

Why Diaper Weaning is Essential in the Solidification of Individuation

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Abstract

This paper explores the importance of diaper weaning, which takes place in a period of life when the toddler is capable of individuation and partnership with his parents. Furthermore, the weaning process may take on a pivotal role in the consolidation of the personality. This article also elaborates upon the crucial conflict that the toddler encounters for the first time in his life; a conflict between his wish to do everything alone, yet also contending with feelings of being afraid that if he does not obey his parents he might lose control over them, and that they might lose their love for him. Hence, the toddler must invest his energy in an economic way. He must choose profitable or cost-effective emotional investments that enable him to balance those two poles in the conflict; to target the emotional investments by mixing or mingling aggression with libido, safeguarding his love for his parents while regulating his aroused aggression toward the same, yet frustrating, libidinal parents. Moreover, the toddler (or his personality components like narcissism, ego and its regulation of object relations) regulates this mixing or mingling aggression with libido while investing it both in his autonomy and the leadership of his parents. Diaper weaning is here considered a developmental process of the emotional capacity to delay satisfaction, to master retention, to learn from others, release and separation from a toddler's "bodily products". It is a pivotal stage of the separation-individuation-autonomy/separateness and "Jointness" process.

Keywords: Healthy narcissism; Immune system; Child development; Familiarity; Parenting; Object relations; Child psychology; Diaper weaning; Separateness; Separation-individuation

Introduction

The toddler, from the age of two years onwards, becomes generally able to invest long-term emotional energy. This reflects a mingling of aggression with libido-at this stage, he is mastering his physical-bodily motility, bodily sensations, proprioception, and self-representations of his body-image. Hence, the essential impact of the weaning process starts from the age of two (or even two years and six months), parallel to the toddler's expression of autonomy.

At this age, the toddler's ego is capable of activating adaptation mechanisms [1-4] such as sublimation and symbolisation [5-7] which in the context of the diaper weaning experiences is crucial for individuation. These feelings include power, omnipotence [8], mastery, possessiveness, responsibility, negotiation, and communication. Memory traces of these crucial experiences concerning mastery of bodily representations provide the essential attributes for the toddler's consolidation of his individuation and autonomy, of his anal narcissistic ideals of power and mastery. His capacities to master retention of his "bodily products" and separation from them may be integrated into his personal characteristics and adapt himself to cultural behavioural standards. They are also crucial in formulating his capacity in joining with others in communication and intimacy [9,10], to separate from them while enhancing his emotional richness.

We have to remember that the baby passes the first weaning process of suckling [11] at about one year of age. I will not elaborate further on the importance of this first weaning process for the baby, as it is beyond the scope of this article and the processes involved are quite different to those seen in diaper weaning.

A baby can be diaper weaned once they have passed their first birthday. At this age, the baby accepts weaning in order to please his parent. The baby accepts this process with compliance, without any sign of self-willingness and pleasure. Nevertheless, I have met parents who have told me that their child, at about 18 months of age, no longer wanted to use diapers despite the fact that his parents would prefer that he continue to use them. In this case the baby gains the same benefit as if he were two and a half years old. But if it is the parents who feel the need to wean the child at one year, it is only the parents who stand to benefit. The baby misses the opportunity to enhance his individuation, of wishing to be weaned, of being respected as a separate individual who has personal needs separate to those of his parents. Very often, these children are inclined to develop a false self and display a genetic oral aspect to their personality. There are also children, with a genetic anal aspect to their personality, who react to the tendency to taming them with constipation or encopresis. (This important issue of genetic and biologic aspects of the personality is beyond the scope of this article.)

In enhancing their individuation, children as well as adults have to express a desire to be weaned, to enjoy the negotiation and marketing [12] inherent in giving and receiving, of restraining and emptying and imitating those who are considered grown up. Each personality is forged out of conflict resolution [11]. It is the privilege of any individual to possess his own assets and to be generous enough to deliver them only when he wants! At one year of age, a child must deliver when others want him to; he thus loses the essential impact of the solidification of his individuation.

Diaper weaning as a pivotal stage in solidification of the individuation process

I wish to identify diaper weaning as a pivotal point within the emotional development within the anal stage; its profound impact is

reflected in all the personality's components. We may observe in this stage the progress of narcissism, the improvement in object relations, and the solidification of the ego.

For parents, diaper weaning may be experienced as a difficult period in their relations with their child. Parents are proud of their child's psychomotor achievements and they are elated by his body mastery and self-control. They encourage his creativity and autonomy and they try to consider and respect his separateness. Concomitantly, parents are aware of their child's need for partnerships and for sharing with them the whole processing of weaning, while at the same time they encounter their child's need to "do alone". It is not easy at all for parents-their child asserts his individuation and alongside this he often competes in a power struggle with his parents' authority.

When parents are disappointed by their child's behaviour during such a struggle, they tend to criticize his performance by shaming him. Of course they are primarily motivated by the love they feel for their child, but in these moments the toddler feels most keenly their disappointment, which he translates as the loss of parental love. It is unbearable for him/her. "Over time, tensions build in relationships between parent and child. Unfortunately, it is human nature to put more weight on disappointment than appreciation" [9 p. 23]. On these occasions, the infant loses the benefit of the diaper weaning process and his self-esteem tends to be low. The toddler is testing his parents' limits and on the same time, he enjoys bonding with them, belonging to them and being part of a powerful family.

Reverberations of these combined memory traces of bodily achievements [1,13,14], together with ongoing parental encouragement along the process of diaper weaning, constitute a sort of a psychic envelope for parents' and toddler's sense of his familiar Self, familiar parent/child and the familiar family. Hence, the toddler experiences his bodily actions and achievements as profoundly satisfying (for his parents and for himself), and feels intense delight in jointness [15] with his parents. "It is an intrinsic aspect of separating from and identifying with the parental object. This psychic shift in self-representation is indicated by a child's willingness to do for himself some of what was hitherto done for him by the parents" [16, p. 66].

We May Divide the Process of Diaper Weaning into Three Periods

First period-from approximately twelve to eighteen months

At around this age the toddler, with the encouragement of his parents, begins to master his body motility and to master control of his sphincters. His parents support his body mastery when he climbs stairs or jump or wish to ride the slide and they encourage him to dress himself, using his own self-control. However, when parents ask to change his diaper or to go to the toilet, these moments become points at which parental encouragement encounters the child's resistance and stubbornness.

Despite the toddler's self-pleasure at this new mastery ability, he experiences his parents' demand to replace his "heavy" diaper with a "clean" one, or to urinate and defecate in the toilet, as an assault on his body self-image and on his separateness. The toddler can't understand why he must relinquish his diaper that represents for him a part of his body, like his skin. While his parents see a heavy diaper as a mess to dispose of, he sees his bodily functions as his only means of productivity. The familiar security he feels when he senses his diaper as part of his body and the pleasure he gets from producing his bodily-

productions are threatened to be taken away from him as soon as possible. These new requirements trigger conflicts of interest between the toddler and his parents. The toddler wishes to enjoy his body self-image "production" in his diaper, while his parents request separation from his diaper or that he restrain evacuation until he gets to the toilet. These demands imply the need to forego many of his familiar and pleasant feelings.

Dani (at seventeen months) resists any persuasion on his father's part to take away his heavy and dirty diaper and to have him wear a new, clean item. Both his parents are very pedantic. Often, they feel even helpless while facing Dani's resistance. Especially, Dani's mother suffer from the conflicts of interest between them, and she asserts, "We'll all become ill because of him ..."

While the toddler parents see a heavy diaper as a mess to dispose of, he senses an assault on his separateness and threats to his bodily-productions. The familiar security and pleasure he gets from these products is threatened to be taken away from him without his permission. We may remember that diaper weaning is highly connected with processing of separation from our belongings or our beloved ones. It is always easier to actively separate from someone than to be unwillingly left behind. (This process is clearly observable in psychotherapy, when the patient going on vacation feels far better than when the psychotherapist takes a holiday). It means that the toddler need to feel that he separates from his belongings according to his wills and mastery without being obliged to surrender to his parents orders.

Second Period from Eighteen Months to about Two-and-a-Half

During this period the toddler is not only able to master his sphincters but he becomes aware, for the first time, of the pleasure he feels when restraining himself. He gains awareness of his power to "produce", to master or to hold back at will. He reveals that he has "body-productions" that provide him the power to deliver or not to deliver his body-productions; he discovers that he can restrain the evacuation of his bodily-productions or release them at his will.

Anna (at two years and five months) has now control over her sphincter and uses this to make her parents proud. She exposes her capabilities of physical maturation that enables her to control her sphincters. Therefore, she declares to her parents: "I want (ego regulation) to give you my kaki, in condition that you will not throw it away, but keep it like you keep my drawings". Anna wishes her parents to be proud of her, as they are proud with her drawings. She speaks to them as they are talking to her: "... in condition of your behaviour". When Anna succeeds in going to the toilet she even obtains new underwear. By using the toilet, she obeys her parents' wishes and keeps them happy. However, she is also concerned as to where her products go and is not sure if she will be able to produce more in future. She asks her mother: "Mummy, when you flash the water where is my kaki going?" Sometimes she withholds her products in her body or in her diaper, as she does not want it to be taken from her. She prefers to restrain herself, to control and guard her products inside her body or in the diaper-this irritates her parents. Anna discovers a new pleasure. She can now control her parents' mood; she can raise her parents' pride and love and she can also irritate them and provoke their aggression. Her mother has to force Anna to change the diaper against her will. Anna acquired sensory skills to sense how she can irritate her parents and where she should accept her parents' authority. She even notices that she can enjoy new sensations that accompany a clean and soft

diaper and superior, new underwear that features a pleasant image on the front.

Ben (at two years and five months) is anxious as to where his products disappear once he is releasing his bodily productions in the toilet. He is uncertain whether he will have more products the following day. Ben's has always replaced his diapers immediately. She even would often "kidnap" his bodily products and this seems to Ben that his product is being stolen from him. She even uses force in order to change his diaper. The moment she sensed he had defecated, she jumps on him to change his diaper. Finally, he gives in to his mother's wishes so as not to be further punished, and goes to the toilet as if he has been trained. Ben feels his mother anxiety and ultimately, he yields to her demands. Like a "well-trained pet", he goes to the toilet at her insistence, as a defence against his anxiety she will otherwise abandon him. Ben does not express pleasure with his "productivity" or mastery; rather, as a displacement of his mother's kidnapping, he often manifests suspiciousness that his siblings might steal his asset-toys from him.

John (at two years and two months) loves flushing the toilet. His mother promises him that whenever he discharges his productions into the toilet he can flush the water. John restrains his wish to retain on to his productivity in order to benefit by flushing the toilet; he even enjoy watching his waste disappear. Having the agency to make it disappear gives him a sense of mastery over it, he is the one who sends them away and separates from them. At the same time, he has a sense of security that the next day he will be able to flush it again, and will have more bodily-productions. Thereby, the experiencing of his pleasure while mastery the toilet flushing, replaces his pain-separation from his bodily-products. Moreover, by using the toilet, he obeys his parents' wishes and keeps them happy that he is a big boy and at the same time he uses it to assert his autonomy. The third anal phase-from two-and-a-half years onward

in the third anal phase, the process of diaper weaning is usually ended. It is a crucial phase in the toddler's emotional development. The toddler enjoys demonstrating his mastery of his body and self-image. He can exercise retention and detention and can identify sensations of fullness and emptiness which helps him to choose separation from his self-products and enjoy the processing of give and receive. The toddler now finds a new exchange with his parents-negotiation with them.

He now associates himself with all the other grown-ups who accept the family rules and he is thus rewarded with his parents' love and pride; his self-esteem is enhanced. Henceforth, it is in his own interest to master his body and assume responsibility for his body self-image. Instead of withholding his products as assertion of his autonomy, he masters his self-image by using the toilet like a grown-up. For this, his parents reward him with love and pride, and he continues to enact the same behaviors. This no longer has anything to do with his parents' demands; it is he himself who demand his body to adhere to the family rules to which he belongs. He may even feel a sense of shame (Kelly 10) if he makes a "mistake" and his bodily-products escape as if without his notice.

Anita (at two years and eight months) has perfect control of her bowels. Instead of the fear she used to feel at the disappearance of her waste, she now knows she will produce more every day anew. She enjoys her emptying of her bowels every morning, she feels that she controls the rhythm of body, that every morning, like a ritual, she has new bodily productions. She enjoys the sensations associated with restraining her bowels and the consequent sense of expulsion as a familiar constant in her life. She enjoys sensing and watching the faeces descend into the toilet, hears them drop, smells them, and separates from them by saying with certainty, "Bye bye. Tomorrow I'll have

more." Anita is signaling that her cyclical perception of her changing body image is constant: a feeling of fullness, emptiness, and, again, fullness. Four months later (at the beginning of the Oedipal stage), her mother hears her speaking in the bathroom to her dolls: "I just gave birth to three babies and tomorrow I'll have more babies." Some weeks later she asks her mother: "Are real babies also born like my kaki?" (Anita demonstrates normal and ongoing emotional development along the oral, anal, and Oedipal stages.)

David (at three years of age) learns to find a balance between holding his waste and separating from "them" into the toilet; he even expands this capacity to keeping something (like his toy) and giving it up by separating from it. He now experiences the difference between immediate gratification and long-term satisfaction. It also gives him a pattern by which to relate to his parents-whether to fight and struggle or obey and reconcile. The anal stage considered a source of ambivalence Diaper weaning may be considered a source of ambivalence [17]. During the anal period, the main anxiety relates to loss of control over one's body, over one's productions, or loss of control over a parent's love. When the toddler is anxious that his body-production might be stolen from him, his aggression against his parents might explode or conversely become inhibited [18,19]. At the same time, when the toddler feels respect for his autonomy, he might activate an ego adaptation mechanism that soothes his anxiety of losing his body-production by consolidating cyclical perception constancies such as "fullness-emptiness-fullness again"; or "day-night-and day" again.

This strengthens the child's self-security and ability to deal with his anxiety surrounding loss as well as his cognition. He feels as if he has mastered the world and he is sure within himself that he can manage the day's sequences. In doing so, he masters the unknown! Each toddler develops a series of rituals by means of which he masters his separation from his bodily products, very similar to the rituals by means of which he masters his separations from his parents while going to sleep or going to kindergarten [1].

"Diaper weaning may reflect one of the main internal conflicts from the anal stage onward (surfacing even in couplehood) whether to hand over or retain, obtain immediate pleasure [20] or gain long-term partial satisfaction. This may occur along with an external conflict [21] concerning whether to obey one's partners or resist them, to struggle or to reconcile. New processes of ego regulation are created and together with the efficient use of self-regulatory "executive functions," the toddler may perceive the situation in his environment according to his subjective reality principle and operate to obtain satisfaction [3]: full satisfaction according to the (oral) pleasure principle or partial and long-term satisfaction according to the (anal) reality principle [1, p. 202].

Following the weaning process, the toddler (like any adult) obtains new information about his body image [22] and about his ability or inability to control his body, through his mastery of psychomotor activities and his achievements [11]. His ego's regulation functions are consolidated and his self-control is strengthened-he is now better able to regulate any anger [18,19] triggered by anyone's attempts to remove his possessions without his permission. These characteristics enable his true self (healthy narcissism [2,15,23]) to be reflected in object relations whenever he provokes power struggle with his parents (as he did when he refused to change his diapers and provoked struggles with his parents).

Hence, the toddler becomes able to gain long-term partial satisfaction, such as management, negotiation, and bargaining with others with respect to “giving” his “belongings” or receiving others. It means that he is capable of restraining his urge for immediate satisfaction; enjoy delaying satisfaction and his tolerance threshold to the otherness is improved [1]. Concomitantly, he gains the benefits of partial satisfaction, such as power, mastery, love, and various significant rewards, despite the cost of feeling hurt or frustrated. Moreover, the toddler is now emotionally oriented to preserve, to immune and take care of his body (body-image) including his self-esteem, belongings, self-productions and creations. It is important milestone in the toddler’s consolidation of his individuation and in this regard I join here the “conceptualization of body image as satisfaction with one’s physical appearance” [24]. This capacity to take care of one’s Self, of one’s body, creations as well as his favorite people reflects the development of the processing of the “emotional immune system” which I re-conceptualized as the innate “Healthy Narcissism” [1,15].

The emotional immune narcissistic process (which through its processing reminds us of the biological immune system [25]) provides to toddler and adult-sense of Self-separateness, sense of familiarity, of the familiar true self [26], of cohesiveness of body- self-image, integrity, and continuity. Thus, we may have a better self-control, peace and happiness, while experiencing and expressing our feelings, mainly love and anger, in relationship [27]. The development of narcissism represents one of the main emotional progresses along the anal stage and mainly the diaper weaning [8]. Unfortunately, developing this crucial subject further is beyond the scope of this paper. Love relations [9], ego and self-regulation [3,4], nostalgia [13,14] self-control and healthy narcissism may be considered as a pivotal key to success and happiness from the weaning process onward [1,2,8,9,28].

From the anal stage onward, along with the satisfaction that comes with restraining himself from emptying his belly immediately and restraining the hunt for immediate satisfaction versus long-term satisfaction, the toddler discovers a rich variety of partial satisfactions. Specifically, this includes the pleasure gained via a sense of power, of omnipotence, of self-esteem that he gains by delaying his immediate satisfaction. These partial satisfactions may be experienced as emotionally enjoyable, long-lasting phenomena during tension arousal, although the wish to achieve the full satisfaction never vanishes. For example, some toddlers obtain greater enjoyment from preparing games with cars or dolls, and from the feeling of controlling their imagination, than from the actual performance of the game.

Most of these games, imagination, the delayed reward and enjoyment of tension arousal may be considered as sublimation (an ego adaptation mechanism) to the weaning processing. Yet, the aspiration for the delayed reward nurtures their preparation, their creations, their emotional and cognitive intelligence, as well as their fun, which become more intense. The toddler thus improves self-confidence, self-control, self-esteem, and autonomy and his self-familiarity is also enhanced (he knows what he can or what he can’t achieve) and above all, love relations with his parents. “When a child takes ownership of his body, this represents the culmination of intricate processes involving internalization and identification resulting in individuation. When the young child begins to take over his or her own toilet functions, and does so with a measure of pride rather than fear or compliance, this becomes an indicator that development is moving in that propitious direction” [16, p. 67].

Following diaper weaning, the toddler begins to draw a narcissistic parallel between the ownership of many assets and sensations of power, which comes to be valued as the experience of expanding self-esteem. At a later stage, possessions can account for the narcissistic significance that money and wealth has for humanity [1,12].

We may notice that these enhanced long-term partial satisfactions provide the foundation for the capacity for long-term love relations complemented by tolerance of the otherness [15] as well as for long-term investments in creativity and work, which may give rise to the emergence of happiness.

Summary

The diaper weaning process has a profound impact in terms of a child’s personality consolidation. Although diapers may be unpleasant, we may remember that weaning is more than just toilet “training”. The toddler, through three crucial stages of weaning realizes consolidation of his self-familiarity, self-confidence, self-control and self-esteem. His sense of power, mastery, separation, individuation and autonomy are all boosted. These characteristics contribute to his capacity to negotiate and reconcile, to join with others in mingling of affects like frustration, anger, love and happiness (which I term “separateness-jointness relations”). Love, ambition, creativity and happiness all depend on a healthy true self-familiarity, self-awareness and self-security that will have a part to play in every area of our life.

Healthy narcissism, ego adaptation mechanisms and separateness-jointness relations consolidate along with diaper weaning; the toddler enhances and upgrades the potency of his intelligence (psychomotor, cognitive, and emotional). These milestones contribute to the development of social and cultural values.

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