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CULTURAL NARCISSISM - MENTAL HEALTH DAMAGE

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Abstract: Our society is experiencing a collective of dramatic personality disorders derived from uncontrolled anxiety. The most evident symptoms are incoherent behavior, lack of apparent perception, immaturity with compulsive traits. In this sense, the importance of the theme is presented in its interaction with the way of relating and constituting itself produced by the contemporary social imaginary. The main objective of the work is the analysis of how the phenomenon of narcissism is manifested in Western culture, having as specific objectives the investigation of brain alterations, they present in pathological narcissists and the neurotransmitters involved. For this, in order to prove the author's concept, the methodology of literature review with articles published in the last 10 years is used. Finally, the importance of the theme is confirmed by its presence in many spheres of life, including the personal, work, education, sport and virtuality, among others.

Keywords: Narcissism. culture.

INTRODUCTION

The mass use of the virtual environment and, especially, of social networks has consequences for the way in which relationships take place in contemporary times. The ease of meeting new people ends up hiding the fragile and disposable character of many bonds built, making diverse relationships less lasting and exacerbating a culture of showing performance in physical, emotional and professional aspects. Thus, while the fragility of the relationship with the other stands out, narcissism intensifies, producing new ways of placing oneself in the world that, many times, favor the manifestation of pathological conditions in a life in which nothing and no one seem to be good for them. enough (RODRIGUES, 2022).

The fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders

(DSM-V) characterizes narcissistic personality disorder through criteria such as exaggeration of a sense of self-importance and grandiosity, lack of empathy, and realization of limitless fantasies regarding to power and influence, taking advantage of others to show their own superiority. The heightened perception of self must be persistent and meet at least five diagnostic criteria, showing that care must be taken when diagnosing the disorder and when considering, for example, arrogant people as pathological narcissists (ZIMMERMAN, 2021). In this sense, it is possible to discuss the influence of the culture of self-glorification as something that can both mask the presence of the disorder and be confused with it.

It is possible to consider the possibility of analyzing narcissism as a social symptom, in such a way that capitalism and the category of consumption potential as proof of the subject's value appear as central factors. The refusal of the other that is instituted when considering oneself as an object also hides a refusal of one's own incompleteness and desire, considering that the subject is constituted in the relationship with the other. There is an alienation from the other both in an individual perspective of the narcissistic subject, from their family experiences, and at a social level, with capitalism (SILVEIRA, 1990).

Not configuring capitalism as a generalized influence since, in our evolutionary line, being the best is also part of a biological condition of the organism for survival, so capitalism is just a reflection of human nature.

In this sense, the importance of the theme is presented in its interaction with the way of relating and constituting itself produced by the contemporary social imaginary. It is a current approach that aims to expand the view that once remained individual in relation to narcissism to a perspective that allows considering the theme in all its complexity.

The main objective of the work is the analysis of how the phenomenon of narcissism is manifested in Western culture, having as specific objectives the investigation of brain alterations present in pathological narcissists and the neurotransmitters involved. For this, the methodology of literature review is used with articles published in the last 10 years and the keywords “narcissism” and “culture”.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For a diagnosis of narcissistic personality disorder to be made, the patient must present at least five of the following criteria beginning in early adulthood: exaggerated and unfounded grandiosity, preoccupation with fantasies of unlimited accomplishments - such as power, influence and beauty -, conviction of being special and unique, need for unconditional admiration, feeling of worthiness, exploitation of the other in favor of one's own goals, lack of empathy, envy and conviction of being envied and arrogance and haughtiness. Despite the feeling of grandiosity, self-esteem problems commonly appear and, in order to feel superior, the narcissist uses the other to reinforce their self-esteem, relating to special people, being part of superior institutions and devaluing other people (ZIMMERMAN, 2021).

Regarding the statistics of narcissistic personality disorder, it is estimated that it occurs in about 6% of the general population, predominantly in men. Often, others appear at the same time, including depression, anorexia nervosa, substance use - predominantly cocaine - or another personality disorder, such as histrionic, borderline antisocial or paranoid. The treatment, in general, follows the same line as other personality disorders, with indications of benefits both from psychodynamic psychotherapies, focusing on primary conflicts, and from cognitive-behavioral ones, seeking to shape behavior

considering the need to receive praise (ZIMMERMAN, 2021).

The study by Mao *et al.* (2016) found significant structural variations in the social brain and Central Executive system related to pathological narcissism. Figure 1 shows the negative correlation found between Pathological Narcissism Inventory (PNI) scores and cortical thickness (CT) in the right dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC) and in the right inferior frontal cortex (IFG); Figure 2 also has a negative correlation between NIP scores and cortical volume (CV) in the right DLPFC, in the left medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC) region and in the right postcentral gyrus.

In general, some patterns of structural changes can be seen in the brain images of pathological narcissists. Among them, the gray matter deficit is significant both in the right prefrontal cortex and in the bilateral middle area, in addition to alterations in the limbic system - responsible for emotions and linked to the lack of empathy, as well as the prefrontal region. frontal - and in the connectivity of the frontal lobe with the other brain areas. On the other hand, the executive functions that regulate what is right or wrong are usually intact, demonstrating that narcissists are aware of their actions, although they are not able to feel guilt for the consequences of their acts aimed at the feeling of grandiosity. Unlike psychopathy, which has clearer genetic inheritance, the genetics related to narcissism is still unclear, with indications that being raised in an excessively permissive or abusive environment impairs the development of areas in which alterations have been found (MAO *et al.*, 2016).

I can also analyze changes in the brain through culture and excesses such as the use of social networks.

Raine (2015) investigated the relationship of narcissistic personality with antisocial

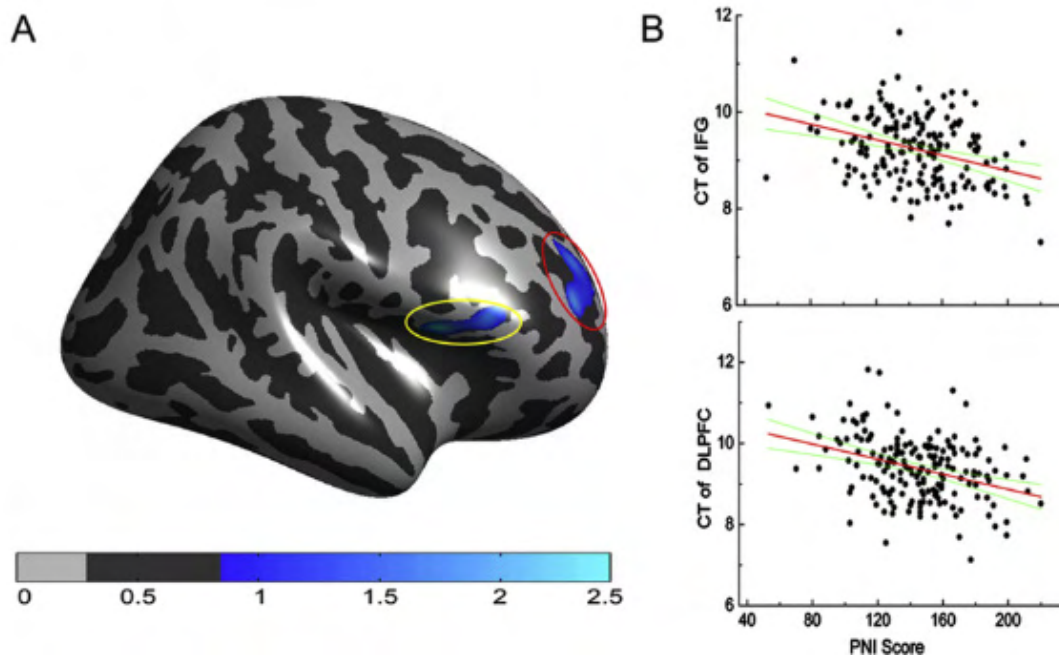


FIGURE 1 – NEGATIVE CORRELATION BETWEEN PATHOLOGICAL NARCISSISM INVENTORY SCORES AND CORTICAL THICKNESS

Source: Mao *et al.* (2016, p. 53)

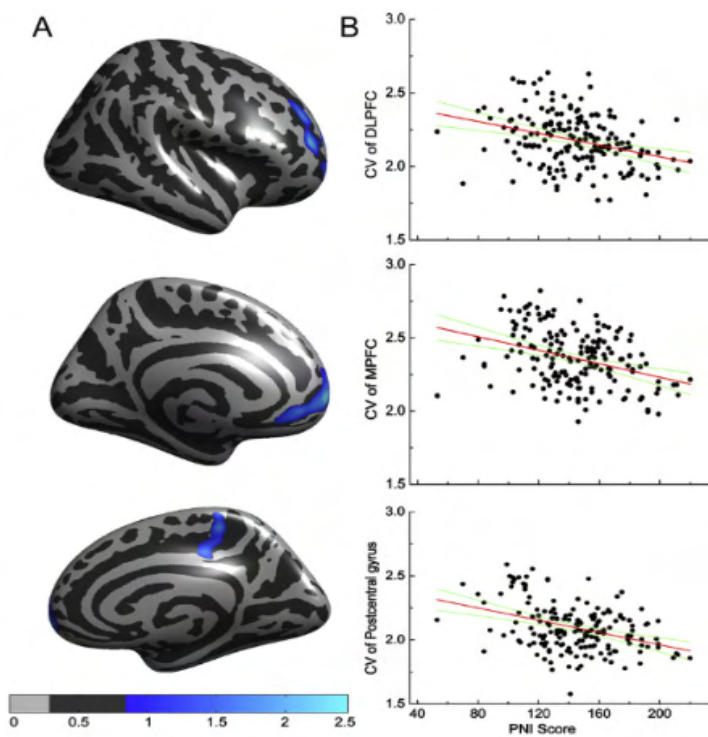


FIGURE 2 – CORRELATION BETWEEN PATHOLOGICAL NARCISSISM INVENTORY SCORES AND CORTICAL VOLUME

Source: Mao *et al.* (2016, p. 54)

personality disorders and violent behavior. Interest was aroused after the realization that the structural deficit in the prefrontal region is common to both conditions, which can lead to confusion about its cause. In their research, the presence of prefrontal changes remained higher compared to subjects who have other personality disorders, which include narcissistic. In this sense, the author came to the conclusion that, although antisocial individuals often present other personality disorders, they presented considerable numbers of failures in the development of the brain region in question in early childhood, that is, the prefrontal cortex never developed. usually, whether in infancy, childhood or adolescence. Thus, the presence of behaviors that indicate impairment of social functions in narcissism, such as lack of empathy, may be related to the concomitant existence of other disorders.

Regarding the neurochemistry of personality disorders, it is possible to find findings in the scientific literature regarding risk factors and vulnerability for them to manifest. The interaction between the Monoamine Oxidase A (MAOA) gene with a negative environment is pointed out as a factor that influences the development and trigger of psychiatric disorders such as the narcissistic personality. In psychiatric clinical conditions with aggressive and impulsive behaviors, there is an important role played by serotonin, although it is not exclusive to it. The need for self-aggrandizement seen in the narcissistic personality is related to reward conditioning and, consequently, to noradrenergic and serotonergic projections. In this sense, an inadequate functioning of neuronal activities results in social inadequacy and impulsiveness (RODRIGUES; SILVEIRA, 2022).

For psychoanalysis, narcissism is something that is part of the human psychic constitution and represents the libidinal

investment in oneself rather than an object. The baby, for example, would assume that he is able to change the world with his desires, considering the moments when he feels hungry and has his needs met by caregivers. These are constitutive experiences that are part of the integration of the self, but in a typical development, narcissism finds its forms of sublimation in objects. There is a considerable degree of narcissism in the distance from reality experienced by psychoses, as it is also present in neurosis, but in a different way as imaginary objects are found for which the libido will be destined (MARCOS, 2016).

In psychosis, it is possible to speak of an ego with an overflowing libido, resulting in the delusions of grandeur of psychotic megalomania, although the latter also has the function of libidinal containment, just as fantasy does for neurosis. In this sense, many of the psychotic delusions have the defensive objective of libidinal restoration with external objects. In neurosis, when this attempt with fantasy fails, we have the formation of phobias, displacement, conversion or reaction formation. Even when the narcissist demonstrates not wanting to draw attention, he actually has the need to stand out, often having seductive abilities with apparent sexual behaviors that lead him to stand out in some way (RODRIGUES; SILVEIRA, 2022).

The manifestations of narcissism are complex, as they can hide, in a behavior, intentions that seem contradictory. This way, it is possible to discuss:

Related to narcissism is fear of abandonment, arrogance, selfishness, lack of empathy, impulsiveness, irritability, manipulation, thinking of being always right, victimism, haughtiness, suggestibility, speeches that are not fully coherent or not so thorough, non-preventive attitudes, monopolize conversations, belittle those who perceive themselves to be inferior, may present envy, vanity, pretense, insist that everything they

have is better, among others. Narcissism is part of instinct and is related to the reproduction and survival of the species. We all have a degree of narcissism, but when out of balance, it causes disorders that compromise social behavior, bringing symptoms such as those reported above. Anxiety is linked to narcissism to the extent that the narcissistic act brings reward, therefore, the need to release neurotransmitters that bring better sensations can increase the degree of narcissism in a human being, an imbalance that can trigger personality disorders (RODRIGUES; SILVEIRA, p. 7).

DISCUSSION

Contemporary culture imposes a way of living and constituting itself that has no tolerance for failures. A victorious subject is one who manages to show his high performance in everything he does in a context where exhibitionism takes on exacerbated proportions. Whether in activities such as work or sport, a call is made all the time to go beyond your own performance limits and show yourself better than other people, in a highly competitive scenario. This way, narcissism gains space and the possibility of demonstrating any manifestation of lack, even though it is constitutive of the human being, is lost. A potentially sickening environment is produced for those who deviate from the norms to some extent (DIAS; SOUSA, 2012).

Contemporary imperatives end up having a contradictory effect: the demand for performance results in a feeling of insufficiency and shame, generating a malaise characteristic of our time and causing the emergence of narcissistic traits. Social media or press and technology are also part of this process by transforming the image and the body into capital, transforming even everyday life into a spectacle, with the dissolution of the boundaries between public and private (HELSINGER, 2014).

There is an environment that no longer

provides the necessary symbolic resources for the subject, making it necessary to retreat from oneself as a form of protection. Much of this context refers to primary human experiences prior to the feeling of self-integration. The fragility and disposability of contemporary human relationships is also called into question when it can be compared with the distance from the object experienced in psychoses (HELSINGER, 2014).

With that, we can conclude that we are inserted in a consumerist and individualistic society, in which the symbolic supports are diluted, the values are in crisis and that the public space is deinstitutionalized. This conjuncture impairs the subject's narcissistic constitution processes, thus causing feelings of emptiness and difficulty in the symbolization processes that, in turn, can lead to an experience of symbolic wandering and the feeling of being at the mercy of annihilation. (HELSINGER, 2014, p. 91).

Contemporaneity carries with it the emergence of pathologies different from those seen in other times, being mostly of a narcissistic character nowadays. Subjective configurations tend to be fragile and change quickly, whether it's when we talk about values or interpersonal and objective relationships. In this sense, there is a proximity to what Zygmunt Bauman called "liquid modernity": institutions, references, lifestyles and beliefs change even before being solidified as truths of the subject, in a process fraught with interruption or incoherence. and instantaneity. There is a picture close to the narcissism proposed by psychoanalysis, with Freud, with individualism taking over to the detriment of the external world (ULLRICH; ROCHA, 2019).

Rather, I want to put as evidence in my own concept of opinion, that we are driven by instinct, therefore, individualism is part of the need for survival, semantics, selfishness is among other behaviors that we suggest

negative in a more coherent society and are healthy, if it goes beyond the homeostatic linear, that is, of balance, ceasing to be what could be configured as “healthy”.

In addition to the lack of concern with the duration of social bonds and modern liquidity, another characteristic that brings contemporary society closer to narcissism is the lack of empathy and indifference to the other in favor of oneself, in addition to the more frequent use of other people to achieve goals. There is an exaggerated value designed for instant pleasure, with a freedom to act without limitations in a claim to completeness, where there is no lack (ULLRICH; ROCHA, 2019).

Despite the strong relationship between the two, it is argued that there is not necessarily an increase in narcissists, but that contemporary social conditions favor the production of an environment in which narcissism is daily expressed. In a society already steeped in narcissism, the rise of narcissists on social media can lead to an increase in this behavior among users, which comes to be seen as acceptable. The attractiveness of narcissists is intensified, as there is a stage for the spectacularization they produce. Recently, an example of a platform that has shown to recognize the existence of this process is Instagram, which removed the obligation to display the number of likes in publications used for self-promotion (LEJDERMAN; ZOT, 2020).

Although narcissistic manifestations through social networks can often be expressing a variation from normal to excessive, there are variable cases of narcissism ranging from healthy to pathological. In this sense, with the means that are quite conducive to the propagation of narcissism in contemporary times, caution is needed in labels. Subjects may present different degrees of narcissism, causing characteristics commonly attributed

to a person, such as arrogance, to be confused with a clinical diagnosis. In this sense, it is necessary to return to the recurrent character of the personality disorder in question, which crosses different areas of life, in addition to the mandatory fulfillment of diagnostic criteria and the presence of symptoms in early adulthood. Furthermore, delusions and megalomanias must be considered independently (LEJDERMAN; ZOT, 2020).

Betts (2014) rescues the notion that new times demand new ways of clinically discussing psychological pathologies. The new social problems cause an impoverishment of the symbolic resources used to defend the subject, leading to five possible paths: passage to the act resulting from symbolic failure, delinquency - seeking symbolic recognition through transgression, however failing -, violence, fundamentalism or fundamentalist defense of the values of the culture of origin or of arrival. In that regard:

[...] new forms of de-subjectivation come as a response to the malaise in social relations [...]. In the psychoanalytic clinic of situations of identity instability in migrations, immigrations, exile, wandering and exclusion, various psychopathological phenomena such as drug addiction, anorexia and massive bulimia and adolescent violence, among other expressions of malaise, must no longer be considered exclusively from the perspective of classical neurotic symptoms (ie, as compromise formations resulting from the repression of forbidden desires) (BETTS, 2014).

Souza and Miklos (2020) also bring social elements that aim to complicate the discussion around cultural narcissism. The contemporary narcissistic subject often finds himself in a dilemma between being and the desire to be essentially caused by the contrast between his own identity and the accentuated standards idealized in the media.

Religion also appears as an element of great

influence: by mimicking and moving from a system based on altruistic self-renunciation to the propagation of the concept of a human being built in the image and likeness of God, there is an excuse for the pleasure shown in the offering of products and services that serve the narcissistic demand. There is, therefore, the transformation of the cult of the sacred to the cult of the self, with appeals to the image and to success. In addition, the church becomes a stimulator of the performance of the faithful, with promises of healing the anomalies that are a consequence of the same context and culture in which it is inserted (SOUZA; MIKLOS, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Narcissism presents itself as a very complex phenomenon, being investigated by sciences ranging from neurosciences to psychoanalysis and anthropological studies. The expansion of the concepts addressed when discussing the theme is consistent with the need, reinforced by the analyzed scholars, of caution when propagating labels to individuals to whom narcissistic characteristics are attributed, being one of the most positive aspects observed in the studies.

Attention is drawn to the significant correlation observed between the criteria used for pathological narcissism and structural changes in the prefrontal cortex, bringing enough evidence to consider that, in fact, personality can be shaped by an interaction between biological and environmental conditions. In this sense, another positive issue in the studies was the possibility of considering an integrative approach, which does not place excesses on either side, whether from an organic or environmental point of view.

In the studies in question, there was considerable mention of the need for continuity and constant improvement of

research, regardless of the approach used. Thus, with adequate investment, it is possible to expect that the cerebral manifestations of narcissism will be better explained in the future, possibly improving the causal relationship between the aspects addressed. Likewise, the concomitance of narcissistic personality disorder with other psychiatric conditions may be more clarified with regard to the genesis of symptoms.

In cultural and anthropological studies, the prevalence of psychoanalytic productions when researching the topic of narcissism is remarkable. Several authors have been interested in analyzing contemporary social phenomena from the Freudian concept and its proposal as a phenomenon that occurs from the most primary relationships of childhood. It is interesting to notice the way in which the ways of inhabiting the world in contemporary times are commonly associated with narcissism in studies, emphasizing the characteristic of libidinal investment to the detriment of the external world as a phenomenon that speaks of its time.

I conclude from the behavioral psychological questions based on neuroscience that narcissism has not only genetic but also epigenetic conditions. Our brain is plastic and molds itself according to everyday habits and the time period of the behaviors reveals the personality of the individual. A technological culture with excessive use of networks, as I have shown in other published studies, alters the brain and the constant need for reward derived from anxiety, elevates narcissism above linear homeostatic as well as the consequences of this virtual culture. In short, the environmental and personal culture creates habits that alter the anatomy of the brain and can cause diseases and disorders.

Finally, the importance of the theme is confirmed by its presence in many spheres of life, including the personal, work, education,

sport and virtuality, among others. More than ever, the reinforcement of the need for new methods – as in psychotherapy and analysis, for example – that meet the needs of their time is necessary.

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