

Volume 8, n 1, 2020

Commentary

Commentary: A Contagious Other? Exploring the Public's Appraisals of Contact with "Mental Illness"

*Salvatore Settineri*¹, *Emanuele Maria Merlo*^{2,3*}

¹ Department of Biomedical and Dental sciences and Morphofunctional Imaging, University of Messina, Italy

² Department of Cognitive Sciences, Psychology, Educational and Cultural Studies (COSPECS), University of Messina, Italy

³ CRISCAT (International Research Center for Theoretical and Applied Cognitive Sciences) University of Messina and University Consortium of Eastern Mediterranean, Noto (CUMO), Italy

E-mail corresponding author: emerlo@unime.it



Keywords:

Clinical Psychology; Contagion; Disgust; Mental illness; Pandemic.

Received: 17 February 2020

Accepted: 11 April 2020

Published: 20 April 2020

Citation: Settineri, S., Merlo, E. M. (2020). Commentary: A Contagious Other? Exploring the Public's Appraisals of Contact with "Mental Illness". *Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 8(1).

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.6092/2282-1619/mjcp-2412>

A commentary on

A Contagious Other? Exploring the Public's Appraisals of Contact with "Mental Illness"

by Daniel Walsh and Juliet Foster. (2020). *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(6), 2005.

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17062005>

First of all, we would like to thank Walsh & Foster (2020) for their intent to consider the prejudice (stigma) towards psychopathologies, which remain meritorious on the plane of social and human commitment.

The introduction underlined how at the basis of the stigma there are figures such as contamination, fear and disgust understood as the removal of an object that is considered dangerous.

The historical perspective, bringing British tradition to the wider Western European history, falls within the current style, even if the monumental work of Foucault (1961) was not mentioned. The reference is to the habit of considering only the most recent literal contributions, always overlooking classical fundamental papers, which were viewed as obsolete.

After all, through two valuable quotations (Rozin, Markwith, & Nemeroff, 1992; Stavrova, Newman, Kulemann, & Fetchenhauer, 2016) the authors approached the theme of the *magic law of contact*, which may be understood by considering gestures and expressions, overcoming words and actions.

So, the symbolic aspect that is an existing set of phenomena based on laws and processes different from consciousness (Settineri, Frisone, & Merlo, 2019), could be considered. The same quotation about disgust, as the *guardian of the mouth*, should be read inversely as an emotional phenomenon. In the field of emotions, reductions and related deductions are always dangerous for the understanding of those phenomena strongly linked to the culture and evolution of mankind.

Nonetheless, the rigorously determined statistical sample left us perplexed, just as the ethical rigor evoked, appeared to be formally necessary in relation to the methods explained. The perplexity is also extended by some themes expressed within the discussions. The symbolic approach makes us reflect: the use of vignettes based on the conviction of water magically contaminated by depression, schizophrenia, the common cold and other general medical conditions through a "credibly disgusting" story.

An experience was then elicited to participants and due to its particular order, it should be defined as a ritual proposed through very modern methods. However, in a classical sense it is well known that a ritual is part of mythological perspectives aimed at creating connections among all involved figures, often boundless in a religious or moral sphere. Their connotations are always embodied with personality structures.

In the author's perspective, personality was considered in its hologrammatic form. The observation group consisted of subjects with a slight prevalence of female individuals. An interesting reflection could arise from the symbolic maturation process, different from general developmental phases with particular reference to emotion, imagery, narrations, identity and representations (Bourlot, 2015, 2020; Manfredi & Massardi, 2019; Merlo, 2019a; Ricœur, 1988; Settineri & Stein, 2019). Phenomena as anxiety, anguish and the search of meaning are crucial points of object relations.

It would be useful to underline how the central focus of this age is underlined by the experience of intimacy that the Spanish call *las entrañas*, a word that is not perfectly translatable both in Italian and English, indicating what is most intimate to each person.

There's a risk of generalizing the emotional experience, especially when different ages are not considered with reference to the maturation process, even if correctly managed in a statistical sense. *Las entrañas*, in other words, could interfere with the conception of the stigma, pointing out an absolute projective effect about the possibility of contamination from schizophrenic and depressed subjects, so far from objective psychometry.

It could also be interesting to consider the implications from the biological lack of knowledge of those students closer to the *logos* studies, considering the new deal of Clinical Psychology about medical conditions (Behel & Rybarczyk, 2019; Belar, & Deardorff, 1995; Caputo, 2013, 2019; Conversano, 2019; Manfredi, 2017; Merlo, 2019b; Rozensky, 2006).

Another aspect that could be considered is the possibility of developing a counter-transferential tendency in a psycho-analytic sense by the psychology students, especially if they are aware of the genesis of emotions and representations.

On the other hand, a detailed and meticulous description of both the experiments linked to the use of electromyography and psychometric tools, lead us to consider the authors' ability to respect the principle of repeatability of the experimental processes. The rigorous, sophisticated and extremely complex method remains as the abode of readers accustomed to refined experimental situations.

In other words, the vulnus of the article is based on the relationship among emotions and their directions (Bourlot, 2019) and in our perspective future implementations about evolutionary and projective possibilities (Gross & Muñoz, 1995) could improve the value of the work.

Some previous reflections on disgust also take into consideration different aspects such as historical and humanistic traits, as Zambrano expressed in her work (1989).

This sentiment of piety is particularly significant in some developmental stages, strongly supported by what was defined as the *entrañas*. The heroic constitutive feeling of identity foreshadows the phase of intimacy which is the adolescent's relationship with objects.

The feeling takes shape from experience and human contacts, so that there's a risk related to the necessity to quantify data. Reductive tendencies are always a risk and in our particular perspective and are linked to the possibility to overlook the symbolic figures present in the processes.

It results as necessary to consider the interactions among words and other symbolic aspects, such as images and emotional expressions.

Finally, there are undeniable merits of the observation by the authors, as the exposure to mental disorders. Other relevant phenomena were the internal world's figures, the subjects' greater affinity with depression and the differences between the "perceived" and the real-life experience. The experiment could probably be transformed into a training proposal aimed at reducing the stigma on a large scale.

This represents the exploratory value of the study. The study allows the readers to start a vast association process, for which the deepening of the stigma could take into account the risks of reduction.

References

1. Behel, J. M., & Rybarczyk, B. (2019). Interviewing in health psychology and medical settings. In *Diagnostic interviewing* (pp. 481-503). Springer, New York, NY.
2. Belar, C. D., & Deardorff, W. W. (1995). *Clinical health psychology in medical settings: A practitioner's guidebook*, Rev. American Psychological Association.
3. Bourlot, G. (2015). Métapsychologie et fictions. *L'Évolution Psychiatrique*, 80(3), 544-553. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evopsy.2014.02.007>
4. Bourlot, G. (2018). Qu'est-ce qu'une narration? Les fonctions psychiques de la narration. *L'Évolution Psychiatrique*, 83(4), 627-645. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evopsy.2018.04.009>
5. Bourlot, G. (2019). The Scopic drive and its destinies. The psychic functions of mask. *Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 7(1). Doi: <https://doi.org/10.6092/2282-1619/2019.7.2233>
6. Bourlot, G. (2020). Fonctions psychiques et potentiels thérapeutiques de la narration chez l'enfant et l'adolescent. *Journal de la psychanalyse de l'enfant*, 10(1), 141-176. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.3917/jpe.019.0141>
7. Caputo, A. (2013). Health demand in primary care context: What do people think about physicians?. *Psychology, health & medicine*, 18(2), 145-154.
Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13548506.2012.687828>
8. Caputo, A. (2019). Psychodynamic insights from narratives of people with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis: A qualitative phenomenological study. *Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 7(2).
Doi: <https://doi.org/10.6092/2282-1619/2019.7.2009>
9. Conversano, C. (2019). Psychological common factors in chronic diseases. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 2727.
Doi: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02727>
10. Foucault, M. (1961). *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique: folie et déraison*. Gallimard Paris.1972.
11. Gross, J. J., & Muñoz, R. F. (1995). Emotion regulation and mental health. *Clinical psychology: Science and practice*, 2(2), 151-164. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2850.1995.tb00036.x>
12. Manfredi, P. (2017). Can you live happily with a chronic illness?. *GAZZETTA MEDICA ITALIANA ARCHIVIO PER LE SCIENZE MEDICHE*, 176(1-2), 57-66. Doi: 10.23736/S0393-3660.16.03182-X
13. Manfredi, P., & Massardi, E. (2019). From the Greek theater to the mind: the opportunities of the mask. *Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 7(1). Doi: <https://doi.org/10.6092/2282-1619/2019.7.2236>
14. Merlo, E. M. (2019a). Adolescent phobia as a “mask object”. *Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 7(1).
Doi: <https://doi.org/10.6092/2282-1619/2019.7.2241>
15. Merlo, E. M. (2019b). Opinion Article: The role of psychological features in chronic diseases, advancements and perspectives. *Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 7(3). Doi: <https://doi.org/10.6092/2282-1619/2019.7.2341>

16. Ricœur, P. (1988). L'identité narrative. *Esprit* (1940-), 295-304.
17. Rozensky, R. H. (2006). Clinical psychology in medical settings: Celebrating our past, enjoying the present, building our future. *Journal of Clinical Psychology in Medical Settings*, 13(4), 343-352. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10880-006-9045-4>
18. Rozin, P., Markwith, M., & Nemeroff, C. (1992). Magical Contagion Beliefs and Fear of AIDS 1. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 22(14), 1081-1092. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.1992.tb00943.x>
19. Settineri, S., Frisone, F., & Merlo, E. M. (2019). The Mask object in psychotherapy: Presentation and Representation. *Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 7(1). Doi: <https://doi.org/10.6092/2282-1619/2019.7.2232>
20. Settineri, S., & Stein, M. (2019). Psychology and psychopathology of the mask. *Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 7(1). Doi: <https://doi.org/10.6092/2282-1619/2019.7.2240>
21. Stavrova, O., Newman, G. E., Kulemann, A., & Fetchenhauer, D. (2016). Contamination without contact: An examination of intention-based contagion. *Judgment and Decision making*, 11(6), 554.
22. Walsh, D., & Foster, J. (2020). A Contagious Other? Exploring the Public's Appraisals of Contact with 'Mental Illness'. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(6), 2005. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17062005>
23. Zambrano, M. Para una historia de la piedad. *Torre de las Palomas, Málaga, 1989.*



©2020 by the Author(s); licensee Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology, Messina, Italy. This article is an open access article, licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Unported License. Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology, Vol. 8, No. 1 (2020).

International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

DOI: 10.6092/2282-1619/mjcp-2412