CHILDREN'S IDENTIFICATION PROCESSES WITH TELEVISION CHARACTERS: CASE STUDIES ABOUT COLOMBIAN CHILDREN AND THEIR FAVORITE CARTOON PROGRAMS

PROCESOS DE IDENTIFICACIÓN DE LOS NIÑOS CON LOS PERSONAJES TELEVISIVOS: ESTUDIOS DE CASO SOBRE NIÑOS COLOMBIANOS Y SUS PROGRAMAS FAVORITOS DE TELEVISIÓN

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Abstract

Through the articulation of psychoanalysis and narrative analysis this study explores the processes of identification of children audiences with their favorite cartoon television programs. In order to understand the characteristics of identification processes, this study explores the way in which both the structure of cartoons and the affective histories of children influence children's identification with their favorite television characters. To achieve that understanding we a) analyzed the narrative elements of the television programs, b) explored the children's affective history, and c) examined how these narrative elements and affective histories influence the appropriation of television programs. These three scenarios were examined through case study on four Colombian children between 6 to 10 years old. The analysis showed that affective factors of children's personal history constitute a significant source of mediation on the appropriation of cartoons. In addition, the narrative elements of the programs become an essential motivation on children's fantasies.

Keywords: Children, television, identification, fantasy, internal script, personification.

Resumen

A través de la articulación del psicoanálisis y del análisis narrativo, este estudio explora los procesos de identificación de las audiencias infantiles con sus programas de televisión infantiles favoritos. Con el fin de entender las características de los procesos de identificación de los niños, esta investigación examina la manera como las estructuras de los programas y las historias afectivas de los niños influencian la identificación de estos niños con sus personajes de televisión favoritos. Para cumplir este objetivo esta investigación analiza a) los elementos narrativos de varios programas infantiles de televisión, b) la historia afectiva de los niños estudiados, c) la manera como estos elementos narrativos y las historias afectivas influencian el consumo y apropiación de los programas infantiles de televisión. Estos tres ámbitos son analizados a través de estudios de caso de 4 niños colombianos entre 6 y 10 años de edad. Los resultados muestran que los factores afectivos de las historias personales de los niños constituyen una fuente significativa de mediación en la apropiación y consumo de programas infantiles. Más aún, los elementos narrativos de estos programas constituyen también una motivación y contenido esencial para las fantasías de los niños.

Palabras clave: Niños, televisión, identificación, fantasía, libreto interno, personificación.

Introduction

Although Cultural Studies have insisted from the decade of the 70's about the importance of conceiving of children as a particular audience with their own particular characteristics, Functionalism, in the decade of the 30's, was the approach that first urged the need to study mass media effects on child audiences (Angel, 2010, Mattelart & Mattelart, 1997). Accordingly, many authors started to ask about the consequences of media contents in audiences supposedly lacking training and experience to consume them critically. For many years the main concern was the question about how media could benefit or affect children.

Since then, the topic of television effects on children has been actively researched (Maigret, 2005; Vilches, 1993; Fuenzalida, 2005). Nevertheless, there are no definitive conclusions and there are still many questions to be answered: Are children so vulnerable to be widely affected by media? How do children benefit from television? What kinds of relationships are generated between children and the characters of their favorite programs? Do children identify themselves with children's programs and how? It was precisely this last question that motivated this study: How are children's identification processes resulting from their consumption of children's television programs? To answer this question we approached three different fields of study.

First, it was fundamental to take children into account, that is, to consider them both as an audience and as individuals. Many studies analyze children as a collective unit and methodologically they do not consider them with a deep analysis of each one's contexts and *life histories.* Far from this perspective, our study takes into account three psychological factors: the needs and conflicts undergone by children (emotional, intellectual, or protective), their affective history (resulting from the relationships with their parents, siblings and friends); and their role as an audience.

The second element necessary to understand the relationship between children and television dealt with the characteristics of children's favorite television programs. These programs were conceived as stories or *narrations* structured and based on characters, actions, topics, conflicts, and needs.

Once children's life stories and television programs were analyzed, it was possible to examine the *fantasies* generated in children's minds. These fantasies (generated through game) manifest themselves in terms of characters, actions, topics, conflicts, and needs. The relationship among these three "macro-categories" allowed us to understand the problem of identification.

Literature Review

Although there are several studies on identification, the theoretical work on this concept is still limited (Cohen, 2001). It is necessary to conceptualize more about the nature of identification, especially in relation to children's identification with mass media. After doing an extensive review of the literature produced in this field, we found that identification has been defined and studied with regard to three broad theories or perspectives: behaviorism, aesthetics, and psychoanalysis. In this section, we will briefly describe the way in which each of these major traditions approach identification.

Under the label of behaviorism we decided to include all of the studies that define identification in relation to the acquisition of new behaviors and the process of learning through vicarious experience. According to this perspective, identification is part of a process of socialization through which children and adolescents learn to take the role of the other in order to internalize the different roles and behaviors that individuals adopt in society. Most of the time this learning process is conducted through vicarious experience, that is, by observing someone else's behaviors. Identification, in this sense, is directly related to the process of socialization that Mead explains when he discusses the nature of the generalized other (Mead, 1934). The other is approached as a model to be imitated. Although Mead´s tradition of symbolic interactionism can be considered as distant from behaviorism, we decided to include Mead´s ideas under this

umbrella, because his ideas has been used to understand how the process of identification consists of taking the role of the other.[1]

In the case of media studies, both Bandura and Mead's ideas and, therefore, traditions, such as social learning theory and symbolic interactionism, have been used to understand the processes of identification of audiences with media characters (Hoffner, Levine & Toohey, 2008). In relation to television, for example, identification is defined as a desire to behave in ways similar to a certain character (Rincón, 2002; Hur & Baran, 1979; Basil, 1996; Hoffner, 1996). Many works examine the extent to which television's characters work as models of socialization that allow audiences –especially children- to vicariously learn behaviors and rules (Rincón, 2002; Monnot, 2010; Mazzarella & Pecora, 2007). Other studies focus on what has been called wishful identification, that is, the "psychological process through which an individual desires or attempts to become like another person, such as a media character" (Hoffner Levine & Toohey, 2008).

It is beyond the scope of this article to examine the different approaches that can be included under this umbrella that we have called behaviorism. In general terms, these studies tend to define identification as a process that involves emotions and feelings. To identify is to feel empathy and affinity toward a character (García, 2002). In this process, sometimes approached as para-social interaction (Tian & Hoffner, 2010), imitation is an important characteristic because the character becomes a model to be followed.

Finally, in most cases, research under these paradigms is conducted by applying quantitative methods because the main objective is to measure the degree of identification of audiences with media characters and to establish typologies of those characters and about the audience's feelings, emotions, and perceptions. Thus, several scales have been designed to measure and study identification from this standpoint (Cohen, 2001).

Aesthetics is the second major theory from which the concept of identification has been defined. From this standpoint, identification is specially approached as an aesthetic experience that individuals have when they appreciate a work of art or any creative work (Bakhtin, 1981, 1990). Unlike the behavioral perspective in which identification implies a process of merging between the audience and a certain character, the aesthetic standpoint considers that identification goes beyond that experience of merging and it is complete when the individual is again conscious and takes distance from the source of his identification. In fact, identification is for Bakhtin one of the elements of an authentic aesthetic experience. However, Bakhtin does not limit the aesthetic experience to an identification process, but defines that aesthetic experience in terms of form: "The first moment of aesthetic activity is identification: I must experience, i.e., see and know, what he experiences, put myself in his place, in a way to coincide with him… but is this plenitude of internal fusion the ultimate end of aesthetic activity? … Not at all: properly speaking, aesthetic activity has not even begun… Aesthetic activity begins properly only when one returns within oneself at one's place, outside of the one suffering, and when one gives form and completion to the material of identification" (as cited in Todorov, 1984: 99). Thus, aesthetic experience is neither a problem of emotions (identification), nor a rational practice, but an activity of giving form, that is, a problem of language.

This aesthetic approach is important because it radically differs from both the behaviorist and the psychoanalytical standpoints. Unlike behaviorism, the aesthetic approach states that identification is not only a problem of feeling the same emotions of the other and, therefore, connecting –merging- with him. And, unlike psychoanalysis, the aesthetic standpoint considers fundamental for an authentic identification experience that the individual, after feeling the connection with the other, becomes aware of this experience and realizes that he/she is a different human being.

This problem of awareness is, according to Cohen (2001), one of the most important elements of identification. In fact, he defines identification as "the degree to which self-awareness is lost during exposure to the text" (Cohen, 2001: 256). From the psychoanalytical point of view, there is identification because the individual adopts the perspective of the other and becomes less

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[1] Not all Mead's ideas can be considered behaviorist. However, several researchers approach them in this way.

aware of his/her individuality. Here identification is not an emotion, but a "process that consists of increasing loss of self-awareness and its temporary replacement with heightened emotional and cognitive connections with a character" (Cohen, 2001: 251).

These ideas of awareness and individuality are central for psychoanalysis, that is, for the third major approach that has been used to define and study identification. Because we adopted a psychoanalytical perspective to conduct our study on children's identification, we will explain in more detail this approach in the next section. For now, it is important to present some introductory characteristics about it. Freud defined identification as a "nonconscious imaginative process that results from psychological pressures due to the Oedipal complex, compensation for the loss of object-love, jealousy, or mortification" (Cohen, 2001: 247). His ideas were later developed and applied to contexts as diverse as leadership, art, and children's tales, among others. Bettelheim's (2002) work on children's tales has been useful to understand children's identification with mass media characters.

As long as psychoanalytical notions have been employed to understand identification in relation to mass media consumption, it has been necessary to do some transformations and adaptations of these notions (Rincón, 2002).

Theoretical Perspective

As stated above, the identification concept has been approached from different theoretical standpoints. But what is it meant by such a concept when we say that the children immersed in the world of television identify themselves with the characters that appear there?

Identification has been generally understood as behaviors and worldviews that an individual appropriates from the external world. This definition increases the confusion in relation to this concept, for it is difficult to differentiate identification from other processes such as internalization, introjection, imitation, and learning. Those processes, although related, refer to specific phenomena on the psychological spectrum. For instance, it is worth noting that concepts such as identification and learning emerge in different fields. While the former emerges from experiences of clinical psychology, the latter is primarily based on models of stimulus-response. As Grinberg (1978: 8) states:

> "Learning processes have a way of representational and functional structuring and internalization which corresponds to the most peripheral aspect of the internal world (…). Identification processes aim at the psychical structuring and its internalization level lies in the core of the internal world".

On the other hand, imitation does not imply a long and perdurable establishment of experience, but it can become a precursor of identification. Both learning and imitation are processes that appear widely in the individual's conscious register. A person can deliberately try to imitate or learn behaviors that trigger some interest. This is a feature that starts marking some central difference regarding identification processes because the psychic activities emerging from these processes are not widely registered in consciousness.

Both imitation and learning produce changes in the structuring of psychic processes. However, these processes aim mainly at transformations in the order of representations and in people's functional order. Identification, conversely, produces deeper changes that affect the ego's internal organization (Freud, 1932).

The study of identification processes as a limit concept between the ego and the other is still in development within the depth psychology standpoint. According to this approach, identification goes beyond an imitative act, and constitutes itself as an intermediary process that includes both individuals' subjectivity and their interactions with the world. Thus, in this article we do not define identification as a passive assimilation of the external world, for there would be previous factors in the individual's psychic history that influence that internalization of the external world. As Grinberg (1978: 12) states, identification broadens the ego structure "on the basis of selection, inclusion and elimination of elements from external or internal objects".

Identifications are part of the basic structure of personality. Parents are the first referents with which children identify themselves, and these identifications become part of the ego. Hence, children's register of the experiences held with their parents over the first years lies at the core of the structure that influence the way in which children create the images of themselves and of their environment. These firsts identifications with their parents are followed by other identifications with significant people such as siblings, uncles, aunts, friends, and teachers, among others. As we will mention, we methodologically approached this aspect by considering the *affective history* of the children studied.

The diverse range of emotions and feelings constitute the affective sphere. It is constructed based on the most significant experiences undergone by children with the first people with whom they have contact. Laplanche understands affects as "all of painful, agreeable, vague or qualified states that present themselves as a massive discharge or as a general tonality" (Mazel & Houzel, 1981: 66). The most significant people who define children's affective sphere correspond to parents, siblings and close people with whom children have a frequent emotional exchange. Both difficulties and gratifications that take place in these relations will become children's specific affective tonality (Klein, 1974; Winnocott, 2005; Dolto, 1974).

To summarize, we adopt a wide perceptions about the concept of identification. It is not that individuals take something from the external world in order to modify their thoughts and behavior, but also that they recognize something internal in that external world that will let them focus their attention on that aspect. In other words, identification is conceived as a process, which according to children's psychic background, defines some mechanisms through which children select, eliminate, and modify traits of the external world to be assimilated in the ego. In our specific case, we examined which television elements were mantained by children, which were transformed, and which ones were omitted.

About Fantasy

A close observation of children's play shows the significance that fantasy exerts on children's development process. Children invest a lot of time, energy, and emotions in activities where imagination deploys all its potential. The pleasure generated by the imaginary world of children has motivated deep studies about the psychic experiences correlated with such activities. Diverse theoretical models of child psychology acknowledge that through fantasy -which is mainly expressed through play- it is possible to apprehend the children's affective reality. Through their fantasies children shape their internal world (Oppenheim, 1997; Durrett, 1959; Stover, Horn & Lieberman, 2006).

If children's fantasy accounts for children's affective history, and if materials from television programs are found in those fantasies, it becomes pertinent to look for the identification processes that the children have with their favorite programs. For Freud (1907), fantasy is an imaginary narration where children represent their own history. In a narration, children make their wishes come true and they defend themselves from their main anxieties. As children's ego is not completely developed, most of their impressions are dominated by fantasy. Due to the lack of maturity in their thinking, it is easier for children to comprehend themselves and to comprehend the world through their fantasy histories, which are similar to folk stories and myths. In the core of their stories, there is a hero who performs a daring journey, but also threats, antagonists, and helpers (Freud, 1907 c). According to Freud (1911), fantasy populates children's symbolic life with all kinds of imaginary beings. In his text *Totem and Taboo,* for example, Freud (1911) identifies spirits and devils as representations of the affective tendencies of psychic life.

In a similar way, Klein (1974) analyzes parents' nonconscious image in children's fantasy representations. These figures are formed by the first introjections that the children make from these representations (Riviere, 1975). Bettelheim (2002) has shown the profound incidence that traditional stories have on children's development. He also explains how, through identification processes, children provide order and compression to their vital impressions:

> "Stories show to children how they can express their destructive wishes by means of a character, how to obtain the satisfaction desired through a second one, how to identify themselves with a third one, how to have

an ideal relation with a fourth, and so on, thus complying with the requirements from the needs of the moment" (Bettelheim, 2002: 72).

Finally, in his studies about the development of the symbol in childhood, Piaget (1961: 181) states that the mythical characters that accompany children in their fantasies "inherit the parents' moralizing activity, which will become later the interior language in their egocentric forms".

It is also important to know that children's fantasy aims at solving children's affective conflicts imaginarily, as it would be impossible to do it in the real world. Their affective conflicts, for example with their parents, may be solved by means of play where they encounter the figure of a witch or a black magician.

Method

Unlike most research done in this area (Tian & Hoffner 2010; Durrett, 1959; Hoffner, Levine & Toohey, 2008), we did not conduct a quantitative study to explore the process of children's identification with television. Instead, we embraced a qualitative perspective that allowed us to analyze the complexity and depth of a few cases (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Atkinson & Housley, 2008). Because of the nature of our analysis we decided to examine only a few cases of study, that is, some children in relation with their favorite cartoon television programs. We analyzed four children and about 80 episodes of their favorite cartoon television programs. Considering the methods and conceptions of psychoanalysis, we conducted depth interviews with the children's parents and designed several sessions of play with children. We spent about eight months working with these children and their parents in order to know how and why processes of identification emerge and what their characteristics are.

To some extent this perspective can be approached as a case analysis study (Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1992) because we selected four children with special characteristics in order to explore how the uniqueness of each one could be used to explain their processes of identification. Each child had a marked preference for *one* specific *cartoon* television program (only one and not several of them) that could motivate interesting processes of identification. According to Stakes's typology (1995), those four cases are not intrinsic but instrumental because they constituted a way to explore a broader reality within a set of cases –what Stakes calls collective case study. In this context we did not consider the case study as a methodological choice but as "a choice of what is to be studied" (Stake, 2000: 436). In fact, as we will explain shortly, to study these children we employed several techniques of data collection and analysis, such as in-depth interview and narrative analysis.

Although we cannot make generalizations about our findings –given the nature of case study research-, we found an interesting web of relationships between the children studied, their affective histories, and the narrative characteristics of their favorite television programs. As Stake claims, we may learn from particular cases even if we do not generalize: "the real business of case study is particularization, not generalization" (Stake, 1995: 8). Thus, our objective was to achieve a deeper understanding of identification processes in four children in order to explore the characteristics of these processes.

According to the approach of our problem of study, identification is a process mediated by three categories: the person identified (the children), the television character that motivates that identification, and the identification process itself. These are methodological units that can only be separated with analytical purposes of study because in the concrete experience these moments are difficult to differentiate. Thus, in order to explore children's identification processes with television characters, we studied each one of these three dimensions, that is, children, their favorite programs, and the identification process that arises between those children and their favorite programs. Next, we will explain the way in which we studied each one of these dimensions:

a) Children: In order to know how the background of children influences their identification with television characters, we conducted in-depth interviews (Ellis & Berger, 2002; Fontana & Frey, 2005) with their parents. The main objective was to know their affective history, that is, the most

significant experiences lived by them. We looked at the intellectual, emotional, and protective needs of the children as well as the main conflicts they experienced in their life as the result of their interactions with their parents, siblings, and friends. These sessions with parents were conducted by the psychologist member of the group who followed the protocols of the discipline.

As we already mentioned, we studied four children because of the complexities of carrying out a psychological analysis like that (Fitch, 1994). The children were chosen after considering criteria such us: age, gender, one specific favorite cartoon, verbal skills, and a representative affective history. After interviewing about 20 children and their parents, we chose four of them who represented these characteristics in a particular way; the four children, therefore, were very different among them. Their ages were between 6 and 10 years old because at that age children have verbal skills that allow them to talk about the programs they watch and to create their own stories using the characters of their favorite cartoon. We recorded each session (12 hours approximately) with parents, transcribed, and analyze them by establishing different codes and conventions. All of them are Colombian children living in the city of Manizales.

b) Programs: According to our theoretical perspective, the elements of a television program constitute one of the sources of identification for the children (the other would be the affective history). We considered it fundamental to analyze the favorite program of each child in order to know which narrative elements might motivate that identification and why. Thus, in order to explore children's identification with television characters, we not only analyzed the characters of a television program, but also all the narrative elements of that program. Through this narrative analysis (Atkinson, et al., 2008; Gubrium & Holstein, 2009), we explored a) the structure of the program (beginning, plot, and end), b) its characters (using different typologies), c) actions, d) topics, and e) conflicts, and resolutions. We analyzed a total of 80, that is, about 20 episodes (about a season) of the favorite cartoon television program of every child, that is, Dinosaur King, Tom & Jerry, The Fairly Oddparents, and Phineas and Ferb. We designed special charts to organize the information and employed different codes to examine each narrative element.

c) Fantasies: Unlike some studies in which researchers directly ask the person with which character he/she identifies, we considered it important to also infer this identification by ourselves after carefully analyzing the affective history of the children and the program he/she likes the most. According to our psychoanalytic perspective of identification, individuals can identify with some narrative elements without knowing why and without even knowing that they feel identified (Cohen, 2001; Freud, 1919). This explains not only why it was necessary to know the affective history of the children, but also why we decided to create sessions to play with them. Through games we managed to make children create their own stories and narratives about their favorite programs. Games have been evaluated as useful tools to study children. They have been used to measure behaviors, attachment, and reactions –in the case of the doll-play interview, for example (Oppenheim, 1997; Durrett, 1959; Stover, Horn & Lieberman, 2006)-, and to access to children's narratives and perception about a certain phenomenon (Lindberg, et al., 2003; Ocampo, García & Grasano, 2003).

Specifically, on paperboard we reproduced the characters of the favorite television cartoon programs of each child. Then, we asked them to create their own stories with these figures. Children had several sessions (about one hour each one, and a total of 20 hours) of "playing" with these figures in which we had the opportunity to record different stories created by them. We analyzed all of these stories using the same categories we employed to study the "real" television programs. This exercise allowed us to compare the narrative elements of the television stories with those employed by the children. It also allowed us to examine which narrative elements from their favorite programs the children included and which ones they rejected or negotiated.

Once we collected and analyzed all of this information, we compared the television cartoon programs with the stories created by the children and analyzed the extent to which both the affective history of the children and the content of the programs influenced the stories created by them. In other words, we explored the relationships between these three dimensions in order to know the characteristics of children's identification with television characters. In the next section, we present the most important findings about these dynamics.

Findings

About the Programs

Before discussing some of our findings, it is important to present a very brief abstract about the four studied television programs. In the following description we show the main conflict of each program; however, the actual programs are much more complex as they offer a variety of plots, characters, and stages. *Fairly Oddparents* is an American animated program that presents the adventures of Timmy Turner, a 10-year-old boy who has two fairy godparents, Cosmo and Wanda. These godparents grant Timmy any wish he wants but always with lessons and consequences. *Tom and Jerry* is an American animated program based on an endless rivalry between a Tom (a cat) and Jerry (a mouse). Both engage in funny persecutions and battles through which each one wants to catch the other.

Dinosaur King is a Japanese animated program that presents the adventures of Max Taylor and his friends who have the power to call forth dinosaur companions. In doing this, they travel along different places to face their enemies. *Phineas and Ferb* is an American television program that presents the adventures of Phineas and his stepbrother, Ferb who do all sorts of inventions for fun. His teenage sister, Candace, is always trying to expose them to her mom, since the projects they want to accomplish always seem unusual, or not appropriate for their age.

First, our analysis shows that programs such as *Fairly Oddparents*, *Phineas and Ferb*, and *Dinosaur King* have a more complex narrative structure than classical animated programs, such as *Tom and Jerry*. These complex programs have high variety of protagonists and antagonists; just in *Fairly Oddparents*, for example, there are more than 60 characters that have appeared in program.

We also found complex characteristics in the management of time and space. In programs such as *Dinosaur King* and *Fairly Oddparents* the conflicts take place in several dimensions of space and time. The management of time is very rich, as the protagonists can carry out actions in different moments (past, present and future) in just one program and even simultaneously. This multiplicity of characters, spaces, and times is possible because these programs are fictional, in the sense that characters' actions have supernatural causes and consequences. In addition, when observing these narrations in more detail, we found that they were not characterized for having just only one significant thematic core. In general terms, the stories presented several topics, all of them articulated in just one plot. According to the studied children's comments, each one of these topics displayed the same level of significance for them. It shows that, when analyzing identification processes, the elucidation of the general topic of a program is not enough to explain the dynamics of this identification, but it is also necessary to carefully consider other elements such as actions, characters, spaces, moments, etc.

Both the analysis of the program and the stories created by children about that program allowed us to understand that the narrative structures of cartoon programs consisted on some prototypical topics that become a meeting zone between the children's identification expectations and the symbolic material offered by the programs. These prototypical topics are presented in the form of *opposites in tension* because these topics outline the crossings and obstacles of the narration's hero. The prototypical topics are:

- *Protection – nonprotection:* In relation to this topic, the program presents a protagonist exposed to different non-protection situations where he/she experiences fear as the predominant feeling. It does not mean that other feelings (such as sadness) are not present. This topic is evidenced when the protagonist encounters the possible loss of his/her helpers (benefactors-protectors) or with the fact that these helpers cannot complete their functions. This topic was mainly found in two programs: *Fairly Oddparents* and *Dinosaur King*.

- *Hunt – escape*: With reference to this topic the program presents a situation where the protagonists encounter threats to their survival or physical integrity by any of the antagonists. The reaction corresponds to two different forms: attacking or escaping. In the hunt-escape schema, the threat is imminent and it is consolidated at the moment of the battle. The hero

generally alternates the role of hunter and hunted. The main program that represented this situation was *Tom and Jerry*.

- Inferiority – superiority: The program presents scenarios and actions where the protagonist feels diminished. In these cases, the hero thinks of himself as being inferior. Such a feeling is not necessarily related to a lost battle or a bad fight, although it is part of it. The protagonist strives to overcome this inferiority situation by acquiring all kinds of attributes (intellectual, physical, instrumental, etc.) which helps him to feel more powerful, capable, and sure in relation to himself and to others. This prototypical topic was found in *Fairly Oddparents*, *Dinosaur King*, and *Phineas and Ferb*.

- Filiation – nonfiliation: This prototypical topic consists of characters' need to affectively link themselves with other characters. It implies protagonists' attempts to belong to a group and to be recognized, accepted and beloved. Love, friendship, and fraternity are common feelings associated to this topic. *Phineas and Ferb* was the program where this topic was evidenced at maximum.

Thus, these four children's programs studied here represent affective and vital conflicts such as protection needs, threat sensations, inferiority feelings, and recognition needs. These programs do not deal with trivial or ordinary entertainment topics; on the contrary, in their narrative cores, they present prototypical dramas which are not alien to the children's world.

About Fantasy

The stories of fantasy created by the four studied children show the ways in which they interact with the narrative elements of their favorite programs. The way in which children take the narrative elements of the programs to elaborate their own stories shows that these elements can be easily adapted to their imaginary processes. They create content-rich narrations and when they want to modify something, they do it easily. Thus, narrative elements become significant material for the children's fantasy work. The analyses carried out allow us to conclude that this appropriation process is conducted mainly through two modalities: the conservation and transformation of the narrative material offered by the programs.

- Conservation: In this imaginative process children incorporate in their stories most of the narrative elements of the television program, that is, the characteristics of the characters, their roles and relations, the narrative structure (start, plot, and ending), as well as the conflicts and obstacles presented in the animated programs.

- Transformation: In this process children take elements of their favorite television programs but modify them.

All of the children studied conserve significant elements of the narrative structures of their favorite programs. It means that the material offered by the programs constitute a significant source for the children's fantasies. In other words, the material provided by the programs enriches children's ludic activity and facilitates expressive forms cannot be necessarily found in other narrative sources. The cartoons provide optimal material to stimulate the fantasizing processes required by the children.

It is also significant the fact that, in their play, some children were not loyal to the program narrative structure, which means they had a particular narrative intention. They aim at expressing something for which the program offers the right material, but when this material is not enough or when it does not completely adapt to their narrative intention, children transform it or introduce new elements in it.

This intention was visible from the cases themselves. Taking into account the stories created from *Fairly Oddparents*, we could analyze, for example, how the girl who chose this program had the intention to make up a story where she could highlight the topic concerning the prototypical idea of protection and non-protection. To reach this goal, she transformed the antagonists by making them more powerful and introduced vulnerable and ineffective helpers. These transformations were close to the characteristics of a tragic narration. Later, when she

made the protagonist more powerful, the girl solved the hero's non-protection situation by approaching her story as an epic narration.

In the case of the child whose favorite program was *Tom and Jerry*, we found that all of the transformations he made, both in the characters and in the relationships among them, were directed to increase the reciprocal aggression forms. For example, the characters devoured one another, aggression forms were crueler than in the program, and some characters died. It reflects that the child's narrative intention was to construct a story where attacks without apparent justification prevailed.

Thus, regardless of the attractiveness of the program, at the moment of conducting some ludic work, children create their own stories without letting the narration interfere with their creative process.

We can also conclude that the studied children have a narrative intention consisting of an internal script that they want to recreate. With this internal script, children watch their favorite program in order to use the program to recreate this internal script. When the program does not satisfy their expectations or narrative needs (internal script), children make an *a posteriori* re-composition in which they modify some elements of the program through plays and games. As we will explain later, it implies the fact that children are not passive when they watch television.

It is also important to notice that there are different modalities of transformation. The child whose favorite program is *Tom and Jerry* presented the greatest number of transformations, as he introduced new characters, changed the relationships among them, and modified the actions and the ways to solve conflicts. Secondly, it was the girl who like *Fairly Oddparents* who made moderate transformations, mainly modifying the characters' functions, accentuating their hostility traits with reference to the antagonists, inhibiting the helpers' functions, and increasing the protagonist's heroic qualities.

There were also minor transformations in the case of *Phineas and Ferb*. In this case the transformations were not in relation to the plot, the actions, the characters or the conflicts but, in a creative way, the girl mixed segments of different episodes she had already seen and constructed a coherent story with them. The composition made by this girl, although apparently lacking significant transformations, evidence that certain topics and characters are sometimes accentuated. A case that is different from those already mentioned is the boy who whose favorite program is *Dinosaur King*. In this case, the child did not make any transformation as the three narrations that he made in the play sessions corresponded exactly to three episodes. When comparing him with the previous cases, one could think that this boy did not have any particular narrative intentions. However, there were significant signs indicating that the boy did not need to make any transformations of the material offered in the program because it entirely fit the fantasies that he wanted to recreate. That is, the child did have a particular narrative intention, but the program offered an expressive form that was equivalent to the internal script that the boy wanted to recreate.

About the Identification Processes

From the analysis of these four cases we can state that the selection made by the children with reference to their favorite programs is not gratuitous. Affective needs underlie this preference. The affective needs of the studied children correspond with prototypical topics developed in their favorite programs. For instance, in the case of the girl whose favorite program was *Fairly Oddparents*, we found that her major affective need was related to a feeling of internal insecurity. Similarly, in her favorite program, *Fairly Oddparents*, it was clear that the most important prototypical topics were *protection-non-protection* and *inferiority-superiority*, closely related to the girl's already mentioned needs.

In a similar way, in the case of the boy whose favorite program was *Tom and Jerry*, we could state that his needs were related to anxiety and emotional tension as the generators of his current home problems. At the same time, the main prototypical topic represented by *Tom and Jerry* was *hunt-escape*, where the characters were under a constant threat sensation, and their

only response was to attack or to flee. This prototypical topic was close to the internal sensation undergone by the boy with anxiety resulting from the stressing factors from his environment.

In the case of the girl whose favorite program was *Phineas and Ferb*, we found that her affective conflicts dealt with emotional fractures from her paternal and maternal figures which were compensated with her grandmother's care. In *Phineas and Ferb*, the topics developed deployed associated problems, mainly concerning to the *protection-nonprotection* and *filiation-nonfiliation* prototypical ideas. The main affective needs found in the boy with *Dinosaur King* were related to the need to protect his mother and the child's desire for paternal protection. In the program, this set of problems was treated under the *protection-nonprotection* and *inferiority-superiority* prototypical topics.

These connections between the topics of the television programs and the stories produced by the studied children shows that children are provided with some particular emotional conditions that influence their narrative intentions. Such an intention is responsible for the appearance of an internal script in children, which consists of a story that stages children's affectivity through play or fantasies from the symbolic material available. It evidences children's subjective agency that aims at narrating themselves and which is based upon historical conditions. Consequently, the four children's stories were different among themselves, and each of them could adopt the characteristics of an epic story, a dramatic narrative, or a persecution, according to their particular narrative intention.

This children's internal script aims at being recreated. With that purpose, children take advantage of the symbolic material provided by their favorite program. Concerning the symbolic material provided by the programs, children carry out conservation or transformation processes from which they give life to their internal scripts. When children carry out these processes, they keep or adapt elements from the program to shape their affective conflicts and, at the same time, to provide some kind of solution to their fantasy. In other words, such conflicts are outlined in internal scripts to be staged through the symbolic material provided by the television program. Similarly, it constitutes a way of relief of tensions resulting from children's problems. Consequently, their favorite programs constitute a source of relief for children.

This process consisting on giving form to children's internal conflicts by using the narrative elements of the television program can be called *personification.* This process can be understood as the staging of children's internal script, through which they unconsciously recognize their affective history by means of a structured narration. Personification could be evidenced in children's tendency to repeat their most problematic topics in their play and fantastic creations.

The process of handling and solving children's internal conflicts can be called *elaboration.* Elaboration happens when children find elements in television programs which suggest some type of response or escape from their most urgent problems. These elements may be assimilated as they appear in the program or they may be transformed for generating relief.

Conclusions

We can conclude that the identification process of the studied children takes place based on prototypical topics presented in television programs, where vital sets of problems close to their experiences and problems are represented. Children's experiences generate some specific affective needs that motivate the appearance of a narrative intentionality with which children recognize and appropriate such experiences. This narrative intention yields some internal scripts with which children try to process and elaborate the tensions resulting from their affective needs. It is here where television programs offer its symbolic material for staging such internal script. Children conserve or transform these elements according to their narrative intention in order to construct a fantasy narration to relieve their psychic needs. At the same time, children's favorite programs motivate processes of personification and elaboration of their emotional conflicts. It leads us to affirm that children, with reference to their favorite cartoon programs, are not just ordinary spectators who passively consume television, but actors who deeply involve in it.

Thus, children's consumption of cartoons is based on the identification process. It implies that the encounter between animated television and infantile audiences is ruled by both children's emotional expectations and explicit content of the programs. Thus, a theory about the identification processes can also contribute to the research done under the Cultural Studies paradigm. It is now important to ask not only about the meaning produced by the audiences when appropriating the television contents, but also about the origin and finality of such a meaning.

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