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# Historiography and empathy: Critical School Psychology actions on self-injury practices

## *Historiografia e empatia: ações da Psicologia Escolar Crítica sobre as práticas de automutilação*

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### Abstract

#### Objective

Intervention research in the field of Critical School Psychology based on historiographical assumptions. The objective was to investigate the current meanings of non-suicidal self-harm in educational environments.

#### Method

In the workshops, psychology students were prepared to put themselves in the shoes of a person with a history of non-suicidal self-harm. Later, these students wrote narratives about that person's past, their current experiences and future expectations.

#### Results

Aspects highlighted in the literature about the history of non-suicidal self-injury were also configured in the current meanings about self-mutilation described in the narratives of Psychology students. Psychology students modified their meanings about non-suicidal self-injury to empathize with people with this experience.

#### Conclusion

As the historiographical approach aims to explain current situations anchored in past events, it favors the planning of actions for educational environments committed to ethical and political aspects. The focus on empathy associated with a historiographical perspective on educational processes can be a way to design actions in the field of Critical School Psychology, given its commitment to the humanization of contemporary society.

**Keywords:** Non-Suicidal Self Injury; Personal Narratives; Educational Psychology.

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## Resumo

### **Objetivo**

*Pesquisa-intervenção no campo da Psicologia Escolar Crítica baseada em pressupostos da historiografia. O objetivo foi investigar os significados atuais acerca da autolesão não suicida em ambientes educacionais.*

### **Método**

*Nas oficinas, estudantes de psicologia foram preparados para se colocar no lugar de uma pessoa com histórico de automutilação não suicida. Posteriormente estes alunos escreveram narrativas sobre o passado dessa pessoa, sobre suas experiências atuais e expectativas futuras.*

### **Resultados**

*Aspectos apontados na literatura sobre a história da autolesão não suicida também se configuraram nos significados atuais sobre a automutilação descritos nas narrativas dos estudantes de Psicologia. Estudantes de psicologia modificaram seus significados sobre autolesão não suicida para assumirem empatia com pessoas com essa experiência.*

### **Conclusão**

*Na medida em que a abordagem historiográfica visa explicar situações atuais ancoradas em acontecimentos passados, ela favorece ao planejamento de ações para ambientes educacionais comprometidos com aspectos éticos e políticos. O enfoque na empatia associado com uma perspectiva historiográfica sobre os processos educativos pode ser um caminho para se desenhar ações no campo da Psicologia Escolar Crítica, tendo em vista o seu compromisso com a humanização da sociedade contemporânea.*

**Palavras-chave:** Autolesão não suicida; Narrativas; Psicologia Escolar.

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We discuss a historiographical approach to the practice of self-injury, based on literature review and on intervention research in the field of Critical School Psychology. In the initiative of relating Critical School Psychology with a historiographical approach, we revisit conceptual and methodological foundations that mobilized professionals to assume a new direction in the field of Psychology, as a resistance to the traditional perspective of this science and profession, which privileged laboratories and clinical protocols and, in this way, distanced itself from daily human life.

In the present discussion, we acknowledge a wide range of bibliographic productions and professional practices, which reference the revolutionary landmark of Vygotsky (1989), by presenting to the world the materialist and dialectic bases of Psychology, highlighting the historical and social nature of human development. We believe that the pinnacle of this landmark was the call for the renewal of methods for knowledge production and professional practices in psychology, which began to consider the constant transformations in the history of humanity around the world, mobilized by socio-political issues that are taken as guiding principles by professionals in the field of Critical School Psychology, an approach which aims to prioritize the everyday experiences of individuals within educational institutions.

The ideas in the field of Critical School Psychology that we defend are focused on the promotion of ethical-political engagement and social responsibility as everyday cultural practices in educational settings. The actions on which we focus are directed to the educational inclusion of people who practice self-injury. Arguing for ethical-political engagement and social responsibility, we aim for a greater comprehensiveness of knowledge about these practices, given the prevalence of the biomedical approach with its reductionist parameters, in which normality and pathology are polarized.

In our analysis, we interweave notes from the literature on the history of self-injury practices with observations resulting from intervention research conducted to give visibility to the historical transformations in the meanings about these practices. We point, in this way, to their situationality and interdependence with social relations and institutional practices.

The objective of the intervention research was to analyze current conceptions about self-injury practices. The methodology consisted of a cycle of workshops with Psychology students, involving the theme of self-injury in different activities to foster the writing of narratives. In summary, as data for our analysis, we considered the observations made from the literature texts on the history of self-injury practices and the observations derived from actual narratives produced by Psychology students during the workshops.

The workshops were offered as a curricular activity of the Emergency School Period (ESP) – implemented by the Brazilian Ministry of Education (MEC) for federal universities as a response to the impact of COVID-19 on academic activities. Thus, the participants were students voluntarily enrolled in this component. Specifically, the cycle of workshops consisted of preventive actions and an inclusive approach in the field of Critical School Psychology focused on demands related to self-injury practices involving higher education students.

The preventive aspect resided in the possibility of social transformation, stemming from our interest in changing the conception of Psychology students about people who practice self-injury, which, until then, was predominantly biomedical. We aimed to broaden these students' conceptions by encouraging them to consider historical and cultural factors. Towards this goal, we articulated the intervention with the experience of empathy, considered here as the ability to put oneself in the other's place. Furthermore, this articulation served as a methodological strategy, as, for ethical reasons, individuals who engage in self-injury behaviors were not directly involved in the workshops.

In summary, as a preventive action and inclusive approach within the scope of Critical School Psychology practiced in higher education, we promoted scenarios that allowed Psychology students to put themselves in the place of a person who practices self-injury, to renew conceptions about this practice (Moreira & Guzzo, 2017). At the same time, the scenarios were planned in the format of an intervention research, which has as its main foundation the researcher's commitment to the transformation of the institutional and human scenario which it investigates (Rocha & Aguiar, 2003).

## **A Historiographical Approach in the Field of Critical School Psychology**

Considering the diversity of epistemological perspectives that can be used in the writing of a historiography, we take Walter Benjamin's theory of history (1993) as our main reference. This theory consists of a critique of the conception of universal history as a linear and timeless succession of facts. Benjamin proposes a historiography that revisits the past but aims at the transformation of the present.

Thus, we assume the challenge of relating the past of self-injury practices, from a rescue of historical discourses described in literature, to current scenarios of its manifestation, addressed in the narratives of Psychology students. In our proposition of a historiographical approach in the field of Critical School Psychology lies the intention to deconstruct the predominance of the past, as is common in the traditional definition of History.

We reinforce Benjamin's thesis that the role of the past is revealed by analyzing how much it impacts the present. It is for this reason that we invested in the analysis of current conceptions about self-injury practices in our intervention research. Our expectation was to open explanatory paths about the present based on an understanding of what was in the past.

## A Historiographical Literature Perspective on Self-Injury Practices

Although the practices of self-injury are subject of debate nowadays, especially in educational settings, they are not an exclusive theme of our time. There are records in the literature that point to their incidence in ancient civilizations, relating it to diverse meanings (Rodrigues, 2015). Some authors have tried to pinpoint possible origins of these practices. Some argue that the first accounts began in mythology. The oldest among these refers to the demoniac Gadarene, described in the Gospel of Mark (Bíblia Sagrada, ch. 5, v. 1-20, 2013), a man of unknown identity who, possessed by demons, screamed and self-mutilated with stones, until Jesus cast out the legion of demons that dominated him.

The rise of Christianity in the Middle Ages was marked by the repression of experiences related to the body, because, according to some interpretations of Augustine of Hippo's incorporation of Platonic philosophy into Christianity, it symbolized the imprisonment of the soul. We evaluate that, since they have always been present in history, self-injury practices should not be viewed simply as "deviations" or "psychopathologies", as advocated by the medical model.

The main consequence of the passage to modernity was the destabilization of universal human narratives and secularization (Berger & Luckmann, 2019), which promoted the coexistence of different worldviews and value systems within the same society (Berger, 2017). In this historical context, marked by rationalism, it was assumed that the body had attributes of a machine and could be systematically tested and verified by science (Reis, 2018). For Gea (2013, p. 49), as of the Modern Age, self-directed violence acquires importance in people's lives, especially among adolescents, to the extent that it enables "[...] the appropriation of their new body and its unprecedented symbolic place in the social community without giving up its conformity to the game of culture".

In the Contemporary Age (1789 to the present day), knowledge about the functioning of the body was linked to advances in biotechnology and dissemination of cultural standards, in which a false idea of control over the body is propagated, given its objectification and logic of a domesticated self-determination (Gea, 2013). Such ideas highlight, at the same time, the plasticity of the body and its structures, with emphasis on its transformation potentials, including aesthetics, which would make it obsolete in relation to the advances of computational biology (Maia, 2017; Sibilia, 2004).

## The Scientific View on Self-Injury Practices

Scholars agree that Karl Menninger 's (1893–1990; 1970) psychoanalytic approach had great relevance for the beginning of the scientific systematization of information about self-injury practices. According to this approach, people resorted to these practices to avoid suicide and to tranquilize themselves. In 1983, the description of self-injury, as it is known today, was first presented: the *syndrome of deliberate self-injury*, characterized by multiple episodes of self-injury and numerous low-lethality injuries, often cuts and burns, accompanied by a sense of relief after these behaviors, without the conscious intention to commit suicide, commonly persisting for several years (Giusti, 2013).

Ribeiro (2019) and Ferreira et al. (2018) warned about the need to review the reductionist focus on biological aspects (the biomedical discourse calls the treatment given by adolescents to their own bodies as *body domestication*). This thought should be replaced by a greater attention to the symbolic exchanges and meanings that young people attribute to these manifestations.

We approach these discussions and argue for the need to study the variations in meanings about self-injury practices considering political and social aspects. To achieve this, workshops where college students produced narratives were organized, enabling the systematization of current information about the topic. We also focused on the saturation of “nows”, emphasizing Critical School Psychology’s commitment to social transformation. This involved acknowledging the past, while building expectations for future conceptions and actions related to self-injury.

## **Critical School Psychology and Empathy: Ethical-Political Solidarity Within Educational Settings**

As part of our preventive and inclusive approach in the field of Critical School Psychology, carried out in higher education, we also planned to systematize information through an intervention research format. However, for ethical reasons, we did not aim to identify or directly approach individuals who engage in self-injury practices. The theme was worked on from the perspective of the other, which we call empathy (Sampaio et al., 2009).

The preventive character and the inclusive approach are linked in the workshop activities for their social transformation potential. For this reason, we designed an interweaving between assumptions of Critical School Psychology, intervention research, and the experience of empathy. The strength of this intertwining lies in the political and social basis that underlies both the actions of Critical School Psychology and intervention research (Corcoran, 2014; Moreira & Guzzo, 2017; Rocha & Aguiar, 2003; Salomão & Viotto Filho, 2020; Vieira, 2020).

The expected social transformation focuses on changing conceptions about people who practice self-injury, so that they are considered within a network of transitional meanings linked to concrete political and social actions. Specifically, we invested in the transformation of concepts and attitudes directed toward people who practice self-injury. To empathy experiment was a strategy to mobilize participants for this transformation.

## **Method**

The cycle of seven workshops was the methodological procedure used in the intervention research, which aimed to investigate current conceptions about self-injury practices. The workshops were held through the Google Meet platform, and the activities included fostering the experience of putting oneself in another’s shoes (empathy) to favor the change of conception about people who practice self-injury and their inclusion in higher education.

### **Participants**

Fifteen undergraduate Psychology students from the 4th to 9th periods participated in the workshop cycle. These included men and women aged 17 to 45. Considering that the workshops were offered as a curricular activity during the ESP, the participation of these students was made official as of their enrollment in this activity. Moreover, because it was planned as an opportunity for systematization of knowledge, as intervention research, we presented the students with an Informed Consent Form for their signature and characterization of voluntary participation. We emphasize that the students had early access to information about this curricular activity from the Psychology course department, responsible for their enrollment. The procedures applied in the workshops were

authorized by the Research Ethics Committee of the Universidade Federal do Alagoas CEP/UFAL, published through the registration CAEE 40259120.6.0000.5013.

## Instruments

The instruments used in our intervention research were mainly conceptual in nature. We used empathy to encourage Psychology students' personal involvement, aiming to promote changes in conceptions about self-injury practices, shifting from a biomedical to a sociocultural perspective.

Nowadays, the discussion about empathy is directly related to taking another's perspective, as a multidimensional ability to infer about their feelings, understand their motivations and needs, in a process that involves affections, thoughts, and attitudes directed intentionally for the benefit of the other person (Sampaio et al., 2009). With this capability, empathy presupposes the exercise of intersubjectivity in human relationships, which makes it an appropriate resource to promote ethical-political solidarity as an everyday cultural practice (Bubnova, 2013; Soeiro et al., 2017) in educational settings.

The concept of narratives was also used in our research. This option was chosen considering discussions by researchers who describe narrative as a cultural tool and organizing principle of human psychological processes (Bruner, 1997). We justify the use of this instrument in our research from the perspective that building narratives involves negotiating meanings for experiences in the world. We believe that the change in conception about self-injury practices stems from the negotiation of students' meanings during the production of their narratives.

The Google Meet platform and Word software were instrumental in facilitating the virtual format of the activities, as we faced restrictions on in-person academic activities as a safety measure due to the risk of COVID-19 contagion.

## Procedures

While defining the procedures for writing individual and collective narratives, we reflected on considerations made by Vieira (2020) about the appropriation of narrativity for the purpose of Critical School Psychology to act for the transformation of interpersonal relationships, with a view to political solidarity in educational institutions. The author reaffirms both Bruner's (1997) arguments, about the narrative organization of human thought, and Hammack and Pilecki's (2012) arguments, on the strict approximation between narrative activity and Political Psychology. For the latter, the sharing of meanings from narratives reflects the need for collective solidarity.

The writing of narratives was linked to the different activities developed in the workshop cycle. The first workshop consisted in a survey of conceptions about the practice of self-injury, conducted through an introductory conversation circle, also to build bonds among the participants. The second workshop consisted in the production of individual written narratives. In this stage, the participants were initially involved in situations that allowed them to experience taking the other's perspective (empathy). They were sensitized to think as if they were someone else.

In preparation for this experience, the researcher did not directly address the topic of self-injury. Specifically, they presented four video clips that illustrated different situations involving people, in which they implied that they needed to choose or make decisions. The participants were mobilized to express opinions about the choices and decisions to be made by the protagonists of the video scenes.

As a follow-up to the second workshop, the researcher asked the participants to produce individual narratives in a Word file and send them by e-mail. To trigger the narratives, the researcher presented the following generative question: "If you had the opportunity to talk to a person who practices self-injury, what do you think they would like to hear? Why?". The researcher then gave them up to 45 minutes to send in their individual narratives and made it clear that he/she would be online to provide support if they needed it.

The third workshop consisted of a round of conversation about the narratives written in the previous workshop. The researcher then asked the participants to take back their files and encouraged them to share ideas about what a person who self-injured would like to hear. The fourth, fifth, and sixth workshops consisted of producing collective narratives focusing on the past, present, and future of an undetermined person who had been practicing self-injury for a few years. The researcher warned that the verbs in the narratives should be conjugated in the past (fourth workshop), in the present (fifth workshop), and in the future (sixth workshop).

In each of these workshops, the researcher asked the participants to organize themselves in a row and instructed them that this row would correspond to the order (from the first to the last person) in composing a shared file that circulated among them. All participants followed this sequence in rounds, in which each one wrote (freely) at least one sentence, preserving the sense of continuity of the ongoing story. Once the last in line had written, a round of collective narrative writing ended.

File sharing (in the form of collective writing) was made possible through a link on Google Docs, where participants located a Word document with the following generative sentences: "The first time I caused injuries to my body was..." (sentence in the past tense for the fourth workshop); "Sometimes I cause injuries to my own body, so..." (sentence in the present tense for the fifth workshop), and "About my behavior of causing injuries to my body, I think in the future..." (sentence in the future for sixth workshop).

The justification for fostering narratives in the past, present, and future reflects discussions in the literature about the role of time as a central parameter for negotiating meanings in narratives (Bruner, 1997; Lyra et al., 2018). Considering this discussion, we strategically mobilized the time of the narrative to motivate variability in the negotiation of meanings and subsequent change of conception.

The seventh and last workshop consisted of a conversation circle in which the researcher encouraged the participants to analyze the ideas pointed out in the written narratives (individual and collective), observing the transformations over time (past, present, and future). All workshops were recorded on Google Meet.

### **Narrative Analysis Procedures**

Our main procedure for processing the data was narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995). Specifically, we were active during the analysis of the students' narratives, such that the results of our intervention research consisted of a story told by the researchers about the stories produced by the Psychology students. In other words, our appreciation of the data, as well as the presentation of the results, consisted of our production of meanings about the information we dealt with during the intervention research.

Thus, we denominated as narrative analysis, the processes underlying our production of meanings about: a) the texts of diverse authors, consulted for insight into historical conceptions about self-injury practices; b) the narratives (individual and collective) produced by Psychology students during the workshops.



We summarize that, after several exhaustive readings of the set of narratives produced during the workshops (15 individual narratives and 03 collective narratives), we structured our narrative analysis to encompass two major topics: 1) Historiographical marks of meanings about self-injury, considering the effects of past events on current individual and collective written narratives of Psychology students; 2) Empathy (taking the perspective of others) as a resource for the work of Critical School Psychology, aimed at social responsibility and inclusion in educational settings.

## Results

### Historiographical Marks of Meanings about Self-Injury in Current Narratives of Psychology Students

Considering that the objective of the intervention research was to investigate current meanings about self-injury practices, we chose to present the results based on clippings from the students' narratives believed to illustrate the topics that structure our narrative analysis.

Through the clippings 1, 2, 3, and 4 (found below), we illustrate how the interdependence of current conceptions of self-injury with descriptions of practices of religious penance, described in the literature on religiosity in the Middle Ages, was organized (Rodrigues 2015).

*Clipping 1* (individual narrative/present tense):

"(...) In cases in which pain is inflicted as punishment, it is worth *making the person question themselves why they need to be punished for making mistakes*, if such mistakes do not escape the nature of the human being; for feeling *guilty*, if, many times it is not their *fault* or it is not something that was under their control (...)"

*Clipping 2* (collective narrative/past tense):

"(...) The same lack of will and the same sadness that seemed endless. In a way, I knew I needed to deal with my suffering somehow. This was my way of dealing with it. *Something in me knew it was wrong*, that I shouldn't, I didn't want to raise questions, I didn't want to be seen like that..."

*Clipping 3* (collective narrative/present tense):

"(...) I feel worse every day, *more and more guilty* for mistreating myself, and increasingly trapped with no way out. I am afraid of reaching a point where I can no longer leave the house, given how much the *judgments* affect me..."

*Clipping 4* (collective narrative/future tense):

"(...) Another thing that makes me quite insecure about my future: how will I deal with the marks of this war (scars), how will I face the looks and *judgments*, but I believe that I will do well, I need to believe that..."

With clipping five (found below), we illustrate how the meanings of Psychology students reflected on knowledge produced by contemporary researchers, which are also accessed by professionals, family members, and even by people who resort to self-injury practices.



*Clipping 5* (collective narrative/past tense):

“(...) Then things got worse. One day, without knowing for sure, I found myself with no way out, as if I had no ground beneath my feet, still in my room, crying alone, I felt that I couldn’t continue like that without things getting worse. I knew I had to do something to *ease the pain I was feeling*, so I hurt myself; I hurt myself because it was better to *feel that pain* than the pain I was feeling inside...”

We highlight this excerpt (among others) from the narrative to exemplify how Psychology students naturalized the statement of researchers, who base themselves on biomedical models, in which self-injury practices are attitudes undertaken by individuals to decrease suffering and avoid suicide (Giusti, 2013). We also observed the extent of this naturalization in the main ideas that were shared during the conversation circle: a) self-injury is a cry for help and a painful experience; b) the person who resorts to this practice has psychic disorders, internal conflicts, and low self-esteem.

### **Critical School Psychology: Empathy as a Resource Towards Political and Social Responsibility and Inclusion in Educational Settings**

We now turn to the second topic of our narrative analysis, in which we intertwine empathy with the Critical School Psychology exercise. We started from professionals’ statements that the actions of Critical School Psychology focus on real people, social transformation, and ethical-political responsibility (Moreira & Guzzo, 2017; Vieira, 2020).

In our results, it was observed that the activities developed for the purpose of fostering empathy provoked broad impact on the production/updating of meanings about self-injury practices in the narratives of Psychology students. Of the fifteen individual narratives analyzed, ten involved some form of negotiation of meanings about the relevance of empathy in interacting with an (undetermined) person who practices self-injury.

Clippings six and seven (posted below) are situations of the negotiation of meanings in the narratives of two different participants (A and B). With these clippings, we exemplify how the Psychology students reflected on the empathy activities in their written narratives during the workshops.

*Clipping 6* (individual narrative/participant A):

(...) Being objective, I would tell the person *they are important and that there are people around them who care about them and who suffer from their pain* (...). I would say these things because they are words that I would like to hear and because I believe them...”

*Clipping 7* (individual narrative/participant B):

“(...) I venture to say that this continuous practice of self-injury is something that overwhelms during times of loneliness, so I infer that the person wants to hear something that gives meaning to their existence, not as a ready-made recipe, but as something that transcends simple discourse where *love, trust, and empathy are the guiding thread* (...).”

## Discussion

In our discussion, we highlight the relation of cultural patterns structured in macrogenetic dimensions in the reading of the history of self-injury practices with tangential traces, which emerge in the microgenetic level of human discourses, active in the window of their experience of the present, in individual or collective situations. This relationship is, therefore, about the integration of the “nows” into the course of history, mentioned by Benjamin (1993).

We rely methodologically on narrative activity, for we recognize that it activates processes of ruptures or tangentials that support the integration of the microgenetic and macrogenetic levels of human experiences in the world. In our appreciation of the stories told by the Psychology students, we captured processes that signaled impacts of the integration of these two levels. For example, in the meanings produced by the students, they indicated marks both of religious teachings, referenced in the descriptions of self-injury in the Middle Ages, and marks of discussions by current professionals. Regarding the Psychology students’ religious, Middle-Age marks, we highlight meanings about punishment and penance aligned with fear of divine judgment. We recognize, however, that these meanings have been updated in student narratives. We interpret that this is not a reproduction of behavior from other times, but a transformation of conceptions, which presupposes human action in the construction of their history. For this reason, for example, the judgment referred by the students (implicitly in clippings one and two, indicating guilt, and explicitly in clippings three and four) is not about final judgment, but a reference to the attitudes of their peers, with whom they compete for economic and affective survival today.

To explain, from a historiographical perspective, how aspects related to the description of self-injury practices in another time were updated in the emerging meanings of current narratives, we argue that self-injury practices are an embodied experience. With this argument, we oppose the reductionist perspective that separates mind and body, or the polarization between normal and pathological.

The embodiment conception or embodied mind originates from the field of Philosophy and underpins critical discussions in the field of Psychology about the largely negative impact that Cartesian dualism has exerted on the production of psychological knowledge, methods, and practices (Abreu & Silva, 2020; Cebolla et al., 2016). According to Lakoff and Johnson (1999), the conception of embodiment causes a break in the Cartesian paradigm by making the proposition of the approach of cognition that is embodied, materialized, and situated in the environment. As to the application of this conception to the field of psychology, there are many debates, still predominantly of theoretical nature, in which it is denounced that the integrated body-mind functioning has been neglected in psychology knowledge and practices.

We draw attention to implications of the embodiment experience for manifestations of self-injury. We acknowledge explanations of the relationship between these manifestations and social expectations about the people who resort to them. We disagree, however, that the experience of social expectations has the individual’s body as the locus of expression. We interpret that the locus for the individual’s expression of the effects of social expectations is his or her possibility of communication, in which the embodiment function underlies.

Put differently, we assume the imbricated relationship between mind, body, and society, and see self-injury as a dialogic, in which meanings are inscribed in the body-mind about the activities that integrate the individual to his political and social relations in the community/institution. The main effect of this change of focus is the possibility of adding discussions about a dialogic approach to self-injury practices to the biomedical model. This addition is necessary because

the assistance methods for individuals engaging in these practices, derived from that model, are reductionist and focus solely on the intrapersonal level, excluding attention to the historical and cultural processes.

In the dimension of the now, “guilt” and expectation of judgment for the self-injuries (in clippings 1, 2, 3 and 4) reflect implications of social and ethical-political responsibility for the forms of organization and functioning of the institutions and community in which a person who self-injures relates. The embodiment, or integrated body-mind experience, is a necessary condition for sociocultural transformations (updates), which emerge at the microgenetic level of interpersonal interactions.

The clippings from the collective narrative presented in the results indicate that the Psychology students’ meanings about self-injury practices reflect current professionals’ discussions. These are other transformations supported by the function of embodiment. We now refer to the two dimensions of collectivized knowledge: a) at the institutional level, represented by the publicized knowledge of the researchers and, b) at the common sense level, represented by the views defended in the students’ narratives.

With a focus on embodiment as an explanation for the historical transformations of meanings conveyed by cultural practices, we alert to the insufficiency of the biomedical model and point to interpersonal relationships and, more effectively, to the ethical-political and social responsibility that needs to be involved in a model of assistance to people who engage in self-injury in educational settings through actions of Critical School Psychology, as we defend here.

In this direction, Vygotsky (1989), when dealing with the concept of social compensation, in which he proposes a shift from naturalistic perspectives (mystical and biological) to sociogenesis (educational), points to the articulation between the production of personal and social meanings in different periods of history and their possible developments, in which he contrasts purely charitable and welfare responses to social education (Dainez & Smolka, 2014), which, in this specific case, would be correlative to social commitment.

Regarding the second topic of narrative analysis, we suggest strategic procedures to give visibility to the resources of the empathy experience for the Critical School Psychology professional to work directed towards ethical responsibility and political solidarity in educational settings. To the extent that fostering empathy can transform conceptions and social experiences related to the people who engage in these practices, it translates as a promising resource for educational inclusion.

In other words, we consider empathy as a path towards an ethics of alterity and the promotion of inclusive practices of welcoming, hospitality, and responsibility for the other in educational settings (Habowski et al., 2018), in which differences are considered beyond the normality-pathology axis and personal tragedy (Diniz et al., 2009), in an approach to the Social Model of Disability (Diniz, 2017). From empathy, we redirect the isolated focus on the individual psyche of the biomedical model to interpersonal relationships and to communicative processes. The plausibility of this viewpoint is supported, when we consider the fear of other people’s judgment frequently mentioned in the narratives of Psychology students.

In our analysis, the fear of other people’s judgment, a relevant aspect in the characterization of the “now” of the conceptions about self-injury, indicated meanings that people who resort to these practices intensify their harm by seeing themselves hindered from their interpersonal relationships, for fear of preconceived evaluations. This scenario leads us to the argument about the need for the preparation of an infrastructure of affect, concepts, and social responsibility for the institutional environments in which people who resort to these practices circulate.

## Conclusion

According to our results, the historiographical approach developed here gave visibility to the updating of meanings about self-injury practices related to descriptions about these practices from other times. We resorted to the concept of embodiment to ground the explanation of how the relationship between present and past of the meanings attributed to this practice was sustained, as well as the relationship between the institutional and collective level of knowledge and the way it is appropriated in personal experiences. At this stage of our conclusions, it is important to recognize the role of embodiment in providing a strong rationale for investing in comprehensive explanations of self-injury practices that consider biological, psychological, cultural, historical, and social processes.

Explanations of embodiment, underlying communicative processes and empathy, open paths for us to destabilize conceptual boundaries that treat thoughts as matters of the head and feelings of pain as a response to aggression to the body. These explanations refer to a critical perspective of human development and, when applied to educational settings, can transform pedagogical postures that privilege intellectual functions which, for example, support ableism. There is an alignment between this integrated perspective of human development, in which one does not alienate its socio-political issues and the fundamental assumption of Critical School Psychology, social transformation.

The intervention research that we report here exemplified some strategies for working with the historicity approach, also exploratory in other educational settings, besides higher education. We evaluate that this approach is necessary to the actions of Critical School Psychology, as it can enable students to a critical self-evaluation through the rescue of life transformations within educational settings. It can also enable teachers and managers to promote the development of planned actions, as it rescues the transformations of their practices over time.

We believe that analyzing implications of past actions for the present is fundamental for planning and revising institutional actions, preserving their political aspects. In this way, a historiographical approach, when applied to the actions of Critical School Psychology, may be favorable to the construction of expectations for future conceptions and actions directed to the manifestations of self-injury, or to other causes that these professionals may become involved with. Specifically, we argue that the historiographical approach can serve as a theoretical and methodological orientation for the practices in the field of Critical School Psychology.

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