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**THE ENVIOUS DESIRE:  
A PERSPECTIVE OF  
FENCES AND BRIDGES  
IN THE ACT OF  
CONSUMPTION**

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**Abstract:** This is a bibliographical reflection about the desires that guide the process of buying goods in social life, having as object the feeling of envy. The envious desire has mechanisms to originate, being indication and identification according to Alberoni (1996). These concepts intertwine in social relationships with the media and people in the social circle, generating a chain of consumption from a specific emotion. However, the whole process is individualistic, creating a competitive and creative perspective that leads to finding the bridge to reach the desire, or even a fence in the consumer culture. Thus, this study proposes to understand these connections between phenomena, in order to outline a probability of exploring these elements within consumer behavior and the settings of the envious perspective in the attributions of value of goods in a consumer society.

**Keywords:** Desire; envy; assets; consumption; relations; Social.

## INTRODUCTION

To understand human relationships cannot be classified as an easy task, many researchers for many years feel instigated and provoked to understand the factors that trigger this relational process with regard to consumer culture.

There are a number of factors that encompass this phenomenon, from social life, goods, social classes, economic perspectives and several others that actively participate in these settings.

Trying to unravel the mysteries that involve the consumption of goods is to understand that there are stages that go through production, conception and emission of these meanings until they reach the consumer (FEATHERSTONE, 1995). And in this tangle of ideas, needs arise that somehow enter into desires, originating with

a weighty content at the time of discussion, as they vary between physical survival and social existence.

Within this universe of possibilities about consumer behavior, several authors have elaborated numerous possibilities to understand the consumer's mind, such as Veblen (1983), Simmel (1983), Bauman (2008), Bourdieu (2017), Baudrillard (2017). Therefore, understanding desire becomes interesting because it is an inconstant emotion that is inserted in people's daily lives, passing through their conscious and unconscious in their attitudes when choosing what to have and the value indications of this acquisition to exemplify your being.

The envious desire can also be understood at some point in this consumption process, entering a flow that is not sustained only in having, because through it, one will arrive at being (ALBERONI, 1996). Therefore, this work tried to reflect on how envy is inserted in the choices of consumer goods, which are configured as fences or bridges in human coexistence, as already mentioned by Douglas and Isherwood (2006).

## THE ENVIOUS DESIRE

Desiring is part of human life as well as needing, whether from a materialist or sociability point of view. Thus, the individual walks a path where he perceives his need, and from it he will derive a given choice in which his own desire will be involved.

Needs are situations of social life and are driven by motivations that start from the physiological principles, even realization and exhibition (DUBOIS, 1998). Desires are formed from the need itself, when these are shaped by an individual's culture and personality. Thus, it is understood that desires are shared in society and bring tangible and intangible descriptions at the time of their formation.

Being in contact with other people induces us to always want new things and consequently more than we need, in an ideology of always going further. Thus, desire is nothing more than: [...] an energy fomented from the outside. (ALBERONI, 1996, p.7). Therefore, desiring is the act of wanting that occurs in the world in a normal process of the individual, but in some cases it is strongly allied with judgment, making them together form a pillar that is configured as the source to originate the feeling of envy. (ALBERONI, 1996).

Envy is a desire that can appear in all cultures, being seen in many historical moments in the most distant contexts. This way, both men and women are susceptible to this feeling, as the confrontation with differences makes people enter into a process of social comparison. We soon find the two roots of envy explained by Alberoni (1996), first, to repel the acquired desire and to devalue or belittle the unattainable and, secondly, to judge it, to compare its value in front of others.

This second root is understood by Festinger (1954) in his studies, which includes the comparative requirement since childhood, where the first confrontations between family members are found, whether brothers, friends, schoolmates, who in the course of life or stay behind or surpass us in some way generating peer evaluation, which causes the dreaded envious feelings.

In some cases, the envious desire can be similar to the act of imitation, but it is worth noting that both differ in evolution, where they have points of parity in the factor of equality seen, but the exposure and search from each one are different.

Envy is directed towards equals, as is emulation; envy wants to take from the other what he has, emulation wants to

imitate him. These are reactions that tend to prolong symmetry or create it, since one wants to generate difference, the other, identity. Contempt, it must be said, tends towards rupture. (Aristotle, 2000, XLVI).

This way, it is understood that envy wants more than the equality factor, it wants to create its own identity, in order to reach the same point or overcome, a competition that has different reactions so that the other is left behind, and no longer have to see it. At this point, envy and imitation have their point of discontinuity when differences become a process of discomfort and personal confrontation. "Envy is a type of psychological pain felt when, when comparing ourselves to the other person(s), we evaluate that our value, our self-esteem and our self-respect are diminished". (CUKIER, 2011, p.15).

In view of this, envy is a kind of vice, something that society condemns and consequently individuals condemn in themselves. However, it is part of the self-worth, acting in an intimate way where it will be built from the will to affirm, being here, where it will be recognized or even respected.

For some authors such as Byington (2002) who study symbolic psychology, envy is part of the structuring function of *Psique*<sup>1</sup>. Within his studies he explains that it was misinterpreted from its beginnings, this is because the envious feeling in its beginnings had revolutionary tones, where it could motivate the search for the unattainable, the new, constant growth, that in a way must be hidden in order to keep social control in the hands of those who hold power. Within this aspect, one of the first factors that disqualified envy is found in religion, which finds as a structuring symbol in the knowledge of life of individuals with clear examples between good and evil, such as Adam and Eve and the forbidden fruit or the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. "Forbidden by

1. The Psyche is a conglomeration of phenomena that can occur in the human mind, such as the feelings, thoughts and perceptions that will form the behavior of the individual.

the Bible, as a capital sin, is a sentiment that has to be kept hidden, which makes its study difficult and indirect” (CUKIER, 2011, p. 13). This perception is based on the ideologies of equality that, according to Bourdieu (2011), emerged as a kind of resentment to ensure the ethos, showing that to achieve ascension it is necessary to follow religious norms. In this context, envy has a procedural character of symbolic elaboration, shaping behavior structures, dismissing its importance and becoming hidden like jealousy, anger and sexuality.

Therefore, all experiences are structuring symbols and all life functions are structuring functions. 'I am angry with a corrupt politician.' The political is a structuring symbol and anger is a structuring function. 'I'm afraid of my neighbor's German Shepherd.' The German Shepherd is a structuring symbol and fear is a structuring function. (BYINGTON, 2002, p. 15).

Therefore, envy is a process where social condemnation, self-judgment, confrontation of the value of the individual who feels in front of the envied occurs, causing different reactions. Its basic principle of understanding is its externalization. "Envy is popularly manifested in the evil eye, 'EvilEye', devil's eye. It seems that being seen is central to the Envy theme, both for those who are envied (is seen) and for those who envy (looks)." (CUKIER, 2011, p. 15). Thus, the being seen becomes an object accused within the conception of the one who looks, succeeding in three types of guilt in the envious. The first is the social judgment of value, in which the person rebels but keeps the feeling or tries to deny it to himself, entering the vein of accusation. Second, comes aggressiveness, where the envious person begins to disqualify the envying subject. And finally, the shameful guilt confrontation, where it is realized that the person who envies did nothing to him, and begins to devalue himself, proving the

humiliation for not being able to accuse someone who did not cause him any burden. (ALBERONI, 1996).

For this reason, when the structuring function operates in a rational way, the probability of being normal and creative is greater, on the contrary, it becomes inadequate, that is, depressive. (BYINGTON, 2002). This way, its connection with consumption in social life becomes visible, as the competition exists for prestige in society, where according to Veblen (1983) there are three types that are; display, honor and power; makes the individual constantly go through a race for ascension, power and recognition where evaluations can be configured through the condemnation of value, which generates a judgment and consequently envy is reached.

## CONSUMPTION AND SOCIAL LIFE

Bauman (2008) portrays consumption as something inherent to human behavior, where any activities that the subject performs in his daily life lead him to consumption, so that he consumes without realizing the real function of the desired object in the first instance.

For example, when preparing a birthday party, products are needed for its realization, and when being invited to one, it is customary to buy gifts to congratulate the birthday person. This occurs simply for the momentary pleasure, even if it is not so important at that moment, because the act of consumption becomes part of the individual's daily life, where everything he needs to acquire in a certain way is from the purchase. Thus, the commodity is configured as a desired and desirable objective.

Consumption is part of a whole behavioral process of each person, but not everyone has the same awareness when acquiring goods, services or ideas. Therefore, consumption is dependent on a matter of choice, according to

Giglio (2015), because when similar ones are left behind, it is understood that the excluded one cannot cause future inconvenience, because something attracted him to want that specific one and perform your purchase decision. All these factors are extracted from a culture of consumption that culminated in the increase in the production of material goods, which have become part of subsistence at the individual and collective level.

The perspective of working on consumption focuses on market demands, understanding the needs that can become essential desires to effect the cycle. Needs are situations of perceptions of the human condition, they can be physical, social and individual. These needs, when shaped by cultural and identity factors, can turn into desires, which, supported at some point by purchasing power, can become a demand and, thus, complete the consumption cycle with the realization of the purchase (DUBOIS, 1998).

Featherstone (1995) understands that to understand consumer culture it is necessary to identify three important perspectives of its construction. Firstly, production, this stage has several aspects of control and manipulation, where the industry works to produce goods that, in a way, filter many activities of the individual such as leisure. The second conception concerns the modes of consumption, here there is a kind of consumerist logic, which structures the use of goods as social markings. And the third is that consumers do not acquire something tangibly and by necessity alone, but also from desires, promises of intangible satisfactions in their social relationships.

The starting point of consumption is established from exchanges, here the consumer is deeply involved in varied and sometimes very different contexts. Within an economist theory, we could say that the consumer is

completely free in his choices, therefore, consumption is not something explicitly imposed (DOUGLAS, ISHERWOOD; 2006). So saying, culture somehow shapes consumption patterns in social life, providing the identification people need to form their buying preferences and attitudes. This is because, in each culture, there are restrictions on some types of consumer goods, making their audiences have structuring symbols when exercising the function of consuming. Therefore, it is worth noting that in social life, the mode of use of goods is independent of purchasing power, whether poor or rich, the individual can acquire goods.

But in view of this, even though the consumption of goods is not restricted to just one class, we must point out that they are used to mark beings based on their meanings. Then: "Goods, in this perspective, are ritual accessories; consumption is a ritual process whose primary function is to make sense of the incomplete flow of events" (DOUGLAS; ISHERWOOD, 2006, p. 112). It is assimilated in this place, that goods bring meanings embedded in them, without this symbology they would become just an object possibly rejected by its audience, so for each look there is a value and a judgment that defines it, also contributing to the culture itself. Explaining better, goods contain social values in their uses, sharing types of knowledge, initially technical, social and even aesthetic as if it were common sense itself, and later the integrative knowledge of action, which carries an ideology, an attribute based on the *trachejo*. social value, the value of itself, the soul of the commodity. (APPADURAI, 2008).

It is understood, therefore, that nothing has a value of its own and alien to the social nucleus, each thing acquires a value according to the point at which it is located. But let's point out that nothing classifies a person more than



their own classifications where they impose themselves, which is easily exemplified as ‘taste’, which is:

[...] a classification system constituted by the conditionings associated with a condition situated in a certain position in the space of different conditions - governs the relations with the objectified capital, with this world of hierarchical and hierarchical objects that contribute to define it, allowing your achievement when specifying yourself. (BOURDIEU, 2017, p.216).

That said, even if there is no clear intention, consumption becomes visible in social life, condemned to function with its markings, or rather, with its signs of dissimilarity, which when legitimized can actually become a distinction through *habitus*<sup>2</sup>. The latter needs to be recognized by their peers, that is, it is necessary for people to identify the individual’s lifestyle and products based on their taste, according to the distinctive signs constituted in the social world and represented in it, so that then it is indeed a legitimate *habitus*. Therefore, we can infer that social goods are actually: [...] veils that disguise the social relations they cover, not just objects of desire. Taken in relation, a person’s objects make physical and visible statements about the hierarchy of values of those who chose them as well as those who read them. (JORDÃO, 2015, p.133). This way, for each context a form will be configured and consequently a value will be assigned to establish classifications in social relations.

According to Douglas and Isherwood (2006), goods are then decoded by communication, so classifications become important, so that they become visible in social activity. However, this reinforcement has a particular set of judgments, which may or may not damage relationships.

## FENCES AND BRIDGES OF ENVY IN CONSUMPTION

In Rousseau’s studies (2015) we verified the conditioning factors of human inequality, it started from the moment when man began to have perceptions around him, he began to notice the distinctions of his own condition as a human being. From the moment that the genre learned to overcome the obstacles of living on land, fighting animals, discovering fire and disputing subsidies for their own subsistence, the differences became more evident, making them begin to distinguish themselves. by several attributes.

This repeated dedication of different beings to themselves, or to one another, naturally ended up generating in the human spirit perceptions of certain proportions. These relations which we express through the words: big, small, strong, weak, fast, slow, fearful, daring and other similar ideas, compared in the face of necessity and almost without thinking about it, finally produced in him a kind of reflection. (ROUSSEAU, 2015, p 97).

Therefore, we understand that with the evolution of society, these differences began to play increasingly intrinsic roles in human behavior, becoming a factor of survival and overcoming in the communities in which they live. Envy, then, can be identified both in the possibility of having as a being, because the acquired objects are the quality that is needed to be recognized.

To better understand, Alberoni (1996) classifies two fundamental mechanisms for envy to establish itself, identification and indication. In the case of consumption, the indication is the first factor to be observed, where the media (marketing and advertising) and their personifications show their audiences what they must want from cultural and behavioral aspects that give credibility

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2. [...] the *habitus* is, in effect, a principle that generates objectively classifiable practices and, at the same time, a classification system (pricipium divisionis) of such practices. (BOURDIEU, 2007a, p.162).

to the value of that good and/or or service. In identification, perceiving the other is a starting point, seeing how those attributions really make sense, when in possession of another person. Even before Alberoni (1996) the philosopher Aristotle (2000) had already formulated this second root, as he said that envy is a regret in the face of the success obtained through the goods of the other in relation to what one possesses, therefore, one competes with others. who is close, such as neighbors, cousins, siblings, co-workers and profession, and so on. Generally, identification takes place within the circles in which the individual is inserted. At this point, the process of competing or getting depressed, being creative or destroying yourself begins, in which case, use as a bridge to satisfy your desire or surround yourself and stay where you are.

Within a social field, the individual is inserted in a framework of alignments where he must choose the pro and the against, then indicating a flag to defend. Thus, consumers will always be making their own selections among their peers, entering a matter of social integration and disintegration. This is because people seek happiness and this is fortified by egalitarian appeals (BAUDRILLARD, 2017), justice and human rights to be able to share the same benevolence, but happiness hypothetically does not bring with it these collective concepts, but individualistic ones. (BAUDRILLARD, 1995). Consequently, the frustrations and personal confrontation of self-worth found in envy continue to guide the context, as the existing disparities in the ideologies preached by society itself do not fit into its conception of social control.

In view of this, even though it is not a unique and essential attribute for the purchase process, the envious feeling can be a phenomenon to be studied in context, as the connections between consumer,

media and social relationships are extremely noticeable in the context of integration. and disintegration of sociable groupings. As well as the need that assumes a role of desire in decision making, the purchase of goods brings out emotions and feelings not always noticeable to the naked eye, but which at some point motivates the person to continue their search and ascension process.

To buy is to be reborn within the desired identity, whatever and how many are discarding the old ones, like changing clothes. It is consumption that will guarantee its own visibility, and then every opportunity must be taken advantage of, in a time that is a succession of nows, at the risk of not having a second chance to achieve ephemeral happiness. (JORDÃO, 2015, 127).

Therefore, a given feeling can cause the meeting of a line towards the desired object or even an unidentified and hidden personal conflict, which depresses and causes pain both in the indication of the media and in the identification with their peers.

## CONCLUSION

The feeling of envy is a complex factor within society that guides the daily life of sociable people, while the context of life is based on acts aimed at exchange, which in the capitalist case is about buying and selling. So, consumption always tends not to be measured, as it is linked to issues such as happiness itself, which is also highly worshiped by consumerist communication tools.

Understanding the extensions of the act of consuming from the actions that trigger it in the final consumer is extremely important to assimilate the consumption culture itself. There is a lot of thought about the reasons for consumption and the techniques to induce the act, but individually there are aspects that hold key elements to understand different views and perspectives, which are sometimes

masked and hidden by structuring reasons of society itself.

Much is said about the social representation of envy attributed in communications issued by the marketing tool, advertising. However, there are few studies about this dissemination among people at the time of consumption. Do people really feel? Does this desire really exist in the purchase decision? Or in the competition for success, can the feeling of envy be perceived at some stage? If so, are we all correct in feeling? We do not know. What is known is that the meanings about the phenomenon are controversial and full of factors that sometimes place it as malefic, and at other times it shows how an attribute was created and reinforced from structuring symbols to cause the structuring function that it has been exercising since its beginnings.

Finally, the study of this feeling within the context of consumption becomes interesting to awaken new perspectives of studies and investigations that are always in vogue in society. There are so many factors that configure this journey that with each new emergence, it can generate a new chain of explorations in order to create multifaceted perspectives when talking about social life from the consumer culture and its connections with human individuality.



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