

Use of Reborn Dolls as a Tool for Stimulating Affection and Parental Care

Uso de Boneco *Reborn* Como Ferramenta para o Estímulo do Afeto e Cuidado Paterno

Uso de Muñecos *Reborn* como Herramienta para Estimular el Afecto y el Cuidado Paternal

RESUMO

Objetivo: Refletir teoricamente sobre o uso de bonecos *reborn* como ferramenta para o estímulo do afeto, do vínculo e do cuidado paterno. **Método:** Trata-se de um estudo teórico-reflexivo fundamentado em revisão da literatura científica e em teorias de Enfermagem. A análise dos achados foi conduzida por meio de análise temática, articulada aos referenciais teóricos. **Resultados:** A manipulação do boneco *reborn* mostra-se um recurso simbólico capaz de favorecer o desenvolvimento de competências emocionais e práticas associadas ao papel paterno. As teorias analisadas permitiram compreender como o afeto, a empatia, a adaptação e o cuidado podem ser estimulados nesse processo, contribuindo para a construção de vínculos afetivos saudáveis. **Conclusões:** O boneco *reborn* é uma ferramenta promissora na educação em saúde voltada à paternidade, desde que utilizado com sensibilidade, escuta qualificada e embasamento ético. Os profissionais de Enfermagem devem considerar a inserção de abordagens inovadoras e humanizadas que valorizem a subjetividade paterna e promovam o cuidado centrado na família. **DESCRIPTORES:** Cuidado paterno; Paternidade; Relação pai-filho; Teorias de Enfermagem; Vínculo afetivo

ABSTRACT

Objective: To reflect theoretically on the use of *reborn* dolls as a tool for stimulating affection, bonding and paternal care. **Method:** This is a theoretical-reflective study based on a review of the scientific literature and nursing theories. The findings were analyzed using thematic analysis, linked to theoretical references. **Results:** The manipulation of the *reborn* doll is shown to be a symbolic resource capable of favoring the development of emotional and practical skills associated with the paternal role. The theories analyzed allowed us to understand how affection, empathy, adaptation and care can be stimulated in this process, contributing to the construction of healthy affective bonds. **Conclusions:** The *reborn* doll is a promising tool for health education on paternity, as long as it is used with sensitivity, qualified listening and an ethical basis. Nursing professionals should consider introducing innovative and humanized approaches that value paternal subjectivity and promote family-centered care. **DESCRIPTORS:** Affective bond; Father-child relationship; Fatherhood; Nursing theories; Paternal care

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Reflexionar teóricamente sobre el uso de muñecos *reborn* como herramienta para estimular el afecto, el vínculo y el cuidado paterno. **Método:** Se trata de un estudio teórico-reflexivo basado en una revisión de la literatura científica y de las teorías de enfermería. Los hallazgos se analizaron mediante análisis temático, vinculado a referencias teóricas. **Resultados:** La manipulación del muñeco renacido se muestra como un recurso simbólico capaz de favorecer el desarrollo de habilidades emocionales y prácticas asociadas al rol paterno. Las teorías analizadas permitieron comprender cómo el afecto, la empatía, la adaptación y el cuidado pueden ser estimulados en este proceso, contribuyendo a la construcción de vínculos afectivos saludables. **Conclusiones:** El muñeco renacido es una herramienta prometedora para la educación sanitaria sobre la paternidad, siempre que se utilice con sensibilidad, escucha cualificada y base ética. Los profesionales de enfermería deben considerar la introducción de abordajes innovadores y humanizados que valoricen la subjetividad paterna y promuevan cuidados centrados en la familia. **DESCRIPTORES:** Cuidado paternal; Paternidad; Relación padre-hijo; Teorías de enfermería; Vínculo afectivo

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INTRODUCTION

Promoting paternal care is a fundamental strategy; interventions that encourage parental involvement, especially in the early years of life, have a direct impact on the quality of parental relationships and on children's emotional and behavioral development.^{1,2}

The emotional and practical involvement of parents, particularly fathers, in family routines is essential for the development of children's social and emotional skills.³ Furthermore, the development of the father-infant bond contributes to more sensitive and responsive fatherhood, promoting the child's emotional security.⁴

Parental guidance through educational programs, which offer a safe space for mothers and fathers to express their difficulties and receive emotional and technical support, promotes parental empowerment.^{5,6} Social support and public health services are also central elements in promoting parental care, especially in vulnerable contexts. Home visits conducted by nurses and community health workers are important as a means of ongoing monitoring and guidance for families.^{7,8}

Men perceive fatherhood as a challenge filled with learning and transformation, often marked by feelings of unpreparedness. Despite this, they demonstrate a strong desire to be in-

involved in their children's care, engaging in activities that promote child development, such as play, emotional interactions, and sensory stimulation.¹⁰⁻¹²

The use of *reborn* dolls has been explored as an effective tool for stimulating paternal affection and care, especially among first-time fathers. In a study conducted by Braden and Gaspar (2015), the application of a structured protocol involving the use of dolls with patients with dementia led to increased well-being, reduced anxiety, and improved social relationships among residents of a specialized center.¹³

Another study conducted by Moyle *et al.* (2019) found no significant reduction in behavioral symptoms, but observed a statistically significant increase in expressions of pleasure among residents who participated in the doll intervention.¹⁴ Furthermore, a systematic review found preliminary evidence indicating that doll therapy can improve patients' overall well-being, stimulate social behaviors, and foster a better relationship between individuals and their surrounding environment.¹⁵

Furthermore, a literature review conducted by Lima *et al.* (2023) highlighted that therapy with *reborn* dolls functions as a non-pharmacological resource, offering benefits such as reduced aggression and anxiety, as well as promoting emotional well-being in

institutional settings.¹⁶

Thus, strengthening community networks and investing in public policies focused on positive parenting are essential actions to ensure child well-being; parental care must be understood as a collective responsibility, involving the commitment of families, civil society, and the State.

METHOD

This is a theoretical reflection, the development of which is based on the literature and theoretical frameworks relevant to the topic. To construct the theoretical framework, we adopted as a basis the Human Relations Theory¹⁷, initially developed by Elton Mayo, which proposes that affection, effective communication, and recognition of the individual's subjectivity are essential elements for establishing healthy bonds. The theory guided the interpretation of the subject, emphasizing the need for practices that value the subjective dimension of the father and child, recognizing care as a relational and affective construct, and not merely a technical or functional activity.

As a basis for this reflection, a narrative literature review was conducted, prioritizing original scientific articles, reviews, and technical documents that addressed the use of anthropomorphic dolls or realistic toys as tools for promoting affection, care,

and bonding.

In addition to Human Relations Theory, this theoretical reflection is grounded in key Nursing Theories that enable a broader understanding of the construction of bonding, affection, and paternal care through the handling of the reborn doll. The following theories were also utilized in a complementary manner: Hildegard Peplau's Interpersonal Relations Theory, which views care as an interpersonal process of mutual growth; Callista Roy's Adaptation Theory, which interprets fatherhood as a process of biopsychosocial adaptation to new roles;

Dorothea Orem's Self-Care Theory, which emphasizes the development of autonomy and responsibility in caring for oneself and others; and Jean Watson's Humanistic Care Theory, which values the transpersonal dimension of care, centered on empathy, authentic presence, and emotional connection.

Although the therapeutic contexts described involve specific populations and should not be automatically extrapolated to all care situations, these findings reinforce the need for a critical, individualized, and well-founded analysis of each clinical case, with an emphasis on skilled listening and ethical judgment. Nursing care must follow technical and clinical criteria, always centered on the person and their actual health needs.

As this is a theoretical-reflective study, based exclusively on secondary sources, there was no need for submission to the Research Ethics Committee. However, the study observed the principles of academic ethics, ensuring proper citation and respect for the copyrights of the authors consulted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Psychoanalytic reflections problematize the contemporary use of *reborn* dolls as symbolic expressions of

substitution, projection, and parental jouissance, bringing into debate the risk of objectifying the child and the transformation of the baby figure into an extension of the adult's unconscious fantasies. The use of these resources must be grounded in a qualified clinical assessment and a therapeutic plan developed based on the Nursing Process.¹⁻⁴

Hildegard Peplau's Interpersonal Relations Theory and the construction of bonding, affection, and care through the handling of the reborn doll

The Interpersonal Relations Theory, proposed by nurse and theorist Hildegard Peplau, emphasizes that nursing is an interpersonal profession based on the relationship between nurse and patient, where communication, bonding, and affection are essential to promoting the individual's health and well-being.¹⁸

According to Peplau, the interpersonal process develops in phases that include orientation, identification, exploration, and resolution.¹⁸ In the handling of the *reborn* doll, these stages can be symbolically experienced: orientation occurs when the father is introduced to the doll and the guidelines for its care;^{11,14,19} identification, when the father begins to recognize his own emotions and parental roles while interacting with the doll;^{19,21} exploration, which consists of the practical exercise of care and the experimentation with paternal skills;¹⁴ and resolution, the moment when the father internalizes the learning, develops confidence, and strengthens the emotional bond with his real child.^{11,21}

Health education that incorporates the *reborn* doll, grounded in Peplau's theory, not only offers technical support for caregiving but also values the father's subjective dimension, encouraging the recognition of his emotions, doubts, and needs. This approach fosters the creation of a therapeutic

space, even if informal, where the father can establish an interpersonal relationship with himself and with the figure of the baby, which facilitates the development of paternal affection and responsibility.

Thus, Interpersonal Relations Theory offers a solid theoretical framework for understanding how the use of the reborn doll in health education can be an effective strategy to foster bonding, affection, and paternal care.^{11,14,21}

Callista Roy's Adaptation Theory and the development of bonding, affection, and care for children through handling the reborn doll

Adaptation Theory, developed by nurse and theorist Callista Roy, is a conceptual framework widely used in nursing to understand how individuals respond to changes and challenges in their environment, seeking to maintain physical and emotional integrity.¹⁹

The theory identifies four main adaptive modes: physiological, self-concept, functional role, and interdependence.¹⁹ In handling the *reborn* doll, the physiological mode can be symbolically activated when the father learns and practices basic care related to feeding, hygiene, and comfort, promoting physical and emotional responses that foster security and competence in caregiving.^{12,20} The self-concept mode is stimulated as the father constructs his paternal identity, developing self-esteem and confidence to face the challenges of his new role.^{15,19} The functional role mode is directly related to the acceptance and performance of the social role of father, which is strengthened through the practice and learning provided by interaction with the doll.^{12,21}

Thus, Callista Roy's Adaptation Theory provides a theoretical framework to explain how handling a *reborn* doll in health education can facilitate the development of bonding, affec-

tion, and care for children by stimulating adaptive responses in parents at multiple levels. This generates a continuous exchange of information and responses that constitute reactions demonstrating effectiveness in the face of stimuli—in the case of parents, originating from their internal or external environment—that reach individuals.^{12,15,21}

Hildegard Peplau's Humanistic Nursing Theory and the development of bonding, affection, and care for children through the handling of the reborn doll

Humanistic Nursing Theory, developed by Hildegard Peplau, is one of the earliest and most influential theoretical approaches in nursing, focusing on interpersonal relationships between healthcare professionals and patients.²⁰

In the context of parenthood, this theory offers a fundamental framework for understanding how the development of bonding, affection, and care can be fostered through educational practices that value human interaction and the expression of emotional needs.²⁰ Handling the *reborn* doll emerges as a pedagogical tool capable of promoting this process by allowing future parents to practice caregiving, express feelings, and develop parenting skills in a safe and welcoming environment.^{11,14,15}

Peplau highlights that interpersonal relationships occur in phases: orientation, identification, exploration, and resolution²⁰, which can be symbolically experienced through interaction with the *reborn* doll. In the orientation phase, the father is introduced to the doll and the role of caregiver, receiving support to address his doubts and anxieties.

In the identification phase, he begins to recognize his emotions and perceive himself in the paternal role. During the exploration phase, there is practical experimentation with care-

giving and the expression of affection through handling the doll. Finally, in the resolution phase, the father internalizes what he has learned, developing confidence and strengthening the emotional bond with his real child.^{11,14,15}

Furthermore, humanistic theory emphasizes the nurse's role as a facilitator of this relationship, fostering an environment of trust and open dialogue that helps the father overcome fears and insecurities, preparing him to experience fatherhood with greater autonomy and sensitivity. The *reborn* doll, in this context, functions as a symbolic mediator that enhances experiential learning and the development of emotional and practical skills essential for infant care.^{11,14}

Thus, Hildegard Peplau's Humanistic Nursing Theory offers a robust theoretical foundation for the use of the *reborn* doll in health education as a strategy to foster bonding, affection, and paternal care.²⁰

Jean Watson's Theory of Humanistic and Transpersonal Care in the development of bonding, affection, and child care through the use of the reborn doll

The Theory of Humanistic and Transpersonal Care, formulated by Jean Watson, highlights the centrality of care as an essential human phenomenon that transcends the technical act to include spiritual, emotional, and relational dimensions. Watson proposes that care is an ethical and moral practice grounded in the deep connection between the caregiver and the care recipient, which promotes healing, well-being, and mutual growth.²¹

In the context of fatherhood, this theory offers a valuable perspective for understanding how bonding, affection, and care can be cultivated through an approach that values the human and transcendent dimensions of the father-child relationship. The handling of the *reborn* doll, incorpo-

rated into health education practices, can serve as a tool to facilitate this experience, allowing fathers to develop not only practical skills but also a deep and conscious emotional connection with the role of caregiving.^{13,16}

Jean Watson emphasizes that transpersonal care involves an authentic and empathetic presence, where the caregiver is truly available to the other, recognizing their uniqueness and emotional needs.²¹ Through the use of the *reborn* doll, this presence can be symbolically experienced by the father, who is invited to connect with his feelings, fears, hopes, and paternal responsibilities, creating an internal space for emotional acceptance and development.^{9,10}

Furthermore, the theory of transpersonal care highlights the importance of creating environments that promote healing and emotional growth.²¹ In this sense, health education that utilizes the *reborn* doll creates a safe and welcoming space where the father can explore his role without judgment, develop emotional and practical skills, and strengthen his emotional and caregiving commitment.

Therefore, Jean Watson's Theory of Human Care and Transpersonal Care offers a fundamental theoretical framework to support the use of the *reborn* doll in health education, highlighting its potential to foster bonding, affection, and paternal care from an integrative and humanistic perspective that values care as a transformative experience that promotes holistic health for the family.²¹

Dorothea Orem's Self-Care Theory and the development of bonding, affection, and child care through the handling of the reborn doll

The Self-Care Theory, developed by Dorothea Orem, is based on the premise that individuals are active agents in their own health and

well-being, possessing the capacity and responsibility to care for themselves and, consequently, for those under their care.²²

In the context of fatherhood, Orem's theory can be applied to understand how health education, mediated by handling the *reborn* doll, contributes to the development of paternal competencies in caregiving and the building of an emotional bond with children. By handling the *reborn* doll, the future father begins a process of active learning, practicing practical skills essential to infant care, such as feeding, hygiene, and comfort, which fosters his autonomy and confidence in the parental role.^{9,10,23-26}

Orem highlights three categories of self-care: universal self-care, development-related self-care, and clinical self-care.²² Furthermore, handling the *reborn* doll can offer an opportunity for the father to develop his emo-

tional self-care, which is essential for building a healthy emotional bond; by recognizing his own needs and emotions during interaction with the doll, the father is encouraged to take care of himself so that he can provide more qualified and affectionate care to his real child.²³⁻²⁶

CONCLUSION

This study reflected on the use of *reborn* dolls as a potential tool for fostering affection, bonding, and paternal care, especially in health education contexts aimed at first-time fathers, grounded in classical nursing theories. This reflection reinforces the importance of person- and family-centered care as a fundamental principle of nursing practice. Encouraging paternal care through strategies that consider the emotional and relational dimensions of fatherhood can

contribute significantly to building healthy emotional bonds, strengthening shared responsibility in child care, and promoting the well-being of children and families.

In light of this, it is recommended that empirical, qualitative, and quantitative research be conducted to systematically investigate the use of the *reborn* doll in promoting paternal care, considering different sociocultural contexts and evaluating its emotional, relational, and ethical impacts. For professional practice, it is emphasized that the use of this tool must occur in a critical, individualized, and ethically guided manner, always mediated by the nurse's clinical judgment, skilled listening, and respect for paternal subjectivity, reinforcing nursing's commitment to innovative, humanized, and family-centered practices.

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