

## **The crisis of identity during adolescence in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Alice Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll.**

*Ester Andrés Sánchez-Ferrer (Máster en Formación del Profesorado 2016/2017)*

Lewis Carroll, who was fascinated by the world of childhood, was a creative imaginative artist who wrote one of the most popular and enduring children's fantasies due to his unique understanding of children's minds, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, in 1865. Because of its extravagant and absurd appearance, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland was highly criticized and labeled as a nonsense book.



However, Lewis Carroll published a sequel of the book in 1871, *Alice Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. Lewis Carroll inculcated Alice books with melancholy and loss of innocence associated with becoming an adult. There is always a surprise hidden behind a book. A lot of people have read Alice's Adventures in Wonderland without noticing that the story includes anxieties that everyone undergoes during adolescence.

Lewis Carroll narrates Alice's story using a dream as a way out of her messy adult life, in which she faces an adult world and leaves the magic childhood. In the book *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, Alice starts a journey whereby she abandons childhood and stops being a child to become a woman. Similarly to every teenager, Alice finds difficulties to live in the adult world, a world that seems very different to hers. Through the looking glass, Alice seeks her identity and maturity.

Adolescence is a transitional period between childhood and adulthood. It is in this stage where the identities of the individuals are formed. Teenagers have to find their role in society and organize their abilities, needs and interests in a way that they would be able to express them in society. According to Piaget (1985), the ultimate function of adolescence is to place adolescents in the adult society. In the case of Alice, the adult

world and society around her is very demanding. For that reason, Alice has a conflict with this world in which she is not interested and she just want to enjoy adventures.

The psychological message that Lewis Carroll' book portrays is the crisis of identity characteristic of the shift that children undergo in adolescence. The psychologist Erik Erikson (1968) considers that adolescence is the period in which individuals search for their identities, which will shape them for the rest of their lives. Regarding Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, individuals suffer a crisis of identity during their adolescence. Besides this, Erikson distinguishes three forms of the constitution of a person's identity. These three forms are the dissemination of identity, by which teenagers are not faithful to their usual way of being; the mistaken identity, that make them being isolated; and the negative identity, represented by a hostile behavior. Teenagers must reflect and find themselves. In this way, Alice follows the white rabbit and fall into the burrow. The burrow symbolizes her own unconsciousness. Inside her unconsciousness, Alice finds a lot of doors that she must open. To do that, she must change her size. The fact that she has to change size represents the changes that teenagers suffer during puberty.

Alice is a ten years-old child who represents the period when little girls start their biosocial development to puberty, with a hormonal revolution in which hormones are moved through the bloodstream and that influences different bodily and physiological functions. Problems with identity are related to body changes, ups and downs and loneliness. Children abandon childhood because of biological transformation processes and they entry adulthood. This involves an abrupt change in their social situation.

Alice is confused trying to find the right side to get in Wonderland's garden because she is either too big or too small. This episode refers to the bodily frustration and anxiety that come along with puberty. Besides, it represents the discomfort that teenagers feel when they are too big to do certain things, and when they feel like adults but they are indeed too small to do other things.

It can be found many symbols that represent the crisis of identity during adolescence that Alice suffers in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* such as the White Rabbit, the Mad Hatter or the Caterpillar. The White Rabbit that is always watching the time anxious for being late is an aspect of Alice's personality that represents the anxiety, obsessive behavior and the demands typical of adulthood. Other references to the adult

age are customs and routines that characterize adults and that are opposed to the children freedom and sense of adventure. Lewis Carroll represents those aspects through the character of the Mad Hatter and his everlasting tea at six.

The puberty uncertainty is also reflected in the dialogue between Alice and the Caterpillar. The Caterpillar symbolizes Alice's inner self. Alice is confused because she has change size too many times and she cannot answer when the Caterpillar asks her: "Who are you?". When the Caterpillar asks Alice about her identity, Alice answers: "I am not me anymore"; making reference to the identity crisis that teenagers suffer and the confused idea of growing up. Alice has lost her own identity. The Caterpillar explains Alice that she must fight against the dragon with a sword. The psychological involvement of this episode in the quest for the lost identity is that the dragon represents the ego and the sword symbolizes the courage. Alice, possessed by the adolescence anxiety tells the Caterpillar that she will not be able to kill the dragon. However, the Caterpillar explains her that she will do it when ready. If Alice defeats her ego, she will see reality clearly and she will be free to find her destiny. When all this happens, Alice's personality will be established and this will correspond to the end of puberty around the age of twenty-one years old as the psychologist Erik Erikson (1968) states.

Another characteristic feature of the lost of identity during adolescence that is portrayed in Alice's books are the idea of feeling not like the rest and the feelings of loneliness and incomprehension. Children have basic needs such as affection and protection. In Wonderland, Alicia looks for comprehension and attentions from the other individuals. However, that is not like this. The flowers from the Queen of Hearts' garden criticize her badly and the despotic queen treats her badly and wants to cut off her head. Alice understands that loneliness and incomprehension are intrinsic to growing up. Teenagers have to deal with the fact that they must grow up and face the real world alone.

To conclude this article, it must be said that both in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and in *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, Alice is a child who wants to mature, but socially she is a child in a woman's body, what involves desperation. Lewis Carroll addresses Alice battle in an attempt to conquer her personality in the transition between childhood and adulthood. In order to overcome her existential crisis, Alice tries to integrate her inner self with her image reflected in the mirror.

