

THE HERO/HEROINE WE NEED TO BE TO FACE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: COVID-19, a disease that can lead to death quickly, has caused health professionals, particularly nurses, a great moral and psychological impact. Within this context, nursing presents itself, more than ever, as the front line of care, because nursing deals with patients 24 hours uninterruptedly, in addition to the lack of Personal Protective Equipment in several places. **Development:** Given this reality, this theoretical reflection aims to reflect on the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications for the nursing work process, under the focus of analytical psychology from the theoretical framework proposed by Carl Gustav Jung. **Final Considerations:** This reflection contributed so that nursing heroes, often unknown and little valued, can reflect, based on the theoretical framework presented, about their professional role. They must seek their rise and recognition before society, in the face of the current world catastrophe, coincidentally in the year in which the profession seeks, worldwide, empowerment through the worldwide campaign called Nursing Now.

Descriptors: Occupational Health; Coronavirus Infections; Pandemics; Mental Health.

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INTRODUCTION

Instead of high expectations and dreams, the progress of contemporary society has revealed how fatal our lives are. It has become a threat of inevitable change that guides us to continuous crisis and tension, rather than peace and rest. Being unable to slow the amazing pace of such a change, let alone predict and control its direction, we focus on what we can do or influence. We try to minimize the risk that we, personally, or those close and dear to us, are affected by the uncontrollable and innumerable dangers that the pandemic world and the globalized economy have in store for us⁽¹⁾.

It is quite true that our insecurity today has never been so immense and fraught with many fears: the fear of not being able to keep our jobs; the fear of falling ill; the fear of contaminating family members or even worse, of seeing the loved ones die, without being able to do anything. However, when insecurity is gone, spontaneity, flexibility, good interpersonal relationships, ability to resolve conflicts, resilience, etc. tend to disappear as well. It is in times of crisis that such attributes, considered as indicators of positive mental

health at work⁽²⁾, appear even more strengthened. The alternative to insecurity is not total tranquility but the boredom of the lack of challenges and the lack of creativity for all of us. How much has each of us been stuck in our routines, losing the essence of what really matters? How fragile and helpless have we felt these days? However, it is also in the worst moments of crisis that human beings are able to demonstrate their greatest potential.

It is possible to understand the current situation from different philosophical and theoretical perspectives. Various statistical models can explain and even predict the likely future scenarios for our actions. But which of the various theoretical models makes us capable of overcoming our fear, even when it seems so real and certain, and which impels us to have creative attitudes and to respond to the current problem?

To answer this question, the objective was to reflect on the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications for the nursing work process. This is a theoretical reflection, exploratory and descriptive study, under the focus of analytical psychology,

from the theoretical framework proposed by Carl Gustav Jung⁽³⁻⁵⁾.

It is noted that the analytical psychology's theory is complex. So, in an extremely synthetic way, concepts exposed here are called myth, archetype, and symbol. In other words, a theoretical approach and a reflection on the current situation in Brazil and worldwide is being proposed particularly by nursing.

DEVELOPMENT

Myth, archetype, and symbol in human societies

In all cultures around the world, human myths have inspired people, causing them to create and innovate in the most diverse areas of science, philosophy and arts. Myths, narrated to children, mainly in the form of stories and fairy tales, contain elements called symbols - spontaneous productions of the human psyche loaded with subjective meanings, transmitting messages from the unconscious to consciousness. According to Jung, the unconscious is the source of human creativity. Thus, accessing the unconscious favors human development, in addition to promoting evolution⁽³⁻⁵⁾.

Jung, then, in his works, exposes that any human mythology is the result of the projection of unconscious aspects. In other words, mythical narratives both fascinate and frighten us, precisely because aspects of our psyche are imprinted there. For instance, Greek/Roman mythology, in which the various gods and goddesses are described as people with human behavioral and sentimental attributes⁽⁴⁾.

Influenced by Greek/Roman culture, Jung incorporated the term "archetype" to explain the psychological tendencies of human beings, since, according to him, these are repeated in a standardized way, outlining the personality of each subject. In other words, each one of us has our personality shaped by certain ways of feeling, acting, thinking, being, and existing. Therefore, there are infinite archetypes for practically all situations experienced by humanity, serving, as learning or lessons from past generations for present and future generations⁽⁴⁾.

In the current context, an archetype that constitutes our psyche is called the hero archetype, described as the Hero's Journey, which can be identified in the vast majority of hero sagas in legends, myths, fairy tales, and movies. There are 12 sequential stages, i.e.,

heroes can only continue on their journey after overcoming the previous ones. The word "hero" comes from the Greek, which means "to protect and serve". A hero is someone who is willing to sacrifice his or her own needs for the benefit of others⁽⁶⁻⁷⁾.

In psychological terms, the hero archetype represents the ability to transcend himself, seeking his identity and wholeness. Heroes are not perfect beings, and like everyone else, they match any of us. We are all heroes, facing guardians and internal monsters, with the support of allies. When we explore our own psyche, we encounter teachers, guides, demons, gods, companions, servants, scapegoats, masters, seducers, traitors, and helpers as aspects of our personalities or as characters in our dreams. All the villains, friends and enemies of heroes can be found within ourselves. The psychological task we all face is to integrate these separate parts into a complete and balanced entity. The hero who is separated from all these parts of himself must incorporate them to become an integral being⁽⁷⁾.

True heroism appears in stories in which the hero is willing to take the risk that

his journey may lead to loss or death. Like a soldier who knows that, by enlisting, he accepts to give his life for his country, if necessary, the hero accepts the possibility of sacrifice. The hero who works best is the one who sacrifice himself. Along the way, the hero may have to hand over his loved one, children or a friend; or he may have to give up an addiction, a luxury or a custom, as a price to enter a new life. He may have to return part of what he won in the Special World. He can return to the starting point, bringing treasures, elixirs, food or knowledge, which he shares with the rest of the group⁽⁶⁾.

The archetype model

We will present the description of the archetypal model function, framing it, with some limitations, within the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic and nursing workers/health professionals who are dealing with this disease.

The call of adventure

This is where the challenge begins. The hero happens to come into contact with forces beyond his comprehension. Someone wiser and more experienced explains the fact and invites him to face the proposed

challenge. In this case, we can make a parallel with a hospital that opened a unit to admit COVID-19 victims and seeks professionals who wish to work at the institution.

In this search, nursing team professionals are essential, under the coordination and leadership that must be performed by nurses. After recruitment, professional work begins, which, at this moment, is configured to carry out training on how to provide care to patients with COVID-19 as well as care to avoid their own contamination. It is a challenge, it is unprecedented and there is a fear in the face of the unknown and the invisible enemy. However, fear is faced beyond what our simple understanding can capture. In this phase, it is necessary that managers already seek interventions through psychological counseling, which can be performed remotely and offer electronic devices and applications to the nursing team about COVID 19⁽⁸⁾.

Refusal of the call

At this stage, the hero, when invited to the challenge, resists due to the magnitude, doubts himself, feels fear and

does not accept what is proposed to him, retreating, presenting several reasons for not accepting it. In many situations, we are faced with the refusal of the subject to agree to work in this unit, either because he doubts himself or because he or she is afraid of contaminating his family members. He seeks other work options and often even gives up his profession, either for lack of recognition or for low pay.

Nursing professionals are faced daily, in their work process, with limited situations, where they perform their overloaded activities due to insufficient human resources, lack of insufficient material and material resources and, mainly, lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) so that they can provide quality care. Moreover, they are poorly valued and recognized, being exposed daily to physical, chemical, ergonomic, and mental risks⁽¹⁰⁾. Such situations, added to fear and insecurity, can greatly influence refusal of heroes to call.

Supernatural aid

This is configured as an aid, protection and training so that the hero, who goes back on his decision, for having lived

facts that made him change his mind, can fulfill his task. It is often important to step back if the hero does not feel ready to accept the challenge, without the superior help provided by figures called mentors. Here, we can draw a parallel with the supporting figure of more experienced people such as teachers and nurses, who commit themselves to train individuals to complete their task. Even family members, capable of encouraging and inspiring courage in the hero, are paramount. His appearance is usually brief in the hero's journey, but of crucial importance.

Professionals can only advance on this journey if they have that support. Once again, nurses emerge as leaders of the nursing team, capable of encouraging and awakening to the need for heroes to arise to face the invisible enemy, capable of killing many people. The spirit of mutual help, responsibility, of serving others and the homeland is born as well as of the oath taken when⁽¹¹⁾ was formed.

Crossing the first threshold

Limit between the safe and known world, for the challenge to be faced. He fears entering the unknown, feeling safer where he knows. Nursing professionals, despite being trained, still do not feel fully confident. They

are afraid of not returning, of not being able to return to take care of their children, or worse, of bringing the disease to their loved ones.

It is a moment that reveals a lot of ambiguity and indecision for the choice about to be made. Many have only managed to overcome this step by disconnecting from their home and family, going to live in a hotel or sleeping at work. This is the moment when the hero enters the challenge. From this moment on, the hero feels ready believing that even towards the unknown, he will find safety. Nurses at this stage are essential to strengthen their team to understand the little-known world of the virus that has affected all countries. Such heroes in their work process are seeking individual and collective strategies to confront the microscopic enemy common to them and to society. A research conducted in Wuhan, China, highlights that it is essential to develop coping strategies to promote workers' mental health⁽¹²⁾.

The Belly of the Whale (tests, allies, and enemies)

The idea that passage through the first threshold towards a type of rebirth is symbolized by the image of the womb or

belly of the whale or being swallowed by some kind of monster. It is thrown into the unknown, giving the impression that he died, when in fact he reappears later, has already evolved, having overcome challenges. Trials arise, allies and enemies are discovered. Many tests are launched, to test the hero and prepare him even more for bigger future challenges. Even the very distinction between allies and enemies is a form of testing.

Nursing professionals encounter challenges, discover collegiality and/or enmity at work and even those who harm or sabotage their actions and intentions. In the new world, they are often tested, discovering their potential, limitations identifying in colleagues and/or subordinates who are allies and who are enemies, who they can trust or not, forming cohesive teams or groups. It is at this stage that the hero unleashes enmities, which can lead to the emergence of significant uprisings and attacks on his figure and work. The figure of the rival also appears, the one who heads the opposing role, who desires the defeat of his opponent, for seeking the same goal. And, finally, the hero comes to recognize the existence of rules of the new world, hitherto

unknown to him.

They are very well-known characteristics of the work environment by the nursing team, when a member enters a new work environment experiencing conflicts, friendships, relationships of trust, rivalries and how quickly he is able to learn and adapt to the new rules of this new place. It is also worth mentioning that heroes in their work process experience conflicts of all nature, but it is worth remembering that no work is exempt from suffering, struggles, hopes and pleasure⁽¹³⁾. Thus, it is necessary that in the work process of nursing professionals there is room to listen and speak and seek a healthier work for all involved, since each team member constitutes his own journey of the hero.

Approach to the hidden cave

Stage that precedes the supreme challenge, the central challenge of his journey, idealized with the purpose of making the hero give up on his journey. At this stage, the hero's loving involvement often takes place, which provides the final encouragement to continue his or her journey. In other situations, there is a direct and bold arrival of the hero, ignoring the

various danger warnings. There are also preparations for the test, which consist of the hero checking his provisions, weapons, strategies, etc. Nursing heroes are aware that the world needs them: there is no way to give up the war imputed by COVID-19. Here the work process of involvement, empathy bonds with patients⁽¹⁴⁾ and coping with another dimension begins.

Supreme trial

This stage focuses on the hero's total change or transformation. It is the critical point where the hero doubts himself, many times, almost giving up completely, for provoking or being responsible for some event that he considers unforgivable. He faces the greatest challenge of his journey, both professional and personal, which guides him to "symbolic death", i.e., abandonment of the "me" of the past to the emergence of a new "me", integrating new attributes of his psyche to conscience.

In this reasoning, the nursing professional can simply witness a death and judge it as his failure, deciding to leave the profession or even cause contamination of a co-worker or his own family. This can be configured as the biggest challenge of his journey, being a decisive point to define

continuation or interruption. After the crisis comes the change, the acceptance of the failure, leading him to transformation in such a way that the old hero, the one who started the journey, is reborn with other fundamental attributes to be able to continue his journey. For instance, if death for a given professional is the greatest difficulty to deal with, due to events in his personal life, dealing with the death of a patient can trigger the process of symbolic "death" of that old "me" and birth of a new "me", who knows how to accept and deal with death.

Although it is a stage of great pain and questioning for nursing heroes to overcome, there is a desire to overcome and continue their work, as there are no substitutes and the sense of responsibility overcomes their fears. However, there are limits even to heroes. Thus, it is of fundamental importance that managers seek professionals with the capacity to work with these heroes in order to promote mental health and prevent health problems of any kind. A review study carried out in China showed that health professionals have depression, anxiety and insomnia, and that these symptoms can have long-lasting

effects on the well-being of these professionals⁽¹⁵⁾.

Reward

After overcoming the previous stage, the hero experiences a period of recognition and reward for having survived the supreme challenge. At that moment, there is the possession of what was sought, with the supreme ordeal: the "mighty sword", the "magic elixir", etc. As an analogy to the nursing professional, one can consider what he sought to find, be it courage, selflessness, compassion, prudence, organization, among other endless attributes that he managed to obtain after overcoming his great challenge. This does not mean that, in another moment of life, he does not start another new journey to face another challenge.

Caution is needed, as scarce resources can cause these heroes and their families to fall ill. It is noteworthy that the process of empathy has been gradually increased between nursing heroes and their patients, but at this stage, there may be a relaxation of care for oneself, but the environment is surrounded by known risks, added to the imminent risk that is microscopic virus from COVID-19. Again, it

falls to nurses, as leaders, to be aware of the situation. The alert must be at 24 hours, which can have consequences for the mental health of the nurse and also for his team. Therefore, the mental health of health professionals, i.e., the first line of defense against COVID-19, should not be overlooked⁽¹⁶⁻¹⁷⁾.

Way back

This stage deals with the choice that is made: staying in the current scenario or returning to his place of origin to share what he has achieved with his community, i.e., returning and applying what was learned, sharing the glories and riches obtained. It is not an easy task, because the community from which he left did not undergo the transformations that the hero went through, so he still has the same doubts and skepticisms that the hero had when he left.

Resurrection

Despite the transformations that the hero went through, this last and greatest challenge becomes the end, which will decide for the symbolic rebirth, where the old "me" no longer exists, and a new personality, one that integrates the old and new "me" in an integrated way. It works as a kind of examination to verify the change

obtained. The challenge has a magnitude never witnessed before, threatening not only himself, but everything that involves him in his life and even his loved ones. He will be put to the test, seeing himself obliged to make choices as a test to see if he really learned the lesson in the past steps, deciding with his new personality, instead of the old one, often making sacrifices for the common good or for others. The nursing team's work process may, in fact, never be the same after the pandemic. New knowledge was learned and incorporated into daily work, especially teamwork, to overcome obstacles⁽¹⁸⁾. Consequently, it is believed that professional and personal life will be given new meaning.

Return with the elixir

At this stage, the hero either returns or remains in the current scenario. There is also the reward for those who collaborated with the hero and the hero himself and also the punishment of the "villain" of the story. The crucial point of this stage is the elixir, what he brought with him from the journey and will share with his place of origin, proving that he was really there and became someone else, transformed.

The nursing team is no longer the

same since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and, of course, many will be heroes and superheroes, but there is no way of not re-signifying life back to what it was before. We must overcome and show society, the scientific community, colleagues, managers and politicians how essential nursing is for the health system anywhere in the world. The report by the World Health Organization⁽¹⁹⁾ points out that "Nurses have always been at the forefront of saving lives and caring for the people. But never before has their worth been clearer than it is now. They deserve not only our gratitude but also tangible support to ensure they are able to contribute to the fullest of their abilities."

Ordinary world

It is where the hero, incorporated to his place of origin, starts to live there again, and can often suffer the consequence of having been away so long, having transformed and no longer adapting. There may be difficulties in reintegration and acceptance due to the changes obtained by the hero, which hinder his coexistence, since he is also no longer the same. Feelings of inadequacy in that environment may arise, causing heroes to move, feel resigned or

seek another journey to face other challenges. Today's nursing heroes are aware of how their profession came about⁽²⁰⁾ (Florence Nightingale and the Crimean War), which is no different than what is being faced with the pandemic. After the Crimean War, nursing took a new direction, and it will be no different this time, as it is stamped worldwide that without these professionals it would not be possible to face COVID-19. It is up to each nursing professional to reflect on the hero who was to a greater or lesser degree within him and seek new work processes that seek to maximize the well-being of all.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS _____

Heroes are introduced to the ordinary world, where they are called to adventure. First, they are reluctant or refuse the call, but in a meeting with the mentor, they are encouraged to cross the first threshold and enter the special world, where they encounter tests, allies and enemies. As they approach the hidden cave, they cross a second threshold, in which they face the ordeal, earn their reward and are pursued on their way back to the ordinary world. They

then cross the third threshold, experience a resurrection and are transformed by experience. Then comes the moment of return with the elixir, blessing or treasure that benefits the ordinary world.

These stages are experienced in the nursing work process. However, there were no more heroes or fewer heroes, as they were all and are important in facing this pandemic. In this way, all of them were in fact heroes who, even though they were unknown and little valued, started to have visibility for society in the face of a global catastrophe. Moreover, before the news of the pandemic, the World Health Organization had already stipulated the year 2020 as the year of nursing empowerment.

It is up to the nursing heroes to reveal what they experienced: their overcoming, their desires and their victories. It is a time to show the world that heroes have always been heroes, but little recognized and valued by society, by other health professionals, as well as civil society in general. It is necessary for society to turn its attention and reflect on the essentiality of nursing and other health professionals, especially nursing, for being with patients 24

hours uninterruptedly.

Finally, this text aims to bring a reflective process to the category in a way that would contribute to raise professional morale in such a painful moment, but that will be transformative for the whole society.

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