mouth, when he highlights the importance of verbal communication interconnected with appropriate speech. The choice of the dragon figure demonstrates imminent danger when using words incorrectly. This vocalization is accompanied by paralinguistic, that is, all the elements resulting from verbal production²³.

The Elderly uses protection for the weakened and worn-out body in its assemblies. Aging brings a scenario of significant changes, favoring the fear of functional incapacities, which impacts on several aspects related to sexuality, interpersonal relationships and, therefore, body image itself. Therefore, the memory of the active body and the fear of limitations corroborate the need for self-care. This resignification of the elderly perspective enhances the autonomy of care²⁷.

Similarities and divergences between women and men in the same generational cycle

Regarding the principles of corporeality, children transmit an idea of a biological body. This proves that body awareness is acquired through interactions between the subject and the environment, that is, it is not innate²¹. This is evident

in the social construction of toy choices in the childhood cycle, the boy is for the ball, just as the girl is for the doll.

Gabriel's (18 years old) choice of the man with money and achieving his goals can be explained by the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Through the observation technique, it was noticed that Anna (14 years old) initially chose the figure of a couple kissing for her mouth. The action caused embarrassment and giving up on the part of the teenager who looked for another image.

Similar to this, in a survey carried out with adolescents and their families, outdated concepts were identified that do not strengthen the dialogue about sexuality. Young people are discouraged from the freedom to demonstrate fear, uncertainty and insecurity that permeate this period. Family, school and religious environments are fundamental to building an autonomous and responsible character in adolescents²⁸.

Adults, like Anna (14 years old) and Gabriel (18 years old), emphasize adolescence as a period of marked discoveries and idealization about body image as a discussion marked by the disparity in body profiles between boys and girls exposed in the collectivization of study. The body appears as occupying a place in the world and capable of communicating consciously in adolescence. Girls show a clear interest in smaller and delicate silhouettes, on the contrary, boys desire strong, masculine bodies, emphasizing virility²⁹.

CONCLUSION

During this study, it was realized that the body undergoes changing representations of signs and symbols over the generations. The sign helps the subject in the designation, so the message arrives faster. Identifying these interpretations consists of considering numerous variables, such as: the stages experienced, memories, sociocultural environments, religious aspects and gender.

The same body manifests itself at times representative, at times influenceable and always existential, there is no dissociation of body-subject. Throughout the research, the identification of body image reflected the recent and stored experiences of each individual. This phenomenon is the multi-significance of the body acquiring meaning in the participants' narrations.

The body, as an object of communication,

presents itself as multifaceted. This message is transmitted both by body language, through behavior, and by paralinguistics, led by the movements that the body is capable of performing. These interactions are important for effective mediation with the world. An example of this is clothing as a strong conductor of concepts and information.

The contribution of this investigation to the

performance of health professionals refers to the fact that communication is fundamental in the relationship between professional and client. In this way, corporeality, when used as a dialect, allows the health professional a mutual construction of knowledge and values, strengthening horizontality in the relationship between the body that cares for and the body cared for.

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