

# BEYOND CRIMINALIZATION: ALTER-CHILDHOOD AND THE COMMUNITARIAN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF DELINQUENCY

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## **Abstract**

This article is based on communitarian social psychology perspective. It will analyse the process of otherness in the relationship between childhood and delinquency. It will discuss in the context of social policies using the notion of device (dispositif). The following sections will develop the relationship between childhood, delinquency and otherness using several approaches: social policies, research in social sciences, the notion of device (Foucault) and historiography, developing a critical over the criminalization process to childhood, and proposing the idea of Alter- Childhood as critical com-pehension.

**Keywords** : social communitarian psychology; childhood; delinquency; otherness; device; social policies

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The relationship between public policies, childhood and crime in Chile is part of an area of action and study that is saturated with undifferentiated assumptions, reproducing stigmatizing certainties rather than critical positions. The purpose of this article is to problematize, from the perspective of community social psychology, the relationship between childhood, delinquency and otherness, with four objectives: 1) public policy and the differential subjectivation of childhoods; 2) the relationships between childhood, crime and otherness; 3) the

notion of device as a producer of alterity in childhood and 4) sociohistorical processes that subjectify childhoods from alterity.

In this regard, community social psychology (Alfaro, 2009, 2013; Montero, 2010, 2011) contributes to developing denaturalizing perspectives of the social, historical and cultural processes contained in these reflective axes, from conceptual, ethical-political and disciplinary dimensions. Conceptually, it enables the intersubjective understanding of the relationship between childhood and crime, from a critical perspective of social relations (Montero, 2011; Piper, 2002), demystifying its nature as an objective manifestation (Montero, 2010; Montero & Montenegro, 2006). ). At an ethical-political level, it facilitates the visibility of the tensions between the guarantee and protection perspective towards children, contributing to the debate on the processes of criminalization in the intervention (Sepúlveda, 2011) and questioning stigmatizing perspectives (Llobet, 2010; Olmos, 2012). At the disciplinary level, it allows defining the intervention from a situated character (Montenegro & Pujol, 2003), contributing to the complementarity between the formulation, design and implementation of the social intervention, by considering the tensions between the disciplinary agents, the formulators and the intervened subjects. (Alfaro, 2013), in a complex reading of the intervention processes (Alfaro, 2009; Piper, 2002). These strong ideas will be used to reflect on the implications of each of the sections, focusing on the notion of alter-childhood, as a process of subjectivation of alterity (Gnecco, 2008). allows defining the intervention from a situated character (Montenegro & Pujol, 2003), contributing to the complementarity between the formulation, design and implementation of the social intervention, by considering the tensions between the disciplinary agents, the formulators and the intervened subjects (Alfaro, 2013 ), in a complex

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### **Public policies and childhood: between guarantees and criminalization**

Public policies in Chile articulate visions about childhood, establishing a dominant discourse from the Doctrine of Comprehensive Protection (Galvis, 2009; Quiroz, 2011), normatively supported by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations Fund for Childhood [UNICEF], 1989), with the intention of marking a milestone of transition between the doctrine based on the

notion of a minor in a vulnerable situation to another that conceives childhood as a subject of rights.

At the level of public policy design, the actions of the Ministry of Justice through the National Juvenile Service have developed the concept of separation of paths (Werth, 2010), as an expression of a supposed difference between the approach towards so-called adolescent offenders of law and boys and girls subject to rights promotion. The future of this perspective is questionable, with many of its effects and practices violating human rights (National Institute of Human Rights [INDH], 2013; UNICEF, 2008).

Public policy oriented towards "lawbreakers" is culturally constructed from the notion of fear of the other (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 1998), cementing social cohesion in the identification of these as icons of dangerousness and insecurity (Vergara, 2007), supporting criminalization processes (Sepúlveda, 2011). It is this radical look at criminalized childhood that allows us to reflect on social intervention from otherness.

If an international analysis of the programs that intervene on criminalized childhood is carried out, preventive strategies focused on the cost-benefit relationship stand out (Greenwood, 2008), which privilege intervention on childhood to reduce criminal behavior in the adult stage, under the assumption of greater permeability of the associated factors (Jenson, 2010; Mann & Reynolds, 2006; White, Temple, & Reynolds, 2010).

In this perspective, Trentacosta and Shaw (2009) carried out a longitudinal study on the relationship between emotional self-regulation and peer rejection, observing a positive association between this and antisocial behavior, and adaptive self-regulation should be worked on early. Hawkins, Kosterman, Catalano, Hill and Abbot (2008) present the effects of a multidimensional



intervention strategy in the school space, reporting significant effects in reducing adult crime. Mann and Reynolds (2006) developed a longitudinal investigation on early educational intervention in juvenile delinquency, relating early intervention and schooling factors to the reduction of delinquency. Likewise, Reynolds, Ou and Topitzes (2004) longitudinally investigated the effects of lower-class preschoolers' participation in Parent-Child Centers, showing higher educational achievements and lower rates of juvenile arrests. Likewise, Crooks, Scott, Ellis and Wolfe (2011) analyzed a school violence prevention program, determining its buffering effect on the commission of violent crimes.

Beyond the school environment, the international review reports intervention programs for children that generally aim to reduce future risks, where delinquency is one of the risk factors. Geen-wood (2008) raises the importance of focusing efforts on the so-called evidence-based practice, which implies focusing on indicators that outline good practices, beyond the conceptual perspective to the base. Cole, Mills, Jenkins and Dale (2005) made a comparison between early intervention programs on delinquency, incorporating into the measurement certain indicators that they call social development, such as school satisfaction, loneliness and depression, concluding that there are no differences in the results between programs. In both experiences,

At the national level, the school environment is represented as a protective factor of various dysfunctional manifestations, defined within a similar field of social problems: illicit drug use, school performance, dropout, risk behavior in general and delinquency, being the National Service for Prevention and Rehabilitation of Drug and Alcohol Consumption ([SENDA], 2013) is responsible for articulating the efforts between the Ministry of Education and



the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security. Outside the school environment, the programs are placed from the perspective of serving sentences, from a perspective of responsibility and control of criminal behavior (Ministry of Justice, 2005).

In summary, the perspective of risk and protective factors defines the intervention on delinquency in boys and girls from the incidence of contextual and individual factors, consolidating a perspective of dyadic interaction and cost-benefit. From there, the possibility of understanding the relationship between childhood and crime as a social, historical and cultural manifestation, reducing the intervention to the purely technical field, is not conceivable. Childhood is thus assumed to be a uniform stage, possible and necessary to intervene from an emergency perspective, before reaching a late stage. They are conceived as potential criminals, summarizing the business of prevention in "taking care of them today to take care of ourselves tomorrow" ("Childhood" Working Group, 2006).

In tension with this perspective, critical guidelines emerge that can be grouped under the notion of social construction of criminalization. Smith (2009) maintains a critical intervention perspective in the judicial sphere, conceptualizing childhood as a social construction and highlighting its agentic quality from the perspective of human rights. Additionally, Gatti, Tremblay and Vitaro (2009) report that legal intervention focuses on family and social characteristics, rather than on the conditions associated with the crime, stating that said judicial intervention has an iatrogenic effect, by increasing the probability of committing crimes in adulthood. In turn, Greenwood (2008) maintains that many of the programs considered successful at one time increase the probability of delinquency in adulthood. Bernburg, Krohn and



Rivera (2006) carried out a longitudinal study on law-breaking subjects, maintaining that juvenile justice intervention increases the probability of involvement in the commission of serious crimes. From these works, the relevance of understanding public policies as ingenious reproductive mechanisms of criminalization is appreciated.

### **Childhood, crime and otherness: possibilities from social research**

The conception of alterity accounts for subjectivizing processes inscribed in discourses and practices that delimit normativity and deviation, categorizing groups from social relations of dominance (Cabruja, 1998). As a scientific heuristic, it is multidisciplinary (González, 2009) and is developed from fields such as anthropology, social psychology, sociology, linguistics and education, requiring a complex articulation to illuminate the processes of knowledge production; They correspond to processes located sociohistorically in modernity (Gnecco, 2008), in dialectical tension with identity processes (Flórez, 2007; Heffes, 2012; Rabello, Rocha, Texeira, Alves, & Antunes, 2006). From a critical perspective, The processes of alterity crystallize the representations of the other on distinctions that facilitate subordination (Juliano, 1994), from the hegemonizing exercise of its inclusive rejection, representing it in a kind of garbage dump of the Self (Gnecco, 2008). The above highlights the double game of modernity, in order to the need to consolidate the figure of the monstrous but at the same time necessary Other, focusing action on the administration of difference rather than its eradication.

Understood in this way, alterity refers to discursive productions that determine specific power relations, which maintain social order and define links of dominance and subordination. Thus, social relations are ignored from their



historical character, producing relatively rigid exclusive essentializations, supported by a binarist reading of social relations (Castro-Gómez, 2000).

Based on the above, the construction of a criminalized childhood as opposed to a normalized childhood (Llobet, 2010) is a matter of administration of crime, its eradication being neither possible nor desirable as it is necessary for the function of social normalization. The exercise of violence is jointly necessary, given the violent nature of the constitution of the modern subject in the colonial and postcolonial horizon (Castro-Gómez, 2000; Gnecco, 2008; Herrera, 2006; Recasens, 2006).

From a contemporary reading, the logic of binary exclusion is tense with the processes of late modernity, from which we witness the rupture of dichotomous ways of producing subjects (Castro-Gómez, 2000), valuing cultural diversity as a way of make new development models viable (Soria, 2012), at the same time blurring the monstrosity embodied in the figure of otherness (Blaney, 2008; Foucault, 2011). However, the state of the art shows a multiplicity of exclusion figures: around sexuality devices (Piola, 2008) or legal-cultural devices (Juliano, 1994); from migratory phenomena (Rea, 2006; Olmos, 2012) or in educational devices (Cabruja, 1998; Colmenares, 2004).

Complementarily, it is consolidated in the spatiality of the city as a place of confrontation with the other, conceiving the city as the space of differences (Rabello et al., 2006) or of ethnic reaffirmation from the recreation of community ties in the context. urban (Planas, 2007). It arises from a diversity of production devices, where the mass media convey hegemonic discourses (Silverstone, 2004), promoting the construction of the dangerous other from the evaluative burden that they assign to it (Álvarez, 2012). This hegemony does not equate to passivity, being stressed by dynamics of valuing difference, based





on processes of resistance and ethnic reaffirmation (Merino, Mellor, Sáez, & Quilaqueo, 2009; Rivera, 2006).

As can be seen from the review presented, the processes of subjectification from otherness allow the establishment of different silhouettes of otherness, from the reification of dangerousness, processes of hegemony and resistance and naturalization of intersubjective processes, among other possible orders. It is worth asking about the relevance of these processes of otherness, to account for the relationship between childhood and crime.

In this review, we observe a group of investigations that assume the existence of young lawbreakers, as bearers of a particular deviation and/or in a condition of deprivation of the resources essential for their integration. Zambrano and Pérez (2004) propose that boys and girls who commit violations of the law are conditioned by a series of psychosocial factors, placing them on the margins of integration and evidencing maladaptive identity processes. Valdenegro (2005) suggests that the practice of violating the law is mediated by a set of psychosocial factors, where the perception of being the object of prejudice and low family social support are characteristic of subjects with violating practices. Salazar, Torres, Reynaldos, Figueroa and Valencia (2009) identify dimensions of life in delinquent children from a psychosocial perspective, highlighting a significant association between personality conditions and delinquent behavior. Reyes (2014) emphasizes the specificity of the criminal phenomenon in female adolescents, identifying particular factors that influence its occurrence. Morales (2008) reviews the main explanatory theories regarding adolescent offending behavior, emphasizing its multicausal nature and at the same time highlighting a particular theory of neuropsychological nature (Developmental Taxonomy), with which it presents the greatest heuristic



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This location in the individual and his microsocial context ignores the macro contextual conditions, omitting the historical, cultural and social production of difference. On the other hand, alterity as a construct allows us to situate this relationship as a cultural, historical and intersubjective expression, highlighting the importance of analyzing the conditions that promote these differentiations and at the same time addressing the specific modalities where the devices for the production of alterity currently operate. .

### **Relationship between otherness and childhood from the notion of device**

The Foucauldian notion of device (Agamben, 2011; Deleuze, 1990; Foucault, 2000) denotes the idea of "machines to make people see and make people talk"

(Deleuze, 1990, p. 155), delineating both the visible and the invisible, as the stateable and the impossible to be said, making the object it defines appear or disappear. Thus, the problematization of childhood as a singular subject in the guarantee paradigm is a particular visibility that blurs the existence of the diversity of childhoods, and specifically childhood from otherness.

According to Agamben (2011), device refers to a heterogeneous set of elements such as speeches, institutions, buildings, laws, among others. It moves away from identification with the notion of institution, becoming an articulation network to the extent that it responds to a specific order of intelligibility (García, 2011).

The notion of devices as regimes (re)producing orders in the world allows us to understand them as lines of force (Deleuze, 1990), configuring the triple dimension of knowledge, power and subjectivity. Regarding the latter, they are understood as a process without pre-existential determination, operating to subject the subject to a certain regime of truth. Understood in this way, the relationship between childhood and crime is culturally and historically contingent, delimited in particular regimes of enunciation.

Agamben (2011) points out that the devices produce different subject positions, and the same individual can be subject to multiple processes of subjectivation. The central importance of the devices in the processes of subjectivation is thus highlighted, opening the door to consider The Other: "What is subjectivized are both the noble, (...) as well as -although in other conditions- the excluded, the evil, the sinners" (Deleuze, 1990, p. 157).

The construction of alterity from the notion of device as an articulating network of meaning can be situated as a process of construction of the other in various areas of the social context (community spaces, mass media, legal field, among

others), being the action that the State develops one of the possible orders in public policies towards children. However, this area has the particularity of making explicit the link between childhood and crime from specific concretions such as national plans and intervention programs, jointly defining the institutions in charge of their execution, the intervention spaces and the particular naturalizations regarding the figure of "lawbreaker."

Understood in this way, public policy and institutions towards derived childhoods constitute social spaces for the construction of otherness, supported by knowledge and practices around the production of difference (Cabruja, 1998). The reification of intervened subjects is made possible both from ways of acting and from knowledge, constituting children's factories (Llobet, 2010), from their character of deviation and danger.

### **The binary production of childhoods as a historical process**

Starting from the proposed approach, public policy and particularly that generated towards childhood is configured as a historical and cultural phenomenon (Llobet, 2010). Thus stated, it is relevant to be able to review the modalities in which the State's action towards children has been manifested throughout history, trying to understand both the continuities and the discontinuities of this exercise.

The first observation that can be made is that childhood is not something given, establishing itself as a social production (García & Gallego, 2011; Gómez - Mendoza & Alzate-Piedrahíta, 2014; "Niñez" Working Group, 2006), which is far from in turn having a uniform concretion.

Childhoods are then constructed from specific historical relationships: institutional networks, legislation, spatialities and practices. In this way, the State and civil society have historically materialized specific childhood profiles,



with the emergence of the school institution towards the end of the 19th century being a historical milestone in its constitution in Chile. This process has translated into the pedagogization of childhood (Alzate, 2003; "Childhood" Working Group, 2006), decanting the subject-schooled child, as the combination between the object of care and obedience.

Understood in this way, the status of childhood is based on desirable social behavior, with relative independence of age or normative-guaranteeing qualities. A particular silhouette of childhood is elaborated from the paradoxical denial of its particularity (Llobet, 2010), which decants as a horizon on everyday practices, restricting the plurality of childhoods from a dichotomous exercise of production of the other and the same.

From a historical perspective, the actions of the State of Chile on childhoods reflect an exercise of binary production characteristic of the processes of construction of otherness, in a state social order that segregates with respect to certain manifestations of childhoods (Salazar, 2006). The specificity of the State's intervention on a segment of popular childhoods constructs a subject whose deviation is dangerous, making it pertinent to model social control and segregation strategies. This action of State intervention gains strength from its sociocultural character, heir to the production of ethnic otherness of the colonial regime, and as emerging from the daily interaction with the other as a source of anxiety and insecurity (Rabello et al., 2006).

The technical-punitive action is combined with the ups and downs of the social order, while popular childhood is the object of study and integrationist intervention from social sciences and social technology in boom cycles, while in periods of crisis it is the object of criminalization (Salazar & Pinto, 2010). The above does not apply to the subjectification of childhoods in upper-middle and

upper social classes, who are outside the segregating radius of the State (Working Group "Childhood", 2006), where being a child-gentleman (Salazar & Pinto, 2010) is one's own. of upbringing in the oligarchic layers, defines a class system that is highly protective and reproduces social differences.

The reformist movement of the mid-nineteenth century developed social spaces of transformation in alliance with the apparatus of punitive social control, configuring from the systems of charity-control (García, 2001) the vulnerable figure of the Minor (Ministry of Justice, 1967), as marginalized but majority subject. A culture of judicialization of social policies is thus cemented (Vergara, 2007), building a particular reading of childhood, already at the beginning of the last century (Rocuant, 1932).

Since the 1950s, an expansion of basic social policies began in Chile, facilitating integration processes of broad social sectors, in the context of the development of the Corporate Welfare State (Larrañaga, 2010). As a result of this ascending social movement, minors are increasingly residual (García, 2001), forming the legal apparatus as the articulating instance of the supplementary policies of a State that conceives childhood from the minority, as a marginal subject.

The transformation of the State that comes with the military dictatorship increases this tendency to judicialize the problems of minors, increasing the space for intervention from the application of supplementary policies, against a background of material deficiencies. An illusion of social policy is thus developed (García, 2001), replacing the psychosocial and material nature of the intervention with the omniscient figure of the judge and legal regulations.

In the context of the transition process to democracy, the governments of the post-dictatorial stage consolidate a commitment that entails the development of

a new impulse to social policies as a whole, from the so-called payment of the social debt (Larrañaga, 2010). Conceptualized in this way, childhood becomes an axis of public policies on various fronts, which is reflected in the projection of National Childhood Plans, in the periods 1992-2000, 2001-2010 and 2010-2014 (Government of Chile, 2010).

These regulatory bodies are intended to be guiding frameworks for government policy in favor of children and adolescents, as a coordinated response to the ratification by the State of Chile of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989). It can be argued that this redefinition of public policies from the valuation of social and cultural differences is part of a shift in support of the new development model that replaces the universalist perspective with that of targeting and compensation (Wade, 2006).

However, these supposed advances are accompanied by institutional segmentation, distinguishing subjects of protection and subjects of control, which has pragmatically translated into the naturalization of social groups from criminalization. Thus exposed, the silhouette that produces the violated subjectivity becomes incarnated, founded on the figure of fear of the other (UNDP, 1998), constituting us from the segregating difference.

### **Conclusions**

As a first reflection, it is possible to sustain the critical conceptualization of the relationship between childhood and crime from the notion of otherness. The above is faced with the existence of various naturalizing practices that reify the silhouette of the young lawbreaker and hegemonically define the notion of the social problem and its approach, from criminalization to childhood (Sarcinelli, 2011; Sepúlveda, 2011).





Based on the above, public policies constitute an important context for the consolidation of the normalizing perspective, combining social action (integrationist) and research. Community social psychology allows the visibility of this tension in a privileged way, providing a critical horizon and social transformation from the promotion of dialogic processes between actors and their interpretive frameworks (Alfaro, 2013).

It thus follows that social programs for childhood are defined as a set of responses to the particular development model in Chile, as an update of the historical constructions regarding the condition and status of said childhood (Working Group "Childhood", 2006 ; Salazar, 2006; Rojas, 2010). It is in this sense that the expression alter-childhood is proposed, connoting the specific subjectivation of another child-subject, defined from social interventions towards childhoods, heirs of the historically segregating differentiation of the Chilean nation-state. This definition of alter-childhood does not translate into the description of a particular way of being, highlighting the condition of process as a contingent concretion and relative to subjectivizing dynamics inscribed in devices.

At the socio-community level, conceiving the relationship between childhood and crime from otherness is tense with the ways of understanding the relationship between the adult world and childhood in a patriarchal and adult-centric context. The radicalization of criminalization processes expressed in the growing sense of insecurity and in the externalization of social problems towards figures of otherness, constitute a challenge for society as a whole, and in particular for public policies towards children, if They really intend to position themselves from transformative and guaranteeing perspectives. From

this perspective, the development of local intervention practices aimed at promoting guarantee perspectives towards children,

From this perspective, the historical and cultural processes at the base of the construction of alter-childhood constitute an axis of comprehensive analysis that allows us to problematize the current perspectives of intervention: citizen security, vulnerability, fear of the other, risk factors, among other. This observation, to the extent that it challenges us not only as researchers or social interveners, but as ethical-political subjects, allows us to position a necessary debate regarding responsibility for the Other as a transformative historical-social commitment (Carballeda, 2013). , which polemicalizes with the criminalizing naturalization that emerges from the binary reproduction of childhoods: children or young people, victims or criminals, fragile or dangerous.

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