

Research on wishes and defenses in violent episodes and their antecedents

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I. Introduction and aims

Freud suggested that in the study of clinical manifestations it was necessary to take into account the combination between these two great groups of concepts: drives (and wishes, which represent drives) and defense mechanisms (and their state). The same defense mechanism, repression for instance, can combine with a certain wish (genital phallic) in hysteria, and with another (secondary anal sadistic) in obsessional neurosis. The same happens with the rest of the wishes and defenses. On the other hand, each defense mechanism can present different states. Freud claimed that the symptoms of hysteria derived from the failure of the defense and the return of the repressed. At other times, as in the megalomaniac delusions, the defense mechanism (foreclosure of reality and of the paternal function) is successful. In addition, certain defense mechanisms have a central character and allow us to distinguish between neurosis (repression), narcissistic pathologies (disavowal), psychosis (foreclosure of reality and of the paternal function), psychosomatic conditions, addictions and post-traumatic neurosis (foreclosure of the affect). In his studies on clinical manifestations, Freud also tried to show the nuances of the coexisting wishes and defense mechanisms, among which some predominated over the others.

The purpose of the current research project is to investigate wishes and defenses (and their state) in the narrations of the episodes of violence and their antecedents expressed by the patients during the sessions. In addition, the research project is restricted to the episodes of moderate violence, that is, those consisting in aggressive actions that include self-directed physical harm, or violence directed at others, or even vandalism, but excludes the cases of serious, repeated suicide attempts or attempted murder. We have also excluded the cases of patients with a diagnosis of psychosis, those with mental disabilities, as well as those who consulted during wars or ecological catastrophes.

II. Method

II. 1. Sample

Narrations of moderate episodes of violence provening from 15 patients

II. 2. Instruments

Narrations constitute a suitable material to apply instruments that allow us to investigate unconscious psychic processes. The David Liberman algorithm (DLA) has been designed to study wishes and defenses in the patient's narrations. The repertoire of wishes, main defenses and their state that the DLA detects can be seen in Table I.

For the study of wishes the DLA includes a grid that allows us to detect scenes (episodes) in each one of the narrations. In this grid five moments are differentiated: two states (one initial and the other final), while the other three are transformations (awakening of the desire, attempt to consummate it, consequences of the former), as may be observed in Table II

With regard to the defenses, the DLA detects them by means of a sequence of instructions that allows researchers to name the defense and its state. The first step of this sequence consists in establishing a link between the wish and a cluster of defenses. For example, GPH is ether combined with functional defenses (sublimation, creativity or the defense in accordance with the goal) or with repression, while O1 is combined either with the same functional defenses, or with disavowal or with foreclosure of reality and the ideal.

The manualization of the DLA instruments for the study of wishes and defenses (and their state) in the narrations is available.

II. 3. Validity and reliability tests

The use of the DLA has been tested regarding its pre and post-dictive validity (Maldavsky, 2009c), its convergent validity (Maldavsky, 2009a, 2009b), and its external validity (Maldavsky, 2009a). Among all of these studies there is a test of convergent validity

between DMRS and DLA. In this test both studies coincided regarding the sample (an interview proposed by J. C. Perry), regarding the fragmentation of the material as well as the repertoire of defenses taken into account. The test threw as a result a kappa coefficient of 0,737. The high grade of agreement between the judges is confirmed by the result of the *Statistical Significance* of 0,000, which means that the probability of such a high value of a Kappa of 0,737 of agreement appearing between the judges by chance is 0, i. e. the probability of a highly significant result due to random is improbable ($P = 0,000$).

As an additional example, we can also mention a reliability test on the comparison between the outcomes of the analysis of wishes and defenses in a sample of 65 narrative sequences (corresponding to the first interview of Patient V) done by each of the co-authors of this paper: Wishes: kappa coefficient: ,729, *Statistical Significance*, 000, Defenses: kappa coefficient, 667. *Statistical Significance*, 000 (Roitman, Alvarez, Maldavsky, Rembado, Plut, Tate de Stanley 2009; Maldavsky, Roitman, Alvarez, Rembado, Plut, Scilletta, Tate de Stanley 2009). In the present research, the inter-judge agreement on the creation of the concrete narrative sequences and their interpretation was obtained by consensus rating.

II. 4. Procedure

The criterion for the case selection included age (between 18 and 38), psychopathology (exclusion of cases of psychoses and of mental disabilities), absence of a violent context (such as wars or ecological catastrophes), and the fact that the episodes of violence were not severe (they were not serious attempts to harm oneself or the others).

In each material the researchers selected the scenes of violence and their antecedents. Sometimes it was the patient who established a relationship between the antecedents and the violent scene, and other times the relationship could be inferred from the sequence of narrations. There was consensus between the authors over the decisions referred to the selection of the 15 cases and of the narrations referred to the episodes of violence and their antecedents.

Each researcher then suggested a summary of the narrative sequence that included the antecedents and the anecdotes corresponding to the outbursts of violence in the 15 cases.

The set of criteria used in each summary was: 1) temporal order, 2) isotopy, 3) economy of information. These summaries followed the recommendations contained in the manualization of the DLA instruments, and led to the description of narrative sequences which had already been sorted out and which are mentioned below. 19 narrative sequences were constructed (for in some cases the same patient narrated more than one violence situation). All of them had the same organization: 1) antecedents, 2) outburst of violence.

Regarding the antecedents, the study of the characteristics of the narration led to establish a distinction between two different aspects. The first narrated a situation which belonged to a lasting state (usually unpleasant) and the second corresponded to an episode of a more transitory nature. In order to express this difference in the research project, The lasting state was usually expressed in the past perfect, while the one that expressed the specific episode was usually expressed in the simple past. Regarding the outburst of violence itself, which constitutes the third aspect, it has been recorded after the other two.

Each narrative sequence was discussed between the authors in order to determine 1) if it was a representative sample of the patient's whole narration (from where it was extracted) and 2) if the aforementioned criterion was respected. Once the researchers came to an agreement on the content of the 19 narrative sequences, we used the DLA instruments to carry out the analysis of the wishes and defenses (and state) in the antecedents (in their two different aspects) and in the violent scene in each case. Each researcher used the manualization to establish the concrete narrative sequences and to carry out the study with the DLA instruments that allow researching into wishes and defenses (and their state) in the narrations. They also applied this manualization to reach a consensus between the versions of narrative sequences and their interpretation as well as to resolve disagreements. There was consensus between the authors over the decisions about both the creation of the sample formed by the narrative sequences (which are the units of analysis in this research project) and the interpretation of the wishes and the defenses in each narrative sequence.

III. Results

1. Table III shows the results of the analysis of wishes, defenses and their state in the three moments: 1) lasting state, 2) specific episode, and 3) outburst of violence which can either be: against the others, against their objects, against the individual's own body (for more details see the Appendix).

As can be appreciated, in the three kinds of narrations (lasting state, specific episode, and outburst of violence) the same wishes (Table IV), the same defenses (Table V), and the same states of the defenses (Table VI) predominate.

2. The analysis of the lasting states of the antecedents shows the dominance of IL, O1, O2 and A1. Among them, IL corresponds to a lasting state of disphoric character, with the experiences of rootlessness, of economic crisis, of apathy and somnolence, while O1 wishes (resorting to lies or depending on false subjects or on a subject with an absurd conviction about the speaker), O2 (suffering the other's indifference and having low self-esteem) and A1 (feeling of humiliation and injustice) are less frequent. In the cases that IL in a disphoric version prevails, O2, also in a disphoric version (low self-esteem and experience of indifference), often has a complementary value.

Regarding the defense, foreclosure of the affect and disavowal predominate, and their state is sometimes successful, other times failed and yet other times the state of the defense is combined (successful-failed).

In the specific episode of the antecedents, O1 and failed disavowal prevails. This blend corresponds to the situation of depending either from a false character or from a delirious character.

At the same time, although in the outbursts of violence the same pathological defenses of previous moments are maintained, these mechanisms undergo changes with regard to their state, as the successful foreclosure of the affect (combined with IL) and the successful disavowal (combined with A1) as the complement of the central wish, defense and state predominate.

IV. Discussion

One of the shortcomings of this research project is the size of the sample, which is due, in part, to the difficulty of obtaining narrations provided by the violent individuals themselves. In consequence, we will only be able to offer some initial remarks of a methodological as well as clinical nature.

The differentiation between two aspects of the antecedents, characterized by the persistence of a state vs. the emergence of a specific event, was suggested by certain elements in the patients' narrations. The authors suggest that the lasting state of the antecedents corresponds to a contributing factor, while the more specific episode is the expression of a situation that triggers the violent episode.

The pathological defenses that are failed or successful-failed in the antecedents of the outbursts of violence, such as foreclosure of the affect or disavowal combined with A1, become successful when the outburst of violence takes place. In consequence, the outburst of violence seems to reestablish the successful state of the pathogenic defenses, mostly of the foreclosure of the affect and the disavowal linked with A1. Therefore, through the episode of violence patients in general manage to re-establish the balance that had been lost in the lasting state. However, the outburst of violence fails to transform the disavowal linked to O1 into a successful mechanism (dependence on a false character or on a character that has absurd ideas regarding the patient). This seems to be a decisive factor that may lead to the development of new outbursts of violence.

In fact, in the scene where O1 and failed disavowal are combined, the conflict is double: on the one hand, there is hostility towards the other who becomes false or absurd, and on the other hand, there is a feeling of inferiority for having believed in such character without foundation. This aspect of the conflict (the feeling of inferiority for having believed in a false person) could well be the most powerful contributing factor to the outburst of violence.

In our view, those situations where O1 and failed disavowal are blended lead us to focus on the bonds of dependency the patient has established with a character that appears to be a false self, or an 'as if personality'.

V. Conclusions

In general terms, the combined study of the wishes and the defenses seems to offer greater specificity to the analysis of the patients' accounts.

In more specific terms, the analysis of the wishes, the defenses and their state in the narrations of the episodes of violence tends to suggest that in the antecedents (of the outburst of violence) what predominates is a disruption in the patient's pathological narcissistic balance, which derives from the combination between devitalization and exclusion states (IL and successful-failed foreclosure of the affect), a feeling of injustice (A1 and failed disavowal), and, above all, the feeling of being dependent on a false character (O1 and failed disavowal). When the outburst of violence finally takes place, the patient manages to reestablish the lost pathological narcissistic balance because he recovers vitality and actually consummates an avenging action. However, the feeling of being dependent on a false character remains unchanged, which allows us to anticipate that the cycle culminating in an outburst of violence will repeat itself.

Tables

Table I Wishes and main defenses

Wishes	Defenses	State
LI	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful
O1 O2 A1	Disavowal	
	Foreclosure of reality and of the paternal dimension	
A2 FU FG	Repression plus characterological traits Repression	
LI O1 O2 A1 A2 FU FG	In accordance with the goal	Successful/failed
	Creativity	
	Sublimation	

Table II: Narrated scenes and wishes

Wishes	GPH	UPH	A2	A1	O2	O1	IL
<i>Scene</i>							
Initial state	Aesthetic harmony	Routine	Hierarchic order	Natural legal equilibrium	Paradise	Cognitive peace	Tension balance
First transformation = Awakening of desire	Desire for aesthetic completion	Ambitious desire	Desire to dominate an object in the frame of a public oath	Desire driven by thirst for justice	Temptation Expiation	Abstract cognitive desire	Speculative desire
Second transformation = Attempt to consummate desire	Reception of a power or gift	Finding the mark of the father deep inside the object	Discerning that the object is faithful to corrupt subjects	Revenge	Sin Reparation	Access to truths	Gain in pleasure through organic intrusion
Third transformation = Consequences of the attempt to consummate desire	Pregnancy Aesthetic disorganization	Challenge of adventure Challenge of routine	Virtue recognized Social condemnation and moral expulsion	Leadership formally recognized and honored Being unable to move; being locked away and humiliated	Forgiveness and loving recognition Expulsion from paradise	Recognition of genius Loss of lucidity; the other enjoys objective cognition	Organic euphoria Asthenia
Final state	Shared harmony Lasting feeling of disgust	Adventure Pessimistic routine	Moral peace Moral torment	Evocation of heroic past or return to lasting peace Lasting resentment	Valley of tears Recovery of paradise	Bliss in revelation Loss of the essence	Balance of tensions with no energy loss Lasting tension or asthenia

Table III: Wishes, defenses and their state in violent episodes and their antecedents in 15 patients

Narration	Lasting state	Specific episode	Outburst of violence
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	Wish	Defense	State	Wish	Defense	State	Wish	Defense	State
I	IL Main	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful-failed	O1 Main	Disavowal	Failed	IL Main	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful
	O1	Disavowal	Successful-failed	A1	Disavowal	Failed	A1	Disavowal	Successful
II	IL Main	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful-failed	O1 Main	Disavowal	Failed	IL Main	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful
	O1	Disavowal	Successful-failed	IL	Foreclosure of the affect	Failed	A1	Disavowal	Successful
III	IL Main	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful-failed	O1 Main	Disavowal	Failed	IL Main	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful
	O2	Disavowal	Successful-failed	A1	Disavowal	Failed	A1	Disavowal	Successful
IV	IL Main	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful-failed	IL Main	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful-failed	IL Main	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful
	O2	Disavowal	Successful-failed				A1	Disavowal	Successful
V	IL Main	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful-failed	O1 Main	Disavowal	Failed	IL Main	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful
	O2	Disavowal	Successful-failed	A1	Disavowal	Failed	A1	Disavowal	Successful
VI	IL Main	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful-failed	O1 Main	Disavowal	Failed	IL Main	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful
	O2	Disavowal	Successful-failed	A1	Disavowal	Failed	A1	Disavowal	Successful
VII	IL Main	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful	O1 Main	Disavowal	Failed	IL Main	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful
				A1	Disavowal	Failed	A1	Disavowal	Successful
VIII	IL Main	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful	O1 Main	Disavowal	Failed	IL Main	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful
	O2	Disavowal	Successful	A1	Disavowal	Failed	A1	Disavowal	Successful
IX	IL Main	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful-failed	O1 Main	Disavowal	Failed	IL Main	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful
	O1	Disavowal	Successful-failed				A1	Disavowal	Successful
X	IL Main	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful-failed	O1 Main	Disavowal	Failed	IL Main	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful
	O1	Disavowal	Successful-failed	A1	Disavowal	Failed	A1	Disavowal	Successful
XI	IL Main	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful-failed	O1 Main	Disavowal	Failed	IL Main	Foreclosure of the	Successful

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	O2	Disavowal	Successful-failed	A1	Disavowal	Failed	A1	affect Disavowal	Success ful
XII	IL Main	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful-failed	O1 Main	Disavowal	Failed	IL Main	Foreclosur e of the affect	Success ful
	O2	Disavowal	Successful-failed	A1	Disavowal	Failed	A1	Disavowal	Success ful
XIII	IL Main	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful	O1 Main	Disavowal	Failed	IL Main	Foreclosur e of the affect	Success ful
				A1	Disavowal	Failed	A1	Disavowal	Success ful
XIV	O2 Main	Disavowal	Successful-failed	O1 Main	Disavowal	Failed	IL Main	Foreclosur e of the affect	Success ful
				A1	Disavowal	Failed	A1	Disavowal	Success ful
XV	IL Main	Foreclosure of the affect	Successful-failed	O1 Main	Disavowal	Failed	IL Main	Foreclosur e of the affect	Success ful
	O2	Disavowal	Successful-failed	A1	Disavowal	Failed	A1	Disavowal	Success ful

Table V: Percentages of central wishes in the three sectors

	Lasting state	Specific episode	Outburst of violence
Wish	%	%	%
IL	93.33	6.67	100
O1		93.33	
O2	6.67		
	100	100	100

Table VI: Percentages of defenses and their state in the three sectors

	Lasting state	Specific episode	Outburst of violence
Defense	%	%	%
Foreclosure of the affect	93.33	6.67	100
Disavowal	6.67	93.33	
	100	100	100

Table VII: Percentages of the states of the dominant defenses in the three sectors

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	Lasting state	Specific episode	Outburst of violence
State	%	%	%
Successful-failed	86.67	6.67	
Failed		93.33	
Successful	13.33	0	100
	100	100	100