INTERNATIONAL STUDIES IN TIME PERSPECTIVE

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Chapter 4
Temporal Orientation and Future Time Perspective of Adolescents in Institutional Care

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Abstract: Based on the paradigm of Dan McAdams, according to which identity is constructed in narrative, an exploratory research of qualitative nature was conducted on the life stories and the projects for the future of adolescents placed in Childhood and Youth Homes, under the protection measure of extended placement in an institution. This study sought to answer, among others, the following research questions: Are the institutionalized adolescents more oriented towards the past than towards the future? What projects do the adolescents make for their future lives? Following the methodology of Grounded Analysis, 17 adolescents, between the ages of 15 and 18, with a minimum of 5 years of institutionalization, were interviewed. The results showed that: 1) there are no significant statistical differences between the orientation towards the past, present and future of these institutionalized adolescents; 2) their future time perspective is sparse, poorly structured, more imagined than motivational, and is mainly composed of the objects which can ensure them the basic conditions for subsistence, such as having a job and a home. From the findings obtained during this research some practical implications were taken, which concern some aspects of the care provided to the institutionalized children and adolescents.

Keywords: adolescents, institutionalization, temporal orientation, future time perspective.

Introduction

One of the main inspirers behind the concept of future time perspective, understood as the image that an individual has of his future, was Nuttin (1963 in Abreu, 1999). Particularly interested in the motivational force that the time perspective plays in behaviour, Nuttin focused on the component of future time perspective, which he widely studied. After Nuttin, future time perspective was developed by other authors like Gisela Trommsdorff and Rachel Seginer that boosted research in this field. In examining the concept of future time perspective, Trommsdorff (Trommsdorff & Lamm, 1975; Lamm, Schmidt & Trommsdorff, 1976) ended up replacing it by the concept of future orientation, and this replacement came to be accepted and used by the researchers that followed her, in particular by Seginer or Nurmi. However, this substitution of concepts seems to conflict with other dimensions of psychological time, which may result in some kind of conceptual confusion.