

Sadomasochism



*A developmental approach: from
normality to perversion*

Three essays on the theory of sexuality (1895)

- About the psychosexual development and by that about the formation of character
- Related to the psychosexual stages
- Those stages are following each other in time. One after each other
- So Freud describes sexual development related to the **erotogenic zones**
 - Oral character
 - Anal character
 - Phallic character
 - Oedipal character
 - Genital character

Three essays on the theory of sexuality (1895)

- ❑ Soon Freud realized that the relation between the developmental stages which were following each other in time and the development of character was much more complicated.
- ❑ In other words the relation between inner drives, their gratification and the development of the personality was much more complicated
- ❑ That is why A.Freud developed her concept of the developmental lines

A. Freud: Normality and Pathology in Childhood (1965)

- ❑ She stressed the fact that development was a going on process
- ❑ In development one developmental stage will influence the other
- ❑ A going on process also on the continuüm from **normality** to **pathology**
- ❑ Developmental lines represents the result from the interaction between **drive** and **superego** development and their reaction upon influences from the external world
- ❑ It is about **external** behavior which can be observed and about the **inner** development, necessary for making the next developmental step in an adequate way

A. Freud: Normality and Pathology in Childhood (1965)

- She described one developmental line as basic related to the other ones namely that one that follows the development of the child
 - which is in the beginning of their development completely dependent of the care of the maternal object
 - At the end as a young adult able to function emotionally and fysically on their own, in a self confident way

A. Freud: Normality and Pathology in Childhood (1965)

- At the end the human infant has developed into a personality which has found a balance between autonomy and relatedness
 - Biologically unity between mother and child
 - Need satisfying analytical relation between mother/child based upon the physical needs of the child
 - Objectconstancy
 - Able to bear ambivalencies
 - Object relatedness
 - Latency
 - Puberty and Adolescence

A. Freud: Normality and Pathology in Childhood (1965)

The concept of the developmental lines makes it possible to:

- Differentiate between different forms of pathology
 1. **Conflictual pathology**: the hysteric and obsessive compulsive neurosis (**somatic self**)
 2. **Developmental pathology**: psychosomatics and borderline (**psychological self**)

- To bring together Normality and Pathology

- In case of perversions Kernberg developed a developmental line about **sadomasochism** from **normality** to **perversion**
(*Aggression in personality disorders and perversions 1992*)

Freud: Masochism 1

Three essays on the theory of sexuality (1895)

- ❑ Behavior is related to drives and the regulation of them
- ❑ Drives manifest themselves in a specific way related to the developmental fases: *drives and component drives*
- ❑ Masochism as a (component) drive

A child was beaten (1919)

- ❑ Masochism as a psychological reaction on and a defense against the oedipal constellation
- ❑ Unconscious guilt feelings: repression of the oedipal wishes.
- ❑ Both drive and defensive activity

Freud: Masochism 2

Beyond the pleasure principle (1920)

- ❑ Introduction of the death instinct
- ❑ For the first time: primary and secondary masochism
- ❑ Primary masochism related to the death instinct

The Economic problem of masochism (1924)

- ❑ Two drives: sexuality and aggression
- ❑ Primary masochism: related to the concept of the death drive,
- ❑ Secondary masochism
- ❑ Feminine masochism:
- ❑ Moral masochism: related to the superego and the unconscious need for punishment

Freud: Masochism 3

Analysis Terminable and interminable (1937)

- Further elaboration of the difference between primary and secondary masochism

Masochism

- A psychological reaction to and defense against the oedipal constellation
- An Inborn drive, primary masochism
- More and more attention to the narcissistic aspects of masochism and
- In case of masochism: analyzing the preoedipal forerunners of the superego
- Keep an eye on the development of early object relations

Freud: Masochism 4

- Nowadays more focus upon intense feelings of anxiety and aggression than on guilt feelings
- Upon narcissistic vulnerabilities and childish feelings of being all mighty.
- Differentiation of masochism as a part of the conflictual pathology and as a part of developmental pathology
- **Kernberg (1992)** developed a developmental line related to masochism from normality to perversion.

Kernberg: Normal Masochism

- ❑ The price you have to pay for adequate integration of normal superego functions
- ❑ There are unconscious guilt feelings which will manifest themselves when repressed infantile wishes are activated
- ❑ Self criticism in a realistic way, that can bring in some dysphoric feelings

Kernberg: Depressive masochistic P.D.

Within the area of the neurotic personality organization

- ❑ Strong but integrated Superego and an integrated Ego identity
- ❑ Dependent on support, love and acceptance by others. Because of their inner feelings of ambivalences about others which activate intense feelings of guilt
- ❑ Problems in the expression of aggression
- ❑ They feel very responsible, and are focused very much on their job performances
- ❑ High expectations and standards, by failing depressive reaction
- ❑ Vulnerable for rejection by and disappointments in other people
- ❑ Related to moral masochism
- ❑ These people are able to live on the level of take and give, they can react with love and emotional understanding to other people
- ❑ Conflicts and by that conflictual pathology is dominating.

Kernberg: Sadomasochistic P.D.

Within the area of the borderline personality organization (more high level)

- ❑ Partial Object relations, ego diffusion
- ❑ Archaic forms of defense related to splitting
- ❑ Alternating between sadistic or masochistic behavior to the same person
- ❑ They experience themselves as victims of the aggression coming from outside
- ❑ Mostly there are in their history stories about, verbal, physical or even sexual abuse
- ❑ Both conflictual and developmental pathology; conflicts and deficits

Kernberg: Primitive selfdestructivity and self harm

Within the area of the borderline personality organization (medium and low level)

- Severe self destructive behavior, severe superego pathology, absence of the ability of experiencing guilt feelings
- Those patients in whom the histrionic or dependent personality disorder is dominant. Intensely dependent on other. Selfdestructivity is related to intensive feelings of anger, or with temporarily deep depressive reactions. It is an unconscious way to control again the environment by provoking guilt feelings in people in the outside world.
- This group is characterized by malignant narcissism. They are not involved in other people. Their selfdestructivity is provoked at the moment their pathological grandiose self is hurt. That results in the experience of traumatic rejection or humiliation.

Kernberg: Primitive selfdestructivity and self harm

Their suicidal or selfdestructive behavior goes openly together with sadistic behavior. It is about their trying to triumph over pain. In a way those people triumph over those people who feel shocked by that extreme behavior.

- The third group in this area is characterized by psychotic aspects. In their histories forms of bizarre suicidal attempts can change with extreme cruelties against other people. There is no firm differentiation between inner and outer world, fantasy and reality or self and object.

In this developmental line developed by Kernberg about masochism we see that the integration of the superego is diminishing and the primitive aggression against the self or the other is raising.

The functional meaning of Masochism

- There is always something like masochism:
 - As long as there is a superego, helplessness and frustration in early childhood, a need for object relations and a need for self definition
 - As long as there is separation, individuation, internalization. And as long as there are interactive conflicts between Ego and Superego, there will be a form of masochistic behavior.

- Masochism is related to gratification but that gratification is not only sexual, the pleasure principle has different forms of expression

- The pleasure principle can be related to aggression, or related to maintaining important object relations, or to the adequate feelings of selfdefinition

Masochism and Guilt feelings

- Sometimes masochism is the price that have to be paid for because of forbidden oedipal wishes.
 - A sadistic Superego is punishing a masochistic Ego
 - By punishment one is freed from unconscious guilt feelings

- Agression is externalized in the outside world, the masochistic patient provokes pain and anger at other object while he is inducing guilt feelings in the other who is behaving quite aggressively

Masochism and maintaining object relations

- In the masochistic activity prae-oedipal aggression towards the primary caring object is directed toward the self
- For the masochistic patient pain and frustration became equal to get love and they get a meaning in maintaining vital object relations
- The masochistic activities help to control: “It depends all on me..... I am not doing well..... when I change, the relation will change into a good direction “. So the patient is in control of the quality of the object relation

Masochism and Self esteem

- ❑ Where frustration, helplessness and the loss of magic and mighty fantasies are there, the masochism sometimes has the function of repairing the failure of the self esteem.
- ❑ Masochism is related to narcissism, this role is very important during the separation and individuation process

Masochism and selfdefinition

- ❑ Frustration and unpleasant experiences are needed in the development of the child to come to an adequate differentiation between the self and the other
- ❑ Frustration and unpleasant experiences are useful in the process of creating boundaries during the separation/individuation process
- ❑ Saying "No" during the anal phase can be seen as an attempt to differentiate oneself from the rest of the world
- ❑ Self destructive masochistic behavior can have the function to feel yourself, to feel the Ego and to have the experience of being an independent, autonomous person: **I am suffering that is why I am existing**