

GRACE NOTES XII

DR SALMA SIDDIQUE considers food, fairytales and cultural scripting.

FOOD AND EATING is a recurring narrative woven into the process of therapy since time immemorial. Eating rituals and practices articulate different identities through cultural scripting stories (Drego, 1983; White & White, 1975), of patterns, of avoidance, of conflict and relationships, of discomforts consistent with transgenerational experiences of insecure/anxious attachments.

Food as motif, symbolism or allegory within fairytales is particularly evident in 'Hansel and Gretel' (Grimm, 2014), a tale involving the abandonment of children. The gingerbread house is home to a witch who almost eats the children. In other fairytales food can be dangerous, for example the apple in Snow White. Fairytales can hold the archaic material of our scripts (Berne, 1975, p39), giving us an ideological message (script belief) of self blame for our eating habits. The anthropologist Mary Douglas (2002) suggests that the rule making around food can create order and symbolise the good and bad split between purity and danger. Douglas gives us examples from Leviticus and Deuteronomy (Bible) warning against eating certain animals.

Food in the stories we grew up with is depicted as a tool of seduction to attract children – the red apple, the gingerbread house, the giant peach, Willy Wonka's chocolate bar – symbolic of the baited trap to entice, to lure and to fulfil desires. Steiner (1969) builds on the ideas of Berne (1975) showing how parental thinking is informed by our ideas of attachment and our belief that others may interfere with our desire to maintain an exchange of positive strokes. Hansel is fattened as a potential food source and the moral or script message of the story is if you become too greedy and try to take what you have not earned then there is a break of cultural authority (Berne, 1952), crossing the cultural frame of reference of the group (James, 1994) and inviting the game Persecutor, Rescuer and Victim. Food can be symbolic in maintaining the drama triangle.

In contemporary society fairytales and myths reflect the values of different sections of our society. For me, no story from childhood echoes this more deeply than Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (Carroll, 1992). Food in the narrative is a metaphor for growth and wellbeing that

leads to healthy adulthood. Ironically, in the journey through adolescence Alice controls and mediates her relationship with the world through her size. Once down the rabbit hole and through the secret garden Alice finds a bottle labelled DRINK ME, drinking it results in shrinking which means Alice is too small to reach the key on the table to open the door. She also eats cake labeled EAT ME and grows larger. The Alice syndrome of labelling food products (UK government public health policy) is seen to be key to tackling the obesity epidemic and the promotion of food safety is seen as a necessity to manage the shrinking and expanding of people.

How does this relate to our own experiences as clients and therapists? The recent theme of the BACP Therapy Journal has been on Fat stigma (Moller, 2014). Two reflections struck me. The first being the therapist's body size, image and identity with its potential for transference and the second being Yalom's (1989) case study of the fat lady and his acknowledgement of his disgust for the client. Prejudice and stigma are inherent in us all in and out of the therapy room.

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