



Nomadic life, fleeing from self-knowledge to find the world: A case study in existentialism



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ABSTRACT

The case study described here explores the clinical understanding developed in an internship in a clinic-school, between August 2021 and December 2022, when the university still maintained social distancing. Through online consultations, adapted from the existentialist approach, the case of a woman with complaints of anxiety, depression and a history of suicide attempts, living a nomadic life, living in a van with her husband, both musicians, who performed in several cities as a form of survival, is discussed. The condition of online consultations, which began in the Covid-19 pandemic, made it possible for the patient to undergo psychotherapy, however, the conditions were precarious, due to lack of private space for sessions and difficulties in accessing the internet, requiring strengthening the therapeutic alliance and clinical management to overcome challenges. Among the initial complaints, the patient identified herself as "the daughter of a narcissistic mother," a conclusion she reached after reading a self-help book and which provided her with an explanation for behaviors she could not understand in herself. Existentialism rejects any determinism, understanding that the subject is a constant totalization in progress and never encloses itself in a tendency, pathology or a priori vocation. The case illustrates the complexity of family relationships and how identification with labels can both help and limit the psychotherapeutic process. The existentialist approach provided a mediation to question these fixed identities and opening a resignification of their history and new existential possibilities, taking into account their choices and project of being.

Keywords: Existentialist Psychotherapy, Maternal Narcissism, Clinical Management.

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INTRODUCTION

Existentialist psychology is based on the premise that "Man is nothing more than what he makes of himself" (Sartre, 1987) and that we are the result of our daily and constant choices. However, these choices are not always made in a clear way and focused on who that subject wants to become, alienating himself from his possibilities. Sartre (1987) proposed a method to be applied in psychology, inspired, on the one hand, by his studies on Freud and, on the other hand, by the foundations of phenomenology and existentialism, which he will call Existential Psychoanalysis. The objective of Sartrean psychoanalysis is to decipher the nexus between the various behaviors, thoughts, emotions, states and actions of the concrete subject, by extracting the meaning of each of these experiences towards an end that unifies them, which he will define as the *project-of-being*. It is this nexus that defines the meaning of someone's life, that explains the choices they make and how they launch themselves into their existential trajectory. This means that existential psychoanalysis seeks to decipher the "project-of-being" of each patient, as it is this that elucidates the different movements of a person in the world, whether the choices that make it feasible or those that lead the subject to a confrontation with his own desire, producing suffering and alienation (Sartre, 1987, Schneider, 2011).

Thus, among the various psychological approaches, existentialism stands out for rejecting any type of determinism and fixed human nature, because freedom is its theoretical and methodological amalgam. However, Sartrean freedom is not reduced to "doing what you want", as is the vulgar notion of freedom or free will, but the paradoxical condition of being condemned to choose, because not choosing is also a choice, and by choosing, we choose our being. Therefore, choice is not something random, but rather situated, that is, it occurs within a structure of choice, which defines our field of possibilities of being (Sartre, 1988; Sartre, 1987).

This article uses the case study methodology, which according to Gil (2008), consists of the deep and exhaustive study of one or a few objects, in a way that allows their broad and detailed knowledge. The study followed the precepts of ethics with research with human beings, and the patient gave her authorization by signing the Informed Consent Form.

The present case study explores the management and clinical understanding developed in an internship in a clinic-school at a public university in southern Brazil, between August 2021 and December 2022, when the institution was still maintaining social distancing. Through online consultations, adapted from the existentialist approach, the case of a woman, who here we will call Mary, at the time 33 years old, with symptoms of anxiety, depression and a history of suicide attempts, who lived a nomadic life, living in a van with her husband, both musicians, who performed in several cities as a way of survival. The condition of online consultations, which began in the Covid-19 pandemic, made it possible for the patient to undergo psychotherapy, however, the

conditions were precarious, due to lack of private space for sessions and difficulties in accessing the internet, requiring strengthening the therapeutic alliance and clinical management to overcome challenges.

Another of the patient's initial complaints is that she identified herself as being "the daughter of a narcissistic mother", a conclusion she reached after reading a self-help book and which established for her an explanation for her suffering and behaviors that she could not understand in herself, and the explanation "fit like a glove" for what was previously indecipherable.

Here in this chapter we will raise a reflection on the concept of narcissism inside and outside the scientific context and how such explanation impacted the patient's appropriation of the relationship with the mother and herself. A reflection on the concept of narcissism through media brought by the patient is proposed, as well as an existentialist view of the elements that identify the conditions of existence of the patient in the face of these experiences when relating to the mother. Through concrete examples worked in psychotherapy sessions, it was possible to draw a parallel between the characteristics observed by the patient and some existentialist concepts that are fundamental for the clinical understanding of the phenomenon, in addition to the appropriations and elaborations made by the patient regarding her situation.

Existentialist psychotherapy has a processual character, with a method that brings different gradual phases of understanding and intervention with patients (Pretto et al., 2022). The ultimate goal is "(...) mediation for the transformation of the patient's dynamics of being. (...) It aims for the subject to take his history in his hands (Schneider et al., 2022, p. 281), to the extent that this will make him viable in his being. Thus, the problem of narcissism in the analysis of the case study emerges as a triggering theme for reflections related to the patient's knowledge and project of being, however, one cannot fall into the trap that Mary herself set for herself, by reducing the explanations of her life to this maternal relationship, requiring clinical management to expand the process of understanding her being, taking into account the complexity of his life. The objective in the psychotherapeutic process was not to foster the idea of the narcissistic mother, but the way in which the patient experienced herself as the daughter of this mother, with her characteristics and limitations, seeking to enable Mary to choose herself elsewhere in the world, other than this reduced space of being the daughter of a narcissistic mother.

What guides such existentialist considerations, by bringing as its main analyzer a system of sociological and anthropological forces that delimit the field of possibilities of choice and definition of a subject, is what we call *situation*: contextual conditions that place this subject in the experience of being, relating to the environment, to other people, ideas and objects (Sartre, 1987). The situation is the indissoluble unity between the context and its objectivity and the subject and its subjective experience, which seeks to apprehend the process of historical singularization of a person within his

socio-material universe. Therefore, it is not simply an individual in his or her social environment, but the complex web of dialectical relations between subjective experiences and material and social determinations, resulting in what Sartre defines as the universal-singular (Alvim & Castro, 2015).

Returning to the existentialist concept of freedom, it is in a situation that the subject is free to make his choices and, thus, build the image of a human being for himself and for all others. However, the process of constructing a being does not always follow a linear planning according to what the subject chooses. Schneider (2011) exemplifies with the person who wants to be calm, but, at the same time, gets stressed at the slightest sign of irritability, that is, it is the acts that define the being, and not simply what one intends to be.

From the existentialist point of view, the construction of a subject's personality is made from the appropriation of the social and anthropological context in which he finds himself. The environment in which the subject is born is already conformed in its structure: at the anthropological level, its historical moment, culture, social class; at the sociological level, their family, community, their groups. Thus, the experiences that each subject has within this context enable the subjectivation of these elements, humanizing themselves from the established relationships. The relationship with the other mediates not only the relations with the world, but also the *Knowing-Yourself* or the cogito of this subject, which is existing in the midst of various socio-anthropological forces (Castro & Ehrlich, 2016; Bocca, 2021). These mediations can be positive, making the person's being viable, or negative, when they make this being unfeasible and are a source of intense suffering. The social forces existing in family groups are, to a large extent, the main mediating forces of the *knowing-of-being*, positive or negative. The impossibility of untying oneself from this social network allows the subject to appropriate what is experienced and build this cogito over time (Schneider, 2011).

However, the construction of the cogito is not done in a simple way, but through psychophysical experiences lived spontaneously, in which the person experiences himself in a certain way and is affected by such an experience. As a child, the possibilities of choice are limited, but in the development of a personality and its autonomy, the subject builds himself, distancing himself from those who until then made the choices for him. Sartre (1987) points out that when the subject experiences himself choosing from external pressures, in order to avoid the anguish of choice, we enter into a process of *bad faith*. Unlike common sense, in which bad faith constitutes a deliberate lie, in existentialism *bad faith* is the attempt to avoid the responsibility of choice, adopting a posture of acceptance of what is imposed by others or denying one's own freedom of choice.

The ability to critically reflect on the choices made by those responsible is what fosters the process of subjectivation and separates the *should-be*: when the choices are made by others; from the *can-be*: when the subject is responsible for his or her self and for all the possibilities of existence, within a system of social and institutional forces. In this way, the sociological and anthropological

conditions will be presented to set the context in which the patient was constituted, and based on this information, reflect on the interventions, clinical management and considerations that this case made possible (Schneider, 2011).

SOCIOLOGICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL CONDITIONS OF THE PATIENT

Mary arrives at the teaching clinic service of the Federal University of Santa Catarina, referred by the University Hospital after a nervous breakdown, anxiety symptoms and a history of suicide attempt. Married, she leads a digital nomad life, living in a vehicle with her husband and living between different places. Both worked as musicians, performing in several cities along the Brazilian coast, in addition to seeking to be influencers of this way of life, with posts on social networks.

She is the youngest daughter of three brothers, the other two being men, from a traditional family from Minas Gerais, whose personal beliefs are the evangelical religion and the upbringing based on Christian values of honoring parents and husband. Within these beliefs, the idea that psychological issues are seen as "lack of God" stands out, such as, for example, the middle brother, diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder, also had a history of suicide attempt, but his parents did not refer him for scientific treatment, due to his religious view. Mary was the one who took him to a psychological shelter, after one of the crises, even with a lot of resistance from his parents.

The mother is presented as a narcissist, wants everything the way she establishes, does not respect the wishes of her children, and has always used physical violence as a form of education and control. The father is described as very loving, but who is submissive to his mother and has never defended his children from maternal violence, which makes Mary have a lot of resentment towards him. Until the age of 16, the relationship was better, having worsened after the death of their grandmother, who was a mediator of care and often protected the grandchildren from physical and verbal aggression from their mother. Her grandmother is the great inspiration for Mary, who has memories of the teachings in the kitchen and the songs that her grandmother sang to her, stating that today she likes to cook and works with music because of her grandmother. After her death, Mary's mother entered, according to the patient, an obsessive process of construction and renovation on the family land, aiming for the financial freedom that comes from renting these properties. However, her mother's desires to expand the properties on the land did not begin with her grandmother's death, but Mary says that living with construction materials is something that refers to childhood, including being the subject of some of her memories, which will be deepened throughout the text.

Regarding her professional life, Mary says that she graduated in economics, but not because of her desire, but because she gave in to the choice imposed by her mother, who dreamed of being a journalist. She has a postgraduate degree, but because she did not identify with the training, she

never worked as an economist. The first time he lived away from his parents was at the age of 17, during his undergraduate studies. Although she often lived away from her family, the geographical distance never made her really feel distant from her family, stating that her mother called every day when she was in college, but that due to the fights, it decreased over time.

Because they live in a nomadic way, one of the main challenges of psychotherapy would be the possibility of online care, demanding flexibility on both sides - patient and psychologist - considering various adversities encountered in the process. As main difficulties we can mention the quality of connection, and issues related to privacy, as well as the impossibility of defining a stable routine. However, considering Mary's current situation, therapy was the fundamental support network for her to better elaborate what was causing her suffering at that moment.

When we started the therapeutic process, the patient was in a city in the interior of Rio Grande do Sul, waiting for the maintenance of the couple's vehicle, staying at an inn and looking for work. The referral to the teaching clinic was based on a crisis, in which the patient was very resistant to delving into this first session, arguing that she would need to explain her life story first. The main symptoms presented were "blackouts" of memory before the crises, in which she felt very distressed, sad, and was referred by the University Hospital with indications of panic attacks, with symptoms that involve fear of dying, intensified by family relationships.

Entering into the analysis of the concrete situation related to hospitalization, Mary reports that her husband turned off his cell phone before the presentation and, as usual, forgot to call when they finished. When she turned on her cell phone the next day, she received the news that a very dear cousin of theirs had died. This puts the husband in a situation of intense emotional affectation, raising questions about their permanence in the project, considering returning to Minas Gerais for good. For Mary, her husband symbolizes a lifeline, her support, and when he is not well, she finds herself helpless and alone. The experience of being alone and helpless is something that is repeated in her affectations, suggesting a *knowing-to-be* based on these characteristics and guiding her choices to overcome this condition.

When faced with the possibility of ending the trip, returning to her hometown, the closeness to her mother and the conservative culture, Mary went into deep suffering. Intensified by the lack of sleep, instability in the project of the trip, the patient perceives her being and her project in threat and enters what was considered a panic attack. The identification of this element was crucial for the process of psychotherapy, considering that identifying and clarifying the *project-of-being* is also the role of the existentialist psychologist, as explored in the introduction of this work. From the analysis of the situation, the planning of the clinical management was built on the mother-daughter relationship, identifying that it was there that Mary's suffering originated.



But what does Mary's choice for this nomadic life mean? Wouldn't this be an escape from the demands and instabilities of family and motherhood and the consequences that this structure of family choice imposed on the understanding of oneself? She sought to find the world by escaping from herself and the demands of others, but what she found was an emptiness that she produced for herself. We can bring here Sartre's (1983) reflection on Roquentin, in the novel *Nausea*, when he discusses that the great meaning of the character's existence was "to live adventures". He crossed seas, left cities, climbed rivers, entered forests, but where had all this led him? What did these adventures add to you? Boredom and nausea surround him. The feeling of adventure, which guided Roquentin to the present moment of the novel, defined the meaning of his life, faded, "I have just discovered, for no apparent reason, that I lied to myself for ten years. Adventures are in books" (Sartre, 1983. p. 63). He realizes that stories, facts, incidents have happened, but not adventures, because these are simply ways of telling what happened to him, because what outlines the tone of the adventure is the way of narrating it. What we see appearing, therefore, and which helps us to understand the psychological disturbances experienced by Roquentin is that, in fact, what is at stake is his project-of-being. *Nausea* is just the psychophysical expression of this crucial questioning of your being: your whole life is in question, you look at your history and you don't recognize yourself anymore. The spontaneity that marked his history made him a "prisoner of passage", that is, without a place of his own, fleeing from affective references, without committing himself to a future. Roquentin looked at the mirror and did not recognize himself. What had he done with his existence? He felt empty (Schneider, 2011). These Sartrean reflections on Roquentin can help us understand the impasses of Mary, who in some way also became a prisoner of the passage.

THE MOTHER'S NARCISSISM AND THE IMPACTS ON THE DAUGHTER'S EXISTENTIAL TRAJECTORY

In 2019, Mary and her husband lived in the United States and she worked at a financial institution in the area of education. One of Mary's job duties was to plan and execute personal development events and, many times, she participated in the dynamics proposed for the hired professionals. One of these activities began with a regression meditation, in which participants were instructed to remember their experiences as children and from that memory, write a letter to a parent, which would be burned later. At the time of meditation, Mary remembered a passage from her childhood in which she cut her hand, which bled a lot, and she cried a lot, screamed for help, and no one came to help her, causing her to experience herself, for the first time, alone and helpless. Other memories of Mary's helplessness returned, mainly related to her mother. These memories put Mary in psychophysical affectation, with intense crying, shortness of breath, tightness in the chest and tremors throughout her body.



There was a Brazilian psychologist who tried to calm her down, and based on Mary's narrative about her life story, she suggested that her mother's behavior could be explained by narcissism, and that the narrated behaviors of extreme control, violence, inflexibility are consistent with the characteristics of narcissistic people. From then on, Mary began to study the conditions of narcissistic people, appropriating the *know-how to be* 'the daughter of a narcissistic mother'. What was once a thought that the mother had something wrong, began to be interpreted through the pathological look, related to narcissism. In the course of her informal research, Mary finds several pieces of information about narcissism, as well as a significant community of people who attributed similar suffering to hers because they related it to living with narcissistic people, increasing her certainty of being a 'daughter of a narcissistic mother' and its emotional consequences.

Narcissism represents, culturally, love for oneself. Theorists who study narcissism argue that people with these characteristics are more concerned with how they present themselves to others and society than with what they feel. They end up acting without feelings, without considering others and their needs, leading to a lack of empathy, focusing on their own interests, aiming to gain control of situations and maintain themselves in power in the context where they are inserted (Lowen, 2017). A review study on maternal narcissism discusses the effects of narcissistic psychological abuse that bring various consequences of long-term psychological and physical suffering to children, which can result in emotional trauma for both mother and child. It sheds light on the complex condition of maternal narcissism, highlighting individual and sociocultural aspects in its constitution, as well as highlighting that changes in society, such as social networks, have played a crucial role in the increase of this condition (Lima & Araújo, 2024). Mary sought several sources of information to delve into the damage of being the daughter of a narcissistic mother, and found the book entitled "Prisoners of the Mirror" by Engelke (2016), with which she established an identity by presenting many examples of situations in which Mary recognized herself, as highlighted below: "Because she owns her appearance, she is always giving her opinion about how you should wear your hair, or about the style of cut that looks best on you. You are forbidden to develop a style of your own." (Engelke, 2016, p. 33)

In session, Mary described episodes experienced with her mother, such as one in her mid-20s, when she already lived alone, worked and was financially autonomous, having cut her hair in an asymmetrical way, which she considered modern, feeling very good about the new aesthetic. The mother went to visit her and when she saw her daughter's hair, she said that the hair was "ridiculous and horrible, a thing of the devil and that her daughter could not wear her hair like that". He asked his older brother to hold Mary and cut his daughter's hair. Mary was deeply shaken by the violence perpetrated by her mother and experienced herself helpless again, as she relived several other experiences of moral violation that her mother caused, coming to the conclusion that she could only

live and be herself if she was away from her mother. This reflexive appropriation becomes a certainty of being for Mary and was the basis of her choice for a nomadic life.

Other characteristics brought as being of narcissistic people by the book are the lack of empathy, sense of entitlement, and above all the impossibility of making mistakes, as Engelke (2016, p. 106) points out that "you, the daughter of a narcissistic mother, learned to judge yourself through the behavior of her harsh words. The narcissistic critical voice has become yours and you have internalized the message that you are not good enough. Because he believes in his 'incompetence', he feels insecure and reluctant to believe in his own potential. Mary identified these characteristics in her daily life, and often reaffirmed in session that she experimented by questioning everything she does, not being good enough. When bringing it to the concrete, she exemplified situations of maintenance of the Kombi, which had different opinions from her husband, but did not speak because she did not trust that her ideas could be good and help improve the couple's trip.

This discomfort tends to disappear as soon as you turn your back on your narcissistic mother. Away from it, you are who you want to be. When in lively conversations with your friends and yes her presence or interference, you become the owner of your own story, describing events in your life with authority and confidence. His reports are based solely on his perception without being challenged or rectified by anyone. By identifying with whom you communicate, you connect with the moment and with other people in a genuine way (Engelke, 2016, p. 33).

Contrary to what the book points out, it is not always possible to choose one's paths just because one is away from one's mother, to the extent that current situations relive past experiences, by establishing noematic correlations, that is, objects - concrete or abstract - place the subject in the same experience of being emotionally strong already experienced (Schneider, 2011). The example that Mary instills is of a dilemma she was going through in her marriage, in which her husband constantly asked her to put her opinions in relation to the trip and the vehicle in which they lived, but she felt a great fear, experiencing herself judged by her mother, in a relationship in which nothing Mary manifested was accepted or validated.

By comparing the concept of narcissistic personality disorder from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, it is possible to identify the elements in common with the behaviors brought up in Engelke's book (2016), such as "a diffuse pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy" (American Psychiatric Association, 2014. p. 763). However, the role of existentialist psychology is not to foster a pathologizing posture, especially in third parties, but to understand within the history of these subjects conditions of existence that led them to be as they are, and how this affects the constitution of the subject in psychotherapy, as well as the relationship with others and with their own suffering.

Narcissism can be understood as the other's view of the subject's constitution, not in a pathological way, but as a form of manifestation of interpersonal relationships. As part of the

constitution of the subject, Sartre presents the dimension of *being-for-other*, in which he explores how self-consciousness is mediated by the perception of the other. By having this need for admiration, people with narcissistic traits place the responsibility for their value on the other, exempting themselves from the responsibility of valuing themselves (Sartre, 1987).

In the light of these situations brought by the patient, several intervention proposals were elaborated under clinical supervision, identifying that suffering comes from an emptying of being. Realizing that her choices are made from the mother figure, Mary no longer knew what was genuinely hers, and what she chose in an alienated way. Therefore, the therapeutic planning was presented with the objective of recovering Mary's autonomy through the appropriation of her choices. But first, let's discuss the existentialist understanding of family and maternal relationships.

EXISTENTIALIST REFLECTIONS ON FAMILY AND MATERNAL RELATIONSHIPS

The family is widely studied by Sartre in his theory of groups, as it plays the fundamental role of mediation between individuals and society. How this mediating process takes place is fundamental, because it can make people's project of being feasible or even, depending on the demands and relationships established, place themselves as unfeasible. Often a family can be corroded by an internal seriality, that is, its members are unable to weave their individual projects around a collective project, remaining a plurality of solitudes, forging serialized family structures. Therefore, most families end up not being able to constitute themselves as groups, but as a series (Schneider, 2011).

In the book "The Family Idiot", Sartre (1971) will work from Flaubert's biography, using the progressive-regressive method, to analyze the constitution of Gustave's project of being. In methodological terms, Sartre begins the progressive analysis, by rescuing the sociogenesis of Gustave's life story. To explain the socio-historical factors that engendered the constitution of the Flaubert cell in an integrated way, in which Gustave is the second child of the couple Archille-Cléophas and Caroline. The existentialist considers that in order to understand the dynamics of Flaubert's being and his psychological sufferings, it will be necessary to re-establish the structures of the Flaubert family in historical objectivity.

It describes the socio-anthropological conditions of the parents. The father is the son of a traditional rural family, linked to the Ancien Régime, imbued with feudal values, including maintaining the rights of primogeniture. But he is inserted in the context of the late eighteenth century, having gone to study medicine in Paris, becoming a great physician and surgeon, a liberal and contemporary man, who opposes aristocratic values, being a typical representative of the French petty bourgeoisie. On the other hand, Gustave's mother was heiress to an aristocratic family and brought her values in her way of life and in her affection.



The small Flaubert family would be undermined by this contradiction: it had instituted within it a rigidity of customs, typical of the aristocratic mentality, "pater familias" style, but with a need to adapt to modern, bourgeois values. All, however, must preserve the "Flaubert honor", the "pride" of belonging to this family. This cell will have a very consolidated, very integrated structure, with the maximum requirement of adaptation to the instituted norms, as an unquestionable absolute, offering no space for individual expressions (Schneider, 2011, p. 261).

Sartre (1971) then goes on to describe Gustave's relationship with his mother, establishing a possibility of parallel for reflections on the situation of the patient Mary. The biographical data demonstrate the fragility of Caroline's family relationships, described as an unloved child, as her mother died in childbirth and her father had difficulty raising her, without having dedicated himself to taking care of his daughter with affection, having died when the girl was ten years old. Raised from then on by her uncles, she always lived as a lonely person, bringing a bitterness in her way of being in the world. She dreamed of the origin of her maternal family, which was of the French nobility, and lived on past idylls and in contradiction with values brought by her own husband. Therefore, in her marriage, she dedicated herself more to her role as a mother than as a wife. His first son receives the official function of successor of his father and future head of the family, asserting the right of primogeniture, a value still of feudal origin. Then she ended up losing two sons, and began to desire a daughter. However, Gustave is born, in an experiential situation of fear of the loss of her child and non-acceptance of not having been a girl. Three years later, a daughter was finally born, who would also be named after her mother, Caroline.

This is the sociological atmosphere that gestated Gustave's existential birth in his early years. He will be raised by the hands of his mother, who offered him all the necessary care, with food, baths, initial education, but he was a cold, self-centered person and could not be affective in his love. The existentialist will discuss in detail how Caroline's personal history crosses Gustave's experiences of constitution, building her sensitivity, because "by treating him in an untender, cold, unaffectionate way, Gustave constitutes Gustave as a passive agent, making him intuit an 'inability to live'" (Schneider, 2011, p. 262), an experience very similar to that of the patient Mary studied here. Sartre will, however, deepen the discussion of the essential mediation of maternal care in the first years of a child's life, considering it the basis for the constitution of a person's future sensitivity:

When a mother breastfeeds or cares for her newborn, she does so with all the completeness of her being, which, of course, sums up in her person her entire life since birth. At the same time, she realizes a relationship that varies according to circumstances and individuals – in which she is the subject – and which many call 'maternal love'. I affirm that this is a relationship and not a feeling. (...) By this love and through it, by the person himself, skillful or clumsy, brutish or delicate, as his history has made it, the child is manifested to himself. That is to say, that she discovers herself not only by her exploration of herself (...), but that she apprehends her flesh by pressures, contacts, touches, mistreatment, or caresses. He begins to identify his body as violent, affable, contracted or light by the violence or affability of the hands that revealed him. (...) To begin with, he internalizes the rhythms and maternal works as qualities lived in his own body (Sartre, 1971: p. 435).

Reflecting on the mother/baby relationship serves as a foundation for understanding the psychological development of a child, placing itself at the basis for understanding Flaubert's dynamics of being, indicating that his mother's lack of love threw him into the passivity of being, the genesis of future psychological impasses and the basis of the future neurosis experienced by the writer. This child becomes insecure and the result of domestic tyranny, struggling in his verdict of being "the idiot of the family", for not responding to maternal and paternal demands and desires. He ends up building a resentment against his father, who placed him in the demand of being a true Flaubert, without him wanting and getting it. He ends up blaming his father for being responsible for his unhappiness, just as Mary did with her mother, as if they could escape from their responsibilities of their freedom and choice to be (Sartre, 1971; Schneider, 2011).

Sartre (1971) then proceeds to carry out a regressive analysis, descending to singular experiences, because beyond Gustave's social conditioning, which materialized as an "alienated spontaneity", it is necessary to verify what Flaubert did with what was done to him. Sartre goes on to discuss a second moment of this existential plot, arriving at the process that the existentialist of personalization, as he passes from his proto-history and enters, definitively, into his history. The structure of his family was internalized in attitudes and externalized in practices by which the child made himself what they made him. Constant totalization, which implies what the subject wishes to be (becoming) emerges as a response to the threat of detotalization, in the sense of what others have made of him and which thus requires a movement of retotalization, in the sense of doing something of what others have made of us (Schneider, 2011). But, as the existentialist points out, "without a doubt, no determination is imprinted on an existent without it surpassing it by its way of living" (Sartre, 1971, p. 653).

PROPOSAL FOR PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION

Among several clinical methods applied in existentialism, the progressive-regressive method stands out, which Sartre (2002) discusses in the book "A Question of Method", starting with a reflection on Marxist logic, and a critique of the subject's passivity in the face of his history. For the author, the subject is the product and producer of his own history, because while he is constituted as a being, within a pre-existing culture, he also modifies this culture, based on his choices, he builds an image of himself and of the other. And it is these others - and this subject - responsible for the world in which they live.

According to Bocca (2021), two moments of the progressive-regressive method can be highlighted: the first moment is the *analytical and regressive*, and aims to know a little about the history of this subject, his childhood, anthropological and sociological conditions in which he was inserted. The second moment is the *Synthetic and progressive*, and it is in it that the project-of-being

of this subject and the ongoing totalization in which it finds itself is recovered. These moments occur in a constant movement, analyzing the past to then help in understanding what causes suffering, because it is through the project that the human being defines himself, and in the threat or unfeasibility of it, that the malaise can be observed.

Therefore, one of the main objectives of the existentialist psychotherapeutic method is to elucidate for the subject his project and the impact of this on his choices, as well as the material circumstances that delimit the subject's freedom in the face of such choices. In addition, to understand the origin of suffering and the construction of conditions of existence that make their being viable, placing the subject as responsible for the construction and implementation of their project, encompassing the changes present in the movement of what is experienced. It is from action that each subject constructs his reality, and only by appropriating the ideas of his cogito and his project that these actions become effective (Schneider, 2011).

Thus, the initial clinical management was idealized based on this movement of analyzing situations from Mary's past that placed her in this knowledge and rescuing her project, aiming at the appropriation of her choices in the face of the needs that the experience impels. But in addition to the daily choices and appropriation of her being, another important intervention was to humanize this mother, taking her out of an abstract narcissistic role, placing her in a concrete situation, rescuing a little her history and the social and cultural conditions that led her to be who she is. Born in a patriarchal context in the interior of Minas Gerais, her mother had a very difficult life and Mary was able to observe how her mother being someone "selfish" and controlling may have been an invented way out of situations of vulnerability and suffering from her life experiences. Psychotherapy sought, therefore, to initially build an attitude of alterity, for her to recognize her mother as an other, with her singular history, her qualities and defects, differentiating herself from herself, in order to build a reciprocity, which is the ability to put oneself in the place of the other and understand the other's gaze.

Like Roquentin (Sartre, 1983), Mary perceives her emptiness of being through alienated choices, which aimed to escape from her original context and limited the critical appropriation of her project of being. The psychotherapeutic intervention started from this conclusion that the patient herself reached to assist in the identification and development of practices and knowledge based on what is hers. Understanding that subjects are also made of the denial of what generates discomfort is not always enough to understand the need to confront the contradictions of Mary's choices. In view of this, the subsequent clinical intervention was based on the rescue of the elements that, at first, were chosen in an authentic way and that could be the starting point for the elaboration of future potentialities.

Two significant elements emerged in her life, as an existential alternative: music and gastronomy, inherited from her maternal grandmother, and which was the reference of love and affection that she received during her life. Transforming this element into a work activity became a possibility when she met her husband, four years before starting the therapeutic process, because he was a musician and had worked in the area for many years. She says that when she is singing she forgets that she is that abandoned girl and manages to connect with the music, without thinking about anything else at that moment. Based on this statement, we encourage the development of more activities in which she experiences herself immersed in enabling experiences, aiming at a future with more possibilities of being.

DISCUSSION

During the course of psychotherapeutic care, several challenges arose, sometimes due to the specificity of the case, sometimes due to Mary's condition as a nomad. The need for online service encountered obstacles such as the quality of road connection and privacy, for example. These factors were overcome through the understanding of both the patient and the psychologist, through investment in the therapeutic bond, which is fundamental for the psychotherapeutic process to be successful.

The role of psychotherapy is also to question certainties and convictions brought by patients, because as Sartre (1987) provokes, it is necessary to find what the subject cannot stand, but considers unalterable. By considering something unalterable, the subject denies his freedom in the face of situations, entering into a process of acceptance of suffering. When Mary arrives in the process, stating that she is "the daughter of a narcissistic mother", she gradually understands that this definition is reductionist and that her life story brings much more complexity than just this profile of daughter.

Existentialism rejects any determinism, understanding that the subject is a constant totalization in progress and never encloses itself in a tendency, pathology or a *priori vocation*. It is through action that each person chooses to be, and this fixed and rooted essence does not exist. Thus, understanding that she is not condemned to be a daughter of a narcissistic mother was the first step to broaden her field of possibilities of being and to the critical appropriation of her choices. Because it brought a condition based on narcissism, there was no validation of other psychic dynamic dimensions of this mother, preventing the possibility of change in the relationship established with her.

The objective of humanizing the mother was to deconstruct the determinism of her behaviors, as being her only mode of existence. This movement opened the possibility for the relationship between mother and daughter to be re-elaborated, but always pointing out that this movement is

dialectical, that is, each action of Mary in relation to her mother is capable of resulting in small changes in the mother's behavior as well. Despite this deconstruction, the intention was never to romanticize the relationship between mother and daughter, reconsidering this label of narcissism was not intended to accept the violence and impositions perpetrated by the mother, but to place the daughter in a place of free subject, who should choose within the structure of choice that this maternal relationship provided or limited her.

Literature proved to be an important ally for Mary to realize that she is not the only one to go through this, it helped her to exchange experiences with other people and, above all, motivated her to seek help and take ownership of her possibilities of choice in the face of this relationship. However, this reading model limited Mary's ability to see herself and her mother as beings in a constant process of change, while existentialist psychotherapy, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of daily choices and personal responsibility in the construction of one's own being and in the dialectization of interpersonal relationships.

During the therapeutic process, there was a greater openness to maintaining this relationship with the mother, so that it was possible to verify the changes in the situation. The first context in which a positive change in this sense could be observed was in the receptivity of returning to Minas Gerais, in which she would see herself again in the presence of her mother and family. What was the main trigger for the crisis that led her to psychotherapy, at that moment became the possibility of putting into practice what was elaborated in the therapeutic process and meeting loved ones again, resignifying past experiences and rebuilding her bonds, especially with her younger brother.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Mary's case illustrates the complexity of family relationships and how identification with labels can both help and limit the psychotherapeutic process. The existentialist approach provided a space in which it was possible to question these fixed identities and explore new possibilities of being, taking into account their choices and responsibilities. At the conclusion of the therapeutic process, Mary realized that she was leaving this role of victim, was able to have deep conversations with her mother and realized that she was more aware of her choices.

Popularizing academic topics through different media, making them accessible to the general public, can have a beneficial effect of expanding knowledge. However, if this reading is not done critically, there is a risk of superficial and incorrect interpretations of certain topics, leading to inappropriate and simplistic practices. By understanding human complexity, existentialist psychotherapy contrasts ready-made answers and impersonal solutions, investigating in the construction of each subject elements that can be used as tools for the appropriation of their own being, in an authentic way.



The existentialist movement has been investing in the scientific contribution to the contextualized understanding of different phenomena, through case analyses and the publication of studies based on the scientific method. Sartre (1987) emphasizes the importance of understanding the subject as an ongoing totalization, constituting itself through its daily choices and responsibilities. For this, case studies are fundamental to identify, in clinical practice, theoretical concepts applied in praxis and how the methodology presents positive changes in the therapeutic process of each patient.

However, the obstacles of a teaching clinic service do not always allow it to be possible to deepen the therapeutic process, in view of the limitation of time and resources. However, existentialist psychotherapy brought significant changes not only in the relationship she established with her mother, but mainly with herself, how she saw herself in the world and how she chose herself towards her project of being. A process focused on questioning the deterministic view and appropriating her responsibilities allowed Mary to move away from the role of victim and understand what the possibilities are within this relationship.

The humanization of the mother, the appreciation of activities that bring well-being and the critical reflection on the literature consulted were key elements in the clinical management, providing Mary with the possibility of building herself beyond the initial labels and determinisms, and finding a private and liberating path. The role of psychotherapy is not to adapt to arbitrary means, but rather to put the power of her choices in Mary's hands, and to make her experience herself more and more in an engaged and authentic way.

With this, the nomadic way of life is no longer lived as an escape, she rediscovers the ties with her family roots, with her existential territory, although traveling to different places remains a project to live her life.



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