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# Liquid Youth: From Street Kids to Theater Actors; An Account of a Reaffiliation Process

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We report an action research investigating ways of using communication strategies to help abandoned adolescents living in a shelter in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to be reaffiliated with society. A team of researchers, psychiatry in-training students, and municipal caretakers worked with teens who decided to engaged in theater production. Adolescent mothers and fathers, pregnant girls, and boys participated in the collaborative writing of a theater play, its performances, and collective debates. Data were analyzed, during the process, around the notions of affiliation, disaffiliation, and reaffiliation to feed the action research. The article discusses how vulnerable Afro-Brazilian adolescents are affected by negative globalization, suggesting that the theater process can lead them to resignify their lives and to reaffiliate with society.

*Keywords: street kids, adolescents, communication, theater, liquid modernity, empowerment, action research*

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People living in the streets are outcasts of *liquid modernity*, "a civilization of excess, redundancy, waste, and waste disposal" (Bauman, 2004, p. 97). This phenomenon is apparent in most former European colonies that still face difficulties in dealing with poverty derived from acute class differences resulting from colonization rooted in exploitation, slavery, and cultural genocide. The face of abandonment is easily found in streets filled with vulnerable adults and minors living in public spaces. The "problem of waste" (Bauman, 2004, p. 71) of a consumerist liquid society affects us all.

To face this problem, the outdated Brazilian justice system places disaffiliated adolescents in municipal shelters. *Disaffiliation* is defined as situations in which youths find themselves increasingly disconnected from two main axes of ordinary life—education/work and family/community—around which *affiliation* is defined; they become disaffiliated from the social order and lose their dignity (Castel, 1995). In other words, they get farther and farther away from family protection and the environment in which they grew up because of social and economic problems and difficulties generating income.

After being caught in the protection net established by the law, a dozen adolescents with whom we worked were living in one of the biggest municipal shelters in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Located in a violent neighborhood surrounded by shantytowns, the shelter houses approximately 120 youths. At the time the research was carried out (between 2010 and 2013), its surroundings were partially controlled by drug traffickers and militias. We engaged both the adolescents and the caretakers in a reflective critical-thinking process through a theater production and performance experience. They had an opportunity to freely express themselves, thereby improving comradeship, mutual respect, and self-esteem, in line with studies on health promotion and youth empowerment (Wong, Zimmerman, & Parker, 2010) and female adolescent health (Banister, Jakubec, & Stein, 2003). In this article, we describe the process and suggest that theater communication is a powerful tool for overcoming suffering, disillusionment, and hopelessness. This study is part of an interdisciplinary research program integrating different communication and psychiatry projects that involve communication, education, psychology, sociology, and mental health scholars and students. They work in collaboration with caretakers with the goal of helping adolescents cope with violence and empower them to improve their mental health.

## Social and Historical Context

### *Late Abolition of Slavery and Poverty*

Brazil was "discovered" by the Portuguese in 1500.[2] Once the lands were distributed among Portuguese nobles, extraction of goods—including slaves—to be sold in Europe began. Millions of Africans were abducted, tortured, and killed in the most obnoxious, grievous, and cruel commerce mankind has ever seen (Ribeiro, 2000). Worse, the few who survived the hardships of slave ships that crossed the Atlantic Ocean from Africa to Brazil suffered unspeakable violence. Slavery was abolished on May 13, 1888, after many decades of pressure from abolitionist and republican movements and, most notably,

[2] Couto (2011) suggests that Portugal did not discover the lands given by Pope Alexander VI in 1493 (bill *Inter Cœtera* that led to the Treaty of Tordesillas between Portugal and Spain), as previously thought, but just took possession.

representatives of British economic interests. However, abolition did not significantly alter the lives of the former slaves, namely those who were living in Rio de Janeiro, which was the Brazilian capital at that time. In fact, the newly liberated were officially abandoned by the state. Just one month after the abolition decree, a law was issued criminalizing "idleness," which targeted virtually all freed slaves. Later, a new constitution established that "beggars" and "analphabets" could not vote, and that involvement in crime would be punished with the withdrawal of citizenship rights (Constituição da República dos Estados Unidos do Brasil de 24/02/1891). As a result, those men and women did not have—or lost—access to most social benefits such as education, housing, health care, and job training that would have enabled them to get out of the circle of social disaffiliation. New constitutions and laws enacted later did not significantly change the situation. Instead, a series of military or militarized civil governments issued renewed laws subjecting the Afro-Brazilian disaffiliated population to a vicious cycle that engendered forms of survival antithetical to human dignity, reinforcing a social order conveniently manipulated by the upper classes.

For almost a century of "freedom" from slavery, many African descendants and other disaffiliated Brazilians ended up in "total institutions" (Goffman, 1961). Those who did not, the majority, were pushed to the periphery of the cities in the beginning of 20th century as a result of sanitization policies aiming to clean up the streets of "good" neighborhoods (Abreu Esteves, 1989). To get to work, the disaffiliated needed to travel back and forth to the city on a daily basis. To avoid these lengthy and difficult commutes, they relocated to the mountain slopes closer to their jobs, leading to the development of *favelas* (now called "communities"). Most of these shantytowns were built in the mountains surrounding the coast, which was occupied by the middle and upper social classes. The proximity between hill and beach allowed poor workers living in the slums to easily get to the coast where low-paid and unregulated jobs (as servants, maids, etc.), reproducing the slavery logic, were available. Almost no social ascension was possible. The numerous *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro, developed during more than a century of social abandonment and demeaning treatment, created countless problems not only for "Brazil by the beach," but, most important, for the poor population, namely children and adolescents, whose civil rights were shamefully violated.

### ***Youths, Crime, and Social Fear***

Efforts to integrate disaffiliated youths into society began only in the 1960s. The first bylaw making school attendance free, secular, and mandatory for all children was approved in 1961 (Ribeiro, 1984). After the end of the military dictatorship imposed in 1964, the new 1988 constitution led to a federal bylaw regulating citizen rights for children and adolescents (Lei nº 8.069, 1990), ensuring access to education, health, and housing. In addition, it banned punitive practices, abolished juvenile asylums and boarding schools, and created a legal framework encouraging sociopedagogical approaches. However, the state's actions and law compliance have been largely delusional, and the integration of poor children and adolescents into society has been difficult. Many youths still abandon their families or are abandoned by them. Often, they plunge in the subworld of crime and become hostages of drug dealers (who "slave" them as sellers and users of crack cocaine), corrupted police (that share benefits of criminal activities with traffickers), or even illegal militias (that, with the pretense of protecting the population, take over the business of drug dealers and terrorize entire neighborhoods by imposing taxes and their own "justice" code). When adolescents witness violent crimes, they are sentenced to death. If they are not killed

(sometimes in horrendous ways such as being burned alive inside old car tires), they are forced to flee their homes and end up living on the streets. These are the youths with whom we worked.

The 21st century economic development of Brazil that made the lives of approximately 40 million middle-class inhabitants significantly better, thanks to strong government social agendas, did not change the insidious practices that continue, pervasively, to drain social justice. The historical abandonment to which African descendants have been subjected is far from fixed. Slavery and later "sanitizing" have been prolonged by a ruthless elite that has a strong grip on power through endemic corruption. It reproduces colonialism through a porous political system of representation reinforced, on the one hand, by bureaucracy and red tape and, on the other hand, by media control (Bosi, 1992; Frank, 1980). Governments committed to change are not enough to ensure law compliance. As a result, Brazil still is one of the most violent countries in the world (Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2008). Crime figures are similar to those of countries at war. The mean homicide mortality rate involving youths grew 209.1% from 1980 to 2011; in 2011, it reached 53.4 per 100,000 inhabitants (Waiselfisz, 2013), with 29,757 violent deaths of youths. In the United States, which has one of the highest rates among OCDE countries, the mean homicide mortality rate of the entire population in 2010 was 4.8 per 100,000 inhabitants, with a high of 17,030 homicides in 2006 (Cooper & Smith, 2011). The Rio de Janeiro police detained, in 2008, 1,821 minors involved in all kinds of crime (Secretaria da Segurança, 2009). In 2013, the figure skyrocketed 237.61% from that of 2011 (Bottari, 2013), with 7,222 detentions (Secretaria da Segurança, 2014). By 2013, general violent crime figures went up 16.3% from the previous year, with 4,745 homicides and other 188 violent deaths, most in the metropolitan region. This situation increases the globalized phenomenon of "liquid fear" (Bauman, 2006). Regarding, specifically, disaffiliated Afro-Brazilian youths, social fear against them has been increasing with the complicity of biased media coverage. Upper classes control most Brazilian media companies and executive, legislative, and judiciary leadership jobs. Media employees, who come from the middle classes, usually reproduce a discourse of fear that reflects a violent and authoritarian ideology that has been nurtured for centuries (Chauí, 2014), describing poor adolescents as dangerous and responsible for public insecurity. The consequence is that discourse perpetrated against them comes back violently as delinquent behavior.

## Liquid Youth: Disaffiliated Adolescents in a Globalized World

Contemporary communities have been shattered since what has been conventionally called "globalization" became an insidious economic process that endangered societies previously assumed as secure and leading to common good (Bauman, 2007), and the sense of community has collapsed: "The new individualism, the fading of human bonds and the wilting of solidarity are engraved on one side of a coin whose other side shows the misty contours of 'negative globalization' . . . a parasitic and predatory process" (p. 24). *Liquid modernity* is a metaphor explaining how modernity has transformed itself in permeable ways in which security is not attainable: What was certain became uncertain, safety has turned into fear, and prisons have been replaced by other dumping sites. *Liquidity* helps us explain the process driving millions of disaffiliated men and women, young and old, toward nothingness and other forms of neglected identity. The *liquid youth* who wander in the streets of Rio de Janeiro and other metropolises around the world are just "the waste of the planet-wide triumph of modernity, but also of a new planet-wide disorder in the making" (Bauman, 2004, p. 66).

Disaffiliation, as such "disorder in the making," often leads teenagers to experience profound life imbalances caused by societal rejection that increase psychosocial and mental risks and turn them into outsiders (Becker, 1963) and outcasts (Bauman, 2004). Disaffiliated adolescents are usually confronted with dysfunctional families, home abuse, and outlaws. As a result, they discover that life on the streets is less disturbing and even joyful (Leite, 2003). However, this state of things can be fought. According to Castel (1995), "exclusion is immobile. It designates a state, or else deprivation states" (p. 15). On the other hand, disaffiliation "isn't endorsing a rupture" (p. 15) and can allow life to be rebuilt. *Disaffiliation* stands for the idea that "exclusion" is provisional and can be repaired. The youths could, thus, be reintegrated into society by means of *reaffiliation*.

Most typical teenagers develop relational problems before ending up on the streets. When they are caught by the police and sent to municipal shelters for their protection and education, authorities try to find them a home. When their lives or homes are at risk, the state prescribes a psychological follow-up for family members. If this is not possible, the adolescents are sent to voluntary host families. In some cases, when the justice system is unable to protect them, they keep rotating between shelters until they reach 18 years, the legal age in Brazil. Such a situation illustrates the complete disaffiliation cycle described by Castel (1995): When human beings are born, they are naturally *filiated* with their families, and then they *affiliate* with institutions such as communities, schools, and so forth. However, the zones of affiliation can be broken when vulnerability (by abandonment, unemployment, etc.) replaces community and social integration. When this process—generally called "exclusion"—reaches a breaking point, another zone is opened: that of disaffiliation. Castel explains that disaffiliation is not rupture, but a need to rebuild a way of life leading to reaffiliation. While recognizing that globalization reinforces disaffiliation processes, communities can provide conditions for reaffiliation. According to Bauman (2001), "If there is to be a community in the world of individuals, it can only be (and it needs to be) a community woven together from sharing and mutual care" (p. 150). The community of disaffiliated Afro-Brazilian adolescents of our research, with their typical stories of Rio's shantytowns, found in the collaborative theater experience the affective basis for their reaffiliation.

## Method

We adopted a sociopedagogical action-research method focused on communication-based activities with the goal of providing reflective collaboration among the research team, caretakers, and adolescents. This work happened in the context of in-training activities with graduate and undergraduate psychiatry students, with the support of technical teams of caretakers (social educators and psychologists) in a municipal shelter with the goal of reaffiliating the youths and promoting their social rehabilitation. This partnership, which determined the choice of participants of our research, has been going on for almost two decades. We focused, on the one hand, on collaborating with the caretakers who did not have suitable training to tackle difficult behavior and psychological disorders resulting from life histories tainted by violence; they worked under stressful conditions with little support from the institution and often developed psychological disorders of their own. On the other hand, we supported collaboration between the adolescents, who presented hectic and aggressive behavior and other manifestations of deep suffering. From mid-2010 to 2013, the research team organized 4 hours/week of therapeutic sessions (464 hours total) with the caretakers and the adolescents in which well-established clinical procedures for

social rehabilitation were followed, in addition to 16 hours/week of collective meetings, team supervision, and theater-related activities (approximately 700 hours total).

We applied Riel's (2010) suggestions regarding action-research "cycles" or phases, each one encompassing a plan, taking action, collecting and analyzing evidence, and reflecting, consistent with Lewin's (1946) recommendations of evaluating action, learning from it, correcting the next step, and modifying the "overall plan" (p. 38). Interunderstandings emerging from collective discussions among researchers, students, and caretakers fed the phases. Because in-training students were engaged in the research, we considered it appropriate to integrate the reflective practitioner approach (Schön, 1983), according to which the effectiveness of an intervention, in professional practice, could be enhanced by means of collaboration and critical thinking. The notion of critical thinking can be traced back to the critical constructivist school. Developed by cognitive psychology and argumentation theorists, *critical thinking* can be defined as the construction of cognitive abilities (Piaget, 1977b), in which logical operations (such as hypothesizing, negating, etc.) scaffold learning (Vygotsky, 1978). The interveners (researchers, students, and caretakers) were the "reflective practitioners" and, although the adolescents were the "learners," under Shön's (1983) approach, all participants were learners in their own right. We recognize that researchers, caretakers, and adolescents did not have the same privileges. However, we followed Piaget's (1977a) definition of *cooperation* according to which collaborators who treat each other as equals and establish collaborative relationships should be considered equals. Such commitment emerges from what Scardamalia (2002) calls "collective cognitive responsibility" (pp. 67–69): By being authentic and by enabling participants to engage in collaborative activities, empowerment is achieved (Wong et al., 2011).

### *Participants, Sampling Strategy, and Data Sources*

We adopted convenience sampling; participants were selected because they were known, close, or simply available. This technique, based on a nonprobable sampling, cannot provide quantitative validity (Babbie, 2001), but is useful when the reality is unique and the research aims to explore a specific context. In our case, as put by Rubin and Babbie (2010), "other methods may not be feasible for a particular type of study or population" (p. 146).

The participants were approximately 20 adolescents from two houses (groups), among many, of the shelter: one with girls who were either pregnant or already mothers, and other with boys within the same age range (from 12 to 17 years old). The sample size varied because the shelter population changes constantly: Youths come and go either because they are judicially transferred from one facility to another or by means of evasion. During the research, the groups did not have the same adolescents all of the time, although a core remained in spite of the population fluctuation.

### *Process and Analysis*

Our way of implementing action research supposed that activities, data, and results were all part of a single methodological process. The researchers collected qualitative and logical-argumentative data to feed the following phases: brainstorming with the caretakers, discussions with the whole team, play writing, rehearsals, theater, and DVD Christmas presentations.

We used two discourse analysis techniques. During brainstorming and discussions, we took notes, video- and audio-recorded some sessions, and transcribed the data. Then, we applied the *templum* operator for abducting categories (Boudon, 1997), which enables the design of meaning spaces. Abducted categories were fed back into the therapeutic sessions with the caretakers and adolescents. For the text of the play, the audio and video recordings of the theater and DVD Christmas presentations, and the follow-up debates between the adolescents and the audiences (composed of street kids and caretakers from other municipal shelters), we applied natural logic (Grize, 1996). This discourse analysis method allows the grammatical markers of natural language (subjects, objects, predicates, etc.) in collective sense-making and communication processes to emerge. It is a rigorous tool for finding categories that reflect social representations. According to Moscovici (1961), social representations are communicated "systems of values, ideas and practices" (p. xiii). As with the *templum* analysis, we fed back the categories to the participants, which were used as scaffolds for discussions.

At the end of the process, we triangulated the data using Castel's (1995) circle of affiliation, disaffiliation, and reaffiliation, with the goal of confronting the categories emerging from the play with the actual ideas and judgments voiced by the adolescents. The data provided us with suggestions of what it means to be a disaffiliated Afro-Brazilian in a liquid society, in which social representations of slavery and human waste are everywhere, and possible paths for reaffiliation. As such, our analyses should be understood both as a process and its outcomes.

## The Action-Research Process

### *How the Idea of Producing a Theater Play Came About*

We started our intervention by engaging in discussions with the caretakers to assess their difficulties in dealing with the adolescents' hectic and difficult behavior and early sexuality. Many were pregnant girls or young mothers living in the shelter with their babies. The caretakers needed to develop easier relationships with the teens, which were marked by periodic outbreaks of unrest, conflicts, and violence. In a series of meetings, we discussed which communication strategies might improve relationships and be appropriate to deal with adolescent pregnancy, motherhood, and fatherhood. Categories abducted by the *templum* operator from these discussions highlighted that, sometimes, the caretakers reproduced negative social representations about the adolescents and did not reflect on their histories of suffering that, curiously, were shared by them because they felt, as professionals, as neglected as the population they had the mandate to serve. During these meetings, strategies to overcome suffering by devising conflict resolution strategies were discussed.

Next, we started to weave these meetings with the ones with the adolescents. Conflicts among them often arose under the form of disagreements and serious misunderstandings. One of these conflicts, provoked by an adolescent mother who would become a playwright, main character, and a pivotal figure in the theater process, led to a significant change in the series of meetings that were taking place in the shelter. She tried to strangle a colleague because she had a "stinky pussy" after the colleague had

accused her of having a "cougar bad breath."[3] With enormous difficulty, the caretakers calmed them down and proposed a game strategy, previously discussed with the researchers, that could potentially "create new mediations indifferent to the violence and contradictions that could have stamp their history" (De Gaulejac, 1999, p. 15). It was a playful activity in which all adolescents, organized in small groups, came up, through theater games, with a shared meaning of "respect," a notion that was antithetical with their behavior: They had difficulties in foreseeing a silver lining. As a result, two adolescents—the mother who assaulted her colleague and another who was pregnant—decided to write a theater play together. The meetings continued to take place while the play was being written with the supervision of one of the caretakers. All data were analyzed and the abducted categories continuously fed discussions within the community. Social representations and judgments about social classes, race, sexuality, and so on were debated with the goal of defying all participants to challenge their own prejudices in the search for cooperative interunderstanding in the framework of the reflective practitioner approach.

### *The Play Script: "Two Lives in One"*

**The creative process.** The play-writing process took approximately one year. Two adolescents worked together on a script, which was revealed later to be their own stories, written in their own terms, with the help of one caretaker. In the meetings, we discussed the need to embrace the adolescents' creativity, but this particular caretaker came up with a "final" text that expressed not only the adolescents' values, but also hers: "We fought [against the caretaker. . .]. She wrote the final text, but all ideas were ours . . . because they came from our lives." This tension was present in the somewhat detached "final speech" of the play. Although the caretaker involved was not that concerned and was simply responding to institutional requirements that demanded some control over the adolescents, the caretaker had a positive assessment of the process: "What is interesting about the play is that we laugh [but] we could later discuss the issues raised by the script."

**The story.** The play that the young mothers called "Two Lives in One," suggestive of pregnancy, was an autobiographical account of their lives. It tells the story of a girl who has a relationship with a boy who is involved with drug trafficking, consumes crack cocaine, and carries a gun. She tells him about her newly discovered pregnancy. He claims the father is another guy, suggesting that she is a whore, refusing to accept the situation and to take responsibility for her and the baby: "I have nothing to do with this . . . nobody will make me accept this. . . . I did not ask you to get pregnant . . . you do not even know if this baby is mine." Infuriated, he spanks her in front of her mother, who appears suddenly from nowhere and implores him to stop. The mother takes her daughter home. The teen tells her father and mother about the pregnancy, the reason why her boyfriend was spanking her. Astonished by the fact that her daughter did not take any precautionary measures to avoid pregnancy, the father expels her from home under the complacency of the mother: "If your boyfriend does not take responsibility, I don't care, try to find someone who will. . . . Get out and never come back home. . . . Go on, leave or I will spank you myself." Abandoned on the streets, she looks for help from friends who have a place to live ("My father expelled me from home . . ."), but they turn her away because she rejects their suggestion to have an abortion: "We are sorry, you know, either you look for a public shelter or go on living in the streets." Then, she

[3] Brazilian slang for people having terrible bad breath.

meets other friends who are addicted to crack cocaine. They also suggest an abortion, but one of them recommends that she look for help from the Guardianship Council, an elected municipal organization charged with the protection of minors in cases of neglect or abuse: "I'll smoke a crack stone first, and then I take you there." The counselor sends both teens to the Department of Social Services, which places the pregnant adolescent in a public shelter and the other girl in a health clinic to treat drug addiction. The main character adapts to the shelter (whose rules include going to school) and has her baby there. After one year, she is informed of the violent death of her former boyfriend: "The father of your baby died in an armed confrontation with the police. . . . We need to take care of your rights." The caretaker tells her that she needs to be both father and mother to her baby, and announces that the shelter got an internship for her. Reaching majority, she would be able to choose between returning home and having a normal life elsewhere. The play ends with the "final speech" mentioned above in which she tells everyone that she saved money and got a place of her own, apologizes for her wrongdoings, and thanks all those who helped her overcome difficulties. She promises that she will help others as she was helped. Then, all actors say in unison, "We are not good enough if we are not together." The play has as soundtrack of a funk rap song called "Cinderella" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sR0kLWuDcN4&list=RDsR0kLWuDcN4&index=1), which tells the story of a fatherless girl who fell in love, became pregnant, was abandoned, struggled to survive, had her baby, and from a "princess" became a "queen."

**Emerging categories.** The categories that emerged from the story, applying Grize's (1996) discourse analysis, are suggestive of the ease with which liquidity drains the human sense of security and dumps wasted lives. On the other hand, they are consistent with Castel's (1995) notions of affiliation, disaffiliation, and reaffiliation. Regarding affiliation, we found the category family sheltering (subcategories: mother and father and subordination to rigid family rules). Indeed, the adolescent was affiliated, living with her parents, but her life started derailing because of her involvement with a drug-addicted adolescent dealer with whom she had sex and became pregnant, a common consequence of the sexual behavior of poor Brazilian adolescents (Castro, 2014). Regarding disaffiliation, the categories were drugs (subcategories: addiction, drug trafficker violence, and assassination), pregnancy (subcategories: sex life, expulsion, abandonment, and motherhood), street (subcategories: search for help, having a baby/abortion, expulsion, and social services authorities), and shelter (subcategories: acceptation and education). In fact, the adolescent was disaffiliated, sharing with other street kids the cultural and social context of drug use and trafficking, violent behavior and guns, typical of the disarray of liquid society. Finally, the category autonomy (subcategories: work, gratefulness, and awareness) is suggestive of reaffiliation because, as shown in the final speech, when reaching majority, she recovers her freedom and reaffiliates with society.

**The performances.** Play production and rehearsals followed the script-writing process. However, the way the shelter was structured made a smooth process practically impossible. The adolescents did the first rehearsals in their own houses. The shelter had no theater, but only an open area for sports, where the first public performance happened. Social educators and adolescents from other municipal shelters attended it. The actors had difficulties in following the actual words of the script and improvised a lot. The scenes of violence (the beating of the adolescent girl and the boyfriend's assassination by drug traffickers) were exaggerated and, interestingly, provoked laughs, which we believe were suggestive of discomfort. At the end, the main actor was unable to improvise on the "final speech," which was written on a piece of

paper that she took from her pocket and smoothed out. It broke the rhythm and sounded idealistic, but the audience warmly applauded the performance anyway.

A few months later, the team obtained a municipal theater for another public performance, free of charge, with all professional resources and technicians. As in the case of the shelter's presentation, adolescents and caretakers from several shelters were invited. The adolescents took charge of costume design, makeup, and hairstyling, with the help of the caretakers. The invited adolescents, amazed by the experience, wore their best clothes and styled their hair for what was their first visit to a real theater. As with the first presentation, the actors improvised a lot (but for the final speech, which was read pretty much like in the previous performance) and were very physical in the scenes of violence that, again, provoked laughs. The presentation was highly appreciated and greeted with enthusiasm and emotion, manifested through cries and whistling.

After both performances, collective debates took place among researchers, caretakers, actors, and adolescents from the other shelters to discuss what the play had meant to them. We fed the discussions with the categories that we had found in the theater script analysis. Concerning affiliation, the teens reproduced common social representations of the Brazilian middle and upper classes about family relationships: "I liked it: *favela* people and pregnant daughter. Nice play!"; "She was wrong [to get pregnant]. . . ." However, they also confronted the play with their reality: "What is really nice is to be with our family, home"; "My father is an inmate. Too much confusion, too many drugs"; "My mother lives around, but I never lived well with her. I left home when I was 11."

With regard to disaffiliation*,* the adolescents reacted to the way the play raised drug problems: "It [the play] is about drugs"; "This play is about a pregnant girl and a father who does not want to take responsibility and who is a drug trafficker"; "I loved the crack addicted. Great actress!"; "This stuff was real life, drug stuff. This is also real life, man. But it is drug trafficking, gun stuff, pregnancy." The drug problems found an echo and resignified experiences lived by some adolescents: "It is very bad for us, adolescent girls, to get involved with drug traffickers and crime because they are not always those who will provide us with a different life. What can they provide? A bad life, drugs, prison"; "Theater changes a lot of things. Some guys come, then evade [back to trafficking], come back, and are lost. If they do theater, they will not think in drugs anymore." One adolescent who was in the audience confessed that the play brought up tough memories from the past: "I cannot go back home now because my [family had to move to] another house. We lived there . . . there are militias. I had a problem with drug trafficking. They wanted to kill me. I left [home, and here] there is no risk."

Concerning pregnancy, some adolescents disagreed with the characters, but others reinforced social representations about the father's behavior: "The father told her to use condom [but] I would have helped her"; "Both her father and mother gave her advice, told her to use condoms. He was right. At the very end she went to the shelter, thus it was fine"; "Her mother should have said that she would leave home with her"; "She lost [her home]. It happens"; "At the end everything was fine: She did not lose anything"; "I see a nice thing in this play . . . what can really happen with a pregnant adolescent." The adolescents also commented on their sex lives: "It is tempting [to have sex], but we should avoid being guided by others"; on being expelled by the parents: "Fathers must help: not expel [but] sometimes it is

the mother who expel"; on life decisions that they might take: "For my son, I would do everything different from what happened to me"; "I would provide education to my son"; and on abandonment: "I never saw my mother again. I know nothing about her."

Other categories of disaffiliation revealed resignification processes of abandonment: "What happened to me was different. My mother told me she would arrange an abortion. I was ashamed and I decided to flee. She had already too many things to pay, and would have even more with me." They confronted the destiny of the main character with their own perceptions about solidarity: "If it was me, if someone has told she was pregnant and needed shelter, I would have helped"; and also about what the social services authorities could do for them: "They help the youths this way: to know what our rights and duties are. And find us a job, an internship, a program. By studying, we show society that we are not useless, and that we will replace them [the people in charge] in the future." In spite of all trials and tribulations of living in a public shelter, the participants' comments showed a move from disaffiliation to reaffiliation: "Many people think that shelters are places for drug addicts, but we try to show the contrary. It is the home of the adolescents."

Reafilliation shown in the attachment of some kids to the shelter went beyond its bars and fences. Although they were still living there, they manifested a sense of what it is to reaffiliate and not to be dumped as human waste (Bauman, 2004). Many adolescents showed how resilient and what critical thinkers they could be: "I got an internship, and I think that I need to do my duties"; "[Love, morality, ethics] are values that we can get. We only need to be open to them"; "I have to understand what is right and wrong. It is useless for the caretakers to control me and tell me what to do, as I was a child. When I get there, in the real world, who will take responsibility for me? Who will take me to the doctor? Who will wash my clothes? What was showed [in the play] is a bit of the shelter reality."

**The Christmas presentation.** The two performances were videotaped. After a few months, close to Christmas, we organized a movie theater presentation for the adolescents of the two houses and the caretakers. It was a tremendous success: The adolescent actors were treated as movie stars; the public screamed with delight, but also rage, criticism, pleasure, and astonishment. The actors had significant emotional reactions: Some cried, many laughed, and others were clearly moved by the event. The adolescents and caretakers got copies of the DVD as Christmas gifts. When the actors realized that their faces and names were on the cover of the DVD, they had tears in their eyes and showed joy and gratitude; they felt important and had their "15 minutes of fame" and a memento of their work. Although most actors were still in the shelter, the adolescent mother who coauthored the play and performed the main character left after becoming 18. She was working and raising her child, like in the warmly applauded "movie" that she cowrote and starred: "When we go back home, we have to start over from zero, because everything changes from the life we had in the shelter. I am now living with my mother-in-law, the grandmother of my son." She is our best example that the liquid cycle of affiliation–disaffiliation can be overcome by reaffiliation.

**Discussion and Final Thoughts**

The cycle of violence lived by poor youths, most notably on city streets, is well documented (Goodwillie, 1993; Hawkins et al., 1998). Many studies report their situation in the United States and Canada (Gaetz, 2004; Haley & Roy, 1999; Webber, 1992), Africa (Rurevo & Bourdillon, 2003; Veale & Donà, 2003; Ward & Seager, 2010), Asia (Beazley, 2003; White, 1993), and Europe (Teclici, 1999). In Latin America, research on youths, namely street kids, reports how social violence, drug use, and trafficking are intertwined, and reflect social injustice (Birch, 2000; Karabanow, 2003; Salazar, 2008; Whitworth Wittig, Wright, & Kaminsky, 1997; Yurén, de la Crus, & Romero, 2008). In Brazil, studies cover the same kind of "liquid" problems (Butler, 2009; Campos & Leite, 2013; Drybread, 2009; Inciardi & Surratt, 1998; Leite, 2003; Rizzini & Butler, 2003) and gender differences (Abreu Esteves, 1989; Castro, 2014; Raffaelli et al., 2000).

Most studies suggest that even if the abandonment of street kids is strongly related to child abuse (Hyde, 1995) and use of guns and drugs (Bijlefeld, Treanor, & Beard, 1987; Blumstein, 1994; Dominguez, Romero, & Paul, 2000), survival needs also engender a notable resilience (Scheper-Hughes, 2008). Our research dealt with many levels of complexity related to the circle of abandonment, suffering, and resilience. It suggests that even though the youths had been living under strain, they were not only able to survive by their own on the streets, but also learned from their experiences and engaged in significant activities in the shelter when they had the opportunity to do so. Some of them reconstructed their lives, and many others fled from the shelter, disappeared, or were, tragically, killed in the streets.

Although the play's coauthors were girls, both girls and boys participated in the performances and debates. The story suggests that their viewpoints mirror reality and highlights significant differences among boys and girls. Both boys and girls face survival difficulties that are historically situated (Abreu Esteves, 1989; Castro, 2014; Raffaelli et al., 2000) and based on representations built in their relationships with their peers and family (on the streets, at school, etc.) and the media (Charmaraman & McKamey, 2011). However, girls are usually victims of gender violence and must find ways to tackle it (Ballet, Sirven, Bhukuth, & Rousseau, 2011; Bertram, 2012; Taylor, 2008).

Boys think that pregnancy prevention is a girl's responsibility (the boys who participated in this project thought that the father of the play was not wrong in expelling the pregnant adolescent from home). They reproduce traditional Brazilian slum cultural patterns of male and female roles, and are usually those who, through aggressive sexual behavior and the use of guns and drugs, are more likely to exert sexual dominant behavior (even if girls are, many times, according to themselves, those who "provoke" them). The likelihood that they engage in unprotected sex is, thus, extremely high. When female adolescents end up facing pregnancy (J. E. C. Carvalho, 2007), the only way out is to confront the situation because "it happened" (Castro, 2014). Research points to the need to empower girls by respecting their desires, needs for pleasure, and subjectivity (Tolman, 2012). Discussions with the adolescents suggest that they were empowered by the theater experience.

In spite of the gender differences, the process in which they engaged had a "therapeutic effect." Theater communication arose as a powerful tool for resignification processes, critical thinking, and

learning. The use of arts such as dance (Ireland, 2000), music (Rose, 1995), and theater and video (M. Carvalho, 1995; FACES Improvisation Theater Company, n.d.) to overcome violence against adolescents is not new. Empirical studies worldwide (Board of Regents of the University of Colorado, 2003; Gutierrez & Vega, 2003; Teclici, 1999) and in Brazil (Scivoletto, Silva, & Rosenheck, 2011) revealed new practices and strategies for reaffiliation.

As far as our research is concerned, there are indications that theater contributed to the youths' reaffiliation because it enabled resignification of their own lives. It was also significant for the adolescents of the other shelters who watched the play and participated in the discussions. With regard to the actors, critical examples of life resignification were their abilities to write the play; discuss the characters by making links with their experiences and those of their peers; evoke strong emotions (such as in the DVD Christmas premiere); and show how proud, touched, and grateful they were for the gift they received.

Reaffiliation is neither easy nor straightforward. This action research through theater activities produced a perceived reaffiliation for some youths. Although we acknowledge the obvious limits that such activities could have on the juvies, and the fact that the activities could not be considered the only cause of reaffiliation, they were certainly significant and empowered at least some of the youths. Communication is a complex ecological process in which many dimensions interact with each other, shaping universes of meaningfulness. Meaning emerges from the cognitive abilities that people build in life; affectivity shaped by relationships with family, peers, and communities; and moral values that enable public behavior and ethics. The natural and social environments are critical in building meaningful configurations that transform, constantly, our understandings (Campos, 2015) in the increasingly liquid society in which we live (Bauman, 2007). Adolescents, caretakers, and researchers built cognitions, shaped affections, and judged morally and ethically the contexts of the affiliation–disaffiliation–reaffiliation processes, thanks to communicative theater activities built around a reflective practitioner approach. As for education and caring, they are essential. One of the mother actors pointed to the importance of education to curb adolescents' criminal behavior and love to reaffiliate them: "[Mothers provide education but their sons become criminals] because they lack love."

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