

Change of affect regulation in dream narratives during psychoanalytic treatment

Narrative working through of emotional experiences
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INTRODUCTION

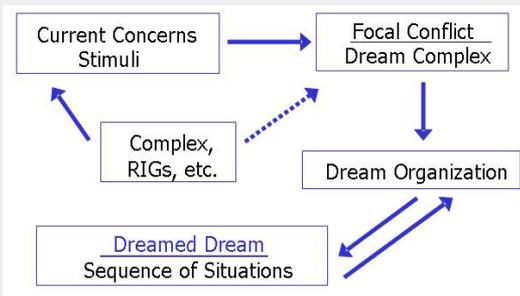
Why affect regulation?

- No change during treatment without change in the capacity of affect regulation.
- A wide and flexible range of affect regulation capacities correlates with psychological and physical health.

Why dreams and affect regulation?

- Dreams as microworld: problem-seeking structure with the aim to resolve problems
- Affects are everywhere in the dream: in every place or object, their interactions and movements.
- Affects as motor and central feedback mechanism during the dream generation process (safety vs. involvement)
- Reprocessing of not integrated information (unresolved conflicts, traumata, loss)
- Resolving only possible in interactions → dream tendency towards interactions (involvement)

Model of dream generation



METHOD

Dream coding system

- Dream is analyzed under structural aspects and as sequence of situations and explicit interrupts.
- Formal dream elements are coded in three fields (position field, field of movements, interaction field).
- Situations end by interrupts: changes in interaction type, the movement of an object, apparition of new objects or new attributes of objects, explicit interrupts like cognitive or affective comments or evaluations.
- Interrupts are the central affect regulation mechanism to increase safety or involvement – depending on the arousal level for the dreamer at each moment of the dream.
- Reduction of the complex system of nearly 160 codes (Moser & von Zeppelin 1996) to 35 codes
- Testing of reliability and validity

Hypotheses for validity-testing: The coding system shows

- individual patterns of affect regulation
- individual changes during treatment
- flexibilisation of affect regulation capacities in treatments with good outcome

Dream example - Case 3

Typical dream during the ending phase of treatment of this patient: no place, no attributes, only subject and object (position field), no movement, but nearly immediate interaction.
→ low capacity of affect regulation

Case 3, Dream 9, Session 708

SITUATION	FIELD OF POSITIONING	FIELD OF MOVEMENT	FIELD OF INTERACTIONS
S1	SP OP, 1 POS REL		
S2	SP OP ₁		IR.C resp
S3	SP		V.R.
S4	SP OP ₁		IR.C resp
S5	SP OP ₁		IR.D ((IR.S))

Dream example - Case 5

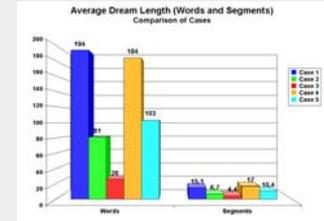
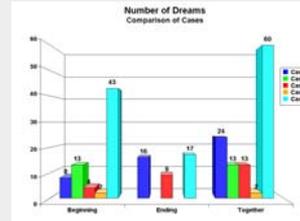
Not typical because an unusual short dream for this patient. Although the dream is shorter (by words and situations) than the dream example of case 3 more dream elements and kinds of interrupts are used → higher capacity of affect regulation.

Case 5, Dream 46, Session 550

SITUATION	FIELD OF POSITIONING	FIELD OF MOVEMENT	FIELD OF INTERACTIONS
S1	SP IMPLW (TIME) SOC SET		
S2	SP OP, BEK		IR.C resp FAIL
/EX AFF-R. [Despair]			

Material

- Transcripts of sessions in which dreams were recounted of the first and last 100 sessions of five long-term psychoanalytic treatments (altogether 112 dreams) from the Ulmer Textbank. These cases have already been analyzed by Leuzinger-Bohleber (1987, 1989).



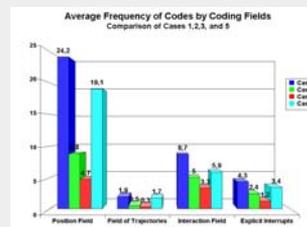
RESULTS

Reliability for segmentation: Cohen's Kappa = .936

Reliability for all 35 codes together: Cohen's Kappa = .913

Validity of the dream coding system: It shows

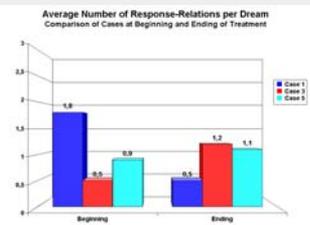
1. Individual dream patterns



The differences between average number of codes sorted by fields (see: coding system) are high significant ($p < 0,01$) between cases for all fields; for interrupts is a tendency towards signif.

2. Individual changes

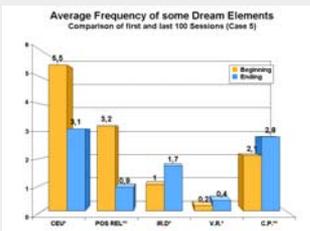
(here one code as an example)



Response-Relations (as an example) are interactions with high level of involvement. Case 1 shows a significant decrease, case 3 significant increase and case 5 small, not significant increase.

3. Flexibilisation of affect regulation in treatments with good outcome

Case 5 has been rated in prior studies as treatment with good outcome. Coding shows significant decrease for CEU (cognitive unanimated elements) and POS REL (spatial positioning) which corresponds to a reduced dream length. At the beginning the dreams started often with long descriptions of places and their elements (CEU), a special form of regulation because the dream has long sequences only in the position field. At the end of treatment the dream structure is clearer and other forms of regulation increased significantly, for example the cognitive interrupts (C.P.), distance relations (IR.D) which are interactions of others observed by the dreamer, and verbal relations (V.R.).



DISCUSSION

The dream coding system is a reliable and valid instrument to measure changes in affect regulation capacities. The dream coding system is a quantitative and qualitative usable instrument that may be very useful in psychotherapy process research.

Further research on the validity of the dream coding system seems necessary and should use other instruments on affect regulation like questionnaires in still ongoing treatments and compare dream narratives with other emotional narratives.

References:

- Döll, S. et al. (2004). Die Veränderung von Träumen in Psychoanalysen. In: M. Leuzinger-Bohleber, H. Deserno & S. Hau (Ed.), *Psychoanalyse als Profession und Wissenschaft. Die psychoanalytische Methode in Zeiten wissenschaftlicher Pluralität* (pp. 138-145). Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Leuzinger-Bohleber, M. (1987/89). *Veränderung kognitiver Prozesse in Psychoanalysen. Band 1 + 2*. Berlin: Springer.
- Moser, U. & von Zeppelin, I. (1996). *Der geträumte Traum. Wie Träume entstehen und sich verändern*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.