



# Can we heal with metaphor?

## Figurative language in psychoanalytic approaches to trauma

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### Introduction

**Chronic Post Traumatic Stress Disorder** develops following prolonged subjection to totalitarian control with actual or perceived inability for the victim to escape.

- Developmental Trauma: early childhood experiences (sexual, emotional or physical abuse, neglect)
- Complex Trauma: one experience prolonged in time (imprisonment or torture)

Psychological symptoms include helplessness, lack of control, and deformations of identity and sense of self (Herman, 1992)

### The death of language

“The occurrence of senseless events [...] fundamentally questions the semantic dimension” (Grubich-Simitris, 1984)

**Dehumanization leads to “a world without metaphor”** (Herzog, 1982)

“The camp had dried up my brain and I could not squeeze another word from it. [...] in those folds of my brain where ecstatic adjectives were stored, there was nothing but hatred” (Shalamov, 1994)

### The reconstruction in psychoanalysis

A highly intimate, long-term relationship enhances safety, positive affect, and the empathic bond with others (Connolly, 2011)



Narrative reconstruction of events allows reorganizing internal experience and building a sense of self (Laub & Auerhahn, 1993)

Metaphor lies at the heart of our capacity to think creatively and is highly correlated with mentalization (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980)

### Objectives

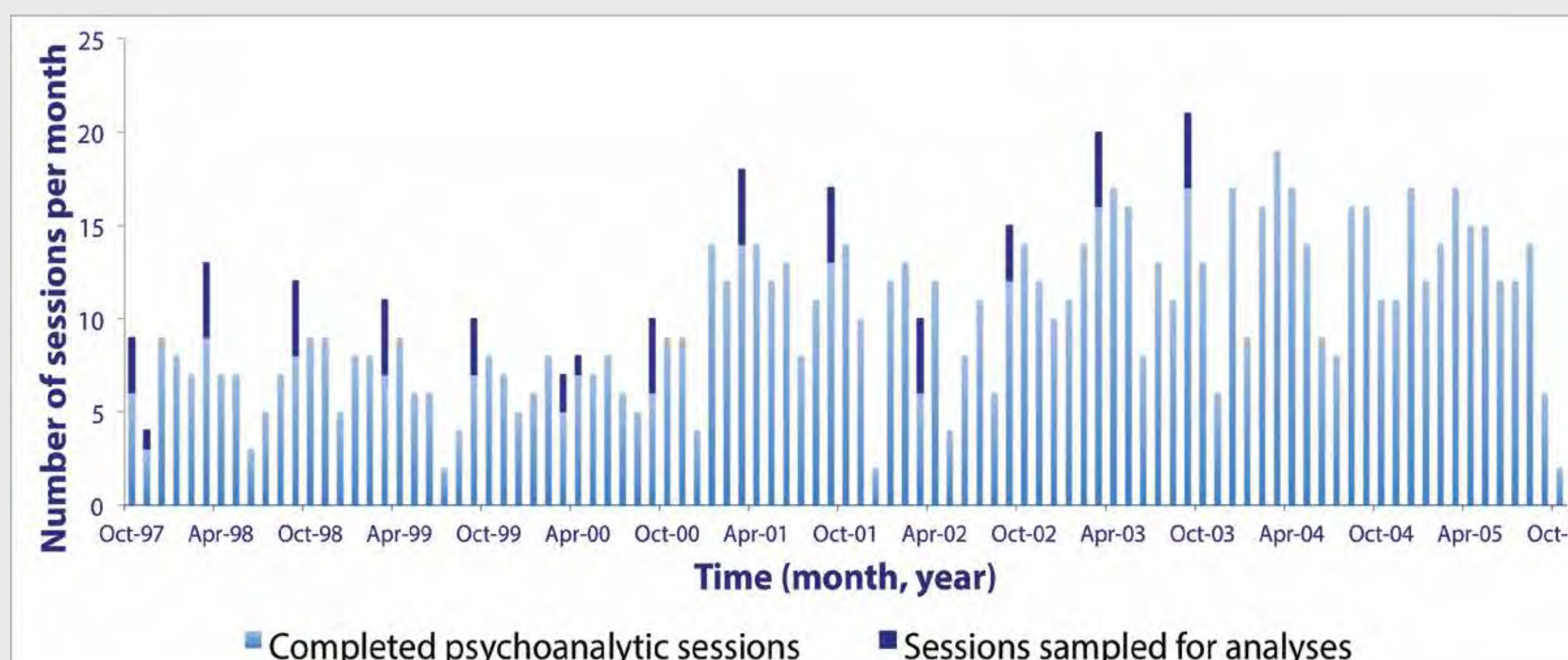
Identify literary tropes and narrative structures that emerge and evolve in a completed psychoanalysis and investigate the emergence of a narrative identity and the role of creativity in psychoanalytic treatment of trauma.

### Methods

**Subject:** The subject was selected through oral interviews and written submissions based on need for treatment, suitability for psychoanalysis, and creative promise. Both analyst and patient are deceased.

**Materials:** A complete psychoanalytic treatment over 8 years, for a total of 968 recorded sessions. Analyses include a sample of sessions equally distributed across time.

Number of sessions completed per month of therapy



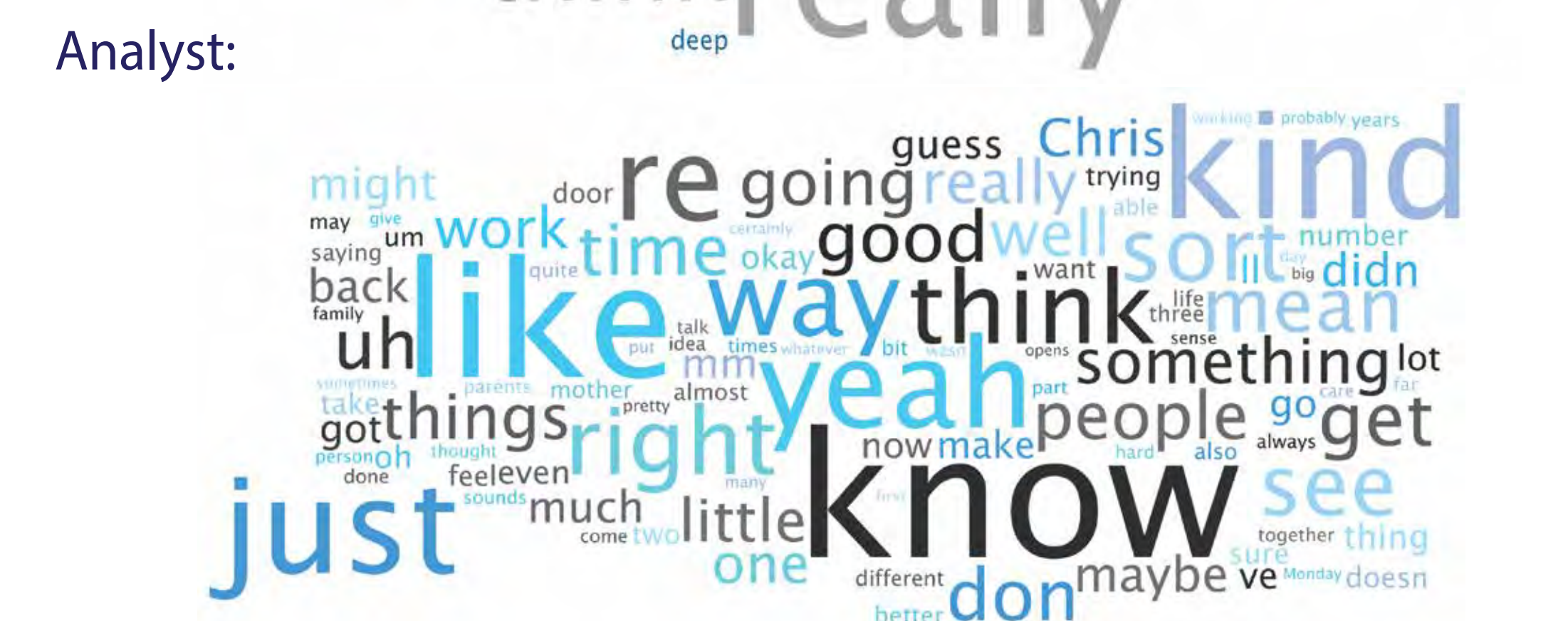
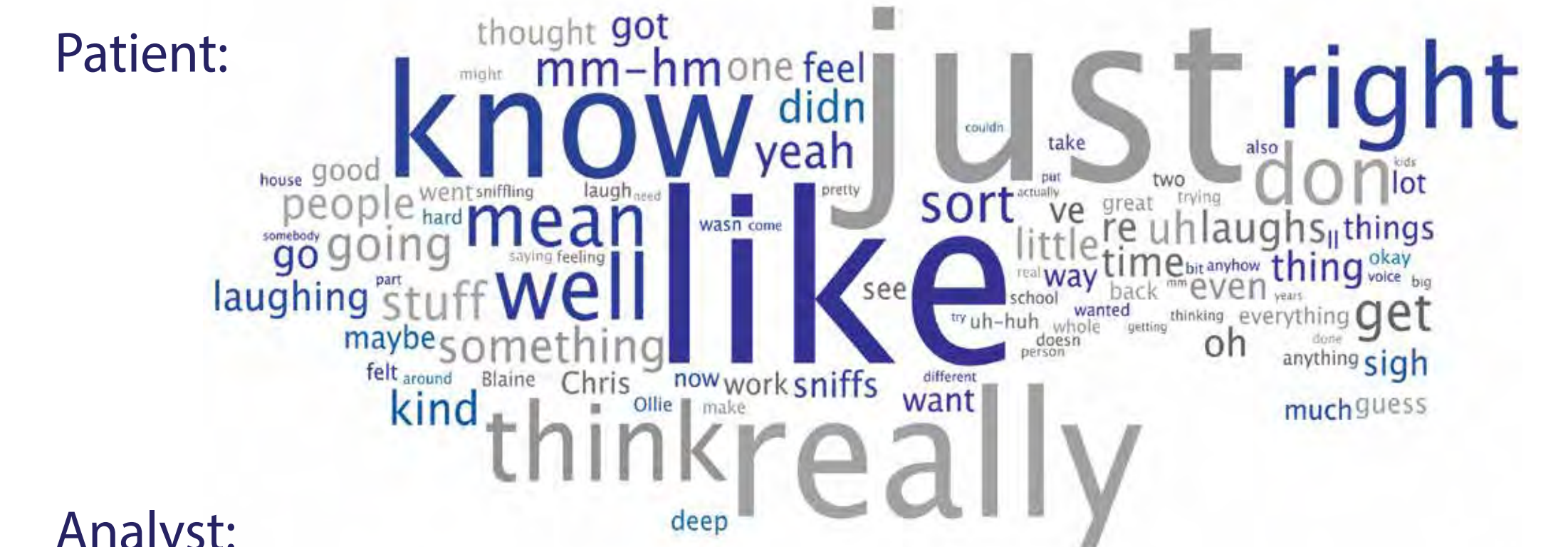
**Other measures:** the subject completed a battery of psychological testing including Attachment Inventory (AAI), Rorschach Test, Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), Bender-Gestalt Test and Thematic Apperception Test (TAT).

### Analyzing metaphor

1. **Manual identification of metaphors** (Pragglejaz Group, 2007)
  - For each lexical unit, establish meaning in context
  - Determine whether the unit has a more basic meaning e.g. more concrete, precise, or related to bodily action.
  - Decide whether contextual meaning contrasts with basic meaning but can be understood in comparison with it.
2. **Text mining with NVivo**
  - Similes (like, as)
  - Common verbs (make, give, put, think, part, way)
  - Prepositions (in, on, up, down, within, between, out of, from through, into, over, behind)

### Lexical Choices

Word usage frequency summaries over the course of treatment



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