

DEFENSE MECHANISMS, PERSONALITY DISORDERS AND EATING DISORDERS: A COMPARISON

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Introduction: An analysis of the literature on eating disorders (ED) indicates that Eds are often comorbid with the diagnosis of Personality Disorder (PD). This seems to be a psychopathological feature, characteristic of this patient population. However, the double classification seems to be often insufficient when describing a very complex psychopathological picture. These observations have informed our intention to investigate these two distinct nosographic groups by means of a single construct.

Aims: The aim of this study is to identify and describe (through tests that evaluate defense mechanisms) the defensive styles that characterize the two groups of patients, in order to outline a defensive profile that can assimilate or differentiate the psychopathological groups.

Materials and methods: The study was carried at the Department of Psichiatry of the San Gerardo Hospital in Monza. The Defence Style Questionnaire-40 (Farma Cortinovis, 2000) was administered and analysed. The sample consisted of 40 participants with eating disorders, recruited among the outpatients for eating disorders, and 40 patients with personality disorders recruited from two Psychiatric Outpatient Services.

Results and conclusions: The data analysis showed a statistical significance in the use of Immature defense mechanisms and Neurotic defence mechanisms in both clinical samples. The patients with PD used a significantly higher number of psychotic defense mechanisms than patients with ED. These results may suggest that in ED patients, the symptoms can be themselves considered as defense mechanisms, or a defensive style that characterizes and makes specific the psychopathological picture.