



Affection and its manifestations: The impact of Covid19 on the mental health of brazilians

Carolina Ferraz Santos Sampaio

Institution: University Presidente Antônio Carlos (UNIPAC-JF)

Address: Juiz de Fora - Minas Gerais

Edilson Dantas Lima Júnior

Institution: College Santo Agostinho (FASA-VIC)

Address: Vitória da Conquista - Bahia

Nirvana Ferraz Santos Sampaio

Institution: State University of Southwest Bahia (UESB)

Address: Vitória da Conquista - Bahia

ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to present a discussion about the vicissitudes of affection in the face of the coronavirus pandemic experienced by Brazilians. Therefore, we resorted to Psychoanalysis, based on Freudian texts and concepts, to analyze statements taken from newspapers and magazines of national circulation, published in 2020. We consider that the drive energy demarcates processes that occur between the psychic and the somatic.

Keywords: Affect, Anxiety, Melancholy, Grief, Pandemic.

1 INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2019, the global landscape was shaken due to the novel coronavirus (nCOVID-19), initially reported in China and widely spread, leading to a pandemic. In Brazil, the Covid-19 pandemic began in February 2020. This situation can be approached from various fields of knowledge, such as the medical sciences: epidemiology, pulmonology, intensive care, and infectious diseases, as well as psychology, with humanistic and phenomenological approaches, focusing on the study of consciousness, among others.

Dalgalarrondo (2008), a psychiatrist, considers psychic functions including consciousness, attention, orientation, experiences of time and space, sensory perception, memory, affectivity, will, psychomotor activity, thought, judgment of reality, and language, as well as composite psychic functions like consciousness and self-valuation, body schema and identity, personality, and intelligence. All these psychic functions work together and are separately analyzed as objects of study. In this text, we prioritize affectivity, which, according to Dalgalarrondo (2008), is a generic term encompassing various forms of affective experiences such as mood, emotions, and feelings.



Therefore, in this chapter, we will discuss the following question: what changes in affect can be observed among Brazilians due to the coronavirus pandemic? We consider beforehand that libidinal energy delineates processes that occur between the psychic and the somatic, and to understand affect and its manifestations, we examine some concepts from Psychoanalysis, including the concepts of affect, anxiety, symptom, mourning, and melancholia.

In developing our response, we refer to the Vocabulary of Psychoanalysis, authored by Laplanche and Pontalis (2001), and to some texts by Sigmund Freud, namely Mourning and Melancholia (1917), Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920), and Anxiety and Instincts from New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis (1933). Furthermore, we analyze statements materialized on the Brazilian CNN, BBC, G1, and Uol websites, as well as in VEJA magazine, published between March and June 2020, using the theoretical framework studied. We then discuss the fear of death and uncertainties related to the pandemic, as well as the possibility of self-destruction and the destruction of others, whether they are elderly, young, or children, from various social classes, whether they are men, women, or any gender, regardless of race or other uniqueness.

2 AFFECTION, ANXIETY, SYMPTOM, MOURNING AND MELANCHOLY: THE DRIVES IN TIMES OF COVID-19

How has the Brazilian population been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic? It can be observed that the effects of the pandemic are diverse, ranging from changes in daily life, alterations in hygiene habits, and social isolation to job loss and the loss of family members and friends. In this manner, Brazilians have been driven to experience anxiety and the development of symptoms, which are manifested either physically or in psychic representations.

According to Laplanche and Pontalis (2001), the term "affection" originates from German psychological terminology. The authors indicate that this term encompasses any affective state, whether painful or unpleasant, vague or qualified, whether it appears in the form of a massive discharge or as a general tone. According to Freud, every drive expresses itself in both the affective and representational registers. Affect is the qualitative expression of the quantity of drive energy and its variations (Laplanche and Pontalis, 2001, p. 09).

Furthermore, within this context, for Sigmund Freud, affect is defined as the subjective translation of the quantity of drive energy, in which the drive is one of the concepts that mark the boundary between the psychic and the somatic. It can be noted that, alongside the term "affection," Freud uses the expression "quantum of affect," which corresponds to the drive to the extent that it separates from representation and finds an adequate expression of its quantity in processes that are sensitive to us as affect. Freud indicates various possibilities for the transformation of affect: "First, the conversion of affects (conversion hysteria);



second, the displacement of affects (obsessions); and third, the transformation of affect (anxiety neurosis and melancholia)" (Laplanche and Pontalis, 2001, p.09).

Thus, the notion of affect is used in two perspectives: it can be merely a descriptive value, denoting the emotional resonance of an experience, usually a strong one, on the one hand, and, for the most part, this notion postulates a quantitative theory of investments, the only one capable of translating the autonomy of affect into its various manifestations. Freud then formulated a genetic hypothesis intended to translate the lived aspect of affect. Affects would be "reproductions of old events of vital importance and possibly pre-individual" (Laplanche and Pontalis, 2001, p.09). Therefore, it can be inferred that the account given by the interviewee in *Veja* magazine on 05/08/2020 presents a quantitatively modified investment in the experienced affect, altering both the psychic and the organic aspects. As follows:

"The last time I left home was on March 13. After that, I realized things were getting serious and decided to isolate myself. Confinement gave me a tremendous anxiety crisis. I felt short of breath. I reacted. I sought remote support and took breaks to soak up the sun. When I notice I'm starting to get nervous, I stop what I'm doing and take deep breaths." (*Veja Magazine*, 05/08/2020).

In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920), Freud introduced two relevant concepts: the life instincts and the death instincts. The former refer to existing vital units, and the latter, the death instincts, tend toward the destruction of vital units. Thus, we are faced with dynamic processes that provoke an excitatory mechanism with the purpose of achieving a goal. In the face of the pandemic, some people think about the collective, about the lives of others, but some also think about food deprivation and start stockpiling, as evidenced in the following statements:

"Today, the supermarket is open and has food, but what about tomorrow? What about when the virus really takes hold? I have a family to feed; nothing can be lacking," declared the businesswoman. A medical friend has already warned his group that the situation will worsen, and it's "good to be prepared."

"Soon, the number of sick people will increase, and people will become desperate. I don't want to face that, so I'm preparing now. What's here is enough for over a month, maybe even two if we're economical."

"We have to think about the collective, but Brazilians don't think. The streets are crowded, the subways are packed. Sooner or later, there will be a shortage of food, and then what happens? Will my daughter go hungry? I don't want to fight over food." (*UOL*, 19/03/2020)

With this, we can observe what Freud names, drawing from Greek mythology, as Eros (the life instinct) and Thanatos (the death instinct). We are here confronted with what repeats in humanity, that which leads towards brotherhood and that which leads towards war and destruction.



In "Anxiety and Instincts," a text from New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis (1933), Freud considers anxiety as:

"an affective state, that is, a combination of certain sensations from the pleasure-unpleasure series with the corresponding discharge innervations and their perception, but probably also the precipitate of a certain significant event, inherited, something comparable to an individually acquired hysterical outbreak." (FREUD, 1933, p. 224)

The author begins by differentiating between realistic anxiety and neurotic anxiety. He considers the first to be a reaction that seems understandable to us in the face of danger, that is, harm that will come from outside, and the second, entirely enigmatic, he regards as having no purpose.

Analyzing realistic anxiety, Freud reduces it to a state of high sensory and motor tension and calls it "anxiety disposition," from which anxiety reactions develop. According to him, there are possible outcomes: the development of anxiety, the repetition of the old traumatic experience, is limited to a signal, and the remaining reaction can adapt to the new danger situation, leading to flight or defense, or the old situation prevails, and all reaction is exhausted in the development of anxiety, and the affective state becomes paralyzing and inadequate to the present.

Regarding neurotic anxiety, Freud observes three conditions:

First, as freely floating general anxiety, ready to temporarily attach itself to any new possibility that arises, as seen in typical anxiety neurosis. Second, firmly connected to certain ideational contents in so-called phobias, in which we can still recognize a relationship with external danger, but we must judge the anxiety before it to be entirely disproportionate. Third, finally, anxiety in hysteria and other forms of severe neuroses, which accompanies symptoms or arises independently, as an attack or as a more lasting condition, always without visible grounding in external danger. (FREUD, 1933, p. 224)

Furthermore, we can observe in the statements presented above, taken from the UOL report on March 19, 2020, the anxiety generated by the fact of having children to feed, which precipitates the interviewee to the point of saying: a) "good to be prepared," b) "I'm already securing it. What's here can last for over a month, maybe even two if we're economical," and c) "Will my daughter go hungry? I don't want to fight over food" (UOL, 19/03/2020).

Another relevant aspect is what Freud discusses about the significant relationship between the development of anxiety and the formation of symptoms, that is, the fact that one can represent and substitute the other. An agoraphobic's illness, for example, begins with an anxiety attack in the middle of the street. This repeats every time he goes out on the street again. He then develops the symptom of agoraphobia, which can also be called an inhibition, a restriction in ego functioning, thus sparing himself the anxiety attack. In the context of the pandemic, the act of going out to buy essential items can trigger phobias. It is unknown who is asymptomatic, who has the virus, as observed in the statement taken from UOL: "And



staying isolated at home makes me very ill. Plus, there's that, going anywhere is like entering a war: we have to prepare, put on gloves, masks. It's very difficult" (UOL, 04/03/2020). Thus, anxiety, as an affective state, is the reproduction of an old threatening event; anxiety serves self-preservation and is a sign of new danger; it can be replaced by symptom formation, as if psychically linked by it – as if something were missing to connect the pieces into a whole.

What can be said about the losses during the pandemic? In newspapers and magazines, there are recurring reports of the unemployed and people who have lost loved ones. Thus, in the face of various clinical forms, we could speak of mourning and melancholia, and we will do so based on Freud's 1917 text. Some consider melancholia to be a normal affect of mourning.

However, melancholia presents itself in various clinical forms, whose grouping into a single unit does not seem established, as some are related to somatic conditions. According to Freud (1917):

The association of mourning with melancholia is justified by the overall picture of these two states. The causes arising from life's interferences also coincide, at least where we can see them. Generally, mourning is the reaction to the loss of a loved person or an abstraction that takes its place, such as homeland, freedom, an ideal, etc. Under the same influences, we observe in some people melancholia instead of mourning, and for this reason, we suspect that a pathological predisposition exists in them.

Regarding mourning, numerous losses can be observed related to: (i) economic issues triggered by unemployment, which was already affecting the country and increased with the pandemic; (ii) loss of freedom of movement; (iii) loss of a loved one, as exemplified in the table below:

| (i) Job loss | (ii) Loss of freedom | (iii) Loss of a loved one |
|---|--|---|
| "The only way now is to pray because the bills keep coming. No one has suspended water, electricity, or internet payments," says Jaqueline, who spent most of Monday (03/23) crying due to the dismissal. "I don't know what to do now." (BBC, 03/26/2020) "I had renovated our house, and everything was on installment, relying on my salary." (BBC, 03/26/2020) | "I never thought this virus could take him down. Today, I'm afraid! Afraid to go out on the street and bring this virus into my home and infect my family. [My father] loved to cook and was very good at it. His joy was seeing the table full at Sunday lunch. He always mentioned how happy he was with everyone's visit." (G1, 03/27/2020) | "I'm feeling unwell, a bad sensation in my body, dry mouth, bitter taste, it's everything." (G1, 03/19/2020) "I don't want anyone to go through what I went through, losing a family member who was also infected. [...] The suffering of this isolation is much greater when you lose a family member and can't give them a hug. Much greater than the suffering of staying in your house and not being able to go to the gym." (G1, 03/27/2020) "One is taking care of the other. It's as if we're postponing the grieving process, so we'll suffer later when we're alone. It was a way we found to cope with it." (BBC, 04/23/2020) |

Table 1. Possibilities of mourning during the pandemic.



Regarding melancholia, in the context of this pandemic, we consider that its onset and the impact on the lives of those who have lost their jobs, are in confinement, or have lost a loved one, can only be observed later. For instance, the case reported by Márcia Cristina dos Santos, a 50-year-old nurse who lost her father and husband within a span of two days due to coronavirus. She told the BBC on 23/04/2020, "One is taking care of the other [referring to herself and her mother, both widows]. It's as if we're postponing the grieving process, so we'll suffer later when we're alone. It was a way we found to cope with it." Given the above, how will these two individuals go about processing their grief? What will be the impacts on their lives? We cannot define.

3 FINAL REMARKS

When we revisit the guiding question of this text, namely, "What changes in affect can be observed among Brazilians as a result of the coronavirus pandemic?" we find that drive energy demarcates processes that occur between the psychic and the somatic, encompassing various modalities of affective experiences such as fear, sadness, anger, frustration, mood swings in the face of insecurity and financial instability triggered by "pleasure-displeasure," the life instinct, and the death instinct, and by (dis)love.



REFERENCES

DALGALARRONDO, P. Psicopatologia e semiologia dos transtornos mentais. 2a ed, Porto Alegre: ArtMed, 2008.

FREUD, S. (1917). Luto e melancolia. Tradução Paulo César de Souza, São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2010.

_____. (1920). Além do princípio do prazer. Tradução Paulo César de Souza, São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2010.

_____. (1933). Angústia e instintos, In: Novas conferências introdutórias à Psicanálise. Tradução Paulo César de Souza, São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2010.

LAPLANCHE, J.; PONTALIS. Vocabulário da Psicanálise. 4a ed, São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2001. [https://veja.abril.com.br/saude/as-saidas-para-superar-a-tristeza-e-a-depressao-que-crescem-no-](https://veja.abril.com.br/saude/as-saidas-para-superar-a-tristeza-e-a-depressao-que-crescem-no-isolamento/)

isolamento/ Acessado dia 15/06/2020

<https://g1.globo.com/sp/campinas-regiao/concursos-e-emprego/noticia/2020/04/03/coronavirus-acic-estima-142-mil-desempregados-na-regiao-de-campinas-por-causa-de-quarentena.ghtml> Acessado dia 15/06/2020

<https://economia.uol.com.br/noticias/bbc/2020/03/26/demitidos-por-causa-do-coronavirus-brasileiros-que-ja-ficaram-desempregados-com-a-pandemia.htm?cmpid=copiaecola> Acessado dia 15/06/2020

<https://economia.uol.com.br/noticias/bbc/2020/03/26/demitidos-por-causa-do-coronavirus-brasileiros-que-ja-ficaram-desempregados-com-a-pandemia.htm?cmpid=copiaecola> Acessado dia 15/06/2020

<https://economia.uol.com.br/noticias/bbc/2020/03/26/demitidos-por-causa-do-coronavirus-brasileiros-que-ja-ficaram-desempregados-com-a-pandemia.htm?cmpid=copiaecola> Acessado dia 15/06/2020

G1 <https://g1.globo.com/bemestar/coronavirus/noticia/2020/03/27/coronavirus-a-dor-de-quem-perdeu-um-familiar-ou-um-amigo.ghtml> Acessado dia 15/06/2020

<https://g1.globo.com/sp/sao-paulo/noticia/2020/03/19/mae-do-1o-morto-por-coronavirus-no-brasil-tem-sintomas-e-marido-e-filhos-internados-esse-problema-existe.ghtml> Acessado dia 15/06/2020

<https://g1.globo.com/bemestar/coronavirus/noticia/2020/03/27/coronavirus-a-dor-de-quem-perdeu-um-familiar-ou-um-amigo.ghtml> Acessado dia 15/06/2020

<https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-52391413> Acessado dia 15/06/2020

<https://ninalemos.blogosfera.uol.com.br/2020/04/03/tenho-panico-e-ansiedade-e-os-dias-de-pandemia-nao-tem-sido-faceis/?cmpid=copiaecola> Acessado dia 15/06/2020

<https://ninalemos.blogosfera.uol.com.br/2020/04/03/tenho-panico-e-ansiedade-e-os-dias-de-pandemia-nao-tem-sido-faceis/?cmpid=copiaecola> Acessado dia 15/06/2020

<https://economia.uol.com.br/noticias/redacao/2020/03/19/coronavirus-supermercados-estoques-quarentena-sao-paulo.htm?cmpid=copiaecola> Acessado dia 15/06/2020