

Animes and Mangas: Work “Oshi No Ko” as A Mediating Instrument of A Critical Practice in Psychology

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ABSTRACT: This article aims to problematize the reflections of neoliberal logic on the psyche from the perspective of critical psychology using the Japanese work “Oshi no Ko” as a source of analysis. To do this, we used qualitative documentary methodology of a reflective nature with the use of Atlas.ti software to assist in the survey of indicators and categories. The work addresses the reality of the entertainment industry today, bringing its problems, contradictions and impacts on the mental health of those who consume and produce its content. The analysis was influenced by the reflexes of neoliberalism, as a way of functioning of capitalism today, a system of accumulation that supports the logic of consumption. Based on the results obtained and reflections made, this study concludes that neoliberal logic uses the entertainment industry to manipulate individual desires to sell desirable ideas and products. This manipulation, in turn, generates countless damages and contradictory feelings, both for those who consume its content and for those who produce it.

KEYWORDS -Social Psychology; Art; Neoliberalism; Entertainment.

I. INTRODUCTION

Currently, modern capitalist societies are marked by a dichotomy that shapes the political and economic structures of the world. The political sphere, which should be grounded in principles of equality where each voice carries the same weight, has been dominated by economic logic. Power has been concentrated in the hands of property owners, hierarchical power structures prevail, and decisions are often authoritarian. Trump's victory, for instance, represents a triumph of neoliberalism. Serbian-American economist and professor at the City University of New York, Branko Milanović, notes that “Like any wealthy property owner, \[Trump] does not believe his role is to show compassion to his employees but, on the contrary, to decide what they should do and, if given the opportunity, to lower their wages, force them to work more, or dismiss them without compensation” (PUC Minas, 2020).

However, what seems even more striking is how Trump's victories in both 2016 and 2024, as well as Bolsonaro's in 2018, reflect the world of social media and the lies and hate messages that permeate these spaces. During election periods, both candidates prioritized strategies based on social media, allowing them to address their voters directly through campaigns saturated with fake news, attacks, and far-right ideological stances. These campaigns aimed to attack opponents and leftist ideology, demonizing their ideals and, through social media and mass media, fostering the proliferation of lies and sensationalist attacks that delegitimize political projects that differ from their own (Iasulaitis & Vieira, 2022).

As will be discussed later in this paper, it is understood that the use of media - especially social networks - as manipulation tactics generates a noticeable impact on human subjectivity. Through these tools, neoliberalism employs widely accessible instruments to manage and capture subjectivities, aligning individual desires - and fears - with the political agendas offered (Iasulaitis & Vieira, 2022; Safatle et al., 2020). In other words, the use of social networks as a means of disinformation and mass manipulation directly interferes with the subjectivity of their users, managing the individual interests of a dominant class as if they were to benefit the popular classes - which they do not.

Believing in the potential of art to affect people and promote reflection through sensitivity (Souza et al., 2018), this study aims to problematize the effects of neoliberal logic on the psyche from the perspective of critical psychology, using a Japanese animation as an analytical source. The chosen work demonstrates the impacts of neoliberalism and capitalism on the cultural industry (including social networks) and on the configuration of subjectivities, and will be used as a source for reflective documentary research. The decision to use an anime aligns with previous research (Carvalho, 2023; Carvalho & Souza, 2023; 2024) that observed how this type of material enables identification and elaboration of feelings and emotions, as well as fosters processes of reflection on political, cultural, and social themes. Moreover, it is possible to use them to understand the interests, frustrations, and fears of viewers, due to their potential to access emotions and stimulate imagination.

However, to advance this analysis, we believe it is necessary to briefly revisit some central concepts, emphasizing our understanding of neoliberalism and offering a brief historical review of its relationship with psychology, particularly Brazilian psychology. It is important to note that throughout the conceptualization and analysis process in this work, the conceptions are studied through the lens of Historical-Dialectical Materialism, which allows us to understand the complexities of the social relations and constructions behind the phenomena under study. The choice of this theoretical-methodological approach stems from the understanding that knowledge production in the field of psychology is also a political tool and carries the potential to unveil alienating processes (Guzzo, 2016).

Throughout this work, we will use analytical categories¹ such as contradiction², labor³, totality⁴, mediation⁵, and praxis⁶. Based on the proposed analysis process, we will transpose the phenomena under study into the reflections of the researchers. In doing so, we acknowledge that this allows only a partial and historically situated/located reading (Paulo Netto, 2011). That is, this work does not aim to provide an in-depth analysis of neoliberalism and psychology, but rather to initiate a dialogue with reflections relevant to the professional category, mediated by an artistic materiality. To do so, we begin with brief conceptualizations and contextualizations.

Neoliberalism has emerged as a controversial concept, marked by political and ideological disputes regarding its definition (Andrade, 2019). Since its formulation, the idealization of the free market, the defense of

¹Central concepts of Historical-Dialectical Materialism constructed with the aim of facilitating the process of analyzing reality (Oliveira et al., 2013).

²It concerns the constitutive quality of totality, its movement, its driving force. Based on the social constructs that generate unresolved consequences, contradictions refer to the dialectical-historical condition of human products (Oliveira et al., 2013).

³Human action in the pursuit of meeting needs - elementary or otherwise - through the alteration of nature. It is a dialectical process in which both nature and the human being are transformed (Oliveira et al., 2013).

⁴It is much more than the sum of all human and natural products. Totality encompasses something that goes beyond itself. The relationships established between these parts, as well as the contradictions they generate, constitute a complex and multifaceted totality. Moreover, no totality remains stable, as it is constantly and endlessly in motion and transformation (Oliveira et al., 2013).

⁵Processes through which human construction takes place. These are the mediations that make it possible, among other things, to unveil alienation. They are the webs that connect human constructions and through which they are made and analyzed (Cury, 1985).

⁶A form of human objectification characteristic of their existence. It is not about the subordination of practice to theory, or vice versa. It refers to a historical and creative condition of the human being, who produces and reproduces their living conditions (Kosik, 1962).

non-intervention of the State in the economy, and the decentralization of state planning have been central to its proponents. However, there has been no consensus on what the actual role of the State should be (Peck, 2010). But what, in fact, can we define as neoliberalism? According to Saad Filho (2015, p.59):

In Marxist literature, it has been understood in four distinct yet closely related ways: as a set of ideas inspired by the Austrian and Chicago economic schools and German ordoliberalism, developed under the aegis of the Mont Pèlerin Society; as a set of policies, practices, and institutions inspired and/or validated by these ideas; as a class offensive led by the State against workers and the poor, in the name of the bourgeoisie in general or finance in particular; and as a material structure of economic, social, and political reproduction, implying that neoliberalism is the mode of existence of contemporary capitalism or a system of accumulation.

Integratively, these conceptions formulate the functioning of neoliberalism in favor of the capitalist system through the defense that specific individuals - endowed with exchange goods - are better suited to carry out economic interventions than the State itself (Saad Filho, 2015). Thus, the dichotomy between State and market establishes itself as the driving motif, understanding these two institutions as rivals representing divergent interests (Saad Filho & Johnston, 2005).

Despite representing a highly controversial and fragmented theory, neoliberalism is sustained under the aegis of capitalist logic. Rooted in pillars of populist discourses such as “individual freedom,” “democracy,” and “merit,” this logic perpetuates individualizing conceptions (Saad Filho, 2015). But how does this logic relate to psychology? This science, in question, has its process of construction and maintenance intimately connected to neoliberal processes. Since its inception, psychology has been instituted by the demand for normatization, maintenance, prediction, and behavioral control of a society undergoing a productive system change—namely, the implementation of capitalism. Therefore, it is sustained precisely by the demand stemming from the logic of establishing standards deemed as normality (Parker, 2014).

Based on specific interests, psychology is called upon to categorize behaviors considered normal or deviant from the norm - this norm being established according to the interests of the dominant classes. Those who contest the new productive – exploitative - form, as well as the morality established according to criteria for maintaining the family and private property, are diagnosed as abnormal and deviant. Psychological treatment is then suggested to these subjects, normatizing them through the modulation of behaviors according to what is expected of them (Parker, 2014).

Following neoliberal logic, psychology tends toward individualization and the blaming of individuals for their suffering processes (Maia, 2001). Within this logic, individuals are understood as free and capable of mobilizing their own resources to achieve better living conditions. However, if they fail to achieve this goal, they have only themselves to blame. Consequently, society, the productive system, and especially the State, are absolved from responsibility for ensuring the population’s well-being.

Through this process, a conception of synergy between personal desires and social imperatives is established, making it difficult to distinguish what is deemed desirable from what the subject would actually desire. By transposing the interests of the dominant classes onto subjects - as if these interests were favorable to them - everyone becomes responsible for fulfillment, falling under the logic of self-realization. Correspondingly, if this becomes unfeasible, the responsibility/blame for such failure lies with each individual (Safatle et al., 2020).

In other words, neoliberalism begins to govern psychic suffering, while this system is sustained by psychological and moral concepts - such as self-realization, as previously mentioned. That is, we understand that this system is maintained not through epistemological foundations, but through an ethical-moral vision of what is established as desirable. In this task, psychology plays a major role in legitimizing these assumptions by positioning itself as a supposedly neutral and evidence-based science (Safatle et al., 2020). Thus, psychology functions as an instrument for maintaining and legitimizing this exploitative productive system while simultaneously being sustained by it, through the sale of its treatment services for what it has defined as pathological, thereby constituting a powerful ideological tool (Parker, 2014).

Counter to this movement, there is advocacy for a critical psychology that seeks to break with the hegemonic practices established so far. Especially in Brazil - a country marked by exploitative colonization processes - psychology finds a fundamental role in promoting processes of awareness and empowerment of subjects through the defense and claim for better living conditions (Martín-Baró, 1997). In this counter-hegemonic approach, our role as psychologists is not to sell treatment, but rather to foster processes of identifying the material and subjective conditions of subjects' lives, empowering them through community action grounded in their territory and own interests.

As Castro, Perez, and Guzzo (2024) point out, Brazilian psychology faces difficulties in reaching this horizon due to historical issues. Since its arrival in Brazil, psychology imported models from the Global North - marked by neoliberal logic - into a South American reality characterized by dictatorial processes, structural violence, and social inequality. The regulation of the profession at the national level occurred in 1962, shortly before the military coup that established the Civil-Military Dictatorship in 1964. From that moment on, all collective action was prohibited. Consequently, Brazilian psychology focused its training and professional practice on private and individual clinical work. In doing so, this science and profession was only able to access individuals, thereby falling into neoliberal logic and playing a role in maintaining this system.

In 1988, with the promulgation of the Citizen Constitution and the country's redemocratization, psychology's work in communities became possible. Additionally, the Constitution provided for the construction of public policies in health services (Unified Health System - SUS), social assistance (Unified Social Assistance System - SUAS), and education, establishing the presence of various professionals, including psychologists. With the formalization of SUS in 1988 and SUAS in 2005, there was a massive influx of psychology professionals into public services, enabling this science to work with communities. This movement could now lead to genuinely revolutionary action, once it is understood that any process of social change and transformation occurs only collectively (Castro, Perez & Guzzo, 2024).

Despite enabling psychology's exit from private consulting offices, it was not possible to forge a solid path toward social transformation. This is because psychology education, constructed during the dictatorial era based on international models, does not address the complexity of community psychology (Castro, Perez & Guzzo, 2024). Recent studies conducted by Perez (2023) address the fragmentation of psychology education in Brazil, which does not adequately prepare – equip - professionals for work in the Brazilian reality marked by expressions of the so-called social question.

We believe that psychologists' work should aim to promote the development of autonomous and conscious subjects (Guzzo & Ribeiro, 2019) and that, to this end, it is necessary to offer possibilities for reflection and transformative interventions (Dugnani et al., 2022). Considering new possibilities for instrumentality in our praxis is one path.

In this regard, art can be a psychological instrument that enables subjects' power to act, due to its potential to evoke emotions. It has the capacity to affect people through sensitivity, promoting a defamiliarization of reality (Souza et al., 2018). Emotion and creativity are ethical-political dimensions of transformative action, as a means to overcome inequality, acting on the singularity of emancipatory political action (Sawaia, 2021).

Previous research (Carvalho, 2023; Carvalho & Souza, 2023) has revealed the capacity of animes and mangas to serve as mediators in transformative actions of expression, resignification, and resistance, reflecting on various themes related to subjects' experiences, including political issues. We believe that the psychologist's action is political insofar as it must influence changes in their work context (Guzzo, 2008, p. 22).

However, this potential remains largely unknown. In an integrative review (Carvalho & Souza, 2023b) that sought to observe how studies in psychology and/or education, published between 2012 and 2022, understand animes and mangas, the authors highlighted how these materialities favor elaboration and reflection on fundamental issues for the development process. At the same time, they also revealed scarce research relating animes and mangas, especially within psychology.

This contrasts with the number of anime and manga enthusiasts in the country. According to a survey conducted by Netflix (Jovem Nerd, 2017), Brazil is one of the countries that consumes the most anime

worldwide. Moreover, Brazilian fans today exert influence in the international context related to these media. One example is the streaming platform Crunchyroll (2021), with over 5 million registered users. Its annual voting (Anime Awards) was reported by Shorty Awards (2020), with Brazil contributing a total of 1.2 million votes, making it the second most influential country in the polls.

The lack of research within psychology also contradicts data from other fields of knowledge. According to Melo and Cordaro (2016), researchers in Visual Arts, animes and mangas enable the exploration of controversial and traumatic themes, as well as portray overcoming after critical moments. For the authors, by channeling insecurities, war reminiscences, and fears, animes and mangas fulfilled a social role of “representing and expressing that which was inexpressible or taboo in other media forms” (Melo & Cordaro, 2016, p. 14).

Thus, if we are among the greatest appreciators of these materialities, and other fields highlight this potential, why is psychology not making greater use of these artistic materialities in our professional practices? Why have psychological research studies not yet approached this materiality? Is it merely a lack of familiarity with the plots and possibilities of these works or a lack of proximity or interest on the part of professionals? Or is there some kind of prejudice against this type of materiality? With this in mind, we propose an analysis of the content of the work “Oshi no Ko” to reveal how the narratives of these types of works can contribute as mediators of critical practice, seeking to break possible prejudices regarding this type of materiality both in our practice and research, as well as in psychologists’ individual interest.

II. METHOD

This research adopts Historical-Cultural Psychology as its theoretical-methodological framework, which is itself grounded in historical and dialectical materialism. From this perspective, psychological processes develop through movement - represented by contradictions that oppose and articulate between elementary and higher processes - achieving an understanding of the historical concreteness that shapes human subjectivity (Bulhões & Martins, 2018). This theoretical framework served as the basis for the discussion and analysis of the work “Oshi no Ko”, which will be presented in detail in the following subsections.

This study is configured as a documentary analysis (Cellard, 2012) of a reflective nature, utilizing the transcription of dialogues from the work “Oshi no Ko” as the primary document. To conduct this analysis, the Atlas.ti software was employed to assist in creating the categories of analysis, as will be detailed in the subsequent sections.

2.1. INSTRUMENTS

Our instrument of analysis was the work “Oshi no Ko” (推しの子- loosely translated as “My Favorite Child”). The first chapter of the manga was initially published in April 2020 by Aka Akasaka and Mengo Yokoyari in “Young Jump” magazine, published by Shueisha. Since then, its chapters were released weekly until November 2024, concluding at chapter 166. The work achieved international success, receiving awards and adaptations into other media. Currently, the anime has two seasons, both directed by Daisuke Hiramaki (2023, 2024). The first season consists of 11 episodes released in 2023, and the second has 13 episodes released in 2024. There are plans for a third season and a live-action adaptation in both series and feature film formats.

This article focuses on the events of the first season of the anime and the first 40 chapters of the manga. Specifically, four arcs were analyzed: the first, “Prologue” (chapters 1–10); the second, “Show Business” (11–20); the third, “Dating Reality Show” (21–32); and the fourth, “The First Concert” (33–40). Streaming platforms were used to watch the episodes multiple times, and the manga chapters were read in their Brazilian Portuguese translation published by Panini (Akasaka & Yokoyari, 2023a; 2023b; 2024a; 2024b).

The choice to analyze only this first season relates to the article’s objective of unveiling some possible narratives and how they may contribute as mediators of critical practice. The intention is not to provide an artistic or critical analysis of the plot or aesthetics of the work, but rather to contribute to breaking potential prejudices regarding this type of materiality and to help build new tools for work in our psychology practice and research.

The story follows a doctor and his patient who, upon dying, are reincarnated as twins of a 16-year-old Japanese pop idol. With an unusual plot, the story is constructed by interlinking the characters with the entertainment industry and the complex web of relationships that emerge within this universe.

For the analysis, we relied on the software Atlas.ti. This tool is characterized as an instrument for qualitative documentary research analysis. In general terms, the software houses documents selected by the researchers in a hermeneutic unit. With all documents housed in a project, researchers carry out the analysis by searching for codes. Codes are essentially key concepts or central ideas relevant to the research. Once researchers select the codes to be searched, a careful and repeated reading of the documents is initiated to identify them (Walter & Bach, 2015).

After all documents are read and identified, the software systematizes the data by providing a co-occurrence table of codes, as well as a descriptive count of how often each code appears in the documents. The use of this software facilitates data visualization in qualitative research, enhancing the analysis process by making it more visible and tangible (Walter & Bach, 2015).

2.2. PROCEDURES

After selecting the material, we watched the 11 episodes, making cuts of scenes that presented content relevant to the research objective. Whenever there were doubts regarding events or when it was necessary to gain a broader understanding of a specific issue, the corresponding manga chapter was read, combining these two resources with the scene cuts. Transcriptions of the characters' dialogues or careful descriptions of the scenes from the anime or manga were compiled into a separate spreadsheet.

From this spreadsheet, the central content of each selected scene was identified. This stage was termed: Pre-indicators. Following this initial survey, the scenes were processed with the aid of the Atlas.ti software, listing each pre-indicator developed in the previous stage. Subsequently, the pre-indicators were grouped by meaning, content, and relevance, aiming to facilitate the analysis process. As a result, the indicators were finally defined.

After defining the indicators, a new grouping was conducted based on similarity, opposition, or complementarity to formulate the final codes. With this completed, reports were extracted from Atlas.ti, especially the occurrence and co-occurrence tables. Based on the analysis of these reports, investigative categories were developed, organized by content nuclei to be detailed in the discussion section of this work.

III. RESULTS

The results obtained are summarized in Fig. 1 below. It is possible to understand the procedure followed with the number of findings at each stage and to observe how all inferences and categorizations using the software were conducted, supported by the theoretical framework. The use of the software aims to facilitate the analysis process, not to replace the researchers' analytical work.

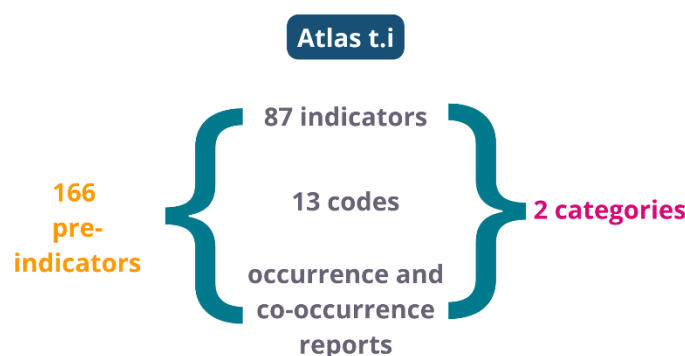


Figure 1. Visual synthesis of the agglutination of results

The process of creating the indicators began with the analysis of the episodes' dialogues through the identification of central contents. In this initial stage, 166 pre-indicators were named. Subsequently, the researchers conducted a careful reading of each pre-indicator and grouped those with direct similarity, resulting in 87 indicators, including the names of characters. In the final stage, the researchers analyzed the content and relevance of similar or irrelevant indicators - those with low frequency and minimal contribution to the analysis.

Thus, a total of 13 final indicators was established: Professional Aspirations; Japanese Culture; Defamation; Joyful Emotions; Operation of the Entertainment Industry; Internet; Freedom; Industry Manipulation; Life and Death; Labor Relations and Neoliberalism; Family Relationships; Health; and Psychic Suffering. Following this, the identified contents were analyzed and systematized into two final categories: "This is not a place for art but for business" and "People die easily. So, when they cry for help, we must act before it is too late," which will be developed in the analysis section of the present work.

Once the indicators were selected and identified in the episodes' dialogues, the Atlas.ti software provided a co-occurrence table. This table shows how many times an indicator appears near or even simultaneously with other indicators. To clarify visualization, we used the data provided by the software to create a Stanley graph, as shown in Fig. 2. In this graph, one can observe the proximity and distance between some indicators.

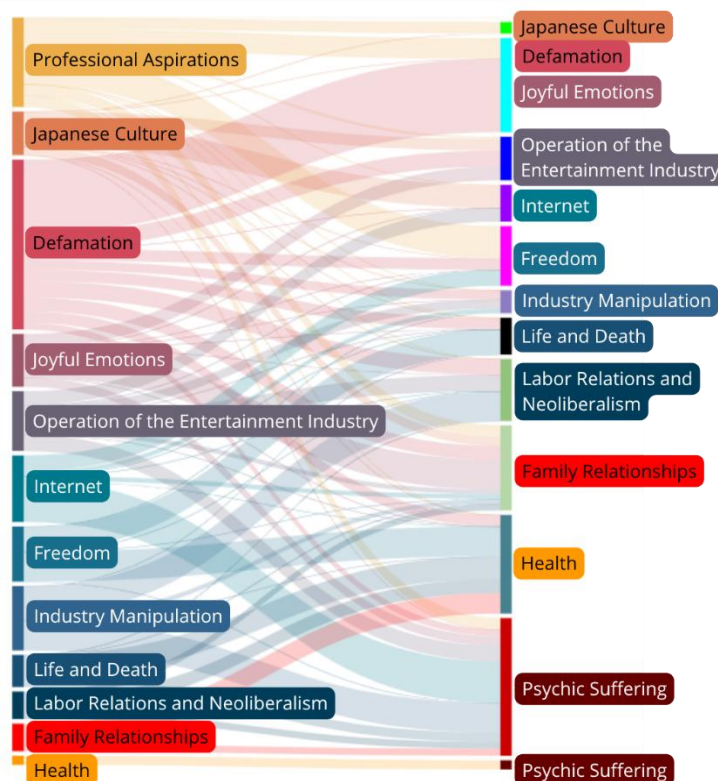


Figure 2. Stanley co-occurrence plot

In this graph, we can highlight several data points relevant to the analysis, such as the proximity between the indicators: (1) "defamation" and "joyful emotions"; (2) "freedom" and "life and death"; (3) "industry manipulation" and "labor relations and neoliberalism"; (4) "internet" and "psychic suffering"; (5) "joyful emotions" and "family relationships"; (6) "professional aspirations" and "freedom"; (7) "industry manipulation" and "psychic suffering"; and (8) "life and death" and "health." In the graph presented below, stronger - more frequent - occurrences are represented by thicker connecting lines.

Based on the descriptions of the anime's dialogues, a word count was performed, and these data were then systematized into a word cloud to facilitate information visualization. As shown in Fig. 3 below, the most frequently mentioned words appear larger and more prominently. Notably, the words "being," "idol," "people,"

[illegible]

IV. DISCUSSION

4.1. “THIS IS NOT A PLACE FOR ART BUT FOR BUSINESS”

I finally realized that the world revolves around money. (...) This is a rather depressing realization. (...) Being an idol is fun, so I wouldn't mind continuing like this if it were just me. But I want to send these children to good schools and make sure they have courses and so on. To provide many options, I have to sell better and earn the most, right? The way things are now, I won't be able to make these children happy (Hiramaki, 2023).

In another passage, spoken by the character Ichigo Saitou, the co-occurrence identified among the indicators “industry manipulation,” “neoliberalism,” and “lies” is illustrated. In this context, the entertainment industry aligns with the neoliberal work logic, which operates under the law of selling labor and manipulating image in favor of what is intended to be sold:

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necessary. This goes for the big shots too. They act like they are doing something great, but they only look at the numbers (Hiramaki, 2023).

An interesting observation is the proximity between “freedom” and “professional aspirations” (0.14). This relationship is present in the anime’s narrative through characters who aspire to join the entertainment industry, becoming idols for those who consume this content. Just as marketed within the neoliberal logic, the image of great idols - crafted through manipulations to conform to the desirable standard - is perceived as a possibility of liberation from the difficult conditions associated with so-called “freelance” work. Thus, the characters understand the idol industry as a form of freedom and direct their professional aspirations toward this dream, as illustrated in the following excerpt from Hoshiro Ai:

Idols are objects of adoration. They shine through the magic of lies. Lies are the most exquisite form of love! Being able to hide one or two only proves that a person is a top-tier idol. Accumulating lies, appearing happy while singing, regardless of our hardships. What a fun job! But the happiness part is something I have never truly felt. No one notices, but we also have our own feelings and lives. The happiness of a mother, and the happiness of an idol... Normally, you only have one or the other, but I want both! Hoshino Ai is a greedy girl (Hiramaki, 2023).

A relevant factor in this construction is the role of the internet. As observed in the data obtained, the indicator “internet” showed significant co-occurrences (0.18) with the indicator “psychic suffering.” Through the content disseminated on the internet and the facilitated access to others’ opinions, the image and behaviors of a person - especially one viewed as an idol - become vulnerable targets of unrefined criticism from their audience. Similarly, as seen with characters portrayed as fans of the idols in the anime, public opinion expressed through online comments is abundant and harsh. A striking example is a criticism directed at one of the characters via the internet: “Worms like her are the result of a mother who does not raise her children properly. It’s a vicious cycle” (Hiramaki, 2023).

Moreover, numerous reports detail mistreatment and abuse within the media entertainment industry. These cases are many and globalized. Among the most famous are the social pressures and abuses suffered by Marilyn Monroe (Clark, 2022), the numerous abuse allegations against musician P. Diddy (Firpo, 2024), the sexual abuse allegations against film megaproductor Harvey Weinstein (BBC, 2018), and the scandal of sexual abuses committed by the head of a major music talent agency in Japan (Khalil & Cai, 2023). All these contradictions lead to the neoliberal logic of selling well-being in exchange for purchasing a dream established as desirable: that of being an idol.

Thus, we arrive at the question of how the entertainment industry aligns “art” production within a neoliberal reality and its consequences on the human psyche. To illustrate this idea, an important statement by the director follows:

The lead actress’s agency promotes her as “a charming actress with real acting skills.” So, what happens when a girl with an even more beautiful face shares the screen? That would be a problem for their image strategy, right? Ai was simply too cute for the scenes. Therefore, the higher-ups ordered her to be cut as much as possible during editing. The screen time an artist receives tends to be decided by the balance of power between companies, so just see this as an unfortunate incident and accept it. It’s good to dream about the entertainment industry, but it’s better not to have illusions about it. **This is not a place for art, but for business** (Hiramaki, 2023).

In the previous passage, the manipulations of the contemporary entertainment industry become strikingly evident, aimed at selling a specific image aligned with the interests of the capital invested in that content. Furthermore, these manipulations culminate in the shattering of the dreams they promote. As previously noted, the entertainment industry markets itself as a possibility of liberation, a dream for many who consume it. However, when realized, that dream transforms into business and manipulation, creating an abyssal - and contradictory - distance from the freedom initially aspired to. Ultimately, this leads to a reflection on the contradiction between entertainment industry and art.

Toldo and Lopes (2017) conducted a study on the logic of some film production companies and highlighted a differentiation in their operations. While some companies focus on auteur-driven production, characterized by artistic intent and the transmission of ideas, others adhere to market logic, centered on advertising sales and entertainment. This differentiation tends to fuel debate about what, if any, real distinction exists between art and entertainment. As Barbosa (2018, p. 146) summarizes: “broadly speaking, within the context of entertainment, the tendency is toward increasing sophistication, whereas in the context of visual arts, the tendency is toward popularization. Nevertheless, general inclusion within the logic of consumption must be considered.”

4.2. “PEOPLE DIE EASILY. SO WHEN THEY CRY OUT FOR HELP, WE MUST ACT BEFORE IT’S TOO LATE.”

In the previous category, it was possible to observe that the work “Oshi no Ko” enables reflection on the vicissitudes of neoliberalism and capitalism by correlating them with the entertainment industry and the internet. These reflections allow us to examine contemporary society and consider how systemic forces affect everyday experiences and lives. Building on this reasoning, this category proposes to explore how the work reveals the manipulation by the entertainment industry and the internet as producers of suffering - not only for those directly involved in these industries but also for the public and consumers. However, the suffering discussed here is not any ordinary suffering; rather, it is an ethical-political suffering (Sawaia, 2021).

Ethical-political suffering encompasses the psychosocial dimension of the exclusion/inclusion process within socio-historical contexts marked by social inequality. This type of suffering is not understood as individual but as determined by a person’s social situation, which hinders their ability to resist the oppressions present in their life (Sawaia, 2011). This concept has become key within the human sciences today, especially for understanding the psychosocial dimension of exclusion/inclusion processes in socio-historical contexts of inequality (Bertini, 2014).

Within the work, ethical-political suffering appears when observing the characters and their subjectivities, relating their affects and lack of individual autonomy within the society in which they are embedded. For example, lying functions as an important mechanism in the narrative for controlling appearances and manipulating interests in favor of capital. This is evident in the quote by the character Ichigo Saitou: “In this industry, lies and self-interest are hidden behind smiles. You cannot cause damage to the broadcast” (Hiramaki, 2023).

However, dialectically, lying also emerges in the work as a mechanism that affects the characters’ subjectivities and their perceptions of reality itself. While in the previous quote lying is portrayed as a social control mechanism within a perverse industry, the following statement by the character Hoshino Ai demonstrates how lying - encouraged by this same market-driven manipulation - produces ethical-political suffering.

When I perform well, everyone is satisfied. So, I also pretend to be happy. I am a liar. Before even thinking, I say whatever fits the situation. I can’t even distinguish my true feelings from the lies. For a long time, I have always been bad at loving anything. I thought I could never be an idol \[...] My impression of idols was that they are pure beings who smile and bring smiles to everyone’s faces. The opposite of me, a liar who hates people. I’m sure I would never be capable of loving the fans, and they wouldn’t love me either (Hiramaki, 2023).

Here, the affections fragment the character’s wholeness and human condition. She no longer knows what it means to love, caught between her own feelings and the impressions shaped by a market-driven product created by capital. These emotions manifest in how she understands herself, perceives others, and experiences inter subjectivity—both in direct interpersonal relations and anonymous interactions within the society she inhabits. This reflects the dynamics of our own society and our relationship with contemporary industries.

Recent research has shown that most people use social media primarily to connect—49.7% report maintaining contact with friends and family as their main reason. However, traditional “social networks” no

longer fulfill this social function, prompting users to migrate to other digital spaces centered on direct messaging platforms such as Messenger, Discord, Slack, WhatsApp, and iMessage (The News, 2024; Statista, 2024).

It can be argued that these “social networks” have ceased to be truly “social” as they increasingly resemble platforms for cheap entertainment filled with advertisements and short, captivating content from strangers. According to The News (2024), connection has been replaced by consumption, as these networks have become “engines for discovering highly addictive content, driven by AI. Instead of connecting us to people we know, we get trapped in a loop of short videos and viral trends, losing the ‘social’ aspect and focusing solely on media.”

This aligns with themes explored in “Oshi no Ko”. The work addresses the complex interplay between family relationships, society, and the characters’ own emotions. This is exemplified in two statements made by the character Hoshino Ai at different points in the narrative.

I grew up in an orphanage. I only had a single mother from the beginning, until she was imprisoned for theft when I was little. So, I was placed in an orphanage while she was incarcerated. But my mother never came to get me after she was released. But that’s okay. I mean, the orphanage is better than getting beaten. I don’t remember ever having loved anyone or being loved. Someone like that could never be an idol, right?

“Lies... can become truth.” Upon hearing this, I decided to become an idol. I wanted to love someone. I wanted an object for my love. I thought that if I became an idol, I would be able to love my fans. I wanted to say “I love you,” and for it to come from the bottom of my heart, so I said the lie “I love you” everywhere. I thought that if I became a mother, I would be able to love my children. But I still haven’t told my children that I love them. If I said those words and realized I was lying... The thought of that frightens me. [...] **I sang all those love songs thinking I wanted to love. Hoping that someday it would be true** (Hiramaki, 2023).

It is evident how the work effectively conveys the ways in which structures of power impact the subjectivity and mental health of the characters, demonstrating that this subjective and emotional dimension is a direct consequence of experiences of exclusion and oppression within their sociocultural contexts. The character’s trajectory marked by abandonment and neglect, the market-driven context that delineates the standards of what an idol should or should not be, the complex reflections on love and the capacity to love, as well as the lack of support and care — including within public policies — collectively contribute to the character’s ethical-political suffering (Sawaia & Busarello, 2022).

The concept of ethical-political suffering primarily critiques the invisibility of subjects in traditional political analyses, emphasizing the urgent need to listen to the voices of the oppressed. From a broader perspective, the work encourages reflection on the complex interrelation between health, death, life, and freedom, highlighting the relevance of both ethical-political suffering and ethical-political health as key categories for understanding psychosocial dynamics in contexts marked by inequality and exclusion (Sawaia & Busarello, 2022).

It entails understanding health from a broad conceptual framework that opens the way to comprehend and intervene in health, considering it as both a matter of social inequality and political organization, while simultaneously rooted in the very subjective motives for mobilization. This category expands the indicators of health to encompass happiness, a sense of commonality, and the collective capacity to confront the State, which represents the power to revolutionize the entire social relations system. Thus, affects and ethical-political suffering are its principal etiological agents (Sawaia & Busarello, 2022, p. 24).

The dialectic between ethical-political suffering and ethical-political health is evident in the work. In “Oshi no Ko”, we observe the need to understand individuals within their broader context and to strive to transform the social conditions that perpetuate inequality and injustice. Here, a particular correlation emerges with the necessity within psychological praxis. It is imperative to comprehend individuals’ suffering not as isolated or culpabilized phenomena but as a reflection of hegemonic social issues in each historical moment. Our professional practice must aim at transformation and seek the ethical-political health of subjects. “It is

necessary to care for happiness as much as ethical-political suffering in order to fully achieve health. Thus, its weakening equates to a weakening of the capacity to act against servitude” (Sawaia & Busarello, 2022, p. 24).

In the work, we perceive this commitment through the artists’ critique, as they emphasize the need for effective public policies in response to abandonment, neglect, and violence - both within the family and the entertainment industry. The narrative underscores the importance of investment in physical and mental health - understood not as an individual concern but as a matter of social inequality and political organization - and in the promotion of healthier standards regarding how artists “should” or should not be. All of this invites reflection on the power of the work, not only as an object of analysis but also as a mediating tool to engage with critical themes relevant to our context and professional practice in psychology.

V. CONCLUSION

Throughout this study, we sought to highlight the interconnection between the modern entertainment industry, neoliberalism, and psychological suffering. Based on the results obtained and the reflections carried out, we conclude that neoliberal logic operates through the entertainment industry by manipulating individual desires in order to promote and sell desirable ideas and products. This manipulation, in turn, produces countless harms and contradictory feelings, not only for those who consume such content, but especially for those who produce it. We believe that the analysis of this material demonstrates the potential of using anime and manga - particularly “Oshi no Ko” - to foster critical debate and reflection. It has allowed us to reflect on society, our professional practice in psychology, and our own conceptions of emotion, suffering, and health. This highlights the transformative power that anime can hold for critical practice, not only in research, but also in applied psychological work.

Just as this study has offered relevant insights for the field of Psychology through the analysis of an anime, it reinforces the importance of incorporating such artistic materialities into the formation of a more critical and contextually grounded psychological science. We conclude that using anime as analytical tools holds significant potential for scientific knowledge production and for strengthening Critical Psychology as a scientific discipline.

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