

RELATIONAL SADOMASOCHISM

**THE MASOCHISTIC DEFENSE
OF RELENTLESS HOPE**

**THE SADISTIC DEFENSE
OF RELENTLESS OUTRAGE**

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**THE PATIENT'S RELENTLESS PURSUIT
HAS BOTH
MASOCHISTIC AND SADISTIC COMPONENTS**
MARTHA STARK (1994)

**HER RELENTLESS HOPE
- WHICH FUELS HER MASOCHISM -**
IS THE STANCE TO WHICH SHE DESPERATELY CLINGS
IN ORDER TO AVOID CONFRONTING
INTOLERABLY PAINFUL REALITIES
ABOUT THE OBJECT AND ITS SEPARATENESS

**HER RELENTLESS OUTRAGE
- WHICH FUELS HER SADISM -**
IS THE STANCE TO WHICH SHE RESORTS
IN THOSE MOMENTS OF DAWNING RECOGNITION THAT
THE OBJECT IS INDEED SEPARATE AND UNYIELDING

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**I DO NOT LIMIT SADOMASOCHISM
TO THE SEXUAL ARENA**

**RATHER, I CONCEIVE OF IT AS
A "DYSFUNCTIONAL RELATIONAL DYNAMIC"
THAT WILL GET PLAYED OUT
- TO A GREATER OR LESSER EXTENT -
IN MOST OF THE PATIENT'S
"RELENTLESSLY PURSUED" RELATIONSHIPS**

**ESPECIALLY IF THE PATIENT HAS
NOT YET COME TO TERMS WITH
THE REALITY THAT THE WORLD
WILL NEVER BE ALL THAT SHE
WOULD HAVE WANTED IT TO BE**

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**MASOCHISM AND SADISM
ALWAYS GO HAND IN HAND**

IN OTHER WORDS
THE "MASOCHISTIC DEFENSE OF RELENTLESS HOPE"
AND THE "SADISTIC DEFENSE OF RELENTLESS OUTRAGE"
ARE FLIP SIDES OF THE SAME COIN

THEY ARE BOTH DEFENSES
THAT SPEAK TO THE PATIENT'S REFUSAL
TO CONFRONT THE PAIN OF HER GRIEF
ABOUT THE OBJECT'S LIMITATIONS,
SEPARATENESS, AND IMMUTABILITY

AND MORE FUNDAMENTALLY
THEY SPEAK TO THE PATIENT'S REFUSAL
TO CONFRONT THE PAIN OF HER GRIEF
ABOUT THE OBJECT'S REFUSAL
TO BE POSSESSED AND CONTROLLED

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**MASOCHISM IS A STORY
ABOUT THE PATIENT'S HOPE**

HER HOPING AGAINST HOPE THAT PERHAPS
SOMEDAY, SOMEHOW, SOME WAY,
WERE SHE BUT ABLE TO BE GOOD ENOUGH,
TRY HARD ENOUGH, BE PERSUASIVE ENOUGH,
PERSIST LONG ENOUGH, SUFFER DEEPLY ENOUGH,
OR BE "MASOCHISTIC" ENOUGH,

SHE MIGHT YET BE ABLE
TO EXTRACT FROM THE OBJECT
- SOMETIMES THE PARENT HERSELF -
- SOMETIMES A STAND-IN FOR THE PARENT -
THE RECOGNITION AND LOVE DENIED HER AS A CHILD

IN OTHER WORDS
SHE MIGHT YET BE ABLE TO COMPEL
THE IMMUTABLE OBJECT TO RELENT

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**NOTE THAT THE INVESTMENT
IS NOT SO MUCH
IN THE SUFFERING PER SE
AS IT IS IN THE PATIENT'S
PASSIONATE HOPE THAT
PERHAPS THIS TIME ...**

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**SADISM IS THEN A STORY
ABOUT THE RELENTLESS PATIENT'S
REACTION TO THE LOSS OF HOPE**

EXPERIENCED IN THOSE MOMENTS
OF DAWNING RECOGNITION
THAT SHE IS NOT
- AFTER ALL -
GOING TO GET
WHAT SHE HAD
SO DESPERATELY WANTED
AND FELT SHE NEEDED TO HAVE
IN ORDER TO GO ON

IN THOSE MOMENTS OF ANGUISHED HEARTBREAK
WHEN SHE IS CONFRONTED HEAD-ON
WITH THE INESCAPABLE REALITY
OF THE OBJECT'S SEPARATENESS
AND REFUSAL TO RELENT

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**ORDINARILY A PERSON
WHO HAS BEEN TOLD "NO"
MUST CONFRONT THE PAIN
OF HER DISAPPOINTMENT
IN THE OBJECT
AND COME TO TERMS WITH IT**

FEELING ALL THAT SHE MUST
IN ORDER ULTIMATELY
TO MAKE HER PEACE
WITH THE REALITY OF IT

IN OTHER WORDS
SHE MUST GRIEVE THIS
THWARTING OF HER DESIRE

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BUT THE RELENTLESS PATIENT DOES SOMETHING ELSE

AS SHE COMES TO UNDERSTAND
THAT SHE IS NOT, IN FACT, GOING TO BE REWARDED
FOR HER UNSTINTING SELF-SACRIFICE

**AND POWERED BY HER CONVICTION
THAT SHE HAS BEEN HAD**

- DUPED, CONNED, VICTIMIZED, BETRAYED, REJECTED, ABANDONED -

SHE WILL REACT DEFENSIVELY
- IN EITHER FACT OR FANTASY -

WITH THE SADISTIC UNLEASHING OF
A TORRENT OF ABUSE DIRECTED TOWARDS
EITHER HERSELF
- FOR HAVING FAILED TO GET WHAT
SHE HAD SO DESPERATELY WANTED -
OR THE DISAPPOINTING OBJECT
- FOR HAVING FAILED TO PROVIDE IT -

SHE MAY ALTERNATE BETWEEN ENRAGED PROTESTS
AT HER OWN INADEQUACY AND SCATHING REPROACHES
AGAINST THE OBJECT FOR HAVING THWARTED HER DESIRE

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WHEN THE RELENTLESS PATIENT IS CAUGHT UP IN
HER HOPE AND EXPECTATION THAT GOOD WOULD SURELY
BE FORTHCOMING WERE SHE BUT ABLE TO GET IT RIGHT,

IT IS CLEARLY A (MODEL 2) STORY ABOUT
"DEFENSIVE DISPLACEMENT" OF "NEED FOR GOOD,"
"ILLUSION," AND "POSITIVE MISPERCEPTION"

BUT ONCE THE RELENTLESS PATIENT IS CONFRONTED HEAD-ON
WITH THE INTOLERABLY PAINFUL REALITY THAT WHAT SHE
HAD BEEN ANTICIPATING IS NOT, IN FACT, GOING TO HAPPEN,
THEN PATHOGENIC INTROJECTS BECOME ACTIVATED AND KICK IN
VICTIMIZER AND VICTIM / ABUSER AND ABUSEE / SEDUCER AND SEDUCEE

SUCH THAT IT BECOMES A (MODEL 3) STORY ABOUT
"DEFENSIVE PROJECTION" OF "NEED FOR BAD,"
"DISTORTION," AND "NEGATIVE MISPERCEPTION"

THE "MASOCHISTIC DEFENSE OF RELENTLESS HOPE"
IS THEREFORE A STORY ABOUT MODEL 2

THE "SADISTIC DEFENSE OF RELENTLESS OUTRAGE"
A STORY ABOUT MODEL 3

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SO IF A PATIENT IN THE MIDDLE OF A THERAPY SESSION
SUDDENLY BECOMES VERBALLY ABUSIVE,
WHAT QUESTION MIGHT THE THERAPIST THINK TO POSE?

IF THE THERAPIST ASKS
"HOW DO YOU FEEL THAT I HAVE FAILED YOU?"

AT LEAST SHE KNOWS ENOUGH TO ASK THE QUESTION,
BUT SHE IS ALSO INDIRECTLY SUGGESTING THAT THE
ANSWER WILL BE PRIMARILY A STORY ABOUT THE PATIENT
AND THE PATIENT'S "PERCEPTION" OF HAVING BEEN FAILED
- WHICH ADDRESSES THE "SUBJECTIVE TRANSFERENCE" -

THEREFORE BETTER TO ASK
"HOW HAVE I FAILED YOU?"

WHICH SIGNALS THE THERAPIST'S RECOGNITION
OF THE "FACT" THAT SHE HERSELF
- SEDUCTIVELY AND UNWITTINGLY -
MIGHT WELL HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE
PATIENT'S EXPERIENCE OF UPSET AND OUTRAGE
- WHICH ADDRESSES THE POSSIBILITY OF BOTH
"SUBJECTIVE TRANSFERENCE" AND "OBJECTIVE TRANSFERENCE" -

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THE THERAPIST MUST THEREFORE HAVE
BOTH THE WISDOM TO RECOGNIZE
AND THE INTEGRITY TO ACKNOWLEDGE
THE PART SHE MIGHT HAVE PLAYED
IN PRECIPITATING THE ABUSE

PERHAPS BY FIRST STOKING
THE FLAMES OF THE PATIENT'S DESIRE
AND THEN DEVASTATING
THROUGH HER FAILURE
ULTIMATELY TO DELIVER

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IN ANY EVENT
THE SADOMASOCHISTIC CYCLE IS REPEATED
ONCE THE – SEDUCTIVE – OBJECT
THROWS THE PATIENT A FEW CRUMBS

THE SADOMASOCHIST
– EVER HUNGRY FOR SUCH MORSELS –
WILL BECOME ONCE AGAIN HOOKED
AND REVERT TO HER ORIGINAL STANCE OF
SUFFERING, SACRIFICE, AND SURRENDER
IN A REPEAT ATTEMPT TO GET
WHAT SHE SO DESPERATELY WANTS
AND FEELS SHE MUST HAVE
IN ORDER TO SURVIVE

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