

# The talk of the soul in sexual dysfunctions

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## Abstract

This work represents a proposal to search an interaction between symptom and psyche, an attempt to go beyond the body – seat of the physical difficulty – toward an encounter with the soul. What does the soul want from me? What does the deepest part in me demand with this symptom? If neglected, the soul not only goes away: symptoms arise, neurosis is its speech. Wanting to ward off conflicts only makes them to come closer, because it is part of their nature to express themselves in us and in our symptoms. Seeking for the meaning of nobilities like psyche and sex is the same of intending to explain love, beauty, life, death and God. To get closer to it, we turn to mythic patterns that enhance a look at a locked sexuality that needs integration, linking concepts of analytical psychology in an archetypal perspective. The goal is to restore a sense of soul through the sexual encounter.

## Descriptors

sex, sexuality, sexual function disturbances, individuation.

## Conflicts of interest:

The authors state no professional or personal interest that may create a conflict of interests regarding this manuscript.



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## O falar da alma nas disfunções sexuais

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### Resumo

Este trabalho representa uma proposta na busca por uma interação entre sintoma e psique, uma tentativa de ir para além do corpo – sede da dificuldade física – na direção do encontro com a alma. O que a alma quer de mim? O que aquilo que é mais profundo em mim deseja com esse sintoma? Se negligenciada, a alma não apenas vai embora: os sintomas surgem, a neurose é a sua fala. Querer afastar os conflitos só faz com que eles se aproximem mais, pois é de sua natureza se expressarem em nós e em nossos sintomas. Buscar o significado de grandezas como a psique e o sexo ocupa o mesmo lugar de querer explicar o amor, a beleza, a vida, a morte ou Deus. Para nos aproximarmos disso, recorreremos a padrões míticos que ampliem o olhar sobre uma sexualidade que se encontra bloqueada e necessitada de integração, entrelaçando conceitos da psicologia analítica sob uma vertente arquetípica. O objetivo é restabelecer um sentido de alma por meio do encontro sexual.

### Descritores

sexo, sexualidade, distúrbios da função sexual, individuação.

## El hablar del alma en las disfunciones sexuales

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### Resumen

Este trabajo representa una propuesta en la búsqueda de una interacción entre el síntoma y la psique, un intento por ir más allá del cuerpo – sede de la dificultad física – hacia el encuentro con el alma. ¿Qué quiere el alma de mí? ¿Qué desea con este síntoma aquello que es lo más profundo en mí? Si se descuida, el alma no simplemente desaparece: surgen síntomas, la neurosis es su discurso. Querer evitar los conflictos solo hace que ellos se acerquen más, porque es su naturaleza expresarse en nosotros y en nuestros síntomas. Buscar el significado de grandezas como la psique y el sexo está en el mismo lugar de querer explicar el amor, la belleza, la vida, la muerte o Dios. Para aproximarnos a esto, recurrimos a patrones míticos que mejoren la mirada de una sexualidad que se encuentra bloqueada y necesitada de integración, entrelazando conceptos de la psicología analítica bajo una vertiente arquetípica. El objetivo es restablecer un sentido de alma a través del encuentro sexual.

### Descriptores

sexo, sexualidad, trastornos de la función sexual, individuación.

## Introduction

I, your soul, I am your mother, enfolding you with affection and fear. Your nurturer and destroyer, preparing for you good things and poison. I am your intercessor [...] I teach you the devices that protect you ... I am your body, your representative in the world of the gods, your brilliance, your breath, your scent, your magical force. (Jung, 2013, pp. 515-516)

Where do sex, dysfunction and soul unite? Perhaps this union is found in the search for meaning of the sacred that involves the fundamental dimensions of human existence, a sentiment that today is so little considered. This search is not just any search, but the individual quest of a certain person to whom, within the soul, something is revealed: a better understanding of himself. Seeking the sacred aspect of sex deepens the value it can add to human life. Here, it is not only necessary to understand the problem, but to feel its integrative dimension in the deepest strata of the soul.

We seek here to address sex through the psychic, especially in terms of its dysfunctional aspect, shifting it from the physical side - where it is only a medical diagnosis - to the whole human being, through his soul. To do so is to go beyond the commonplace, such as: "premature ejaculation presents in this manner...", "erectile dysfunction occurs in this or that way", "vaginismus displays these or those symptoms", and follow on the path of integrating universality of dream, myth and archetype.

As we delve into the inner life of patients, we see these dysfunctions in a kaleidoscope of forms, contexts, emotions, and sensations, which ultimately are always symbolic of what is contained in the soul of the person. Thomas Moore (2009) states: "The soul has something cold and liquid, hot and igneous." (p. 44) Sex is a system of symbols in human life unlike any other. It is through it that the human race is perpetuated.

### Structural basis of our identity

Sex as a part of human life – and certainly a good part of it - has piqued our attention since the very beginning of our existence. It is an event that makes possible the intercommunication of the person with himself and with the other. Sex is one of the structural bases of our identity and involves the encounter with the other. Through it, there results the interaction of our life story and that of our partner(s). It is in this encounter that our insecurities are naturally present, making the connection not only a physical act, but an act of intimacy where we reveal who we are. As Moore (1996) explains: "Sex is the clear mirror of the soul, revealing itself in its gestures." (p.224) Sex is also an art and therefore requires some skill. But sex goes far beyond the physical encounter. It has a greater complexity. It embraces the biological, the psychic and the religious. So, when interacting sexually, an individual confronts his physical potential, his socialization and moreover must engage with his or her cultural values and religious beliefs. We can say that this person, without

realizing it, is in a boiling cauldron when it comes to sex. Some individuals can interact without any major problems, others, when experiencing conflict, manifest symptoms.

Issues that involve sexuality have only recently undergone serious study. It is only from the beginning of the 20th century that sexual behavior was more widely researched, and a great deal is owed to Sigmund Freud, Alfred Kinsey, William Masters, Virginia Johnson and Helen Kaplan, among others.

In today's world, sex is no longer taboo. It is talked about everywhere. What happens in bed is openly discussed, and attempts are made to solve its mysteries by placing it in the public sphere, demystifying its power by unraveling it. By removing the soul from it, what is left is only the body as matter and in this there is inevitably a price to pay. No matter how freely one speaks about sex and calls for more sex education, girls and boys continue to accidentally impregnate themselves, and adult men and women continue to present problems in this sphere of existence. How can this body that expresses a symptom and this dormant and unexamined soul find an area of conciliation? As Thomas Moore (2009) advises: "We must return to the mythological body, subtle, full of fantasies, of the imagination. Body and spirit marrying in the chapel of the soul." (p. 41)

Sex is a fundamental part of human life, in which deep mysteries are lodged; as the psyche reveals itself through symbolic images charged with emotion, sexual dysfunctions can be understood as images that the soul chooses to awaken people to cultivate themselves. Looking closely at the soul at times arouses feelings of shame, apprehension, fear, perplexity and even hopelessness. Jung (2002) states that soul is like the prima material of alchemy:

The prima materia is [...] of little value and is found everywhere, but nobody knows it. It is also elusive and vague, just like the pencil produced from it; it has a thousand names. The worst is that without it the work cannot even begin. (p. 171; OC XIII, 209)

### **Sexual dysfunction, diseases of the soul**

We will not discuss here detailed technical or clinical explanations regarding sexual dysfunctions. For those who wish to delve deeper, the book "Heterosexuality" by William Masters, Virginia Johnson and Robert Kolodny (1997) is recommended. A couple may go through delicate moments, in which the lack of desire may arise, but such a situation is only considered as dysfunction when it becomes constant: what characterizes a sexual dysfunction, whether in man or in woman, is remaining removed from the sexual initiation phase for consecutive months, provided that the person is not experiencing a crisis in the relationship. Almost invariably, when the dysfunction occurs in one partner, the other also demonstrates difficulty. It is worth noting that sexual difficulties do not only appear in heterosexual relations: the psyche is not tied to gender or sexual orientation.

However, due to the organic complexity related to the genders, there exist differences between male and female sexual difficulties. In a man, we can find ejaculatory problems, such as premature ejaculation and delayed ejaculation. Regarding the issue of erection, it is seen as dysfunctional when there is a constant appearance or maintenance of erection. The female sexual difficulties, in turn, are observed as related to orgasm: dyspareunia and vaginismus. Dyspareunia is persistent or constant discomfort or pain at the beginning, during and/or soon after the end of the sexual act, with vaginismus - involuntary contraction of the vagina muscles – as both cause and consequence. In severe cases, it can completely prevent penetration of the penis.

Sex is derived from the word *secare*, which in Latin means to separate, or cut. Soul and sex have something in common in these words: separate and cut. Sex separates us into men and women, cuts us or divides us, and leaves us incomplete, creating the search for the other. The soul appears separated from us, but contained in us, and can be cut off from its instinctive base.

In our era, Eros, son of Aphrodite and lover of Psyche, god who symbolizes sex and sexuality, is only remembered by the word “erotic”: of what may remain of this divinity, the carnal aspect endures. As Jung recalls, an excluded god becomes a disease. This god is the link between us and the soul: the one who makes the connection between the physical and the emotional. Eros wants to permeate the soul and leaves in the legacy of this union voluptuousness, sexual pleasure, pleasure of the senses, pleasure in general.

Aphrodite, mother of Eros, is an ancient goddess of the Great Mother lineage, the only daughter born of the immortal essence of Uranus, the sperm that fell to the sea after he was quartered by Cronos: the sea that is an incarnation of emotion, of the unconscious. It is place that rejects being chained and shackled: no matter what we say about it, there will always be something in it that we cannot describe. According to Plotinus, the Neoplatonic philosopher, Aphrodite yearns for union with us and, despite demanding enormous tasks, leads us to Eros, who serves the soul who longs to be worked on and seeks in sexual relations a reason for this. It is in the encounter with the other - in the friction of relationships – where we find the possibility of meeting the soul. In Aphrodite, we find the sexuality that stimulates us to look at beauty, the beauty of a sunset, a flower or a beautiful body, the aphrodisiac which, if it is not present, takes from life pleasure and beauty, sex remaining hollow.

The fear we have of the feelings and emotions that sex provokes in us is very closely related to our fear of those things that lie within the psyche in general. Both take us away from the safe and stable life we crave and throw us into a whirlwind of experiences. To live life with sexuality is to live it erotically. The soul, we may say, is erotic, for it constantly desires something.

Here we report here a survey carried out in Brazil in 2000, which surveyed a vast geography of the country, from Oiapoque to Chuí, sponsored by the Pfizer Laboratory, when the impotence drug for men, Viagra, was released,

and leading to the book "Sexual Discovery in Brazil". In the study, it was found that:

The Brazilians have a number of fears about sex, but male sexual fears register at higher rates than female fears. [...] The greatest fear of man and woman is not satisfying his or her partner. The fear is even greater than infection by (Sexually Transmitted Diseases) STDs. [...] Women and men with sexual difficulties have impairment (repercussions) in other areas of life: self-love, self-esteem, relationships in general with partner(s) work, travel, relationship with children, social relationships. (pp. 51-52)

According to Abdo (2004), "Just think! According to this research, the importance of sex in the lives of our people is equivalent 'to having a safe source of income', to being able 'to breathe' or to 'take a vacation every year'." (p. 56)

The inner life has its way and its time: the search for immediate solutions to problems and the use of medicines, for example, does not guarantee that there will be satisfaction or even a positive physical result; the soul seems to cease being restless.

Our body is the concrete, the visible, the place where everything can literally reveal itself. A sexual attraction is felt in the body, but it is not simply a physical event. It also involves the psyche, especially the unconscious, which has its desires and intentions. What we imagine to be our intention or agency is, ultimately, the intention of our ego. But behind this recognized intention, there is something very powerful, the unconscious, especially the contents of the collective unconscious, and the ego has great difficulty in accepting this, which generates a separation of body, psyche and spirit: each being observed separately, creating a psychic division in which the body becomes the bearer and expression of the neurosis that is generated by the conflict. The body separated from the psyche becomes a stranger to us. And based on this strangeness, how do we relate to the other and the body of the other? This division makes the delivery impossible. How can I give myself if I cannot recognize myself in my own division?

We are today governed by efficiency and, in search of such efficiency, we sometimes blind ourselves to the sensitivity of our body and what it communicates to us. Our era is marked by productivity: our life and our body must be productive and, as machines, we cannot fail, which would generate an anxiety that is rooted in life in general and in sexual life, in particular. Pleasure must happen in a balanced way, because in excess or scarcity it opens up a pathway to darkness, which will reveal itself in the dysfunction, creating in a person a sense of failure. According to Moore (1994): "Without understanding the alchemy of failure, there is a good chance we will never be successful." (p. 177) If, in any way, there is a loss or rupture between life and psychic profundity, then symptom and failure are the only paths that the individual may take.

Sex is food for the soul. Each orgasm is a *petit morte*, as the French say. We must accept its power to attract us and to disturb us. In it are embedded the experiences of both pleasure and failure, which can lead us to destructive ways of living, since they have a very thin line between the healthy and the obsessive.

We all have the capacity to bond with our dark side: and sex can open doors in order to do so. The psyche, in its nature, does not care where we walk when its goal is the realization of sexuality. To do so, unconscious forces may include the deepest underworld in our lives in pursuit of its fulfillment. Religious repression, for example, by giving a disapproving perspective of the body and eventually seeing sex as demonic, stimulates what it wants to repress: sexual symptoms and perversions. Moore (1999) recounts a fact expressing this repression: "In monasteries, scribes used to fill the empty margins of books with strong language and sexual imagery. These margins were known as gutters." (p.443) Sexuality is literally placed in the gutter. Still, sexual dysfunctions and symptoms represent an attempt by the psyche to force us to perceive ourselves and to be open to the possibility of new sources of creativity. As Heinrich Zimmer (1999) puts it: "The function of malignity is to keep the dynamics of transformation functioning. Evil must be accepted and assimilated, not avoided." (p. 39) A cure, whether of a sexual dysfunction or any other problem, is acting creatively in the face of these problems or dysfunctions, assuming the responsibility for what is occurring at the moment and entering into life by accepting the challenges it imposes.

To do so, we have to give up a static life, accept what frightens us, the movement of the soul, the imaginary, and to abandon security and, above all, the fantastical attempt to have exclusively rational control. We are controlled by a culture that believes a problem must be solved only by the rational mind. We forget that there that there are other elements contained in this problem. Left aside are emotions, values, thoughts, vision, influences, and passions that often interfere and are often responsible for the problem that presents itself. Letting go of our unconsciousness, which gives us some comfort, is, after all, something that requires a great deal of work. In sexual dysfunction something was left aside and turned the individual against himself. When the internal dialogue is resumed, the problem can be seen in a creative and constructive way. The symptom is asking for is a life adjustment. Our lives are separate from our instincts and nature. The intense life directs us away from the contact with our physical side. Sex in the instinctual side also has an aggressive nature, Mars and Aphrodite: on the one hand, virility and masculine force of penetration, on the other, soft feminine harmony of receiving. When these two forces are separated, difficulty, be it feminine or masculine, then appears. Sex needs the primitive, the instinctual, and the spontaneous. As we move away from the instinctual side of sex, we trivialize it and lose its mysterious side in the process. We try to study it in minutiae and the more it becomes hidden. In fact, we are not aware of the depth of its roots in the soul or what its definitive place in life is.

## Final considerations

All dysfunction is nothing more than a reminder; it is an attempt to make us look at our lives. It is a call to reassess what we are doing, or not doing, and thereby making possible the death and rebirth of things inside of us, with another story and other meanings

Attention and focus are also qualities that we need, as they are fundamental tools for transformation. There is nothing like physical pain to understand what is wrong with the body, and nothing like emotional pain to enable us to focus on where transformation is needed. The individual who has a symptom wants to get rid of the discomfort and very quickly realizes that it is all tightly tied together. Mere understanding or willpower is not enough. The dysfunction has deep roots: as long as transformation does not occur, the symptom will persist. As long as the person remains blind to what the soul wants, it will have to deal with this discomfort.

If a problem arises, sharing the issue with the partner makes it possible to find a way to manage it. Intimacy facilitates relational adjustment. Such solidarity may not bring about healing, but it tightens the bonds. Staying closer at this point helps to work out the fantasy about dysfunction and thereby opens a door for realization of what each has brought to the relationship. What was lifeless and soulless can awaken and Eros can return. The anxiety that took hold of the relationship can be alleviated, as meaning is created for the moment. It is necessary to respect the difficulties that a relationship brings with it. We are different from each other. Therefore, truly gratifying intimacy must admit that sex can suffer multiple injuries from these differences. Discovering the interiority of the relationship and being enchanted with it is the way to healing. When a person becomes genuinely interested in himself and the other, there is an opportunity to understand what the soul speaks through all imperfections, misconceptions, mistakes and errors - the person as he is, naked before life, passing through a strainer of received values and retaining only what it concerns itself: what Jung calls **individuation**.

Working with the psyche is time-consuming; it is a process in which the history of dysfunction has to be unveiled in the patient's story-the story being played out, the familiar, social, and religious patterns that are part of the staging, the myth to which this individual surrenders. The less one is aware of this, the more one interprets a play for which we do not have a script. The sex inside this piece does not find the tranquility and the creativity that would permit a more satisfactory result.

Sex contains in itself the mutual attraction and pleasure that places us in contact with each other. We must face a sexual dysfunction as a mystery that appears so we continue asking questions, pointing out directions, confusing us and testing our intelligence, and, in the end, always surprising us. We are most often so interested in explanations that we fail to realize how immune we are to the transformative power that dysfunction requires. Dysfunction is an imprisonment, an anger that turns the individual against himself. We treat the



person and their dysfunction with actions that address the symptoms of stiffness and dryness. Our efforts to help are such that the problem is not faced in its concreteness, but in its symbolic aspect. If restored as a mature principle of life, sexuality acquires new meaning. It is necessary for Eros to arise, for he is the interlocutor between soul and sexuality, wrapped in pleasure and enchantment. If the soul remains asleep, our life will also remain paralyzed. "Being in the soul" can be a painful process, full of dismemberments and deaths, but therein exists the possibility of transforming our lives.

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