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Libidinal drives, defenses and early experiences determining psychosomatic symptoms

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1. Aims: to research libidinal fixations and defenses in a taped session of a psoriasic patient

2. Instruments: the David Liberman algorithm (DLA), which contains several tools allowing to detect drives and defenses (as well as their state) in the clinical manifestations

3. Sample

Diego (aged 45) suffered a chronic psoriasis relatively controlled. The disease began when, driving a vehicle, a friend died in a car accident. During a session of his second year of treatment, the patient first described his headache, that he attributed to the meal he eated before. Immediately he narrated two dreams. He commented that the first dream was very strange and it vanishes. "There is a very fix image of the dream; but it was the apartment of Mar del Plata, the apartment's lobby" He added that "the elevator was not there. I look the hole of the elevator; and the man who cares the building was killing little rats or throwing poison in the darkness. Suddenly from a hole got out a little white rat, small, unborn-like, without hair either tail and starts turning round as it is dying, but when it is turning round it is transformed in a kind of a siberian white dog, and starts turning round. The legs fail as the poison was making effect and starts the neurological thing and I wake up with that image of the dog"

"And then I had another dream that wakes me up. I was with the remote control of the TV, I wanted to put channel 19; one nine, I pressed the nine and it appears, I press one, nine, and I could not put the 19. It just switches on the one or nine and like that repetitively. I woke up in the desperation that I could not put the 19. I should play the 19 in the lottery (he smiled)."

The first dream occurred from Saturday to Sunday. He compared it with a film he saw on the TV on Freud's life. He referred to his own disgust and desperation and added that Freud dead from a cancer in the jaw. Because of the smell of Freud's decomposition body, the dogs followed him. Concerning the dog, he commented that it was a big puppy.

Almost immediately he referred that his headache disappeared. He added that after the dream on the remote control he awoke with rage and that the doctor applied to Freud doses of morphine. Then he said:

"I am still static, the husky white dog of the dream is the same as the one in front of my house. I do not even know the name of my neighbor, no that I think I do not see the dog from a while. The siberian are very stupid, they are not dogs to have in house, they are a little bit silly. If you open the door to a siberian they start running and never stop. They have it in their blood. Have you ever see that there is a lot of siberian in the street? They run and turn round and they get lost. They do not bark, miaow, they are all day long ahuu ahuuu. The neighbor stays alone, he is widowed, he goes to his daughter house and the dog ahuu".

This material was combined with some narrations on his daily life during the weekend. He continued with little enthusiasm, but the anxiety diminished. He remained distant from his wife. He wanted quite moments, at least during some minutes. He tried to convince some friends to travel to other city aiming at playing golf and disappearing. Now the conflictive situations (like atomic bombs) did not appear. The relationship with his wife remained in a statu quo that he did not like. The bond was paralyzed. When his wife said something he suffered an attack of rage and felt pain in his breast.

Referring to his headache Diego explained that during his previous meal he drank two glasses of wine and then he slept. When he awoke the headache appeared. When he alluded to the issues on his daily life his speech was interfered by frequent yawns that did not appear when he referred to his dreams or associations with them.

4. Narration level analysis

In the narration level of analysis it is possible to distinguish three kind of stories: 1) the dreams, 2) the associations to them, 3) some scenes of daily life.

Dreams' manifested contents

A. First dream
1. A man throw poison in the hole of the elevator,
2. from a hole emerged a little rat, white, unborn,
3. the rat, transformed in a white dog siberian- like, was affected in the nervous system by the poison.

B. Second dream
1. He tried to put 19 in his TV remote control,
2. he only could put the number one or the nine, but not both together,
3. he awoke desperate because of his impossibility.

Dreams' associations

To the first dream

C. 1. He saw a documental film on Freud's life.
2. he knew that Freud dead from a cancer.
3. the documental was very shocking for him.

D. 1. Freud had a bad smell,
2. the dogs followed him by the streets.

E. 1. Siberian dogs are silly.
2. if someone opens the door, the siberian dog began to run endless and get lost,
3. these dogs do not bark, but miaow.

F. 1. The white siberian dog is similar to the dog of his neighbor,
2. if the siberian remained alone in the neighbor's house, the dog miaowed all day

To the second dream

G. 1. He had to bet to the number 19 to the lottery

Daily life narrations

H. 1. He eat some indigested meal and wine, and then he slept,
2. when he awoke the headache appeared,
3. during the session the pain relieved.

I. 1. He maintained the distance with his wife,
2. the bond was paralyzed,
3. he did not like this statu quo.

J. 1. In the past, when his wife said something he suffered an attack of rage and felt pain in the breast.
2. Now the distance from his wife increases, but the anxiety diminished.

K. 1. He tried to convince some friends to travel to other cities aiming at playing golf,
2. he wanted to have some quiet moments.

The manifest content of the first dream (story A) did not permit to know what the patient's position was in the dream scene. The narration corresponded to IL and foreclosure of the affect, and A1 and disavowal (being imprisoned), both defenses having a successful state for the man and failed for the rat-dog. The associations with the siberian, and specially the imitation of the miaowings, allow to infer that the patient was identified with the rat-dog. Other sectors of his associations showed that the dog was attached to a dying man (story D). The scene corresponded to IL and failed foreclosure of the affect and O2 and failed disavowal, with the prevalence of IL. The scene referred to the siberian miaowing alone in the house (story F) showed the same eroticisms, defenses and prevalence, with the addition of A1 and failed disavowal (being imprisoned). Finally the scene of the siberian running by the streets and getting lost combined IL and failed foreclosure of the affect, O2 and A1 and failed disavowal and UPH and failed repression + evitative characterological traits, IL prevails. The documental film on Freud's life that shocked him (story C) combined IL and failed foreclosure of the affect (shock), O1 and failed disavowal and UPH and failed repression + avoidance IL prevailed.

In sum, the analysis of the first dream plus its associations permits to infer the relevances of IL and failed foreclosure of the affect, combined with O1, O2 and A1 and failed disavowal and UPH and failed repression + evitative characterological traits.

The second dream (story B) showed the inoportance of the apparatus to control other apparatus from the distance. The scene corresponded to O1, and the failure of the patient in his attempts indicated that the defense was failed disavowal. UPH and failed repression + avoidance had a complementary function. The association of the dream descjphering the meaning of the number as an indication to bet on the lottery (gambling) corresponded to IL and to UPH accompanied respectively by successful foreclosure of the affect and by successful repression+ ambitious traits of character. IL prevails.

In sum, the analysis of the second dream and its association leads to infer that O1 and failed disavowal prevail the y are accompanied by IL and successful foreclosure of the affect and UPH and successful repression+ ambitious trait of character.

The stories on patient's daily life are four. The first one (story H) included the moment of the session itself, where the headache disappeared. The first part (eating an indigesting meal, drinking and sleeping, and awaking with the pain in the head) corresponded to IL and failed foreclosure of the affect, but the last part (the disparition of the headache) indicated the prevalence of IL and successful defense in accordance with the goal.

The second anecdote (story I), on the paralysis and distance regarding his wife, corresponded to IL and successful/failed foreclosure of the affect and UPH and successful/failed repression + and avoidance trait of character, that prevailed.

The third anecdote (story J), on the difference past-present in the patient's bond with his wife, had two parts. In the past, the rage and the pain on the breast when she said something (like if an atomic bomb exploded) corresponded to IL and failed foreclosure of the affect, O1, O2 and A1 and failed disavowal and UPH and failed repression+ avoidance traits of character, with the prevalence of IL. The present situation differed from the first one: the distance from her permits the patient to avoid the anxiety but he remained without enthusiasm. UPH and the successful repression + avoidance trait of character combined with IL and successful/failed foreclosure of the affect, that prevailed.

The fourth anecdote (story K) referred to the patient's attempt of having quiet moments playing golf with friend in other cities. IL and successful foreclosure of the affect combined with UPH and repression+ avoidance traits of character, wich is prevalent. But this story shows just the patient's avoidance wishes, and not if he succeded or failed in the attempt to consummates them.

The outcomes of the analysis of the first dream (and the corresponding associations) match the results of the study of some stories of patient's daily life. The scene of the man poisoning the dog and its consequent paralysis (story A) can be combined with the narration on eating, drinking and sleeping, and then awaking with a headache (story H). The scene of the siberian miaowing (story F) can be combined with the actual situation of the patient without contact with his wife (story I). But in the scene of the siberian IL and foreclosure of the affect and UPH and repression + avoidance traits of character failed, instead in the patient's daily life foreclosure of the affect was successful/ failed and the avoidance traits of character succeeded.

Moreover, the scene of the dog's endless running by the streets and getting lost (story E) is an extreme combination between foreclosure of the affect (and flight) and avoidance trait of character, both failed. This outcome is the same of the result of the study of the scene of the dog miaowing. The scene of the dog imprisoned (story F) combined with the first part of the narration on the patient's conflict with his wife (story J), referred to the past discussions.

In sum, some toxic states appearing during the patients daily life were also represented in his first dream. The state of the mechanisms during the patient's daily life (successful avoidance and successful/failed foreclosure of the affect) opposed to the state of the same defenses in the first dream and its associations.

The second dream revealed other aspect of the patient, centered on O1 and the failed disavowal. The results of the analysis of the associations to the dream, combining IL and foreclosure of the affect and UPH and repression + ambitious traits of character, both successful, match the outcomes of the study of the daily life stories. Both outcomes differ on the state of foreclosure of the affect (successful in the association and successful/failed in the daily life) and on the type of successful UPH character trait (ambitious in the association and avoidance in the daily life). This second dream combined with the anecdote of the narration on the TV documental film on Freud's life (stories C and D). It exists a connection between the second dream and these associations: when the patient failed in the use of the TV remote control, some unpleasant scenes appear, like those he saw at the TV. All this sequence, including the second dream and the associations, corresponds to O1 and failed disavowal and UPH and failed repression + avoidance, with the prevalence of O1. But the content of the unpleasant scene appearing in the TV corresponds to IL and failed foreclosure of the affect (which is prevalent) and O2 and failed disavowal. It is noticeable that the story D can be connected with both dream contents.

Speech acts analysis

An inventory of the most important aspects of Diego's speech acts included: 1) yawns, 2) miaowing, 3) narration of concrete facts, 4) causal links, 5) self interruptions, 6) laughing, 7) references to rareness, 8) exaggerations.

Yawns express IL. Miaowings combines mimicry and catarsis. Narrations of concretes facts and causal links indicate A2. Self interruptions correspond to UPH. Laughing expresses IL and GPH. References to rareness and exaggerations indicate GPH.

Some features of the enacted scenes were common to the daily life anecdotes and the dream contents and their associations. In both types of stories, self interruptions (indicating UPH and failed repression + avoidance) are common to the two types of anecdotes. Also exaggerations, references to rareness and mimicry were common to the Diego's narrations, indicating GPH and repression + successful histrionic trait of character.

But those features have just a complementary value. Regarding the state of the main defense, the most relevant enacted scenes differ from the narrated anecdotes. The scenes enacted by the patient when narrating either 1) dream contents and associations and 2) daily life anecdotes differ. In the narrations of daily life anecdotes (H, I, J and K stories) yawns predominated IL and successful/failed foreclosure of the affect). In the combination of the narration of the first dream (story A) and its associations (C, D, E and F stories), the patient enacted the same blend GPH and successful defense in accordance with the goal and IL and successful foreclosure of the affect, with the prevalence of IL. In the combination of the narration of the second dream (story B) and its short association (story G) the patient enacted a scene mixing IL and successful foreclosure of the affect and GPH and successful creativity, with the prevalence of IL.

To sum up, when Diego described daily life anecdotes, he displayed scenes where IL and successful/failed foreclosure predominate, and when he narrated the dreams and gave their associations, he enacted scenes with the prevalence of IL and successful foreclosure of the affect. In consequence, the major difference among the enacted scenes when Diego referred to the daily life anecdotes and when he alluded to the dreams stories and their associations is the state of foreclosure of the affect.

Comparison between narrated and enacted scenes

It is interesting to notice that 1) the outcomes of the research of daily life narrations corresponding to a) the patient's past bond with his wife and b) the transitory headache are the same as the results of the study of the first dream,

2) the results of the investigation of the present state of the patient's relationship with his wife match the outcomes of the study of the scenes he acted when narrated this group of anecdotes, and 3) the results of the analysis of the enacted scenes when the patient narrated the dreams scenes and their associations differ from the rest of the studies.

That is to say, the foreclosure of affect 1) failed in the first group of narrations, 2) combined failure and success on the second group of scenes (narrated and enacted), and 3) was successful in the other enacted scenes (corresponding to the associations of the dreams).

But the analysis of the second dream signaled the relevance of O1 and the failed disavowal, like in the narrations C and D. The failure in the attempt to control the TV images was accompanied by the come back of the scenes of the dead of Freud. These anecdotes correspond to the return of some disavowed contents. The reference to the atomic bomb when the patient was in an open conflict with his wife also corresponds to O1 and failed disavowal.

UPH and failed repression and avoidance resources had a complementary function in the past patient's conflictive relationship with his wife and in the stories of the dreams. Instead, in the present bond with his wife and in the associations to the second dream UPH and repression and avoidance traits succeeded. A combination between 1) IL and successful/ failed foreclosure of the affect and 2) UPH and successful repression and avoidance is noticeable. The opposition between 1) the failed defense in the narrated anecdotes of the dreams and their associations, and 2) the successful foreclosure of the affect in the corresponding enacted scenes allows to infer that the patient pretended to use the transference relationship as a means to recover a pathological equilibrium and not to substitute it by a combination of more benign mechanisms.

5. Discussion

On the patient's psychic structure and libidinal and Ego fixations

In the present situation the patient had reached an economic equilibrium thanks to a combination between successful/failed IL and foreclosure of the affect and UPH and successful repression and avoidance traits, with the prevalence of IL.

Sometimes this defensive structure failed. In that case, UPH and failed repression and avoidance resources.

A1 and failed disavowal (feeling of injustice), O2 and failed disavowal (feeling of lack of love), O1 and failed disavowal (catastrophic fantasy on the end of the world) combined with IL and failed foreclosure of the affect (anxiety attack or somatic perturbation). This was the main component. It is interesting to observe a complementary defense of foreclosure of the affect: flying. Story F and some extreme avoidance traits during the sessions (some of them transformed in excessive ambitious traits) are representative of this mechanism. This defense corresponded to a post-traumatic structure, and can be connected with the origin of the psoriasis. The psychosomatic disease reveals that another mechanism, also complementary of foreclosure of the affect, had relevance: the organic introjection. It was reflected especially in the first part of narration L corresponding to the moment of conflict with his wife. This defense had relevance in psychosomatic illness.

The anecdote of the origin of his headache revealed other mechanisms: the incorporation (of an indigesting meal and of alcohol). That mechanism (incorporation) also is an attempt to elaborate the traumatic situation (where the Ego remained passive), thanks to the fact of being simultaneously active and passive. The Ego repeats by himself what he previously only suffered. However, Diego's tendency to the incorporation had less importance that flight. That is to say, the posttraumatic structure prevailed.

On the value of single-case research

The outcomes of this research can be compared with the results obtained by the application of the DLA to a sample of 10 discourses of psoriasic subjects answering to the Phillipson test images. In that research (Tate de Stanley, C., Alvarez, L., Britti, A.M., Neves, N., Rotman, C.R. and Maldavsky, D. "Libidinal fixations and defenses in psoriasis illness: analysis of the discourse with DLA," SPR Meeting, 2006), the outcomes highlighted the relevance of UPH, A1, O2, O1 and IL wishes and characterological defenses, disavowal and foreclosure of the affect having either successful, failed or both states.

These outcomes were distributed in a spectrum with two extremes (more or less severity) and various intermediate states. The outcomes of the single-case analysis arrived at similar conclusions, but including the different members of the spectrum in the various states of the same patient who differently combined wishes and defenses (and their state) either in his narrated and enacted episodes during the session. This coincidence between the outcomes of both studies shows the usefulness and pertinence of the single-case research.

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