

Women and Love in the Clinical Treatment of Addiction

As Mulheres e o Amor na Clínica das Toxicomanias

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Abstract

From a psychoanalytic perspective, addiction can be understood as a response to the distress generated by castration, in which the subject establishes a particular relationship with the drug object, driven by the belief in a reunion with the lost object. In this relentless attempt to fill the lack, the subject may become immersed in what Freud conceptualized as the compulsion to repeat, confronting the pure culture of the death drive or, as Lacan suggests, a rupture with the little “pee-pee,” revealing a break with phallic jouissance. However, our clinical experience shows that when this phenomenon is approached and treated on a case-by-case basis, subjects also provide accounts that point in other directions. In the case of some women, for example, we observe that they occupy different positions: seeking their subsistence in the Other, they are faced with the imminent loss of the love object and with the impossibility of covering the Real through the fantasy of completeness pursued through love. As a result, they may make countless concessions, including drug use and, at times, involvement in criminal activities. In this context, the present article aims to examine the relationship between addiction, women, and the various forms of consent many offer to their partners in order not to lose love — or, more precisely, in order not to lose themselves.

Keywords: psychoanalysis, jouissance, toxicomania, women, love.

Resumo

A toxicomania pode ser pensada, sob a perspectiva da psicanálise, como um recurso diante do mal-estar suscitado pela castração, em que o sujeito se lança em uma relação particular com o objeto droga, na crença do reencontro com o objeto perdido. Nessa incessante busca por tamponar a falta, o sujeito pode acabar imerso no que Freud conceituou como compulsão à repetição, colocando-se frente à pura cultura da pulsão de morte ou, como sugere Lacan, frente ao rompimento com o pequeno “pipi”, revelando um corte com o gozo fálico. No entanto, nossa experiência mostra que, quando pensamos e tratamos essa clínica caso a caso, escutamos sujeitos que também nos fornecem outros relatos. No que se refere a algumas mulheres, por exemplo, verificamos que elas perpassam outros lugares: ao buscarem sua subsistência no outro, quando se deparam com a iminência da perda do objeto amoroso e com a impossibilidade de encobrir o real

com a fantasia da completude, visada por meio do amor, passam a fazer inúmeras concessões, incluindo o uso de drogas e, por vezes, alguns crimes. Nesse caminho, o presente artigo visa abordar a relação entre a toxicomania, as mulheres e os diversos consentimentos que muitas oferecem a seus parceiros para não perderem o amor ou, mais precisamente, para não perderem a si próprias.

Palavras-chave: psicanálise, gozo, toxicomania, mulheres, amor.

Resumen

La toxicomanía puede ser pensada, desde la perspectiva del psicoanálisis, como un recurso frente al malestar suscitado por la castración, en el que el sujeto se lanza a una relación particular con el objeto droga, en la creencia de un reencuentro con el objeto perdido. En esta búsqueda incesante por taponar la falta, el sujeto puede terminar inmerso en lo que Freud conceptualizó como compulsión a la repetición, situándose frente a la pura cultura de la pulsión de muerte o, como sugiere Lacan, frente a la ruptura con el pequeño “pipi”, revelando un corte con el goce fálico. No obstante, nuestra experiencia muestra que, al pensar y abordar esta clínica caso por caso, escuchamos sujetos que también nos aportan otros relatos. En lo que respecta a algunas mujeres, por ejemplo, se verifica que transitan por otros lugares: al buscar su subsistencia en el otro, cuando se enfrentan a la inminencia de la pérdida del objeto amoroso y a la imposibilidad de encubrir lo real mediante la fantasía de completitud, buscada a través del amor, pasan a realizar múltiples concesiones, incluyendo el consumo de drogas y, en ocasiones, la comisión de algunos delitos. En este sentido, el presente artículo tiene como objetivo abordar la relación entre la toxicomanía, las mujeres y los diversos consentimientos que muchas de ellas otorgan a sus parejas para no perder el amor o, más precisamente, para no perderse a sí mismas.

Palabras clave: psicoanálisis, goce, toxicomanía, mujeres, amor.

Résumé

La toxicomanie peut être pensée, du point de vue de la psychanalyse, comme une ressource face au malaise suscité par la castration, dans laquelle le sujet s'engage dans une relation particulière avec l'objet drogue, dans la croyance de retrouver l'objet perdu. Dans cette quête incessante pour pallier le manque, le sujet peut finir par s'immerger dans ce que Freud a conceptualisé comme la compulsion de répétition, se retrouvant face à la pure culture de la pulsion de mort ou, comme le suggère Lacan, face à la rupture avec le petit « zizi », révélant une coupure avec la jouissance phallique. Cependant, notre expérience montre que, lorsque nous pensons et traitons cette clinique au cas par cas, nous écoutons des sujets qui nous fournissent également d'autres récits. En ce qui concerne certaines femmes, par exemple, nous constatons qu'elles traversent d'autres situations: en cherchant leur subsistance auprès de l'autre, lorsqu'elles sont confrontées à l'imminence de la perte de l'objet amoureux et à l'impossibilité de masquer le réel par la fantaisie de la complétude, visée à travers l'amour, elles en viennent à faire de nombreuses concessions, y compris l'usage de drogues et, parfois, certains délits. Dans cette perspective, le présent article vise à aborder la relation entre la toxicomanie, les femmes et les divers consentements que beaucoup accordent à leurs partenaires afin de ne pas perdre l'amour ou, plus précisément, de ne pas se perdre elles-mêmes.

Mots-clés : psychanalyse, jouissance, toxicomanie, femmes, amour.

Psychoanalysis is a praxis that, since its creation by Freud, has been theorized from clinical practice. Therefore, when approaching the clinical treatment of addiction from a psychoanalytic perspective, it is necessary to consider the specific features of each subject's relationship with the drug object, highlighting the singular way in which the drug is incorporated into their drive economy.

To analyze drug use through Freud's work, we must focus on two key moments: first, in 1920, when Freud introduced the death drive in his second dual-drive theory; and second, in 1930, when he identified intoxication as one of the most effective, albeit crude, methods for coping with the discontents of civilization.

In this clinical field, although some subjects establish a specific relationship with the drug object in pursuit of drive satisfaction that corresponds to a position of jouissance, often a deadly one, we have observed that this does not apply to all subjects. In our clinical and institutional experience, many women's relationships with drugs unfold within dimensions that evoke the distinctions formulated by Freud when situating women in relation to castration and by Lacan when positioning them within the formulas of sexuation.

Lacan's rereading of Freud points to the inseparability of the unconscious and language. From this perspective, femininity and masculinity are understood as positions that are constructed and structured through the intervention of the signifier. There is no binary opposition but rather a sex and the Other sex. Beyond biological characteristics, these positions

correspond to distinct modalities of jouissance in relation to the phallus, assumed through language in response to lack and castration. This perspective highlights the absence of complementarity and symmetry between masculine and feminine jouissance and, consequently, points to the impotence of love in making two become One.

This proposition led Lacan to assert that there is no sexual relationship. Based on the differences between the positions subjects assume in relation to castration, we can identify distinct forms of jouissance operating in each field. By delimiting our object of inquiry to the relationship among addiction, women, and love, we encounter particularities that invite reflection on the concessions some women make within their relationships with romantic partners and on the role played by recourse to drugs.

The Clinical Treatment of Addiction

The inscription of language causes human beings to diverge from the natural condition in which animals exist, creating what Jorge (2002, p. 26) described as “an unbridgeable abyss,” since language introduces the dimension of lack, making total jouissance inaccessible and subjecting it to the laws of culture. Freud (1895/2020) described this operation in Project for a Scientific Psychology when discussing the condition of absolute helplessness into which the infant is born. In attempting to eliminate discomfort, the infant initially has only crying at its disposal, which necessitates the intervention of another human being. By hearing and interpreting the cry as an appeal, this other person comes to the infant’s aid, offering signifiers, such as hunger, and their corresponding objects, such as the breast as a source of nourishment. In doing so, traces are established of what Freud would later describe as a first experience of satisfaction, resulting from the discharge of excessive excitation within the organism. When a new excitation emerges, the infant projects that object into perception, hallucinating the breast as a means of obtaining relief from discomfort. Because hallucination alone is insufficient to eliminate the distress, the infant must return to crying until someone responds once again.

Freud’s emphasis on the prematurity of the human newborn, which exposes the infant to a condition of radical helplessness, is fundamental for understanding that this situation can only be transformed through the presence and investment of another person who, through care, speech, and desire, turns what was initially a piece of flesh into an erogenous and drive-invested body. The first apprehension of reality therefore becomes possible only through an external other who, by giving contour to the infant’s body, establishes an encounter that inserts the child into a chain, into a symbolic order, thereby creating the conditions through which the infant may come to recognize the world through a dialectic that includes the Other¹:

It is important to understand this because it also introduces the notion of investment (*Besetzung*, or cathexis) as it has sometimes been translated, which can only occur if there is investment energy, that which arises from the very necessity of life (*Not des Lebens*), the drive toward life. Certainly, it takes some time for the infant to realize that the hallucinated breast is different from the breast from which nourishment is actually obtained. However, once this distinction becomes possible, a certain group of experiences and memories stands out from the initial and unconscious psyche. This group is no longer regulated by the pleasure principle but rather by the reality principle, which allows the infant to distinguish, negate, and differentiate experiences through judgment. [...] What interests us here is the importance of alterity in both moments. Initially, the external stranger, the nearby person who assists the infant and whom Freud identified as the *Nebenmensch*, inaugurates in the young subject the complex of the Other, a crucial moment in the transition from an organism governed exclusively by the first law of psychic functioning to one also governed by the second law, the reality principle, and provides the developing subject with the conditions necessary to interact with the world into which they were born (Marques, Alberti & Mählmann, 2022, p. 536-537).

At a second moment, when discomfort reappears and a new offering becomes possible, the encounter can no longer be the same as the first. This point seems essential because a remainder persists and generates repetition through the attempt to recover what has been radically lost. Thus, while this constitutive relationship with the other saves the infant, it simultaneously entails subjection to the Other. Subjectivation operates along a double pathway: on the one hand, there is alienation to the desire of the Other and, consequently, to the field of language, allowing an escape from helplessness; on the other hand, a certain separation is required so that the subject’s own desire may emerge, even if this desire ultimately concerns the desire of the Other. Within the movement of alienation and separation:

[...] an extraction of the object takes place that belongs neither to the field of the subject nor to the field of the Other but rather to an intersection that points to the object as that which is lacking to both, making possible, through this very lack, the establishment of a bond with the Other (Calazans & Bastos, 2010, p. 249).

¹ It is worth remembering, with Lacan, the difference between other and Other. The other, the fellow, the external stranger, is a reference for the ego, because it is imaginary, a living being of the same species, but it is also the one who embodies the Other, a radical alterity insofar as the subject is determined by it, receiving from it their own message in an inverted form: “[...] it is in the Other that the unconscious, structured like a language, is located” (Lacan, 1968-69/2008c, p. 220). The Other emerges as a “function of speech” (1954-55/1985, p. 297), “place of the word” (Lacan, 1956-57/1995, p. 79), “the one who establishes and authorizes the play of signifiers” (Lacan, 1957-58/1999, p. 323), “place of the code” (Lacan, 1968-69/2008c, p. 50), being indicated by Lacan as an indispensable condition for the constitution of the subject.

Consequently, what becomes inscribed as a mark is not the object itself, such as the breast in the previous example, but rather the representation of the experience of satisfaction produced by the breast's capacity to reduce excessive excitation within the infant's organism. As a drive object, the object is always already lost:

A nostalgia links the subject to the lost object, through which all efforts of the search are exercised. It marks the rediscovery of the sign of an impossible repetition because it is precisely not the same object and could never be so (Lacan, 1956-57/1995, p. 13).

This premise places drive satisfaction within the order of partiality and leads Lacan to state that the subject's relationship to objects is, in fact, a relationship to the lack of an object: the object has no status and enters into function only in relation to lack (Lacan, 1956-57/1995, p. 67). A harmonious encounter with the object neither exists nor has ever existed. This premise is also present in *The Seminar, Book 5: Formations of the Unconscious*, in which Lacan (1957-58/1999) examines the constitution of the subject through the encounter with the Other, in whom the code is found and who receives the demand (Lacan, 1957-58/1999, p. 405). Faced with an offering, the infant may accept it and thereby consent to entering the field of the Other, eventually using these same codes to address demands back to the Other. Human beings survive only through this subtraction. This is their curse, a "consented curse" (Lacan, 1959-60, p. 362), enacted through the language that comes from the Other and constitutes the subject as lacking.

Demand, established through language and radically different from need, is characterized by containing an enunciation—a speech act that belongs to the dimension of alterity and to the code of the Other. As Quinet reminds us, in demand, there is always a request for the restoration of a status quo ante, a previous state of fulfillment that the subject supposes exists or once existed (2003, p. 88). Thus, insofar as it is addressed to the Other, demand is always a demand for love, since what the subject seeks through demand is the love presumed to be at stake when the Other responds.

At this point, a gap opens between what is demanded and what is received, between what is sought and what is obtained, and it is from this gap that desire emerges. The transformation of need into demand through the intervention of language gives rise to the inherent mismatch that remains in the subject's relationship with the Other, a mismatch ratified by desire and revealing the impossibility of completeness. Desire is lack. There is no equivalence or mirroring between what is requested and how the Other interprets it. The object offered will never coincide with the object imagined, and something will inevitably be lost. Therefore, desire, which is neither fully apprehensible nor articulable because it is not inscribed within the register of the signifier, can only be inferred insofar as it is articulated through demand: desire signified [...] by the existence and intervention of the signifier, that is, in part, alienated desire (Lacan, 1957-58/1999, p. 298).

If desire is what emerges in these intervals, "if it takes shape in the margin where demand is torn away from need" (Lacan, 1960/1998, p. 828), it will always elude capture because it remains as a residue of the signifying operation and presents itself as an enigma. Given the impossibility of anchoring it, Lacan (1960/1998) situates desire as the desire of the Other, appearing to the subject through the question: "Che vuoi? What does the Other want from me?" In the absence of a clear answer, the subject is confronted with anxiety—a crucial point in the clinical treatment of addiction. Before proceeding, however, we return to Freud's Project (1895/2020), this time through Lacan's reading in *The Seminar, Book 7: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959-60).

From Freud's text, Lacan extracts the concept of *das Ding*, an inassimilable remainder beyond meaning that results from the encounter with the Other:

Das Ding is that which—at the initial point, both logically and chronologically, of the organization of the world within the psyche—appears and becomes isolated as the strange term around which the entire movement of *Vorstellung* revolves, governed, as Freud shows us, by the regulatory principle known as the pleasure principle, linked to the functioning of the neuronal apparatus. It is around this *das Ding* that the entire adaptive process revolves, a process particularly characteristic of human beings insofar as symbolic processes are inextricably interwoven within it. [...] *Das Ding* must indeed be identified with *Wiederzufinden*, the tendency to rediscover that which, for Freud, grounds the human subject's orientation toward the object. This object, we should note, is never actually specified. [...] We also characterize it as a lost object. Yet this object was, in a sense, never lost, although its rediscovery remains the essential aim (Lacan, 1959-60/2008, p. 74).

Freud's 1920 text is also articulated with *das Ding*, but here through the concept of the death drive, a mute energy disconnected from the signifier and elevated by Freud to a primary position within psychic life. The death drive is characterized by an impulse toward immediate and complete discharge, i.e., a force of disengagement from life aimed at eliminating all tension and returning to the inorganic state. The introduction of this drive reorients Freud's work. Whereas satisfaction had previously been conceived as resulting from the reduction of excitation, in accordance with the pleasure principle, Freud now points to a realm beyond the pleasure principle, one that engenders repetition through a wager on recovering a prior state. Yet with each repetition, what becomes marked is a loss, an extra element, a more and more that no longer brings appeasement but rather *jouissance* (Marques, 2016, p. 48).

Although not explicitly formulated by Freud, the notion of *jouissance* appears at several points in his work as a form of pleasure derived from pain or, as he noted in 1920, as a greed for a different kind of pleasure (Freud, 1920/2020, p. 16). It is from these formulations that Lacan (1959-60) develops the concept of *jouissance*, articulating it with desire and *das Ding*, which enables him to understand the constitution of the psyche as a structure marked by loss and by attempts at recovery. Faced with the impossibility of completeness introduced by language—where no response is ever equivalent and no symmetry between the subject and the Other is possible—desire emerges as what remains, what is left over from the process of subtracting demand from need: $N - D = d$. In this framework, in the search for a reunion with an experience of satisfaction that is forever lost, the subject repeats, thereby producing a compulsion to repeat that propels them toward an excess beyond the pleasure principle: “the extreme of pleasure, insofar as it consists in forcing access to the Thing, is something we cannot bear” (Lacan, 1959-60/1997, p. 102).

Lacan (1962-63/2005) developed the concept of the object *a*, linked to a constitutive loss in the subject, to conceptualize the object-cause of desire. In *The Seminar, Book 10: Anxiety*, he presents object *a* as a trace indicating the repetition the subject engenders, a trace that moves and animates the subject in the pursuit of the impossible reunion with the originally missing object: object *a* comes to function as an index of the lost Thing [...] deceiving the subject by causing desire; a pure promise doomed to failure (Marques, 2016, p. 54). Although it operates as a driving force, object *a* cannot be separated from anxiety, as the clinical treatment of addiction clearly demonstrates.

Anxiety was addressed by Freud at two particularly important moments: first, in *Inhibition, Symptom and Anxiety* (Freud, 1926 [1925]/2020), and second, in the lecture *Anxiety and Instinctual Life* (Freud, 1933 [1932]/2020). In both texts, anxiety is conceptualized in contrast to fear. Freud argues that fear has an object, whereas anxiety does not. He further identifies the ego as the seat of anxiety and enumerates the situations of danger in which it arises: “the danger of psychic helplessness corresponds to the stage of ego immaturity; the danger of object loss (loss of love) corresponds to the dependency of the early years of childhood; the danger of castration belongs to the phallic stage; and finally, there is anxiety before the superego” (Freud, 1933 [1932]/2020, p. 82). Later in the same text, Freud adds the anxiety associated with bodily decline, that is, with the approach of death.

In all these situations, we observe the reactivation of the anxiety of helplessness at specific moments when the subject finds themselves in the position of the object. In other words, we observe anxiety arising from the subject’s objectification before the enigma of the Other’s desire. Lacan (1962-63/2005), in agreement with Freud, designates this as a signal of danger: “[...] more precisely stated, I say that the danger in question is linked to the ceded character of the constitutive moment of object *a*” (p. 352); i.e., [...] anxiety manifests itself as being complexly related to the desire of the Other [...] linked to my not knowing what object *a* I am for that desire (p. 353).

It is from this perspective that Lacan (1962-63/2005) situates the relationship between desire and anxiety. He states that not only is anxiety not without an object, but it most likely designates the deepest object, the ultimate object, the Thing. It is in this sense, as I have taught you to say, that anxiety is that which does not deceive (p. 338-339), insofar as it affects the subject’s *moi*—the projection of a surface—and attests to their position through a signal of threat, revealing a as the remainder abhorred by the Other (p. 133), that which should not appear but, if it does, compels and implicates the subject “in the most intimate part of themselves” (p. 191).

Thus, the subject who uses drugs in search of relief from anxiety attempts to eliminate helplessness itself and its various manifestations. Addiction therefore presents itself as a mode of response that temporarily—and this point must be emphasized—replaces the psychic elaboration required in the face of each of these situations. In an attempt to soothe the unbearable, the subject turns to consuming more and more doses because, in practice, the absence of the drug immerses them in anxiety. Consequently, while seeking a solution capable of plugging the anxiety generated by helplessness and by the enigma of the Other’s desire, the subject turns to drugs to suspend their suffering, only to become entangled in a mechanism that erases them as a subject.

Addiction may inscribe the subject within the promise of an absolute, seamless *jouissance*, leading the addict to believe that the lost object can indeed be recovered and that completeness and fulfillment are therefore attainable. As discussed earlier, there is something structural for every subject concerning the lack of the object. The drive objects (the breast, feces, gaze, and voice) merely veil the Thing, demonstrating that in every attempt at reunion these objects already stand in for something else. Nevertheless, the addict continues to presume that the encounter is possible, even though its impossibility is often expressed in their own speech.

This tendency to place oneself in increasingly dangerous situations—whether through escalating doses, mixing substances, or seeking and using drugs in trafficking zones exposed to conflicts between police and drug dealers or among rival factions in communities, alleys, and marginalized neighborhoods—points to an effect of *jouissance* that eliminates the possibility of confronting lack, misencounter, and suffering. In 1923, Freud argued that in some cases a disjunction of the drives occurs, resulting in the predominance of the pure culture of the death drive (Freud, 1923/2020, p. 54). In addiction, this pure culture can carry the subject away in their relationship with the drug (Alberti & Bastos, 2018, p. 212).

One example is Gabriel, a polysubstance user who sought treatment complaining about the effect he called a trip, which he could no longer achieve through drug use. Gabriel reported that life without drugs was almost always a bad trip and that, for this reason, he had been consuming larger quantities of drugs and experimenting with new combinations in an attempt to reach the desired effect. Failing to achieve it, he nearly suffered an overdose. Upon returning to treatment, however, he was able to state: “I’m afraid of dying, but I just wanted to feel that again, that trip that makes you forget everything [...] life doesn’t give me that.” Gabriel was right. The analyst’s role was to remind him that drugs had not provided that trip for a long time and almost certainly never would again. If he wanted to live, he would need to give up that trip in order to discover other ones in life.

Lacan (1961-62/2003) turns to a topological object, the torus, to explain repetition and the search for satisfaction. This object has no fixed form; rather, it consists of the very path traced by the circuits of demand, which establish a void at the center. It therefore represents a request that continually renews itself, attempting to recover the impossible while circling the emptiness created by the lack of the object of demand. Even when the torus closes and returns to its starting point, that point is no longer the original one. Repetition never repeats the same thing; it embodies the logic of the +1. A mark is left, and repetition seeks a path to recover that mark and relive the experience of satisfaction. Yet every time it appears to rediscover it—when in fact it never does—it encounters the mark as +1, the mark of difference that confirms the original experience as irretrievably lost. Repetition is therefore always beyond or short of what it seeks:

In this regard, I spoke to you about the significance we might conventionally attribute to two types of circular links insofar as they are privileged. The one that revolves around what may be called the generating circle of the torus, if it is a torus of revolution, **is capable of repeating itself indefinitely, in a certain sense both the same and always different.** It is well suited to represent for us signifying insistence, and particularly the insistence of repetitive demand. On the other hand, what is enclosed within this succession of circuits—a complete circularity, although entirely unnoticed by the subject—offers us a passive symbolism that is evident and, in a sense, maximally intuitive regarding what is contained within the very terms of unconscious desire, since the subject follows its paths and routes without knowing it (Lacan, 1961-62, unpublished manuscript, emphasis added).

In the clinical treatment of addiction, it is common to hear that as drug use intensifies, many subjects progressively sever their ties—with family, friends, and work—isolating themselves in a movement that may ultimately annihilate them. There is therefore a form of *jouissance* capable of placing the subject outside discourse, creating a kind of short circuit. According to Lacan (1975-76), drugs break the marriage with the phallus, with the little “pee-pee”; that is, they break with phallic *jouissance*. In such cases, we encounter subjects like Danilo who, during the most severe phase of his drug use, rented what he called “stinking cubicles in fifth-rate dumps in downtown Rio,” referring to hotel rooms where he spent days consuming drugs without even knowing whether anyone else had been there with him. Danilo suffered a cocaine overdose in 2018, the year his father died and shortly before the death of his mother, who was in the terminal stage of cancer. Determined to stop using drugs, he has remained abstinent ever since. Yet he still insists that he must stay away from all drugs: “I want them every day, but if I start again, I’ll go all the way. I only stop when everything is gone, when there’s nothing left of me. Last time, there was almost no life left. So every day it’s just for today.”

In *Femininity and Drugs in Contemporary Society*, Prates (2007), revisiting Lacan (1975-76), reminds us that in order to speak of a rupture with phallic *jouissance*, there must first be something already established, something consolidated; an inscription within phallic *jouissance* is required. In the feminine field, however, what we find from the outset is an “open” relationship within this marriage to the phallus—a hole. Thus, while the clinic presents numerous examples of subjects who use drugs to produce such a rupture, it is important to remember that this is not the only possible pathway. This point leads us toward the clinical treatment of addiction through the cases of certain women who establish a highly specific relationship with drugs.

Women and Love

In “On Narcissism: An Introduction” (1914/2020), when discussing the differences in object-choice between men and women, Freud teaches that:

Women, strictly speaking, love only themselves, with an intensity comparable to that of the man who loves them. Their need is not satisfied by loving, but by being loved, and they become attached to the man who satisfies this need (Freud, 1914/2020, p. 85-86).

Returning to the topic of narcissistic love, Lacan adds:

Love is distinguished from desire, understood as the limit-relation established between every organism and the object that satisfies it. This is because its aim is not satisfaction, but being. That is why one can speak of love only where the symbolic relation exists as such. [...] Love, the love of the one who desires to be loved, is essentially an attempt to capture the other within oneself, within oneself as object (Lacan, 1953-54, p. 314).

As his theory developed, years after the 1914 text, Freud distinguished the paths of the Oedipus complex in boys and girls in “The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex” (1924/2020). In this text, he presents the meaning of castration as a metaphorical operation that, in the face of the perception of lack in the maternal field, allows symbolization by the subject through either the threat or the recognition of loss. Moving further, in the lecture on “Femininity,” Freud (1933/2020) explains that at this moment the girl, upon encountering the deprivation of the phallus, distances herself from the mother out of hatred and shifts her libido toward the father. In this context, Soler emphasizes that:

A woman is one whose phallic lack incites her to turn toward the love of a man. First it is the father, himself the heir to a transformation of the love originally directed toward the mother, and later the spouse. In short: upon discovering herself deprived of the penis, the girl becomes a woman when she expects the phallus – i.e., the symbolized penis – from the one who has it (Soler, 2005, p. 26).

According to Freud, girls accept castration as an accomplished fact (Freud, 1924/2020, p. 186), and therefore do not experience anxiety in the same way as boys. In addition, Lacan emphasizes that the essence of woman does not lie in castration (Lacan, 1971-72/2012, p. 45), since for women this incidence falls upon the threat of losing love, which also becomes a source of anxiety, of the most primitive anxiety of helplessness, with the loss of the love of the Other prevailing: it is in love that a woman, whether hysterical or obsessive, seeks her subsistence. Without the love of the Other, she does not fear losing a valuable object; she fears losing herself, swallowed up by non-being (Ribeiro, 2011, p. 163).

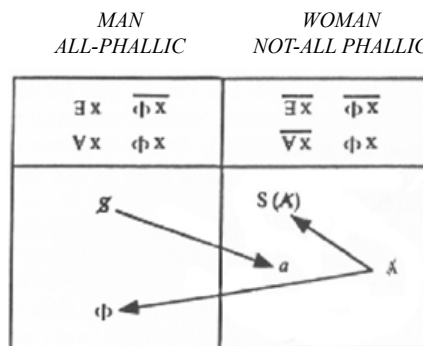
It is essential to emphasize that, for both Freud and Lacan, masculine and feminine are not reduced to man or woman in biological terms. Freud examines the differentiation between masculine and feminine in the psychological sense—activity and passivity—the biological sense, and the sociological sense, in an important note added in 1915 to the section entitled “The Differentiation Between Men and Women,” included in “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” (1905/2020). Lacan advances Freud’s theory through the duality of “having or being,” situating the feminine question as “being the phallus,” that is, being what is lacking in the Other. Thus, in *The Seminar, Book 20: Encore* (1972-73/2008) and in “L’Étourdit” (1973/2003), Lacan addresses masculine and feminine positions through the formulas of sexuation and states that any speaking being is inscribed on one of the two sides. The same subject may therefore alternate between one side and the other, although one side will tend to be privileged. He reiterates that this division corresponds to the subject’s position in discourse, that is, to the way the subject is inserted into the phallic function:

Between what symbolically founds the argumentative function of the terms man and woman, there persists the gap of the indeterminacy of their shared relation to jouissance. They are not defined in relation to it according to the same order (Lacan, 1971-72/2012, p. 44).

From this disproportion, Lacan reminds us that while man takes woman as object *a* in fantasy, that is, as the object-cause of desire, the story is different for women. Women may also relate to the object at the level of fantasy, but there is something beyond this: a supplementary jouissance that overflows, an Other jouissance that implies the lack of a signifier in the Other and that, although related to phallic jouissance, is not restricted to it. Leader (2023, p. 131) adds that, at a purely formal level, Lacan linked feminine sexuality to an oscillation, that is, to “the implication of a bond not only with a man, sometimes, but also with the points at which the symbolic does not respond.”

Figure 1

Quantum Formulas of Sexuation



Fonte: Lacan (1972-73/2008, p.105).

Through the quantifier formulas, Lacan shows that logic bears the mark of the sexual impasse. While the subject is caused by object a ($\$ \rightarrow a$), woman directs her desire toward the phallus ($\mathcal{A} \rightarrow \Phi$). Thus, object a appears as the remainder of $\mathcal{A}$, for where the Other is barred, where Woman does not exist, or where her existence is a woman's dream (Lacan, 1971/2009, p. 69), the subject places her as the cause of his desire, which represents an act incited in either a fetishistic or erotomanic manner (Marques, 2016). For the man, the partner bears a phallic mark insofar as, as the chosen object, the partner appears in the place of the phallic signifier, $\Phi(a)$; through this path, masculine desire bets on plugging the lack in the Other. Thus, in the fetishistic form, desire prevails, since men's act of love is the polymorphous perversion of the male, through which one sees that phallic women situated beyond the 'you are my woman' by which he constitutes the partner, confirm that what emerges in the subject's unconscious is the desire of the Other (Lacan, 1960/1998, p. 742). Therefore, the satisfaction of having an object not only appeases his castration anxiety but also confirms his position on the masculine side of the partition of the sexes. By designating the partner with "you are my object of desire," he receives, in return for this message, the soothing confirmation that he himself is the man of that object-partner.

For women, on the other hand, what is at stake is the desire for the phallus, which, in its erotomanic form, bets on the partner as the one in whom she will find the signifier of her desire, the only one capable of responding to her lack: $\mathcal{A}$. It is from this point that the demand to be loved emerges. This demand is not reduced to the request "tell me that you love me"; rather, it extends to the various concessions she makes to the partner. These concessions are always anchored in the question "does he/she love me?", a veil that covers her fundamental motive: the enigma of the feminine, the Other that she is to herself (Marques, 2016).

Because there is no sexual relationship, given the impossibility of complementarity inherent in the differences identified by Lacan, love comes to function as a substitute. In other words, faced with the incidence of the Real and the impossibility of completeness, the subject resorts to the imaginary of love in an attempt to cover over lack. Thus, if we consider that women, on the one hand, turn toward the phallus, through which the man serves as a connector, and, on the other hand, turn toward $S(\mathcal{A})$, i.e., toward what is lacking as a signifier in the Other and is empty of meaning, would not the fear of being swallowed up by nonmeaning be the reason they privilege the position of being loved?

Women and the Clinical Treatment of Addiction

In our clinical and institutional experience in mental health services and care settings for people who use drugs², the difference between what teams say about male and female patients in meetings and case discussions is noticeable. Regarding men, the discourse is consistent with what they themselves report, since the severity of many cases is almost always delimited by stories that repeatedly involve financial losses and the rupture of social ties due to drug abuse. Regarding many women, however, it is common to hear teams express discomfort: "they are much more difficult"; "they talk too much"; "they demand attention all the time"; "they disrupt groups, come in and out, speak loudly, threaten to throw themselves in front of buses"; "they lie down on the sidewalk saying they want to die and only come inside after hours of intervention"; "we do not know what it is, we only see the confusion and noise when they arrive." These demands also carry an address that, in such cases, is situated within the transference bond. Addressed to the team, their words, acts, and noise must be worked through so that, from there, we can extract what is singular in each woman's story, allowing them to be told one by one.

When we listen to these patients, we perceive that the relationship with their romantic partners and/or with their sons is a predominant factor in their discourse. This relationship can be observed in the case excerpts presented below, which aim to demonstrate what can be drawn from our hypothesis. Ana, 24 years old, a patient at a CAPS ad, reported that she had been very restricted by her father during childhood and early adolescence: "The only day I went out for a friend's birthday, I met my husband and, a month later, I ran away with him. He said he worked in commerce, but it was a drug-dealing spot. Before I knew it, I was there with him, using, selling, and carrying drugs. I was arrested twice, while he was with the whole favela, but to this day I can't separate from him, even though he cheats on me, beats me, and gets me into trouble. Just thinking about it, I feel like I'll die if he leaves."

Vilma, a 60-year-old woman, sought help at CAPS ad for one of her sons, who used cocaine, and reported that, in addition to this son, her husband and eldest son were also users and had already been involved in drug trafficking. According to Vilma, she only discovered her husband's involvement in trafficking after they had been married for more than 10 years and had 5 children: "I always knew he drank and liked marijuana; he even kept it at home. But when the police raided my house looking for him, I found out that the bar where he worked was a drug-dealing spot. I almost died! But what could I do when I already had 5 children with him? It was his money that supported the house. I was a cleaner, and with so many children I couldn't work every day." Some time later, Vilma's husband was killed in a confrontation with traffickers from a rival faction, and her eldest son was arrested. Vilma gave this son more than half of her monthly income so that he could

² The experiences in question refer to work carried out in Mental Health Outpatient Clinics and in Psychosocial Care Centers for Alcohol and Other Drugs (CAPS ad).

“pay for his life in prison.” These amounts referred to the purchase of personal items, a cell phone, and drugs. When questioned, she said: “What do you expect me to do? I already lost my husband to trafficking; I can’t lose my sons too! Being in prison has a cost: everything there is paid for and expensive. We pay so that he stays alive. I learned that when my husband was arrested. I already lost my husband, but if I lose my sons, I’ll have nothing left.”

Camila was 19 years old when her father died of cirrhosis. She studied music, a craft taught to her by her father, and played in bars, which led to many arguments between her and her mother. Unlike her father, until the moment of his death, Camila had never drunk alcohol; afterward, however, she began drinking, and this quickly became abuse. In the first analytic interview, she said: “I wanted to know what it was that killed my father, so I started drinking spirits, because that was all he liked: cachaça, brandy, rum, and others.” When the analyst asked whether it was not already clear what had killed her father, Camila continued: “He was the only thing that kept me away from my mother’s craziness. She is abusive, invasive [...] do you think he drank for no reason? He wanted to be a musician, but she made his life so hellish that he gave up. If I no longer had him, I would have his drink [...]. It was that or be swallowed up by my mother.”

The book *What Is Mass Incarceration?* (Borges, 2018) supports our clinical observations by analyzing data on women in prison. Regarding the classification of crimes committed, 62% of cases fall under drug trafficking. In addition, in most cases, women are arrested during operations whose primary target is a male family member. Reports of imprisonment for transporting or storing small quantities of drugs at the request of these family members, especially partners and sons, are common. The data also indicate that, in 95% of cases, there are reports that the women were using drugs at the time of the arrest. Another important reference is the documentary *If I Didn’t Have Love* (Chaves, 2013), in which Geysa Chaves portrays the women’s penitentiary Tavera Bruce, in the Bangu Complex. According to the data presented, nine out of 10 women were serving sentences for involvement in crimes committed by their husbands, partners, or boyfriends. The film follows the stories of five women who, one by one, narrate the concessions they made in order not to lose their partners’ love.

According to Prates, the impossibility of a naming that would say Woman leaves an enigma: this lawless one ‘who has no government and never will’ means that ‘A woman’ always escapes and is never where one believes she can be found (Prates, 2007, p. 51). It is because of her connection with the barred Other of language, $S(A)$, and because of the lack of a signifier that would say A woman and affirm the existence of the exception, that Lacan declares that A woman does not exist: If woman is not all, it is because her *jouissance* is double (Lacan, 1971-72/2000, p. 101).

Still following Lacan’s reasoning, we recall that there is something of the order of madness in women when it comes to love, since

The universal of what they desire is madness: all women are mad, as people say. That is precisely why they are not all, that is, not wholly mad, but rather conciliatory, to the point that there are no limits to the concessions each one makes to a man: of her body, of her soul, of her possessions (Lacan, 1973/2003, p. 538).

In light of this, can we affirm that, among the concessions a woman may make to a man in order not to lose his love, even the use of a resource that brings her close to death—such as drug use, trafficking, and other crimes—may be included? In the clinical treatment of addiction, as already mentioned, we see the subject resort to a means of dealing with the distress generated by castration, which places them in a particular relationship with the drug. Anchored in the belief in a reunion with the object that has always already been lost and in the incessant attempt to plug the lack and anxiety that return from this impossibility, the subject is, in many cases, marked by a rupture with phallic *jouissance*. However, as we trace the paths of the feminine, we perceive that some women, when faced with the loss of the love object—an object that throws them back into the impossibility of covering the Real with the fantasy aimed at through love—find themselves traversed by anxiety and devastation. Thus, in the face of the countless concessions made in order not to lose love, in the relationship between women and addiction, the substance to which we refer does not seem to be the drug, nor even crime, but rather the very subsistence of these women, with love functioning as the resource that emerges from the fear of non-being.

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