The impact of the survival rule on situation-reaction-chains to symptom – an empirical analysis

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The impact of the survival rule on situation-reaction-chains to symptom – an empirical analysis

- In 100 outpatient psychotherapy patients who were treated with strategic-behavioral therapy, an affective-cognitive behavior therapy ACBT after Woolfolk, the maladaptive complex scheme of the "dysfunctional survival rule" was individually registered at the start of the therapy. On the one hand, its influence on the emotional regulation, the social behavior and on the symptom formation was investigated. On the other hand, its change in the direction of functional behavior control was analyzed at the end of the therapy. It was also attempted to identify various typical reaction chains that lead to symptom formation (symptom paths). Both the natural primary emotion in the symptom-triggering situation as well as the resulting action stimulus was prohibited by the survival rule in more than 80 % of the patients. In almost all of the patients in the event of non-observation, this caused the loss of indispensable interpersonal references in advance so that massive anxiety was triggered. Well over 80 % of patients reacted then with secondary avoidance responses such as fainting, guilt or shame, followed by an overcompensated behavior and, ultimately, symptom formation. At the end of the therapy there was a highly significant reduction on the impact of the dysfunctional survival rule on the experience and behavior of the patient, correlating with the extent of recovery. Further detail analyses with reference to predictor characteristics are reported.

- Key words: survival rule – reaction chain to symptom – primary emotion – secondary emotion – Affective-Cognitive Behavior Therapy ACBT – Strategic Behavior Therapy SBT
Objective

• As a complexe core schema the "dysfunctional survival rule"
• seems to determine emotional,
• cognitive and behavioral actions of persons,
• so that this rule does not allow to solve interpersonal problems
• without symptoms and illness.
• The hypothesis is examined by this study.
Methods

- In 100 outpatient psychotherapy patients who were treated with strategic-behavioral therapy,
- an affective-cognitive behavior therapy ACBT after Woolfolk,
- the maladaptive complex scheme of
- the "dysfunctional survival rule" was individually registered at the start of the therapy.
- On the one hand, its influence on the emotional regulation, the social behavior and on the symptom formation was investigated.
- On the other hand,
- its change in the direction of functional behavior control
- was analyzed at the end of the therapy.
- It was also attempted to
- identify various typical reaction chains
- that lead to symptom formation (symptom paths).
Results

• Both the natural primary emotion in the symptom-triggering situation as well as the resulting action stimulus was prohibited by the survival rule in more than 80% of the patients.
• In almost all of the patients in the event of non-observation, this caused the loss of indispensable interpersonal references in advance so that massive anxiety was triggered.
• Well over 80% of patients reacted then with secondary avoidance responses such as fainting, guilt or shame, followed by an overcompensated behavior and, ultimately, symptom formation.
• At the end of the therapy there was a highly significant reduction on the impact of the dysfunctional survival rule on the experience and behavior of the patient, correlating with the extent of recovery.
• Further detail analyses with reference to predicator characteristics are reported.
Approaches of schema analysis

• Piaget (1995) Schema
• Beck (1979) basic assumption
• Grawe (1987), Caspar (2007) plan analysis
• Sulz (1994) survival rule
• Young et al. (2005) maladaptive schema
• Hayes et al. (2005) ACT: rule governed behavior
• Sachse et al. (2008) schema modification
Dependent survival rule

command: **Only if I always** give in
prohibition: **and if I never** show rage
need: **I can keep** warmth and security
fear: **and I can prevent** separation an being alone

If the Patient understands
the life determining meaning and significance
of his dysfunctional survival rule,
he is concerned and shocked.
Function analysis

1. What is the function of the symptom for self regulation?
2. What is the function of the symptom for the social system?
3. What is the purpose of the symptom?
4. What is avoided by the symptom?
Frustrating situation

Survival Rule

primary emotion

primary impulse

anticipation of consequences

secundary feeling

avoiding behavior

symptom

somatic marker

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Situation: Spouse brashly rejects heart's desire

Rage

Primary behavioral impulse: Choking

Depression

Expectation: “She won’t love me anymore.”

Survival strategy

An example: In an imaginal exercise, the patient answers:

Anticipation: She won’t love me anymore

Suppression of the impulse to attack

Fear of loss, guilt

Suppression of the impulse to attack

Depression

Fear of loss, guilt

somatic marker

primary impulse: choking

rage

Survival Rule
What happens in the symptom-triggering situation?

Frustration of:

- Needs for belonging: 66
- Needs for autonomy: 22

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Which needs are frustrated?

![Bar chart showing the needs frustrated]

- Need for attachment: 30
- Need for self value: 37
- Need for autonomy: 15
What is the first emotion? (primary emotion)

Reaction - R -: primary emotion

- grief
- anxiety
- rage
- joy

Häufigkeiten

grief 5
anxiety 3
rage 88
joy 2
What is the first impuls? (primary impulse)

- Attack: 69
- Confrontation: 12
- Separation: 12
- New behavior: 5

Häufigkeiten
Is the primary impulse adequate and suitable?

Reaction -R-: primary impulse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adequate</th>
<th>Not Adequate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Häufigkeiten

its kind and intensity

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What expectation has the person, which fear?

- Separation
- Destruction
- Loss of control
- Loss of love
- Counter-aggression
leads this fear to change of direction of behavior in the chain of reactions?
Which feeling results from expectation and fear? (secondary feeling)

- Anxiety: 46
- Guilt/shame: 9
- Grief: 8
- Powerless: 32
- Rage: 3
Which are the body reactions?

- Tension
- Tachycardia
- Weakness
- Headache
- Nausea
- Agitation
- Dizziness
- Narrow chest
- Pain

Reaction -R-:

Body reaction

Häufigkeiten

Anspannung
Herz-Kreislaufbeschleunigung
Schwäche, schwere Kopfschmerz
Übelkeit, Erbrechen, Bauchschmerz
Innere Unruhe
Schwindel
Brustkorb eng
Schmerzen
Change of direction of behavior?
Is resulting behavior contrary to primary emotion?

following the emotion  
contrary to primary emotion
Which AVOIDING behavior results?

**Avoiding behaviors:***
- Attack
- Withdrawal
- Giving in
- Diverting
- Doing nothing
- Go near the other
- Body reaction
- Expressive behavior

**Frequency Chart:**

- **Attack:** 6
- **Withdrawal:** 20
- **Giving in:** 50
- **Diverting:** 2
- **Doing nothing:** 10
- **Go near the other:** 10
- **Body reaction:** 2
- **Expressive behavior:** 6

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Which symptom results?

- Depression
- Anxiety disorder
- Obsessive-compulsive
- Adaption disorder
- Pain disorder
- PTSD
- Personality disorder
- Eating disorder
- Somatization

Häufigkeiten

Depression

Anxiety disorder
What is the effect of the symptom? What is the purpose of the symptom?

Consequence - C of symptom

- Avoiding an aversive stimulus: 65
- Stopping an aversive stimulus: 14
- Entering a positive stimulus: 12
- Keeping a positive stimulus: 2

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The impact of the survival rule

Source: VDS35-Kognitionssanalyse: Überlebensregel
Survival rule: only if I always...
Survival rule: only if I always...
	his corresponds to following dysfunctional personality traits:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personality trait</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxious-avoidant</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Histrionic</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anancastic</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survival rule: only if I always...

Patients formulated the following prohibitions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prohibition of survival rule</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To have feelings</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have needs</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have rage</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To show feelings</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To show needs</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To show rage</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Does primary impulse violate the survival rule?

Does primary impulse offend against prohibition of survival rule?

- YES: 87
- NO: 4

Häufigkeiten
Does real behavior violate the survival rule?

Does real behavior offend the order of survival rule?

Häufigkeiten

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Häufigkeiten</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Survival rule: ... **keeping need satisfaction**

Following needs were formulated:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic need – positive reinforcement</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>security</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>love</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>validation</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>warmth</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feeling welcome</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attention</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-determination</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sympathy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survival rule: ... **preventing threat**
Following threats were formulated:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic fear – negative reinforcement</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loss of love</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>separation</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter-aggression</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Losing self-control</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>destruction</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Losing control over others</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Impact of survival rule **before therapy** ...
(t-Test: highly sign (***). High power g: 0,9 bis 1,45)
Impact of survival rule after therapy...
(t-Test: highly sign (***)). High power $g: 0,9$ bis $1,45$)
Literature