Hate speech in the psychoanalytic clinic
O discurso de ódio na clínica psicanalítica
El discurso de odio en la clínica psicoanalítica

This is a narrative review carried out between 2018 and 2020, influenced by the global context. It aims to analyze hate speech phenomena and their manifestations in conjunction with the psychoanalytic theory, as well as clinical management. From the perspective of the Freudian theory, the possible unconscious motivations of those who use hate speech are explored and an attempt is made to identify its impact on the mental health of their targeted individuals. Three thematic areas are brought into the debate, namely: Hate speech in society, Hate speech and the psyche, and Hate speech in the psychoanalytic clinic. There are countless examples of hate speech throughout history, which do not seem to lose power even in a social scenario in which they are widely questioned and condemned. Its persistence is justified in the Freudian hypotheses about destructive impulses inherent to human beings, their resources for identification, and their narcissistic motions. Psychoanalytic theory brings to light the origins of the human desire for destruction and reveals an unpalatable notion: it is not possible to fully rid oneself of that desire. Psychoanalysis allows individuals to find healthier ways to channel these narcissistic impulses, identifications and motivations, seeing as their exacerbation can potentially cause psychic illness - in addition to the possibility of culminating in the real annihilation of these many “others”.

Descriptors: Psychoanalysis; Aggression; Hate; Psychological distress.

Esta é uma revisão narrativa realizada entre 2018 a 2020, por influência do cenário mundial, com o objetivo de analisar os fenômenos de discurso de ódio e suas manifestações em articulação com a teoria psicanalítica, bem como o manejo no âmbito da clínica. À luz da teoria freudiana, exploram-se as possíveis motivações inconscientes daqueles que proferem o discurso do ódio e busca-se identificar seus impactos na saúde psíquica de seus alvos. Três áreas temáticas são trazidas para o debate, a saber: O discurso de ódio na sociedade, Discurso de ódio e psiquismo e O discurso de ódio na clínica psicanalítica. São inúmeros os discursos de ódio ao longo da história, que não parecem perder potência mesmo diante de uma realidade social em que são amplamente questionados e condenados. Essa persistência do discurso se encontra justificada nas hipóteses freudianas sobre os impulsos destrutivos inerentes ao ser humano, seus recursos de identificação e suas moções narcísicas. A teoria psicanalítica traz à luz as origens de desejo humano de destruição e revela uma constatação indigesta: não é possível se livrar completamente desse desejo. Por meio da psicanálise, tem-se a busca por saídas mais saudáveis a esses impulsos, identificações e motivações narcísicas, já que sua exacerbação é potencialmente causadora de adoecimento psíquico – além de poder culminar na real aniquilação desses tantos “outros”.

Descritores: Psicanálise; Agressão; Ódio; Angústia psicológica.

Esta es una revisión narrativa realizada entre 2018 y 2020, por influencia del escenario global, con el objetivo de analizar los fenómenos del discurso de odio y sus manifestaciones en articulación con la teoría psicoanalítica, así como el manejo en el ámbito clínico. A la luz de la teoría freudiana, son exploradas las posibles motivaciones inconscientes de quienes emiten discursos de odio y se trata de identificar sus impactos en la salud psíquica de sus destinatarios. Se aportan al debate tres áreas temáticas, a saber: El discurso de odio en la sociedad, Discurso de odio y el psiquismo y El discurso de odio en la clínica psicoanalítica. Existen innumerables discursos de odio al largo de la historia, que no parecen perder potencia ni siquiera ante una realidad social en la que son ampliamente cuestionados y condenados. Esta persistencia del discurso se justifica en las hipótesis freudianas sobre los impulsos destructivos inherentes al ser humano, sus recursos de identificación y sus conductas narcisicas. La teoría psicoanalítica saca a la luz los orígenes del deseo humano de destrucción y revela una constatación indigesta: no es posible deshacerse completamente de este deseo. A través del psicoanálisis, se buscan salidas más sanas a estos impulsos, identificaciones y motivaciones narcisistas, ya que su exacerbación es potencialmente causa de enfermedad psiquica - además de poder culminar en la aniquilación real de tantos “otros”.

Descripciones: Psicoanálisis; Agresión; Odio; Distrés psicológico.

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INTRODUCTION

Hate speech permeates the history of mankind with remarkable persistence and universality, taking different shapes according to the most prominent issues of each time or scenario, but always based on analogous principles, whereby its targets are seen as a threat that needs to be eliminated.

It is revealed, therefore, as one of the manifestations of the destructive impulses that Freud has long identified as inherent to human nature, representing a hindrance to life in society. However, contrary to religious and popular belief, which tend to preach love to others as a moral obligation, Freud postulated that these aggressive impulses, paradoxically, also have a degree of importance for the maintenance of the subject’s own integrity, making the path to love for others more tortuous than one may think\(^1\).

Culture and the various forms of relationship that mark the insertion of human beings in civilization affect the subject’s intrapsychic experience, whereas aspects inherent to the psyche not only guide subjective reality, but can manifest into social phenomena\(^1\). Therefore, a dialectical relationship between the subject and their surroundings is revealed.

In any form, hate speech is rooted in unconscious motivations. It is therefore reasonable to consider that such motivations can be revealed on the psychoanalytic couch, as well as their effects on the subjectivity of their targets - especially when one considers that these targets tend to belong to systematically harassed social groups, potentially resulting in psychic suffering specific to this experience.

Considering the patent contemporaneity of hate speech, it is relevant to explore how subjects can be motivated or affected by it and, from that, explore ways to approach the phenomenon in the context of the psychoanalytic clinic. The purpose of this paper is to analyze hate speech phenomena and their manifestations through the lens of the psychoanalytic theory, and management within the scope of the clinic.

METHOD

This is a narrative review of the psychoanalytic theory, for an exploration of the social phenomenon known as hate speech and clinical experiences resulting from it.

It begins with a description of the concept of hate speech, identifying its most common understandings in society and citing a number of historical examples for contextualization purposes. Through the lens of Freudian theory, the possible unconscious motivations of those who use this form of speech are explored, and an attempt is made to identify its impacts on the psychological health of their targets.

For this, it uses concepts such as primary narcissism and death drive, as well as Freudian writings addressing collective phenomena, such as *Civilization and Its Discontents*\(^1\) and, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*\(^2\), with contributions from contemporary authors as well. It also brings up issues pertaining to the psychoanalytic clinic and the role of the analyst in the face of hate speech or its effects.

This study was developed in mid-2020, considering the blatant escalation of hate speech around the globe, with emphasis on the global political events witnessed throughout the decade of 2010.

RESULTS

This review is supported by 21 references and brings three debate topics, namely: *Hate speech in society, Hate speech and the psyche* and *Hate speech in the psychoanalytic clinic*. 

DISCUSSION

Hate speech in society

The term "hate speech" is dictionarized in the English language, having become a universally discussed concept. The Oxford dictionary of the English language defines it as "Abusive or threatening speech or writing that expresses prejudice on the basis of ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or similar grounds".

In a report prepared for a conference on the subject at the Council of Europe, a European organization dedicated to the defense of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, McGonagle provides the following explanation:

all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, antisemitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including: intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin.

In Brazil, an official journal of the Federal Senate defines the potential targets of hate speech as: "political opinion [...], socioeconomic position, educational level [...] genetic characteristic, state of physical or mental health [...] or any other condition".

These definitions reveal that hate speech does not constitute random attacks. It aims at specific targets, usually selected because of their differences from the speaker, and arises from narratives that are built to justify, albeit in a delusive and exclusivist manner, the oppression of such targets. These narratives are guided by forms of extremism and intentionality that are elusive to the common variety of expressions of human affects.

The ideals that support hate speech are woven into the social fabric, determining the way certain groups, organized or not, act in society. Thus, the affect "hatred" is materialized through language as a set of values, entering the symbolic register that dictates both the relationships between subjects and what they each believe to be capable of tolerating.

A classic historical example is the hatred fostered against various social groups in the Nazi regime (paradigmatically, the Jewish people, but also the Romani, Polish, Soviet, Asian and other peoples, as well as the physically and mentally disabled, homosexuals, mixed-race individuals, and others), which saw them as a major threat to be fought against. This idea was supported and repeated ad nauseam in the speeches of its leaders. The Third Reich revealed how this type of speech can quickly leave the field of affects and materialize in the reality of everyday life, including in the form of legislation.

In recent Western history, other emblematic cases of rules and laws actively supported by hate speech include the Jim Crow laws in the United States and Apartheid in South Africa, both regimes that enacted social segregation of black people and other persons of color, depriving them of basic rights guaranteed to the white population and subjecting them to countless episodes of violence.

There are also countries that consider homosexuality a crime, even subject to the death penalty, or that limit the rights of their homosexual citizens, such as prohibiting same-sex marriage and the adoption of children by same-sex couples. Hate speech against foreigners is also frequent, especially in the face of immigration waves, having gained momentum in recent years - with emphasis on attacks against Islamic citizens, which has been broadly referred to as Islamophobia.

Many other examples of hate speech could be cited. However, these suffice to demonstrate the common thread present in its rhetoric: non-white races would represent a "threat to the 'natural' supremacy of whites"; homosexuality would represent a "threat to the perpetuation of the species"; women would represent a "threat to the superiority of men"; immigrants would "end our jobs and destroy our homeland"; and so on. Therefore, a typical paranoid logic is evident.
Hate speech and the psyche

In Freudian theory, hatred emerges as a primary affect for the subject’s own constitution, gaining power during a phase of the baby’s life in which the external world is experienced as a threat to survival, intituled “primary narcissism”. In this phase, the baby invests all of their libido (vital energy) in themselves, a psychic movement that allows them to perceive themselves as individuals. However, such excessive narcissistic investment makes the outside world seem extremely strange and threatening, and so they hate it.

Freud says in Instincts and Their Vicissitudes: “we feel ‘repulsion’ for the object and therefore hate it; this hatred can afterwards be intensified to the point of an aggressive inclination against the object – an intention to destroy it”, the object being that which is part of the external world. As such, hatred comes before one’s ability to love, which is developed when the subject begins to introject objects into their own psyche. With this introjection, the external world is no longer seen as completely uncanny, dividing itself into “a pleasant portion (introjected) and an uncanny portion”. This dynamic creates an ambivalent relationship between love and hate that will persist throughout the subject’s life.

The concept of death drive is subsequently developed as unconscious motions characterized by their constant pursuit of repetition, encompassing the aggressive dispositions of the psyche. The primary goal of these motions would be the elimination of tension and psychic disturbances; consequently, every human being would have an innate aggressive disposition that is important for their survival. From then on, psychoanalytic theory starts to consider a dynamic relationship between life drive and death drive, in addition to narcissistic movements.

Green, on the other hand, suggests that primary narcissism can be thought of not only as a phase of the human constitution that, after being completed, is fully overcome, but as a psychic resource that remains “active” throughout life, to a greater or lesser extent. It would thus be a condition that never, in fact, leaves the subject: a structure, and a defense prior to repression, supported by the notion, presented in The Ego and the Id, that everything that all original aspects of the psyche never cease to be a part of it.

Thus, the psychic mechanisms inherent to primary narcissism would always be available for the processes of drive attachment, and could serve the destructive tendency of the death drive as an intention to “destroy” objects perceived as strange. The paranoid fantasy on which hate speech is rooted points precisely to this “strangeness” between subject and object, revealing an inability to sustain the differences present in intersubjective relationships, or, in other words: “the social treatment removes equality and installs strangeness.”

Hate is perpetuated as a mediator of pacts formed in the social fabric, based on narcissistic identifications, alluding to the most primary aspects of the psychic apparatus, which elucidates the persistence of hate speech throughout history, as it requires both an excess of identification with similar ones as an excess of distress in the light of differences. Through these pacts, groups come together to preach or carry out the extermination of others who, in their fantasy, threaten their existence and integrity.

Hate speech in the psychoanalytic clinic

Two main spectrums of manifestation of hate speech in the clinic can be pointed out: the subject who propagates the speech and the subject who is a victim of it. This categorization does not mean that one subject cannot play both roles, especially considering the structural nature of the rationality of this discourse in society and the complexity of the psychic manifestation of hatred. These two poles are considered in this study for the purpose of better understanding.

Considering these two spectrums, one must consider that individuals who strongly identify with more structured and circumscribed forms of hate speech, especially those linked to group organizations, probably constitute a smaller portion of the people who seek the help of a psychoanalyst. This may be due to the fact that psychoanalysis itself is the target of some
of these groups (it was not by chance that books written by Freud were burned by the Nazi regime), as well as the fact these individuals usually obtain great narcissistic satisfaction from this identification, based on a sense of belonging that leaves no room for self-questioning.

In Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, it is postulated that groups end up playing an integrating role for the subject, insofar as the investment of psychic energy destined for external objects is directed at the group relationships, reinforcing narcissistic investments. The discharge of drives that this subject obtains from violent speech and actions, as well as from relationships of identification, may end up masquerading any type of suffering or limitation resulting from the inability to bond with others, tolerate differences and preserve alterity.

Still, should they chose to work through their issues on a psychoanalyst’s couch, analysis will offer them the opportunity to form healthier relationships of identification, sublimating their destructive instincts, and identifying the fragility and unfeasibility of some ideals, seeking to pave paths towards ideals of self and the other that will bring less obstacles to their own life and their life in society.

This will not be possible if the psychoanalyst is attached to the popular belief that reinforces superegoic conflicts, such as the demand to love thy neighbor as a moral obligation. In other words, the idealization of human nature as inherently kind creates “disruption in the face of the rhetoric of hatred”, which can mar the listening with judgment.

In these cases, the psychoanalyst would certainly also need to be aware of manifestations of destructive impulses within transference, and some personal aspects may play a larger role than with patients who do not have a particular appreciation for this type of discourse. As such, how would the transferential relationship be established between a black psychoanalyst and an analysand strongly identified with racist views?

In the other spectrum - individuals who are targeted by violent speech -, one can think that, if psychoanalysis postulates that human beings become subjects by way of the gaze of other subjects, hate speech shows that this gaze can be filled with negativity. Even if not accompanied by violent acts, narratives based on “hatred towards others” can lay the foundation for a traumatic experience of the target subject, leading to a self-perception of inferiority, impotence, inadequacy and vulnerability. This is enhanced by the fact that the object of hate is a constitutive aspect of the subject, therefore unchangeable and irremovable (nationality, sexuality, race, and others).

On racist speech, Nogueira argues that "the signifier 'black color' is evidently inserted in a semantic, political, economic and historical arrangement". Skin color, therefore, appears among the various signifiers that constitute the symbolic representations engendered in culture. Thus, in addition to the impacts that are usually the object of sociological study (lack of opportunity, greater social vulnerability, lower income), racist speech carries profound subjective implications.

Therefore: How to measure the suffering caused by a speech that says that the subject is not welcome, that they are different, or inferior? Or by laws and social rules that determine that someone should have less rights, or even be killed, for who they are? From these semantic arrangements, the speech itself becomes ammunition. The wounds caused are used as extra ammunition, often being reduced to “persecutory delusions” by those who attack, which only reinforces the negative psychical impact.

All of this corroborates the traumatic potential of this type of speech. Pereira points out that “trauma is installed within the sphere of that which is inaccessible, something encrypted”, without any kind of symbolization, being felt by the subject as something foreign to himself, leading to anguish. Laplanche and Pontalis say that the trauma “is defined [...] by the subject’s inability to adequately react to a traumatic event”.

Another important theoretical proposition regarding trauma is that it occurs when the surroundings deny, or fail to acknowledge, an experience lived by the subject, such as in the
case of children who are victims of sexual abuse and, when reporting what happened, hear from adults that it does not matter, or never happened\textsuperscript{19}. This causes the child to question their own experience and the legitimacy of their anguish.

This formulation reinforces the role of non-acknowledgement in the equation of psychological suffering resulting from traumatic situations, evidenced in the dynamics of hate speech. This occurs when any attempt to denounce this speech is labeled as an exaggeration or a lie without further elaboration. This denial, combined with the subject’s inability to name the violence suffered and the affects triggered by it, results in tremendous psychical conflict, possibly resulting in a drive excess that, when failing to find a symbolic outlet, can lead to atrocious suffering.

Ocariz\textsuperscript{20} highlights that, for psychoanalysis, “\textit{the traumatic is that which returns and is linked to repetition}”, meaning that it is directly linked to the dynamics of the death drive. One of the consequences of this would be an immobilization of the subject, who in the face of flagrant derogation find themselves unable to take on the place of a desiring subject, maintaining themselves in mortification. This is one of the causes of more severe cases of depression and suicidal ideation.

Another possible effect of the trauma would be an attempt to reframe the traumatic scene through a mechanism of identification with the aggressor, in which the only way for the subject’s psyche to deal with the feeling of helplessness and the threat of non-survival in the face of the trauma is to identify with the one who perpetrated it, thus becoming like them. The aggression received is then shifted to another violent speech, used by the target, in an attempt to preserve a shattered self. The subject who introjects the figure of their aggressor can even succumb to self-rejection that can be equally overwhelming in its violence.

In any case, be it the subject who shifts their hatred towards others or the one who, tormented by marginalization, directs their drive force towards their own destruction, their suffering should be expressed through language for reframing and depotentiation, allowing their most primary impulses to follow healthier pathways for the subject and their surroundings:

\textit{The lack of truth makes way for repetition as a social symptom. Breaking with the repetition compulsion means being able to speak and listen to the various versions of what happened, accepting the multiple versions}\textsuperscript{2}. Therefore, it is important for the analyst to act as a witness, recognizing the effects of trauma and creating conditions for the analysand to name them. Says Frosh\textsuperscript{21}:

“the analyst becomes responsible for the [...] possibility (or impossibility) of repair. The inability to perceive, to recognize the subject’s suffering, represents a new episode of violence, this time perpetrated by the analyst”.

The analyst’s inability to listen to the analysand’s suffering could result in “\textit{the loss of that third space in which change would be possible}”. Notwithstanding the aspects of transference that are present in any analytical work, a reissue of the traumatic in analysis, especially as a result of the analyst’s inability to listen, can be brutal for the subject who wants to be heard in their pain.

One of the possible iatrogenic consequences of this impoverished listening would be a transferential relationship supported by an unconscious sadomasochistic dynamic, in which the analysand returns to the setting to repeat the cycle of aggressions that is already familiar (without being able, therefore, to break it), and the analyst replicates the role the aggressor.

An analysis work that allows the analysand to work through the process of naming and symbolizing their suffering will create conditions for them to distance themselves from a self-perception that is glued to the external gaze, and build other ways of being in the world, including in their relationships with those who are different, promoting healthier drive discharges than stagnation and apathy or the act imposed by the destructive drive\textsuperscript{19}:
Interventions from analysts help in the symbolization process, so that there are not only behaviors driven by unbridled vengeance and punishment, behaviors that lead to passages to the act, without the mediation of savage impulses.

CONCLUSION

There are countless examples of hate speech throughout history, which do not seem to lose power even in the face of a social scenario in which they are widely questioned and condemned. It is often believed that their worst representations have been overcome, only for them to reappear with twice the power in the social bond. The persistence of this type of speech is justified in the Freudian hypotheses about the destructive impulses inherent to the human being, their resources of identification, and their narcissistic motions.

Psychoanalytic theory brings to light the origins of the human desire for destruction and reveals an indigestible finding: it is not possible to get rid of that desire completely. What is shown to be viable through psychoanalysis is the search for healthier ways to channel these narcissistic impulses, identifications and motivations, since their exacerbation can potentially cause psychic illness – in addition to being able to culminate in the real annihilation of these so many "others".

The walls of the psychoanalysts’ offices are witnesses of the depth and complexity of the unconscious marks of the types of violence for their victims. Consequently, to end the suffering caused by these wounds, it is not enough for black people to become aware that they are subject to a racist system, homosexuals to become aware that they are neglected in heteronormative social traditions, or transgender people to become aware of the violence imposed by the cisgender norms of culture, and so on, because its traumatic nature can only be accessed by other means than that of mere rational understanding.

This is where analysis comes into play, in which the analyst does not ignore these factors and creates the possibility for symbolization. Furthermore, through transference, the analyst can respond from another place, detached from the commonplace of traumatic narratives and attuned to the complex myriad of representations, defense mechanisms, repetition compulsions and other psychic mechanisms that respond to such violence - evidently unique to each subject, but still having common features.

It would be utopian to imagine a society in which hatred does not figure as one of the operators of human relations, especially as it maintains an intimate bond with love, marking its ambivalence. However, the notion that the human being has an innate disposition to desire the annihilation of others allows for a reflection on how this disposition manifests itself in life, allowing them to embark on a work of exploring new paths for their most primary defenses - paths that enable a less devastating existence and a coexistence with the other that is supported in alterity.

This study has as limitations the scarcity of research on hate speech through the lens of psychoanalysis and, therefore, it is not possible to cover all the gray areas that may arise regarding the manifestations and effects of this type of speech. The preliminary propositions presented here can still be developed and deepened to broaden their understanding and practice. On the other hand, this review points out the importance of the theme and offers guidance for psychoanalytic practice.
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