

It's The Psychoanalysis, Stupid?

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The title 'It's the psychoanalysis, stupid?' comes from 'It's the economy, stupid!', a famous phrase by James Carville – Bill Clinton's lead strategist in the latter's successful presidential campaign. The expression became popular and ended up as a trending topic within political discourse for years. Its structure has been since utilized when someone wishes to emphasize the main focus of a discussion.

With this sentence, I invite you to reflect about the diverse forms through which it is possible to theorize by using psychoanalysis as a thinking tool; to reflect about the influence of social problems on the cultural life of individuals, groups, and of society as a whole.

We must bear in mind that, whereas it is a tradition to discuss psychoanalysis among colleagues, to divulge psychoanalytical knowledge always rouses resistance. This is understandable, since it forces one to leave one's comfort zone – i.e. the intimacy of one's own office or the safety of speaking from a theoretical stance.

In 2007, the Argentinian Psychoanalytical Association created the Department of Psychoanalysis and Society in an attempt to encourage its members to participate and exchange within the social realm. It is a space for frank expansion, a symbol of the work of colleagues within the community over many years, be it via workshops or study groups – both in school days and other settings. In addition, it has provided a fruitful interface with psychiatry. In that same year, our first book was published: *Psicoanálisis y Sociedad, Teorías y Prácticas* [Psychoanalysis and society: theory and practices] (Moise, Orsi, et al., 2007).

2017 marked the beginning of the International Psychoanalytical Association's 'One IPA for all', an initiative focused on the community and in sync with our thinking. These ideas were reflected on our second book: *Psicoanálisis y Sociedad, Nuevos Paradigmas en Lo Social* [Psychoanalysis and society: new paradigms within the social realm]. Today, we complement the original paper issues with a digital version (Orsi, 2017).

As for me, for years I have worked in order to strengthen the role played by psychoanalysts in the mass media, the press, as well as in social media, blogs, websites, Facebook, Instagram, etc. I receive continuous validation of the space that such involvement has in the institution, the culture, and the society within which the psychoanalyst interacts. At the same time, we continue to be careful as to reach the general public without falling into a banalization of the theory. This impact is multiplied within the analytical framework with one's patients – especially today, given the intensive use of technology as a result of the pandemic. Themes such as the modes of diffusion of mental health are discussed in bulletins, notes, interviews, articles, columns, and blogs. It is the diffusion's 'domino effect': transference and countertransference with journalists, the media, and even with patients, when their analyst appears on a mass media outlet.

The digital world has affected the way we relate to each other, the way we live, discover, make contact, learn, love, and work. Social connections, previously subjected to the limitations of the physical world, can now take place with great predominance of images – which sometimes even replace words.

These virtual spaces can become a fertile terrain for studies, as well as for the construction and diffusion of knowledge and of the way we interact with our patients. It is necessary to reflect deeply about the way we gauge intimacy in the current times. We must also consider the transformations in the practice as a product of, first, each era's changes and, second, the advances in theory and technique – which modifies the focus of psychoanalytical treatments.

In times of a pandemic and Zoom, the image of an analyst who is not affected by their context belongs to the past. What logics do these new modalities impose? How do these changes affect the psychoanalytical technique, the mind, the thought, the affections, and our offices? How can we use the new tools to communicate and diffuse psychoanalysis without compromising it? Psychoanalysis has a lot to say in this respect, and many works on the theme are continually published.

Transdisciplinarity is crucial in order to consider these questions, and further along I will comment, as an example, about such a task within a Balint group.

It is indispensable to open ourselves to a transforming world without losing our essence. Not to consider the digital methods or to use them with language and timing belonging to the pre-digital culture means losing countless opportunities for the diffusion of psychoanalysis to reach its intended receivers.

Digital divides

It is known that the digital divide makes women an almost absent minority within the creation of technological products and the direction of this field's companies.

In terms of the production of information, it is important to consider the low participation of women in writing rooms and in posts of editorial responsibility within media outlets, as well as in society as a whole.

The digital divide intensifies social differences and hinders those who do not have the abovementioned elements. It intensifies social inequalities based on race, class, and gender. In the meeting WOMEN 20, there was a mention of G-20's Gender Forum, with a warning regarding the difficulties to access the strategic use of technology.

The approach on violence and femicide in the media and social networks

For decades, feminist studies have been concerned with mass media's role in the production and reproduction of gender stereotypes and gender violence. The media has a fundamental role in such constructions through its choice of biased contents, language, and narratives for the audience's consumption.

Violence against women – in particular its most serious form, femicide – responds to multiple factors, such as the social constructions and symbolic violence that exist around what it means to be a man or a woman within each society. The growing number of female homicides and gender violence cases have gained more attention from society and media in the last decades and are now disseminated as never before. Nevertheless, the number of cases does not decrease, but rather, increases in an alarming fashion (Orsi, 2019).

Many women have organized online forums to talk solely about gender violence. Subsequently, the exchange transcended those networks and media and turned into street demonstrations: the

#niunaamenos [not one (woman) less] march in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on June 3rd, 2015 has been followed in other parts of Latin America and Europe by campaigns such as *Me too*, *Time's up*, and *Balance ton porc* – all emphasizing the importance of denouncing gender violence.

In times of quarantines and pandemics, there is a great increase in cases of violence and femicide due to the forced cohabitation with the aggressor. This is the case even for children, according to Unicef, who has created campaigns to prevent violence and bring awareness to the problem in this traumatogenic moment.

Such crimes are increasingly violent, and women keep being murdered, despite the fact that many cases of violence are denounced. Intimate femicides are usually the corollary of previous violence inflicted onto women by their partners or ex-partners – i.e., they do not represent isolated violent incidents. This highlights the role that policies intended to prevent gender violence can have in couples' relationships, women's protection, and the prevention of femicide.

It would seem that more effective actioning is lacking. There is a gap between actions and that which is written in the laws. There are flaws in preventive campaigns. It is interesting to analyze the connections between women's homicides for gender reasons and their media coverage, particularly in Latin America.

Different television cultures can offer different narratives and propose different perspectives of society. The narrativity of the news varies from country to country and from culture to culture – it is usually more sensationalistic in Latin America. It is a pandemic of information – or 'infodemic': according to the WHO, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and its responses have been accompanied by a massive infodemic. These approaches maintain a disconnection between femicides – which are presented as isolated, individual cases – and the wider social issue of domestic violence.

Is it possible for communication to generate a copy-cat effect, as mentioned by some articles? The copy-cat effect refers to a certain element of imitation, identification, and compulsion to repetition that can be recognized when comparing days when there is news about femicides and days when there is not. It is possible to conclude that the presence of intimate femicides on the TV news seems to increase the likelihood of similar crimes.

In this landscape, it is important to highlight psychoanalysis's task within the community in two different aspects: prevention and contention.

Psychoanalysis: a tool for prevention

As an example, I will talk about a device I used to prevent cases of burnout within my work with female penitentiary mediators, as requested by the National Direction of Mediation. I chose to organize a *Balint group* because it consists of a reflection group that acts as a support for its members. It performs a preventive function regarding the decisions about the group's organization, as well as regarding its members' health and the attention to potentially critical situations. Such a system allowed me to address, in the conversations with the mediators, the very conflict of their job – a job that generates anxiety, weariness, overwhelmingness, paralysis, and psychosomatic symptoms.

A space of listening and group integration can be constituted, helping to solve, work-through, and re-dimension the issues that the individual has not been able to overcome on their own. It shifts the framing of the issue and, if necessary, its occupational setting.

I chose this method also because the social, economic, and political situation, work conditions, unemployment, and unpredictable work situations together affect subjectivity and become source of physical and psychological suffering. All this is accentuated when the work takes place in prisons. The collective discussions about the feeling of helplessness, the risks, obstacles, frustrations, and other difficulties within their daily tasks were very important for the group, as was the emphasis on their success in performing the task in hand. At the same time, it was very important for them to gain awareness about the need to keep a useful, appropriate distance from the work in order not to be excessively invested and, thus, risk becoming ill or suffering in another way – which would stop them from doing the job. It was an effort to neutralize the job in order to withstand it since, broadly speaking, the work was being adequately done (Orsi, 2019).

It was necessary, however, to develop a link of trust with the aim to overcome the obstacles that were presented.

The fact that they were able to comment on the difficulties that they faced in the penitentiaries, in the re-linking and social readaptation of prisoners, relieved them by enabling and working through the material that they brought into the discussions.

Due to the good result of this experience – with annual evaluations during more than 4 years – I was invited to be part of *Taking care of those who take care in times of Covid-19*. This is the APA's initiative to work with health professionals from a prestigious geriatric and rehabilitation institution.

Finally, these experiences make me think, with Charlotte Brunch, that: 'sexual, racial, and gender violence, and other forms of discrimination within the culture cannot be eliminated without changing the culture' (Pascencia Pacheco, 2017).

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