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Analysis of wishes and defenses in the narrations of six oncology patients. An application of the David Liberman algorithm (DLA)

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**I. Goal**

To investigate the psychic organization of six oncology patients, in the moment of contraction of the affection.

**II. Sample**

Six oncology patients, two women and four men, were interviewed taking into account three criteria: (1) they must have finished chemotherapy and rays, (2) they must have overcome the critical stage of the disease and (3) they must not have any kind of metastasis at the moment of the interview. The patients were Jorge (77 years old, prostate cancer since approximately a year and a half), Luis (65, bladder cancer since three years), Armando (74, bladder cancer since two years), Elba (82, colon cancer since three years), Juana (59, breast cancer since almost five years) and Alfonso (72, prostate cancer since at least nine years). Semi-structured interviews were carried out, with questions dedicated to gather information about general circumstances from their lives, about the illness' precedents and about the impact of the disease in their lives.

**III. Method**

The David Liberman algorithm (DLA) is a method that allows detecting wishes and defenses (as well as their state) in narrations. The repertoire of wishes that it analyzes is composed by: Intrasomatic libido (IL), Primary oral (O1), secondary oral sadistic (O2), primary anal sadistic (A1), secondary anal sadistic (A2), urethral phallic (UPH) and genital phallic (GPH). These wishes might be combined with

certain central defenses, such as: Foreclosure of the affect, Foreclosure of reality and the ideal, Disavowal, Repression, In accordance with the goal, Creativity, Sublimation. The state of the defenses can be successful, failed or both. The DLA has several instruments useful for the detection of these concepts in the different levels: narrations, speech acts, para-verbal components, movements.

Regarding the narrations, they can be analyzed in terms of scenes representing wishes. There is also a sequence of steps that allows us to infer defenses, once the main wishes have been detected in the scenes. Each one of these scenes synthesizes different possible anecdotes. We find it convenient for this research to first explain some of the traits corresponding to O1 and IL. As for the first one (O1), we may say that when the subject believes in lies that are contradictory to the facts there might be a failure of the cognitive wish. It may also happen that a patient feels dependent from a subject that believes in words that don't match with the facts. Regarding IL in its disphoric version, they involve states of de-vitalization, economic poverty or expulsion from a space (locked outside) as well as crisis of somatic terror, vertigo states or terror to the risk of economic or financial collapse. In regards the defenses, we may say that foreclosure of the affect is usually complemented by a mechanism of escape from the reality, known by other authors –as well as by Freud- as “fly”. This mechanism has been usually associated to the PTSD, even though it may also be observed in many other pathologies of severely regressive type.

We might also add that the DLA instruments allow carrying out qualitative and quantitative researches. Fragments of sessions in which there are only a few fragments, complete interviews with a wider number of anecdotes, as much as a large cluster of sessions can be investigated by resorting to this method. The qualitative research involves the combination between wishes and defenses (and their state), taking into account that some components are dominant and others are subordinated, complementary or in conflict. As for the quantitative research, it requires from the application of a table of punctuation in which not only the defenses are valued but also their state, as much as the central and

complementary episodes. For this last type of research (quantitative) it is convenient to focus in the study of complete sessions.

The use of the DLA has been tested regarding its pre and post-dictive validity, its convergent validity, its construct validity, and its external validity. Among all of these studies there is a test of convergent validity between DMRS and DLA, which 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. that the probability of a highly significant result due to random is improbable ( $P = 0,000$ ).

#### **IV. Procedures**

In the present paper we will analyze the narrations. The initial material was constituted by the taped individual interviews, from which we proceeded to the selection of the sample appropriate to respond to the research aims. Due to the fact that the objectives required the study of already occurred events, the sample should be composed by the narrations in which the patients referred to episodes previous to the contraction of the disease, but relatively close to the moment of the predictable origin of the affection. We constructed then 13 narrative sequences, each one of which could be summarized in a series of phrases that expressed different moments ordered with a temporal criterion.

#### **V. Analysis of the narrative sequences**

Taking into account the previously mentioned criterion –the selection of narrations that correspond to episodes that are close to the moment of contraction of the disease-, we have been able to draw 13 narrative sequences, corresponding to the 6 oncology patients (3 from Jorge, 2 from Luis, 2 from Armando, 4 from Elba, 1 from Juana and 1 from Alfonso). As an example of these narrations that we have analyzed regarding dominant wish and defense, as much as state, we will quote here 3 of them, with their respective analysis. We will also add the analysis of the

para-verbal or motor component that allowed us to cut out these narrative sequences.

Table I: Examples of narrations with their respective analysis

| Jorge   | Elba   | Juana  |
|---|--|--|
| Verbal  |  |  |
| 1. My wife's death was terrible<br><br>2. When I am alone at home I think about it and cry. | 1. I felt sorry for my daughter because of her financial problems,<br><br>2. Instead of being anguished I tended to be apathetic | 1. My husband cheated on me,<br><br>2. We separated 10 years ago,<br><br>3. When I think about it I cry a lot. |
| IL failed foreclosure of the affect   | IL successful-failed foreclosure of the affect   | IL failed foreclosure of the affect  |

Next we will present a series of grids that synthesize the results obtained from the analysis of the narrations.

Table II: Analysis of narrative sequences

| Interviewee | Narration | Wish | Defense                   | State      |
|-------------|-----------|------|---------------------------|------------|
| Jorge       | I         | IL   | Foreclosure of the affect | Successful |
|             | II        | O1   | Disavowal                 | Failed     |
|             | III       | IL   | Foreclosure of the affect | Failed     |
| Luis        | I         | O1   | Disavowal                 | Failed     |
|             | II        | O2   | Disavowal                 | Successful |

|         |     |    |                           |                       |
|---------|-----|----|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Armando | I   | IL | Foreclosure of the affect | Successful            |
|         | II  | IL | Foreclosure of the affect | Successful            |
| Elba    | I   | IL | Foreclosure of the affect | Successful-<br>Failed |
|         | II  | IL | Foreclosure of the affect | Successful-<br>failed |
|         | III | O1 | Disavowal                 | Failed                |
|         | IV  | A1 | Disavowal                 | Successful            |
| Juana   | I   | IL | Foreclosure of the affect | Failed                |
| Alfonso | I   | O1 | Disavowal                 | Failed                |

Table III: Dominant wishes in the narrations

| Wish  | Nº | %     |
|-------|----|-------|
| IL    | 7  | 53.85 |
| O1    | 4  | 30.77 |
| O2    | 1  | 7.69  |
| A1    | 1  | 7.69  |
| TOTAL | 13 | 100   |

Table IV: Dominant defenses in the narrations

| Defense                   | Nº | %     |
|---------------------------|----|-------|
| Foreclosure of the affect | 7  | 53.85 |
| Disavowal                 | 6  | 46.15 |
|                           |    |       |

|       |    |     |
|-------|----|-----|
| TOTAL | 13 | 100 |
|-------|----|-----|

## **VI. Discussion**

As we may observe, the dominant psychic currents seem to correspond to a combination between IL and the foreclosure of the affect and O1 and the disavowal. O2 combined with disavowal and A1 with the same defense were also detected, but with a secondary role in the interviewees' psychic life. These results are coherent with those found in similar studies with other patients such as, for example, psoriatic. Due to this, we think it might be possible to extend these results to a major population.

IL is often linked to the feeling of helplessness, which might be manifested in different types of narrations. Among them we have the episodes where a subject feels excluded or expelled from a space, the situations of financial lost, and also of being exposed to other person that escapes and with that act shows his libidinal abandonment to the subject.

## **VII. Conclusions**

We detected the presence of two fragments (on one hand, the feeling of helplessness and, on the other hand the exposition to someone else's lies) in the narrations of the oncology patients. This finding conducts us to think that the dominant wishes and defenses, in the situations that preceded the moment of contraction of the disease, were IL combined with foreclosure of the affect (toxic condition).and O1 connected with disavowal (schizoid characterologic traits) . The combination between these two psychic currents is frequent in psychosomatic pathologies, as much as in toxic and traumatic neuroses. What prevails in all of them is the organic alteration by different ways.