

Individuation of the self and eating disorders in adolescence

Giancarlo Di Luzio

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to present an etiopathogenetic hypothesis of eating disorders (DCA) during adolescence, from the theoretical model of Self Psychology and clinical experience gained in the field. According to this hypothesis, a particular structural deficit of the Self and familial relations lay the groundwork that structures an eating disorder, in a time when food and weight changes occur physiologically. The second section highlights all this, through the description of a session of group psychotherapy featuring patients with eating disorders.

Key-words: eating disorders , adolescence , analytical group psychotherapy , self-psychology

In this short article I will briefly give an opinion¹ on Eating Disorders (E.D.) in adolescence that I elaborated from my experience with patients affected by E.D., treated mainly in analytical group psychotherapy.²

Then I will relate on a session in which young patients told some fairy tales. In these tales one can trace significant aspects of their difficult individuation path.

It is with extreme frequency that young individuals suffer from E.D., especially girls³ even if it is with a certain difficulty that they are expressed in an explicit way, due to feelings of shame or absence of illness awareness³.

One must refer to literature for the nosographic (ICD-10, DSM-IV Classification), epidemiologic, clinic and therapeutic aspects.

The data frequently reported is that on 100 girls of age 15-25, 10 suffer from an E.D.; out of these 2 from a severe E.D. (more precisely, about 0,5 from nervous anorexia and 1,5 from bulimia).

As it is known⁴ E.D. include: Anorexia Nervosa (A.N), Bulimia Nervosa (B.N) and Eating Disorders Not Otherwise Specified (EDNOS). This last group also includes B.E.D (Binge Eating Disorder). Rarer forms are verifiable in the age of growth taking into account the differential diagnosis for very young patients⁵.

Classifications of the DSM IV and ICD-10 exclude the psychogenic obesity which is also closely linked to E.D.. In fact it is often the starting point and sometimes the final stage. They both share the same "negative body image"⁶ and the necessity of the multidisciplinary approach.

Working and writing specifically on E.D. in adolescence I. Bruch (1973) with clinical farsightedness places in the same area, even if on opposite poles, E.D. (in particular A.N.) and what she defines as "growing age obesity". To one extreme therefore there is A.N., in which the maximum of alimentary restriction leads to a weight loss with life risk (*quoad vitam*) among the highest in psychiatric diseases. To the other

extreme there is "growing age obesity" that is a psychogenic overeating condition, often due to BED, with a serious health risk (*quoad valitudinem*). Bruch (1973) claims that both these two conditions are opposite but similar ways to escape the adolescence developing challenge taking shelter in the more controllable body and food areas; this condition of "anaesthesia" of the adolescence process is compared to the story of the *Sleeping Beauty*. At the age of fifteen she is exploring a forbidden wing of the castle when she is pricked by the sharp needle of a spinning-wheel and enters into a long long sleep.

Adolescence and Eating Disorders

Adolescence, as it is well known, is the nodal point for the development of E.D.. In fact it is the critical period in which various factors converge: the process of individuation of the Self, the elaboration of the idealized infantile Self (including the idealized body image), the experience of comparison with peers, a more autonomous self-experimentation and separation from the family, the mental integration of the adult "sexualized" body and the definition of gender identification.⁷

This remarkable psychic torment is one of the reasons why E.D. really begin in adolescence.

As it is well known E.D. have a multifactor origin. Biological, psychic and environmental factors are closely intertwined.

In fact in adolescence important biological factors are added to the psychic and relational ones. In particular the hypothalamic-hypophysal-gonadic axis activation supports the physiological processes of somatic growth and sexual development; this causes an increase in food intake in order to satisfy the energetic and anabolic needs.

In fact two "para-physiological" phenomena, at the limits of physiology, meet in this phase and in predisposed cases contribute to the development of E.D.: the increase in appetite and "dieting":

1. The increase in appetite and puberty weight increase of the girl at around 12 years of age, due to hormonal growth, stimulates the somatic growth processes and modifies the fat distribution placing it in typically female areas (pelvis, thighs...). These phenomena scare the girl and cause her to experience a worrying loss of self-control.
2. Dieting: this constitutes a form of compensation for the former phenomenon: the girl regains a feeling of self-esteem and power. She starts to control her alimentation and actively checks on her weight and body shape.

The two phenomena favour both transitory and partial E.D.. which are so common at this age, as well as "structured" E.D.. In my opinion this latter outcome occurs when the para-physiological phenomena can come together with a particular inadequate structuring of the Self (and of the family relationship context). Having said that, each situation is different from another and therefore any schematization is only a

theoretical-clinical point of reference. The analytical work does however show that often such a deficit was generated from a particular “transgenerational field”⁸ and following a predisposed infantile phase.

In summary the hypothesis on the E.D. genesis expressed in this work is the following:

In a transgenerational field and after a predisposed infantile phase a deficient Self is generated unable to face the development tasks of adolescence. The increase in appetite and weight contribute⁹ to the start of dieting, which in turn leads to alimentation restriction or loss of control (which will then take structure in the E.D. symptoms.) The deficient experience of oneself is projected and “put into practice” in the body image and generates the experience of the “negative body image”: the image of one’s body is experienced as “faulty” and one tries to “magically repair” it with alimentation control. When this is “almighty” it leads to a life-threatening restriction (A.N), when it fails it leads to “eating binges” with attempts of compensation by means of vomiting, laxatives, etc.(B.N.) and also without compensation (B.E.D).

The analytical work with these patients highlights a highly varied transition from one form to another. The fixed continuity in the same nosographic pattern is therefore becoming more the exception than the rule.

The “transgenerational field” and the predisposed infantile phase

Analytical work often shows us that the parents of the child have suffered from alimentary problems themselves and that they had suffered from lack of care from their own parents.

Literature also highlights weight and alimentary troubles and diabetes in parents, ancestors and relatives as predisposal factors of E.D..

The food and body image culture they received in their family is handed down to the child from birth. It can be a hyper-evaluation of food as a “good object” that with “almightiness” cures all “negative internal objects”. This means the attunement and mirroring of affections remains lacking while overeating and being overweight becomes the family reference model. On the other hand a phobic approach to food and weight increase (“to be fat”) means the development of an anxious control over calorie intake and weight increase from an early age.

So from the earliest stages the mother-child relationship is altered in the sense that the mother, incorrectly identifying her own or her child’s emotions¹⁰, uses food as a “calming” factor for every emotional situation. This leads to a progressive inactivity of the physiological circuits of hunger and satiety perception.

Due to family “transgenerational” psychopathologies the parents often inherit a narcissistic fragility with super-ego, perfectionist and compulsive-obsessive aspects. Their personalities are often scarcely mirrored and permanently hypercritical and depreciating.

As they had experienced themselves they transfer to the daughter the job of living up to highly perfectionist ideals, both in social image and in academic performance.

However her Self and her potential are not reflected and therefore the girl prematurely sees herself as “faulty”, “inadequate” and “devalued.”¹¹

In this context the young girl is confused and both torn between her needs and her parents’, and also between her emotional and alimentary needs. The body experiences are muddled up with the psychic ones and the development of a healthy perception of hunger and satiety is compromised. As Bruch (1973) correctly underlined, these effects are not totally innate. They are “learnt” correctly in a facilitating relationship context.

Therefore at this point alimentation has lost its connection with biological aims, but has taken on the psychic function of emotional regulation and self-structuring.

The Self-deficit in E.D.

Bruch (1973) wonderfully described the deficient sense of the Self¹² as a dimension characterized by interior emptiness, hyper compliance to what others desire, social isolation, in the belief of not being able to live up to ones parents’ perfection.

The Self-Psychology has added to this a theoretical frame useful to its understanding. It is a description of the self-object¹³ functions and experiences (fusion, mirroring, antagonism etc.) necessary for the structuring of a Self which is healthy, authentic, mirrored, capable of self-esteem and development, assertion and creativity.

S. Sands (1989)¹⁴, in particular, studied the application of the psychology of the Self to E.D.. As previously stated, the future patients’ Self hasn’t had the possibility in the family to develop in the context of valid and mirroring self-object experiences. The deficient self-object relationships don’t allow the girl to feel positively “validated” and “confirmed” in her being and existing. She therefore feels the need to carry out particular “repairs” to her image in order to be “presentable” to others.

In this non facilitating relationship context the girl has blocked the development of the “nuclear project of the Self.” She has structured a substitute “adaptive” Self which is often “obliging” to parents’ expectations and highly idealized. The experiences of a respected, effective, autonomous, competent and authentic Self are compromised¹⁵. The devalued Self, deprived of love, is lived, with variations from case to case, as “negative, empty, inadequate, inconsistent, ugly, different, alien, without rights, unpresentable, non-existent, etc.).

Progressively and prematurely a permanent lack of self-esteem dominates and pervades the idea of oneself. It is in this situation of vulnerability that she arrives to puberty. It must be underlined that this fragile self-esteem will remain as one of the more pervasive and constant nuclear feelings in E.D. to an extent that they represent one of the most important semiological criteria in the diagnostic evaluation.

E.D. in adolescence

However the development task in this phase needs sufficient self-esteem to confront oneself to others. It needs a reduction in the “symbiosis” with parental figures and a

differentiation from them. A restructuring of oneself that integrates new body experiences, the identification of kind and the reshaping of the ideal Self.

It is necessary therefore to have a radical change of the Self-objects scenario. This must move from the family area to the “laboratory” of ones peers and the world of other adults.

The confrontation with ones peers, requiring an exposure to other real, concrete and limited aspects of the Self seen as faulty, generates feelings of unbearable anxiety and depressive frustration.

The precarious “presentability” of oneself and the inadequate relational support of the family open the route to a possibility of a “retirement” from interpersonal rapports. The girl closes herself off from others and puts her psychophysical development into hibernation. She “stops” time¹⁶ and regressively substitutes the new adolescent-relational self-objects with the more reassuring world of the body and a relationship with food.

Moreover the first menstruation, weight increase, the reshaping of a more feminine and softer figure and the increase in appetite lead her to a situation of “alarm”. The body has now become the most critical area for her self-esteem. Mass-media models, comments by her parents, boys and friends “stress” her relationship with her body. The body image experienced as a representation of the Self is given substitutive “reparatory” functions of her psychic image.

If in all girls there is a tendency of body and weight control, in her it is all the more accentuated. The emerging sexuality heightens her feelings of inadequacy. She escapes from the dangerous “match” and tries to recover self-esteem and a positive image by playing her own “game” of diet control with the objective of reduced weight and a thin appearance. In summary: the inhibition of the Self individuation associated with a non-perceptive state of hunger and satiety plus the installation of the alexithymic condition cause a shifting of the psychic experience to the body area. The Self is realised in the body image. It becomes the representation of the total Self and therefore a “negative body image”. With the excess in weight the vulnerable Self is hidden and “protected”; instead with emaciation it is “repaired” with a “thin” appearance. This is positively idealized as “ethereal”, “delicate”, and “disembodied”¹⁷. At the same time the binges try to make up for and calm the empty space but also to the other extreme to express an angry attack on the negative Self.

In time the “match” with food and the body can become an exciting and euphoric challenge. In A.N. cases in particular: peaks of exaltation and abysmal lows in self-esteem are reached, depending on the success or failure of these objectives. These are omnipresent in the thought of an A.N. case.

At this point one of the results is that the mind, so one directionally absorbed, will no longer be subject to intense, driven, emotional and relational anxieties of the adolescent experience. It will, on the other hand, be occupied obsessively and with a persecution complex of thoughts concerning body shape and food quantities and the fear of being unable to control them.

The adult and sexualized body is substituted by a “starving” or “binged” body.

In this titanic battle against vital developmental changes, alimentary habits and thoughts become a real pathological behavioural dependence, similar to substance abuse behaviour. Bulimia and anorexia become an irreplaceable companion, just as drugs are for the addict and are often perceived as their only real personality¹⁸.

Various authors talk of “bulimic” or “anorexic personality” as an autogenous system which supplies those self-object and self-nursing experiences which are not supplied in the interpersonal field¹⁹. One retires from the “interpersonal theatre” and takes refuge in a more controllable and less frustrating “body theatre”²⁰.

At this point the Self-objects no longer belong to the “human world” but to the “non-human” one²¹. The girl therefore unconsciously uses adolescent dieting, entering into a full time “structured” E.D., in order to magically stop time and the entrance into a new vital cycle which brings distress. The E.D. becomes her “faithful companion”, her “self-objects” which magically “cures” and “looks after” her Self too fragile to live among human “objects”. She resorts to old more controllable “objects”: food and the fantasy of a perfect body

The evaluation and treatment of E.D. in adolescence requires attention to the prognosis and the type of cure.

In fact, as previously stated, the majority of E.D. are transitory and regress in time. Therefore when deciding and starting an analytic treatment²² one must examine the consistence and cohesion of the Self, the seriousness of the lack of self-esteem, the entity of misperception of the body (feeling “fat”) and alexithymia, the rigidity of the ideal perfectionism, the shame in exposure to the interpersonal field especially among peers and finally to the gravity of the family psychopathology. In my experience group treatment can be very useful after an initial individual phase.

Beside, in this age group, a simultaneous family approach is both useful and effective as indicated in literature.

Clinical Material

I relate on a group session in which we focused in particular on two fairy tales meaningful in childhood and adolescence for two members of the group (Isa and Caterina): *Nevina*²³ and *The Ugly Duckling* (these were read from their personal books but due to lack of space you can find the texts in the notes).

The former tale was read and told by Caterina (CA). She is 29, anorexic first and then bulimic with a borderline personality disorder and a past of drug abuse. The latter tale was read by Isa, a severe anorexic of a Binge eating/purging type. She was keen on classic dance but when at about twelve an instructor remarked she was a little overweight to be a dancer she abandoned her passion. Her physical aspiration was to be like the “Barbie doll”. She collected dozens of them and dreamed of becoming like her. Some years earlier she had a quarrel with her father to force him to accompany her to a party. That evening the car was involved in a tragic accident and the father died. From that day all the memories of the father were erased despite she was only ten at the time. For some time she was convinced her father hadn’t died but had

simply moved to another city. One day at a party while observing her thighs she thought they were too large and from that moment she started to reduce her caloric intake. She became anorexic, her menstruations ceased, she became obsessed with her eating habits and her figure. It was sufficient to see a girl slimmer than her to be unwell for days. She couldn't bear that somebody else was a "doll". Only she was to be a "Barbie". She took great care with her clothes and in particular had a thing about shoes; she dressed as if she were a perfect "doll" to be positively appreciated when introduced to the world. Initially she successfully defeated hunger but slowly but surely hunger got the upper hand and so she started binge eating and vomiting. She has been in the analytic group for almost four years and has gradually become more cooperative.

This session took place in July 2007.

The other group members are:

- Vanni (24 yrs, bulimic)
- Eloisa (24 yrs, bulimic)
- Cecilia (28 yrs , anorexic)
- Gina (21 yrs, bulimic)
- Mary (21 yrs, bulimic)
- Renzo (17 yrs, bulimic)

A (Analyst): "Do you remember that in the last session an interest in fairy tales from one's childhood emerged? Do you remember any?"

CA: "I don't know why I have always liked this tale *Nevina e Fiordapriole* (*Sweetsnowflake* and *Aprilflower*)...I have brought the book ...Must I read it all? How embarrassing!"

A: "Go ahead..."

CA: "A princess called "Nevina" lived alone with her father..."²⁴

V. (Vanni): "A myth came to mind this week which is very similar to my situation...Penelope's situation in the Odyssey weaving wool and than unweaving it to avoid marrying one of the Procys. This behaviour is both to keep her mind off that Ulysses may not return and also to avoid facing the demands of the Procys. She could even stop this ritual (for example marrying one of the Procys or taking her own life) but she didn't." (He compares his situation to hers in the sense that he works out in the gym but then he cancels the good work by overeating and so the situation remains the same day after day.)

A: "There is the feeling that the situation is going forward and backward...Is there anything else?"

Isa: "My childhood tale was the *Ugly Duckling* but I can't bring myself to read it because it makes me cry...I don't know why."

Eloisa: (she volunteers and reads the tale): "...Once upon a time down on an old farm, lived a duck family, and Mother Duck had been sitting on a clutch of new eggs..."²⁵

“...The episode of the farmer who gathers it strikes me, the series of unlucky events: it ends up in the milk, in flour, it’s a complete mess, it is forced to run away...”

Isa: “I feel like crying all the same.”

Cicely: “There is a very banal film which in this period has made me think: it is *Pretty Woman*; first of all her job which is the complete opposite to mine but sometimes opposites...”

A: “They attract each other.”

Cicely: “No, they have something in common as someone so thin can have with someone so obese, that is to say food. After meeting Richard Gere she changed but in her job she already had class and beauty...nice clothes helped, however it took somebody to believe in her to bring about the positive transformation that she carries forward in life. She remained true to herself in her simplicity...so she was alone and had to depend only on herself like me as I lost my parents...although it’s not a tale, it expresses a similarity to my situation...I had actually thought of the “Ugly Duckling” too.”

A: “Let’s sum up what we have come up with , impressions...feelings...”

Isa: “I am doing my best not to cry.”

A: “You can cry if you want to.”

Isa: “The day I read the tale I broke down and criedthe fact is that I would like to know why...I had thought of the *Ugly Duckling*’s theme which is banal: ugliness becoming beauty and being admired...but I think there are many more expects that must be considered...and I’m trying to understand them.”

A: “This is the reason why it is interesting to work on myths and tales. They have an energy which goes beyond rationality and we are able to touch deep emotions.”

Isa: “As a child I avoided reading this book to avoid suffering ...”

Eloisa: “I think that one of the points which touches you is refusal...you are born and everybody refuses you and I can identify with this...”

Isa: “However this is not my story, I was strongly desired. My mother performed miracles to have me: desired, desired! I do not remember my childhood well, I had a blackout which cancelled the first 10 years. Maybe the refusal came later.”

Eloisa: “Maybe not the refusal of yourself but growing up you came to be in a certain way because a part of you was refused...”

A: “Eloisa seems to say that the feeling of being an ugly duckling or to be “defective”, “negative”, does not necessarily come from a true and real refusal but from the fact that parents look for something that doesn’t exist...in the tale the main suffering point was that the ugly duckling was not an ugly duckling but potentially a beautiful swan but nobody ever saw this potential.”

A: “When the duckling is able to “disentangle” itself from the expectations of the parents there it is a turning point. It understands that it can be beautiful and happy even if it is not what its parents would have wanted, also when he looks for his path away from them and their expectations.”

CA: “There is a possibility of identity change when he meets the swans.”

A: “It had to go against his nature, committing a violence on himself but if one wants to manage to change scenario, and that is what we are trying to do here, one can find one’s true potential.”

CA: “Identity change. It hadn’t really lived until he met the swans, all the time before seems wasted.”

Eloisa: “Maybe it makes you cry because you are still looking for this identity... who am I?”

Isa: “It could be...”

A: “There is the realization that to remain in the same scenario brings suffering. There is an impossible battle between incompatible parts...one the discovers the chance to have a different dignity, a different beauty but it is a hard struggle to move on to a new scenario even if this improves one’s value.”

A: “No one has said anything about the other tale.”

Isa: “The term diaphanous surprised me in the figure of “Nevina”: she is diaphanous, transparent, untouchable, pale, fair-haired, ghost-like. These features attract me and my perennial dilemma is whether to follow this model or not...”

CA: “But “Nevina” cannot survive in spring and I chose this tale because these two worlds can never touch...I had also thought of bringing a story of Donald Duck...”

Isa: “It is sad that they cannot be together...I was a little disappointed because I was expecting him to die in the arms of the prince or that when he raised his eyes, she would change into a star, swan...cloud...but she goes back home and that’s it.”

A: “I’m struck by the representation of these parts of oneself which we talked about; “Nevina” finds herself in a world similar to anorexia where emotions are cold and even if there is the desire for warmth, the two worlds (freezing-winter and warm-spring) are not compatible; we are experiencing this in the therapy: “Nevina” (the “anorexic part”) necessarily dies in the moment in which life is reborn but this mourning cannot be accepted; one would like a combination which is not possible...”

Cicely: “The “Ugly Duckling” spent all its life thinking and believing it was ugly because the others said so.”

A: “...“All its life” is a *lapsus* of yours...maybe one doesn’t think one has the right to change...”

Cicely: “He had convinced himself like I did. I think that who has this problem has a big insecurity. You convince yourself because the others say so. Even when it became beautiful it did not believe it. It hid its face behind its wing. It’s difficult to control this as even if they say that you are very beautiful if you passed all your life thinking you were ugly you have the impression that they say it just not to make you feel worse.”

A: “In the tale there is the convergence of two movements: one is the search for a new positive identity and the other is the fear of change...”

Cicely: “But the beauty you find may not be the beauty you were looking for because the beauty we want must be absolutely perfect and therefore it’s frustrating...”

A: “The message is not to search for that beauty which one pre-established, but maybe for the beauty of the true self that can even be superior to physical beauty...”

Cicely: “In the end however it does not have that arrogance which the other ones have when they are told that they are beautiful. Having suffered it is easier to appreciate one’s beauty without pride...”

Isa: “I feel a little anomalous. The moment I was approaching this ideal I had so much energy and joy, that I didn’t want to go back. I had suffered so much to arrive there that I had to throw it in other people’s faces and the shyness disappeared.”

Cicely: “I do not say shyness, it’s more not being convinced of having some worth.”

Isa: “I had moments in which I thought I had not reached it but I was in fact approaching what was the illness’ peak, I had a sense of power when I understood that I could do it...I had tried many times before, but I couldn’t succeed...the fall came after...”

Cicely: “You and I see beauty in a different way: you in thinness, I now see it at this moment in which I am getting back on top. When I was so thin I did not like myself, I had lost my ideal. I am speaking about my present experience...”

Eloisa: “The duckling is happy because it became itself, that is a swan. You were looking for something you were not; you could be exalted, you could like it and that was all, but in fact it was an imposed ideal, how much of you was there in that?”

Isa: “Anyway 20 kg more or 20 kg less...there is always the problem of understanding who you are but it’s as though this outside packaging, the 20kg less, has the same effect on others, giving you self-confidence.”

Eloisa: “You have a crutch with which you support yourself: “I am thin so I can expose myself””.

A: “The idea that one can be oneself is interesting of being what you really are. When people see you they send you a positive image of yourself as you really are...something that tells you: you are fine just as you are...well done...”

Cicely: “Everyone asks me: “what have you done? Have you got engaged?” Even elderly people who have not seen me for a long time. I know that when you are well, it is noticeable to others and your true self comes out. They have told me that I am full of life...I always laugh but I don’t recognize this in myself but it comes naturally...they are things I have never been told before, I am surprised as though I do not deserve it, it seems strange to me. In these moments I think: “Maybe it’s really me” but a moment later something stupid happens and I think the opposite. There is this contrast; one day you feel well, and the day after you think you are worth nothing. It’s still difficult but before these moments didn’t exist at all...”

A: “What do you think of this work on the tales?”

Cicely: “It’s cool but one does not realize...you think it’s not relevant while instead...”

A: “And...Instead...it moved an important emotive area for Isa...”

Isabel: “It’s a tale which has always made me suffer...”

The aspects of the illness which emerged from this session are many and varied. It is not possible to touch on all of them due to a lack of space. However it was reported to show an example of the topics of the internal “scenario” of E.D. patients. These

themes surfaced through the use of fairy tales, myths or other fantasy stories. In my opinion these are always useful to stimulate research in the analytical work.

Briefly we can hypothesize that:

- In the tale of *Nevina* – there is a representation of the anorexic-bulimic alexithymic problem (the far from life and emotionally “cold” part) of risking to “die” if one approaches life and emotions (the spring world of “April flower”). This is a reason why these people have difficulty in freeing themselves from the illness. Sands (1989) speaks of “bulimic” and “anorexic personality” to indicate the dominance of the pathological side of a personality.
- In the *Ugly Duckling* tale – There seems to be the story of an individual who sees himself as ugly due to a family that doesn’t recognize his “potential Self”. It is only an adventurous exploration which allows us to discover that his Self was perceived as “ugly” because it didn’t correspond to the family group’s expectations. In a new context his Self was valuable and could restart its development process.
- In the story of Penelope’s “procrastinating” behaviour – the boy “projects” the infinite rituality of compensation mechanisms and weight and alimentary phobias, which he uses to avoid confronting reality.
- In the film *Pretty Woman*, Cecilia describes the aspiration, desire and possibility of someone with a devalued Self (J. Roberts, the “prostitute”) to be re-valued if one meets a positive “mirroring” figure (R. Gere) and thus expressing her potential.

Conclusions

E.D. are traceable to problems of the Self. These emerge in adolescence due to the difficulties which the vulnerable Self encounters in its individuation process upon entering the new interpersonal “scenario”.

A positive transgenerational family history and a pre-adolescent history constitute a predisposed terrain in a phase where weight and alimentary changes occur physiologically.

Intervention in the adolescent phase is crucial. One of the most useful preventive interventions is that of DCA detection and treatment in the premature sub-clinical phase.

In E.D. the identification of the Self remains in a state of “retirement”, in a “non-human world.” It is seen as a “self-cure” for a Self too fragile to live among “human objects.”

The objective of the analytical cure is to substitute this “self-cure” with an “interpersonal cure” which should allow possibilities for the inhibited Self to reopen to the world of affection and people through therapeutic experiences of human self-objects.

Notes

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¹Influenced by psychoanalytic theories centred on Self and its developmental processes (Kohut, Winnicott, etc...).

²They are adolescents or grown-ups who are analytically working at the adolescent phase of their trouble.

³The male relationship: female is of 1:10-20.

⁴One commonly refers to the DSM IV-R classification.

⁵Rarer forms of E.D.:

- Feeding Disorder of Infancy or Early Childhood
- Pica
- Rumination
- FAED ("food avoidance emotional disorder")
- Selective Eating
- Functional Dysphagia
- Pervasive Refusal Syndrome.

⁶For "negative body image" see I. Bruch (1973) and M. Cuzzolaro (2004).

⁷The "sexualized body" of M. Laufer.

⁸See Kaës R., Faimberg H., Enriquez M., Baranes J.-J., Baranger W.-M. and other psychoanalytic authors who used the concept of "field" and "transgenerational".

⁹"Contribute" as socio-cultural factors (advertising, fashion-world images etc.) strongly influence the adolescent's physical role models.

¹⁰It is the phenomenon "alexithymia" described by Nemiah and Sifnooes (1970).

¹¹This experience is dramatically accentuated in the cases of child abuse not rare especially in bulimia.

¹²Bruch describes it as "the concept of the Self".

¹³Refer to Kohut for definitions of the Self, Self-objects and Self-object experiences.

¹⁴See bibliography for S. Sands (1989) contribution. She highlights three factors which justify the female prevalence of E.D.: the female difficulty of separation from the mother, the value of Western culture in the body image of a girl compared to motor-muscular activity of boys, the importance of the mother in the identification process.

¹⁵Is one of the signs of alexithymia.

¹⁶Comparison with the "sleep" in *Sleeping Beauty*.

¹⁷See the tale of *Nevina*.

¹⁸Neuroscience has showed that the gratification effect and food compensation, as with drugs, lies in the elevation of dopamine in the "shell" of the "nucleus accumbens".

¹⁹See bibliography of S. Sands (1989) and C. Costin (1999).

²⁰For notion of "body theatre" see S. Resnick (1976).

²¹For concept of "non-human field" see Searles in bibliography.

²²Must be integrated with nutritional-medical and psychiatric ones for the monitoring of the psychopathological and somatic conditions.

²³*Sweetsnowflake*.

²⁴She continues reading the tale *Nevine e Fiordaprile* (*Sweetsnowflake* and *Aprilflower*): “Nevina modelled it on little shapes taken from the stars and edelweiss. When the cornucopia was full, obeying her father, she emptied it at the four horizon points and snow fell on the world.

Nevina was pale and transparent. She was as beautiful as the goddesses of the past. Her locks were faintly blond. Her face was of a blond imitated by the Polar Star. Her hands were of the whiteness of not yet fallen snow. Her eyes were as sky blue as the glaciers. Nevina was sad.

In the hours of break, when the night was clear and starry, father January interrupted his work to sleep in the immense flowing beard. In these moments Nevina lent on to the icy banisters, cupped her chin in her hands and dreaming stared at the distant horizon. An injured swallow, passing over the mountains towards sunny lands had fallen into her hands. Her hands had tried in vane to comfort it. In agonized shudders the swallow had raved, longing for the sea, flowers, palm trees and eternal spring. From that day on Nevina dreamed of unknown lands. One night she decided to leave. She cautiously passed over the flowing beard of January and left the ice and eternal snow. She took the valley road and ended up amongst the fir trees. The gnomes when they saw her pass so delicately and fluorescent in the darkness of the forest interrupted their dances, straddled on the tree branches and stared at her all giggling curiously.

-Nevina!

-Nevina! Where are you going?

-Nevina, come and dance with us!

-Nevina!

And the little kind spirits crowded round her trying to stop her by tightly hugging her ankle and imprisoning her light feet in ivy branches and dead fern.

Nevina smiled, deaf to their affectionate appeals. She removed a snowflake from the silver cornucopia and spraying it around her managed to free herself from her little playmates. Thus she continued as cautiously, quietly and lightly as the goddesses of the past.

Arriving in the valley she was on the big road. The air was milder and a sense of panic overcame Nevina's heart. To breathe she removed snowflake from the silver cornucopia and sprayed it around her thus regaining strength and breath in the suddenly icy air.

She carried on quickly and covered a great distance. At a junction she halted in ecstasy with dazzled eyes. In front of her there opened up unknown space, an infinite blue plain. It was like another sky taken from the celestial vault and placed on earth, held and moved at the edges by invisible hands. Nevina pushed on stunned. The land around her changed: anemones, carnations, mimosas, violets, mignonettes, daffodils, hyacinths, jonquils, jasmines, tuberose, until the eye could see. From the hills to the sea, unstopped by the garden walls and hedges, the flowers overflowed like a river of petals from the houses and trees.

The olive trees stretched out their silver veils, the palm trees towered straight, sublime as arrows hurled into the blue...

Nevina turned her eyes on things never seen before. She forgot to spray the snowflakes and then anguish repossessed her. She then took off a snowflake and an area of pure white flakes and icy air formed around her re-giving her breath. The flowers, the olive trees, the palm trees looked with astonishment at the delicate little girl who flew past in a snow whirlwind and they shivered at her passing.

A beautiful youth, with a green and violet jerkin, appeared in front of Nevina. He stared at her with troubled eyes, barring her passage.

- Who are you?

- I am Nevina, January's daughter.

-Then don't you know that this is not your father's kingdom? I am Fior d'aprile and you are not allowed to pass on my lands. Go back to your glacier, for your good and mine.

Nevina stared at the prince with such imploring and sweet eyes that Fior d'aprile felt moved.

- Fior d'aprile let me pass! I will not stay long.

I want to touch that blue, green, red and violet snow that you call flowers. I want to dip my fingers in that upside down sky that you call sea!

- Fior d'aprile looked at her and smiled and then he nodded his head.

- Let's go then. I will show you my kingdom.

They went on hand in hand, staring into each others eyes, ecstatic and happy. But as Nevina went on a grey area obscured the blue sky and a swirl of Flakes covered the marvellous gardens. They came to a village in festivity where peasants were dancing under the almonds in blossom. Nevina wanted Fior d'aprile to let her dance. They started dancing but the happy gang dispersed with a shudder, the music stopped and the air became freezing. From a grey sky, with almond smelling snow, iced snow petals fell. It was real snow that Nevina let off when passing. The two had to escape from the angry complaints of the gathering. At a safe distance they looked back and saw that the village was again celebrating under a clear, sunny sky.

-Nevina, I want to marry you!

-Your subjects would not want a queen who lets off intense cold.

-It doesn't matter. My will shall be done.

They continued further, holding hands, staring into each others eyes, without cares and happy...but suddenly Nevina stopped with an even more delicate paleness.

- Fior d'aprile! Fior d'aprile!...I have no more snow!

And she tried in vane with her fingers the bottom of the cornucopia.

- Fior d'aprile!...I feel like I am dying!...Take me to the border... Fior d'aprile!...I can bear no more!...

Nevina doubled over, she felt faint.

Fior d'aprile tried to hold her up, he took her in his arms and carried her towards the valley.

-Nevina!

-Nevina!

Nevina did not reply. She became even more transparent. She took on the appearance of a transparent bubble about to disappear.

-Nevina! Answer me!

Fior d'aprile covered her in his silk cloak to protect her from the burning sun. He ran on, arrived in the valley to entrust her to the cold north wind.

However when he lifted the cloak Nevina was no longer there. Fior d'aprile looked around lost, pale and shaking. Where was she? Had he lost her on the way? He buried his head in his hands in desperation when suddenly his face lit up. He saw Nevina on the other side of the valley. She was smiling and waving goodbye.

The cold north wind, an old tutor of hers, was pushing her to snowy paths, towards the eternal ice, towards the inaccessible reign of her father January” (by Guido Gozzano).

²⁵“ ...one nice morning, the eggs hatched and out popped six chirpy ducklings. But one egg was bigger than the rest, and it didn't hatch. Mother Duck couldn't recall laying that seventh egg. How did it get there? TOCK! TOCK! The little prisoner was pecking inside his shell.

- “Did I count the eggs wrongly?” Mother Duck wondered. But before she had time to think about it, the last egg finally hatched. A strange looking duckling with gray feathers that should have been yellow gazed at a worried mother. The ducklings grew quickly, but Mother Duck had a secret worry.

- “I can't understand how this ugly duckling can be one of mine!” she said to herself, shaking her head as she looked at her last born. Well, the gray duckling certainly wasn't pretty, and since he ate far more than his brothers, he was outgrowing them. As the days went by, the poor ugly duckling became more and more unhappy. His brothers didn't want to play with him, he was so clumsy, and all the farmyard folks simply laughed at him. He felt sad and lonely, while Mother Duck did her best to console him.

- “We don't know anyone as ugly as you.” The ugly duckling did not lose heart, however, and kept on making inquiries.

- “Nobody loves me, they all tease me! Why am I different from my brothers?” Then one day, at sunrise, he ran away from the farmyard. He stopped at a pond and began to question all the other birds.

- “Do you know of any ducklings with gray feathers like mine?” But everyone shook their heads in scorn.

- “Poor little ugly duckling!” she would say. “Why are you so different from the others?” And the ugly duckling felt worse than ever. He secretly wept at night. He felt nobody wanted him.

He went to another pond, where a pair of large geese gave him the same answer to his question. What's more, they warned him:

- “Don't stay here! Go away! It's dangerous. There are men with guns around here!” The duckling was sorry he had ever left the farmyard.

Then one day, his travels took him near an old countrywoman's cottage. Thinking he was a stray goose, she caught him.

- "I'll put this in a hutch. I hope it's a female and lays plenty of eggs!" said the old woman, whose eyesight was poor. But the ugly duckling laid not a single egg. The hen kept frightening him.

- "Just wait! If you don't lay eggs, the old woman will wring your neck and pop you into the pot!" And the cat chipped in:

- "Hee! Hee! I hope the woman cooks you, then I can gnaw at your bones!" The poor ugly duckling was so scared that he lost his appetite, though the old woman kept stuffing him with food and grumbling:

- "If you won't lay eggs, at least hurry up and get plump!"

- "Oh, dear me!" moaned the now terrified duckling. "I'll die of fright first! And I did so hope someone would love me!"

Then one night, finding the hutch door ajar, he escaped. Once again he was all alone. He fled as far away as he could, and at dawn, he found himself in a thick bed of reeds. "If nobody wants me, I'll hide here forever." There was plenty of food, and the duckling began to feel a little happier, though he was lonely. One day at sunrise, he saw a flight of beautiful birds wing overhead. White, with long slender necks, yellow beaks and large wings, they were migrating south. "If only I could look like them, just for a day!" said the duckling, admiringly. Winter came and the water in the reed bed froze. The poor duckling left home to seek food in the snow. He dropped exhausted to the ground, but a farmer found him and put him in his big jacket pocket.

"I'll take him home to my children. They'll look after him. Poor thing, he's frozen!" The duckling was showered with kindly care at the farmer's house. In this way, the ugly duckling was able to survive the bitterly cold winter. However, by springtime, he had grown so big that the farmer decided: "I'll set him free by the pond!" That was when the duckling saw himself mirrored in the water. "Goodness! How I've changed! I hardly recognize myself!" The flight of swans winged north again and glided on to the pond. When the duckling saw them, he realized he was one of their kind, and soon made friends.

- "We're swans like you!" they said, warmly. "Where have you been hiding?"

- "It's a long story" replied the young swan, still astounded. Now, he swam majestically with his fellow swans. One day, he heard children on the river bank exclaim:

- "Look at that young swan! He's the finest of them all!"

And he almost burst in happiness. (Hans Christian Andersen)

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Notes on the author

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Dr. Giancarlo Di Luzio, Psychiatrist, IPA psychoanalyst, IAGP-COIRAG group-analyst.