

The Centrality of Beating Fantasies and Wishes in the Analysis of a Three-Year-Old Girl

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Freud's (1919) classic paper, "A Child Is Being Beaten," with its introduction to masochism, offers an excellent example of how child psychoanalytic data can clarify his ideas, correct those where he went astray, and check whether ones that seem speculative are supported by developmental data. Toward these ends, the analysis of a three-year-old girl with prominent beating fantasies is presented. Her analytic material suggests that it is unimportant from a treatment or pathogenesis perspective to differentiate between different types of sadomasochistic content in such fantasies. That is, the phenomenological distinction between beating fantasies and beating wishes does not seem to have much practical utility. All such fantasies have the same essential structure and are compromise formations in which pain is sought to maintain the complex equilibrium provided by them. Her material also indicates that such phenomena do not require oedipal stage engagement or dynamics to develop, although they will, of course, be colored by this stage's issues as the child engages it. Even sexualization, the so-called hallmark of beating fantasies, can arise as a means to deal with various cumulative traumas and does not require access to the sexual stirrings of the oedipal stage to occur.

In addition to the clinical efficacy of child psychoanalysis, it has great value as a research tool, one that may be overlooked in today's emphasis on evidence-based treatments, with *evidence* used as a synonym for quantitative research methodologies inappropriate to studying psychoanalytic phenomena. Many important concepts and ideas in psychoanalysis are derived from analytic material of adult patients with the assumption that reconstructed data accurately renders the patient's developmental experiences. Although often correct, such an assumption has questionable validity, given the vicissitudes of memory, and opens one to criticisms of being wildly speculative or of confusing anecdotes with data. Studying actual child development, either observationally or through the lens of clinical child analyses, offers a better position to rebut such criticisms, and places the conceptual model of the mind, its development, and its functioning on more solid ground.

Freud's (1919) classic paper, "A Child Is Being Beaten," with its introduction to masochistic phenomena, foreshadowing of the concept of the superego, emphasis on the role of fantasy in development and adult functioning, and ideas about the psychosexual life of children, is an excellent example of how data derived from child psychoanalyses could clarify his ideas, correct those where he went astray, and check whether ones that seem speculative are supported

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by developmental data. The ideas that Freud offered in this seminal paper are so important and have so many implications for psychoanalytic thinking that it was selected to be part of the Contemporary Freud: Turning Points and Critical Issues series put out by the International Psychoanalytic Association (Person, 1997). In her introduction to this volume, Person noted that, despite the paper being almost a century old, it raises many questions that continue to challenge psychoanalysts today.

For example, many analysts do not find overt beating fantasies in their patients today to the degree that Freud and his early colleagues did (for example, Modell, 1997). Some suggest that current day derivatives of the beating fantasy (such as being humiliated) have a different content because today's children are exposed to far less physical abuse than the children of his day. In Freud's era, it was not uncommon for school-aged children to observe other children being flogged at school. Hence, there was more day residue to stimulate the content of a child being beaten on his or her buttocks than there is today. Furthermore, it is less socially acceptable for parents today to enforce discipline through spanking than at the turn of the last century. This explanation contains an implicit assumption that beating fantasies require direct exposure to physical beatings to develop. "Consequently, the etiological question of whether masochistic fantasy is primarily the product of autonomously generated fantasy (or conflictual wish), as Freud suggested, or largely the derivative of a real event, often forgotten [is raised]" (Person, 1997, p. XI). This question bears directly on modern-day debates about the validity of regaining access to repressed childhood memories of sexual abuse. It also is relevant to considerations about the impact of societal manifestations on fantasies or actions and vice versa. One cannot help but noticing how sadomasochistic imagery and behavior are permeating current culture. Rock-and-roll lyrics or the popularity of body piercing are only two of many examples of this tendency, raising questions about both the degree to which culture influences fantasy content and the degree to which unconscious fantasy influences culture.

Many authors have commented on Freud's single-minded grounding of the beating fantasy in the oedipal complex and his finding/assumption that the beater is always the father in the fantasy (Bergler, 1948; Schmideberg, 1948; Lester, 1957; Rubenfine, 1965; Ferber and Gray, 1966; J. Novick and Novick, 1972, 1996, 1997; Asch, 1980; Galenson, 1980; Myers, 1980; Modell, 1997; Shengold, 1997). Freud clearly tied beating fantasies in girls to their oedipal attachment to their father. "This being beaten is now a convergence of the sense of guilt and sexual love. *It is not only the punishment for the forbidden genital relation, but also the regressive substitute for that relation*, and from this latter source it derives the libidinal excitation which is from this time forward attached to it" (Freud, 1919, p. 189, italics in original). Several analysts (Mahony, 1997; Modell, 1997; J. Novick and Novick, 1997) have noted that the preoedipal mother is ignored in his formulations. Yet the Novicks (J. Novick and Novick, 1972, 1996) found that beating wishes appear before the oedipal stage and its sadistic conception of parental intercourse that provides the sexual excitation to the beating wish. This debate about the oedipal versus preoedipal origins of such fantasies parallels debates about whether masochism more generally is derived from oedipal conflicts (K. K. Novick and Novick, 1987; Sugarman, 1991a). Both Freud (1919, 1924) and others (for example, Brenner, 1959, 1982) have emphasized the centrality of oedipal stage impulses and anxieties in the genesis of masochism. But a "trend toward increasing the number of determinants and functions of the beating fantasy has continued in the work of authors after Freud, with a shift to emphases on the preoedipal rather than the oedipal determinants of the fantasy [Bergler, 1938, 1948; Schmideberg, 1948]" (J. Novick and Novick, 1996, p. 5). As with beating fantasies, some

find conflicts deriving from separation-individuation subphases (Valenstein, 1973) and anal stage issues (Burgner and Kennedy, 1980) contributing to more general manifestations of masochism. Out of deference to Freud, it has become common to differentiate these preoedipal contributors and manifestations as only *protomasochistic* (Galenson, 1988; Glenn, 1989), despite research demonstrating that every developmental stage affects masochistic psychopathology, including beating fantasies (K. K. Novick and Novick, 1987).

Related to this expansion in determinants of beating fantasies are questions about how much they are truly driven by libidinal impulses or conflicts. Shengold (1997) emphasized that aggressive wishes play far greater a role than libidinal ones. And Mahony (1997) stated, "The sadistic component of the sexual function has grown 'prematurely independent' and, without apparent evidence of trauma, undergoes fixation" (p. 51). Modell (1997) also emphasized that it is hatred, not love, that gets erotized in the beating fantasy, reminding one of Stoller's (1975) groundbreaking work on the role that hatred plays in perversion. Many point out that preoedipal problems with the mother during the separation-individuation subphases results in poorly modulated aggression, making the beating fantasy an attempt to control and neutralize rage (Asch, 1980; Galenson, 1980; Myers, 1980). These ideas are supported by the Novicks' (J. Novick and Novick, 1972; 1996) finding that such fantasies originate in the anal stage wherein relationships are experienced along the lines of power and control so that hitting and being hit become avenues to discharge and/or regulate aggression. Being beaten during this stage involves wanting or fearing punishment or losing love, not oedipal longing or guilt. The Novicks made the point that the latter determinants do not come into the picture until the oedipal stage and its sadistic theory of intercourse. Modell (1997) added to the complexity by emphasizing that even the guilt in such fantasies may involve something other than oedipal longings. It can involve guilt over feeling pleasure because of an unconscious assumption that one's own gratification requires someone else's deprivation.

Another question about such fantasies addresses their definition—Do they require concrete and manifest content of a child being beaten, or can they substitute content that seems derivative or symbolic of an actual beating? Modell (1997), for example, did not find manifest beating fantasies to be common in his patients but more frequently found fantasies of humiliation. Are these fantasies equivalent? Does the manifest content of any particular masochistic fantasy matter? Is there any practical purpose to distinguishing subtypes of masochistic fantasy, or is the manifest beating fantasy simply the prototype for any such fantasy in which being degraded, mistreated, or punished is prominent in a patient's analysis and serves as a window into the vicissitudes of their masochism? These questions are ones that the Novicks' (J. Novick and Novick, 1972, 1996) research on children's beating fantasies helps to answer. They distinguished beating wishes from beating fantasies proper. The former are defined as "instinctual representations that may or may not reach consciousness and can be defended against, sublimated, or appear in derivative forms at varying distances from the original impulse" (J. Novick and Novick, 1996, p. 6). In contrast, the beating fantasy is defined as "the fulfillment in the form of conscious or preconscious thought of the sexualized wish to beat or to be beaten" (p. 6). They went on to say, "We found that beating fantasies rarely played a significant role in the analytic material of children. . . . No beating fantasies were reported in prelatency children. . . . The question of incidence may turn in part on the definition of fantasy" (p. 6). In contrast, beating wishes appeared almost universal in their observations of nursery school children and the analyses that they studied. These findings fit with Freud's observations of narcissistic contributors to the beating fantasy including the first

form of the fantasy he reported being motivated by the humiliation of no longer being the sole recipient of the parents' love (J. Novick and Novick, 1997). Thus, this form of his beating fantasy might be considered a beating wish because it is not sexualized. It may be that beating wishes, more than beating fantasies, are the crucial element contributing to masochism.

The many questions and issues surrounding the phenomena of beating fantasies detailed previously suggest a value to using child analytic data to broaden, deepen, and perhaps modify the understanding of their genesis, evolution, and function. Toward that end, the analysis of a three-year-old girl in whom beating wishes (or fantasies, depending on one's definition) played a prominent role is presented. It is hoped that examining the emergence of such fantasies in the course of an analysis will clarify their multiple meanings, determinants, and functions. In addition, describing the technical handling of these fantasies and their impact on the child's behavior in sessions can offer the opportunity to derive and clarify certain technical issues about child psychoanalysis more generally.

SARAH

Presenting Problem

Sarah was a three-year-old girl brought for consultation by her mother because her excessive negativism, moodiness, demandingness, and tantrums had all the hallmarks of masochistic provocativeness (Sugarman, 1991a, 1991b; 2008). Nothing her mother did satisfied Sarah. For example, Sarah awakened routinely late at night, frightened and calling for her mother. No sooner did her mother come than Sarah ordered her to leave. If her mother left, Sarah screamed angrily for her to return. Not surprisingly, her mother felt unable to win and Sarah felt ungratified. Sarah's extreme ambivalence exacerbated her pervasive fears of loss of her mother's love so sadly exemplified in her frequent questions of "Do you still feel good about me?" or "Are you still my friend?" Early hints of beating wishes/fantasies appeared in regular requests that her mother "Tell me I'm in time out!" or "Tell me I did it really, really bad!" During the consultation period, Sarah accidentally hurt her mother's hand refusing to exit her car seat. She then reacted to her mother's anger by pleading tearfully to "Let me feel the pain!" until her mother gave in and softly spanked her. At that point, Sarah sobbed inconsolably and fell into a deep sleep. This sudden release of intense affect followed by somnolence suggested early sexualization of aggression and anxiety related to a beating fantasy/wish.

Developmental History

The sheer number and quality of losses, failures of parental attunement, and environmental disruptions suffered by Sarah in her brief life made it seem that her entire life had been one huge cumulative trauma. Conceived to save a failing relationship, Sarah's parents could not make her a priority despite the best of intentions. For example, her mother felt surprised and guilty that she did not feel the intense love for her newborn that the numerous books she read had predicted. Instead, she was preoccupied with the physical complications and pain from Sarah's birth, anxious and frustrated at shifting from being a career woman to a caregiver, and depressed that the baby was not improving her marriage. Sarah's father was obsessively preoccupied with his

career and athletic interests. He showed minimal interest in caring for his newborn daughter. This absent/ambivalent parental involvement peaked when they left Sarah with a sitter for a two-week vacation at three months of age. Her mother returned to work after the vacation, leaving Sarah with sitters over several more weekends during the girl's first year. Her father did not want to care for her by himself. Furthermore, Sarah was exposed to volatile parental arguments during that year. A double hernia repair occurred toward the end of the first year, but Sarah's mother was vague as to symptoms or reactions; the mother's lack of typical maternal preoccupation made it impossible to discern possible somatic pain. Sarah was often allowed to cry in her crib for prolonged periods while her mother talked on the phone with colleagues and her father prioritized work and athletics. Somewhere between twelve and eighteen months of age, Sarah became afraid to go to sleep at the same time she developed intense separation reactions to her mother leaving for work.

Sarah's father left Sarah and her mother when Sarah was twenty-one months old. Three months later, a brief reconciliation failed and her mother left Sarah with her father, seeing her twice a week for the next several months. Her mother regained custody of Sarah when she was two years, nine months old. They moved in with a friend of the mother's where Sarah was not allowed toys because they made a mess. Three months later, Sarah and her mother moved in with the mother's new husband-to-be in San Diego, hundreds of miles from her father.

The Analytic Frame

Based upon Sarah's presenting symptoms, developmental history, and behavior during our consultation sessions, I recommended psychoanalysis for a persistent developmental disruption that had the potential to evolve into a masochistic neurosis, already being manifested in beating wishes and at least one occurrence of a beating fantasy. Sarah's mother and I settled on a five-session weekly schedule with weekly parental sessions with the mother and her new husband. I met with Sarah's father and his new wife whenever they visited San Diego and had intermittent phone sessions with him, also.

Early Emergence of Beating Fantasies

Sarah's beating fantasies or wishes were played out in derivative form from the beginning of analysis. Thus, her early sessions were characterized by her provocative enactment of conflicts as she confronted me with a plethora of issues and difficult behaviors in almost every session. Unlike most children her age, Sarah used toys minimally in her play, preferring more direct enactment and precocious verbalizations. I hypothesized that Sarah's precious verbal abilities were an effort to please her mother. This inference was confirmed during one early session where Sarah alternated between being a baby and an adult in her play. When the baby picked up a book, I asked if the baby was trying hard to be a grownup to make her mommy happy. Sarah responded by playing at reading and then at "studying." Her comments about her mother led me to say that perhaps Sarah's mommy studied a lot. (I knew that her mother was studying for a professional licensure exam at the time). Sarah, in her play role, punished me for talking too loudly while she studied. I then wondered if this ever happened to Sarah. She explained that she was only allowed to whisper in her mommy's library. In this derivative of her beating wishes, Sarah demonstrated how identification with the aggressor and turning passive into active played a significant role, in

contrast to Freud's assertion that typical feminine passivity plays a prominent role in masochism. Others have also challenged his emphasis on passive longings being at the core of masochism and beating fantasies. "Masochists are very active in their pursuit of pain and failure, in part to maintain the receptive relationship with an intrusive object" (J. Novick and Novick, 1997, p. 41).

But Sarah's provocativeness could not always be confined to play or managed with verbal interpretations. Her ragefulness taxed my ability to remain empathic and neutral. She often stuck her face in mine, spitting or screaming obscenities early on. At other times, she tried to hit me or to destroy aspects of the office. The limit-testing determinants of this provocativeness were interpreted and I said she could not hurt herself or me or break things; "words are always okay." Sarah quickly tested me, calling me a "fuck-face" and an "asshole," attempting to provoke a figurative beating. Despite my understanding, Sarah's seemingly single-minded pursuit of provoking rage and aggression often succeeded in stimulating sadistic countertransference fantasies. At times I was taken aback, and at other times I was filled with consternation, at the sadistic fantasies I experienced in the face of her provocativeness. It was all too easy to use my understanding of her vulnerabilities to imagine saying things I knew would hurt her to the core. At other times, unfortunately, my countertransference went beyond the fantasy level as I proved the adage that countertransference enactments frequently precede countertransference awareness. In one session, Sarah became infuriated when I told her to stop tearing apart the binding of a book of mine. She then tried to hit me with the bathroom key holder she had carried in from the waiting room. When I placed it out of her reach, she started to cry, saying I had hurt her and she would never like me again unless I apologized. My own countertransference rage was expressed in my silence, rationalized at the moment as neutrality. At that point she retreated behind a chair. I gave her a few minutes to gain control of her feelings (and, in retrospect, for me to gain control of mine) before I checked on her. To my dismay, she had removed another book from a shelf, and was tearing apart its binding. At that point I picked her up, deposited her in the middle of the room, and said I was going to be the boss of her feelings because she seemed unable to do so; I also instructed her to stay where I could see her. Later self-reflection and analysis allowed me to realize her defensive attempt to externalize her rage into me and the contribution of this defense to her strivings to be punished. But her beating fantasies played such a prominent role during the early part of her analysis that such countertransference feelings were not unusual even when managed better than this particular episode. Over time, I learned to help her to better contain the rage and anxiety fueling her fantasies by not making eye contact, not initiating verbal communication, and not doing anything else that made her feel that control was being taken away from her. Sarah's exquisite hypersensitivity and overreactivity to feeling helpless became gradually clearer.

Sexualization Contributing to Beating Fantasies

Sarah's rapid introduction of sexual material into our sessions highlighted the degree to which sexualization maintained a tie to her mother, suggesting that her provocative behavior was, in part, an attempt to cope with the severe overstimulation gradually revealed in the parental sessions. This overstimulation also seemed, in part, the cause of the hypersensitivity and overreactivity noted previously. Her mother was simply incapable of remaining clothed around Sarah, or locking the bedroom or bathroom doors, despite my repeated explanations and exhortations. Regardless of cause, the degree to which Sarah insisted on enacting her sexual concerns took me by surprise, as I struggled to help her to put her concerns into words. She introduced her sexualization in

the early weeks of analysis by pointing to my crotch, asking if I was like her stepfather. Sarah progressed rapidly to asking me to remove my clothes, lie on top of her, and "make love" while she had the rug on my couch say, "Me too, fuck!" It was obvious that she had been overstimulated and I tried to ascertain whether actual sexual abuse had occurred. But her mother's reports and Sarah's associations did not support this possibility. Regardless, my technical dilemma was to help her to process her experiences, psychodynamic conflicts surrounding them, their effects on her, and the functions being served by their enactment without repeating the trauma through overstimulation in the analytic sessions. Toward this end, I moved the arena of impulse expression into puppet play, whereupon Sarah had her puppet ask mine if it were a boy or a girl and, then, if its name was Penis. Soon Sarah had the puppets kiss and get married; then the female puppet hit the male in a play sequence which she repeated over several sessions. Sexualization and beating were intertwined from the beginning of the analysis. But unlike the typical oedipal sadistic interpretation of intercourse, or the fantasies described by Freud (1919), Sarah's fantasy was that the mother, not the father, was the beater.

Hints that these seeming primal scene themes and/or beating wishes involved feelings about her parents' divorce surfaced in questioning whether I was a daddy and/or divorced from my mommy. Sarah followed these questions by attempting, once again, to have her puppet stick its head in my crotch, which I understood as an effort to maintain an object tie, and to mitigate object loss via sexualization. But I interpreted on the side of the ego, saying that, perhaps, Sarah was trying to show me what it was like for her at home. I also insisted that such behavior be confined to the puppet play. Sarah responded by wanting to see the puppet's "tush" and then asked to see mine, confirming my interpretation, and demonstrating her attempts to actively master the passively experienced overstimulation at home. These sexual themes intensified around Sarah's first separation from me, one that her mother announced to both of us with only a few days warning, despite my explanation to her at the beginning of analysis of the value of planning and consistency. Sarah asked me to undress in the last session before the trip, while refusing to discuss why this felt so important. Upon her return, she had the male puppet lie on top of the female puppet while they slept. Once again, Sarah found it difficult to contain her conflicts to the puppet play, requesting that she and I play at hugging, kissing, and getting married. I asked her what getting married meant. She explained it meant I should take my clothes off and lie on top of her. The next session Sarah tried to lie on top of my puppet and became angry when I removed my hand from it, ordering me to put my hand back in the puppet. I refused, saying that she really wanted to lie on top of my hand. "Right," Sarah angrily retorted. Again she demonstrated her desperate attempt to connect to the object via sexualization, and her difficulty in keeping these impulses confined to fantasy. As I got to know Sarah and her mother better, I realized that she was also identifying with her sexually overcharged mother's way of connecting with men.

The Continuing Interaction Between Sexualization and Beating Wishes

Sarah's beating wishes remained intimately intertwined with her defensive sexualization, but appeared only intermittently throughout the first one and one-half years of her analysis. One early emergence occurred about six months into the analysis as Sarah still tried to enact her primal scene issues, and to connect to me/mother via sadomasochistic sexualization. In the middle of a play theme about control struggles over having her hair brushed and choosing her own hairstyle, Sarah turned to a puppet, asking if another puppet was its friend. Before the puppet

could respond, she accused the two of them of fighting in bed. I had the second puppet say that sometimes her Mommy and Daddy sound like they are fighting in bed, using material gleaned from recent sessions. Sarah explained to my puppet that its parents were making love, not fighting. My puppet replied that the noises made it difficult to tell the difference, and expanded recent work, saying that she liked to go peek or listen sometimes, but worried her Mommy would be mad and punish her if she found out. Sarah reassured the puppet that her Mommy would not be angry, and then prompted it to express other anxieties like loss of love, abandonment, and loyalty conflicts over its two daddies. Each time, she reassured the puppet that its fears were unfounded.

Sarah then returned to the sadomasochistic hair brushing theme, but tried to brush my hair. My moving the play back to the puppet angered Sarah, who then threw the hairbrush, narrowly missing me. Her wish to actualize her impulses directly with me, outside the play, felt essential. Action was still Sarah's preferred mode of connecting and communicating with others. I said that I could see that I had hurt Sarah's feelings, and angered her, by not letting her touch me, but that throwing was not allowed. Only afterward could I realize how my own countertransference anxiety led me to prematurely set a limit, rather than to explore. In retrospect, once again, I had been drawn into a sadomasochistic enactment of the beating fantasies that brought Sarah to analysis. Sarah denied feeling hurt or angry, while punishing my puppet for doing "something bad." I had my puppet lament how difficult it was to be good, despite wanting to be so much. It then said that it liked being punished, because that helped it feel not so bad for doing things it thought were mean or bad. Variations on this theme and interpretation were repeated for the rest of the session, finishing with one in which Indians were going to come and cut off Mommy's and Daddy's noses. Castration seemed to be joining the other danger situations and sadomasochistic expressions preoccupying Sarah. I had my puppet worry that her nose would also be cut off because she had been so bad. Sarah reassured my puppet that this would not happen, and stalled at leaving the session.

The Evolution of Beating Fantasies

Sarah's beating wishes continued to evolve, and come to the fore, around whatever new conflict became active in sessions and/or at home. Approximately six months later, Sarah went through a period of stealing from friends, schoolmates, and her mother. In part, this behavior seemed an expression of her envious hunger for maternal love and, in part, it seemed to be an attempt to provoke punishment (a metaphorical beating) from her mother, who reacted angrily and critically, without recognizing how far Sarah went to ensure being caught. In that context, her mother brought Sarah twenty minutes late for a session, explaining that she had to take a phone call just as they were leaving for my office. Sarah began the session by shooting me with the toy gun, readily allowing me to displace the play to puppets. After shooting the puppet a few times, she asked me to get the telephone books and tablet that allowed her to work/play at my desk. She became a teacher, quizzing me, the student, on my colors. I never answered correctly, while lamenting my inability to do anything right. At that point Sarah stamped my hand with "medicine that will hurt really bad." I protested only to be told that my cut would "bleed and bleed and bleed" if I did not cooperate. Then Sarah instructed me to cry, and, as teacher, told me she would discontinue the painful medicine if I stopped crying. I did so, only to be tortured with the medicine anyway. I then cried about not being able to trust anyone to do what they promised. Sarah, as teacher,

explained that this was a place where you get tricked, mumbling something about coming here to play. She refused to expand on the connection between coming to play and being tricked.

Instead, I was ordered to play; Sarah then asked if I wanted to visit her every day. I replied that I already saw her every day but Saturday and Sunday. Sarah explained that I could see her those days, also, and I exclaimed how happy that made me. The mood soon changed as Sarah quickly challenged me-as-student about whether I had stolen my toy or whether I had "only borrowed" it. I protested my innocence only to be accused severely of having stolen it and ordered to settle for another toy. But that one was soon taken from me also as the teacher insisted I could only play with my friend, the puppet. Sarah kept checking to be sure I had not stolen anything else while I lamented how difficult it was not to steal things I wanted. Sarah said something about her Mommy, prompting me to complain that my Mommy always found out when I stole something, got angry at me, and made me return the stolen toy (a scenario I knew occurred regularly at home). I then admitted that this made me sad, in response to the teacher's question. Sarah-as-teacher said that she would tell my Mommy to stop treating me this way.

Oedipal Contributors

Some two years into the analysis, when Sarah was now five years old, her beating wishes, expressed in themes of being punished and/or mistreated, began to show input from oedipal strivings in addition to the pre-oedipal longings and dangers that had motivated them. Oedipal aggression was apparent in Sarah's newfound, more direct, complaints to her mother at home that she was the "worst and meanest mother in the whole world." Sarah became openly affectionate with her stepfather at this point, competing directly with her mother for his favors. She began waking her mother up in the middle of the night to accuse her of trying to make Sarah ugly. And she accused her mother of sending her to brush her teeth so her mother could be alone with the stepfather. I interpreted this competition in one play sequence where we were both animals, commenting that the kitty was hurt and angry because it wanted the doggy to love it more than its Mommy. Sarah agreed and elaborated accordingly. Screen memories of having been beaten when younger emerged as Sarah struggled with her guilt over her oedipal aggression. She began one session by asking her mother in the waiting room why she had hit her as a baby. She then asked her mother to walk her into the consulting room, not allowing her to leave. I said that Sarah might worry that her angry and hurt feelings made her mommy's love for her go away, making her afraid to allow her mommy to leave. Sarah responded that her mommy really did stop loving her when she was angry. Her mother, probably helped by our parent meetings, acknowledged that she knew she seemed that way to Sarah at those times. Sarah then allowed her mother to leave the consulting room.

During another session, competition with me, as mother, in the transference became evident. Sarah asked me to draw pictures and then spoiled them while proclaiming hers to be prettier. I commented that she was making sure her pictures were prettier than mine. Sarah confirmed the interpretation, emphasizing how much prettier both her pictures and she, herself, were. Somatic anxieties at home and regression to anal messing or separation themes during sessions initially accompanied this engagement of oedipal issues. Themes of guilt over sexual impulses were less evident at first.

Transient phobic fears around oedipal strivings also occurred during this phase. For example, she developed a fear of going to the bathroom herself over one weekend visit from her father.

She explained that she was afraid of a shark or octopus. Sarah then associated to hearing that her stepfather and his own daughter had once seen sharks while skin-diving. At that point, Sarah asked me why I thought she was having her fears. I said they sounded like they involved her feelings about her stepfather and his daughter. Sarah reflexively responded that she never got mad at the daughter and then modified it to "sometimes" getting mad at her. She then added that "sometimes" the daughter was jealous of her.

These oedipal battles and more directly expressed sexual competition soon came together in a beating fantasy over some months in Sarah's play. It involved variations on the theme of me being Timmy, a "stupid" and awkward student, ridiculed and mistreated by my teacher and classmates, all played by Sarah. Striking sexual conflicts were woven into the sadomasochistic play. In one session, Timmy was punished for being "stupid" in class by having his clothes removed by his teacher; then he was killed. My girlfriend came to see my "naked and dead body." I-as-Timmy was prompted to bemoan being unable to make love to my girlfriend because I was dead. The girlfriend, played by Sarah, also lamented our inability to make love. She then moved out of the play and voiced her anxieties about her school grades, an anxiety that was being exacerbated, at that time, by her mother's concern that Sarah was not learning to read quickly enough in her academically oriented kindergarten. The connection between these academic worries and a masochistic regression from competition, particularly Sarah's oedipally based sexual conflicts, seemed clear in this sequence.

These conflicts continued to expand as Sarah, in another session, pretended to read a book about George Washington getting in a fight over a piece of paper; she then told me she had seen the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. At that point she transitioned into the beating fantasy, becoming the teacher having each student in class recite a jingle. Timmy could not remember his jingle, only to have the teacher ridicule him, before reminding him that it went, "Poo poo, ca ca, diarrhea, penis, making love!" She went on to say that "A boy sticks his penis in a woman's mouth and pees in it." I asked if she had ever seen that, knowing that she had recently seen a pornographic video tape that her parents had "accidentally" left in their VCR. Sarah smiled, saying she had watched it on TV. I commented that it excited her, as she began to jump around. She again smiled and agreed.

Two sessions later Sarah, as teacher, ordered me-as-Timmy to my cot while warning me that policemen were coming to my house because I had been "so bad!" The teacher then asked me if my grandmother had taken her clothes off when she died. Timmy was prompted to answer yes and to elaborate that he liked to touch ladies bodies. Soon he was sadistically taunted that he would be killed and have his clothes removed. Sarah laughed gleefully as Timmy protested he did not want to be naked. Later he was killed, his girlfriend visited, and he was ordered to cry because he could no longer make love to her. The next session began with me-as-Timmy being sent to my cot again, this time for talking too much in class. Periodically I was sent to the principal's office, only to be sent back to my cot, back to the office, etc. Then the teacher showed me pictures of various sexual scenes including a penis peeing in a lady's mouth, me naked, my penis, me making love to my girlfriend, and so on. Such taunting alternated with repeated punishments, most notably losing my girlfriend's love. I-as-Timmy bemoaned being punished for liking to look at pictures like the ones the teacher was showing me. The session ended with the teacher humiliating Timmy by showing pictures of him naked to the class. Sarah instructed me not to tell her mother what we had talked about when I returned her to the waiting room and watched anxiously to be sure I obeyed.

These beating wishes, the narcissistic contributors to them, and her sadomasochism were worked on in the displacement for several months to give Sarah the time she needed to modify the anxiety that overwhelmed her whenever she felt her intense emotions. During this time, I elaborated my role in the play while touching on all sides of the conflicts expressed by Sarah—her impulses, her defenses against them, and the internal prohibitions and ideals that contributed to her incessant search to be punished or beaten. But I eventually brought the conflicts back to Sarah directly once I thought she could tolerate knowing her inner world. Thus, I spent several sessions interpreting and working through how she felt like Timmy—nothing she did or was pleased her mother. She was never smart enough, pretty enough, polite enough or the right gender. This work allowed more analysis of her sadism and its origins in maternal misattunement, as well as its contribution to her critical superego. It also allowed her to gradually confront her mother about the mother's criticalness; and her mother did alter her behavior in response to Sarah's complaints.

Primal Scene Contributors to Sarah's Beating Fantasies

Soon the teacher–student play evolved into sexual triangles that seemed an attempt to deal with the excessive sexual stimulation at home. For example, I-as-Timmy was spurned by my girlfriend because she preferred to make love to Jonathon. Then my parents said they were leaving me because I was so mean. Finally, they abandoned me for my meanness and I was killed. I understood this sequence to demonstrate Sarah's guilt over her oedipal competitiveness and her defensive regression to preoedipal, separation concerns.

These sexual conflicts and primal scene exposure were also addressed by Sarah in the more direct, verbal manner that characterized her progress in the analysis. Thus, she interrupted a play sequence about being a good student to tell me she had figured out why she had, once again, become afraid of snakes. She no longer thought it was her stepfather's scary stories that caused them; it was the monster movies on TV, including one about a giant snake. We discussed this theory and Sarah realized she had never seen a movie about a giant snake. At that point, I reminded her that she had recently told me of another time she had "accidentally" watched one of her parents' movies on TV, one in which a lady sucked on a man's penis. "Penises look kind of like snakes" I said. Sarah agreed, adding the seeming nonsequitor that it scared her when her mommy and daddy fought late at night. I remembered how she used to watch her parents make love, and asked if she feared they were now fighting and hurting each other because of their noises. Sarah agreed, imitating the sexual noises she heard. Further discussion led her to admit that she still sometimes watched them making love while insisting she had done it more often when she was three-and-a-half. She went on to say that she feared her daddy (stepfather) was being hurt by her mommy, describing her mother "on top." Sarah's ability to discuss these experiences and fantasies more directly and nondefensively suggested significant working through of her masochistic conflicts. In this context, she soon admitted her fear that her mother and stepfather would divorce when they fought. She did not want to have another daddy; two were enough. She went on to talk in detail about her mother's divorce from her father, her loss of her father, and her memory of believing the divorce was her fault. Sarah could not articulate a fantasy about what her contribution had been, however. We talked about missing her father as she cried about only seeing him 3–4 times per year.

Beating Fantasies During Termination

Sarah had been symptomatically improved at home for well over a year when her mother and I agreed that she was ready to terminate once she expressed the desire to do so. And Sarah raised the question around the third anniversary of the analysis. After discussing this request over several sessions, we negotiated a schedule of gradually reducing the frequency of sessions by deleting one session per week each month over the next six months, with Sarah exercising complete control over frequency and the stopping date during the last month. Her anxiety about termination appeared immediately after this negotiation. Sarah asked to go to the bathroom to clean the pierced earring holes in her ears before they got infected. I reminded her of previous insights about somatic worries, saying that worrying about her body often disguised other worries. Perhaps our plan made her worried about the prospect of not seeing me again. Sarah replied that she did not care about not seeing me—in fact she did not even like me. I asked if not liking me allowed Sarah not to miss me. She exclaimed, “I can stop whenever I want and I can walk out and stop now!” This rapid reemergence of sadomasochistic tendencies around termination made me question its appropriateness and pay close attention in the months that followed.

Sadomasochism and separation remained linked in the subsequent sessions. Soon Sarah calculated the precise number of days until we would stop seeing each other. Simultaneously, she reenacted beating fantasies or wishes from earlier in the analysis. For example, she became the cruel teacher, punishing me for being the “dumb” inept student. Or she kicked over furniture and created huge messes for me to straighten. I said that she was trying to make me angry and that sometimes people start fights to not miss the person whom they are leaving. Sarah replied, “Shut up, dummy!” This brief flare-up subsided after a few sessions of working through, while her mood remained happy at home, and her academic performance stayed excellent. Thus, her ability to confine her brief regression to our sessions suggested that they were a transference reaction to imminent termination, rather than a continued vulnerability to separation requiring a longer analysis.

Sarah’s termination continued uneventfully over the next several months. Former contributors to her beating fantasies/wishes came up and were worked through one more time, but without the provocativeness characteristic of her earlier enactments. She seemed now able to express in play and reflect on her separation anxiety, need to split her ambivalence toward her mother by having me be the bad object, loyalty conflicts, and defensive anger with me so as to avoid the pain of loss without resorting to sado-masochism. Thus, the beating wishes, as well as her sadomasochism, seemed worked through enough to allow for more adaptive compromise formations. Almost two decades of follow-up suggest that she has maintained these gains well into early adulthood.

DISCUSSION

The degree to which Sarah’s beating wishes played a central role in her analysis adds a developmental perspective to many of the questions about beating fantasies that have been raised since Freud’s (1919) seminal work. Space limitations limit those that can be discussed in greater detail. Toward this end, I have prioritized two such issues for further consideration: (1) definitional questions; and (2) the role of sexualization. These issues also shed light on some of the other questions that cannot be considered in more detail.

Definitional Issues

Sarah's clinical material offers some insight into the definition of beating fantasies. Much debate has occurred around the variable reports of the frequency of overt beating fantasies. Some analysts find them to be not uncommon (Joseph, 1965); others find them to occur quite rarely (Modell, 1997). This inconsistency has given rise to questions about the value of separating out beating fantasies from other sadomasochistic fantasies, as well as consideration to whether actual exposure to physical beatings is a prerequisite for overt beating fantasies. Sarah's case material sheds a developmental perspective on these questions. In keeping with the Novicks' (J. Novick and Novick, 1972; 1996) findings that beating fantasies never occurred in their sample of prelatency children, Sarah only demonstrated one instance meeting their definition of an overt beating fantasy wherein one could see a sexualized wish to be beaten. This occurred during the evaluation, when she begged her mother to let her "feel the pain" after accidentally hurting her mother's hand. Nonetheless, her material in the analysis was rife with examples of what they term *beating wishes*. Her provocative behavior with me, the content of many of her later imaginary play enactments, etc. all revolved around derivatives of the impulse to be beaten. And these derivatives did have the instinctualized quality characteristic of a classic beating fantasy.

I suggest that the distinction between an overt beating fantasy and a beating wish is unimportant in understanding or treating Sarah's masochism. It seems that the major distinction is one of content; an overtly sexualized wish to beat or be beaten is the content of a beating fantasy and somewhat more veiled or derivative content characterizes the beating wish. Yet an implicit assumption of a contemporary ego psychological or structural perspective is that the structure, more than the content, of any particular mental phenomenon is most salient in understanding and working with it. Both beating wishes and beating fantasies have the same underlying sadomasochistic structure in which the conscious or unconscious aim is "the active pursuit of psychic or physical pain, suffering, or humiliation in the service of adaptation, defense, and instinctual gratification of oral, anal, and phallic levels" (K. K. Novick and Novick, 1987, p. 381). This commonality of structure challenges the value of distinguishing beating fantasies from wishes and suggests they be seen as only subtypes of sadomasochistic fantasies, more generally.

Furthermore, the predominance of beating wishes over beating fantasies in prelatency children is likely developmental more than a reflection of actual exposure to beating experiences. Mayes and Cohen (1992) pointed out, "Imagination as a mental capacity is part of a line of development that begins in the earliest symbiotic interactions between mother and infant, takes further shape as the child moves from dyadic to triadic relations, and culminates in a fully mature capacity to reflect upon in thought one's wishes and feelings vis a vis multiple others" (p. 23). That is, the capacity to fantasize develops gradually while paralleling and interacting with the development of other crucial mental functions, most notably mentalization, cognition, self-other differentiation, and reality testing. Good-enough parenting allows fantasizing to crystallize toward the end of the oedipal stage but remain vulnerable during the latency stage because of its interdependence with mentalization or reflective functioning. "In latency, the capacity to reflect on mental states remains a vulnerable capacity that is dependent on the reflective function of a parent at times of crisis. When a parent who can contain and transform the child's experience is not available, the child's potential space for reflection can collapse, leaving the child unable to differentiate inner from outer reality" (Jemerin, 2004, p. 211). Without the capacity to mentalize and to differentiate inner from outer reality, the child will remain unable to consciously take ownership of his fantasy

because he experiences the fantasy as real (Fonagy, et al., 2002). Until consolidation of this latency stage accomplishment, it is difficult for the child to experience his fantasy as originating from him for the same reason—it feels like it is real. Hence, beating wishes must be experienced in derivative terms and enacted in play to protect the child from the anxiety that his fantasied impulses, fears, and scenarios might become real. Elsewhere (Sugarman, 2008), I have described using these play enactments of Sarah to promote her capacity for insightfulness while waiting for her ability to tolerate the anxiety of knowing her own internal states to develop before interpreting them as involving herself directly.

In other words, Sarah's sadomasochistic constellation arose quite early as a reaction to and manner of dealing with the multiple cumulative traumas to which her young ego was exposed. Much of her punishment-inducing behavior seemed to originate in early painful, unhappy interactions with her mother that she clung to and reenacted through the early stages of her analysis. Sarah seemed like Valenstein's (1973) patients, whose "attachment to pain signifies an original attachment to painfully perceived objects" (p. 389). But their expression and phenomenology was limited by the capacities of her developing mind; and these capacities developed more slowly and in a skewed direction because of the previously described traumas. It would have been difficult for her to form and maintain an articulated beating fantasy because her infancy, toddlerhood, and early phallic stage all lacked the attuned parenting necessary to facilitate the development of the requisite mental capacities to do so.

Extrapolating from Sarah's beating wishes, it seems reasonable to assume that the issue of oedipal contributors to them and her masochism, more generally, involves the development of crucial mental functions more than specific oedipal conflicts. Sarah's clinical material confirms the Novicks' (K. K. Novick & Novick, 1987) finding that every developmental stage contributed to her masochism expressed in her beating wishes. Her beating wishes were enacted far earlier than her entry into the oedipal stage. And the underlying conflicts and anxieties expressed and managed through them were predominantly preoedipal until she had progressed into oedipal issues. Thus, her material is consistent with Grossman (1986), who described masochistic phenomena such as Sarah's beating wishes as "derivatives of more fundamental organizers. The more significant issues may then concern problems in the development of the regulation of aggression and the internalization of the authority for its control, based on some form of identification with fantasy controlling objects. Eventually, in the course of development, these become superego issues" (p. 409). The debate about oedipal versus preoedipal determinants of beating fantasies and masochistic pathology seems due more to the discipline's unwillingness to relinquish allegiance to Freud and his emphasis on drive derivatives or mental content. Once one accepts the need to reconsider his formulations, one takes one more step toward correcting the developmental lag (Busch, 1993; Gray, 1982) that has interfered with fully integrating the implications of the structural model into the understanding and treatment of patients.

The Role of Sexualization in Beating Fantasies

Those who insist that beating fantasies must originate in the dynamic conflicts of the oedipal stage tend to emphasize that the sexualized quality of the wish to beat or be beaten indicates the oedipal origins of the fantasy. Indeed, even the Novicks (J. Novick & Novick, 1997) reported that the sadistic theory of intercourse does not arise until the phallic stage. "It is via the sadistic theory of intercourse that the beating wish becomes sexualized. At the phallic stage both boys

and girls were seen playing hitting games or chasing and catching games, all accompanied by intense sexual excitement. . . . Diffuse sexual excitement and masturbation usually accompanied or followed the games" (pp. 38–39). And, of course, once one accepts that the fantasies originate at this stage, it follows logically that a girl's fantasies must involve the father.

Yet Sarah's material seems to contradict this idea. Her sexualized beating wishes certainly predated her engagement of oedipal issues, and the content of her wishes and fantasies regularly portrayed her mother, not her father, as their perpetrator. This seeming contradiction can be reconciled if one differentiates sexualization emerging out of normative developmental experiences from sexualization as a defense and/or self-regulating strategy arising from and attempting to cope with trauma. As Coen (1992) stated so eloquently, "Sexualization should be used only to designate phenomenologically that aspect of sexual behavior and fantasy whose goals and functions are not sexual arousal and pleasure but defense" (pp. 128-129). Defensive functions served by such sexualization include: (1) countering painful emotions, (2) feeling more vital and alive, (3) gaining self-definition and self-cohesion, (4) attaching to a hoped for comforting object, (5) maintaining a grandiose fantasy of omnipotent control, and (6) defending destructive aggressive impulses that threaten to destroy the needed object or the self. Sarah's beating wishes served all these purposes and were gradually analyzed.

Her mother, the perpetrator of the metaphorical beatings enacted and worked through in the analysis, fits Coen's (1992) description of the typical mother causing such sexualization. "My view is that sexual (sensual) feelings have played an unusually significant role during early development because of the mother's seductive overstimulation of the child, together with her relative neglect of his emotional needs" (p. 134). As mentioned, it was virtually impossible to persuade Sarah's mother to cease her multiple and traumatic overstimulation. These ranged from excessive nudity to not keeping pornography away from Sarah's grasp to failing to lock the bedroom door to prevent primal scene exposure. At the same time, Sarah's mother remained woefully out of tune with Sarah's emotional and developmental needs. Only the analytic work allowed Sarah to gain sufficient understanding of her mind's workings to confront her mother on her narcissistically injurious behavior, or to control her own voyeuristic impulses and stop watching her mother and stepfather having sexual intercourse.

Hence, Sarah's analytic material demonstrates that even sexualized beating fantasies/wishes do not have to originate in the oedipal stage or to focus on the father. Enough cumulative trauma and sexual overstimulation can give rise to similar phenomena. Her analysis also highlights how much aggression, more than sexuality, may be the drive/affect giving rise to such fantasies. Her sexualization was clearly defensive, not an expression of developmentally normative sexual longings. Underneath it, preoedipal rage associated with unmet dependent and narcissistic needs proved the more difficult drive impulse to regulate. Furthermore, her fantasies did not require actual exposure to beatings to develop. Rather, her own rage and wishes to hurt in retaliation for the multitude of ways in which she had been emotionally battered was sufficient to give rise to them.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis of a three-year-old girl in whom beating fantasies played a central pathogenic role has been offered to study such fantasies in more detail. Her analytic material

suggests that it is unimportant from a treatment or pathogenesis perspective to differentiate between different types of sado-masochistic content in such fantasies. All such fantasies have the same essential structure and are compromise formations in which pain is sought to maintain the complex equilibrium provided by them. Her material also indicates that such pathological phenomena do not require oedipal stage engagement or dynamics to develop, although they will, of course, be colored by the issues generated in this stage as the child engages it. Even sexualization, the so-called hallmark of beating fantasies, can arise as a means to deal with various cumulative traumas and does not require access to the sexual stirrings of the oedipal stage to occur.

Sarah's analysis also illustrates the many technical issues raised by treating a child this age in which sadomasochistic issues play a central role. For example, lacking a latency-aged capacity for fantasizing, she resorted to enactment to bring these conflicts into the analysis. As a result, I struggled to move them into more of a fantasy realm with puppets. In general, this succeeded, but she periodically balked because of both her developmental limitations and her dynamically based determination to actualize her beating wishes. It was also necessary to respect her limited affect tolerance, regulation, and proclivity to feel overstimulated or out of control by allowing her to control and initiate verbal interchange, eye contact, and so on, as well as to use play to prepare her for more advanced ways of reflecting on her internal world (Sugarman, 2008). Such sensitivity to her limitations is a common way in which the technical dictums of tact and timing are manifested in prelatency analyses. It is, also, an example of the essential sameness of the psychoanalytic process in adults and in children, even prelatency ones (Sugarman, 2009). One can work to promote a process of insightfulness (Sugarman, 2003) into the inner workings and conflicts of such young children just as much as one can do with adult analysands, so long as one takes into account the developmental limitations of their mental organization. And Sarah's follow up suggests that it can be as effective in bringing about long-term structural change.

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