

*Int. J. Psycho-Anal.* (1979) 60, 39

## PSYCHOSEXUALITY AND THE REPRESENTATIONAL WORLD

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I would like to introduce this paper with a quotation from an important essay by George Klein (1976) which has not received the attention it deserves within psychoanalytic circles:

There is reason to believe that the psychoanalytic conception of sexuality exists in two versions. The first I will call the clinical theory because it is the one that actually guides clinical work. It centers upon the properties peculiar to sexuality, upon the values and meanings associated with sensual experiences in the motivational history of a person from birth to adulthood, upon how non-sexual motives and activities are altered when they acquire a sensual aspect, and vice versa.

The second version, which I will call the drive-discharge theory, translates this psychological conception into the quasi-physiological terms of a model of an energetic force that 'seeks' discharge. This energetic conception is connected with Freud's fundamental belief . . . that the source of all activity in the organism . . . is its tendency to deal with the energetic influxes of 'stimuli,' to discharge them, to reduce the tensions produced by their energetic quantity (p. 73).

Klein goes on to demonstrate that many of the conceptual ambiguities found in psychoanalytic discourse on sexuality are the result of the intermingling of these two logically distinct and mutually inconsistent theoretical frameworks. He argues persuasively that psychoanalysis can easily dispense with the meta-psychological notion of a disembodied, blind energetic force seeking discharge, a relic of nineteenth century physiology, and that it should devote itself instead to an elaboration of the clinical theory of sexuality, i.e. to a systematic study of the particular *meanings* and specific *functions* that can be served by the manifold sensual pleasures experienced in the course of the life cycle.

In line with Klein's proposals, I will focus in

this paper on a facet of the clinical theory of sexuality which has acquired increasing importance as psychoanalytic practice has been extended to include the treatment of more severely disturbed, developmentally arrested patients (Kohut, 1971, 1977; Stolorow & Lachmann, 1978)—namely, the contribution of psychosexual experiences to the articulation and structuralization of the subjective representational world (Sandler & Rosenblatt, 1962). That early sensual experiences contribute significantly to the *content* of self and object images is a fact that has long been known to clinical psychoanalysts, beginning with Freud (1905, 1927). However, here I will be concerned primarily with the role of psychosexuality in determining certain *formal properties* of the representational world (see Stolorow, 1975a), i.e. with the function of sensual experiences, fantasies and enactments in consolidating the structural cohesion and temporal stability of self and object representations, both in the course of normal development and, abortively, in adult sexual pathology. Corresponding to my interest in the problem of narcissism, the accent in my remarks and clinical illustrations will fall more on the self representation than on object representations, but this is not to imply that, in principle, the self is of greater clinical significance than the object world.

### PSYCHOSEXUALITY AND NORMAL REPRESENTATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To elucidate systematically the contribution of psychosexual experiences to the structuralization of self and object representations in the course of normal development would require the construction of a comprehensive developmental psychology of the representational world

supported by data from detailed empirical research. For the present, a brief review of some relevant contributions to the analytic literature and some suggestive comments based on existent theory will have to suffice.

Klein (1976) suggests that, from the standpoint of the clinical theory, sexuality must always be understood in terms of a developing self that seeks 'to perpetuate and preserve its unity, integrity, and coherence' (p. 94). A number of analysts have commented more or less extensively on the role of phase-appropriate psychosexual experiences in articulating and consolidating various facets of the self representation for the normally developing child. According to Jacobson (1964), for example, each stage of psychosexual development makes its own unique contributions to ego and superego structuralization and, by implication, to both the content and formal properties of the evolving self representation. Greenacre (1958) stresses the importance of early psychosexual experiences, particularly those involving the genitals, in establishing the child's recognition of its body self. Emphasizing the earlier pregenital phase, Hoffer (1950) and Mahler *et al.* (1975) claim that the delineation of a rudimentary body image is accomplished through a 'libidization' of the child's body surface resulting from the pleasurable body contacts within the mother-infant interactions. In a similar vein, Winnicott (1945) believes that the proper (sensual) holding and handling of the infant gives rise to the attainment of 'psychosomatic indwelling', a state of awareness in which the child experiences himself as a unit located within his body and bounded by his skin. Lichtenstein (1961) proposes that through the primitive, pregenital, sensual stimulations that occur within the early symbiotic mother-child unit, the infant is 'imprinted' with the most basic outlines for the development of his identity. And finally, Kohut (1971, 1977) has shown that the child's exhibitionistic and voyeuristic pursuits, if met with empathic, phase-appropriate parental responsiveness, contribute crucially to the gradual transformation of archaic narcissistic configurations into a mature sense of self-cohesion, self-continuity and self-esteem.

Erikson's (1950) distinction between psycho-

sexual *zones* and psychosexual *modes* provides us with an important conceptual advance in our efforts to comprehend the role of sensual experiences and fantasies in articulating the developing child's representational world. The epigenetic unfolding of psychosexual modes can be shown to serve in critical ways the consolidation of an individualized representation of the self which is differentiated from images of primary objects.

Experiences and fantasies in the oral-incorporative mode, for example, not only signal the attainment of rudimentary self-object boundaries (Stolorow & Lachmann, 1978), but also contribute to the ongoing process of self-object differentiation by affirming the subjective distinction between inside and outside, between the self as a container and the non-self which can be taken in. At the same time, incorporative fantasies may be employed by the child to appropriate valued and admired qualities of objects to his own self representation, contributing further to its eventual structuralization (Jacobson, 1964; Kohut, 1971).

Experiences and fantasies in the anal-retentive mode provide a stubborn affirmation of the boundaries separating self and non-self, a definitive milestone in self-object differentiation. Through anal-eliminative acts and fantasies, the child ejects undesirable contents from his self representation, further promoting its individualization and refining its demarcation from the object world (Kohut, 1977).

A particularly decisive step in self-definition occurs with the discovery of genital differences and the unfolding of the intrusive and inclusive genital modes which begin to distinguish the sensual self-experiences of boys and girls respectively. As with oral-incorporative and anal-aggressive fantasies, phallic imagery too can serve to buttress the vulnerable self representations of developing children of both sexes (Jacobson, 1964; Kohut, 1971, 1977; Lachmann, 1977). The oedipal saga itself may be viewed as a pivotal phase in the structuralization of the self (Kohut, 1977), which finds its fatefully unique form in emerging from the conflictual flux of images of phallic grandeur and depletion, rivalrous triumph and defeat, threats to genital intactness, and envy of the penis or womb. From the standpoint of the

articulation and consolidation of the self representation, the successful passing of the oedipal period crystallizes the rudiments of an enduring gender identity, gender-specific ambitions and ideals, and an awareness of gender-specific strengths, capacities, vulnerabilities and limitations (Ross, 1977).

To summarize, the psychosexual experiences, fantasies and enactments that occur in the course of normal development may be viewed as *psychic organizers* (Spitz, 1959) which contribute significantly to the structuralization of the representational world and of the self representation in particular.<sup>1</sup> Nature, in her supreme evolutionary wisdom, has harnessed the exquisiteness of sensual pleasure to serve the ontogenesis of subjectivity. This conception of the vital developmental importance of psychosexual experiences helps us to understand the extremely damaging effects that traumatic overstimulations, deprivations, and other early distortions in the sphere of sensual experience can have in interfering with the normal consolidation of self and object representations. An appreciation of the role of psychosexuality in normal representational development also sheds light on the meaning of adult sexual pathology, particularly in developmentally arrested patients, a subject to which I will now turn.

#### THE REPRESENTATIONAL WORLD IN SEXUAL PERVERSIONS

In normal development, psychosexual experiences contribute crucially to the articulation and consolidation of self and object representations. When sexual perversions occur in developmentally arrested individuals, in whom self and object representations are insufficiently structuralized, this function of early psychosexual experiences may be revived in order to shore up a precarious and imperilled representational world. In such cases, it is not the erotic experience *per se* (the 'instinct deriva-

tive') that has been fixated and then regressively reanimated, as Freud (1905) maintained. Instead, it is the early infantile *function* of the erotic experience that is retained and regressively relied upon—its function in maintaining the structural cohesion and stability of crumbling, fragmenting, disintegrating self and object representations. Analytic exploration of the details of perverse fantasies and enactments, their origins and functions, should reveal the particular ways in which they compensate for specific structural weaknesses in patients' representational worlds and ward off specific threats to the integrity and continuity of self and object representations.

This is not to say that structure maintenance is the only aim of perverse activity. Like any complex psychological product, sexual perversions are multiply determined and serve multiple functions (Waelder, 1936; Lachmann, 1975; Stolorow, 1975*b*, 1975*c*). The clinical task is to determine the relative motivational priority or urgency of the manifold functions served by perverse fantasies and acts for a particular patient at a particular point in treatment (Stolorow *et al.*, 1978). For neurotically organized patients, perversion may function principally as a regressive defence against oedipal conflicts and reassurance against the threat of castration (Freud, 1927) or as a hostile, vindictive triumph over traumatogenic early object imagoes (Stoller, 1975). However, for structurally deficient, developmentally arrested patients, the motivationally most urgent function of perverse activity is likely to pertain to an impelling need to restore or maintain the intactness of self and object representations which are threatened with dissolution.

A number of analysts have contributed important insights into the function of sexual perversions in shoring up precarious representational structures. According to Socarides (1973, 1974), for example, perversion is the product of an inability to pass successfully through the symbiotic and separation-individuation phases of early childhood, a

<sup>1</sup> A related point, not covered here, is that the occurrence of particular psychosexual imagery may signal a developmental step in the consolidation of self and object representations, as when castration or penetration anxiety indicates the initially precarious attainment of a sense of

body intactness, and penis or womb envy an awareness of sexual differentiation. While early sensual experiences contribute vitally to the structuralization of the representational world, such structuralization, in turn, makes possible new modes of psychosexual experience (Lachmann, 1977).

developmental failure which results in severe ego deficits. Perversion, in turn, serves the repression of the urge to regress to a pre-oedipal fixation in which there is a desire for and dread of merging with the mother in order to reinstate the primitive, undifferentiated mother-child unity. By implication, the function of sexual perversion is, in part, to compensate for a structural impairment in self-object boundaries, a remnant of a developmental arrest.

The function of pathological sexual activity in restituting or maintaining the fragile self representations of narcissistically disturbed patients has been systematically elucidated by Kohut (1971, 1977; see also Goldberg, 1975). He has demonstrated that a wide variety of perverse activities may be viewed as primitively sexualized attempts to compensate for voids and defects in the structure of the self and to counteract experiences of inner deadness and self-fragmentation. In the perverse act, the patient sexualizes an archaic narcissistic configuration in an effort to find an eroticized replacement for the self-objects who in his formative years were traumatically absent, disappointing, or unresponsive to his developmental requirements, a sequence of events which may be repeated in the course of analysis whenever the patient experiences a narcissistic injury or disruption in the narcissistic transference.

In a previous contribution (Stolorow, 1975c), I attempted to develop some of these notions further by examining the narcissistic function of masochism, including masochistic perversion. I proposed that in structurally deficient, developmentally arrested patients, masochistic experiences might serve to restore or sustain the cohesion and stability of a damaged, menaced or disintegrating self representation through the stimulations afforded by pain and skin eroticism, through exhibitionistic displays of suffering to a real or imaginary audience, through mergings with omnipotent object imagoes, and by creating a fantasied identity between the actual self and the primitive grandiose wishful self. Extrapolating from the ideas of Nydes (1950) and Eissler (1958) on the power of the orgasm to create and confirm conviction, I speculated that the experience of orgasm in the sadomasochistic perversions (and other perversions

as well) might serve to revitalize ecstatically the structurally deficient individual's sense of conviction about the truth and reality of his having a bounded and cohesive self. I argued further that the degree of primitive sexualization, as well as aggressivization, of narcissistic reparative efforts is a measure of the degree of narcissistic vulnerability and the acuteness of the threat of narcissistic decompensation. And finally, I suggested that the Janus-faced quality of the orgasm, in both offering the promise of self-articulation and posing the threat of self-dissolution, might account for the elaborate ritualization with which the structurally deficient individual must surround his perverse acts.

The function of perverse activity in supporting an endangered and failing self representation is illustrated in the case of Bill, whose treatment was discussed in two previous brief communications (Stolorow & Grand, 1973; Stolorow, 1975b). This young man, who suffered from a severe narcissistic personality disturbance with pronounced borderline features, would achieve sexual satisfaction by masturbating to an image of a woman squashing a bug with her foot. At the core of his psychopathology lay a structural weakness in self-boundary maintenance and a profound and pervasive narcissistic vulnerability. It was reconstructed that repetitive traumatic interferences with the consolidation of his self representation had occurred in his early formative experiences with his mother, whose attitude and behaviour towards him had fluctuated between symbiotic overcloseness, depressive unresponsiveness to his developmental requirements, and periodic, sadistically prolonged and erotically tinged, brutal spankings.

Coincident with the unveiling of his deep narcissistic pathology, Bill was gradually able to establish a stable narcissistic transference of the mirroring type (Kohut, 1971). As his sense of self-cohesion became somewhat stabilized within this self-object transference, the bug-squashing fantasy faded into the background. The inference was drawn that the perverse masturbation fantasy had served a vital function in the maintenance of his self representation.

Heretofore, when Bill, in reality or in fantasy, approached a woman in the hope of a liaison, he would begin to feel overwhelmed both with the excitement of possibly having his wishes realized and a terror of losing his precarious sense of self-cohesion and self-boundedness through merger with the powerful object of his wishes. At the same time, he would become plagued by thoughts of being rejected, which shattered his fantasies of omnipotence and entitlement and evoked feelings of intense shame and narcissistic rage. Most catastrophically, the combined anticipations of overwhelming excitement, merger, and a devastating narcissistic injury would trigger off terrifying states of self-fragmentation and self-dissolution.

The image of a bug being squashed by a woman he desired expressed both Bill's dread of self-boundary destruction and self-disintegration through merger and his fear of a crushing blow to his self-esteem. However, the sexualization of this image was also seen as an attempt to restore his self representation along several pathways. First, he reported feelings of exhilaration in identifying himself with the sadistic pleasure he imagined the woman experienced in crushing the bug. This identification with the powerful, sadistic object served to restore a feeling of identity with his own grandiose wishful self. Second, he experienced an empathic identification with the intense pain the bug ostensibly felt in being squashed. The vicarious experience of pain was understood as a means of acquiring a feeling of aliveness and thereby re-establishing a sense of existing as an entity, a cohesive self. And third, as Bill identified himself with the bug, the fantasy experience of being crushed against a powerful object, and of having his self-boundaries painfully ruptured, emphatically dramatized the very existence of those boundaries. The sexualized fantasy of being squashed like a bug was thus seen as a desperate attempt to restore and orgasmically confirm a sense of having a bounded and cohesive self. The prototype for this fantasy was found in the patient's erotically tinged childhood experiences of the spankings administered by his mother, the sensual components of which had been drawn into the service of repairing and sustaining a fragile and precarious self representation. This function of

the early masochistic, anal-erotic experiences was regressively revived on occasions when he felt his self representation to be menaced.

Another illustration of the function of perverse activity in maintaining a structurally defective self representation is provided by the case of Mark (see Lachmann, 1977), a young man who sought treatment, not for his homosexuality, but for the disturbances in self-esteem regulation which were triggered off by disappointments in the pace of his professional advancement. Analytic reconstructions traced the origins of the vulnerability in his self-esteem to his early tie to his mother, a vain, self-engrossed woman who possessed little ability to provide Mark with either the warm, sensual body contact or the narcissistic confirmations which are prerequisites for the rudimentary consolidation of a cohesive and stable body image. As a child, he had maintained a precarious self-organization by embracing the role of mother's admiring confidant, her 'little gentleman' and narcissistic extension. At the same time, the mother undermined his independent grandiose-exhibitionistic strivings and pursuits, subjecting him to frequent, severe shamings and humiliations (for example, when he urinated on the floor at the age of three) which drastically interfered with the structuralization of his self.

The associations to these early, traumatic shame experiences, which emerged in the context of his gradual immersion in a narcissistic mirror transference, revealed three post-latency phases in the development of Mark's homosexuality, shedding light on its function in sustaining his self representation. During his early teen years he would periodically urinate on the kitchen floor in order to roll around on his urine. This practice was understood in terms of his need to shore up the intactness of his precarious body boundaries by creating from his own body fluids a replacement for the warm, sensual physical contact that his object world had always failed to provide. Somewhat later in his adolescence, rolling in his own urine was replaced by masturbation in front of a mirror in which he imagined the sight of a perfect version of himself, whereupon he could feel transformed into an imaginary picture of physical perfection. The self-reparative and self-restitutive functions

of these earlier practices acquired a definitive, enduring sexualization in the homosexuality which blossomed during his later college years. Two essential components in his homosexual experiences were, first, that they were enacted exhibitionistically, in a public setting where he could feel enhanced by the admiration of his onlookers, and second, that they made possible a union with an admiring, idealized, sexually identical partner who simultaneously confirmed and duplicated Mark's own grandiose-perfectionistic wishful self. In their mirror-functions, his audience and his partner were heirs to the urine and the literal mirror of his earlier pubertal years, providing his self representation with an urgently needed modicum of structural cohesion and stability, stamped by the sexual orgasm with a sense of conviction and reality.

As was seen in the cases of Bill and Mark, the therapeutic implications of viewing sexual perversions as remnants of developmental deficits and arrests in the structuralization of the representational world, rather than as products of object-instinctual conflicts, are profound. In the treatment of sexual pathology rooted in structural deficiencies and developmental arrests, the requisite primitive self-object transference configurations are permitted to unfold (Kohut, 1971) and, rather than interpreting what the patient has needed to ward off, the analyst empathically focuses on the archaic states or representational structures that the patient needs to maintain or achieve (Stolorow & Lachmann, 1978). In such cases the aim of the analyst's interpretations is to promote sufficient consolidation of self and object representations to make possible a subsequent analysis of the defensive functions of the patient's sexual pathology in terms of the intrapsychic conflicts that it serves to ward off.

#### SUMMARY

The sensual experiences, fantasies and enactments that occur in the course of normal development are seen as psychic organizers which contribute vitally to the structuralization of the representational world. In the sexual perversions which occur in structurally deficient, developmentally arrested individuals,

this function of early psychosexual experiences has been retained and is regressively relied upon in order to restore or sustain the cohesion and stability of crumbling, fragmenting or disintegrating self and object representations. Analytic exploration of the details of perverse fantasies and acts, their origins and functions, reveals the particular ways in which they compensate for specific structural weaknesses in patients' representational worlds. Some clinical illustrations and therapeutic implications of these formulations are briefly presented.

#### TRANSLATIONS OF SUMMARY

Les expériences sensuelles et les fantasmes qui font partie intégrale du développement normal, servent d'organisateur psychique contribuant à la structuralization de la représentation du monde.

Dans le cas des perversions le rôle attribué à ces expériences psychosexuelles infantiles a été conservé et est utilisé de façon régressive afin de restituer ou de préserver la cohésion et la stabilité des représentations du Self et de l'objet qui sont en état de fragmentation et de désintégration.

Une étude détaillée des actes et fantasmes pervers, de leurs origines et fonctions permet de comprendre comment ceux-ci compensent des faiblesses particulières structurelles dans la représentation du monde de ces patients. Plusieurs illustrations cliniques et les implications thérapeutiques de ces formulations sont présentées.

Die Sinneserfahrungen, Phantasien und Spiele, die im Verlauf der normalen Entwicklung vorkommen, werden als psychische Organisatoren betrachtet, die wesentlich zur Strukturalisierung der dargestellten Welt beitragen. Bei den sexuellen Persionen, die bei strukturell mangelhaften, in der Entwicklung stecken gebliebenen Individuen auftreten, ist diese Funktion der frühen psychosexuellen Erfahrungen erhalten geblieben, wird regressiv zur Wiederherstellung oder Erhaltung des Zusammenhangs und der Stabilität des zerbrechenden, fragmentierten Selbst und der Objektdarstellung, verwendet. Analytische Erforschung der Details perverser Phantasien und Akte, ihres Ursprungs und ihrer Funktionen, zeigt die besondere Art, in der sie für spezifische Schwächen in der dargestellten Welt des Patienten kompensieren. Einige klinische Illustrationen und therapeutische Schlußfolgerungen dieser Formulierungen werden geboten.

Las experiencias sensuales, las fantasías y actuaciones que tienen lugar en el curso del desarrollo normal, son vistos como organizadores psíquicos que contribuyen de forma vital a la estructuración del mundo representacional. En las persiones sexuales que ocurren en individuos cuya estructuración es deficiente y cuyo desarrollo se ha parado, esta función de las experiencias psicosexuales precoces ha sido retenida; cuentan con ella para restaurar o mantener la cohesión y la estabilidad de un yo ('self') y unas representaciones de los objetos que se desmoronan, se fragmentan o se desintegran. La exploración analítica de los detalles de los actos y las fantasías perversos, sus orígenes y

sus funciones, revela las diversas y particulares maneras en las que compensan la debilidad estructural específica en el mundo representacional de estos pacientes. Algunos ejemplos de casos clínicos y las implicaciones terapéuticas de estos postulados son presentados brevemente.

The development of the ideas in this paper was greatly enhanced by discussions with Dr Frank M. Lachmann.

Read at scientific meeting of The National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis, New York, November, 1977.

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