

Presentation of clinical material about a therapeutic group of teenagers

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Abstract

The author presents a group of duration of one year, which is constituted by six members aged between 16 and 22 minutes. The sessions are weekly duration of an hour and thirty minutes. In the first session the therapist has been an active dreamer with his eyes open for the entire group. Through the image of the "History endless" returned to the members of their existential position of "waiting for the dust grains destructiveness of anything," however, able to bring to life "the world of Fantasy." Making possible an imaginative capacity even on content so deadly has mobilized members in the hope of salvation, enabling them to project themselves in a constructive future. In the next session in fact, the boys lead the group through dreams-nightmares, anxieties related to their representation of self. The character Zero represents the part of self-restraint miserable and therefore feared. Its representation in ridiculous allowed them to tolerate, accept and make be faced by themselves. In this way the children were able to produce a dramatic shift from existential emptiness (Zero), forced to imagine a magical and omnipotent force (God), which alone can deal with it, hope to be able to use at least "that one grain of dust, "as a symbol of the beginning of a new birth despite its major limitation.

Key-words: adolescence, group, imaginative ability, dream, conductor

The group introduced here counts six people aged 16-22, and the doctor A. Baldassarre.

MARIA: female, 19, Ethiopian, bulimic, second born daughter, her elder brother lives in London, she lives with her mother and an aunt, having lost her father, a lorry driver in a car accident.

The accident happened when she was 10 and was not taken to the funeral.

She has lived in London from 10 to 17 at her brother's house, working.

Now she is in Italy because of some physical symptoms of sickness.

ANNA: female, 18, parents of Southern origin, first born daughter, she has got a stammering brother. She lives in Rome and has never been involved in any sentimental relations.

She idealizes her father and depreciates her mother, has also always demonstrated an aggressive attitude towards others.

She is strongly critic towards a family which she reposes "perfect".

Her Ego is frail.

DANIELE: male, 22, he asks for marital therapy, as he had left home being compelled to choose between "Ursula or his studies"; the family is against his first important sentimental relation. At the moment he lives at his grandmother's house. He describes his parents incapable of understanding the emergency of some situations and of taking care of serious problems.

His left hand shivers even if he hasn't got any real physical problem.

MARCO: male, 17, only child, his mother died from brain cancer when he was 10; he lives with his father, who is disabled for a stroke and suffers from depression, and his grandmother.

He shows autism and inhibition in the cognitive and emotional processes.

He has neither got relations, nor friends: "It's a waste of time to go on a school trip, spend money ..."

AURORA: female, 17, her parents are separated, she lives with her father, a left oriented intellectual, after the severe depression suffered by her mother; though she has got a younger sister who still lives with the mother. She shows panic attacks and a form of persecution mania.

She shows an aggressive and antisocial behaviour.

At the beginning of the therapy she used to come with friends fearing an aggression by street boys.

MICHELA: female, 17, only child, separated parents, says she has the feeling " that people want to get away from her", in conclusion nobody wants to be with her.

She lives with her mother who appears to be a childish competitive woman, her father ignores her completely.

She often blushes and is ashamed of that, especially at school. She shows such an inanity in her way of thinking that learning is difficult.

Her boyfriends usually leave her alone.

She has also been compelled to change school because unable to feel at easy in the class, she now justifies it saying that "those boys were not nice to me".

The first session after Easter break

April 28th, 1998

The group comprehends Anna, Daniele, Marco, Aurora, the therapist, doctor A. Baldassarre, Michela and Maria, sitting clockwise.

Silence

Maria- I would like to tell you that my brother came from London, and also one of my aunts visited me. My brother's visit happened to be very interesting, even if I discovered that he already knew some circumstances before I did. When I told him about my aunt lately behaviour, (she used not to go to work, spending her days going to church and praying), he was not at all surprised; when I also told him that my mother and my grandmother quarreled a lot, he was not surprised either. Moreover he asked me why I could not remember what happened when our father was alive, for example that our parents were used to quarrel and also our aunt and our mother did

quarrel a lot, my brother thought that our aunt flirted with our father. I said that I could not remember anything and then he asked me "where were you?" So I realize that I had an idea which was completely different from what he was telling me. It seemed to me that I was watching a serial like "Dynasty", something not belonging to my family, something from another planet!

Michela- and after that?

Maria- I must say that after my brother's speech, I started comparing facts, things which I remember and saw at that time and I must conclude that what he told me it is not so absurd.

(during Maria's speech the other seem to be not interested).

Therapist- (What struck me is the silence of the group, everyone appears to be involved in his own thoughts). It's hard to face the truth.

Anna- It happened to me that I had a positive idea of a friend at the beginning, then I changed this idea. Lately I have known that her father is in a mental hospital for criminals because he killed his brother in law as he was jealous of him. Before that, I did not realize the paranoid traits of her character, but now I understand her strange behavior. I should have realize it before: are these things hereditary?

Therapist: Paranoid gene has not yet been discovered.

Daniele- Anna, you know, your friend is of your age. We have idealized our parents because we were young and they were our reference points, but now we are adults and we have to rely on ourselves.

Anna- It's for that reason that I can't continue the relation with my boy friend Giordano, he is intelligent, clever, lively and I feel inferior to him. Once, joking, he said to me : "why do you go to the therapeutic sessions? There, all of them are all depressed, you need my presence to feel alive."

Maria- ...speaking of friends, my friend did arrive and it was another shock to me...as she travels, goes around and came to Rome just for me and, in spite of that, I had a really bad behavior. I have the feeling I won't succeed in changing myself. Maybe I have changed a bit...but only about little things.

Therapist- it's not easy to accept the idea about our parents and friends collapse, but it helps us to become adults; even if we have to face the envy for those who feel better than us and make us feel as if we don't have any project, any place, nothing.

Maria- sure, I feel envious, because I think that I may do the same things the others do, even better. I only don't do them: for example the boy I like so much...I know that he likes me too - someone told me- but I don't do anything to see him again, worse, I avoid his presence.

Therapist- because of some recurring episodes within the members of this group, I am thinking of the movie "The endless story"...have you seen it?

Maria-no, I haven't.

Marco- if you want I can lend you the cassette: it's something funny, I don't see the movies, I just record them. I record everything, if you like something...ask...

Anna- Marco you are our cassette dispenser...

Aurora- that is the movie I like best.

Michela- I don't remember it very well.

Daniele- no, I don't remember it well too.

Michela- I remember the story started with a boy who entered in an antiques shop and started reading a book. Then he identified himself with the protagonist of the story. I don't remember what happened then.

Daniele- the boy had to face many trials to help the Fantasy world not to disappear into the Nothing which was proceeding towards it. The most difficult trials were at the beginning of his fight. In the last one the protagonist had to remember to trust himself. At the end of the story the boy has only a grain of dust in his hand and the Nothing seems winning, but both the boy and the princess know that the grain of dust is enough, because just expressing a wish, the world of Fantasy will be reconstructed.

Marco- I only remember that a character of the movie is robbed of his memory. That thing shocked me because I always wonder how can someone live without memory!

Aurora- it gives me a feeling of anguish.

Therapist- through this story I think we all are saying that it is important to find out will to wish things, even if we sometimes feel poor and strengthless.

Session of May 5th, 1998

All of the member of the group are here, Aurora arrived a little later. We are sitting clockwise: Anna, Daniele, Marco, Aurora, the therapist, Michela.

Maria- I have had a recurring dream. I have been dreaming for years that someone is running after me...the circumstances can be different, also the places, but the fact that someone runs after me is always the same. It often happens that there are blood and dead people around...In my last dream there were two men who entered the place where my employer and I were staying and I immediately understood that they were going to steal him money. I thought to do something, even if I didn't know how, as they were two and had weapons. They saw me and one of them wanted to kill me, the other did not want, he said not her. Then I ran and they ran after me. Of a sudden someone came, he said to be God, whose name was Zero...(she laughs) a psychotic who said he wanted to redeem everybody and started shooting, pointing to the legs...at the end he does not do anything to me. When I start running again they run after me, but when I stop running and hide myself, surprisingly they also stop and don't see me. Differently from the other nightmares, I had, in this dream, stop myself at last. In the other dreams I always went on running thinking that if I stopped I would have troubles. In this dream when I stop running, my legs are extremely tired.

Aurora. (speaking to Marco), did you wear glasses in the dream?

Marco- yes, but now I wear them rarely.

(silence)

Marco- I daresay to say something: I think that a dream, whatever is the dream, it must be understood as the dreamer's product. (to Maria) I was surprised by the fact that you were astonished because they stopped when you stopped. Those persons are

creatures you have created, so they must express something which is inside of you. I go on saying that as your ex-employer was there, the dreamt may mean that you have ill-feelings towards him, as he dismissed you, even if you did a good job.

Maria-I don't know if it is like that. For sure, Zero was an extraordinary character...so strange...he made me laugh...he was completely mad...

Aurora-by any chance, was your aunt dressed like Zero?

All of them laugh.

Therapist-we are experimenting the power of a tragicomic effect, as we have a paradox of someone frightening us, who says to be God; we may hypothesize that when we feel as nothing, it means we are trying to find out some strength from inside.

The atmosphere becomes more serious.

Maria- I felt that Zero was important in the dream.

Therapist- at a certain point Maria stops herself, for the first time, and this makes her change her point of view and the way to face her fears.

Maria- Aurora said something about my aunt wearing Zero's dresses, well...I get angry with my aunt because with her I can't say what I would like and so I get angry.

Anna-when you say what you really think, the others you feel uncovered, without defences.

Therapist-what are the things we cannot say here?

Anna-I have a recurring dream too, but for some years I haven't had it. I dreamt a chocolate river and a cake house. I got into the house and from the roof some mattresses started falling down; then a man's voice said: "what are you doing?, what are you doing?" again and again. I was 16 at that time.

Therapist- It's probable that at that age you felt in between an idyllic and fancy world and the needs of a more mature age, which can be felt as something precocious and obliging.

Anna-I wanted to say something but I do not feel like as I think it's something really private...I also am sure that if I succeed in saying what I have in mind I would feel better as this group represents a secure spot for me.

Daniele-I have always had nightmares, bad men ran after me. When I started running, I could not, instead I went on slowly slowly. When my mother watched thrillers on television I was scared and during the night I did not succeed to get asleep. So I called my parents...I bothered them ...may be they wanted to stay alone...and I started calling "mummy...daddy" (smiles) it was not nice for them! When my sister, who was used to sleep in my parents'room at the time she was very small, came to sleep in my room, I felt much better, calmer. If I woke up because of nightmares, I told her that I had only bad dreams and I got asleep almost at once. I haven't had nightmares for some time. About this group I have the same idea Anna has: also for me this group represents a reference point. I feel that what I say here gets consideration and I also take in consideration what the others say.

Michela- also for me this place represents a spot where to speak... I was thinking of my childhood when I was afraid to go to bed, because I had the idea that the bottom of the bed was full of snakes, spiders, etc...one day my uncle gave me a book about a small ghost, with drawings for children that now make me laugh...at that time at the first sight I was terrorized of it and I did not want even touch the book.

Anna- speaking of "nonentity", I feel inferior to Gordano, I also know that it does not depend on him: he does not think that I am inferior ; if I would be with other people I would feel inferior as well, I would feel inferior to anyone.

Aurora seems to be restless, nervous, as if the group cannot do anything for her.

Therapist- Aurora, would like to say something?

Aurora- I am listening to you all, but I can't speak, I do not think these things can help me.

Therapist- Aurora's suffering has increased, also her rage for the group, she feels linked to the group and would escape, but she can't succeed as it happened before. That makes her suffering increase.

Aurora- It would be a great step not to escape anymore.

I felt helped by the group, but I also see that I can solve things alone out of here.

Therapist- There is still a feeling of dependence which frightens, right now that some barriers used as defences are falling down.

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