

Chapter 10

Sublime Moments in the Light of Developmental Trajectory: An Exploration of the Unit of Analysis



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Introduction

This chapter analyzes sublime moments emerging in the life trajectory of an adolescent girl that does self-harming. The theoretical perspective based on cultural psychology of semiotic dynamics (Valsiner, 2007, 2014, target chapter) guides the construction of the unit of analysis that takes the reconstructed sublime moments on the moving from their mesogenetic context toward an ontogenetic developmental achievement. This means that around the sublime experience, the backward developmental changes and forward developmental movement are the length of this unit. The sign-meaning dynamics within this period relating the intrasubjective and intersubjective exchanges, immersed in sociocultural milieu, comprise the content of this unit. Moreover, we aim to methodologically contribute to a unit of analysis that can apprehend the sublime experience in a constant interaction of this girl's intersubjective and intrasubjective dynamics as they occur in irreversible time of living illustrated by the development of her life trajectory.

We intend to circumscribe the unit of analysis that presents the sublime experience in its developmental changing dynamics of a reconstructive sign-meaning process. Thus, we aim to grasp the process of destructing and constructing sign-meanings by analyzing the reconstructive power of past experiences and the projected imagined future, inferred in the trajectory "chosen" by the adolescent. In order to present this unit of analysis, we will first introduce a summary of the studies regarding self-harming followed by an introduction of the concept of Avenues of Directive Meaning as they delineate the mesogenetic conditions of emergence of the sublime moments. Finally, we will present the four developmental periods that compose our analysis. The first one comprises the previous conditions of the sublime moment

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found at the mesogenetic developmental level. The second one furnishes evidence of the emergence of the sublime moment in the adolescent's trajectory – who we will agree to call Alice from this moment on – and its connections with the arising of “who am I” questions. The third and fourth developmental periods correspond to the emergence of an integration of the transformation resulted from these sublime moments composing an ontogenetic life trajectory. In the third period, we emphasize the change in the concept of love as a construction-destruction process that comprises a new sublime moment that mobilizes the construction of new meanings for oneself, for the world, and, therefore, for the new ways to relate to them (particularly, the changes in cutting). In the fourth developmental period, we detail these mentioned changes (concepts of herself), highlighting the role of the meanings offered by collective culture through the interaction with the personal history of the subject and the construction of new Avenues of Directive Meaning (Lyra, Valério, & Wagoner, 2018).

Self-Harming as Sign-Meaning Destruction and Construction in Life Trajectories

According to Nock (2010), self-injury or self-harm is any act of deliberately imposing physical or psychological damage to oneself regardless of suicide intention. Therefore, these actions intend psychological equilibrium when facing very adverse situations – a condition of complete lack of any other possibilities to rely on other more psychosocially conceived possibilities as a way to adapt and to deal with these circumstances. In such context, self-harming becomes the only way for a person to adapt (Nock, 2010).

In human history, we find examples of self-harming behaviors due to the adaptation to social environments – or the collective culture that surrounds the person, pervading many cultures (e.g., rituals or cultural traditions such as neck deformation in African tribes, self-flagellation by religious groups, the practice of piercing and tattooing) (Almeida & Horta, 2010). These examples referred to above are not considered to be pathological. However, the desire for self-harm is commonly classified as being pathological nowadays in the so-called developed societies. Harming yourself is classified as maladjustment because it lacks shared communication with the sociocultural milieu – whether it be religious or sociocultural. Thus, Rosenbaum (2016) claims that self-harming is socially unacceptable as it is a practice that does not positively promote the construction of socially shared meanings, being limited to the scope of the private. In other words, we prefer to say that, in opposite direction, collective meaning considers self-harming as an unacceptable practice and, therefore, it is maintained as a private practice. This is what, for this author, differs self-injuring from other self-injurious practices (e.g., piercing and tattooing) and makes most self-harmers hide their scars, while some hurt themselves in a very visible part of the body to show their scars to the world as a denunciation of this sociocultural misfit. Self-harming, thus, carries the possibility of involving strong

affective tension both regarding the person's intrasubjective and intersubjective dynamics by injuring the body.

In agreement with Valsiner (2014), we can say that the human body is the arena for the process of semiotic mediation of actively decomposing messages of the signs (internalization) and recomposing them into new intrapsychic patterns (externalization). Through this dual process, people create their personal uniqueness, the *psyche*, and leave their marks on their bodies (e.g., paintings or self-injuries). In this "arena," the skin is the ultimate border of the human body from the outside world. Thus, it is the "social membrane of the mind" (Valsiner, 2014, p. 71). Permanent or temporary marks on the skin have "(...) their internal counterpart in the psyche" (Valsiner, 2014, p.71) and, at the same time, send messages to others and to themselves. Thus, they carry a double function: an intrapsychological and an interpsychological function.

In the same line of reasoning, Rosenbaum (2016) claims that self-harmers use their bodies as an "interpretive canvass" (p. 1). He argues that injuries on a self-harmer's body emerge as a form of iconic representation of feelings and emotional states because they are not conventionally established, so they can be conceived as an absence of formulation and symbolic elaboration. Thus, these individuals take physical action to facilitate communication with themselves and with others.

Thus, self-harming encompasses a process of sign destruction-construction in their own body which aim is to feel adapted or accepted in their uniqueness by themselves, by others, and by the social milieu. This comprises intrapsychological and interpsychological claim for acceptance and adaptation to others and to the sociocultural milieu. Moreover, this process occurs in extreme emotional moments, carrying strong feelings and tension between these people and their sociocultural environment as self-injuries such as cutting are not well accepted in society and considered to be of a pathological behavior (Nock, 2009; Rosenbaum, 2016).

So, in the context of our study, self-harming is a sign which has three interesting points:

- (a) It is done on the body; I mean, it is concretely externalized on the person's own body.
- (b) It is a physical harming of the person's own body in order to construct a new meaning. Thus, it can be thought as including destruction-for-construction of a new meaning at the same time or in the same gesture regarding the own body.
- (c) This new meaning emerges facing adaptation – to be accepted – to very demanding and extreme moments of high psychological tension in which extreme or intense feelings are involved.

These proposals are essential contributions because most of the researches seek to understand self-harm by its biological manifestation or by using tests or questionnaires as methods. Regarding biological etiology, Richardson and Zaleski (1983) associate the repetition of self-aggressive acts with the dependence on β -endorphin. Concerning the use of tests and questionnaires, there are plenty of them: Self-Harm Information Form (Croyle & Waltz, 2007), Self-Harm Behavior Survey (Favazza,

Derosear & Coneiro, 1989), and Self-Injury Survey (Zlotnick et al., 1996), among others. All these studies use nomothetic approaches to investigate the responses of individual samples. In an idiographic perspective, only two studies — which rely on people as related to a sociocultural environment — are found: a Foucauldian reading of the process of self-harm (Arcoverde, Amazonas & Lima, 2016) and the study by Rosenbaum (2016) already referred to, that focus on the body of self-harmed people as an interpretive canvas, vehicle of semiotic communication.

This small number of studies indicates that there is much to be contributed to the subject in terms of an analytical perspective. Considering cutting, in terms of adaptation, as a goal to be achieved – intrapsychologically and interpsychologically – we can see its construction in a life trajectory in which the projection to the future (Zittoun & Valsiner, 2016) is strongly constrained by the possibilities and limitations that are offered by the society (Lyra et al., 2018; Obeyesekere, 1990). Moreover, the meaning that it has can persist or change throughout life. That is why we propose cutting as a sign that emerges and develops, which comprises successive moments of the people's life trajectories developing toward a way of adapting to their feelings and desires and to others in the social group. To interpret the meaning of cutting for people requires to apprehend people's internal dynamics, their interactions with others and with the social milieu as part of their movement toward achieving or not the goal of feeling accepted and, therefore, adapted. Self-harming, analyzed through these lens, takes the role of what we call Avenues of Directive Meaning (ADM) (Lyra et al., 2018) to the center of our discussion in the next section of this chapter.

Avenues of Directive Meaning: Searching for Mesogenetic Conditions Toward Ontogenetic Development

The concept of ADM stresses the focus on interactions of a person with others in constant exchanges with the collective culture available in the sociocultural milieu. Meaning emerges through a movement that relies on the own person's history and on the possibilities available in the sociocultural environment in which the person lives (Lyra et al., 2018). This seems quite obvious; nevertheless, in many ways, there is a tendency to rely on the person's dynamics as the major locus of meaning construction dismissing the deep interactional and contextual – specific time and space – condition of people.

This inclination to focus on the person's dynamics is particularly clear in most self-injury studies. That's why we propose a new approach to this phenomenon: focusing on the negotiated exchanges of the self-harmer and the sociocultural environment. The focus on interactions of people with others as immersed in a sociocultural milieu, constructing meaning and acting guided by these interactions, is exactly the core of ADM's proposal. People that do self-harming require to be investigated by aiming to grasp the meaning of the process of construction of self-harming in specific time and place in which people develop their life trajectories.

ADM stresses that life trajectories are guided by the meaning one creates in order to pursue a goal to be achieved. Moreover, this goal is guided by societal organization disposed in collective culture. Thus, some possibilities of meaning construction are accepted during certain times and in specific contexts but not in others. For instance, during wartime to kill is accepted as an act of bravery and is honored as homeland defense. In times of peace, to take the life of another human being is not only reproved by the laws of the society but by religion and by society as a whole. This diversity of meaning is only possible due to the societal group guidance which creates these divergent possibilities to interpret the same action.

The idea that people construct meaning by navigating these avenues of possibilities of meaning construction offered by collective culture available in the society, directing toward constructing meaning for their acts in some ways and not in others, can be applied to self-harming. Self-harming as a sign emerges and develops as a person strives toward adaptation under societal guidance. These are moments of great tension in feelings from which cutting can emerge and develop as a way to adapt to results from the construction and destruction of signs and hierarchy of signs during people's navigation through these avenues of societal meanings.

The point to be highlighted is that in order to apprehend personal meaning of self-harming, comprising sublime moments, we need to approach how society is constructing possibilities of interpreting the dilemmas faced by the ones that choose to cut themselves as a way toward feeling adjustment. Moreover, it is necessary to identify how others with whom people interact present these societal meanings in their exchanges and communication with these people that do self-harming. Thus, the sublime as comprehending a tension between two opposite categories of values – e.g., bad versus good and honorable versus shameful) – and the subsequent transposition of this dichotomy by creating a new one, a synthesis (that negates the previous opposed categories), and bypassing them is always constructed and felt by the subject in relation to the meaning the society offers in specific time and space or context. Thus, the experience is always context-dependent and, therefore, related to the ADMs the society offers.

In this study we analyzed the case of an adolescent called Alice who does cutting and, consequently, suffers high emotional tension and dilemma, whose major aim is being accepted as she is. All the data was collected through a semi-structured interview made in only one meeting between the participant and the researcher. Nevertheless, this interview was interpreted as the participant's life trajectory reconstruction and, therefore, as the process of transformation of sign-meaning in constructing and destructing signs along time. It is just this approach that allows the research to apprehend and interpret past moments reconstructed by the participants in the present moment and, at the same time, imagined future, both re-evaluated and self-analyzed by the participant in a dialogue with the researcher, in order to approach intrapsychological and interpsychological dynamics of the participant. Moreover, psychological dynamics are grasped and interpreted by the research in a context of time and space.

The Case of Alice

I cut myself in anger (...) and because I want to take it out of me

Alice is a 15-year-old girl who had done self-harming around 1 year before the interview by cutting her arms. Initially, she did not care about exhibiting the marks, but nowadays – once she has stopped cutting herself – she hides them and intends to cover them with tattoos. She is a medium-class girl who studies in a public school and had already changed schools many times – which has always been difficult for her because she loses friends each time. Besides that, her parents are separated, and, according to her, they split up due to the physically aggressive behavior of her father toward her mother ever since she was born. So, she describes herself as someone who has two homes: the one where her mother and stepfather live and the other one where her paternal grandparents live together with Alice's father.

At first, Alice stayed at her grandparents' home till she was 8 years old, and her mother took her to her home. She describes this period as being very stressful and says that she cried every day, mainly because she missed her grandmother. In her words, "Terrible (laughs nervously). I cried every day because I could not get used to being away from my grandmother."

The First Sublime Moment: Who Am I?

The second moment of stressful feelings described by Alice comprises the moment when she started doing cutting – about 1.5 years before the interview, when she was almost 14 years old. She relates this moment to when she was forced to "come out" with her homosexuality in the midst of her family. When questioned about when she started hurting herself, she says:

See, I think ... It was right at ... that I actually remember ... it was right at the ... time I came out. Not that I came out, that I had to talk! (laughs nervously) (...) And then I cut myself in anger. Rage! Just in anger ... and because I wanted to take it out of me. I've already wanted to die once. I've already wanted a lot of things. But nowadays I think like this 'No, I don't want to die. , I want to stay here. , I want to live a lot. I have goals. I have plans. I want to live everything' (...) At those times I wanted to die because I thought I had no reason to live... if I had to continue living the way it was back then, being judged from all sides [of her family] ... I thought that this would never end. So I wanted to die ... I would rather die than live like that.

This is a very rich description of sign and meaning creation out of a sublime moment. The marks on her own body – cutting – show the creation of sign-meaning. They show that within the tension between pain (psychologically and physically felt) and pleasure (inferred by the pleasure of releasing her anger), people create a "solution" to exhibit their inner feeling of pain to society. Alice also encapsulates the pleasure of her pain in the mark, the cutting on her skin, on her own body, because it displays an overcoming of the present tension – I am homosexual, but the others do not accept who I am – toward an action that shows a negation of both through a sign (cutting) that exhibits her new synthesis showing her suffering to others and cutting

what she dislikes in herself due to the others and, thus, demanding a “place” for her in a societal group. Therefore, this sign is the exhibition of her desire for acceptance of her uniqueness as homosexual. Her inimitability is shown as a sign on her own body, “claiming” that she is a homosexual being. This sign emerges, thus, to exhibit her uniqueness as homosexual and the judgments and evaluations against this of others and the society. All tension is, thus, a deep affective tension between her struggle for acceptance and adaptation to others and the society and her intrasubjective and intersubjective dynamics, therefore between herself and others. Cutting is, thus, a new sign created as an outcome from the opposed feelings: who I am (homosexual) versus the not acceptance and rejection of that by others.

We argue that this sublime moment only emerges because “liking girls” is presented as a not possible path for her sociocultural milieu – presented, in this case, by her family. Due to the family’s nonacceptance of her homosexuality, Alice tells that, for quite a long time, she even started believing that being a homosexual was wrong and unacceptable, therefore an impossible path for her life. She tells:

Yeah, I did not want to like girls. That’s why I tried to avoid it. As my grandparents were religious, I tried to see God (laughs). See in God that this was wrong and that was it. (...) That is what I was thinking ... It was wrong, you know? Not that it’s filthy or something like that. I thought it was wrong to live like this ... To be free ... I thought it was wrong to be free. I was raised very straight-laced. (...) I ... I think that, back then, in my mind, there were only thoughts of one day being someone. I thought of being someone. I just did not know who. I did not plan. And I only planned that the religion I wanted for my life was that one [Evangelic/Protestant]. I did not think I would change my mind totally as it is now.

Once Alice cannot be herself in the potentiality of her uniqueness (liking girls) because being homosexual wasn’t accepted and, therefore, not a possible path for her, she sees herself in a strong tension: “If I cannot be myself, so who am I?” Seeking for who she is according to the avenues of meanings presented by her cultural group (e.g., “try to see God”) makes her feel pretty much as a “straight-laced” girl, therefore not being herself. Therefore, as she doesn’t feel as her true self, the cutting that she inflicts on her skin is not only on her body – to hurt and punish herself for “liking girls” – but also for the others who restrain her possibilities of being by telling what avenues of meanings are available for her development/trajectory. So, we can see a flow that goes forward and backward, feeding itself, as illustrated in Fig. 10.1.

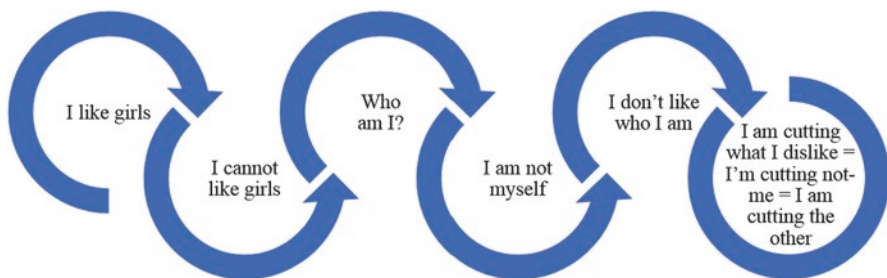


Fig. 10.1 Alice’s inferred self-dialogues

During this very painful experience of not feeling as being herself, Alice faces a sublime moment, which synthesis seems to present a solution for her problem/question (“I show the others my suffering due to my societal group, that’s why I am not me”): I’ll hurt myself and, by doing so, I’ll hurt the others too. This dialogical and dynamic movement points out to a very important relationship between the self-harmer and the world. In Alice’s case, she wanted to publicly assume her homosexuality only when she would turn 18 years old – age of majority and autonomy in Brazil. She supposed she would have her “own life” by then. But she “had to talk,” in her words, about her sexual preference when she was 14: she openly told her stepmother about her sexual preferences, as a secret, but her stepmother told everyone in her family. This event points out to a social promise that was broken and increased her anger and the feeling of taking the anger out of herself as a way of hurting both her and the others (since she couldn’t hurt the others directly) – and, as we said before, as a cry for help by showing her pain because of nonacceptance and nonrecognition (of herself as she is or a “place” for her to be socially accepted).

So, we present this sublime moment and its meanings through Fig. 10.2. On it we can see that, at first, the pain and pleasure of hurting herself were separated and had dichotomic meanings. She felt not only the biological pain but also the sentimental ache of not being accepted. On the other hand, she felt pleasure for taking the anger out on somebody (herself) and also the satisfaction in inflicting physical punishment and exposing to society the marks of the socially expected “solution” for doing something “wrong.” But then a transformation occurs, when, by getting over the dichotomy, she faces a new curvilinear meaning: the pleasure of showing others her suffering and the painful pleasure of creating a sign through which she claims for uniqueness and sends a message for help.

This sublime experience transforms the meaning construction into an ontogenetic level: changing her relation with her life course. We will explore how Alice transforms her concept of herself through the process of destruction<>construction of signs related to her concept of love. This meaning-making also changes her use

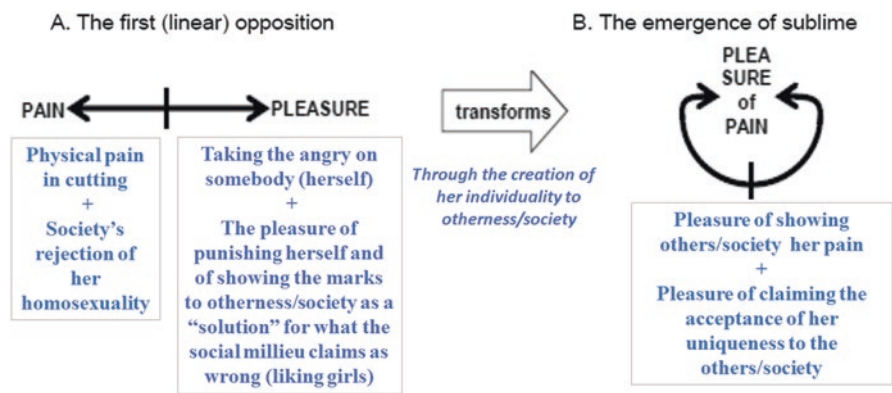


Fig. 10.2 Alice’s making of the sublime by uniting the opposites (pleasure/pain). (Adapted from Valsiner (2018, p. 24))

of cutting (that stops) and her relationship with the scars on her skin. All those processes encompass the new ADMs that are guiding the meaning-making process.

Opening New Paths/Meanings for “Who I am”: The Changing on Alice’s Concept of Love as Another Sublime Moment

During this period of sexual unacceptance, Alice qualifies herself as “close-minded.” Furthermore, she claims that she only changed because of some experiences: (1) when she was infatuated with some girl of her church and (2) when she hooks up with a girl for the first time. Those experiences, according to her narrative, only happened after her grandmother accepted her sexuality. Moreover, they also happened after she started doubting some credos of her religion at that time (Evangelic/Protestant).

About the first aspect – namely, the role of her grandmother – Alice claims that she stopped hurting herself after she moved to her grandmother’s house. There, she did not only find acceptance but also a place for herself (“that did not care” [about her homosexuality]). She says:

In the time of anger I was very blind ... It didn’t know how to deal with my problems. (...) I had no friends and no people I could trust or talk to. Even because... when I came out, after a while, I went to my grandmother’s house. My grandmother accepts me (emphasis), so she agreed with me moving to live there for a while because I couldn’t deal with my mother putting pressure on me anymore. My mother, my father, everyone... And then I went to live there .. And it was there where I stopped with that [cutting herself] (...) Because I stopped listening to [complaints about their decisions]. I moved from a place where they rejected me so much to one where they did not care. So it was good. Then ... I stopped wanting [to die]... I do not know ... I stopped thinking about dying.. stopped everything [the thoughts about dying].

In Alice’s discourse, we clearly see that her grandmother’s acceptance opens up a new path. Thus, the acceptance of her grandmother functions as a catalyzer condition (Cabell & Valsiner, 2013) for the development of Alice’s new meaning construction. Therefore, this new path demands the emergence of a new meaning possible in the sociocultural group – though vivified by only one person (the grandmother) – different from that one that has been destroyed (e.g., I cannot love a girl; I have to avoid “liking girls”). Moreover, the grandmother functioning as a catalytic condition has the function of making emerge another possibility of meaning-making that enables the emergence of a new meaning for her cutting – they ceased to be signs that claim for acceptance of her homosexual uniqueness and become something else. This new meaning of the cutting on the skin is clear once she tells the interviewer that back in the past, she didn’t care about showing the scars and that nowadays she hides and even says she wants to cover them with tattoos. In her words: “I keep hiding them [scars of the cutting] and I want to get a tattoo on top. I think it marks a time that was... difficult. As to my tattoo, however, I’m not with that person anymore [it was a couple’s tattoo], I do not regret doing it because it marks

something in my life. It was a good time. The cutting is like this, but it was a bad time. It marks me.”

This corroborates inference/interpretation that the cutting occurred when there were no paths available to Alice. As soon as the grandmother presents acceptance, new avenues of meaning in the sociocultural milieu that allows Alice to reconstruct the meaning of cutting (new ADM) are created; the cutting ceases, as well as its old meaning – a sign of her desire to be accepted as homosexual – is destroyed, and then she transforms it into an index of a bad time. This change – in the meaning of the cutting and scars – was only possible because Alice opens herself – through the support of her grandmother as a catalytic condition – to new ways of conceiving love.

We see, also in Alice’s discourse, a transformation of this sign-meaning (love) in a religious context. This destruction and construction of love meanings is very important because homosexuality was not accepted by her religion at that time (Evangelic/Protestant). Nevertheless, she uses a circumvention strategy to find a place for it in the religious credo. She describes that love is a lovable feeling and approved attitude. Why to love another girl would not be approved if it is a good thing?

Alice: First, I, even in church, got interested in a girl. So I kept thinking ... Like ... The first thought I had for a long time was ... If this is so wrong, why can we love another person? Not that ... I loved someone (laughs). But I mean it’s a beautiful thing because they say it is a bad thing, a bad thing, how it would make us to do something like this... But I wonder why. Why would a thing that is only evil, only brings evil, would make us love another person?

This way, Alice is trying to create a sign that encompasses her homosexuality as possible to be accepted by a religious credo and, through this, recognized by others and the society. By doing so, she creates paths to answer the “Who am I” question and also creates a socially accepted place to her. At the same time, with this movement, she tries to destruct the sign “it is wrong to love another person of the same sex,” once she realizes that to love is lovable and approved in as much as it is applied to another human being independent of sex orientation. So, she realizes that there is love where it wasn’t possible before and, by doing so, creates a curvilinear synthesis merging both previous meanings (Fig. 10.3). All these dynamics can also be understood as a sublime experience as it surpasses the first opposition that is categorically linear. Alice creates a new synthesis, in which love signifies love for all human beings regardless of sex differences.

The construction of this new sign conduces her toward a new religion: spiritism. Although she likes spiritism, she does not consider herself a spiritist because she is not a practitioner; she says: “It’s because I feel too detached to be part of a religion and to be dependent on it. I understand that the spirits... they... they can do things. They rely heavily on us for things that I cannot commit myself to.” This “no commitment” credo – even with a religion that she likes – is strongly related to her wish to be a “free soul.” This is another movement that the destruction of the old sign (e.g., I’m not me/I don’t like girls/loving girls is forbidden/not acceptable) and construction of a new one (e.g., I’m myself/I like girls/love is acceptable regardless of sex orientation) happens. Due to the importance of this choice, we’ll approach it in a specific subtopic.

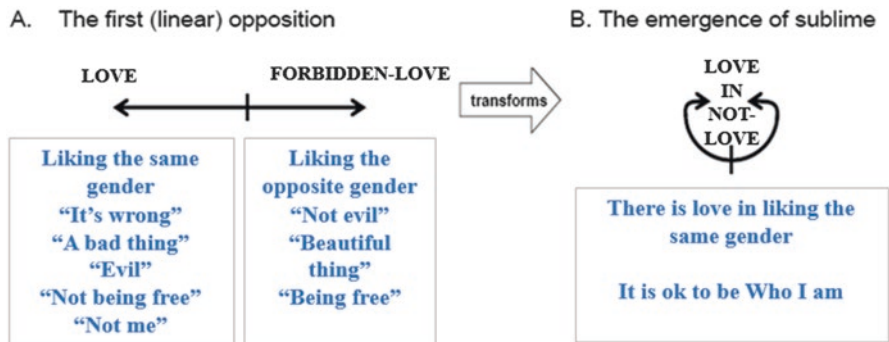


Fig. 10.3 Alice’s meaning-making of the opposites (love-forbidden love). (Adapted from Valsiner (2018, p. 24))

The Emergence of an Ontogenetic Developmental Achievement: A New Concept of “Who am I”

As we argued earlier in this chapter, the new and expanded meaning of love moves Alice toward new avenues of possible meanings and, therefore, demands the creation of new meanings: (1) one relates with her scars/cuts differently (as an index of a bad time) and (2) another sees herself not as “close-minded” person but as a free soul.

This developmental change, as well as her desire for hiding her scars, reiterates that once cutting was a sign of claiming for acceptance of her homosexuality (by herself and the others), comprising the first sublime moment in her developmental trajectory; next, this sign-meaning changed since she was accepted; and, after that, she accepted herself. When questioned about her perspective of herself through time, Alice comments:

How I see myself?(...) I think ... I do not know ... I feel so, I do not know, free. So ... free (laughs). Once I was so close-minded. I was totally against myself. Nowadays I accept myself much more. I accept who I am ... I ... I’m not like my niece [which is also homosexual]. We have this difference... She does not accept herself and she wants to be different... and I see myself like this and I want to be like this. (...) I’m a free soul (laughs). I’m like this, I do not know, free. (...) I did not accept myself. The others I accepted. I did not accept myself. (...) I liked girls. That’s what I tried to avoid. As my grandparents were religious, I tried to see God (laughs). See in God that this was wrong and that was it. (...) But, I think it changed because of myself, because I wanted to change. I’ve grown more love for myself. I have started to see myself differently.

These comments suggest that Alice starts to deal with the constraints that society establishes regarding the acceptance of homosexuality in a different way. She seems to continue seeking the reconstruction of her intrasubjective dynamics through transforming the society’s signs and its hierarchy offered to her. The cutting was a sign of her desire to be accepted as homosexual, an acting toward her adaptation within what was offered by the sociocultural milieu in that specific time and place.

With new avenues offered by society discovered by her some time later and catalyzed by her grandmother’s acceptance of her as she is, Alice starts constructing new meanings, not only reconstructing her intrasubjective dynamic – an internal movement that goes together with an external facing of collective groups in society, which are not going to be explored in this paper.

Focusing Alice’s intrasubjective dynamics, we already mentioned that the meaning of her scars changed from a sign of her struggle to be accepted as homosexual to something that belongs to the past, recognized as a “bad time.” Due to this emerging new meaning, she talks about covering the scars with tattoos, since the latter represent something that can be openly chosen and openly exhibit to others, such as piercing – that she already has. This desire emerges from a kind of a new “agreement” between herself and others in the society, once she doesn’t need to use cutting on her body as a message for acceptance.

However, this self-acceptance by others is gained by using one of the possibilities that Alice finds in her surroundings – to use marks on the body that are socially accepted. This occurs due to the destruction of cutting as a “mark of not acceptance ‘in society’” towards change to “marks that have a degree of acceptance in society like tattoos and piercing.”

Thus, the movement from an unacceptable sign on the body toward the ones that are acceptable is guided by the avenues of meaning society offers. Moreover, Alice’s intrasubjective meanings change along with the dynamics of destructing and constructing signs regarded as possible sign-meaning in the society. This happens through her navigation in the Avenues of Directive Meaning found in society, which are dynamically worked by Alice in order to achieve the goal of feeling adapted and accepted by herself and others – her grandmother’s acceptance of her homosexuality and love with another person regardless of sexual choices as guided/accepted by religion. We summarize Alice’s intrasubjective meaning changes, as well as her sign construction-destruction navigating through offered ADMs by available collective culture in her social milieu as exemplified in Fig. 10.4.

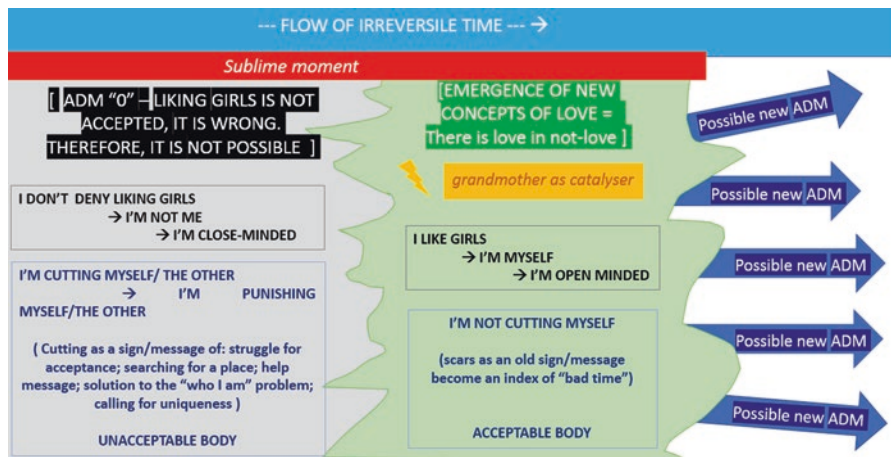


Fig. 10.4 ADM influence in Alice’s meaning-making

Sublime Moments in the Light of Developmental Trajectory: Searching for a Unit of Analysis

In this chapter, we intended to approach the unit of analysis that circumscribes the sublime moments of transformation under the dynamics that comprise the developmental trajectory of an adolescent girl who used to do self-harming, by cutting her own body, and afterward changed her conception of love regarding a homosexual love, including homosexual love as acceptable, therefore an equal kind of love.

We highlighted the role of interaction between people and their societal organization – the collective culture – through the ADM concept as comprising the process of a person's meaning- making guiding both the sublime moment and its developmental life trajectory. We proposed that the sublime as *locus* of transformation of sign-meaning – its destruction and construction of signs – seems to be only approached by a person's reconstruction that takes the form of a person's dynamics in irreversible time, thus constructing life trajectories. Therefore, the researcher's possibility to apprehend these moments is only comprehensible by following the unfolding life course; the successive moments in the present that comprise the sublime experience is always reconstructed by the subjects through sign-meaning construction and destruction. It is within this intrasubjective and intersubjective interactions that the researcher-observer can apprehend and circumscribe the sublime moments always in their movement toward the future.

The researcher's interpreting of what is observed requires grasping the interaction between the person and collective culture as they are disposed through the Avenues of Directive Meaning placed in societal milieu in order to infer the intrasubjective dynamics as they are developing in the subject. This means that the follow-up of developmental changes through a person's life trajectory seems to be a necessary condition for the researcher to apprehend the sign-meaning changes that result from the transforming characteristics of sublime moments. This means that it is the coordination of externalized intersubjective exchanges with the inferred process of the intrasubjective dynamics that is required in order to compose a unit of analysis as it constructs a life trajectory in which occurs the sublime experience. We understand that this point highlights the search for a unit of analysis that fulfills the requirement of a holistic unit and that integrating the irreversibility of time and the complex-holistic requirement of the subject's psyche always corresponds to the complex nature of the psyche in their moving toward the unknown future (Diriwächter & Valsiner, 2008).

Last but not least, in order to still complement this unit of analysis, we finally suggest that we need to include the researcher's perspective on the phenomenon as a following step to be explored to complement this unit of analysis. This dimension has not been covered in this text. Nevertheless, it is a task to be explored in a near future.

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