

SOCIOLOGY & CULTURE

Transcending Deficit
Narratives of Single Life
with...

Saúde Mental Frente aos
Rompimentos de
Barragens e à...

The Evolving Cultural
Images of Eleanor
Roosevelt

Psychology of Human-
Object Attachment

Discovering Thoughts, Inventing Future

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PREFACE

The Global Journal of Human-Social Science (GJHSS) is pleased to present this issue, bringing together a curated collection of high-quality research papers that explore diverse dimensions of human society, culture, and the social world.

This issue features research spanning topics including arts & humanities, sociology, history, anthropology, economics, political science, linguistics, education, and interdisciplinary social inquiry. Each paper has undergone a rigorous double-blind peer-review process to ensure scholarly rigor and originality.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the authors for entrusting their research with us, to the reviewers for their thorough and constructive evaluations, and to our readers for their continued engagement with the academic discourse.

We hope that the research presented herein inspires further inquiry and contributes meaningfully to the advancement of knowledge in the human and social sciences.

The Chief Editor
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Transcending Deficit Narratives of Single Life with a Critical Studies Approach: A Case Study

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Abstract

In the emerging field of singlehood studies, a critical studies approach can be an important guide to transcending deficit narratives of single life. I illustrate this by critiquing a recently published research report that focused on the deficiencies of young single people who had not yet had a romantic relationship and the greater well-being of their romantically involved peers. I suggest that single people may be doing less well not because they are personally deficient or deprived of closeness or intimacy, but because they are devalued and disadvantaged and the important people in their lives are too. Drawing from other research, I show that single people have their own valuable experiences, strengths, opportunities, and accomplishments, and that coupled life comes with its own risks and not just rewards. Importantly, a critical studies approach positions single people in systems of inequality that typically advantage romantically coupled people and disadvantage singles; that adds an important structural and sociological perspective to the emerging field of singlehood studies that sometimes focuses disproportionately on individual psychological processes.

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Transcending Deficit Narratives of Single Life with a Critical Studies Approach: A Case Study

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Abstract

In the emerging field of singlehood studies, a critical studies approach can be an important guide to transcending deficit narratives of single life. I illustrate this by critiquing a recently published research report that focused on the deficiencies of young single people who had not yet had a romantic relationship and the greater well-being of their romantically involved peers. I suggest that single people may be doing less well not because they are personally deficient or deprived of closeness or intimacy, but because they are devalued and disadvantaged and the important people in their lives are too. Drawing from other research, I show that single people have their own valuable experiences, strengths, opportunities, and accomplishments, and that coupled life comes with its own risks and not just rewards. Importantly, a critical studies approach positions single people in systems of inequality that typically advantage romantically coupled people and disadvantage singles; that adds an important structural and sociological perspective to the emerging field of singlehood studies that sometimes focuses disproportionately on individual psychological processes.

Keywords: *Singlehood studies, deficit narratives, critical studies approach, singlism, couple norm, well-being, romantic relationships*

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1. Introduction

In 2017, an essay was published in the *Guardian* and immediately went viral. Under the title “I’m a relationship virgin: I’m 54 and have never had a boyfriend,” the author conveyed the pain she felt because she had never had a romantic relationship. She described her decades-long quest to answer the question, “what’s the matter with me?” I can’t tell you her name. She was too ashamed to be identified. The byline included the name of the reporter to whom she told her story (Taliotis, 2017). I’ll call her Anonymous.

It was baffling to Anonymous that having a boyfriend “just didn’t happen.” “I am gregarious, have loads of interests, work out,” she said, at the start of a list of qualities that should have helped her case. She had been feeling badly about not having a romantic relationship at least since she was 17 and started going to pubs with her two best friends. The guys flitted around them but not so much around her. She’s still trying to understand why a romantic relationship just didn’t happen. In fact, just before telling her story to the reporter, Anonymous had discussed the matter with her best friend, a woman she had known since she was around seven years old.

When Anonymous went to college, she thought she would find “the one” and her “life as an adult” would begin. But college proved boyfriendless. She came close when, while vacationing with friends, she had some fun with a bartender. That, she said, “made me feel normal. Finally, I was the one. . . who was giggly and giddy with excitement and self-importance.” But the fling only lasted a week.

She has been there for her friends who have married and had children, changing the children’s diapers when they were babies and staying in their lives as they grew up, only to have them ask her why she didn’t have a boyfriend. One of her friends is now divorced and Anonymous sees her more regularly; they often vacation together. But then when Anonymous returns to work, she feels self-conscious about having vacationed with a girlfriend instead of a romantic partner. The shame of never having had a romantic relationship sticks to her.

2. The culturally conditioned shame of being single

Anonymous did not come to feel badly about her romantic relationship status all on her own. She had internalized the kinds of demeaning messages about single people that are relentlessly communicated in many places around the world, and rarely challenged. They are the ideological waters we swim in (Day, 2016; DePaulo & Morris, 2005).

In their extensive research in Portugal, Norway, Bulgaria, and the UK, Roseneil and her colleagues (Roseneil et al., 2020) found evidence for a powerful set of assumptions they call the “couple norm” – the belief that being in a romantic couple is “the normal, natural, and superior way of being an adult.” Singlehood, in contrast, is believed to be abnormal, unnatural, and inferior. Anonymous described her life in just those terms – saying she finally felt “normal” and important when she started what she hoped would be a lasting relationship with a man she met on

vacation. She believed that she would find a boyfriend in college and that would spell the start of her “life as an adult.”

It doesn’t have to be that way. That is not the only story that can be told about Anonymous’s life. But to tell a different story takes critical thinking. It means challenging, rather than perpetuating, the narrative that single people (including those who have had romantic relationships) are deficient, and to be normal, natural, and truly fulfilled, you need to be romantically coupled.

Critical studies disciplines such as Women’s Studies, Black Studies, queer studies, rural studies, and so many more challenge the prevailing stereotypes and dismissive assumptions about the devalued groups in question. They surface the strengths and contributions of the people in those groups that were previously ignored or diminished. Importantly, they also position those groups in the context of whole systems of inequality in which the valued groups are advantaged and the devalued groups are disadvantaged (Mintz, 2024). Without an understanding of those social and structural inequalities, any ways in which the members of the devalued group are doing less well than the members of the valued group are likely to be ascribed to personal deficiencies. If, for example, single people are lonelier or less satisfied with their lives than their romantically coupled peers, a deficit narrative might suggest that they need to look inside themselves and figure out how they are getting in their own way, maybe with the help of counseling or therapy.

Deficit narratives of single people and celebratory narratives of romantically coupled people are communicated in many ways. For example, the assumptions that no one wants to stay single, at least not for the long term, and that only romantically coupled people have truly fulfilling lives, are evident in everyday conversations. They also show up in the experiences that are considered milestones and the events that are deemed worthy of celebration. Popular culture is a major purveyor of the ideologies that glorify marriage and romantic coupling and pity people who are single. But it is not just popular culture. Serious think pieces in prestigious publications often do the same. Social scientists, too, can reinforce prevailing belief systems rather than challenging them. The potential of social scientific research to reach people such as Anonymous has been growing as the media increasingly shares stories of the latest findings from published studies.

When Anonymous’s story was published in 2017, very few academics identified as scholars of singlehood (DePaulo, 2026). Since then, interest has intensified and the field has grown. In part because singlehood studies is still emerging as a recognized discipline, the critical studies approach is not yet well developed or broadly understood.

In this article, I will use a research report recently published in a prestigious journal as a case study of a deficit narrative of single life and show how the focus on single people’s shortcomings can be transcended by taking a critical studies approach. In the report, data analyses are presented to make the case that young adults who stay single fare less well than those who enter their first romantic relationship. In my close reading of the report, I will highlight a number of questions. For example, do the authors seem to assume that everyone wants to be romantically coupled? Do they describe single people in the language of deficiencies and failures, while characterizing their peers with romantic relationship experience positively? Do they focus on the presumed risks and trade-offs of single life, while leaving unacknowledged the risks and trade-offs of romantically coupled life? Do they acknowledge other published research showing the strengths of people who do not have romantic relationship experiences when they are young as well as the

problems of people who do have those experiences? Are their interpretations of their findings culturally sensitive? Importantly, in trying to explain why single people sometimes fare less well, do they acknowledge the many ways in which romantically coupled people are applauded, included, and advantaged, while single people are derogated, marginalized, and disadvantaged?

3. The case study

The article I will be discussing is “Life satisfaction, loneliness, and depressivity in consistently single young adults in Germany and the United Kingdom,” published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* in 2026. The authors are Michael D. Kramer, Julia Stern, Laura Buchinger, Geoff MacDonald, and Wiebke Bleidorn. In some ways, it is a very strong publication. The researchers analyzed yearly data from three panel studies from Germany and the United Kingdom. Participants included more than 17,000 people who were surveyed annually from age 16 through 29. At the start of the study, they had no romantic relationship experience. Every year they were questioned about their romantic relationship status, their satisfaction with their lives, their loneliness and depression. The data analyses were meticulous, and the reporting of the results was clear and compelling.

Among the key findings of the Kramer et al. research are that (1) the young adults who entered their first romantic relationship became more satisfied with their lives and less lonely; (2) as the participants grew older, those who stayed single experienced greater decreases in life satisfaction and greater increases in loneliness than those who eventually started a romantic relationship; later in their 20s, the consistently single people reported more depression too; and (3) men, participants with more education and lower well-being, and participants living alone or with their parents were more likely to stay single longer.

4. Single people are characterized as deficient

Throughout the article, single people are described as deficient, deprived, at risk for various adverse outcomes, as having to endure various costs of single life, and as failing and suffering and missing out. Those words and phrases occur more than two dozen times.

Those characterizations are not just used to describe specific findings. They also undergird sweeping statements about single people’s presumed deficiencies; for example, “Being consistently single in young adulthood is related to broad and consistent well-being costs.” Also, “Both men and women,” the authors note, “suffer relatively equally in consistent singlehood.”

The single people who stay single are described as experiencing “prolonged singlehood,” as if living single were a deadly disease. If it is not clear whether a particular characterization is disparaging, flip the script and apply it to married people. People who stay married are not described as experiencing “prolonged marriage.”

When the authors acknowledge that there could be benefits to living single, they then undermine that statement by warning that those benefits come with trade-offs. For example, they note that singlehood could offer “avenues for identity formation and self-reflection for some young adults,” but then add a qualifier: “such advantages of singlehood may need to be traded off against lower well-being.”

In the article, the possibility that some single people embrace their single life, valuing it for all it has to offer, and want to stay single (DePaulo, 2023 a, b), is nowhere to be found. Instead, we hear about people who “voluntarily delay or abstain from partnering.” In fact, the first sentence of the abstract is, “Young

adults increasingly abstain from committed romantic relationships.” “Abstaining” is a different experience than embracing. I moved to California and stayed here because I love it here; I’m not abstaining from living in Virginia.

5. But that’s what they found

An understandable response to my criticism of the deficit narrative is that the authors are simply describing what they found. According to their analyses, young people who stayed single really did fare less well in some ways than those who entered their first romantic relationship. But it is always important to look beyond the specific measures in a particular study, and consider what was not included and to look beyond the reported research to what other research has found. That may be particularly important in an emerging field about a devalued group whose presumed shortcomings are routinely underscored while their strengths are relatively neglected.

5.1. Other research

With regard to other research, a study (Joyner & Udry, 2000) with findings that were very different from those of the Kramer et al. paper is especially relevant. A nationally representative sample of more than 8,000 adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17 reported their romantic relationship status at the start of the study and then a year later. They also completed a measure of depression both times and answered other questions as well. The researchers found that for both the boys and the girls, at every age, those who became romantically involved for the first time became *more* depressed. That was true even for those who stayed with the same romantic partner the entire year.¹

Another study also found that people who entered a romantic relationship (not necessarily their first one) became more depressed (Hu, 2025). Nearly 3,000 people were surveyed four times – when they were 15, 16, 28, and 38 years old. At every age, on average, the single people who entered a romantic relationship became *more* depressed.

Also relevant is a study of the self-esteem of more than 9,000 Germans who were 17, 27, or 37 at the start of the study and who were followed for three years (Luciano & Orth, 2017). Their romantic relationship status and their self-esteem were assessed four times. If romantic relationships were as beneficial to young adults’ well-being as Kramer and his colleagues suggested, then people who entered a romantic relationship (in this study, not necessarily their first) would be expected to enjoy higher self-esteem. The results were not so straightforward. As the authors noted, “beginning a romantic relationship improves self-esteem if and only if the relationship is well-functioning, stable, and holds at least for a certain period of time (in the present research...one year or longer).” As for the people whose romantic relationship was over in less than a year, they ended up with lower self-esteem than the people who stayed single.

In a study of tenth graders (Douglas & Orpinas, 2019), students with little or no dating experience were less depressed than their peers who did date. They were also flourishing in other ways. Without being told who did or did not have experience dating, their teachers evaluated their social skills and leadership abilities. The students who had never dated (or perhaps had had just one date) were rated as more socially skilled and as better leaders. This

suggests a whole different understanding of what it can mean to stay single. The students who were not dating were not at home moping or doomscrolling. They were developing their social skills and their leadership abilities.

An important strength of the Kramer et al. study is its longitudinal design; the Douglas and Orpinas (2019) study is cross-sectional. Also, the tenth graders in that study (typically 15–16 years old) are young compared to the participants in the Kramer et al. research, who ranged in age from 16 to 29. The dynamics could be different at younger ages. The importance of the study of the tenth graders is what it suggests (rather than showing definitively) – that young people who stay single may be benefitting in important ways from doing so.

Research also shows that time spent single may be beneficial to young adults (especially men) who become coupled and then navigate the throes of a romantic breakup (van den Berg & Verbakel, 2024). The study included more than 1,000 German adults who were under 25 when they left home and who eventually became romantically involved and then split up. Some of the adults stayed single for a while before entering a romantic relationship; the others went straight from living at home to living with a romantic partner or spouse. As the authors noted, “Whereas immediately coupled men experienced a relatively steep decline in life satisfaction in the year of the separation, the life satisfaction of initially single men was barely affected.”

The Kramer et al. article was thick with references. But some of the studies that documented the strengths of single people or the costs of romantic coupling were excluded or discounted.

5.2. Beyond the experiences measured in the research

The results of the studies I just reviewed suggest ways in which the authors’ discussion of the implications of staying single during young adulthood could have transcended deficit narratives. That could have been done by acknowledging the kinds of experiences they did not assess in their research, such as the development of social skills and leadership abilities. The young adults staying single may also have been developing their interests and contributing to their communities. They may have been attending to and caring for the important people in their lives (DePaulo, 2023b).

The authors did mention some important potential benefits of single life, such as autonomy, personal growth, identity exploration, and pursuing higher education or a career, but those were framed as experiences that would need to be “traded off” against lower well-being, rather than experiences that are valuable in and of themselves.

6. Coupled life is characterized as risk-free

Unlike the young adults who stayed single and were characterized as deficient and at risk, those who experienced their first romantic relationship were not characterized as deficient in any way and no risks to romantic coupling were acknowledged. For example, there is no mention of the gender disparities and conflicts around the division of labor in heterosexual relationships. No mention of the possibility of intimate partner violence. No mention of the risks of investing so much emotional and relationship capital into one person (Cheung, Gardner, & Anderson 2014), and the consequences of that insularity when the relationship ends.

The copious literature on romantic relationships does include the study of conflict, divorce, and other risks of romantic coupling. However, in the emerging field of singlehood studies, social

¹The authors did cite the Joyner and Udry (2000) study, but then added, “These previous studies often surveyed smaller convenience samples of adolescents at one time point during their development.” However, the Joyner and Udry sample was nationally representative, with more than 8,000 participants, surveyed multiple times.

scientists studying well-being do not always acknowledge that research.

There is also no acknowledgment that coupled life comes with its own trade-offs. There are no words of caution that any benefits of romantic coupling may need to be balanced again a vast array of lost opportunities. Those might include, for example, the opportunities for autonomy or personal growth; for solitude, privacy, peace, and personal space; for spending as much time as you like socializing with, or caring for, as many different people as you like without the judgment or complaint of a romantic partner; for the freedom to spend or save as you like; and for the control over the decisions of everyday life as well as bigger life-changing choices (DePaulo, 2023b; Marsh, 2023; Martinez-Phillips, 2024, 2025).

The previously mentioned study showing that adolescents become more depressed when they become romantically involved for the first time (Joyner & Udry, 2000) also kept track of other significant experiences in the participants' lives – their grades, their relationship with their parents, and any problems with drinking and delinquency. Both the boys and the girls who became romantically involved reported more delinquency and drinking problems than those with no romantic involvement. The boys and the younger girls who were romantically involved were more likely to have grades that were deteriorating. The girls reported that their relationship with their parents was getting worse.²

Longitudinal studies of marriage often show that when people marry, they become a bit happier or more satisfied at first, but over time, that positive feeling subsides (Luhmann, Hofmann, Eid, & Lucas, 2012). The negative ramifications of divorce, though, can be much stronger. In one study, for example (Kalmijn, 2017), the dissatisfaction associated with divorce was more than three times greater than the satisfaction associated with marrying. In the Kramer et al. research, it is possible that there were substantial positive implications of beginning a romantic relationship because it was the young adults' first. That may have made it feel especially meaningful to them, and it may have attracted special positive attention from others. At the same time, it is possible that the ending of a first romantic relationship is especially devastating.

Kramer and his colleagues warn of the “downstream consequences” of delaying the first romantic relationship, such as “further developmental tasks that are otherwise barred or impeded (e.g., marriage, childbirth).” But there may also be downstream consequences of getting into a romantic relationship too soon or getting into one for the wrong reasons. For example, it is likely that some of the romantically coupled young people in the research started their first romantic relationship because that's what they thought they should be doing, when in fact they may have been more likely to flourish in single life. Some may ride the romantic relationship escalator up to higher levels of commitment, such as marriage, before realizing that single life is their best life (Gahran, 2017). By then, they are caught between the costs of leaving the marriage and the costs of staying and living inauthentically (DePaulo, 2023a). That's not acknowledged. Instead, we only hear about how romantically coupled young adults are more satisfied with their lives and less lonely than their peers who are experiencing “prolonged singlehood.”

The glorifying of romantic coupling and the stigmatizing of living single have their own downstream consequences. For example, research shows that even subtle experiences such as

being shown romantic photos rather than photos of books or libraries are linked to a reduction of interest in science and technology among women in college. Similarly, if they overhear a conversation about another woman's date, college women express less interest in careers in science and technology than if they had overheard a conversation about a college course (Park et al., 2011).

For college women, time spent with a romantic partner can come with a cost. In a diary study, women who called or texted or spent time with a romantic partner on a particular day paid less attention in math class and spent less time on their math homework. The next day, those costs continued (Park et al., 2011).

We can't know from that research alone whether the centering of romantic relationships could undermine women's pursuit of careers in science and technology, or their pursuit of higher education. What we do know is that education cannot be undone the way a romantic partnership can. Women with degrees will continue to have those degrees but they may or may not continue to have their romantic partners.

Of course, in a research report that is not a review article, authors cannot be expected to be comprehensive in their coverage of the research literature or in their discussion of the implications of their findings. But they can be even-handed in acknowledging that it is not just single life that has risks, costs, and trade-offs.

7. Valuing relationships beyond romantic ones

In my research on people who are single at heart, I found that they have expansive, open-hearted understandings of relationships (DePaulo, 2023a, b). They value relationships with people and entities beyond just romantic partners, including, for example, friends, relatives, mentors, spiritual figures, and pets. Scholars of singlehood would do well to do the same. Single people's devalued status can be pinned in part on the typical elevation of romantic relationships above all other peer relationships (Brake, 2012; DePaulo & Morris, 2005). In some ways, relationships other than romantic ones are rendered invisible or insignificant, as when the word “relationship” is used as a shorthand for romantic relationship, even in some of the work of singlehood scholars.

Research supports the value of relationships such as friendships in people's lives. For example, in the study of people who were surveyed at four different ages and were found to become more depressed if they entered a romantic relationship (Hu, 2025), another question was also included in the survey each time – whether they had at least one close friend. On average, the participants who started a close friendship did not become more depressed at any age. In fact, those who were 28 or 38 years old became less depressed. It was friendship, rather than a romantic relationship, that was more likely to protect them from depression.

Having a close friendship at age 20 is also linked to greater success in life a decade later, a study of 205 adults in the U.S. showed (Roisman, Masten, Coatsworth, & Tellegen, 2004). At age 30, those who had had a close friendship at 20 were more likely to be succeeding at work, more likely to have a close friendship, and more likely to have a close relationship with a romantic partner than their peers who had not had a close friendship. In contrast, having romantic relationship experience at age 20 was not linked to job success, having a close friendship, or even having a close romantic relationship a decade later.

The words “friends” or “friendship” appear nowhere in the discussion of the meaning of the findings in the Kramer et al. article. The authors seem to imply that closeness and intimacy come only from romantic relationships. For example, when they

²The authors acknowledged that some studies had shown adverse effects of adolescent romantic relationships but then added, “However, most of these studies were based on smaller samples.”

noted that personal characteristics such as gender, education, or living arrangements did not make much of a difference in the implications of a first romantic relationship for well-being, they speculated that “This absence of moderation effects may reflect a somewhat universal response to the prolonged deprivation of closeness and intimacy needs.” In this conceptualization, the single people in their research could have had close lifelong friendships and cherished siblings, but if they never had a romantic relationship, then they were experiencing “prolonged deprivation of closeness and intimacy needs.”

When the authors got to the section in their article on the limitations of their research, they said that “the studies assessed committed romantic relationships, but it is likely that other, more casual forms of romantic and sexual involvement also matter for singles’ well-being.” There was no acknowledgment that friendships matter for singles’ well-being or that it would be important to include relationships other than romantic ones in future research.

Imagine if relationships other than romantic ones were deeply valued and validated – not just in the study I’m critiquing but in the scholarly literature more broadly as well as our everyday lives. Consider again the story of Anonymous and what she revealed about the people in her life. She has a close friend who had been in her life for close to half a century, and another for almost forty years. She has another friend she vacations with often. She has been an important figure in the lives of the children of her friends, from the time they were babies until they were old enough and comfortable enough with her to ask her why she never had a boyfriend.

Consider, too, what else she shared about her life: “I am gregarious, have loads of interests, work out...” She also has a college education. Anonymous is someone with lifelong relationships with friends, closeness with the children of her friends, and a psychologically rich life full of interests and experiences. That she works out suggests that she may have a healthy lifestyle as well. Yet it took a fling with a bartender for her to feel “normal” and important.

Scholars of singlehood have the opportunity to change that. In keeping with a critical studies approach that transcends stereotypes by recognizing devalued people’s strengths and not just their presumed deficiencies, we can underscore the significance of all sorts of relationships in people’s lives. We can make it clear in our work that a good life includes experiences beyond relationships, such as meaningful work, passionate pursuits of important causes, and interesting and varied experiences. We can do so not to spare the feelings of single people or even because it may be the ethical and humane thing to do, but because it’s true.

8. If Single People Are Not “Deprived” of Closeness and Intimacy, Then What Accounts for the Well-Being Findings?

Kramer and his colleagues did find that young adults who stayed single fared less well in some ways (life satisfaction, loneliness, and at later ages, depression) than those who entered their first romantic relationship. They describe those findings in terms of the supposed deficiencies of single people and suggest that their “prolonged deprivation of closeness and intimacy needs” may be a culprit. They suggest that the practical implications of their work may include “counseling and therapy.” In contrast, I’ve suggested that many people who stay single do have closeness and intimacy from meaningful relationships beyond just romantic ones. But

then why did the findings show that they are doing less well in certain ways than their peers who have had their first romantic relationship?

A critical singlehood studies perspective encourages us to look at the broader context of single life, including the many ways in which romantically coupled people are valued and advantaged while those who are single are devalued and disadvantaged. In our research, Wendy Morris and I (DePaulo & Morris, 2005) found that single people are typically judged more harshly than married people, even in studies in which the single people are described in exactly the same way as the married people except for their marital status. We also found that college students who had never had a romantic relationship were judged especially harshly. Those findings suggest that one reason single people are less satisfied is not because they actually are deficient but because they are judged that way. Even in academic journals, they are sometimes described as deficient by social scientists who do not at the same time acknowledge their strengths.

In popular culture, romantic partnering is elaborately and relentlessly celebrated. At a time when growing numbers of young adults all around the world are staying single (Chowkhani & Wynne, 2024), finding a romantic partner is still often depicted as the solution to a character’s troubles and the path to a happy life. In everyday life, too, young people who let others know about their new romantic relationship are often congratulated and cheered and encouraged to talk all about it. Meanwhile, the personal milestones or remarkable achievements of their single peers are far less likely to be praised or even acknowledged.

Along the same lines, maybe people who stay single in their twenties feel lonelier and less satisfied not because they are deprived of closeness or intimacy, but because the closeness and intimacy they do have is devalued and disparaged. Their close lifelong friends may be shrugged off as “just friends.”

In explaining young single people’s greater loneliness, Kramer and his colleagues allude in passing to norms of partnering and social pressures to partner, but mostly pin the young singles’ loneliness on the “absence” of a romantic partner. They don’t consider that the young adults who stay single may be lonely because their friends who became coupled marginalized them, talking to them less (Musick & Bumpass, 2012) and demoting them from dinners to lunches or maybe excluding them entirely. They don’t recognize that the important people in the lives of single people, such as their close friends, are accorded less significance than romantic partners. For example, other people don’t ask about a person’s friends the way they routinely ask about their romantic partner. Single people may feel devalued when the romantic partner of their sibling is invited to family events, but their closest friend is not. When coupled or married people can take time off from work to care for their partner, sometimes by law, while single people are not allowed to take time off to care for an ailing friend, the single people are missing opportunities for deep bonding.

One of the items used to measure loneliness was feeling “left out.” But maybe that is not so much a personal indictment of single people as deficient in well-being as an accurate account of their experiences. Single people often *are* left out by their coupled friends and relatives who socialize with other couples. They are also left out by institutions, organizations, or societies that are organized around couples. For example, in the workplace, and even in places of worship, single people without children may be left out of special activities or interest groups designed for couples or families.

A critical singles studies perspective would look beyond the suggestion that young adults with no romantic relationship experience may need counseling or therapy. Although help from mental health professionals can be useful to people of all romantic relationship statuses, the focus on single people as especially needy is a deficit narrative that locates the problem within them. They are deficient and need help. It overlooks the possibility that newly coupled young adults could benefit from self-examination. Have they marginalized their single friends since becoming coupled? When they do see their single friends, do they dominate the conversations with tales about their romantic relationship? Do they neglect to ask their single friends about their lives, other than perhaps asking them about potential romantic prospects? Do they see themselves as superior to their single friends?

A critical singles studies perspective would also recognize systems of inequality that advantage coupled people and disadvantage singles. For example, rental agents have been shown to vastly favor applicants for a rental property who were a married couple over a pair of friends; cohabiting couples were favored over pairs of friends, too, even though all three kinds of applicants were described similarly in their applications except for their romantic relationship status (Morris, Sinclair, & DePaulo, 2007). Single people are also systematically disadvantaged in the marketplace when they pay more per person than couples do for products and services such as insurance, entertainment, rental cars, and subscriptions. Single people paying full price are subsidizing the discounts that couples enjoy. Maybe single people are less satisfied with their lives than their peers who are romantically coupled because they are treated unfairly in so many ways. Maybe it is that singlism rather than a pile of personal deficiencies that is undermining their happiness.

9. The Milestones, Achievements, and Living Arrangements that Are and Are Not Valued

Among the theoretical perspectives the authors used to predict and explain their findings was a developmental tasks model that describes the milestones that characterize the course of adult life. A well-known model from more than half a century ago (Havighurst, 1972), cited by the authors, describes the first four tasks of young adulthood as selecting a mate, learning to live with a marriage partner, starting a family, and raising children.

That sequence does not fit the growing number of young adults who do not have a spouse or children or do not consider those tasks important. A Pew Research Center survey of a U.S. sample found that 33 percent of the men between the ages of 18 and 29, and 39 percent of the women, were not looking for a committed romantic relationship or even a date (Brown, 2020). For older people, the percentages were even higher.

Teenagers are not so interested either. In another Pew Research Center survey, U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 were asked what was important to them as they looked ahead to adult life. Only 36 percent agreed that getting married was very important, behind having a job or career they enjoy (86 percent), having close friends (69 percent), and having a lot of money (58 percent), and just above having children (30 percent). (They were not asked about the importance of having a romantic relationship.)

Nonetheless, the Kramer et al. results suggest that a young adult's first romantic relationship may still hold some emotional sway. The participants who had become romantically involved by the end of their twenties were faring better in some ways than those who stayed single. As Anonymous's feelings of shame over

not having romantic relationship experience suggests, that first romantic relationship may well be seen as an important milestone and even an indication of self-worth.

But when young adults are asked what counts as a marker of adulthood, they often point to factors such as making independent decisions, achieving financial independence, and taking responsibility for their own lives rather than having a marriage or a committed romantic relationship (Arnett, 2014). Anonymous would pass those criteria with flying colors. She, like so many other successful single people, was making her decisions and maintaining her financial stability without the help of a romantic partner and without the financial advantages that couples often enjoy. If those kinds of achievements were recognized and valued the way romantic relationships are, she and many other single people would likely feel proud of themselves instead of ashamed. They would understand themselves not as deficient, but accomplished.

One of the findings of the Kramer et al research was that young adults who live with their parents (and those who live alone) are more likely to stay single longer than those who live with other people. Here's how the authors talk about the finding about living with parents: "Living in the parents' household likely signals both economic and psychological unreadiness to transition into committed romantic relationships."

By that account, young single people who are living with their parents are doing so because they are "unready" to be romantically coupled; they are deficient. That framing does not acknowledge the many communities in which living in a multigenerational household is deeply valued and quite common (DePaulo, 2015). Young adults in those contexts may be especially likely to be loved and feel loved. Perhaps they are less likely to believe that the only love that counts is the love of a romantic partner.

It is also a framing that assumes that everyone wants to be romantically coupled. To the researchers' way of thinking, it seems, no one is single because they like being single and want to stay that way; instead, they are "unready" for a committed romantic relationship.

10. In headlines and images, the media perpetuated the deficit narrative

In my article on transcending the deficit narratives of single life (DePaulo, 2023a), I cautioned that "Research and theories no longer stay put in stodgy academic journals; they make the leap into the popular press, where readers take them to heart."

So it was with the article on young people entering their first romantic relationship or staying single. Stories in the media proliferated, with headlines about how staying single may "take a toll on mental well-being," and start "hampering mental health." Or how "Being single for a long time makes you unhappy, according to study." Even more striking than the dispiriting headlines were the photos accompanying the stories. One after another showed sad or even despondent single people, such as the one here.



(Credit: Sergey Nivens on Shutterstock)

I don't know if Anonymous saw any of those stories. If she did, I fear she may have felt ashamed all over again. If her friends or relatives saw them, they might start to wonder whether she is truly miserable (even if she doesn't seem to be) and whether staying single has made her so.

But here's something that was not included in the original research report and so was not mentioned in any of the media stories either: The people in the studies who stayed single were not unhappy. In all three studies, at every age from 16 or 17 through 29, the consistently single people were, on average, decidedly happy. Their mean ratings of life satisfaction were solidly on the happy end of the scale.³

11. Beyond the Case Study

I have been focusing on just one article as a case study in how to transcend deficit narratives of single life by taking a critical studies approach. The issues I've highlighted, though, are evident in other publications too. Here, I'll discuss just a few. Once you know what to look for, it is easy to find others.

An example of an article that seemed to promise an acknowledgement of single people who are thriving was titled "Coping or thriving?" (Girme, Park, & MacDonald, 2023a). This review of the factors predicting well-being in singlehood included several hypothesized examples of processes associated with satisfaction with single life. One possibility, the authors suggest, is a secondary control process whereby single people start out wanting to be romantically coupled and they pursue that goal; but when they

never do find a romantic partner, they adjust to "what is perceived as an unchangeable situation." They did not get what they wanted, so they settled for the single life they did not want.

Another dynamic that Girme and her co-authors hypothesize is that "a number of individuals may never desire a romantic partner at any point across the lifespan," adding that "Thus, one pathway associated with well-being in singlehood may be a long-term, stable lack of desire for a partner."

It is undoubtedly true that there are some single people who end up satisfied with their single lives because they have settled for the life they can have rather than the one they want, or because they never wanted a romantic partner in the first place. But both are grudging accounts of what it can mean to be happily single. They don't seem to be describing single people who are deeply fulfilled by single life and truly thriving. Nowhere in the article do the authors acknowledge, even hypothetically, that some single people (such as the single at heart) are powerfully drawn to single life by all that it offers, such as freedom, autonomy, solitude, and the opportunity to attend to a variety of different people, rather than organizing their lives around one person (DePaulo, 2023c). In response to that critique, the authors made one of the same kinds of statements that Kramer et al. did – they acknowledged some positives about single life, but then qualified that acknowledgment with a warning about what could go wrong. Specifically, they said, "DePaulo notes that the 'single at heart' prioritize their freedom and solitude. That's fair enough, but taken too far, these values have the potential to lead to trouble (Girme, Park, & MacDonald, 2023b)."

³Thanks to Michael D. Kramer for sharing the means with me.

In another article, “What social lives do single people want?” the authors identified several profiles of social motives (Park, MacDonald, Impett, & Neel, 2023). One of the profiles was of “independent singles” who value independence and solitude and who are highly satisfied with their single lives. They sound very much like the single at heart who are embracing their single lives, not settling for them. But that’s not how the authors discussed them. Instead, once again, we are offered a narrative of settling as well as an acknowledgment of what independent singles value that is immediately undercut by a warning of potential risks.

The settling narrative was introduced with the observation that the independent singles may be older than other kinds of singles. They continued: “It is possible that those who value independence to a greater degree are more likely to remain single, or, alternatively, being (becoming) single at an older age leads one to place greater value on independence. For example, to the extent that older individuals minimize investing efforts into realizing a less attainable goal such as acquiring a partner . . . , they may be more motivated to value the independence that they do have.” In that telling, the independence afforded by single life is not valuable in and of itself; it is a consolation prize.

The familiar narrative that anything positive about single life is offset by negatives was expressed like this: “preference for independence, even in healthy forms such as solitude, may develop into a source of poor well-being over the long term, if not concurrently.” That statement also illustrates another way in which deficit narratives are inappropriately perpetuated – those happy single people are described as at risk for “poor” well-being. They are not. In every large, nationally representative sample that I’ve seen, single people’s well-being is never at the “poor” end of a rating scale. Typically, they are not even at the mid-point – they are on the positive end of the scale, as they were in the Kramer study.

In the Park et al. article, the independent single people were characterized not as embracing their single lives, but as abstaining from romantically coupled life: “Presumably, those with greater focus on maintaining independence would be the ones who feel more autonomous in their decision to stay out of a highly interdependent relationship.”

Although the independent singles were highly satisfied with their single lives, their overall life satisfaction was the same or lower than that of other groups of singles. As a potential explanation for the life satisfaction findings, the authors point to the independent single people’s “lack of social interactions” (though actually, they were not totally lacking in social interactions). By that telling, independent single people are deficient. Characterizing their relatively low levels of social interaction as a personal deficiency leads to suggestions of personal solutions. One idea the authors have about increasing the social integration of independent single people is to encourage them to have more virtual interactions.

What they do not consider is that the independent single people may already have the ratio of solitude to sociability that they want. As for other possible reasons why their overall life satisfaction is not especially high, a critical studies approach would encourage consideration of the inequalities of single and coupled life. Previously, I described some examples of singlism that were missing from the Kramer et al. explanations for the relatively lower well-being of single people who have not had a romantic relationship (e.g., all the ways in which romantic partnering is valued and celebrated and singlehood is devalued and stigmatized). Those are relevant here, too. Another intriguing possibility (also

not mentioned) is that the independent single people, who are particularly happy being single, may be judged more harshly because they are happily single. In two studies from two countries, the U.S. and Israel, single people who wanted to stay single were judged as less happy and secure than single people who wanted to be romantically coupled. They even elicited more anger (Morris & Osburn, 2016; Slonim, Gur-Yaish, & Katz, 2015).

12. Conclusions

Scholars of singlehood are not studying widgets; we are studying people. The single people who are the topic of our scholarship are a devalued group. The couple norm that sees romantic coupling as “the normal, natural, and superior way of being an adult,” and the related ideologies of marriage and committed romantic relationships that also characterize single life as a lesser life, too often go unchallenged. Perhaps as a consequence, being single – especially being single with no romantic relationship experience – can be a source of great shame and pain.

It doesn’t have to be. Singlehood scholars can be guided by the same kinds of critical thinking that have deepened our understanding of other devalued groups such as women, people of color, queers, people who live in rural communities, and many more. Critical studies scholars look beyond the prevailing ideologically driven emphases on the presumed strengths of the valued group and the deficits of the devalued group to bring to light the overlooked strengths of the devalued group and deficits of the valued group. Because the couple norm and the ideologies of marriage and committed romantic relationships are the default ways of thinking, scholars need to be intentional in their efforts to transcend those biases. Importantly, they also need to expose the systems of inequality that advantage coupled people and disadvantage single people. When those cultural and structural contexts go unrecognized, there is a risk that the devalued group will be characterized as personally deficient rather than unfairly situated. That’s not to say that single people have no shortcomings; of course they do, as do romantically coupled people. But it is important to acknowledge that single people, because of their devalued status, face challenges that romantically coupled people do not.

In studies such as the one I have been critiquing, it can be fairly straightforward to incorporate a critical studies perspective. Two key questions to keep in mind are (1) whether the strengths of the valued group and the shortcomings of the devalued group have been emphasized, with little or no attention to the strengths of the devalued group and the shortcomings of the valued group; and (2) whether systems of inequality have been acknowledged.

If Kramer and his colleagues were reenvisioning their article from a critical studies perspective, they could describe their findings about the ways in which young people who stay single are doing less well than those who enter their first romantic relationship (as they did), but then more fully acknowledge other research that has resulted in very different findings. They could caution that the measures they included (life satisfaction, loneliness, depression) do not represent the full range of experiences that capture the well-being, opportunities to flourish, and potential risks of young adulthood, and then describe those other possible measures. They could be even-handed in their characterizations, acknowledging, for example, that romantically coupled life, and not just single life, comes with trade-offs. They could note the significance of other relationships beyond romantic ones, and the value, in and of themselves, of other life experiences and goals.

They could articulate many of the ways in which single people are stereotyped, stigmatized, marginalized and discriminated against – and point to those dynamics as alternative reasons why young single people may feel less satisfied with their lives or lonelier than their peers who have experienced their first romantic relationship. And throughout, they could acknowledge that not all single people want to unsingle themselves; for some, living single is how they flourish.

The authors could incorporate those and other points of critical thinking into their article, while still reporting the findings from their research. The reported findings would not change, but they would be contextualized in a way less likely to perpetuate the couple norm and the ideologies that deem single life a lesser life. The extra efforts involved in writing from a critical studies perspective would be small, but the potential implications, for other scholars and their own critical thinking, as well as for single people, could be substantial.

With less deficit-focused reporting, media accounts would likely differ as well. The stories in the media of the Kramer et al. research emphasized the hazards of staying single; they were illustrated with photos of despairing single people. People such as Anonymous might see those reports and feel even more ashamed of being single. Women in college who were finding their math and science classes fascinating may withdraw effort from those classes to focus more on finding a romantic partner. People who love their single lives, such as the single at heart, might become reluctant to say so, thereby perpetuating the ideology that maintains that no one really wants to be single.

Stories in the media based on a critical studies rendering of the same results would still report the key findings from the research, in which young people who stayed single fared worse in some ways than those who experienced their first romantic relationship. But they might also acknowledge that single people have their own valuable experiences, strengths, opportunities, and accomplishments, and that coupled life also comes with risks as well as rewards. They might point to the ways in which single people are objectively disadvantaged and coupled people are advantaged so readers understand that single and coupled people are not on an even playing field. Knowing that the young adults who stayed single were not *dissatisfied* with their lives, just less satisfied than their peers with romantic relationship experience, the reporters may have been less likely to illustrate their stories with pictures of forlorn single people.

Critical studies perspectives are subject to resistance and even backlash. Members of the valued, dominant groups may be especially likely to feel threatened by more positive depictions of the devalued group members, and especially resistant to evidence that the devalued groups are objectively disadvantaged. In a survey of a nationally representative sample of adults in the U.S., married and unmarried men and women were asked whether single people are stigmatized and discriminated against (Orth, 2022). They were also given specific examples in which unmarried adults were disadvantaged by unequal taxation, unequal access to health insurance and Social Security benefits, and the lack of certain legal protections from discrimination and asked if they thought that was unfair. In every instance, the married men were least likely to believe that unmarried adults are targets of discrimination and least likely to accept that specific instances of discrimination were unfair.

Persisting in the face of such resistance will be challenging. But it will be worth it for the more accurate and more deeply contextualized understanding of singlehood that could result.

Anonymous and millions of other single people might benefit too, when their full humanity is acknowledged in the scholarship about them, and not just their deficits.

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Saúde Mental Frente aos Rompimentos de Barragens e à Covid-19: O Que Revelaram as Vivências Subjetivas de Trabalhadores da Mineração

Mental health in the face of dam collapses and Covid-19: what the subjective experiences of mining workers revealed.

Article Record

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Abstract

This study discussed the mental health of mining workers from companies operating in the municipalities of Mariana, Congonhas, and Ouro Preto, located in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais, in view of the overlapping socio-environmental consequences of three tragedies: the collapse of the Fundão tailings dam in Mariana/2015; the collapse of the Córrego do Feijão Mine dams in Brumadinho/2019; and the Covid-19 pandemic, between 2020 and 2023. In-depth interviews were conducted with 11 key informants, all in-person, recorded, and subsequently transcribed with the aid of the Iramuteq software, resulting in the empirical material that was examined according to Bardin's Content Analysis method (2016). Mediated by the Psychodynamics of Work theory (Dejours, 2011, 2007, 2005), it has been shown that the mental health of miners has been predominantly affected by aspects related to the precariousness of work, which is intrinsically linked to the socioeconomic dependence on mining in the region studied and the chronic fear of unemployment; with the consequences of socio-environmental tragedies playing a contributing role.

Mental Health

Mining

Occupational Health

Socio-environmental Tragedies

Work Precariousness

AI USE STATEMENT

No generative AI was used for analysis or results.

FUNDING

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY

Not applicable for this article.

ETHICS

No ethics committee approval was required for this article type.

CONSENT

All participants signed the Free and Informed Consent Form (TCLE).

TRIAL REG.

Not applicable.

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Saúde Mental Frente aos Rompimentos de Barragens e à Covid-19: O Que Revelaram as Vivências Subjetivas de Trabalhadores da Mineração

Luís Carlos Mesquita, Monaliza Antunes Ferraz Morais*, and Jandira Maciel da Silva

Abstract

Esse estudo discutiu a saúde mental dos trabalhadores da mineração de empresas que atuam nos municípios de Mariana, Congonhas e Ouro Preto, localizados no estado brasileiro de Minas Gerais, tendo em vista a sobreposição das consequências socioambientais de três tragédias: o rompimento das barragens de Fundão em Mariana/2015; das barragens da Mina do Córrego do Feijão em Brumadinho/2019 e a pandemia de Covid-19, entre 2020 e 2023. Entrevistas em profundidade foram realizadas com 11 informantes-chave, resultando no material empírico que foi examinado segundo o método Análise de Conteúdo de Bardin (2016). Mediado pela teoria da Psicodinâmica do Trabalho (Dejours, 2011, 2007, 2005), demonstrou-se que a saúde mental dos mineiros tem sido, preponderantemente, afetada por aspectos relacionados à precarização do trabalho que aparece, intrinsecamente vinculada, à mineriodependência socioeconômica da região estudada e ao medo crônico do desemprego; sendo que as consequências advindas das tragédias socioambientais tiveram papel coadjuvante.

Keywords: *Saúde do Trabalhador, Saúde Mental, Mineração, Precarização do Trabalho, Tragédias socioambientais*

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1. Introdução

No continente latino americano vigora um paradigma de desenvolvimento focado no crescimento econômico baseado na exploração intensiva e extensiva de recursos naturais, em especial os minerais, em redes produtivas pouco diversificadas e na inserção internacional subordinada (MILANEZ, 2021, WANDERLEY, 2018). As razões do desenvolvimento desse modelo econômico não foram objeto do estudo que será aqui apresentado, mas são discutidas por autores como Milanez (2021) e Bertollo (2018).

Acerca da exploração de recursos minerais, cabe esclarecer que se trata de “[...]atividade extrativa que depende da intervenção ambiental em grande escala, pois é estruturada por uma rede de produção que integra mina, barragens de rejeitos, pilhas de estéril, estradas, consumo de energia, minerodutos, ferrovias e portos (GONÇALVES, 2018, p.2). Cumpre destacar a forte propensão de a mineração acentuar suas atividades e expandir suas fronteiras considerando o contexto da exploração de minerais críticos, tendo em vista a produção de energia limpa, o desenvolvimento da siderurgia avançada e de tecnologias emergentes de ponta. Tratam-se de minerais como lítio, cobre, níquel e cobalto, com tendência de crescente relevância no mercado global (BROZOSKI, 2026).

O Brasil explora cerca de 70 substâncias minerais, entre alumínio, ferro, nióbio, manganês e ouro, sendo o segundo maior produtor mundial de minério de ferro (MME, 2025, 2022). No que diz respeito aos minerais críticos, salienta-se que o Brasil responde por 23,3% das reservas mundiais de terras raras e 19% das reservas de grafite; o que lhe confere a posição do segundo maior detentor das reservas mundiais dessas categorias de minerais, sendo ainda responsável por 90% da oferta mundial de nióbio (BROZOSKI, 2026).

Esse estudo foi realizado com trabalhadores da mineração de empresas que atuam na região do Quadrilátero Ferrífero localizada no estado brasileiro de Minas Gerais (MG). Essa região, na qual a

atividade mineral extrativista é historicamente contexto econômico estruturante, é considerado expressiva para a produção mineral no Brasil, sendo responsável por cerca de 60% de toda produção nacional (IPEA, 2021; 2020).

Por caracterizar-se como a principal atividade econômica, a mineração apresenta-se como uma importante fonte de renda da região do Quadrilátero Ferrífero. Geram-se empregos diretos e indiretos, atraindo trabalhadores(as) de diversos locais do país, entrelaçando fatores econômicos, sociais e políticos, interferindo e alterando os modos de vida e trabalho nos municípios que são minerados e/ou atravessados pela cadeia produtiva secundária da mineração (CARMO, 2019; SILVA, 2019; COELHO, 2018). Inclusive, é sob o contexto de domínio da atividade minerária que Coelho (2018) cunhou o termo mineriodependência. Dentre os municípios pertencentes à região Quadrilátero Ferrífero, destacam-se Mariana e Brumadinho palcos dos maiores desastres socioambientais da história da mineração.

Em 05 de novembro de 2015, na cidade de Mariana-MG, ocorreu o rompimento de uma barragem de rejeitos de mineração pertencente à mineradora Samarco e suas controladoras BHP Billiton e Vale S.A, causando a morte de 12 trabalhadores terceirizados, 1 trabalhador da Samarco S.A (cujo corpo ainda não foi localizado), seis moradores locais (entre os quais duas crianças) e um nascituro. Foram liberados aproximadamente 62 milhões de metros cúbicos de rejeitos que atingiram toda a Bacia do Rio Doce, percorrendo mais de 600 quilômetros e causando danos e destruição que assolaram os estados brasileiros de Minas Gerais e Espírito Santo até chegar ao Oceano Atlântico (PINHEIRO, et.al. 2019). Trata-se do maior desastre sócio ambiental da história da mineração no que diz respeito ao volume de rejeitos derramados (MILANEZ, 2021; WANDERLEY, 2018; GONÇALVES, 2018).

Os horrores e os sofrimentos causados pelo rompimento da barragem de Fundão em novembro de 2015, não foram suficientes para evitar uma repetição em moldes mais acentuados. Desta vez, em 25 de janeiro de 2019, na cidade de Brumadinho-MG, houve o rompimento das barragens BI, BIV e BIV-A da Mina do Córrego do Feijão pertencentes à mineradora Vale S.A. Os rejeitos causaram danos sistêmicos expressos em consequências pessoais, socioambientais, econômicas e patrimoniais por longa extensão territorial, em especial na Bacia do Rio Paraopeba; causando, ainda, a morte de 272 pessoas, sendo 130 trabalhadores diretos, 121 trabalhadores terceirizados e 21 moradores das comunidades locais, destes dois nascituros (AVABRUM, 2026). O rompimento da barragem em Brumadinho é considerado um dos maiores acidentes de trabalho ampliado do mundo (WANDERLEY; MILANEZ; GONÇALVES, 2020; PINHEIRO, et.al. 2019).

Posteriormente, em março de 2020, a Organização Mundial da Saúde (OMS) declara como Pandemia a contaminação e morte de milhões de pessoas por COVID-19, perdurando até maio de 2023 (OMS, 2023, 2020). No Brasil, o decreto 10.329, de 29 de abril de 2020, estabeleceu a prática da mineração como essencial, considerando as atividades: lavra, beneficiamento, produção, comercialização e escoamento de bens minerais que, protegida por essa legislação, não parou a sua produção (Brasil, 2020). Essa decisão política foi contrária às recomendações de autoridades sanitárias do país e do mundo que indicavam naquele primeiro momento o isolamento social como principal medida sanitária de combate à pandemia (OMS, 2020).

Gomes & Bentolila (2021) afirmam que o Brasil vivenciou uma **tragédia gerencial** (grifo nosso) relacionada aos cuidados sanitários para contenção e possível redução do número de mortos pela Covid19. Entre os componentes desta tragédia, destacam-se as informações falsas e distorcidas, negacionismo à ciência e aos dados empíricos produzidos até aquele momento, trocas na referência do ministério da saúde e incentivo ao uso de medicamentos sem eficácia comprovada cientificamente. Dessa forma, o setor mineral se depara com uma realidade de trabalho inesperada, repleta de riscos e sem precedentes.

Partindo da indagação sobre os efeitos negativos desses traumas coletivos sobre a saúde mental dos trabalhadores da mineração, esse artigo tem como objetivo compreender a saúde mental dos trabalhadores de empresas do setor mineral que atuam nos municípios de Mariana, Congonhas e Ouro Preto, pertencentes à região do quadrilátero ferrífero. Essa compreensão contribuirá para a elaboração de estratégias de atenção à saúde para os trabalhadores do setor.

2. Métodos

Esse estudo utilizou o método qualitativo que objetiva apreender os “significados que as pessoas atribuem às suas experiências do mundo social e a maneira como as pessoas compreendem este mundo” (POPE & MAYS, 2009, p.14). Realizou-se entrevistas utilizando em profundidade com informantes-chave (IC), técnica na qual o “informante é convidado a falar livremente sobre um tema e as perguntas do investigador, quando são feitas, buscam dar mais profundidade às reflexões” (MINAYO, 2014, p.262). Ou seja, “podem abranger apenas um ou dois aspectos, mas com maior detalhamento” (BRITTEN, 2009, p.24).

Tendo em vista o objetivo da presente pesquisa, foi solicitado aos informantes-chave que falassem sobre a saúde mental dos trabalhadores da mineração de empresas que atuam nos municípios referenciados, considerando a ocorrência de três grandes tragédias em um curto espaço de tempo: o rompimento da barragem de Fundão em Mariana-MG, o rompimento das barragens BI, BIV e BIV-A da

Mina do Córrego do Feijão em Brumadinho-MG e Pandemia de COVID-19.

O convite para as entrevistas especificou como informantes-chave trabalhadores da mineração que estiveram em exercício profissional entre novembro de 2015 a maio de 2023, período que compreende o intervalo de tempo das três tragédias mencionadas.

A fonte de informação para a identificação dos entrevistados foram o Sindicato dos Trabalhadores na Indústria de Extração de Ferro e Metais Básicos de Mariana-MG (Metabase Mariana) e o Sindicato dos Trabalhadores na Indústria da Extração de Ferro e Metais Básicos de Congonhas, Belo Vale e Ouro Preto em Congonhas-MG (Metabase Inconfidentes). As entrevistas foram realizadas presencialmente nas sedes destes sindicatos e também nos domicílios de três trabalhadores residentes em Ouro Preto-MG e em Mariana-MG.

Participaram do estudo onze trabalhadores da mineração com períodos entre dez e vinte e sete anos de trabalho neste setor e idades variando de 35 a 61 anos. Após a realização de nove entrevistas percebeu-se que o material coletado começava a apresentar repetições expressando o critério de saturação, utilizado para se definir número de entrevistas a serem realizadas (POPE & MAYS, 2009). Realizaram-se, então, mais duas entrevistas no intuito de confirmar esta observação; encerrando, assim, essa etapa da pesquisa com 10 entrevistados do sexo masculino e 1 do sexo feminino.

Todos os participantes assinaram o Termo de Consentimento Livre e Esclarecido (TCLE). As entrevistas foram presenciais, gravadas e, posteriormente, transcritas com auxílio do programa Iramuteq. Ressalta-se que todos os dados que possibilitam a identificação dos entrevistados foram anonimizados.

Para o exame dos resultados foi utilizado o método da análise de conteúdo de Bardin (2016) definido como

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um conjunto de técnicas de análise das comunicações visando obter, por procedimentos sistemáticos e objetivos de descrição do conteúdo das mensagens, indicadores (quantitativos ou não) que deram a inferência de conhecimentos às condições relativas de produção/recepção (variáveis inferidas) dessas mensagens (BARDIN, 2016, pg.44).

Portanto, compreende-se que a análise de conteúdo proposta por Bardin (2016) tem como objetivo extrair significado e compreender o sentido de um determinado conjunto de dados. Ainda de acordo essa autora, o desenvolvimento desse método envolve três etapas sequenciais: a Pré-análise, a Exploração do Material e o Tratamento dos Resultados Obtidos e Interpretação.

Segundo Bardin (2016), a etapa da Pré-análise consiste na definição das hipóteses e objetivos da pesquisa e na escolha dos documentos a serem analisados. Estas duas ações não se desenvolvem necessariamente nessa ordem, mas se relacionam, intrinsecamente. Nesse estudo a hipótese, aqui compreendida como questão da pesquisa, assim como os objetivos, já foram apresentados anteriormente.

Para a escolha dos documentos analisados, deve-se considerar que o material em questão “[...] conterá índices que a análise explicitará” [...] por meio de menção explícita ou não do tema em investigação” (BARDIN, 2016, p. 66). Posto isso, os documentos analisados foi o conjunto das 11 entrevistas realizadas que, posteriormente foram transcritas, como fase de preparação do material, conforme orienta Bardin (2016).

Na etapa da exploração do material é realizada sua codificação, tendo em vista alcançar uma representação metódica de seu conteúdo. Dentre as possibilidades para realização da codificação, apresenta-se

as utilizadas nesse estudo: o recorte, que diz respeito a escolha de unidades; e a classificação e agregação, que trata da definição de categorias (Bardin, 2016).

Segundo Bardin (2016), a escolha das unidades pode ser feita a partir da identificação de unidades de registro para as quais pode-se considerar: a Palavra, o Objeto ou o Referente, o Personagem, o Acontecimento, o Documento, o Tema e a Unidade de Contexto. A categorização, por sua vez, compreende agrupar as unidades de registro sob uma denominação genérica, considerando a similaridade destas unidades. Este processo pode se dar à priori ou não e deve observar os seguintes aspectos: a exclusão mútua e a homogeneidade, que diz respeito sobre a possibilidade da categoria de abarcar o máximo de aspectos da unidade de registro, de forma que esta não possa estar em uma segunda categoria; a pertinência, que se refere como a definição da categoria expressa o objetivo do estudo e/ou o conteúdo das suas mensagens; a objetividade e a fidelidade, que concerne à perenidade da categoria mesmo se submetido à nova análise; e a produtividade, que trata da abertura a novas inferências e interrogações (BARDIN, 2016).

Após ouvir repetidas vezes, transcrever, ler e reler cada uma das entrevistas, foram identificadas como unidades de registro o Tema que, segundo Bardin (2016), é compreendido “[...] como unidade de significação que se liberta naturalmente de um texto analisado segundo certos critérios relativos à teoria que serve de guia à leitura” (BARDIN, 2106, p. 68).

A terceira e última fase etapa da Análise de Conteúdo proposta por Bardin (2016) é o tratamento dos resultados obtidos e interpretação. Este é o momento em que se condensa os dados, propõe-se inferências para, assim, gerar conhecimento. Assim, o Quadro 1 apresenta as unidades de registro e as categorias de análise, destacando-se que essas definições não se deram à priori, muito antes pelo contrário, elas emergiram da leitura exaustiva do material empírico.

Categoria	Unidade de Registro
Trabalho na Mineração	1) Mineriodependência 2) Precarização do Trabalho
Saúde Mental na Mineração	3) Uso de medicamentos, álcool e outras drogas. 4) Vivências dos trabalhadores no contexto das tragédias socioambientais estudadas. 5) Reconhecimento como saída para o prazer no trabalho.

Table 1. Unidades de Registro e Categorias de Análise

3. Resultados E Discussão

3.1. Trabalho na Mineração

Esta categoria destacou-se perante as demais elencadas neste estudo, perfazendo a maior parte do conteúdo das entrevistas. Examinando as falas dos participantes sobressaíram-se duas unidades de registro, a saber: Mineriodependência e Precarização do Trabalho.

3.1.1. Mineriodependência

As falas dos entrevistados apontam que o medo de perder o emprego, em uma região com dominação da atividade minerária, é uma entre tantas outras consequências da mineriodependência, que se estendem e entrelaçam outros aspectos subjetivos, além de aspectos econômicos, políticos e sociais.

Segundo Dejours (2015), o medo “[...] é utilizado pela direção como verdadeira alavanca para fazer trabalhar [...]” e ainda, “[...] o medo é também um instrumento de controle social na empresa [...]” (DEJOURS, 2015, p.147), o que foi evidenciado nas seguintes falas dos entrevistados.

“

Essa é a mentalidade de muitos funcionários da mineração, estão trabalhando no limite, muito no limite, angustiados, porque eles não têm coragem de falar, por causa do medo de perder. Então se você chamar alguém pra fazer entrevista, provavelmente você não vai conseguir. Não vai conseguir, porque a retaliação vem, entendeu? **A retaliação vem, eu não estaria conversando com você aqui se eu não estivesse no sindicato. Eu seria aquele trabalhador que correria de você. Entendeu?** (IC8) (grifo nosso);

“

Cê sente uma certa represália em relação a isso, hoje qualquer atitude que for tomada, que seja individual ou em grupo, pra empresa ela é vista com outros olhos. Tanto que tiveram colegas que foram demitidos por manifestar direito de outras pessoas (IC1);

Estudos sobre o fenômeno da mineriodependência (CARMO, 2019; COELHO, 2018) corroboram com a perspectiva apresentada pelos trabalhadores, afirmando que a necessidade de postos de trabalho neste setor reduz drasticamente ou anulam possíveis enfrentamentos, silenciando a base operária e a comunidade local.

A relação dos trabalhadores da mineração com as empresas do setor, também é marcada por consequências da mineriodependência. Assim, a vivência cotidiana do medo de perder o emprego instaura-se nessa classe trabalhadora fazendo morada em suas subjetividades e tornando-se uma forte barreira para ações coletivas, necessárias na luta pela garantia de direitos. Nesta perspectiva, Dejours afirma que

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Esse medo é permanente e gera condutas de obediência e até de submissão. Quebra a reciprocidade entre trabalhadores, desliga o sujeito do sofrimento do outro, que também padece, no entanto, a mesma situação (Dejours, 1999, p.52).

Os trabalhadores indicam que as empresas utilizam desse fator para coibir a busca coletiva por condições dignas de trabalho, remuneração justa, descanso, direito às condições de saúde e, principalmente, direito à vida.

“

Falta um engajamento maior (...), se criar um conjunto ali, um grupo ali que reivindica alguma coisa, que não seja através do sindicato, você está criando um clima, às vezes, de conflito. Então, acho que é isso, é o medo de as pessoas se comprometerem a lutar pelos seus direitos. Acho que isso atrapalha, por força da empresa. Se a gente se unir aqui e falar que vai ter uma greve aqui pra reivindicar algum direito que tá cortando, os trabalhadores não aderem, com medo de perder o emprego, com medo de represália (IC2);

Também de acordo com Cunha e Mazzilli (2005), a presença recorrente do medo no ambiente de trabalho remete a consequência das diversas mudanças ocorridas no mundo do trabalho, de

“ não mais o medo inerente à tarefa ou de não alcançar os níveis de desempenho desejados pela organização, mas o medo da perda do emprego, desemprego que pode tornar-se estrutural, deixando, portanto, o indivíduo à margem do processo produtivo (CUNHA E MAZZILLI, 2005, p.2).

De acordo com Silva (2019), a mineriodependência que produz o medo de perder o emprego e, conseqüentemente, a renda causa um efeito em cadeia na economia local. Em função desse fenômeno, a comunidade de Mariana -MG se mobilizou em torno do lema ‘Justiça sim, desemprego não’ que, segundo um de seus membros, estruturou-se em torno das seguintes justificativas

“ O que me deixava mesmo indignada era que a própria população de Mariana precisa dessa mineração, os comércios precisam, todo mundo precisa, porque se não há esse retorno da mineração, não há emprego, não há lucro nos comércios [...] e a própria população não via isso, como ainda não enxerga que a gente precisa, infelizmente, até ter outra fonte de renda em Mariana, a gente precisa da mineração aqui (A., exmembro do movimento “Justiça sim, desemprego não”, 2019 apud Silva, 2019, p.68).

Na pauta de demandas desse grupo organizado destacou-se principalmente a urgência pela retomada das atividades da mineração após o rompimento da barragem de Fundão. Desta forma, compreende-se que, apesar dos diversos danos causados pelo modelo minerador brasileiro, a população residente nos municípios ao entorno destes empreendimentos minerários se vê diretamente dependente da manutenção e continuidade desta atividade.

“ Quando você rebaixa o nível de vida na mineração, você rebaixa do conjunto da cidade. No comércio é pior ainda, estou falando nível de salarial. Hoje, o trabalhador é isso, ele é completamente dependente desse processo. Ele depende desse processo. E os governos atuam para ajudar essa dependência, não é para romper isso (IC4).

O medo da perda do emprego está presente de forma significativa na fala dos entrevistados, estando diretamente relacionado ao fenômeno da mineriodependência e estrangulando as possibilidades de mobilização coletiva por melhores condições de trabalho e preservação da vida.

3.1.2. Precarização do Trabalho

Atestando a precarização no ambiente laboral, participantes dessa pesquisa relataram redução drástica nas equipes de trabalho ao longo dos anos.

“ Antes nós tínhamos um número bem maior de trabalhadores, vamos falar assim, numa área que eu precisava de dez pessoas para trabalhar, chegamos a ter onze, sem dúvida. Ah, é

desnecessário? Não, alguém tem que descansar. Hoje nós temos seis e o serviço sai do mesmo jeito (IC1).

“ Na minha opinião tem que melhorar e melhorar muito porque quando eu fiquei na (nome da empresa), minha turma tinha 23 pessoas, hoje tem 10. E o trabalho é o mesmo. Você entendeu? Aí você imagina o desgaste, a meta, a cobrança é a mesma, é a mesma. O número de pessoas, de funcionários, reduziu muito e o serviço continua o mesmo, não muda. A produção tem que chegar lá no Espírito Santo para exportar (IC5).

Nota-se que a redução de trabalhadores é de ordem considerável equivalendo-se a aproximadamente cinquenta por cento do efetivo em cada equipe citada. Os trabalhadores entrevistados afirmam que o número de pessoas é menor e a cobrança por resultados permanece a mesma. Compreende-se que essa perversa equação culmina, evidentemente, em aumento da pressão sobre os trabalhadores que, acudados, tendem a sofrer física e psiquicamente na tentativa de manterem minimamente o seu emprego, fonte renda e sustento familiar. Nesta perspectiva, um dos entrevistados relatou que “em uma das nossas reuniões (reunião com o sindicato), um diretor nosso usou a seguinte frase que me marcou: **o trabalhador tem mais medo de perder o emprego do que de perder a vida**” (IC6, grifo nosso).

O aumento da pressão no trabalho percebido, vivenciado, internalizado e compartilhado pelos trabalhadores é denunciado nos relatos abaixo

“ A (nome da empresa) hoje, a (nome da empresa) e os outras mineradoras menores aí, eu vejo que sugam muito a mão de obra, cada vez mais, buscando uma produção maior, um lucro maior, mas com a mão de obra mais barata que tiver. E isso faz com que a gente entregue a nossa mão de obra de uma forma assim, mesmo desgastando a nossa saúde, nós dependemos daquilo e continuamos (IC2).

“ O tempo todo a empresa pressiona os sindicatos, pressiona o trabalhador em questão de demissão. É a principal arma que as empresas usam para manter os trabalhadores ali, a gente até brinca: debaixo do chicote! porque o cara sabe disso (IC6).

Compreende-se que os relatos apontam para o excesso da exploração da força de trabalho ao mencionarem que as empresas “trabalham sempre com o mínimo de mão de obra” (IC6), e, por conseguinte, “sugam muito” (IC2). Estes relatos vão ao encontro dos escritos de Lacaz (2016) que afirma o malefício das pressões exercidas sobre os trabalhadores, pois as mesmas “são prejudiciais à saúde pelo imperativo de fazer mais coisa em tempo limitado o que é vivido de maneira tensa e singular” (LACAZ, 2016 p.45). Segundo esse mesmo autor, os adoecimentos psíquicos oriundos dessa relação conflituosa com a gestão do trabalho, muitas vezes, são invisibilizados e não aparecem em registros de doenças relacionadas ao trabalho.

Segundo Dejours (2015), os trabalhadores desenvolvem saídas para mediar o sofrimento no trabalho, protegendo-se de possíveis

adoecimentos; saídas essas as quais ele denomina ‘estratégias defensivas’.

Dejours (2015) diferencia as estratégias defensivas entre: Defesa de Proteção, na qual trabalhadores evitam o sofrimento, alienando-se nos processos de trabalho; Defesa de Adaptação, quando há negação do sofrimento, denotando desamparo e impotência dos trabalhadores perante as queixas e relações conflituosas; Defesa de Exploração, mais presente em grupos que se sentem ameaçados e ao pretenderem a manutenção do trabalho, incorporam mudanças na organização das suas atividades, tais como: pagamento por produção, aumento do ritmo de trabalho, mudanças nos turnos de trabalho, pois “o que é explorado pela organização do trabalho não é o sofrimento em si mesmo, mas principalmente os processos de defesa utilizados contra esse sofrimento” (DEJOURS, 2015, p.135).

Como exemplo de defesa de exploração, destaca-se a prática da autoaceleração, caracterizada pelo aumento do ritmo das atividades do trabalho, levando, paradoxalmente, a intensificação do sofrimento por uma exaustão física e mental. Essa prática surge nos relatos dos trabalhadores entrevistados que denunciam, inclusive, o ambiente de ‘concorrência’ que se instala neste cenário:

“Os caras matam você de trabalhar porque se você fizer dez, eu tenho que fazer pelo menos umas oito. Só que os caras em vez de fazer dez, o cara faz cinquenta. Aí o cara acaba te matando, porque se você não faz a pessoa diz: por que você não está fazendo? Porque todo mundo acha que é assim, é equipe, mas não é equipe (IC10).

Indo ao encontro ao relato do entrevistado, Dejours (1999) chama atenção para a prática da autoaceleração e o ambiente de concorrência afirmando que

“Sob a influência do medo, por exemplo, com a ameaça de demissão pairando sobre todos os agentes de um serviço, a maioria dos que trabalham se mostra capaz de acionar todo um cabedal de inventividade para melhorar sua produção (em quantidade e qualidade), bem como para constranger seus colegas, de modo a ficar em posição mais vantajosa do que eles no processo de seleção para as dispensas (Dejours, 1999, p.58).

Concomitantemente com as pressões criadas no contexto descrito acima, os entrevistados revelam ainda perdas financeiras diretas, como redução do percentual no adicional noturno e no valor pago pelas horas extras de trabalho.

“Inclusive vem cortando direitos dos trabalhadores que atinge diretamente essa questão aí, por exemplo, o adicional noturno passa um ano, corta 5% no adicional noturno, isso tudo mexe com a cabeça do trabalhador, por ele trabalhar em um período desgastante, já com a emocional às vezes abalado, e ainda corta benefícios (IC2).

“É igual a hora extra, a hora extra nossa chegava até 120%. Quem fichar hoje na (nome da empresa), não chega a 120% mais, o dele vai até 100% só. Então só tá reduzindo os direitos (IC5).

Além do mais, a política salarial no setor da mineração vem impondo significativa perda aos trabalhadores ao longo dos anos. Os entrevistados denunciam o decréscimo da remuneração que impacta a vida de toda a categoria:

“Nós entrávamos na (nome da empresa), na (nome da empresa), ganhando dez salários mínimos. Você sabe qual é o salário inicial da (nome da empresa) hoje? Um salário mínimo e meio (IC1).

“Tem gente lá que tem mais de 10 anos que nunca teve um aumento na empresa. Eu tenho 12 anos e meu último aumento foi em 2018 (IC7).

Dentre outras contestações dos trabalhadores, estão a falta de transparência na gestão dos salários e a incerteza quanto à política de gestão de carreiras, tendo em vista a existência de salários diferentes para profissionais que exercem a mesma função. Estes aspectos corroboram com dados semelhantes da pesquisa de Carmo (2019) realizada com trabalhadores da mineração residentes na cidade de Mariana – MG.

“Tem esse problema também de faixa de salário, tem muita divergência de salários, entendeu? É a mesma função, o salário do cara é quatro mil e alguma coisa, o outro é R\$ 3.200. Então tem essa, não é só eu não, tem muitos casos assim também. E isso também afeta demais a mente do funcionário, né cara? Porque se um cara faz a mesma função que você, por que ele ganha mil e quatrocentos reais a mais do que você? (IC5).

Os entrevistados também denunciam a perda progressiva de benefícios assegurados em acordos coletivos, como assistência odontológica no plano de saúde e a perda do acesso a medicamentos de uso contínuo via convênios com farmácias.

“A empresa impõe algumas coisas que sufocam os direitos. Agora é o direito ao implante dentário, dentro do plano odontológico, ela cortou. Não só o implante, mas a parte odontológica do plano de saúde, ela cortou dos trabalhadores, isso é reprimir o direito... tanto é que ela pagou por aquilo, igual mixaria e tal, mas é... é... infelizmente, acabou com o direito da pessoa. E hoje muita gente precisa disso, depende e não tem (IC2).

“Ela (mineração) vai ficar rica e nós vamos morrer. E cada vez ela ganha mais e cada vez ela paga menos. E cada vez ela corta

mais. A gente tinha implante (odontológico) cortou. A gente tinha remédio em farmácia a gente não tem mais (IC10).

Assim, com a redução salarial e perda de benefícios, limitando o acesso aos meios básicos de sobrevivência, os trabalhadores têm sido desafiados a buscar possíveis alternativas, mesmo que prejudiciais e danosas à própria saúde física e mental. Uma saída utilizada que se destacou nas entrevistas é a busca cada vez maior por atividades extras nos mais variados setores, visando complementar a renda para garantir a subsistência:

“O nosso trabalhador aqui recebe muito pouco e boa parte deles trabalham na folga para ser Uber. Ou seja, para completar a renda dele, ele tem que fazer essa que está sendo a tendência. Se eu pegar o Uber, eu conheço todos os Uber, por causa do Uber não, aqui é 2V, eu conheço todos eles. Olha eu conheço todos eles porque todos eles trabalham na mineração. Construção civil também é da mineração, serralheria, solda, portão, é a turma da mineração que faz (IC4).

“Eu trabalho com uma equipe lá que a maioria deles tem uma renda extra por fora. E eu mesmo comecei um tempo atrás com fazer serviço de serralheria. Comecei a fazer pra acabar tendo que complementar mesmo a renda do dia a dia ali. Tem gente que mexe com... antena, instalação de antena Sky, tem gente que mexe arrumando máquina de lavar, é vários, tem gente que mexe com aplicativo de Uber, entendeu? (IC7).

Entre as atividades listadas aparece em destaque a função de motorista em aplicativos de transporte. Ressalta-se que na região pesquisada, segundo os entrevistados, não há domínio das maiores empresas de transporte por aplicativo (app) como a 99 e a Uber. Assim diversas outras empresas regionais ou locais disputam esse mercado e a preferência dos trabalhadores motoristas e usuários.

Entre as empresas presentes no território estão a Bibi Car, Pampam, Primaz Drive, Bora MG, 2V APP, Ubiz Car, 31 Motorista, Urban, entre outras. Outras atividades exercidas para assegurar o complemento da renda familiar estão no segmento da construção civil, a exemplo de funções como: pedreiros, serralheiros e eletricitas.

Importante dizer que a associação entre atividades desenvolvidas na mineração com atividades laborais extras executadas nos mais variados setores, conforme apontado, acentua situações de risco em razão do acúmulo de funções e redução do descanso, além dos perigos relacionadas ao exercício destas atividades. Soma-se a isso preocupações econômicas, uma vez que a complementação de renda como autônomos é incerta e variável.

Com todo esse cenário instaurado, os trabalhadores da mineração da região foco desse estudo têm convivido também, desde 2022, com uma nova forma de organização da escala de trabalho: tratam-se dos turnos fixos com jornada de 12 (doze) horas diurnas ou noturnas que, a depender do setor, estão organizadas escalas fixas 2 X 2 ou 3 X 3. Na escala fixa 2 x 2 trabalha-se dois dias ou duas noites consecutivas e folga-se pelo mesmo período. A escala 3 x 3 segue esta mesma lógica.

Cabe também ressaltar que em função do deslocamento até as minas e a realidade do trânsito local nas cidades mineradas, acrescenta-se à jornada de trabalho o tempo em trânsito que gira em

torno de uma hora e trinta minutos a duas horas. Consequentemente, tempo semelhante é necessário para o retorno, ficando assim o trabalhador aproximadamente quinze horas do dia à disposição da empresa.

“Hoje a gente luta contra as mineradoras pela questão do turno de 12 horas, que é algo desgastante para o trabalhador. Só a título de exemplo, um trabalhador que mora em Ouro Preto e que tem que ir para uma mina (em Mariana), além das 12 horas de trabalho, ele gasta em média mais umas 3 horas no trânsito, o trânsito na nossa região hoje é caótico (IC6).

“Colocaram um turno de 12 horas, tentando justificar que é qualidade de vida, que é só na cabeça deles. E hoje nós temos uma redução do descanso, o trabalhador vai estar numa jornada bem maior dentro do ônibus, (considerando o aumento exponencial do trânsito na região em função das obras dos reassentamentos coletivos e obras nas estruturas das mineradoras) mais jornada de 12 horas de trabalho, ele vai descansar que hora? Que hora que isso vai trazer qualidade de vida para ele? (IC1).

Salienta-se que a introdução dessa nova jornada se deu durante o período pandêmico o qual será discutido mais adiante na unidade de registro Vivências dos trabalhadores no contexto das tragédias socioambientais estudadas. Os entrevistados destacaram a pressão exercida pelas mineradoras para ‘imposição’ desses novos horários, aproveitando-se da vulnerabilidade coletiva em função da pandemia, momento em que havia o receio da perda de postos de trabalho e da própria vida.

“Na (nome da empresa) logo na pandemia, quando a turma era mais frágil, sentia um receio de perder o emprego ou qualquer outra coisa desse tipo, ela meteu um turno de 12 horas guela abaixo da turma, guela abaixo mesmo, porque ninguém queria trabalhar 12 horas. Foi forçada, ela forçou, porque ela fez chantagem na PLR, (participação nos lucros e resultados) ela fez chantagem, ela fez várias chantagens nesse aspecto, pelo critério econômico (IC4).

“Hoje o turno de sete às dezenove horas é até bom se comparado... Mas o turno da noite você não tem folga, a folga é pequena. Esse turno é horrível. O pessoal não gosta não tá! Eu acho, uma opinião, acho que eles aceitaram por quê? A (nome da empresa) ia dar 20% de aumento pro pessoal (IC11).

Segundo os relatos, as empresas adotaram um discurso para justificar o turno de doze horas e as modalidades de escala vigentes, afirmando que os trabalhadores teriam mais tempo com a família e mais qualidade de vida. Porém, as pessoas que trabalham nestes horários e os seus familiares, indicam que há uma preocupação com os ritmos biológicos, principalmente relacionados ao sono e à vigília, que podem inclusive acarretar riscos de acidentes. Inclusive, os entrevistados denunciaram a percepção de que os últimos acidentes de trabalho ocorreram na jornada noturna:

“

Onde está uma segurança que você coloca uma pessoa 12 horas a noite se expondo... num equipamento de 200 toneladas, sem poder dormir, três dias ininterruptos. Como é que você vai criar uma segurança para que essa pessoa trabalhe de forma... Qual é a ferramenta para se conter o sono? (IC8).

“

Deve ter uns 4 anos, depois que mudou eu fiquei só a noite. Ela (gerente) não me trocou, eu falei com ela me troca, me põe de dia, eu tô cansado, a gente tá exausto. Mas todos que pediram para trocar foram desligados (IC10).

“

A gente cansa muito, trabalha muito, cansa muito. Mas eu tenho percebido que os últimos acidentes que têm acontecido na área, é tudo a noite. Tudo no noturno da noite, é quatro e pouca da manhã, onze horas da noite. Então eu estou vendo que o pessoal que está... noturno está sendo puxado para isso (IC7).

Percebe-se ainda que entre os trabalhadores há o entendimento que, o trabalho em turno fixo de doze horas em jornada diurna é ‘melhor’ se comparado à mesma jornada noturna. Como consequência, essa forma de organização da jornada de trabalho contrapõe os trabalhadores entre si criando uma forma de ‘competição’ pelo horário julgado como ‘menos ruim’ para se trabalhar.

“

Pra gente que trabalha de dia, no turno de dia (07h às 19h), é relativamente mais tranquilo do que pra quem está à noite (IC7).

“

Hoje o turno de 07h às 19h é até bom. Mas o turno da noite você não tem folga, a folga é pequena. Esse turno é horrível, o pessoal não gosta não tá! (IC11).

“

O pessoal que trabalha durante o dia, a gente vê um desgaste menor, por ser durante o dia. Eu acho que o nosso corpo está acostumado a ficar acordado durante o dia. Agora, o pessoal à noite está sofrendo muito (IC6).

Outro apontamento feito pelos trabalhadores entrevistados em relação às jornadas fixas de 12h, em particular, a jornada noturna, diz respeito às reduzidas possibilidades de convívio social fora do trabalho, uma vez que os períodos de folgas são utilizados para descanso ou para complementação de renda em outras atividades, conforme discutido anteriormente. Desta forma, compromete-se o tempo disponível para a vida em família e/ou para outras atividades de reprodução dos modos de vida:

“

Eu saio às 16h30, eu pego o serviço às 18h. Chego no outro dia às dez pra oito, aí eu tomo um café, deito. Eu tive que acostumar o meu corpo desse jeito, é deitar as dez pra oito e acordar às 16h e trabalhar de novo. Quando foi mudar para o turno de 12 horas falou que a gente ia ficar mais com a família. Aí eu falei: aí antes de mudar, eu brinquei com os meninos, eu falei, nós vamos ficar é dormindo (IC10).

“

Eu percebi que nos turnos de 12 horas, eu perdi muito. Foi batizado dos meus sobrinhos, coisas que eu não poderia ir, questão de alguma festinha que tinha, que as pessoas me chamavam. Eu me privava de tudo por causa do trabalho, porque eu não gostava de trocar (horário) (IC9).

“

Se a gente não começar a olhar, se as pessoas não começarem a achar uma saída, vai só perder. Não é só vida, não, é convívio familiar, é convívio social. A gente vai perdendo isso, você não tem convívio, quem trabalha à noite. Até quem trabalha de dia, chega em casa, até 21h tem que estar dormindo, porque 4h da manhã tem que levantar de novo (IC8).

As falas dos entrevistados corroboram com estudo que aponta que o trabalho noturno associado às condições de trabalho, afetam de forma negativa o bem estar e a qualidade do sono (LUI REINHARDT & FISCHER, 2021). Segundo estas autoras, a dessincronização circadiana conduz a prejuízos do sono que, consequentemente, desencadeiam fadiga e sonolência durante o turno de trabalho.

Na mesma perspectiva, Fernandes et.al (2007), em pesquisa com trabalhadores de turnos diurno e noturno, inferem que o trabalho noturno apresenta especificidades que devem ser consideradas na gestão do trabalho: ciclo sono-vigília, relações familiares e o reconhecimento da atividade noturna pelo meio social. Veronese (2007) aponta ainda que as alterações dos horários de trabalho, somadas à redução das atividades sociais e familiares, contribuem para o sofrimento advindo do trabalho noturno culminando em adoecimentos físico e psíquico.

Até aqui, discutimos a categoria Trabalho na Mineração através de duas unidades de registro, quais sejam, a Mineriodependência e a Precarização do trabalho na Mineração. A mineriodependência contribui para uma gestão do trabalho imposta sob o medo, riscos de represália e ameaças de demissão; a Precarização do Trabalho, por sua vez, expressa, segundo os relatos dos entrevistados, pela redução da média salarial, pela retirada progressiva de direitos e benefícios, pela drástica redução das equipes de trabalho, pelo aumento da pressão por resultados e pela mudança nas escalas das jornadas de trabalho. Infere-se que o medo de perder o emprego é o elemento central e motor de uma retroalimentação entre Mineriodependência e Precarização do Trabalho.

Posta essa situação e seus elementos e, considerando o objetivo do estudo apresentado, cujo cerne é discutir a saúde mental dos trabalhadores da mineração na região desse estudo, considerando o contexto da sobreposição dos efeitos das três tragédias socioambientais aqui referidas, apresenta-se a seguir a categoria Saúde Mental na Mineração e suas respectivas unidades de registro: Uso de medicamentos, álcool e outras drogas, Vivências dos trabalhadores no

contexto das tragédias socioambientais estudadas e Reconhecimento como saída para o prazer no trabalho.

3.2. Saúde Mental na Mineração

A análise das unidades de registro anteriores e o objetivo desse estudo, nos convoca a pensar sobre como acúmulo de desvantagens produzido pela precarização das condições e das relações de trabalho ao longo dos anos na mineração, somada à recente ‘imposição’ do turno fixo com a extenuante jornada de doze horas, tem refletido sobre a saúde mental dos trabalhadores da mineração na região estudada. As entrevistas realizadas indicam consequências para a saúde dos trabalhadores relacionadas ao uso intensificado de medicamentos, álcool e outras drogas. Apontam ainda, ações de saúde realizadas, ainda que frágeis, e sugerem que o reconhecimento seja uma saída enquanto vivência de prazer no trabalho.

3.2.1. Uso de medicamentos, álcool e outras drogas

Segundo participantes da pesquisa, um dos caminhos adotados para lidar com as danosas consequências das condições de trabalho denunciadas tem sido o uso intensificado de medicamentos, bebidas energéticas, álcool e outras drogas, configurando-se sérias ameaças imediatas e a médio e longo prazo, colocando em risco a saúde e consequentemente a vida:

“Temos várias reclamações de procura dos nossos companheiros que tiveram um índice muito elevado de uso de bebida e de outras substâncias não apropriadas para o organismo. Então, isso tudo para a gente afeta diretamente a saúde mental, não só do trabalhador, mas a família do trabalhador que é afetada diretamente (IC1).

“O problema de álcool hoje, eu acho que ele se mantém a mesma coisa que era no passado, o problema é que passou do álcool. Ou seja, a bebida sempre foi um problema. Nas cidades mineradas sempre teve esse problema. O grande elemento é que entrou forte o problema de uso de outras drogas, como crack e cocaína. Que são estimulantes, para o cara aguentar, para o cara acordar (IC4).

“O pessoal que trabalha à noite, eles tomam remédio para dormir durante o dia e tomam remédio para ficarem acordados durante a noite. Eu tenho até uma foto, que o pessoal me mandou, de uma lata de lixo cheia de energético, durante uma jornada no trabalho, numa cesta de lixo dentro da Vale. Então o trabalhador toma remédio, muitas vezes toma bebida alcoólica para dormir durante o dia e remédio para trabalhar a noite. A gente ouve muito falar inclusive, de acharem pinos de cocaína em lixeira, o pessoal tá fazendo uso pra passar a noite acordado, né, isso aí tem relato, sim... Então, isso está muito grande dentro da mineração, a dependência química (IC6).

“Cocaína hoje é uma droga muito utilizada dentro da área da mineração. Por que? É estimulante, não causa nenhum tipo, pouquíssimos tipos de reações, a pessoa não vai ficar

surtada igual o crack faz, não vai ficar louco, quando ela consegue usar cocaína e consegue manter aquele padrão de lucidez. E é uma droga que na área o pessoal chama de **droga do super-homem. A pessoa se torna mais forte, mais resistente.** A droga de super-homem. Por quê? Porque a cocaína vai me deixar mais rápido, mais forte, mais resistente, mais voraz. Então eu vou usar cocaína. E vou ter pouco efeito. Não vou surtar, não vou ficar louco (IC8); (Grifo nosso).

Compreende-se que o uso de psicoativos, conforme discutido acima, têm um preocupante potencial danoso, tanto individual quanto coletivamente, perfazendo-se como mais um fator conseqüente da precarização do trabalho. Nota-se que há uma preocupação dos trabalhadores relacionada ao consumo de bebidas alcoólicas que, em certa medida, tem sido intensificado e agravado com o uso de drogas ilícitas. Os participantes mencionam drogas ilícitas estimulantes como o crack e a cocaína que inclusive é chamada entre eles como a “droga do super-homem” (IC8), pois os ‘capacita’ adicionando atributos como rapidez, resistência e força.

Dejours (2015) cita que ambientes laborais industriais ou outros de riscos equivalentes, suscitam medo recorrente de que a qualquer momento um grave acidente possa ocorrer ocasionando a perda de vidas humanas. Para o autor, estas situações que geram medo ocasionam “problemas de sono e, sobretudo, consumo de medicamentos psicotrópicos pela maioria do pessoal trabalhando numa fábrica: ansiolíticos durante o dia, soníferos à noite e psicoestimulantes pela manhã” (DEJOURS, 2015, p.88).

“Para fazer frente à solidão, ao sofrimento no trabalho, à sobrecarga, ao medo, ao medo dos outros, **mas também ao medo de não conseguir manter a cadência (grifo nosso)**, as pessoas recorrem cada vez mais a substâncias psicoativas para manterem a performance (DEJOURS, BARROS & LANCMAN, 2016, p.233).

Para além do uso de álcool e outras drogas, os entrevistados indicam o uso de bebidas energéticas e medicamentos psicotrópicos, apontando para outros e importantes quadros de saúde física e psíquica que têm acometido trabalhadores do setor mineral conforme relatos a seguir:

“Eu lembro um dia que eu estava em uma assembleia na CSN e falei assim, olha, quer ver uma coisa companheirada, como a turma está doente? Quem toma aqui Citalopran, quem toma aqui Rivotril, Zolpiden, estão tomando isso como Aspirina, ou não é verdade? Aí a turma começa a pensar um pouco coletivamente. Mas no dia a dia, o trabalhador no chão, ele não vê rápido essa relação. Ele não vê, ele não enxerga de fato muito rápido essa relação. Ele não vê porque cedo ou tarde vai estar doente (IC4).

“Já pegamos Rivotril, Clonazepan e outras medicações de controle restrito da saúde mental que as pessoas estão colocando no bolso e levando de forma natural. Ah não, estou tomando esse remédio aqui porque ele me dá calma, ele me

acalma, ele controla a minha ansiedade. Mas você sabe o que é isso? Isso é uma droga. Quem te receitou? Ah não, usei a receita de fulano e se foi bom pra fulano, com certeza vai ser bom pra mim (IC8).

“Até hoje eu tento controlar o sono com remédio e tomo o Êxodus também pra conseguir fugir um pouco desses pensamentos. E aí eu tentando fugir dessa angústia, desses medos, dessa raiva, mas infelizmente é uma coisa que, se pôr a cabeça no travesseiro não tem como fugir (IC2).

Estudo realizado por MOTTA (2021) com operários da mineração que trabalhavam em Mariana-MG no período em que houve o rompimento da barragem de Fundão, aponta que transtornos mentais comuns (TMC's) como depressão e ansiedade apresentaram aumento de 10% para este grupo comparado com grupos de trabalhadores da mineração em outro município. A pesquisa demonstrou também que as condições de vida e trabalho nessa cidade específica àquela época, proporcionaram agravos à saúde, intensificando os quadros clínicos de pessoas com transtornos depressivos e ansiosos.

A respeito da intensificação do adoecimento mental dos trabalhadores de Mariana no contexto do rompimento da barragem de Fundão, conforme Motta (2021), apresenta-se na sequência a unidade de registro:

3.2.2. Vivência dos trabalhadores no contexto das tragédias socioambientais estudadas

A presente unidade de registro discuti as vivências dos trabalhadores da mineração da região estudada nos cenários dos rompimentos das Barragens de Fundão em Mariana-MG em 2015; das Barragens BI, BIV e BIV-A da Mina do Córrego do Feijão em Brumadinho-MG em 2019; e da Pandemia de Covid-19 entre 2020 a 2023.

Os trabalhadores entrevistados relataram que haviam entre eles conversas sobre a possibilidade de rompimento da estrutura da barragem de Fundão, entretanto a mineradora Samarco, empresa brasileira controlada pelas mineradoras Vale S.A. e a australiana BHP, assegurava a segurança do modelo de depósito de rejeitos adotado, assim como a segurança no trabalho; permanecendo, assim, entre os trabalhadores um sentimento de confiança no processo produtivo da mineração.

“Pra a gente, foi até meio que surpreendente, porque realmente a Samarco, ela pregava muito a questão de segurança. A gente, como trabalhador da mineração, os próprios diretores nossos vivenciávamos que era muito cobrado segurança dentro da Samarco. Durante o dia a gente ouviu o pessoal falar lá sobre tremores que eu acho que tava acontecendo uns dias antes também, mas assim, na usina, na parte de cima, lá o pessoal sentiu, mas nada de visível, assim, de impacto na área de barragem. (...) (IC 6).

“Assim, a gente ouvia falar, trabalhando a noite ou trabalhando durante o dia e o pessoal falava: Ah se esse trem romper, se essa barragem romper. Mas ninguém nunca acreditava que ia acontecer (IC 2).

Todavia, após o rompimento da barragem de Fundão, os trabalhadores inferiram que pessoas responsáveis pela empresa sabiam dos problemas, da gravidade e das possíveis consequências e, ainda assim, optaram por manter as atividades garantindo a produtividade. Desta forma, rompe-se não somente a barragem de rejeitos, mas também uma identidade com a empresa e com o processo produtivo mineração.

“E a gente sabe que o rompimento dessa proporção não é da noite para o dia. Eles negam e tal, mas eles sabiam dessa possibilidade, optaram por produção ao invés da segurança do trabalhador. Então o número de vítimas só não foi maior por causa da questão do horário. Se isso acontece durante a madrugada, a tragédia poderia ser muito maior. Poderia não, seria muito maior (IC6).

Outros sentimentos que ficaram expressos nas entrevistas foram a angústia pela perda de colegas de trabalho e pelo sofrimento ético, uma vez que os trabalhadores passaram a serem vistos pela comunidade local como corresponsáveis pelo ocorrido.

“Na época de Fundão, de tarde eu fiquei sabendo, eu tive um baque grande, porque um amigo meu, sabe, eu tenho alguns amigos, teve um só que faleceu, que eu conheci, ele era aposentado da Vale e tava trabalhando na barragem ali embaixo (IC11).

“Quando aconteceu o rompimento a reação dos trabalhadores foi de pânico. O termo que eu poderia usar, pânico. Primeiro porque perderam, por exemplo, porque eu perdi conhecidos lá no rompimento. Trabalhei na noite anterior que antecedeu o rompimento da barragem. Sensação do pânico, sensação de corresponsabilidade, de culpa no trabalhador. Logo depois do rompimento, que a gente não podia ir para o ponto de ônibus de uniforme, porque ele tava sendo retaliado. Nós éramos culpados pelo que aconteceu (IC8).

Ao dizer que trabalhou na noite anterior ao rompimento da barragem, o IC 8 traz, de forma implícita, outro sofrimento vivenciado pelos trabalhadores no contexto da tragédia em questão: o sentimento de vulnerabilidade causada pela sensação que a distância entre o sobrevivente e a vítima é apenas o acaso.

A inclusão pelo ocorrido no município de Brumadinho em Minas Gerais, fisicamente (aproximadamente 130 quilômetros) e temporalmente (três anos e dois meses) distantes do rompimento de Fundão, justificase tendo em vista tratar-se de eventos que compartilham semelhanças estruturais, corporativas e socioambientais, contudo em diferentes proporções, principalmente no que diz respeito ao número de vidas ceifadas. Cumpre reiterar que o rompimento das barragens da Mina do Córrego do Feijão é considerado o maior acidente de trabalho ampliado na história da Mineração (PINHEIRO, et.al. 2019).

Os relatos demonstraram que, mesmo residindo e trabalhando geograficamente distantes da tragédia ocorrida em Brumadinho, os trabalhadores entrevistados foram novamente atravessados pelo sentimento de perda de identidade com o trabalho na mineração e incerteza quanto à segurança no trabalho e, conseqüentemente, medo no que diz respeito à manutenção da própria vida. Sentimentos

estes reforçados pela sensação de negligência e omissão corporativa dada a reincidência do rompimento de barragens de rejeitos.

“Brumadinho foi um choque, principalmente, teve alguns conhecidos nossos, né? Igual o pessoal comentou, podia ter sido um de nós, né? Eu fiquei muito decepcionado com a empresa, porque pelo fato de que? Pelo fato que segundo eles falaram, a empresa não fala isso, segundo o que eles falaram que eles sabiam. No caso de Brumadinho eu tava, acho que tava trabalhando na Mina de Alegria na época. Depois que eu fiquei sabendo que o rapaz que morava aqui em cima perto de casa aqui morreu. Eu conhecia até um outro lá, um técnico de segurança que foi lá de Itabira também, e faleceu também (IC11).

“Quando rompeu o fundão, aí surgiram os comentários, isso nunca mais vai acontecer. Por causa da proporção, isso nunca mais vai acontecer, a empresa agora vai ficar em cima, vai vigiar mais, vai realmente fazer a segurança, não só pregar a segurança. Pouco tempo depois, acontece em Brumadinho, eu entendo que milhares de vezes pior do que a Mariana. Assim, a gente não pode mensurar a vida de uma pessoa para um familiar ou para um amigo, né. Eu falo assim, o número de vidas, né, é muito pior do que aconteceu em Mariana. Mas, mais uma vez, as mineradoras nos provam que a produção está acima da segurança com o rompimento de brumadinho. **Aí, na cabeça do trabalhador da mineração fala assim, amanhã eu vou vir pra trabalhar, mas não sei se eu volto pra casa (grifo nosso) (IC6).**

Outro ponto a ser destacado é a relação de familiaridade, parentesco e/ou amizade dos trabalhadores com outros trabalhadores do setor mineral em cidades vizinhas ou mais distantes. Entende-se que a predominância de empresas de grande porte que circulam e transferem sua mão de obra entre diferentes unidades contribuem para que os trabalhadores se conheçam ou tenham laços familiares independente da cidade em que trabalham, contribuindo para intensificação do sentimento de luto.

Foi relatado pelos entrevistados o medo de perder o emprego, considerando a ocorrência de duas tragédias de grandes impactos negativos no setor mineral sob a gestão da mesma empresa, a Vale S.A. Um dos trabalhadores relata que em razão das perdas das vidas humanas, mas também das demissões causadas após o rompimento da barragem da Mina do Córrego do Feijão, este ocorrido foi sentido como “[...] um segundo rompimento para Mariana [...]”.

“Além de ter acontecido assim pior do que aconteceu aqui em termos de vida humana, mas parece que estava vivenciando lá 2015. Esse foi o sentimento de todas as pessoas que a gente conversou e todo mundo pra baixo, porque muitas incertezas, até mesmo em relação a emprego. E ficou uma coisa assim, uma nota de luto mesmo, sabe? Esses períodos de lay-off, esses períodos de demissões e Brumadinho foi um segundo rompimento para Mariana, para os trabalhadores também (IC2).

“Brumadinho foi... eu já estava na Vale, né? Eu já tinha o quê? Um ano e... um ano e pouco na Vale, né? Aí vem outro desespero, né? Eu saí de uma (Samarco) que tinha rompido e perdi meu emprego. Aí aconteceu na Vale em 2019, eu vou perder meu emprego de novo? Muita gente ficou com medo de perder emprego, a verdade é essa (IC5).

Comparando com as vivências entre as tragédias minerárias discutidas, os trabalhadores entrevistados relataram suas vivências e percepções sobre no período da pandemia por COVID-19.

“A pandemia eu acho que foi o maior impacto na saúde mental dos trabalhadores, foi maior. Porque a pandemia, cara, assim, nas cidades mineradas, pelo menos no último estudo que eu estava acompanhando, era onde que tinha mais transmissão. Então você não tinha na tua família alguém que não sofreu consequências, e as mortes eram muito. Era tipo assim, toda semana morria alguém que era conhecido. Então você perdeu as pessoas, a insegurança financeira dos trabalhadores, e isso afetou demais (IC4).

A fala do IC4 sobre o maior número de transmissão do vírus COVID-19 em cidades mineradas é confirmada por dados da Secretaria de Estado de Saúde de Minas Gerais, SES-MG. Cidades pertencentes à delimitação desta pesquisa apresentaram altos índices de contaminação por Covid-19 como Mariana com 18.307 casos confirmados e 120 mortes, Ouro Preto com 12.850 casos confirmados e 149 mortes e Congonhas com 12.755 casos e 119 óbitos (MINAS GERAIS, 2023). Considera-se que o número de contaminações é alto haja vista a população residente (IBGE, 2022) de Mariana com 61.387, Ouro Preto com 74.821 e Congonhas com 52.890 (MINAS GERAIS, 2023). Ressalta-se que cidades com exploração minerária vivenciam o fenômeno da população flutuante (geralmente residentes por curtos períodos a trabalho) que não são registradas no censo populacional.

Conforme mencionado, o decreto 10.329 de 29 de abril de 2020 incluiu as atividades de mineração como essencial, desta forma, os trabalhadores deste segmento, principalmente das áreas operacionais, continuaram exercendo suas funções presencialmente. Bertollo (2024), aponta que o alto índice de contaminação por covid-19 em cidades mineradas na região do quadrilátero ferífero está diretamente relacionado à gestão das empresas marcada pela superexploração do trabalho vinculada à negligência do governo federal ao caracterizar e decretar o trabalho em mineração como essencial.

O IC 8 revela o medo causado pelo despreparo corporativo e a falta de humanização na condução com os trabalhadores durante a pandemia, medo que é agravado pelo risco da perda do emprego.

“A pandemia ninguém se preparou para ela. Mais medo, mais pânico, agora vai parar tudo, vai me mandar embora, vou ficar dentro de casa, porque você chegava lá, **fazia o teste da Covid, dava positivo, eles te colocavam numa gaiola, numa caminhonete com uma gaiola, para não ter contato, e te levavam embora para casa (grifo nosso).** Pessoal falou assim estão tratando nós igual um porco, me colocam dentro de uma gaiola, isolado, como se eu fosse um

bandido e me leva embora. E aí causou mais problema ainda, porque é uma doença que ninguém sabia, medo, pânico (IC8).

Em síntese, percebe-se que as falas dos trabalhadores entrevistados, ora indicam maior sofrimento em decorrência da Covid-19, ora indicam maior sofrimento em decorrência do rompimento das barragens de rejeito, como indicado na fala do IC 2, residente de Mariana, município onde ocorreu o rompimento da barragem de Fundão.

“ Eu acho que o peso local da barragem de Fundão teve mais peso do que a COVID aqui. Com todos os trabalhadores que eu hoje, desde 2015... O Covid foi pesado, foi e até hoje traz sequelas aí e tal, não sei cientificamente se é provado ou não, mas a gente vê falar. Mas eu acho que o Fundão teve mais peso do que o Covid (IC2).

Posto os sofrimentos vivenciados no cenário conjectural do rompimento das barragens e do período pandêmico, os trabalhadores entrevistados foram convidados a falar sobre ações de cuidado com a saúde. Sobre as possíveis ações de saúde realizadas pelas empresas mineradoras, os trabalhadores mencionaram sobre ações de prevenção à Covid-19.

“ Dentro da (nome da empresa), iniciou-se um processo de conscientização, de manter distanciamento, de higiene. Começou-se a fazer testes de covid. Os testes, né, aí chegaram os testes. Isso, começaram a fazer testes no primeiro momento de 15 em 15 dias. Tinha um checklist pra gente preencher antes de sair de casa. Se a gente estava com algum sintoma, se tivesse algum sintoma, 14 dias de quarentena. Daí a pouco, começou-se a colocar os trabalhadores do grupo de risco em casa (IC3);

“ A (nome da empresa) tentou amenizar ao máximo o impacto, não visando o trabalhador, visando o lucro, porque que ela não parou em momento algum. Mas ainda colocou algumas coisas que deu uma segurança maior pra gente, vamos dizer assim. Tomou algumas medidas de proteção e de prevenção, mas outro problema... Nós continuamos trabalhando, nós continuamos gerando riqueza, vamos dizer assim, como produto final. E a saúde ficou do mesmo jeito, não teve aquele amparo, criou-se uma pseudo-prevenção de que álcool em gel ia resolver o problema, que máscara ia (...) quando a pessoa chega, fazia tudo, tinha uma poltrona para cada trabalhador (no transporte/ônibus pra a empresa). Quando chegava aqui, o cara passaria e aglomerava. E era um contato, tinha que ter um contato. Isso aí era utopia falar que não ia ter. Então, do que ela tentou fazer, ela visou o lado físico. O lado emocional ficou pouca coisa, porque você saía de casa para trabalhar, você voltava e encontrava o seu filho dentro de casa (IC1);

Para o IC 1, tratou-se de uma “pseudo-prevenção”, uma vez que, mesmo com a adoção de medidas como uso de máscara em gel e álcool, o isolamento social, medida sanitária crucial na prevenção da Covid -19, não ocorreu, tendo em vista que as atividades laborais na

mineração mantiveram seu ritmo ou, como menciona o entrevistado “[...] não parou em momento algum.” Razão pela qual o entrevistado interpreta que as medidas de prevenção adotadas não se tratam de uma preocupação genuína com a vida de trabalhador e seus familiares, mas sim com a manutenção do ritmo da atividade e do lucro.

3.2.3. Reconhecimento como fonte de prazer no trabalho

As três unidades de registro discutidas até aqui revelam sofrimento vivenciado no cenário da precarização do trabalho na mineração denunciado nas falas dos trabalhadores entrevistados. Todavia o trabalho também é carregado pela dimensão do prazer que, segundo Dejours (2007), é mediado pelo reconhecimento no trabalho que “[...] é um ingrediente essencial da saúde mental” (DEJOURS, 2007, p.29). Nesta direção, uma cena se repetiu e despertou a atenção dos pesquisadores: o corpo em movimento, a expressão facial das pessoas entrevistadas, o ‘brilho nos olhos’, a imposição da voz, o gestual, a postura física de uma forma geral ao falar da atividade que exercem. Os entrevistados demonstraram prazer em falar do seu saber e do uso da inteligência prática no trabalho.

Segundo Dejours (2011), quando os trabalhadores conseguem vislumbrar as contribuições da mobilização de sua inteligência no trabalho, transformando o sofrimento do encontro com o real do trabalho em prazer, “esse prazer é de grande importância para a saúde plena, pois inscreve a relação do trabalho como mediadora da realização de si mesmo e da construção da identidade. É a condição necessária para tornar válido o aforismo segundo o qual “o trabalho é a saúde” (DEJOURS, 2011, p.383).

Corroborando com esse autor, as declarações de prazer no trabalho, apareceram vinculadas ao fazer da atividade e apontaram que esse pode ser vivenciado na união presente em equipes longevas, no saber-fazer laboral e no reconhecimento

“ Minha função era uma tarefa que todo mundo me elogiava na questão de trabalho. Graças a Deus, eu sempre fui... Até hoje, os meninos me falam nossa, eu acho até bonito, acho interessante. Nossa, mas essa solda sua ficou top, hein? Tipo assim, os enchimentos ficam muito bons. E meus colegas, às vezes, falam que eu tenho dez anos de empresa, mas dez anos muito bem vividos. E meu colega falou assim, estava contando as pessoas que ele gosta de trabalhar, e ele falou assim, sabe uma pessoa boa de trabalho, você... aí ele falou, espetacular, você... sabe, tipo assim, igual eu falo assim, é pessoas que você sabe, que te dão uma positividade (IC9);

“ Cara, eu tenho 27 anos que eu tô nessa luta e eu... pra mim, cara, eu gosto demais, sabe? Gosto muito da minha profissão, gosto mesmo... isso aí engrandece o ser humano, né, cara? (grifo nosso). Você sair todo dia de manhã cedo pra você pegar o seu sustento ali, não tem coisa melhor. E eu trabalho porque eu gosto, entendeu? Eu escolhi essa profissão pra mim e tô nela aí há 27 anos (IC5);

Quando a qualidade de meu trabalho é reconhecida pelos outros, então me é possível – embora se trate de uma questão exclusivamente pessoal – destinar o reconhecimento do registro do fazer para o registro do ser: eu sou mais inteligente, mais competente, mais seguro de mim mesmo depois do trabalho do que antes dele. Pouco a pouco,

de etapa em etapa, eu mesmo me desenvolvo, minha identidade se fortalece, eventualmente eu me realizo (DEJOURS, 2009, p. 4).

Novamente, os trabalhadores relataram o reconhecimento no trabalho, em especial pelos pares. Segundo o IC 10, outra forma de reconhecimento aparece enaltecendo a inteligência prática pelo modo com que o trabalhador se adianta ao resultado da atividade prescrita, para evitar possíveis erros que conduziriam a correções e repetição das atividades.

“ (...) eu falo que a gente aprende as coisas, cara, no dia-a-dia, ninguém vai me tirar o que eu aprender, ninguém. Então quando eu falo algumas coisas, é porque é muito difícil você fazer algumas coisas que as pessoas falam assim: como você consegue fazer isso? Eu falei, cara, é muitos anos fazendo” (...) Cara, se eu não souber trabalhar, eu vou fazer retrabalho. Já em vez de eu fazer outro serviço eu tenho que fazer outro retrabalho que me dá dor de cabeça, minha chefe vai me ligar, vai perguntar por que que deu aquilo. Então assim, são coisas que você tem que, você evita a fadiga. Mas é trabalhar com a cabeça, minha avó falava assim: trabalha com a cabeça senão o corpo padece. Então você aprende a trabalhar, não é ser preguiçoso, você vê o que está errado antes de você fazer. Para você não fazer retrabalho, trabalhar duas vezes (IC10).

De acordo com Dejours (2005), “o reconhecimento é a forma específica da retribuição moral-simbólica dada ao ego, como compensação por sua contribuição à eficácia da organização do trabalho, isto é, pelo engajamento de sua subjetividade e inteligência” (DEJOURS, 2005 p.55).

Mendes & Morrone (2022) ao analisarem a trajetória de pesquisas brasileiras em psicodinâmica do trabalho, indicam que grande parte delas infere a importância do reconhecimento como fonte de prazer, e assinalam que este reconhecimento pode ser exercido pelos pares e/ou superiores hierárquicos.

Ao passo que os trabalhadores relataram serem reconhecidos pelos pares nas relações horizontais nas equipes de trabalho; os mesmos, mas não consideram que têm o seu fazer laboral reconhecido pelas empresas mineradoras, entendendo que por estas são vistos ‘apenas’ números de matrícula.¹

“ (...) a mineração vai ficar mais rica... e nós vamos morrer tudo. Vamos morrer, porque... outro dia eu falei... não existe (nome do entrevistado) lá... Não existe (nome do entrevistado) não existe. Existe 9Y3B-41X5. É só isso “(...)” E na hora de mandar embora é o 9Y3B-41X5. Então, assim, cara... não sei se eu estou falando certo ou não, tá? Mas ela vai ficar rica e nós vamos morrer. E cada vez ela ganha mais. E cada vez ela paga menos. E cada vez ela corta mais direitos (IC10).

“ (...) a gente é número, a gente... Eu não sou (nome do entrevistado) não, não sou. Eu sou A234-K8T9. Amanhã se o cara me manda embora, no outro dia ninguém sabe quem eu sou, nem tá pensando em mim. É matrícula, entendeu? Tipo assim, hoje eu vejo isso, que a gente é só matrícula (IC11).

Diante do exposto, compreende-se que os entrevistados enxergam o reconhecimento no trabalho como fonte de prazer que, por sua vez, alimenta mais engajamento e identificação com a atividade laboral, reiterando as discussões teórica trazidas por Dejours (2011, 2009, 2007 e 2005).

A despeito de o reconhecimento pelo trabalho ser fundamental para a saúde mental do trabalhador, conforme afirma esse autor, e o alimenta e o movimenta nos processos de trabalho; os entrevistados relataram que o reconhecimento é percebido pelos seus pares. Para a empresa os trabalhadores afirmaram serem apenas números, o que revela uma condição despersonalização sentidas por eles.

4. Considerações Finais

A pesquisa realizada buscou discutir a saúde mental dos trabalhadores da mineração de empresas que atuam nos municípios de Mariana, Congonhas e Ouro Preto, pertencentes à região do quadrilátero ferrífero localizada no estado brasileiro de Minas Gerais, tendo em vista a sobreposição das consequências socioambientais de três grandes tragédias coletivas - o rompimento das barragens de Fundão em Mariana MG no ano de 2015, das barragens BI, BIV e BIVA da Mina do Córrego do Feijão em Brumadinho-MG em 2019 e a pandemia de Covid-19, entre 2020 e 2023.

Mas o que a análise das entrevistas em profundidade, realizadas com os trabalhadores entrevistados, surpreendentemente, revelou foi um estado de sofrimento mental dos trabalhadores da mineração, que antes de mais nada, relaciona-se com a organização do trabalho das empresas do setor mineral do que decorrem dos efeitos da sobreposição das tragédias supracitadas. Trata-se de um cotidiano de trabalho tensionado por um modelo de gestão pautado na precarização do trabalho. Precarização que se expressa na redução significativa das equipes de trabalho e manutenção de metas de produtividade, nos cortes de benefícios históricos, no progressivo rebaixamento salarial e na imposição de turno fixo de 12 horas.

Destaca-se aqui um dos principais achados dessa pesquisa: os efeitos simbióticos da relação entre a precarização do trabalho e a minerodependência socioeconômica da região estudada; relação que tem o sentimento de medo crônico do desemprego enquanto um mecanismo silencioso de controle e sujeição dos trabalhadores da mineração ao processo de precarização do trabalho mencionado.

Ainda em relação à deterioração das condições de trabalho, a manutenção de metas de produtividade com equipes enxutas, encerra entre os trabalhadores da mineração um ambiente de concorrência e, conseqüentemente, a luta pela manutenção do emprego, fazendo com que estes recorram ao que Dejours (1999) denomina como estratégias defensivas, a exemplo da autoaceleração e a competitividade. Estratégias estas que, segundo este mesmo autor, são exploradas pelas empresas, acentuando o esgotamento físico e mental dos trabalhadores.

A implementação impositiva do turno fixo de 12 horas, em particular o noturno, introduzida no contexto de vulnerabilidade instaurado pela crise sanitária e social da Covid-19, emergiu como fator significativamente negativo na rotina e na saúde mental dos trabalhadores da mineração. Ressalta-se que a privação crônica de sono, ocasionada pelo trabalho noturno em turnos fixos, bem como outros comprometimentos na vida familiar e social trazidos por essa lógica de organização de escala de trabalho, somada à ocupação em atividades extras, agravam os riscos de acidentes e esgotamento físico e mental.

Importante dizer que, sob o contexto de drástica redução salarial e incertezas quanto à manutenção do emprego, os trabalhadores

¹Os números de matrícula foram alterados para preservar a identidade dos trabalhadores..

da mineração recorrem a outras atividades de trabalho informais durante suas folgas.

Posto isso, esse estudo revelou que para manterem a performance laboral os trabalhadores da mineração são impelidos ao consumo de bebidas energéticas, de álcool e outras drogas, tais como psicotrópicos (ansiolíticos e antidepressivos); além de outras drogas estimulantes ilícitas, como a cocaína. Cabe ressaltar que foi observado certa naturalização no uso dessas substâncias.

No que concerne ao rompimento das barragens de rejeitos, os relatos dos trabalhadores entrevistados denotaram que a contradição dos discursos de segurança no trabalho encampados pelas mineradoras localizadas na região estudada, visto a ocorrência dos rompimentos, desencadearam nos trabalhadores da mineração quebra de identidade com essas empresas; as quais passaram a serem percebidas como negligentes e focadas exclusivamente no lucro em detrimento da vida e da saúde. Os relatos expressaram também o sofrimento pelas perdas das vidas humanas e angústia, devido à vulnerabilidade de sentirem que, apenas pelo acaso, não foram eles vítimas fatais dos rompimentos.

Outro aspecto que reforça à percepção de desumanização institucional, foi a manutenção das atividades laborais no contexto da pandemia, com aval governamental, e a falta de preparo e manejo das corporações, a partir de denúncias que mostraram práticas de estigmatização e falta de apoio psicossocial.

A despeito de todo esse cenário, o trabalho na mineração ainda resiste como lugar de prazer, demonstrado no orgulho pelo saber-fazer e no reconhecimento deste saber pelos pares. Em contrapartida, a despersonalização promovida pelas empresas, que reduzem os trabalhadores a meros números de matrícula, reforça o sentimento de desamparo.

Em suma, esse estudo demonstrou que a saúde mental dos mineiros do Quadrilátero Ferrífero, especificamente dos municípios de Mariana, Congonhas e Ouro Preto, tem sido preponderantemente afetada por uma engrenagem estrutural que se capitaliza sobre a minerio dependência socioeconômica da região estudada e o medo crônico do desemprego. Por sua vez, as consequências advindas das tragédias socioambientais apresentadas nesse estudo tiveram papel coadjuvante sobre a saúde mental, tendo os pesquisadores que despertarem o tema nos entrevistados.

Foi verificado ainda que a vivência dos trabalhadores entrevistados no contexto dos rompimentos das barragens e durante o período pandêmico revelou o sentimento de vulnerabilidade e de desamparo institucional, colocou em xeque os discursos corporativos de responsabilidade social.

Em última análise, espera-se que os achados aqui postos sirvam de subsídio para sindicatos, profissionais de saúde e movimentos sociais na luta por condições de trabalho dignas na mineração. Mas, acima de tudo, para reestruturar o modelo minerador brasileiro, considerando a agenda 2030 da Organização das Nações Unidas (ONU), em especial centralidade os ODS 3 e 8, que preconizam, respectivamente, a Saúde e Bem-Estar e o Trabalho Decente combinado ao Crescimento Econômico.

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Eleanor Roosevelt: A Study in Shifting Cultural Prisms

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Abstract

Every culture needs heroes and heroines to ensure social cohesion, but portrayals do not remain static. They change as social values tilt from one direction to another. The image of Eleanor Roosevelt in popular culture offers a vibrant illustration. Niece of one United States president, Theodore Roosevelt, and the wife of another, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Eleanor, the longest-serving First Lady in U.S. history, ranks as arguably the most important U.S. woman of the twentieth century and one of the world's best-known figures. To the public, Eleanor represents multiple roles – wife, mother, political leader, activist, diplomat, journalist, and media celebrity. She died in 1962 but remains a persona that functions as a prism through which to view attitudes toward women's roles. Her portrayals, including her own self-depiction from her birth in 1884 until her fatal illness, illustrate acceptable perimeters for women at different periods. When hidden details of her life emerged, she became a focal point for arguments over women's conduct.

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Eleanor Roosevelt: A Study in Shifting Cultural Prisms

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Abstract

Every culture needs heroes and heroines to ensure social cohesion, but portrayals do not remain static. They change as social values tilt from one direction to another. The image of Eleanor Roosevelt in popular culture offers a vibrant illustration. Niece of one United States president, Theodore Roosevelt, and the wife of another, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Eleanor, the longest-serving First Lady in U.S. history, ranks as arguably the most important U.S. woman of the twentieth century and one of the world's best-known figures. To the public, Eleanor represents multiple roles – wife, mother, political leader, activist, diplomat, journalist, and media celebrity. She died in 1962 but remains a persona that functions as a prism through which to view attitudes toward women's roles. Her portrayals, including her own self-depiction from her birth in 1884 until her fatal illness, illustrate acceptable perimeters for women at different periods. When hidden details of her life emerged, she became a focal point for arguments over women's conduct.

Keywords: Eleanor Roosevelt, Popular Culture, Gender Roles, First Lady, Biography, Women's History, Lorena Hickok, Social Change

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1. OVERVIEW

The most active presidential spouse to date, Eleanor acted as a lightning rod for disagreement over woman's proper place while in the White House from 1933 to 1945. Her constant travels on behalf of the Roosevelt administration, her interest in racial justice, and her determination to earn her own money made her far different from previous presidential spouses. While she encountered criticism for unwomanly activism as First Lady, she also received numerous awards, including four honorary doctor of law degrees, for advocating social betterment. In 1939 *TIME* magazine chose her as one of the few women pictured on its cover, describing her as "the world's foremost female political force."¹

After the unexpected death of Franklin in 1945, Eleanor served as a U. S. delegate to the United Nations, a leader of the Democratic Party, writer, speaker, international traveler, and television personality. At her death, she garnered praise as the "First Lady of the World."² This tribute incorporated her success in achieving passage of the U.N. Declaration on Human Rights, a document increasingly important since its adoption in 1948. As Harvard legal scholar, Mary Ann Glendon, put it, "Today, the Declaration is the single most important reference point for cross-national discussions of how to order our future together on our increasingly conflict-ridden and interdependent planet."³

In her autobiography, three volumes published at different periods after being serialized in mass-circulation magazines, Eleanor constructed herself as an independent woman who overcame

personal insecurities within the framework of her husband's position and legacy. A year before her death, she condensed the three books into one, titled simply *The Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt*, and added new material, which emphasized her love of democracy, faith in the United Nations, and dedication to creating "greater understanding between peoples."⁴

Reviewers and readers alike praised her three volumes. The first, *This Is My Story* (1937), ran initially in the *Ladies' Home Journal*. Eager buyers swept 250,000 copies of the magazine with her first installment off newsstands. Eleanor described how she moved past the rigid, upper-class bias of her orphaned upbringing and the domination of her mother-in-law, Sarah Delano Roosevelt, venturing into politics while her husband recuperated from infantile paralysis.

The second, *This I Remember* (1949), appeared in *McCall's*, a popular woman's magazine, picturing Eleanor as a pathbreaking First Lady who assisted the mobility-impaired Franklin as he combated the Depression of the 1930s and subsequently led efforts to win World War II. It chronicled her activities as she provided information for her husband and spurred him to advance New Deal social programs, although she conceded that "the spurring was not always wanted or welcome."⁵ An overwhelming commercial success, *This I Remember* became a Book-of-the-Month-Club selection.

On My Own, the third autobiography (1958), published first in the *Saturday Evening Post*, chronicled her international travels and work for the United Nations, modestly recounting how she took part in world affairs after her husband's death. Her condensation of the three books into a single autobiography received mixed

¹"Oracle." 1939. *Time*, April 17:22.

²M. van Thoor, "Death of Eleanor Roosevelt," 2001. In Beasley, M. H., H. Shulman, and H. R. Beasley, eds., *The Eleanor Roosevelt Encyclopedia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 122.

³M. A. Glendon. 2001. *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. New York: Random House, xvi-xvii.

⁴P. M. Spacks, "Autobiography," 2001. In Beasley, et. al., *The Eleanor Roosevelt Encyclopedia*, 40-41.

⁵A. E. Roosevelt, 1949. *This I Remember*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 349.

reviews. One reviewer pointed out, “The human individual, the true ER, is not revealed.”⁶

2. UNEXPECTED REVELATIONS

After Eleanor died, her self-portrait of growing independence within the perimeters of her marriage, a narrative embraced by her first biographers, was upended by the disclosure that Eleanor and Franklin had considered divorce in 1918 while Franklin was serving as Assistant Secretary of the Navy in Washington. In his memoirs Jonathan Daniels, whose father Josephus Daniels had been Secretary of the Navy, recounted Franklin’s love affair with Lucy Mercer, Eleanor’s social secretary.⁷ Knowledge of the romance, which had been hushed up for years, led to assumptions that the Roosevelt marriage existed in name only after 1918 even though Eleanor agreed to remain Franklin’s wife if he promised never to see Lucy again.

Eleanor emerged as a wronged wife who stayed married due to Franklin’s political career, financial considerations, their children, and social mores that considered divorce a disgrace. Syndicated columnist Drew Pearson speculated that emotional scars inflicted by the affair, rather than desire to be a helpmeet, stimulated Eleanor to pursue her own career in the White House.⁸

Franklin’s biographies mentioned the rift between husband and wife.⁹ They included comments from Franklin’s aides who pictured Eleanor as disliking compromise, criticizing her husband behind-the-scenes, and failing to acknowledge his declining health.¹⁰

More revelations occurred when the papers of Lorena Hickok, a journalist who had covered Eleanor for the Associated Press and worked as an undercover reporter on Depression conditions for the Roosevelt administration, were opened at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library in 1978. Correspondence between Eleanor and Hickok, called Hick, revealed their intense relationship when Eleanor entered the White House. In a biography of Hickok, Doris Faber, a journalist, expressed dismay that the library had released the letters, which she feared would diminish Eleanor’s reputation. The correspondence documented Eleanor’s unhappiness after Hick left Washington following Franklin’s inauguration in 1933. Eleanor wrote Hick, “I felt a little as though a part of me was leaving tonight, you have grown so much to be a part of my life that it is empty without you even though I’m busy every minute.”¹¹ Excerpts from the correspondence also appeared in an article, “First Lady a Lesbian?” in the publication, *Lesbian Tide*.¹² Speculation arose that Eleanor and Hick had been drawn to each other because they both had plain appearances.

In response, members of the Roosevelt family and some historians hotly denied that Eleanor had a homosexual affair with Hick, contending that Eleanor expressed herself emotionally to many correspondents in keeping with Victorian styles of letter-writing. Entering the controversy, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., a leading biographer of Franklin, argued in the *Washington Post* section that even if Eleanor had been a lesbian, that should not diminish

public respect for her achievements.¹³ The *Post* also featured views of Rhoda Lerman, who had based a novel on Eleanor’s discovery of Franklin’s love for Lucy.¹⁴ Lerman speculated that Eleanor might have had a physical relationship with a woman but that she was more attracted to men.¹⁵

Subsequently, Blanche Wiesen Cook, Eleanor’s biographer, fought against presumptions that Eleanor, the mother of six children (one of whom died in infancy), lacked the capacity to express herself sexually. These presumptions stemmed from Eleanor’s children. Her daughter, Anna Roosevelt Halsted, recalled her mother had instructed her that sex was simply a wifely obligation. One of Eleanor’s sons, James Roosevelt, declared that his parents did not have sexual relations after Eleanor learned of Franklin’s affair.

The Hickok letters caused new interpretations of Eleanor’s life. Reviewing Eleanor’s close attachments, Anne Constantinople, a Vassar professor, found they illustrated broadly-defined sexuality based on human relatedness. Constantinople pointed to historian Susan Ware’s examination of Eleanor’s deep, successive involvement with four persons: Earl Miller, a highway patrolman who acted as her bodyguard when Franklin was elected governor of New York in 1928; Hickok; Joseph P. Lash, who wrote the Pulitzer-Prize winning biography, *Franklin and Eleanor*; and David Gurevitch, her doctor.¹⁶

Recent writers looked at Eleanor’s personal life from the standpoint of queer theory. In an academic journal, *AMERICANA*, Angela Beauchamp called attention to twenty-first century television programs and films that presented Eleanor as defying socially acceptable categories of womanhood by living “outside heteronormative models.”¹⁷ She stressed that gender-oriented filmmakers view Eleanor as engaging in a life very separate from the normative, a life “quite queer, regardless of any sexual activity that we will likely never know about.”¹⁸

3. CHANGING IDEAS

In accord with Eleanor’s autobiography, popular culture first treated Eleanor as a supportive wife acting as the “eyes and ears” of a somewhat disabled president. The full extent of Franklin’s inability to walk was kept secret from the public until it formed the basis for a Broadway play in 1958, “Sunrise at Campobello.”¹⁹ Made into a movie two years later, the production reenforced the image of Eleanor as a devoted wife who overcame objections from Franklin’s mother, Sara, to back Franklin’s political aspirations after he was stricken with infantile paralysis.

After Franklin’s affair became known, biographies by Lash presented Eleanor as surmounting personal disappointment in marriage by embracing worthy causes.

The advent of feminist studies complicated Lash’s picture of an unfulfilled wife who sublimated her own desires through work for social betterment. In two volumes in the 1990s, Cook portrayed

⁶R.H.S. Crossman, 1962. “Mrs. President,” *New Statesman* 64: 3 Aug., 149. See also W. A. Rusher, 1962. “We Surrender Dear,” *National Review* 11 4 Nov., 308-309.

⁷J. Daniels, 1968. *Washington Quadrille: The Dance beside the Documents*. New York: Doubleday, 145.

⁸J. A. Edens, 1994. *Eleanor Roosevelt: A Comprehensive Bibliography*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 178.

⁹K. S. Davis, 1993. *FDR: Into the Storm, 1937-1940*. New York: Random House, 5-6.

¹⁰G. C. Ward, 2001. “Franklin Delano Roosevelt.” In Beasley, et. al., *The Eleanor Roosevelt Encyclopedia*, 456.

¹¹D. Faber, 1980. *The Life of Lorena Hickok: ER’s Friend*. New York: Morrow, 119.

¹²Edens, *A Comprehensive Bibliography*, 180.

¹³A. M. Schlesinger Jr., 1979. “Eleanor Roosevelt and the Styles of Friendship,” *Washington Post* 23 Oct., Sect. C: 1-2

¹⁴See R. Lerman, 1979. *Eleanor: A Novel*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

¹⁵H. Mitchell and M. Rosenfeld, 1979. “Eleanor Roosevelt and the Styles of Friendship,” *Washington Post* 23 Oct., Sect. C: 1-4.

¹⁶A. Constantinople, 2001. “Sexuality,” In Beasley et. al., *The Eleanor Roosevelt Encyclopedia*, 476-477.

¹⁷A. Beauchamp, 2020. “I Will Not Be Your Little China Doll: Representations of Eleanor Roosevelt in Film and Television,” *AMERICANA: The Journal of American Popular Culture (1900 to Present)*, Spring, volume 19: 5 https://americanpopularculture.com/journal/articles/spring_2020/beauchamp.htm accessed Jan.1, 2022.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁹“Sunrise at Campobello,” in *Wikipediaorg/wiki/Sunrise_at_Campobello*, retrieved 25 Oct. 2022.

Eleanor as a courageous woman who overcame upper-class bigotry to draw inspiration from other women, operate as a shrewd politician herself in the Democratic party, and take high-minded stands on issues – like peace and racial justice – during the 1930s. Cook, who contended Eleanor and Hick had a fervent love affair, viewed their relationship as “taken out of context and treated meanly” instead of being seen as part of “a hard-won struggle to live life fully.”²⁰

The Hickok letters brought a new dimension to Eleanor’s place in popular culture at a time when homosexuality and bisexuality, once only whispered about, gained currency in general conversation. Referencing newspaper headlines, such as “Secret Romance of President Roosevelt’s Wife – the Untold Story,” Rodger Streitmatter edited the most erotic Roosevelt-Hickok letters in 1998. He argued that Eleanor, whose associates included numerous lesbian couples, “was a professed believer in sexual freedom.”²¹

In a 2010 book, Hazel Rowley examined the Roosevelt marriage and determined that the couple’s extraordinary political partnership allowed each party to seek personal fulfillment with others. Rowley pointed out that Franklin had close ties with his secretary, Missy LeHand, and a tender relationship with his cousin, Daisy Suckley. She noted that Hick, often short of money, lived at the White House when she was in Washington and slept in Eleanor’s sitting room, but that her picture was cut out of official photographs.²²

4. DIVERSE IMAGES

Each of these four cultural images of Eleanor – loyal wife, proponent of worthy causes, courageous leader, and symbol of sexual freedom – has been featured in varying forms of media for decades. In fiction, biographies, cartoons, plays, television programs, films and videos, Eleanor’s life continues to be explored in the twenty-first century in accord with changing ideas of women’s competencies and acceptable behavior.

Numerous examples exist in popular culture. For instance, in twenty mysteries written by her son Elliott from 1984 to 2001, an all-knowing Eleanor solves crimes in the White House and other locales connected with the Roosevelts. She figures in two recent novels featuring women detectives, as she backs women pilots in Britain during World War II in one book and surmounts being falsely accused of seducing a woman secretary in a second one.²³ Romance novelists fictionize her intimacy with Hick.²⁴

Nonfiction writers ponder the degree to which passion between Eleanor and Hick influenced Eleanor’s extraordinary career. One writer, Susan Quinn, commented, “The letters between Eleanor and Hick are less remarkable now for their shock value than for the moving and poignant story they tell of two women who loved each other intensely and deeply.”²⁵

Study of cultural images pertaining to Eleanor provides insight into what has been viewed as acceptable conduct for women in general during the last century. Her life illustrates how women

have been transformed from subordinate to multi-dimensional individuals in popular culture.

5. LOYAL WIFE

During Franklin’s first term as President, Eleanor used her White House platform to reach out to other women. Not content with the stereotypical role of being the President’s hostess, she staged press briefings for women reporters only, held conferences on women’s issues, and traveled ceaselessly around the country. She also earned income herself by writing and speaking. Churning out magazine articles and advice columns, she syndicated a daily newspaper column, “My Day,” a diary of her activities, gave commercial radio broadcasts, lectured on noncontroversial topics like the importance of education and published books.

An inviting target for cartoonists, Eleanor stood 5 feet, 11 inches tall, weighted 160 pounds and displayed prominent front teeth. Cartoons in newspapers upholding racial segregation and opposed to Franklin’s administration depicted her with hostility. Other cartoons presented her as the kindly presidential spouse. John Knott in the *Dallas Morning News* drew her driving a car to offer a lift to “The Forgotten Woman” in the Depression.²⁶ The most famous cartoon appeared in the *New Yorker*. It showed two astonished men working in a coal mine looking up from their labors with one exclaiming, “For gosh sakes, here comes Mrs. Roosevelt.”²⁷

Possibly it inspired her own visit to a coal mine two years later.

The *Washington Evening Star* mocked her women-only press conferences in a Clifford Berryman cartoon that pictured women reporters chattering inanely and asking silly questions.²⁸ Discounted by men reporters, Eleanor’s press conferences upended the Victorian idea that it was unladylike for wives of presidents to seek publicity. They created a bond between her and women reporters, some of whom had been hired by male-only news organizations because Eleanor refused to allow men to attend the weekly briefings.

In her autobiography Eleanor acknowledged the press conference idea originated with Hick, who told her that women reporters were in danger of losing their jobs unless they “could find something new to write about.”²⁹ The women accepted Eleanor’s money-making ventures, especially since she donated most of what she earned to charitable causes, modernizing the concept of a lady bountiful. The reporters applauded Eleanor’s travel to serve as Franklin’s “eyes and ears.” According to Hope Ridings Miller, society editor of the *Washington Post*, “We all felt that she was absolutely marvelous to look after him so well.”³⁰ Eleanor claimed that she used the conferences to inform the public about White House life and that she had no intention of trespassing into Franklin’s domain, although she sometimes did, pushing the boundaries of a public role for women.

“My Day,” her chatty syndicated column parodied for rambling details, attracted both pro-and anti-Roosevelt cartoonists. Its unpretentious tone allowed Eleanor to tell what she did both within and without her family circle. After Franklin’s death, she said her favorite cartoon referred to efforts by journalists to learn whether her husband would run for an unprecedented third term in 1940. Appearing in the *Chicago Times*, the cartoon portrayed

²⁰B. W. Cook, 1992. *Eleanor Roosevelt*. New York: Viking, vol. 1, xii.

²¹R. Streitmatter, 1998. *Empty Without You: The Intimate Letters of Eleanor Roosevelt and Lorena Hickok*. New York: Free Press, xix.

²²H. Rowley, 2010. *Franklin & Eleanor: An Extraordinary Marriage*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 194.

²³See J. Winspear, 2022. *A Sunlit Weapon*. New York: HarperCollins. Also, S. E. Macneal, 2015. *Mrs. Roosevelt’s Confidante*. New York: Bantam.

²⁴See S. W. Albert, 2016. *Loving Eleanor: The Intimate Friendship of Eleanor Roosevelt and Lorena Hickok*. Bertram, TX: Persevero Press.

²⁵S. Quinn, 2016. *Eleanor and Hick: The Love Affairs That Shaped a First Lady*. New York: Penguin, 6-7.

²⁶*Dallas Morning News*, 1933, 22 Nov.

²⁷*New Yorker*, 1933, 3 June.

²⁸*Washington Evening Star*, 1934, 19 March.

²⁹Roosevelt, *This I Remember*, 102.

³⁰M. H. Beasley, 1987. *Eleanor Roosevelt and the Media: A Public Quest for Self-Fulfillment*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 104.

her typing “My Day” in bed near a picture of Franklin while musing, “But it would make such a nice scoop if you’d only tell me, Franklin.”³¹ It indicated a gulf between the Roosevelts, not commented on at the time. The public assumed that Franklin as a man had no obligation to consult his wife.

6. IMPACT OF WORLD WAR II

Before the United States entered World War II, Eleanor signed a contract with the Pan American Coffee Bureau, which paid her \$28,000 for a series of twenty-eight Sunday evening broadcasts over the National Broadcasting Company (NBC). When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, due to her contractual obligations, Eleanor addressed the nation before Franklin did. Calling on Americans to rally for the war that lay ahead, she declared, “We are the free and unconquerable people of the United States of America.”³² When a later broadcast warned housewives of an impending sugar shortage and led to hoarding before rationing was instituted, journalists questioned her judgment. She was excused on grounds of what columnist Raymond Clapper referred to as “naivete” that led her heart to outrun her head.³³

On her February 22, 1942 broadcast, Eleanor defended herself after she was forced out of the position of Assistant Director of Civil Defense, an unpaid post to which Franklin had appointed her, making her the first president’s wife to hold a government office. After six months she left the job amid criticism for hiring her friends at high salaries, including a ballroom dancer to direct children’s recreation in bomb shelters. The press soon softened its condemnation on grounds Eleanor had meant well. The *New York Times* said her resignation did not reflect upon “her goodwill and her unselfish devotion to the general welfare.”³⁴

Eleanor also used her program to defend the administration’s decision to intern Japanese Americans in camps. While she had disagreed with this move in “My Day” two months earlier, after Franklin ordered internment she told listeners, “Friendly aliens have to suffer temporarily in order to insure the safety of the vital interests of this country while at war.”³⁵

She supported Franklin in public, even if she profoundly objected to his decisions.

Eleanor’s global travels during the war, publicized as undertaken at her husband’s request to improve the morale of troops, led to scathing caricatures in the Republican press. A Joseph Parrish cartoon in the *Washington Times-Herald* pictured Eleanor happily waving from a plane, while below her a motorist was chastised for using rationed gasoline and denounced as “Hitler’s little helper.”³⁶ Less accepted by the public than her earlier travels, Eleanor’s wartime trips provided material for her newspaper column and magazine articles, with supporters regarding them as continuation of her “eyes and ears” mission. Visiting soldiers and expressing concern for them, Eleanor solidified her image as a motherly figure as well as an intrepid journalist.

In August 1942 the premier cartoonist Herblock drew her and her secretary in a lifeboat with commandos, having survived an

attack on a ship sinking in the background. Printed in newspapers across the country under the caption, “Just Don’t Be Surprised, That’s All,” it satirized the bland tone of “My Day,” with Eleanor shown dictating, “My Day has been rather a busy one.”³⁷

Franklin permitted Eleanor’s extensive visit to the South Pacific, which he initially opposed, to keep her out of the United States after her advocacy for civil rights unleashed critics who charged she had caused race riots. When violence burst out in Detroit in 1943 following Eleanor’s push for integrated housing for defense workers, many people in both the North and South pointed accusing fingers at the First Lady, according to historian Doris Kearns Goodwin.³⁸ The editor of the *Jackson (Mississippi) Daily News* thundered, “It is blood on your hands, Mrs. Roosevelt.”³⁹

Fearful of offending Southern Democrats in Congress, Franklin said little on race.

Similarly, he stayed aloof from Eleanor’s efforts to aid refugees seeking to flee Hitler’s persecution of the Jews. Although the public expressed limited interest in refugees, Eleanor’s position was seen as appropriate for a benevolent First Lady. Not so her stand on civil rights. Large segments of the North joined Southern segregationists who did not see her as a good woman when it came to race.

By the time Eleanor left the White House in 1945, it was impossible to overlook all that she had accomplished. She had written more than 2,500 columns, 200 articles and six books, including two autobiographies and an examination of the basis of democracy, and given at least 70 speeches annually along with scores of radio broadcasts, while influencing New Deal programs.⁴⁰ She had transformed the position of First Lady from hostess to leader, but, nevertheless, she had remained within her husband’s orbit.

After Franklin’s death on April 12, 1945, Eleanor rejected suggestions that she seek political office – possibly the presidency – and told a reporter, “The story is over.”⁴¹ This was not to be.

Joseph Lash, whom she first met as a disillusioned youth activist in the 1930s, played a major part in revising it.

7. SAINTLY HEROINE VS. COURAGEOUS LEADER

In 1971 Lash published, *Eleanor and Franklin*, a biography praised as the definitive story of the couple’s personal life. With first-hand knowledge of the Roosevelts, Lash offered new insights on their marriage. The son of Russian Jewish immigrants, he had toyed with communism after receiving a master’s degree from Columbia University in 1932. Becoming close to Eleanor following the end of her intense relationship with Hick, he was selected by Franklin D. Roosevelt Jr. to write Eleanor’s biography and given sole access to her files.

Eleanor met Lash, national secretary of the American Student Union, in 1939 when he was called to Washington to testify before the House Committee on Un-American Activities investigating communists in youth organizations. An opponent of the committee, which equated liberalism with communism, Eleanor attended

³¹ *Chicago Times*, 12 May 1940. See A. R. Paddon, “Cartoons,” in Beasley, et. al., 76-79.

³² “Pearl Harbor Attack,” 1941. Script of Eleanor Roosevelt’s radio broadcast, 7 December. In S.D. Smith, ed., 2014. *The First Lady of Radio: Eleanor Roosevelt’s Historic Broadcasts*. New York: New Press, 191-192.

³³ R. Clapper, “Mrs. Roosevelt Sees No Evil,” *Liberty* magazine, 4 April 1942, included in scrapbook “Amidst Crowded Days,” Eleanor Roosevelt Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY.

³⁴ “Mrs. Roosevelt Resigns,” editorial, *New York Times*, 21 February 1942.

³⁵ Script of Pan-American Coffee Bureau Broadcast, 15 February 1942. Ruby A. Black Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

³⁶ *Washington Times-Herald*, 15 September 1943.

³⁷ Beasley, *Eleanor Roosevelt and the Media*, 152 and following illustration.

³⁸ D. K. Goodwin, 1994. *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 445-46.

³⁹ See A. M. Black, 1996. *Casting Her Own Shadow: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Shaping of American Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 91-92.

⁴⁰ Black, *Casting Her Own Shadow*, 47-48.

⁴¹ Michaelis, *Eleanor*, 440.

the hearing at which Lash appeared, resulting in committee members toning down their questioning. She urged Lash to keep in contact with her.

Lash soon resigned from the communist-Influenced student union and embraced the New Deal. After leading the youth division of Franklin's 1940 presidential campaign, he became head of the International Student Service, and ran an integrated youth leadership institute at the Roosevelt summer home at Campobello, New Brunswick.

Eleanor's closeness to the much-younger man dismayed conservatives who considered Lash a dangerous radical. It led to false reports in Eleanor's confidential file kept by J. Edgar Hoover, head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, that the First Lady and Lash indulged in a salacious relationship.

Drafted into the Army in 1942, Lash was stationed on Guadalcanal which Eleanor insisted on visiting during her South Pacific trip so she could spend time with him. Following the war, he worked as a reporter in New York, covering Eleanor when she was at the United Nations.

Eleanor and Franklin, a phenomenal best-seller, enthralled the reader with dramatic details: Eleanor's friction with her mother-in-law; her difficulties as a mother; but above all, her despair when she stumbled on the love letters between Franklin and Lucy. Describing Eleanor's misery after she learned of Franklin's affair, Lash wrote of Eleanor's "desolating conviction that she had failed as a woman and was in some way responsible for Franklin's involvement with Lucy."⁴²

Out of her suffering, Lash contended, she realized that she could find fulfillment only through her own actions. "She buried herself in work," Lash explained.⁴³ Painstakingly covering her career, he made almost no mention of Hick. His biography ended with Lash pointing out Eleanor's anguish when she learned that that Lucy, then a wealthy widow, had been with Franklin when he died unexpectedly and had dined with him at the White House during her frequent absences. Lash asked rhetorically if this had not been "another dark night of the soul for her."⁴⁴

In a second volume, *Eleanor: The Years Alone*, Lash reported on Eleanor's importance at the United Nations, her frustrations with her children, and her around-the-world trips as an unofficial U.S. ambassador. He noted her closeness to Dr. David Gurewitsch, her physician, who replaced Lash as Eleanor's chief confidant in the late 1940s and accompanied Eleanor on her overseas travels. In her last years, Eleanor shared a house in Manhattan with Gurewitsch and his wife, Edna, who published a book in 2002, *Kindred Souls*, that analyzed Eleanor's deep affection for the doctor almost two decades her junior. Edna stated that Eleanor loved him but understood a physical relationship was out of the question.

After the Hickok letters attracted attention, Lash published two books, *Love, Eleanor: Eleanor Roosevelt and Her Friends* and *A World of Love: Eleanor Roosevelt and Her Friends: 1943-1960*. Although intended to show that Eleanor used gushy terms of endearment in letters to many people besides Hick, none of the letters Lash used conveyed the intimacy of the Hickok correspondence. The long-range significance of Lash's work centered on the way his initial biography was utilized for television. *Eleanor and Franklin* was made into an Emmy-winning docudrama in 1976 and followed with a sequel, *Eleanor and Franklin: The White House Years*, in 1977.

Lash's image of a betrayed wife who turned to good works resonated with the public for decades. It influenced audiences who disliked Eleanor's portrayal as a shrewish spouse in *Hyde Park on Hudson*, a 2012 British film that presented Franklin in simultaneous dalliances with both his secretary, Missy, and cousin, Daisy Suckley, while Eleanor tied herself to Hick. Viewers expressed displeasure with the selfish Eleanor in online comments and compared the movie unfavorably with the 1976 docudrama.⁴⁵

The framework for examining Eleanor's life shifted in 1992 with the publication of the first of Blanche Cook's three-volume biography. A professor of history and women's studies, Cook spent ten years studying Eleanor's life. Retrofitting Eleanor into a feminist network, Cook argued that Eleanor's previous biographers had accepted the way Eleanor pictured herself in autobiographies that concealed her emotions. Calling denials of Eleanor's love for Hick "high-strung and voluble," Cook insisted that Eleanor's "romantic love for her younger friend Earl Miller, a highway patrolman, which began when she was forty-five and he thirty-two, had been dismissed almost without hesitation."⁴⁶

Lamenting that Eleanor's correspondence with Earl Miller had been lost, Cook speculated that Franklin did not offer Miller a job in Washington to separate him from Eleanor, a move that intensified her relationship with Hick. Praised for resurrecting Eleanor as a feminist heroine, Cook's first book introduced Eleanor operating within a world of supportive women and Miller.

In volume two, which covered the years 1933 to 1938, Cook quoted extensively from the Hickok letters, showing how Eleanor's position as First Lady interfered with efforts to maintain a private relationship with Hick. Cook presented Eleanor as Franklin's partner at the White House, waging political battles behind the scenes, standing up for African Americans and youth, and using the media to influence public opinion. "Fueled by power, they were each dedicated to making life better for most people," Cook wrote.⁴⁷

Sixteen years after volume two, Cook published her concluding book, which chronicled Eleanor's life from 1939 to 1962. It stressed the widening gap between Eleanor and Franklin and Eleanor's difficult position when her beliefs on vital issues such as refugees clashed with Franklin's official policies. Cook's well-received work clashed sharply with Lash's portrayal of a betrayed wife.

8. TODAY'S SYMBOLISM

In Eleanor's most recent biography, the nature of the relationship between Eleanor and Hick is left unclear. In his 2020 one-volume biography, David Michaelis wrote of "intimacy – left incomplete," as Eleanor withdrew from Hick after eighteen months.⁴⁸ This occurred as Eleanor found it increasingly hard to make time for Hick, who had given up her journalistic career and been reduced to political jobs engineered by Eleanor.

Beauchamp pointed out that Eleanor has been pictured or "referenced in more than four hundred film and television programs...not including her own newsreel and television media."⁴⁹

Referring to queer theory, she contended that Lash's portrayal of Eleanor as a betrayed wife countered "whispers about Eleanor's sexuality at the time" [and] "actively disrupts a normative

⁴²J.P. Lash, 1971, *Eleanor and Franklin*. New York: Norton/New American Library: 325.

⁴³Ibid., 325.

⁴⁴Ibid., 929.

⁴⁵Beauchamp, "I Will Not Be Your Little China Doll," 6.

⁴⁶Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt*, vol. 1, 13.

⁴⁷B. W. Cook, 1999. *Eleanor Roosevelt*. New York: Viking, vol.2, 1.

⁴⁸Michaelis, *Eleanor*, 344.

⁴⁹Beauchamp, 1.

understanding of this woman's independent life."⁵⁰ Equating independence with same sex orientation, however, seems questionable, if it means that ideas about heterosexual marriage allow women no latitude for self-development.

Arguing that narratives since 2000 have led to public acceptance of Eleanor as queer, Beauchamp included movies, such as *Hyde Park on the Hudson* (2012) and independent films by women like *The Honeymoon Years of Eleanor Roosevelt and Lorena Hickok* (2005).⁵¹ Nevertheless, Eleanor is not always presented as a clear-cut symbol of sexual freedom. The 2020-21 television series, "Atlantic Crossing," treats her as a talkative First Lady who observed Franklin romantically involved with Norwegian Princess Martha and counseled Martha's husband on how to save his marriage by referring to mistakes made in hers.⁵²

Eleanor's career, with its emphasis on women expanding the traditional feminine sphere, personified the ideals of social feminists of her day. She did not frame her voluminous writings columns in gender-specific terms. Yet, her main audience was other women, who looked to her for advice.⁵³

Esther Van Wagoner Tufty, a long-time Washington correspondent, recalled during Eleanor's centennial celebration in 1984, "Eleanor Roosevelt caused more to be written by, for and about women than any other woman."⁵⁴

Today Eleanor occupies a secure place in popular culture. The last major poll on First Ladies, conducted in 2014, found that Eleanor retained the title of America's Best First Lady in polling.⁵⁵

She remains a role model for many. In 2011, Noelle Hancock, an unemployed blogger, published a memoir, *My Year With Eleanor*. She wrote that she conquered her fears – and climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro – inspired by Eleanor's advice, "You must do the thing you think you cannot do."⁵⁶ Eleanor's life continues to inspire in different directions.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Beauchamp, 9.

⁵²<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/shows/atlantic> Retrieved Oct. 26, 2022.

⁵³M.J. Binker, ed., 2018. *If You Ask Me: Essential Advice From Eleanor Roosevelt*. New York: Atria Books, x-xii.

⁵⁴Remarks by Esther Van Wagoner Tufty, American News Women's Club, Washington, DC., 27 September 1984.

⁵⁵See the Siena Research Institute website, <http://www.siena.edu/sri/research>.

⁵⁶See N. Hancock, 2011. *My Year With Eleanor Roosevelt*. New York: HarperCollins.



Man's Attachment to Objects: Mechanisms of the Link Between the Psyche and the Material

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Abstract

Attachment is a crucial aspect of significant and enduring interpersonal relationships. The initial attachment bonds are established between infants and their caregivers, typically parents. However, humans continue to form attachment relationships throughout their lives. This lifelong process means that individuals experience various attachment figures, which can include both people and objects in their environment. Research in psychological sciences, particularly influenced by Bowlby's work, has primarily focused on human-to-human attachment, such as the bond between mother and child. In this study, we aim to demonstrate that, in addition to forming connections with other people, humans also develop attachments to non-human entities, specifically objects.

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nature of attachment

significance of possessions

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Man's Attachment to Objects: Mechanisms of the Link Between the Psyche and the Material

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Abstract

Attachment is a crucial aspect of significant and enduring interpersonal relationships. The initial attachment bonds are established between infants and their caregivers, typically parents. However, humans continue to form attachment relationships throughout their lives. This lifelong process means that individuals experience various attachment figures, which can include both people and objects in their environment. Research in psychological sciences, particularly influenced by Bowlby's work, has primarily focused on human-to-human attachment, such as the bond between mother and child. In this study, we aim to demonstrate that, in addition to forming connections with other people, humans also develop attachments to non-human entities, specifically objects.

Keywords: *Attachment to objects, nature of attachment, significance of possessions*

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1. Introduction

Numerous studies in psychology examine attachment, particularly human connections with others. Notably, the research by Spitz (1958), Bowlby (1969), Ainsworth (1973), Main and Solomon (1986), and Mbiya (2012) has concentrated on the bond between mother and child.

According to Bowlby (1969), the attachment bond is crucial for all aspects of development, especially cognitive abilities and learning. Most psychologists, psychoanalysts, psychiatrists, and advocates of mother-child attachment believe that children are inherently social and grow through interactions with important figures in their lives. Their sense of security varies, depending on how well others meet their needs. Therefore, attachment is seen as an instinctual mechanism aimed at ensuring species survival by fostering closeness among humans.

However, humans do not exist solely among other people; they are also surrounded by objects. The intricate and often subconscious relationship individuals have with these objects can be significant. For instance, organizing a familiar space or donning a cherished piece of clothing can evoke feelings of confidence and tranquility. Additionally, there are tragic instances of suicides linked to the destruction of poorly built homes, as well as family conflicts that arise during inheritance disputes (often referred to as succession wars), and crimes committed for financial gain. These actions can be understood through the lens of attachment to objects, which can evoke feelings that reflect a person's needs.

This perspective aligns with Tisseron (1999), who asserts that we form authentic connections with our possessions. Even the phenomenon of fetishism in psychopathology illustrates how deeply objects can affect an individual's mental state.

Humans are relational beings. They maintain daily connections not only with other people but also with the objects in their

environment, whether material or virtual. Objects do not have just one function; they can serve many purposes. Their relationships with individuals can take various forms.

Daily experiences lead us to observe that acquiring certain objects can create a sense of euphoria, promoting psychological tranquility and good health. Conversely, the absence of a familiar object, whether due to separation or loss, can cause anxiety. There are many cases where people have committed extreme acts against others because someone damaged or lost an important object. For these individuals, the object holds significant emotional value. As Searles (1986) points out, from birth, individuals develop a spatial reference frame based on their bodies and their environment, including both people and objects. Over time, all stimuli in their environment are internalized, forming their mental map. For example, the shirt that someone wears daily is not just an item of clothing; it is also an intimate object. Similarly, a home is not merely a neutral space defined by its size and cleanliness; it is an environment that reflects an individual's intimacy (Djaoui, 2011).

Objects serve as fields of intense social interaction with individuals. They shape how we appropriate these objects and how we establish uses and habits. In modern society, objects and images are indispensable partners in our lives. For example, advertising uses sophisticated visuals and films to sell us an ideal of happiness. It is entirely up to us to possess this ideal, provided we buy more objects.

The objects we use daily feel natural because they are part of our surroundings and integrated into our lives without much thought. Yet, when we pay attention, we see how omnipresent they are in our relationships with the world and others. This is especially true for items like mobile phones, which facilitate communication across distances. Similarly, a coffee table or a desk, where we spend hours each day, acts as a locus for connecting and separating people

in a network of emotional ties, power dynamics, professional relationships, hierarchical structures, and shared interests.

All the objects humans use daily - office desks, mobile phones, clothes - intertwine with human relationships. People uniquely keep objects and invest them with meaning beyond their functionality.

Researchers from various fields have studied the influence of objects on human relations. Degonet (1989), in "In Praise of the Object," noted that objects have been neglected by humankind. Thus, people perceive objects as commodities, viewed as "realized or fixed social labor." The author argues that objects have long been excluded from philosophical discussion because the labor they embody has been despised by philosophers. Rehabilitating the object means revaluing the labor involved in its production and recognizing the social labor in the commodity-object as non-alienated labor.

Semprini (1995) observed that the object is often treated as secondary. He conducted research to integrate it into contemporary American sociological approaches. Semprini argues that the object exists not just through an intersubjective relationship that defines it but also gives it a usable status. This intersubjective relationship and the object's existence arise from practices that create the framework for its use. Therefore, the object is shaped by the practices in which it participates. In other words, there is a constant dialectical relationship between the practices that create the object and the social facts it reflects.

Latour (cited by Blandin, 2001) reintroduced the object and the networks it connects, framing them in a binary relationship that contrasts "nature" and "culture." Latour deserves recognition for taking objects seriously and for significantly contributing, along with his collaborators, to demonstrating how objects are intertwined with our daily actions.

Tshimpaka Yanga (2006), from an ethnological perspective, places the object within the hierarchy of social values among the Bantu people. The object "Cintu" is ranked below the human being "Muntu" in the hierarchy of "Ntu." Yanga explains that "Ntu," in the noun "Muntu," signifies "one who exists with intelligence" and is related to other nouns that refer to "beings devoid of intelligence," such as "Cintu" (thing) and "Bintu" (things).

The analysis of the relationship between humans and objects reveals a shared interest among various disciplines, including anthropology, philosophy, ethnology, and sociology. These fields recognize that objects can influence human interactions and social dynamics. Objects can serve multiple roles: they may function as "social operators," "total social facts," "ethnic facts," or "mediators." Consequently, they can be examined through different lenses, such as a "social fact" (Degonet, 1989), a "mediator" (Latour, 1991), a "social operator" (Semprini, 1995), or as a "cultural value" (Tshimpaka Yanga, 2006).

From a psychoanalytic viewpoint, Tisseron (1999) posits that objects serve as mediators within the psychic realm. They facilitate connections between the individual and the external world, as well as among individuals themselves. However, for objects to effectively mediate these relationships, they must first act as "mediators of self to self." This indicates that objects play a critical role in shaping both our psychic and social lives, thereby influencing our identities.

This study specifically explores the attachment to objects, as opposed to attachment to other human beings. The objects under consideration are categorized into three types: objects of knowledge, familiar objects, and objects of memory. The objectives of this research are to elucidate the psychological mechanisms that

underlie human attachment to objects, to investigate the reasons for retaining objects beyond their practical utility, and to assess the nature of attachment in relation to the symbolism associated with these objects.

2. Methodology

2.1. Study environment

This study was conducted in Kinshasa, the capital city of the Democratic Republic of Congo. In addition to being our residence, Kinshasa is home to the administrative headquarters of telecommunications companies operating in the DRC, particularly Orange.

2.2. Participants

We included only adult participants in our study who met the following criteria: they were at least 18 years old, resided in Kinshasa, owned at least one mobile phone, knew how to use social networks, and were available to participate in the study. Our sample consisted of 637 participants, with 59.2% identifying as men and 40.3% as women. The largest age group was 18 to 25 years old (46.2%), followed by those aged 26 to 33 (32.7%) and those aged 34 and over (21.1%). The majority of participants were self-employed professionals (49.9%), followed by civil servants (27.2%) and the unemployed (22.9%). Single individuals represented a significant portion of our sample (68.4%), compared to married individuals (16.2%), widowed individuals (9.3%), and divorced individuals (6.1%).

2.3. Data Collection Tool

To gather data from participants, we developed an object attachment assessment scale. We selected two main criteria: individual criteria and collective criteria. Consequently, our instrument included six dimensions, each assessing the respondents' degree of attachment to various objects. These dimensions are:

1. **Objects of Individual Knowledge:** This dimension examines the effects of possessing or lacking certain personal information devices or tools, such as mobile phones, computers, books, and newspapers.
2. **Objects of Collective Knowledge:** This dimension assesses the instructional contribution of new information technologies to the Congolese population. The selected objects include the internet, digital television (with or without a decoder), and international news channels like RFI.
3. **Individual Familiar Objects:** This dimension evaluates the relationship individuals have with possessions linked to their personal privacy, including jewelry, clothing, vehicles, and shoes.
4. **Familiar Shared Objects:** This dimension explores the community's attitude toward shared goods, such as family plots, cooking pots, the N'djili River, and public transport buses.
5. **Individual Souvenir Items:** This dimension investigates how individuals react to certain objects, events, or facts related to their personal histories, including birthdays, childhood photos, and primary school reports.
6. **Collective Souvenir Objects:** This dimension focuses on the collective memory of the Congolese population regarding significant events or figures in the country's history, such as monuments to prominent figures, June 30th celebrations, and the achievements of the DRC national team.

Overall, this study aims to provide insights into the attachment individuals and the community have towards various objects and how these attachments reflect their identities and experiences.

The objects discussed can be characterized in both physical and virtual terms, assessed through a scale comprising 60 items. This scale features various degrees of agreement. “Strongly disagree” indicates a lack of awareness or concern about the object, suggesting that the respondent does not feel attached to it. “Somewhat agree” reflects a minimal connection, where the respondent acknowledges the object but does not feel particularly concerned about it, indicating a very low level of attachment.

The “Undecided” option represents the respondent’s uncertainty regarding the item in question. “Agree” signifies a moderate level of attachment, indicating that the respondent recognizes the object in their consciousness, suggesting a significant but not overwhelming concern. Finally, “Completely agree” denotes a strong attachment, where the object is highly present in the respondent’s awareness and signifies an intense connection.

2.4. Preliminary Investigation

To validate our assessment tool, we tested it with 54 participants, categorized into four groups: students (20 participants), unemployed individuals (12), civil servants (9), and self-employed workers (13). The key findings from this investigation are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Reliability coefficients for item consistency and cohesion using Cronbach’s Alpha Test ($p > 0.01$)

Dimensions	Number of items	Cronbach’s Alpha
Objects of individual knowledge	10	0.701
Objects of collective knowledge	10	0.786
Individual familiar objects	10	0.730
Familiar, shared objects	10	0.721
Individual souvenir items	10	0.721
Collective souvenir objects	10	0.704
The entire scale	60	0.864

The value (0.864) of Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient that emerges from this table reveals the existence of a strong correlation between the items of different dimensions of the object attachment scale, guaranteeing internal consistency.

3. Field Activity and Computerized Analysis

3.1. Participant consent

The consent forms were signed by the participants before they completed the object attachment rating scale.

3.2. Einvestigation

We conducted a computerized analysis of these protocols using SPSS 20.0, a statistical data processing software. Across the entire object attachment rating scale, the minimum score was 60 and the maximum was 300.

4. Results

Table 2 shows the scores for the various categories of objects included in this study.

Table 2. Scores for the various categories of attachment objects ($N = 637$)

Object categories	$\bar{X}$	Med	Mod	σ	σ^2	Min	Max	SMD
Objects of individual knowledge	2.87	2.90	3.00	0.85	0.725	1.00	5.00	0.33
Objects of collective knowledge	3.50	3.50	3.50	0.80	0.646	1.00	5.00	0.31
Individual familiar objects	3.56	3.60	3.60	0.78	0.615	1.00	5.00	0.31
Familiar, shared objects	4.02	4.20	5.00	0.83	0.703	1.00	5.00	0.33
Individual souvenir items	3.97	4.20	5.00	0.82	0.675	1.00	5.00	0.32
Collective souvenir objects	3.52	3.50	3.50	0.81	0.659	1.00	5.00	0.32

$\bar{X}$: Average; Med: Median; Mod: Mode; σ : Standard deviation; σ^2 : Variance; Min: minimum score; Max: Maximum score; SMD: Standard error of the mean.

Table 2 indicates that objects of collective knowledge, individual familiar objects, collective familiar objects, individual memory objects, and collective memory objects each have an average score of 4. This score corresponds to the “agree” category on the scale, suggesting a minimizing attachment style. In contrast, the category of individual knowledge objects has an average score of 3, which aligns with the “undecided” response, reflecting a neutral stance.

Table 2. Specific attachment items (Continued) ($N = 637$)

Statements	$\bar{X}$	σ
Item 27: I am proud to wear my own clothes and not other people’s.	4.52	1.357
Item 33: The N’djili River is a common good that we must preserve.	4.63	2.194
Item 35: The cooking pots in the house are so useful that they are carefully guarded.	4.69	1.342
Item 37: The family plot is a common asset that no one has the right to sell alone.	4.67	1.372
Item 38: In sanitary facilities, cleanliness is mandatory for everyone in the family.	4.56	1.427
Item 43: When the DRC national team plays, Congolese people are proud to support them.	4.52	1.374
Item 44: In our country, there are names of personalities that remind us of past events in the DRC.	4.72	1.292
Item 51: I can never forget my birth date.	4.57	1.457
Item 60: I remember certain happy and unhappy events from my life.	4.57	1.408

Table 2 shows that out of 60 items in our instrument, 9 items were evaluated at level 5, corresponding to precise attachment.

Table 3. Items of preoccupied attachment ($N = 637$)

Items and statements	$\bar{X}$	σ
Item 7: Spending a day without watching television is unbearable for me.	2.07	1.42
Item 10: Owning an iPhone X is, for me, a sign of prestige.	2.27	1.58

Table 3 reveals that the 2 items that were assessed at level 2, corresponding to preoccupied attachment, belong to the category of individual knowledge objects.

The correlations between different types of attachment objects are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Relationships between categories of attachment objects ($N = 637$)

Category	OKI	OKC	OFI	OFC
OKI	1.00			
OKC	0.461**	1.00		
OFI	0.336**	0.506**	1.00	
OFC	0.259**	0.313**	0.448**	1.00

* $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$.

Legend

- OKI: Objects of Individual Knowledge;
- OKC: Objects of Collective Knowledge;
- OFI: Individual Familiar Objects;
- OFC: Collective Familiar Objects;
- OSI: Individual Souvenirs;
- OSC: Objects of Collective Memories.

Table 5. Correlation of individual objects and collective attachment objects ($N = 637$)

Comparison	Correlation (r)
Individual items / Collective objects	0.670** ($p = 0.000$)

** $p < 0.01$.

The correlation between individual attachment objects as a whole and collective attachment objects is highly significant (Table 5).

Table 6 shows the link between the cognitive mechanism and the different attachment objects.

Table 6. Link between the cognitive mechanism and the different attachment objects ($N = 637$)

Independent Variable	OKI	OKC	OFI	OFC	OSI	OSC
Cognitive Mechanism (MC)	0.325**	0.414**	0.233**	0.435**	0.259**	0.418**
Significance (p)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

Legend

- MC: Cognitive Mechanism;
- OKI: Individual Knowledge;
- OKC: Collective Knowledge;
- OFI: Individual Familiar;
- OFC: Collective Familiar;
- OSI: Individual Souvenirs;
- OSC: Collective Memories.

Table 7 shows the link between the affective mechanism and the different attachment objects.

Table 7. Link between the affective mechanism and the different attachment objects ($N = 637$)

Independent Variable	OKI	OKC	OFI	OFC	OSI	OSC
Affective Mechanism (MY)	0.360**	0.349**	0.463**	0.258**	0.367**	0.262**
Significance (p)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

** $p < 0.01$. MY: Affective Mechanism; OKI: Individual Knowledge; OKC: Collective Knowledge; OFI: Individual Familiar; OFC: Collective Familiar; OSI: Individual Souvenirs; OSC: Collective Memories.

5. Discussion

5.1. The Problem of Human Attachment to Objects

Our study indicates that the positive valence ratings for items associated with psychological attachment to objects are significantly higher, at 80%, compared to the negative ratings. Most respondents rated these items at level 4, signifying a strong emotional connection to various objects in their surroundings. This finding suggests that participants are not only familiar with these items but also have a strong interest in them. The objects in question include everyday possessions such as furniture, cell phones, televisions, the internet, books, clothing, photographs, and kitchenware. These items are often purchased, earned, or received as gifts. Respondents take pride in their ownership of these objects and experience distress when they are no longer in their possession.

Therefore, regardless of socioeconomic status, ownership can be viewed as a reflection or extension of one's identity; these objects can be considered a sort of alter ego. Researchers have termed this attachment to personal possessions the "endowment effect" or "dispossession aversion" (Tisseron, 1999). Attachment is fundamentally an emotional bond between an individual and an attachment figure. This bond can be reciprocal between adults or develop between a child and their caregiver. Our findings suggest that this emotional bond can also exist between an individual (adult) and objects, whether material or virtual. In this context, objects become attachment figures for individuals.

This aligns with the work of Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981), who describe an individual's attachment to an object as an investment of psychic energy. Bergadàa (2006) emphasizes that individuals who become attached to objects believe they can transfer their sense of ownership to those objects. According to Belk (1988), this type of attachment allows individuals to extend their identity to the object.

Muanana Kalombo Nsanga (2003) argues that a person's attachment to objects, considered as artifacts, reflects their unique way of feeling, thinking, and judging. It encompasses their will to exist in the world as it is, to express themselves according to their preferences, and to communicate in their own language. This attachment influences their actions, reactions, and overall way of life in response to their environment. As a result, a genuine fusion occurs between the individual and the object. The object thus plays a significant role in shaping one's identity. Escalas and Bettman (2003) illustrate this concept by examining a beer brand as an object of consumer identification. They argue that consumers construct their personal identities and present themselves to others through their brand choices, incorporating the brand into their self-concept.

The analysis of the role of objects in providing emotional security reveals their significant impact on self-identity and expression. Familiar objects offer reassurance, forming the foundation for self-belief and hope, as well as facilitating the full expression of emotional life. Tisseron (1999) notes that some children can only eat comfortably if their food is served on a familiar plate, and adults may feel at ease in unfamiliar environments as long as they have their preferred music or screens. This illustrates how objects can create a sense of belonging and comfort.

Hall (1971), in his work on personal space, identifies four types of interpersonal distances: intimate, personal, social, and public. From this viewpoint, objects can help establish these distances between individuals. Beyond spatial considerations, the sounds and visuals from the animated machines around us heighten our familiarity with the world, reinforcing the idea that people define themselves through their possessions. Bonetti, Djaoui, and Serfaty-Garzon, as cited by Agneray et al. (2015), describe this as a way of engaging objects in the construction of self.

Among the 60 items evaluated in our study, only 9 received a rating of level 5 (positive valence), indicating strong attachment. This suggests that respondents are familiar with and attentive to the objects in question. The varying intensity of attachment can range from minimal to very strong. According to Agneray et al. (2015), clothing, like one's home, serves as an extension of intimacy and symbolizes the interface between the individual and the world. Consequently, attachment to personal clothing reflects an unconscious expression of self-affirmation in relation to others. In addition to clothing, respondents expressed a strong attachment to the N'djili River, which is one of the largest rivers in Kinshasa and serves as a primary water source for the city's only

drinking water distribution company. The respondents also highly valued shared cooking pots, communal land management, and cleanliness in sanitary facilities. These findings suggest that shared objects within families or communities play a significant role in defining individuals' identities. Society is not merely a reflection of individuals but also of the connections among its members. Shared objects reinforce a sense of community by linking spatial identity to social identity.

Similarly, items related to birthdays and significant life events were positively regarded by respondents, indicating that objects—whether physical or virtual—carry personal memories. This observation aligns with Tisseron's (1999) thesis that objects embody both joyful and painful memories. Overall, we can affirm that humans develop attachments to objects in their environment, which contribute to the formation of identity and collective memory. Attachment to an object can be viewed as an extension of the self; it fosters psychological well-being and self-affirmation. Conversely, losing an object or being separated from it can lead to distress, with the intensity of grief reflecting the depth of emotional investment in that object (Fauré, 2012). Attachment to an object represents a sense of fulfillment arising from the connection between the individual and the object. Our findings support the work of Fournier and Yao (1997), who noted that attachment bonds can extend to objects and brands as well.

It is important to distinguish attachment from addiction. While attachment relates to well-being or psychological distress associated with an object, addiction refers to a pleasure derived solely from that object. Aulagier (1979) argues that addiction involves a regression where individuals substitute themselves for the object of desire, leading to a denial of the fact that no object can fully satisfy that desire. The fundamental void created by loss cannot be permanently filled, making desire perpetual and metaphorical. In addiction, the relationship to an object becomes one of necessity and exclusivity, where the object becomes the sole source of essential pleasure. This analysis highlights the complex interplay between objects, identity, and emotional well-being, underscoring the significance of shared experiences and attachments in shaping individual and collective identities.

We would like to highlight that our respondents rated two items negatively out of the 60 in our survey, with a level 2 rating indicating preoccupied attachment. While they are familiar with these items, they express little interest in them. The items in question are item 7: "I find it unbearable to go a day without watching television," and item 10: "For me, having an iPhone X is a status symbol." The responses indicate that not watching television is not a significant concern for our respondents. In fact, traditional tools like television no longer dominate as the primary means of information or entertainment. Mobile phones, equipped with numerous applications and internet access, have become viable alternatives for obtaining information and entertainment. Consequently, while television remains useful and important, it is no longer the sole source of media consumption.

In our technologically advanced society, a variety of devices are readily available. For our respondents, owning a specific brand of phone, such as the iPhone X, does not elicit feelings of pride. Given the multitude of smartphone brands on the market, many of which may surpass the iPhone X in features, it is plausible that some respondents may not even recognize the iPhone X. How can someone desire something they are not familiar with? In many cases, the primary purpose of mobile phones is communication, making the brand less significant than the ability to connect with others.

Addressing the relationship between the psyche and objects, we refer to Eiguer's perspective from 1987, which emphasizes affective investment. Individuals project their unconscious connections onto their relationships with others, reflecting representations of internal objects and their interactions. Eiguer distinguishes between the narcissistic link, which focuses on self-identification and shared interests, and the objectal link, which is based on identification rather than investment. The objectal link involves recognizing the unconscious other in relation to the real other. Drawing from Eiguer's insights, we can analyze the relationship between the psyche and objects through the lenses of narcissism and object relations. As noted, objects play a role in self-definition. In the process of affective investment in an object, individuals both define themselves and project their conscious and unconscious representations onto that object.

It is also essential to clarify that according to Bowlby's theory from 1973, attachment is a dimension of interpersonal bonds, particularly between a mother and child. An individual's attachment figure is someone who shares similarities with them. The findings of our study expand the concept of attachment figures, suggesting that objects can also serve as attachment figures. This attachment to objects can manifest through the personal value placed on them (the endowment effect) or through psychological distress associated with their loss (grief or aversion to dispossession).

5.2. Cognitive Factor in Object Attachment

Analysis of the results reveals a positive and highly significant correlation between the cognitive mechanism and the different categories of attachment objects. This suggests that cognition influences an individual's attachment to objects in their environment. This finding aligns with that of Quéré (cited by Diguier, Laverdiere & Gamache, 2008) who asserts that in an individual's attachment to objects, there is "the reincarnation of the spirit." This tendency is characterized, on the one hand, by the consideration of contingent elements of the situation, and on the other hand, by the reintegration of objects into cognitive processes. Thus, according to Quéré, the cognitive factor contributes, to a certain extent, to the realization of the process of human attachment to objects.

In his study on brand attachment, Helbrunn (2001) identifies six "roots" of attachment. These are psychological variables related to the individual (propensity for inertia, extraversion/introversion), objectively measurable variables related to the brand's situation in its market (awareness, market share), variables related to the consumer's psychological perception of the brand (degree of familiarity, perceived confidentiality, perceived longevity), variables related to the product category, elements related to the genesis and development in the consumer-brand relationship (context of consumer-brand encounter), and elements related to the consumer's affective situation (situation of emotional emptiness, fragility).

Cognition is found in the dimension of the consumer's psychological perception of the brand, as explored in Helbrunn's study. In other words, before a consumer can become attached to a brand, they must first know it, that is, learn about it, including all its qualities. Similarly, before an individual can become attached to a given object, they must first know it and understand everything that object represents for them. There is therefore a cognitive dimension (mental appropriation) that determines a person's attachment to the object; this is the symbolism of the object. Different objects of attachment have a specific meaning for the people who possess them, based on a particular history. Consequently, the individual who becomes attached to the object

carries within them elements of both the past and certain aspects of the future. It is at the intersection of memory and what the object represents for them (symbolism) that the immediate and unique relationship between the subject and the object can be created. This finding from Helbrunn's study aligns with our own by emphasizing that the value of the object determines the type of attachment of the psyche.

Our results show that the correlation between the cognitive mechanism and collective familiar objects ($r = 0.435$), collective memory objects ($r = 0.418$), and individual knowledge objects ($r = 0.414$) is highly significant. In other words, cognition strongly influences attachment to collective familiar objects, collective memory objects, and individual knowledge objects. Certainly, objects such as the family plot, the iron, the household cooking pots, etc., are for collective use. As such, members of the community know that these objects cannot be used exclusively for personal purposes. It is this knowledge that prevents individuals from appropriating these shared familiar objects. Following this perspective, Tisseron (1999) states that such objects (collective familiar objects) have a dual role: utilitarian and a shared history. Indeed, in addition to their simple utilitarian use, collective familiar objects refer to a fragment of the history of several people (members of a family and/or a community). Hence the important place reserved for the community, especially in African societies.

Collective memorabilia are objects that reside in the collective memory of the members of a given community. Consequently, each person within the community understands its significance. Among the collective memorabilia we have considered in this study are monuments to certain figures who have served the country, June 30th, the date dedicated to the country's independence day, the killings and massacres of Congolese people in the eastern part of the country, and so on. Thus, the knowledge that individuals have of what these various collective memorabilia represent for the country influences their attachment to them. As Tisseron (1999) states, monuments are guardians of memories. They bring together the memories of an entire community, memories that are both individual and familial, as well as official.

Cognition also influences the objects of individual knowledge. Indeed, objects such as the internet, computers, mobile phones, televisions, and radios, etc., included in this category, convey information and knowledge. By engaging with them, individuals seek to satisfy their need to learn, communicate, and/or acquire knowledge. This finding partially aligns with that of Jane Pei-Chen Chang & Chung-Chieh Hung (2012), who attest that, driven by the desire to learn, the internet has become the most popular medium used by the population. Studies have also shown that the percentage of students using the internet has increased dramatically, for example, from 24.5% to 79.5% between 1996 and 2001 in the USA (Odell et al., 2000). The number of internet users who regularly connect exceeded 1.5 billion individuals in 2009, with 19% of them in China alone (Flischer, 2010).

The results of our study also reveal that the cognitive mechanism is weakly correlated with individual familiar objects ($r = 0.233$) and individual memory objects (0.259). This suggests that cognition does not exert a significant influence on attachment to familiar objects and individual memory objects. Therefore, we can conclude that cognition may not be the sole factor explaining the psyche's attachment to objects.

5.3. Emotional Factor in Attachment to Objects

Research on human attachment to figures has primarily concentrated on the emotional aspect. Building on these findings, we

have examined affectivity, in conjunction with cognition, as a key factor influencing human attachment to objects in this study. The analysis of our results reveals a significant correlation between affective mechanisms and various categories of attachment objects, highlighting the role of emotions in object attachment. These findings are consistent with previous research, particularly by Agneray et al. (2015), who explored attachment to housing and underscored the impact of emotional factors. They noted that the bond to one's home is shaped by numerous variables, and this bond becomes apparent in experiences of burglary, which are often perceived as an "intrusion," a "violation," or a "defilement." Similarly, separation from one's home, whether voluntary or forced, is a complex experience that can be perceived very differently from one individual to another.

In our study, attachment to objects is influenced by feelings of pride or confidence associated with ownership, as well as by the grief that accompanies their loss. For instance, Item 26 ("if I had a vehicle, I wouldn't accept someone throwing a stone at the windshield") and Item 27 ("I am proud to wear my own clothes and not someone else's") received positive responses from participants, indicating a strong attachment. This suggests that our respondents have a personal connection to these objects and care deeply about them. Their unwillingness to tolerate damage to their vehicle and their pride in wearing their own clothes reflect the emotional significance these objects hold for them. It is also noteworthy to mention a positive shift in attitudes; not long ago, people often exchanged clothes without concern, indicating a change in how attachment and ownership are perceived today.

The evaluation of Item 55, which states, "I have objects at home that I find difficult to part with," revealed a positive response from our participants, particularly those with a minimizing attachment style. These findings reinforce the idea that our respondents have a strong attachment to certain objects and others hold not only practical value but also serve as important markers of personal history. As a result, individuals feel a sense of belonging and connection to these items, often experiencing guilt or psychological distress when faced with the prospect of parting with them. This attachment to objects carries significant emotional weight. Our results support our first secondary hypothesis, which suggests that retaining an object beyond its practical utility indicates that the attachment is rooted more in emotional value than in rational assessment.

Tisseron (1999) highlights the significant emotional attachment we have to objects, noting that these objects can trigger anxieties, particularly the fear of losing control over them. This is especially true for individuals who become overly identified with their possessions. Additionally, people may experience anxiety from feeling like an object themselves, struggling to recognize their own identity within the context of these objects. Conversely, some may desire to be treated as objects. However, the boundary between wishing for the autonomy of an object and fearing dehumanization is quite delicate. To address this fear, Tisseron outlines three strategies that individuals may employ. First, the desire to escape loneliness can lead someone to replace human connections with objects. Second, if the fear of being objectified by others is overwhelming, a person may objectify others in return. Lastly, some individuals may intentionally construct their identities as objects to seek validation from those around them. Tisseron reminds us that objects are dynamic, serving as "permanent instruments of mediation for the psychic assimilation of our experiences."

In the context of this study, we examine how our anxieties are linked to the elevation of both material and virtual objects to the status of libidinal objects. The separation anxiety experienced in early childhood, often related to the mother, evolves into adult anxieties concerning the loss of material objects. Just as a child invests emotionally in their primary caregiver, adults transfer this emotional investment to objects. The absence or loss of these objects can evoke significant anxiety, as they are often perceived as “good objects,” with possession providing a sense of narcissistic reinforcement. The fear of losing or being deprived of such objects leads to feelings of abandonment.

Aulagrier (1979) further explores the nature of objects by categorizing them within the realm of pleasure. He identifies three prototypes of relationships between subjects and objects: the relationship of a drug addict to their drug, the bond between a gambler and their game, and the connection one has with the self-image of another, typically observed in romantic passion. In these scenarios, the object of pleasure becomes intertwined with the objects of need, positioning pleasure as something that is imposed and necessary, rather than a matter of choice. Moreover, transforming the object of pleasure into a need alleviates the individual from the burden of responsibility in decision-making. Aulagrier asserts that whether these needs are physical or psychological, their fulfillment is always accompanied by pleasure; without this, individuals would be reluctant to engage in the actions necessary for satisfaction. This results in a baseline level of pleasure that is essential for the psyche and body to function and cope with the inevitable suffering of life. This foundational pleasure emerges as a primary need that must be met for the individual to thrive and continue living.

Agneray et al. (2015) define “heritage” as the emotional connection individuals have to their homes, which are viewed as shared objects among family members. The authors suggest that inheritance can manifest in various ways, including the genetic or biological transfer of material goods, as well as the passing down of values, skills, and rituals. Inheritance also encompasses emotional legacies, conveying feelings of pride, shame, or guilt tied to family histories. The question of inheritance fundamentally shapes our identities, as individuals must navigate their psychological, physical, and material memories in relation to this heritage, whether through acceptance, rejection, or adaptation. Interviewees recognize that shared family objects form part of the heritage handed down by previous generations, such as parents and grandparents, fostering a sense of connection through commonality. This attachment to objects is inherently social.

Research on human attachment, as highlighted by Silvestro-Teissonniere (2011), shows that separation from caregivers can lead to significant emotional distress and impact later life. Spitz's work on mother-child relationships introduced the term “hospitalism” to describe the negative effects of maternal separation on infants. Similarly, detachment from familiar objects can cause psychological and emotional instability. This is reflected in our findings, where respondents expressed strong agreement with the statement regarding the secrecy of personal belongings, such as a land registry booklet. They resist revealing its location to strangers, recognizing its value and the significance it holds for family members, representing parental sacrifices and heritage. In Kinshasa, the importance of land ownership is well understood. Moreover, our analysis indicates a weak correlation ($r = 0.262$) between affectivity and attachment to individual knowledge objects. This suggests that emotional connections have limited influence on attachment to these items. Instead, cognitive factors play a more

significant role, as individual knowledge objects, as defined in this study, primarily reside within the cognitive domain.

6. Conclusion

This study explores the mechanisms behind human attachment to non-human figures, particularly the objects in our environment. It highlights how our possessions reflect and shape our identity. In this context, individuals often define themselves not by “being” (who they are) but by “having” (what they own), whether those are material or virtual objects. The human psyche, through its cognitive and emotional processes, plays a crucial role in fostering this attachment. Cognition enables individuals to perceive objects within a utilitarian framework, effectively transforming them into meaningful possessions. The emotional bond that develops between a person and an object is influenced by personal experiences and societal context.

The initial attachment bonds are established between infants and their caregivers, typically parents. This lifelong process means that individuals experience various attachment figures, which can include both people and objects in their environment. Therefore, attachment is seen as an instinctual mechanism aimed at ensuring species survival by fostering closeness among humans.

However, humans do not exist solely among other people; they are also surrounded by objects. The intricate and often subconscious relationship individuals have with these objects can be significant. For instance, organizing a familiar space or donning a cherished piece of clothing can evoke feelings of confidence and tranquility. Objects serve as fields of intense social interaction with individuals. They shape how we appropriate these objects and how we establish uses and habits. In modern society, objects and images are indispensable partners in our lives.

Overall, we can affirm that humans develop attachments to objects in their environment, which contribute to the formation of identity and collective memory. Attachment to an object can be viewed as an extension of the self; it fosters psychological well-being and self-affirmation. Conversely, losing an object or being separated from it can lead to distress, with the intensity of grief reflecting the depth of emotional investment in that object.

This study specifically explores the attachment to objects, as opposed to attachment to other human beings. The results show that the cognitive mechanism strongly influences attachment to collective familiar objects, collective memory objects, and individual knowledge objects. Cognition also influences the objects of individual knowledge, satisfying the need to learn, communicate, and acquire knowledge.

In conclusion, our study underscores the complex interplay between objects, identity, and emotional well-being. It highlights how shared experiences and attachments shape individual and collective identities, contributing to a deeper understanding of the link between the psyche and the material world.

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Decolonial Epistemologies of the Forest: Yanomami Knowledge and the Future of Planetary Thought

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Abstract

This article examines Yanomami knowledge as a decolonial epistemology of the forest and, secondarily, places it in dialogue with Maya mythic memory in order to argue that Indigenous cosmologies should be understood as complex ontological systems rather than residual forms of folklore. Drawing on Enrique Dussel's concept of the mythic-ontological core and the decolonial critiques of Aníbal Quijano, Ramón Grosfoguel, Walter Mignolo and related authors, the text analyzes how myth, symbolism, ritual and historical memory organize Indigenous visions of nature, personhood, illness, aesthetics and territory. The discussion is based on a critical rereading of ethnographic and bibliographic materials on Yanomami ethnobotany, shamanic medicine, edible mushrooms, women's basketry, the fungus *përisi*, and the political-ecological denunciations formulated by Davi Kopenawa and allied researchers. The article argues that Yanomami thought expresses a sophisticated relational ontology in which forest, body, spirit, community and territory constitute a living totality. From this perspective, the destruction of the forest represents simultaneously ecological devastation, ontological aggression and epistemic violence. The text further argues that the category of planetary thought can be reconfigured from Indigenous perspectives—not as a new universalism, but as a pluriversal horizon grounded in reciprocity, alterity and the defense of life. By foregrounding Yanomami knowledge and placing it in comparative dialogue with Maya historical memory, the article proposes an intercultural and interscientific agenda capable of renewing anthropology, environmental ethics and intercultural education in Latin America.

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Abstract

This article examines Yanomami knowledge as a decolonial epistemology of the forest and, secondarily, places it in dialogue with Maya mythic memory in order to argue that Indigenous cosmologies should be understood as complex ontological systems rather than residual forms of folklore. Drawing on Enrique Dussel's concept of the mythic-ontological core and the decolonial critiques of Aníbal Quijano, Ramón Grosfoguel, Walter Mignolo and related authors, the text analyzes how myth, symbolism, ritual and historical memory organize Indigenous visions of nature, personhood, illness, aesthetics and territory. The discussion is based on a critical rereading of ethnographic and bibliographic materials on Yanomami ethnobotany, shamanic medicine, edible mushrooms, women's basketry, the fungus *përisi*, and the political-ecological denunciations formulated by Davi Kopenawa and allied researchers. The article argues that Yanomami thought expresses a sophisticated relational ontology in which forest, body, spirit, community and territory constitute a living totality. From this perspective, the destruction of the forest represents simultaneously ecological devastation, ontological aggression and epistemic violence. The text further argues that the category of planetary thought can be reconfigured from Indigenous perspectives—not as a new universalism, but as a pluriversal horizon grounded in reciprocity, alterity and the defense of life. By foregrounding Yanomami knowledge and placing it in comparative dialogue with Maya historical memory, the article proposes an intercultural and interscientific agenda capable of renewing anthropology, environmental ethics and intercultural education in Latin America.

Keywords: *Decolonial epistemology, Indigenous cosmology, Yanomami knowledge, mythic-ontological core, intercultural dialogue, forest thought, Indigenous knowledge systems, planetary ethics*

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1. Introduction

The modern organization of knowledge has been profoundly shaped by Eurocentric classificatory regimes that separated reason from myth, science from cosmology, and humans from nature. Such distinctions did not emerge as neutral achievements of the intellect. They were consolidated through conquest, missionary expansion, racial hierarchies and the disciplinary institutionalization of knowledge. In this process, Indigenous peoples were frequently positioned as objects of description rather than as authors of concepts, methods and interpretations. The epistemic consequence of colonial domination was not merely the silencing of particular voices, but the downgrading of entire worlds of intelligibility.

This article insists on a decisive point: the Indigenous societies of Abya Yala were neither outside history, nor devoid of philosophy, nor incapable of abstraction. They were covered over by the rhetoric of modernity. Florescano's observation that the Indigenous person appeared in dominant historiography only as a reflection of the conqueror's action summarizes the logic of colonial narrative. What was denied was not only political agency, but ontological density. In decolonial language, this is the covering of the Other.

This article is built upon this diagnosis and argues that Yanomami thought, interpreted through the category of the mythic-ontological core, constitutes a powerful epistemology of the forest whose implications exceed ethnographic particularity. The argument is not that Yanomami knowledge should be assimilated into Western science as a supplementary archive of useful information, nor that it should be romanticized as an untouched reservoir of purity. The argument is more demanding: Yanomami thought offers conceptual categories for rethinking the person, illness, the environment, aesthetics, territory and the future of planetary coexistence.

The article has four interconnected objectives. First, it reconstructs the theoretical basis of the mythic-ontological core in Dussel's philosophy of liberation and relates it to decolonial debates on the coloniality of knowledge. Second, it identifies central dimensions of Yanomami ontology present in territoriality, ethnobotanical knowledge, edible mushrooms, women's basketry technologies and shamanic medicine. Third, it introduces the Maya case as a comparative horizon, particularly with regard to historical memory, symbolic narration and the right to interpret reality from Indigenous temporalities. Finally, it proposes that the future of planetary thought must be reoriented from Indigenous relational ontologies rather than from an abstract managerial universalism.

From a methodological perspective, the article combines hermeneutic analysis, comparative interpretation and a critical synthesis of ethnographic literature. It does not aim to replace collaborative field research nor to speak in the name of Indigenous communities. Its objective is to reorganize a set of arguments and materials into an academic article capable of demonstrating that Yanomami knowledge is not merely local knowledge, but an epistemic intervention in contemporary debates on environmental collapse, intercultural dialogue and the defense of life.

The relevance of this intervention is immediate. The planetary crisis is not only climatic; it is civilizational, ontological and pedagogical. Extractivism destroys forests, but it also destroys relationships, memories and obligations. Against this destruction, the Yanomami proposition that the forest is alive, that minerals are not inert wealth, and that illness can be released by the violent penetration of the earth should not be dismissed as metaphorical excess. It must be recognized as a form of planetary critique.

2. Maya Memory as a Comparative Horizon

Although this article prioritizes Yanomami knowledge, the Maya case remains important as a comparative horizon. Ethnographic and bibliographic research situate both traditions within a broader effort to recover the ancestral knowledge of Abya Yala against the chronology that places 1492 as the privileged beginning of history. The observation by Enrique Florescano that Mesoamerican traditions communicated not only through alphabetic writing but through a plurality of media is decisive. It challenges the colonial assumption that the European form of literacy is the necessary condition for historicity.

Maya cosmology presents an intricate articulation between temporality, territoriality and collective memory. Time is not merely chronological succession; it is ritualized recurrence, the inscription of cycles and an ethical orientation. The relationship between maize, body, land and community expresses a principle of ontological continuity between humans and the living world. In this respect, the Maya comparative horizon clarifies a point that is also relevant to the Yanomami case: Indigenous knowledge is sustained by symbolic and practical systems in which survival, memory and cosmology are inseparable.

We also recall Enrique Dussel's interpretation of Chiapas, Mexico, where the Maya insurgency signaled that reality can be interpreted in different ways and from different historical skins. This image of changing skins is theoretically fertile. It suggests that decolonization is not merely a critique of external domination but also a transformation of perceptive and hermeneutic position. To see through the eyes of the Other is to destabilize the *ego conquisco* that later became the *ego cogito*.

The comparative value of the Maya case for this article lies less in a meticulous ethnographic parallelism than in demonstrating that Indigenous historical memory is itself a form of theory. It organizes claims about land, language, world and futurity. If Maya texts destabilize the monopoly of alphabetic historicity, Yanomami knowledge destabilizes the monopoly of modern ecological thought. Together they suggest that ancestral knowledge is not regressive nostalgia but an active mode of interpreting the world.

3. The Yanomami Mythic-Ontological Core: Territory, Forest, and Alterity

This research defines the Yanomami not as an isolated remnant but as a complex cultural and territorial formation that spans northern

Brazil and southern Venezuela. Their communities are politically and economically autonomous while remaining connected through networks of exchange, alliance and ceremonial relations. Such a sociopolitical configuration already resists simplifying stereotypes. It is neither atomized individualism nor a centralized state order, but rather a relational territoriality sustained by mobility, reciprocity and negotiated autonomy.

A decisive characteristic of the Yanomami mythic-ontological core is that the forest is not an external environment. It is *urihi*, the forest-land, a living totality that nourishes, shelters, teaches and responds. In Yanomami cosmology, the forest is understood as a living entity embedded in complex exchanges between humans and non-humans rather than as an inert space for exploitation.

This research repeatedly returns to this point through the denunciations of Davi Kopenawa regarding mining and disease. The extraction of gold is not merely an economic activity; it represents a violent penetration of the earth that releases *xawara*, a deadly smoke or epidemic force. In Yanomami thought, epidemic diseases are associated with the destructive intrusion of outsiders and the disturbance of the forest's balance.

Within a modern extractivist framework such statements may be interpreted as symbolic language. Yet their philosophical significance lies precisely in refusing the division between the literal and the symbolic that makes ecological destruction possible.

This ontological proposition is also political. One must recall the long history of invasions, illegal mining, epidemics and genocidal threats affecting Yanomami territories. In this context, the Yanomami become intelligible not only as victims but also as interpreters of a destructive civilizational logic. Kopenawa's critique of the greed of the whites presents minerals as dangerous substances rather than neutral wealth. This inversion is fundamental. What modern capitalism names a resource, Yanomami cosmology may name poison. Such a reversal destabilizes developmentalist common sense.

An ethics of alterity is equally at stake. Here the Dusselian demand to think from the skin of the Other is adopted. Applied to the Yanomami case, this means suspending the colonial impulse to translate every Indigenous statement into the grammar of deficiency. The old label of the "fierce people," popularized in a certain anthropological tradition, appears as a simplification laden with prejudice. In contrast, long-term collaborative research reveals a society characterized by deep ecological knowledge, dense ritual life and sophisticated conceptual production.

The Yanomami mythic-ontological core therefore includes at least four inseparable dimensions: territorial defense, the ontology of the living forest, critique of extractivist modernity and affirmation of Indigenous thought as theory. These dimensions structure the following sections on ethnobotany, health and aesthetics.

4. Ethnobotany, Food, and the Intelligence of the Forest

One of the strongest contributions of this article is the synthesis of Yanomami ethnobotanical knowledge. Far from constituting a random inventory of useful plants, this knowledge appears as a science of relations. The works of Bruce Albert, William Milliken and other researchers are cited to show that Yanomami communities identify and use hundreds of plant species, including cultivated plants, fruits, salts, medicinal substances and edible fungi. Such diversity is inseparable from patterns of migration, horticulture, gathering and ritual practice.

The agricultural repertoire includes cassava, banana, plantain, papaya, maize, sugarcane, peach palm, yam and sweet potato, as well as an extensive variety of fruit trees and condiments. This detail is not trivial. Multiplicity matters. The recognition of different varieties of cassava, bananas and other crops indicates a classificatory intelligence grounded in careful observation, memory and experimentation. This is not subsistence in the pejorative sense of mere survival. It is a cultivated ecology.

The section dedicated to mushrooms is particularly revealing. Through collaboration between Yanomami researchers, the Instituto Socioambiental and the Hutukara Yanomami Association, edible fungi become a site where ancestral knowledge, linguistic preservation and scientific dialogue intertwine. Mushrooms are collected in the forest, secondary growth areas and former gardens, and their growth is understood through the observation of rainfall, lunar cycles and the succession of cultivated areas. This constitutes environmental knowledge embedded in everyday practice.

The description of preparation methods is equally important. Mushrooms may be roasted in leaves, cooked in broth or consumed with *beiju* (cassava flatbread) and roasted green bananas. These culinary details should not be treated as simple ethnographic color. They reveal how knowledge circulates through taste, gendered labor, mobility and memory. Women and men collect mushrooms differently according to their activities; older women returning from gardens and men coming back from hunting transport and transform the fungi within a broader social economy of care.

Sanoma groups are known to identify fifteen edible species, several of which were documented for the first time in scientific literature. This represents a particularly illuminating case of interscientific dialogue. Indigenous knowledge does not merely confirm preexisting scientific categories; it can precede and redirect them. The naming of species, recognition of substrates, distinctions between collection in secondary growth and primary forest, and practical judgments concerning edibility and preference reveal a robust empirical tradition.

This ethnobotanical intelligence has planetary significance. It challenges the monocultural model of food production and the industrial reduction of biodiversity to commodities. It also challenges the pedagogical model according to which science flows only from the university to the community. Davi Kopenawa has explicitly stated that books are being used as a non-Indigenous tool to preserve and teach Yanomami thought. The movement, therefore, is not assimilation into literacy but the strategic appropriation of writing in defense of Indigenous epistemic continuity.

Here the forest is teacher and mother. It multiplies food when respected and becomes impoverished when violated. Such a proposition is ecological, but it is also ethical and political.

5. Health, Shamanism, and the Relational Ontology of the Person

The discussion of health is one of the most conceptually rich parts of this article. Engaging with the work of Bruce Albert and Gale Goodwin Gomez, as well as Silvia Maria Ferreira Guimarães, it presents Yanomami and Sanuma medical thought as a relational ontology of the person. Illness is not understood as an isolated mechanical failure in a discrete body. Rather, it is interpreted as a disturbance in the network of relations that articulates the bodily envelope, image, vital principle, unconscious thought, animal double, community, and the dangerous alterities that surround the village.

The synthesis proposed by Albert and Gomez regarding the concept of the person is particularly illuminating: conscious thought, essential image, vital breath, unconscious dimension, and animal double compose a distributed personhood. Disease may involve aggression against the image, the capture or injury of the animal double, or disturbances in the balance between conscious and unconscious dimensions. Such a description is evidently difficult to translate into biomedical categories, yet this difficulty should be understood as evidence of ontological divergence rather than epistemic inferiority.

The description of Sanuma shamanism presented by Guimarães further clarifies this perspective. Shamans operate across multiple temporalities and spaces; they interact with enemies, the dead, auxiliary beings and forest entities in order to defend life and restore balance. The manuscript emphasizes that this is not “mere magic.” Rather, it constitutes a mode of knowledge integrating narrative, chant, sensation, interpretation, affect and therapeutic action. The songs of the *hekula* spirits function as sources of consciousness, theory and moral orientation.

A particularly important insight concerns translation and health policy. If professionals operate at the frontier between radically distinct systems of interpreting illness, then intercultural care cannot be reduced to technical extension. It requires epistemic humility, anthropological training and, ideally, linguistic competence. Medical and educational programs should incorporate anthropological knowledge and basic notions of the Yanomami language in order to reduce the violence of clinical misunderstanding.

The broader significance lies in the challenge posed to the ontology of the modern individual. Yanomami thought suggests that persons are not closed units but relational compositions constituted by breath, image, animality, dream, memory and social bonds. When this ontology is ignored, institutional care becomes another form of colonial imposition. When it is taken seriously, the possibility of genuine intercultural dialogue in health emerges one in which biomedicine is decentralized rather than simply exported.

In planetary terms, the implications extend beyond Indigenous policy. A civilization increasingly experiencing illness as an ecological, psychosocial and systemic phenomenon may learn from ontologies that have never separated body and environment so radically.

6. Women’s Knowledge, *Përisi*, and the Decolonization of Aesthetics

The discussion of women’s basketry and the fungus *përisi* is extraordinarily important because it demonstrates that aesthetics, ecology, technology and the gendered transmission of knowledge are inseparable. *Përisi* is described as a black and resistant fungal fiber used in the ornamentation of baskets. It grows on the forest floor and requires practical experience to be located and collected. Women identify its signs, recognize the dangers involved in gathering it and transmit this knowledge from mothers to daughters.

This is not merely technical knowledge. It constitutes a theory of material relations. The testimonies of Yanomami women respond to non-Indigenous misunderstandings that identify *përisi* as plastic, painted vine or synthetic filament. Their response is epistemologically powerful: *përisi* is a forest material known through embodied practice, and its durability, brightness and resistance derive not from industrial manufacture but from ecological intimacy. In a world saturated with petrochemical materials, such a proposition is decisive.

The scientific identification of *Marasmius yanomami* as a species named in recognition of Yanomami knowledge offers a remarkable example of reversed authority. Instead of science naming an inert object according to its own taxonomy, collaborative research recognizes that Indigenous women already possessed stable and practical knowledge of this organism. The act of naming thus becomes a gesture of epistemic reparation, even if only partial.

From an aesthetic point of view, baskets are not merely functional containers. The braided lines, historical motifs and the adaptation of designs across generations and intercultural encounters reveal a complex visual language. It is here that Enrique Dussel's reflections on the aesthetics of liberation become especially relevant. If colonial aesthetics universalized a single canon of beauty and relegated colonized arts to the status of craft or ethnographic residue, Yanomami basketry imposes another starting point. Beauty emerges from communal memory, practical intelligence and the respectful transformation of forest materials.

The case of the *përisi* fungus also expands the meaning of sustainability. Too often sustainability is discussed through managerial abstractions disconnected from concrete worlds of making. The work of Yanomami women presents another model: materials are gathered through ecological knowledge, worked through inherited technique and valued not only through market exchange but as heritage, pedagogy and collective visibility. In this sense, their art already constitutes a planetary critique of disposable modernity.

To decolonize aesthetics, therefore, does not simply mean including Indigenous works in museums. It means recognizing that worlds of beauty are worlds of ontology. The basket is a form of thought.

7. Toward a Planetary Thought of the Forest

The expression "planetary thought" can easily be appropriated by a new universal discourse that merely expands the abstractions of modernity. If the planetary is imagined as a managerial vision from nowhere, it will reproduce the same epistemic hierarchy that once denied Indigenous worlds. This article proposes another path. If the horizon of the world is to move beyond the limits of modernity, the planetary must be rethought from pluriversal locations, and the forest constitutes one of these privileged locations.

Throughout this discussion, Yanomami knowledge is repeatedly connected to the possibility of reeducating the city from the forest. This formulation deserves emphasis. It suggests that the problem is not only how to protect remote Indigenous territories, but how to transform the epistemic habits of societies structured by extraction, speed and instrumental rationality. Forest thought is therefore pedagogical. It teaches limits, reciprocity, observation, slowness and interdependence.

The ecological theory of networks proposed by Fritjof Capra offers a possible bridge, provided that it does not recolonize Indigenous knowledge through scientific authority. The point is not that systems theory finally proves what Indigenous peoples have always known. Rather, the point is that an encounter becomes possible when science abandons its monopoly over the valid description of the world. At that moment, Indigenous relational ontologies can be heard not as pre-scientific intuition, but as theory beyond modernity.

The political implications are significant. Environmental ethics must move beyond models of stewardship in which humans benevolently administer a passive nature. Yanomami thought implies an ethic of coexistence with a living earth, with dangerous forces and with reciprocal obligations. Intercultural education

must move beyond inclusive multiculturalism and open space for epistemic conflict, translation and transformation. Anthropology must move from representing Indigenous life to learning from Indigenous concepts.

The future of planetary thought, in this sense, will depend on the capacity of institutions to welcome forms of intelligence that were previously disqualified. The forest is not the opposite of theory; it is one of its most urgent sources.

8. Conclusion

This article has argued that Yanomami knowledge should be understood as a decolonial epistemology of the forest and that its theoretical significance becomes clearer when interpreted through the category of the mythic-ontological core. Far from being reducible to folklore or local belief, Yanomami cosmology articulates a dense relational ontology in which body, spirit, food, fungi, art, territory and illness form a living whole. The comparative reference to Maya historical memory reinforces the broader point that the Indigenous peoples of Abya Yala have long produced historical and ontological interpretations of the world that colonial knowledge attempted to conceal.

Several conclusions emerge from this analysis. First, myth must be reconsidered as a sophisticated symbolic rationality rather than as the negation of reason. Second, ethnobotanical and shamanic knowledge are not peripheral cultural traits but central components of Indigenous theory. Third, women's material practices, such as the use of *përisi* in basketry, reveal that aesthetics is inseparable from ecology and the transmission of knowledge. Fourth, intercultural dialogue will remain superficial unless it transforms the very criteria through which knowledge is recognized.

More importantly, Yanomami thought speaks directly to the contemporary planetary crisis. The devastation of the forest is not merely an environmental event; it is an attack on worlds of relation and on the possibility of other futures. Listening to Yanomami knowledge, therefore, is not a benevolent act of inclusion. It is an intellectual and ethical necessity for any serious attempt to rethink life on Earth.

What emerges from the forest is not a nostalgic return to origins, but a rigorous invitation to pluriversality. If the future of planetary thought is to remain faithful to life, it must become less imperial, less extractivist and more capable of learning from those who have never separated knowledge from territory, nor territory from responsibility.

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- A structured assessment covering originality, significance, clarity, methodology, and overall quality.
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C. Responding to Reviewer Comments

Addressing reviewer feedback is simple and flexible. You have two options:

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Option B - Email: If the Dashboard is not convenient, you may simply send an email with a numbered list of corrections referencing the line numbers, along with your responses to each reviewer comment.

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- Upon acceptance, a **galley proof** (Early View edition) of your article is prepared according to the journal's publishing schedule.
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- This version represents the final, corrected article but **does not yet include Volume or Issue numbers**.

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