
DENIAL OF PREGNANCY: A PSYCHOANALYTICAL STUDY

Thomás Gomes Gonçalves¹

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre-RS, Brasil

ABSTRACT. The situation in which women ignore their own pregnancy for a long period or even until labor is known in the scientific literature as denial of pregnancy. Such phenomenon occurs with women who do not present psychotic symptoms. From the analysis of three cases of women who denied their pregnancy, the psychic dynamics inherent to this complex phenomenon is investigated through a qualitative method. The main instrument for data collection was a set of three semi-structured interviews. Data was analyzed by means of Interpretative Analysis, and based on the ideas of the psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi about trauma. Three assertions were identified, which allowed observing that women who went through this situation have suffered at early age a trauma marked by a double abandonment by maternal and paternal figures. Thus, the hypothesis is that denial of pregnancy is a situation of uterine abandonment in which the experience of parental abandonment repeats in pregnancy.

Keywords: Pregnancy; psychoanalysis; psychic trauma.

NEGAÇÃO DA GRAVIDEZ: UM ESTUDO PSICANALÍTICO

RESUMO. A situação de mulheres desconhecerem o próprio estado gravídico durante boa parte da gravidez ou até o momento do parto é denominada na literatura científica como negação da gravidez. Tal fenômeno ocorre com mulheres que não apresentam sintomatologia psicótica. A partir da análise de três casos de mulheres que negaram a gestação, investiga-se a dinâmica psíquica inerente a esse complexo fenômeno pelo método qualitativo. O principal instrumento para coletar os dados foi uma série de três entrevistas semidirigidas. Os dados foram analisados por meio da análise interpretativa e com base nas proposições sobre o trauma do psicanalista Sándor Ferenczi. Foram identificadas três asserções que permitiram concluir que, mulheres que passaram por essa situação, sofreram em tenra idade um trauma marcado por um duplo abandono, tanto da figura materna quanto paterna. Desenvolve-se, assim, a hipótese de que a negação da gravidez seja uma situação de abandono uterino, na qual a experiência de abandono parental é repetida na gestação.

Palavras-chave: gravidez; psicanálise; trauma psíquico.

NEGACIÓN DEL EMBARAZO: UN ESTUDIO PSICOANALÍTICO

RESUMEN. La situación de mujeres que desconocen su propio embarazo durante buena parte del embarazo o hasta el momento del parto es denominada en la literatura científica como negación del embarazo. Tal fenómeno ocurre con mujeres que no presentan sintomatología psicótica. A partir del análisis de tres casos de mujeres que negaron el embarazo, se investiga la dinámica psíquica inherente a ese complejo fenómeno a través del método cualitativo. El principal instrumento para la coleta de los datos fue una serie de tres entrevistas semiestructurada. Se analizaron los datos a través del Análisis Interpretativa y con base en las ideas sobre trauma planteadas por el psicoanalista Sándor Ferenczi. Se identificaron tres aserciones que permitirán concluir que, mujeres que pasaron por esa situación, sufrieron en edad temprana un trauma marcado por un doble abandono, tanto por la figura materna cuanto por la paterna. Se desarrolla la hipótesis de que la negación del embarazo sea una situación de abandono uterino en la cual la experiencia de abandono parental es repetida en el embarazo.

Palabras clave: embarazo; psicoanálisis; trauma psíquico.

¹ E-mail: thomas_gomes@hotmail.com

This article addresses the denial of pregnancy phenomenon. In such a situation, women without a psychosis diagnosis deny gestation for a long period or, in extreme cases, until the labor moment (Chaulet, 2011). Thus, a delayed discovery of the pregnancy may result in damaging consequences to the health of the woman and of the baby: subjection to x-ray examinations, ingestion of contraindicated medicines, use of illicit drugs and/or tobacco, low weight at birth, mental retardation and elevated mortality (Wessel et al.). In addition, some women, for not having time enough to prepare themselves during pregnancy, may present difficulties of relationship with the baby after birth. In some cases, this difficulty is evidenced when a mother is unable to name her newborn (Pierronne et al., 2002); in more radical situations, in turn, she may kill the baby, which configures neonaticide – death of an infant caused by his or her mother in his or her first day of life (Resnick, 1969; Bonnet, 1993).

It is important to say that such phenomenon is not recent in the scientific literature. The first record of it dates back to 1681, from clinical observations of the gynecologist François Mauriceau, who observed that an irregular menstrual cycle could lead some women to interpret mistakenly the typical symptoms of a gestation and, consequently, to deny the pregnancy. However, only from 1980 scientific productions have become more constant, especially in France, country in which, in 2003, the first scientific association about the phenomenon was created – the *Association Française pour la Reconnaissance du Déní de Grossesse* (Chaulet, 2011; Grangaud, 2001; Guernalec-Levy, 2007; Marinoupoulos and Nisand, 2011).

Some researches show that denial of pregnancy is not a rare situation. In Germany, said phenomenon occurs at a rate of one case to every 475 births (Wessel, Endrikat & Buscher, 2002), in Austria, the rate is of one case to every 400 births (Brezinka, Huter, Bielb & Kinzl, 1994), in the United States, one case to every 500 births (Heneghan & Rosenthal, 2007), and, in France, one case to every 1,000 births (Pierronne, Delannoy, Florequin and Libert, 2002). It is worth highlighting that neither an empirical or epidemiological investigation nor a study case has been conducted in Latin America. Thus, this article is the first study about the denial phenomenon in this region of the American continent.

In this direction, considering that denial of pregnancy is a frequent situation that may result in several consequences, both neonatal and psychic, this article aims to comprehend the psychic implications involved in this phenomenon, based on the life story of women who did not know they were pregnant, seeking to explore the inherent psychic dynamics in these situations, in order to understand what psychically prevented these women from noticing the gestational process.

Method

This is a qualitative research. It counted with the participation of three women who did not know they were pregnant during the entire gestational process. The participants were found by convenience and could be both primiparas and multiparas. It excluded participants who faked the gestation, patients with psychotic picture, mental retardation, and/or those who were taking drugs with properties that could affect their logical and reasoning ability. It is important to stress that only participants who experienced the phenomenon within the minimum period of ten years after the situation occurred were included.

The Mini International Neuropsychiatric Interview – MINI – was applied, in the version translated into Portuguese by Patricia Amorim (Amorim, 2000), with the purpose of identifying the presence or absence of psychopathological properties typical of psychosis in order to meet the inclusion criterion (absence of psychotic symptomatology).

The main instrument used was a set of three semi-structured interviews with each of the participants. Each interview always started with an initial stimulus that served as a guiding axis for data searching. These interviews were voice recorded and later transcribed. The first interview approached the participants' life story, their relationship with their parents and their view on femininity and maternity; the second interview had as stimulus the gestation experience and the occurrence of the non-recognition of their own gestation, in addition to how they discovered they were going to have a

child; and, finally, the third interview contained the following stimuli: the hypotheses of the participant herself about the occurrence of denial of pregnancy and the consequences of this experience to her life.

Such research was submitted to and approved by the Ethics Committee of the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul (PUCRS), and the participants signed an informed consent form (TCLE) agreeing to participate in the study. Thus, all necessary ethical considerations have been met and observed.

The analysis of the data of the study case of each participant was carried out through the "Interpretative Analysis" method by Frederick Erickson (1997). This method proposes the discovering of different universality strata and particularities present in the specific case studied, that is, what aspects are widely universal, which of them can be generalized to other similar situations and which of them are exclusive to the case at hand. In this way, the interpretative method enables a logical and non-statistical generalization, allowing the researcher to seek for concrete universal factors, organized from the detailed study of a specific case. These universal factors, as Erickson (1997) understands, are evidenced according to their concrete and specific manifestation in people's experiences, not in abstractions or in a statistical generalization of a sample to an entire population.

To discuss the findings, the psychoanalytic framework was used, because this subject presents itself as the fundamental subsidize in this study due to its instruments for discussion. Psychoanalysis allows exploring the singularity of a life experience because it speaks of that which is not limited to a causal or consensualist explanation (Birman, 2009). It is worth highlighting that the notion of trauma to be explored in results was based on considerations of the psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi on the traumatic.

From the sociodemographic data sheet, was prepared, containing the Table 1.

Table 1: Characterization of the participants and aspects concerning the unknown gestation.

Participant	Current age	Current Marital Status	Schooling	Number of Gestations	Unknown gestations and respective age then
Nádia	25	Married	Complete Higher Education	3	3rd/25 years old
Natália	22	Single	Incomplete Higher Education	1	1 st /20 years old
Paola	38	Divorced	Incomplete Higher Education	2	2nd/32 years old

Throughout the interviews, it was possible to find the data contained in Table 2.

Table 2: Data related to the baby.

Participant	Sex of the baby	Weight at Birth	Height at Birth	Current age of the child
Nádia	Male	3,500 kg	50 cm	(Stillborn)
Natália	Female	2,690 kg	45 cm	1 year and 8 months old
Paola	Male	3,160 kg	49 cm	6 years old

Results and Discussions: Presentations of the Assertions

After data analysis, three assertions regarding the psychic dynamics present in the cases of the women who did not know they were pregnant until the labor moment were identified.

First Assertion: Perception Disavowal

It was a normal working day when Nádia tried to lift up a student that had fallen from his chair in the classroom, making a good amount of exertion. As a result of such act, she started bleeding. When she saw all that blood, she thought it could be her period, but thought it was strange, because she had “menstruated” twelve days ago. In the same day, she was dismissed by the school’s principal to undergo an examination. She went to a health center, and the doctor, after examining her, revealed: *“This bleeding was an attempted miscarriage... You are pregnant, and nine months pregnant.”*

In that morning, Paola knew that that would be her last day with her husband at home. She tried not to think much about the end of her marriage and performed all the proposed activities for that day: she took her daughter to school, attended a professional qualification activity at work, and, in the end of the day, picked her daughter from school and both went by bicycle to her parent’s, where they would have dinner. After the meal, she came back home and began to feel a strong pain. She took a warm shower and tried to sleep, but the pain persisted. She got up and took another shower, letting the water run on the spot she felt the pain. She tried to sleep again, but the pain on her back grew stronger. She called her father so that he could take her to the hospital, as she could no longer stand that big discomfort and malaise. Paola, for the entire way to the hospital, thought she had kidney stones, due to the exact location of her pain. In the hospital, she felt a huge amount of liquid running from her private parts, calling the attention of the nurse that was assisting her:

“This is pregnancy!” Then the doctor said: “No way, no way!”. Then they placed the ultrasound below my bellybutton, and there they were, the heartbeats, and the doctor said: “This right there is a heart, and not the mother’s. Take her! Take her! Because the fetus is alive! Take her because the fetus is alive!”.

Natália went to sleep feeling a pain in her stomach. She tried to relate the pain to a possible hangover, but she knew the pain she was feeling was different from that when she drank. She thought it could be cramps, because she had not “menstruated” that month yet, but she wondered at that fact, because she had never felt cramps before her period. The pain grew stronger throughout the day; her mother, who had just arrived from work, noticing her daughter had a pain, suggested her to take a painkiller to sooth it. She went to the bathroom and noticed a little bleeding; she thought she had gotten her period and that her pain would soon go away. The pain, however, became so intense that Natália was not able to stand on her feet, and she asked her mother to take her to the hospital, because she could no longer bear so much pain. In the hospital, a doctor performed an echography and asked her: *“You know you’re pregnant, don’t you?”*

Elas não sabiam que estavam grávidas até o final da gestação. Nádia, Natália e Paola não haviam percebido que estavam gestando outro ser. A partir desse fato, que contradiz o senso-comum, de toda mulher saber que está grávida, impõem-se diversos questionamentos: como não puderam perceber o estado gravídico por nove meses? E as alterações no corpo? E os movimentos intrauterinos? E os sintomas típicos da gestação? Não pararam de menstruar?

They did not know they were pregnant until the end of their gestation. Nádia, Natália and Paola had not realized they were gestating another being. From that fact, which contradicts the common sense, that of every woman knowing she is pregnant, several questions emerge: How come did they not notice the pregnancy for nine months? What about the changes in their bodies? What about the intrauterine movements? What about the typical symptoms of a gestation? Did they not stop menstruating?

The non-perception of one’s own pregnancy refers to an inner movement in which two bodies are not perceived: the body itself of the woman who does not perceive herself as pregnant, and of the baby

she is gestating. Next, the explanations each participant gave to the typical symptoms of gestation are explored.

About intrauterine movements, Natália affirmed she never felt her daughter moving, at any point of her pregnancy, and justified the little motion of the baby with her constant ingestion of alcoholic drinks during the period in which she did not know she was pregnant:

I don't remember this thing of moving, I don't remember having felt it... I don't know, they say he/she kicks, does this and does that... Look, if she kicked, I didn't notice, I thought it was something I had eaten... I don't know, my daughter was immersed in alcohol, she didn't move. She was there motionless, with a hangover.

Nádia declared she never felt her son moving during all nine months in which she was not aware of her own pregnancy:

I didn't feel it, you have no idea, that's what I say, you know? That's why people don't believe it. I didn't feel anything, anything! The same thing I feel right now I felt then. And, for you to have an idea, the kid was born with 3.5 kilos.

Paola took six tablets of an appetite suppressant drug during the entire unknown gestation and attributed to the side effects of that drug the fact that she did not notice any intrauterine movement of his son:

That drug gets you sleepy, but it didn't get me so during the gestation. So much so that when he was born, they did the heel prick, the hearing test and such... And he wouldn't wake up. He wouldn't suck in the first hours like that... He just slept, and slept, and slept...

Concerning weight gain, Nádia reported, during the interviews, having put on 14 kilos in the course of the unknown pregnancy, but related this fact to other causes:

I noticed I was fatter and such, but only a bit fatter... I used to say: I'm getting fat... but that's all... And my mom is fat, so I thought at that time I was becoming like her... Fat... I thought it was a natural thing. Another thing is that I was so focused on my brother and on my job too, which is very, very, very tiresome, it drains me! So, when you are anxious, you automatically eat, eat, eat, you eat nonstop... I didn't have time to look at myself, for being living all those problems because of my brother.

Natália reports that she probably gained only four kilos during the period in which she did not know she was pregnant. Then again, a typical symptom of pregnancy was related to some question linked to the ingestion of alcoholic drinks:

An important fact to tell you is that I didn't have a belly, you understand? It wasn't that baby bump. I had gained four kilos. Once, my daughter's godmother touched my belly and she said: "Wow, what a hard belly!". And my belly was really hard, and then I said: That's a lot of beer, hã! But, seriously, I drink beer and my belly gets bloated and I never cared about this weight matter. This is not important to me... I weighed myself on a scale yesterday, because I went to the bathroom of my daughter's godmother, because there was one there, just because of that.

Paola did not notice significant weight changes, since she was taking drugs to lose weight and always suffered the "yo-yo" effect of the medication:

I didn't have a baby bump... I noticed it was more on the sides like that, you know? I must have lost weight, after what I thought to be the yo-yo effect of the drug; I think it was already the baby's weight itself.

The absence of menstruation configures the first evidence that a woman is expecting a child. It is known that, when a woman is pregnant, she does not menstruate, but the three interviewees stated vehemently that they "menstruated" during pregnancy. Possibly, this alleged menstruation was a

bleeding resulting from some other complication, but the participants interpreted it as menstruation and as a sign that they were not pregnant. Nadia has a history for unknown pregnancies; she found out she was pregnant with her first daughter only in the fifth month, and “menstruated” until the sixth month, and, about the last gestation, of which she was not aware until it ended, she reported having “menstruated” every month of it:

In my first gestation until the sixth month and this last one, I got my period all nine months. So, my periods came normally in all of the months, I was done with the contraceptives and two days later I got the period, everything normal. Because the body is used to taking hormones, right? And then, in my case, I was done with the contraceptives for that month and, automatically, I have to get it, and that's what happened.

Natalia had never had a regular menstrual cycle, for this reason she paid no attention to the occasions in which she did not menstruate during the unknown gestation:

My menstruation has never been regular... My menstruation stayed normal during that period in which I didn't know I was pregnant and changed only in the third quarter of the gestation, but, because it was irregular, I didn't bother to check it, you understand?

Paola reports that she “menstruated” during the nine months of gestation, and only two months before the birth of her son, she noticed that she had begun to have an increased blood flow, leading her to see a doctor:

It never failed, I didn't get it a month, but I got it in the other, you know? Then, it got irregular, but I always got it. Once I bled a lot for twelve days straight, I went to the doctor, the doctor gave me a medicine to stop the bleeding. Nobody never asked me to do an exam to see what that was, just the medicine.

The non-perception and the non-association of typical signs of a pregnancy to a possible pregnancy allow identifying elements similar to the description elaborated by Figueiredo (2003) regarding the *Verleugnung* mechanism, understood by the author as “disavowal”. This mechanism would be broader in comparison to what Freud originally proposed, that is, it would not be, then, restrict to psychosis and fetishism only, as Freud considered. Thus, what is at stake in this understanding is not the disavowal of the perception itself, but the capacity of the transitive process, of metaphorization and of sense; a perception's capacity to travel to other perceptions is disavowed, preserving, in this way, a certain continuity. Disavowal does not cause perception to lose its meaning, but rather its significance, obstructing, thus, “the capacity of activating associative tracks throughout these webs that grant perception its ‘authority’ and its effectiveness” (Figueiredo, 2003; p. 63). Figueiredo (2003) affirms that the objective of disavowal is to dodge a traumatic perception, remembrance or outcome, and, thus, “the disavowed perception retains an immense traumatic potential, at the same time it has its transitive effectiveness abolished” (p. 63).

By associating the disavowal's proper dynamics to the situation of a woman not knowing she is pregnant, it can be said that the participants, regardless of presenting perception flaws, are subjects “endowed with a fine capacity of observation ..., capable of registering and storing important aspects of their outer and inner reality in which they evolve” (Figueiredo, 2003; p.57). However, they seem not to predict consequences to these elements, unable to link them to each other in order to draw a more cohesive conclusion about themselves and about others. Figueiredo (2003) highlights that it is not about “denying what is seen in its proper sense, but about preventing what is seen from leading the psychism to what could be inferred of what has been seen” (p. 60). Therefore, there is a rupture in association. In this way, the participants who do not know about their gestation may even perceive some bodily changes, but they do not put much thought into it and do not go ahead with their hypotheses towards discovering a possible pregnancy. Thus, the following enunciation would contemplate this disavowal dynamics in cases of unknown gestations: “*I know I'm getting fat, but even*

so...". The "I know" (meaning) perceives what is going on, but the "even so" (significance) avoids contact through an associative and transitive via with the suspicion of a pregnancy. Thus, the perception of typical symptoms of gestation is disavowed because to embrace them, may mean to face a traumatic experience.

The next two assertions will approach this traumatic experience, treating it as being derived from an abandonment experience.

Second Assertion: Maternal Abandonment and Orphanhood of a Living Mother

Under the prerogative that mother and daughter have a good relationship and want the best for each other, Nádia tried to understand why her relationship with her mother was troubled and marked by depreciation:

Sometimes, I say that my mother is even envious of me... I see my daughters, how I do everything for them, and if she can bring me down, she will. "Oh, why do you look terrible, why are you fat!", and this and that... This kind of thing that really upsets me... The other day I was telling my husband that it can just be envy, this thing my mother feels about me. Because it shouldn't exist... a relationship like that, of a mother with her daughter! We want all the best for our kids and my mom seems to block me, you know? The other day we were talking and she told me: "A carrion is always surrounded by vultures".

Maternal rudeness was present in Paola's report as well. She noticed that, instead of the usual enchantment and care a mother has towards her child, there was only lack of esteem and of appreciation in the relationship with her mother:

Once, I mentioned her: Oh, I saw a funny thing, I went downtown and people were looking at the kids and at me. Then she said to me: "I bet they were thinking: 'that woman right there with such pretty kids, and she has that ugly face!'" ... Usually, to your mother, you are perfect, you are gorgeous, right? No! Not to my mother!

For not having an affective and intimate relationship with her mother, Natália tried to understand what might have been happened between them that could explain the detachment.

I haven't been breastfed. I was born with a hemangioma in my lips... My mother wanted to remove it... It was getting smaller, you know... As I was growing up, it was getting smaller. Obviously, it wouldn't get perfect, but then my mother decided to remove it...

From the scenes and situations presented by the participants, it is possible to perceive a disqualifying maternal discourse towards the daughters, as it can be observed in the comparison made by Nádia's mother with the carcass of a dead animal, the depreciative discourse of Paola's mother, and the effects on Natália's mother due to a body mark. In this way, it is possible to think that these women occupy for their mothers a place of scorn and disesteem. Moreover, they seem to have been what Ferenczi (1929/2011) describes as "unwelcomed children". These children, according to the author, have not been well received in their families and "clearly registered their mothers' conscious and unconscious signs of aversion or impatience, and their will to live has been broken. The smallest of the events, in the course of their further lives, were enough to arouse in them a desire to die" (p. 57). Those subjects observed by the author presented an early loss of their taste for life, a decrease in the pleasure with living, little resistance to death and unconscious self-destruction tendencies. In addition, maternal deadly investments in the beginning of life would come to increment the child's innate death drive (Ferenczi, 1929/2011). In this direction, Mello and Herzog (2012) state that, in this scenario, "the individual's formation would take place under the impact of the death drive, installing a psychic operation situated beyond the principle of pleasure" (p.69).

The reports of the participants and the impressions generated when they describe situations of their lives with their mothers cause the sensation that they have been orphans of living mothers (maternal role/care role), deprived of maternal assistance, put aside, and unable to enjoy their place

and right as daughters. These women, who represented to their mothers what is of the order of the invisible, had to deal with the impacts of this maternal rejection throughout their lives. Their mothers seem to have undermined the possibilities their daughters had to come to exist as such and ruined their self-image. Thus, several aspects in the life of the interviewees have been compromised, leaving them helpless and clueless about how to act, to think and to feel. In this way, a scenario of intensities has been installed, in which abandonment became central. In this sense, one of the points in which abandonment is made explicit is the total lack of communication between mothers and daughters about sexuality matters. Nádia reported she has never had her mother as somebody who could explain to her aspects concerning sexuality and experiences proper of the puberty and adolescence period: *"We've never had a mother-to-daughter conversation like that, you know? We've never talked about sexuality, we've never talked about anything, about anything, anything... Ever ..."*

Natália revealed that she had never talked to his mother about sexuality or about the process of becoming a woman, so much so that she menstruated for the first time and did not tell her mother, in addition to never having commented about dates. Natália believed that there was no openness for them to approach this kind of subject. She believed that her sexual condition could compromise this communication channel between the two of them: *"There's also my sexual choice... Because I like girls too. So there's that, you know? And my mother always stood against it, a lot... She even said once: 'I'd rather have a dead daughter than a lesbian daughter!'"*

Paola never knew she would menstruate one day; her mother never explained to her that this would happen. Once, she was taking a shower, at the age of nine, and started bleeding and thought she was going to die; she called for her mother, who did not explain to her what that bleeding was about, she only told her that she had received a visitor and that she should not tell anybody what had happened. When she left the bathroom, her mother had already told her father and her godmother, who congratulated her for the menstruation. For having menstruated at that age, Paola said that her mother began to be extremely vigilant in relation to her sexual life, controlling her steps so that there was no chance for her to have any type of intimacy with a man:

She said that I could have a boyfriend only after I turned fifteen, you know, before that she wouldn't accept it at all. So she always said to me: "If I catch you kissing, with a boyfriend, you're gonna see!" I couldn't, it had to be, everything, always, totally hidden, you know? She used to wait for me in front of the school and, when I attended catechesis, she went with me and stayed there knitting.

Third Assertion: Paternal Disavowal and the Abandoning Silence

During the interviews conducted with the participants who did not know about their own gestation, the absence and weakening of a male figure in their life stories called attention. If not asked, they would very likely not have spoken about their fathers and partners. The sensation generated with their reports was: where is the father, the husband, that is, the man in their discourses? With respect to their fathers, the content of the interviews allow identifying that the paternal figure occupies a secondary place in which their permissive attitudes predominate. In this direction, Paola caused the impression that her father was dispensable in the family dynamics. She said that if her father spent less time working and more time at home, there would probably be conflicts due to his presence. The place her father occupied in the family configuration was that of a weak man unable to perform his roles at home:

My father, my father's life is the truck, you understand? He's a guest here at home. He doesn't have an opinion, he stands for nothing... Anyway. Everything is fine to him. My father, he's nice for a week, you understand? He left to work when I was 3, 4 years old, so my life... If my father stays home more than a week, we kill each other. Now my father is thinking of quitting, even because he miss my daughter like crazy, so we'll see how it's going to be.

In Nádia's case, it was possible to observe that in the rare times her father was brought into her speech, he was described in a way that the powerlessness before life vicissitudes was explicit. Nádia remembered that her father consumed alcohol since when she was a kid, when her parents were still

married. In this way, she described her father as a man with a weakness for drinks, who has never managed to perform the role of a father neither towards her nor towards her brothers. The two of Nádia's brothers were drug addicted, and the younger one was staying in a clinic for treatment when the interviews were conducted. They got involved with drug dealing and had already stolen money from her father. Nádia reported that he has never acknowledged that his sons had issues with drugs, nor has made any effort to help them to be treated. Nádia has always asked for her father to serve as a role model to his children:

He told me that, he'd quit when he wanted, now it's been three months since my father quit drinking. I said to him that he had to be a role model to the two of his sons who are addicted: You have to help, sometimes an example is worthy more than millions and millions of words, you better begin to be an example! It's never worked out, he always kept on drinking.

According to Nádia, her father's attitude was to get rid of responsibilities, having a secondary role in her life:

My father, he's very harsh, he's very reserved, you know? He doesn't judge, he doesn't speak a lot. And whatever I decide, if I'm ok, he's ok. He doesn't expose himself too much like that.

In Paola's case, her father seems to have performed a more maternal than paternal role. She keeps good memories of her father, who passed away recently, considering him as her great partner in several situations of her life, since when she was a child, until moments after she divorced. However, it was noticeable that, when Paola talked about situations in which she saw herself subjected to her mother's tyranny, her father became absent in her discourse, and can be seen, in this way, as a weak man unable to intervene before the rude attitudes of his wife.

The man who is weak to perform his roles at home, the man with a weakness for drinking, the man who is weak to intervene in face of maternal aversion can be thought as fathers who have not occupied their assigned ruling position, thus failing to perform the paternal role. This impossibility relates to the attraction and power force derived from the precarious relationship with the mothers, which prevented the participation of a third party. When exploring the mother-daughter relationship, Zalcberg (2003) affirms that the father's function should be that of the one who rescues his daughter from the submissive position before the maternal desire. However, the authors observe that, in some cases, what happens is an unconscious complicity between the father and the mother in relation to the transmission of the law, causing the father to consent with a certain weakening of the power of his word, not holding himself accountable for this function as the original point of the law. In this way, when the mother deems herself to be the law, she can "favor the exclusion of the paternal role in the life of the child" (Zalcberg, 2003; p.87)

As pointed out in the previous assertion, the abandonment experience promoted by the mother results in several impacts on the life of a girl. It is worth, therefore, thinking over the possibility for a father to take his daughter away from this condition, providing her with some sense to the experiences lived in her relationship with her mother. With respect to what has been heard in the interviews with the participants about her fathers, it is possible to notice a movement of inertia, weakness and lack of action towards saving the daughter from the maternal abandonment. Thereby, what can be observed with this paternal posture is a permissive role and an attitude that does not counteract the mother's abandonment actions, bringing about, as a consequence, a deadly silence. In this direction, the father, according to Zalcberg (2003), when solidary towards the mother, ends up not being of any help to limit the mother's power, thus being a father who, just as the child, is subjected to the mother, therefore, weak and powerless. Ferenczi (1933/2011) states that the trauma will install only after the second moment, that is, when a third party denies the situation occurred, not being witness of a shock that happened in a previous moment, which ended up crushing the feelings of the one who has suffered the violence. In this sense, Osmo and Kupermann (2012) affirm that the help that is not provided to the child by a third party can happen in different manners, whether with proofs of incomprehension, punishment, demand for heroism or even reaction through a deadly silence. According to the authors,

“that which is denied is what will make the trauma pathogenic” (p. 332), because when there is receptiveness and understanding, trauma does not take place.

Futher Considerations:

Is Denial of Pregnancy a Situation of Uterine Abandonment?

Based on the interviews that explored the life story of Nádia, Natália and Paola, it is possible to comprehend that in their primordial experiences there has been a traumatic experience of abandonment. That trauma was understood through Ferenczi's contributions on the traumatic, situation that occurs in two moments. In the case of the participants of this research, the first moment occurred when they could not count on the maternal assistance they needed in their first years of life, thus suffering maternal abandonment; the second moment occurred when their fathers denied and did not oppose the situation of abandonment experienced with the maternal figure. It seems that a double abandonment has been installed via “orphanhood before a living mother” and a “paternal abandoning silence”.

This study did not aim to exhaust a so complex phenomenon as the situation of denial of pregnancy; however, this double abandonment present in the lives of the interviewees who denied their gestation until the labor moment, allows proposing some hypotheses on the reason why a gestation develops unnoticed. In this direction, the hypothesis is that the denial of pregnancy phenomenon is a situation of uterine abandonment, that is, the woman who has experienced a double abandonment passively, ends up abandoning her baby in her uterus in an active manner. In this way, to these women, the gestational process seems not to be ruled by a principle of pleasure but it rather operates in service of a death drive and repetition compulsion. In this sense, Freud (1920/1974), when addressing repetition compulsion, states:

This 'eternal return of the same' does not surprise us when it is an active behavior of the person involved, and when we can discover in his being an unchanging character trait that must express itself in the repetition of the same experiences. We are much more strongly affected by those cases in which a person seems to experience passively something over which he has no influence, while constantly experiencing repetition of the same fate... (p.182).

In conclusion, the abandonment mark is imperious, and the denial of pregnancy situation in the life story of Nádia, Natália and Paola seems to make explicit this movement from being abandoned (passive before the double abandonment) to becoming abandoners (agents of an abandonment action). Thus, the uterine abandonment denounces the parental abandonment suffered by these women who go through this experience of unawareness of their own gestation. In order to embrace, one needs to have been embraced, the inability of embracing another being inside oneself turns into uterine abandonment, repeating the abandonment and unwelcomeness suffered in life. They are women who, at an early age, were fed only to be kept alive, but who did not receive the food that love is; on the other hand, they have carried a baby protected only physiologically by the umbilical cord, with no affective bonds though.

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Thomás Gomes Gonçalves: psychologist, member of the Psychoanalyst Studies Center of Porto Alegre (CEPdePA), psychoanalyst in training; master in Clinical Psychology from the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul; doctoral student of the Graduate Program at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul.