

A Specific Use Of Masochistic Fantasies

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In this paper I want to describe how a patient of mine, Max, used masochistic fantasies to detach himself from having any real emotional experience. I shall endeavour to show that by getting engrossed in these fantasies he was trying to prevent his internal good parents from having any meaningful relationship with him. Finally, I shall demonstrate that as a consequence of this mechanism Max's own efforts at having a proper relationship were frustrated.

My plan is to first describe the consultation session I had with him with a view to give a picture of his personality at that time. Then I shall give material from the early analysis where I obtained Max's picture of his parents. After this I shall proceed to demonstrate how this picture was enacted in the transference whereby it was possible for us to reach his masochistic fantasies and the use he put them to.

Consultation Session

Max was a six-foot tall, handsome man of thirty. He was dressed immaculately and seemed to have taken considerable care about his appearance. To start with, I made some encouraging sounds for him to begin. He remained silent. Soon I realized that if I did not ask questions Max was not going to say anything. It was not as if he did not mean to talk. He was distinctly waiting for me to ask questions. I finally decided to accept this situation. I asked him what had brought him to analysis.

He spoke in a very specific manner. His sentences were short and abrupt. Also he spoke very fast. I shall demonstrate this.

He said:

“I have this pain”.

“In the testes”.

“I went to Dr. Mistry– a specialist”.

“Dr. Mistry said nothing wrong with them”.

“Looks like an emotional problem”.

“See an analyst”.

“Therefore I phoned you”.

He said all this so fast that I could not understand anything at all. I had to ask him to repeat himself a couple of times.

After this he again remained silent. I felt a pressure to ask more questions. If I did not the session was not going to move at all. I finally pointed out that he could not tell me anything without my asking questions. He said that he did not know what he was supposed to tell me. He was advised to see me and here he was. How was he to know what to say?

I want to emphasize that there was no rudeness or cussedness in his talk. He seemed to be blankly stating what he thought were facts. Yet, one felt that there was something quite stupid about him.

I suggested that he might tell me more about his pain in the testes. He responded by saying that there was nothing to tell. It was just like any other pain. It had started a few months ago. He had ignored it at first. When it had recurred a couple of times he had consulted Dr. Mistry. What more can one say about a pain, he added.

I then asked him about his family and work. In very clipped sentences he told me that he was thirty years old, Roman Catholic from Goa. He worked as a Clerical assistant in a private firm where he earned Rs. 3000/- per month. He was the youngest of five children – the eldest a brother and three sisters. The brother and two sisters had left the house because they were fed up with their father. Max and Ella, the sister two years older than him, lived with the parents.

Max then said that his father was a very difficult man to live with. He was terribly interfering. Nobody in the family could stand him. Max hated to live with the father but he was too afraid to do anything about it. I could not get much information about Max's mother in this session. He only said that she was O.K.

He then said that he was not quite happy in his job. People in his office told him that he stared at women's breasts. He himself did not know if this was true. When others said so he felt disturbed.

After a brief pause he said that "by the way" he often had this urge to look at men's penises. Now, since this was the only information actually volunteered by him without my question, I had hoped that he might tell me more but nothing came out from him. I had to ask him what his feelings were when he had this urge. He replied in a totally surprised tone, "What feelings? It has nothing to do with feelings. I just look. Where do feelings come into this?"

I felt that now I had a clue to what was taking place between us. I had been pressurized to ask questions to which he had replied in a flat, matter-of-fact manner. I had asked all the right questions and he had answered them as well as he could. He had told me about his pain in the testes, about his difficult father and about his need to stare at penises and breasts. In a way all this would seem all right. Yet, it was not. Somewhere, all emotions were missing. He did not seem to feel the pain in the testes nor his anger at the father. He had no feeling when he stared at breasts but people said so. He had not come for analysis on his own but had only followed his doctor's' orders. I was behaving like a proper analyst without having proper analytical experience of any ordinary consultation session. On the whole therefore, he and I were being forced to go through an experience without, in any way, feeling anything. And this seemed to be the crux of the matter. All affects were getting split off from the actual experience.

I wondered where these affects had gone. Then I observed that in my counter-transference I was getting slightly irritated and frustrated at having to ask so many questions. I also noticed that I was a little exasperated with Max for being a bit daft, a little bit stupid. Was I not being forced to experience these feelings? Max had distinctly

conveyed to me that he could not allow any emotions to be attached to his experience. They had to be cut off and pushed into myself.

Here I formulated to him that he had come for analysis at the behest of his doctor. He was supposed to have emotional problems but as far as I could understand it, he himself did not seem to think so. The only thing that he had admitted was that people commented on his staring at breasts. Even this, he himself had not noticed. I wondered, therefore, why he should feel compelled to come for analysis.

Max replied that what I said was quite true. If others did not say anything, he did not feel he had any problems but, he added, others did say so and it did disturb him. So it was a problem. I then told him how I conducted analysis. Surprisingly, he heard me very attentively. I finally ended the session here after making arrangements of time and fees.

From this session following things were clear to me:

1) Max had made an effort to cut off affects from the analytical experience. As a result, I was forced to ask him questions about his emotions in a way that did not seem natural to me.

2) I felt that Max was a bit daft, a bit stupid but not really unintelligent.

3) I had no idea whatsoever about his pain in the testes.

I shall now describe what I learnt about Max's view of his parents in the following few months. He seemed to volunteer this information on his own but he did this in a particular manner. He said that he read a lot of magazines. In one of them he read that one's present problems might be a result of the manner in which one's parents dealt with one. Hence he felt that he should tell me about them – not that he himself felt like telling me. He also said that his staring at breasts and penises might be a problem because this too he had read in a magazine. In short, he would tell me everything provided a magazine supplied the reasons for it. If I asked him what his views were he tersely retorted by saying, "I don't know these things".

Nevertheless, whatever he did tell me about his parents was quite revealing. He said that his father was a very interfering person. He did not allow Max to do anything

or go anywhere. He suspected all of Max's behaviour. The father had a habit of asking too many irritating questions like "where did you go, with whom, how, what did you do, how much did you spend, why didn't you go somewhere else, why didn't you come back at this time, why could you not have done this some other day", etc.

Max found these questions highly exasperating. He could not understand what their purpose was, since, in actual practice, the father could not stop him from doing anything. Max felt that the only reason he could imagine was that the father did not want him to have sex. The father, it seemed to Max, was anxious that his children might go out and indulge in free sex which, being a Catholic, he could not tolerate. Max observed that the father had made serious efforts to prevent his first three children from getting married. All three had to elope with their spouses.

Max felt that it was not as if the father was genuinely concerned about his children's well-being. In fact, Max felt that his father was a very detached man. As long as Max kept off sex, the father was not one bit bothered about him. Every day the father read *The Times of India* from its first "T" to the name of the printer on the last page. If he finished reading this once, he began all over again. Max felt that the father was too engrossed in this 'peculiar' habit to worry at all about his children's real problems.

Gradually, Max started talking about his mother. He said that she was an illiterate woman, intellectually far inferior to the father who was highly educated. There was a tremendous gap between the two. He felt that the mother was quite stupid and could not possibly understand either her husband or her children. She was felt to be a constantly complaining, bitchy, chatterbox of a woman by both Max and his father.

Max said that he could not understand what his mother wanted. She seemed to be ill and bitter all the time. If anybody asked her what the matter was she replied by saying "I don't know". He said that she was "obsessed with her own imaginary illness for which she did not take any medicines".

She too seemed to Max to be dead against sex. She too was anxious that Max should not go out with girls for "that would get him into trouble".

To sum up: Max felt his father to be

- a) A detached, self-engrossed person who
- b) Had an irritating habit of asking intrusive questions.

He felt his mother to be

- a) Very stupid and
- b) Engrossed in her own illness.

Both of them were felt to be against Max's sexuality. With this I also learnt that in actual practice Max had no relationship whatsoever with any woman. In a way he seemed to have accepted his parents' directives of not indulging in sex.

I shall now demonstrate how these pictures of parents gradually and subtly entered into the transference. I would like to state here that sessions with Max were extremely slow and tedious. I had to wait patiently and long to arrive at any understanding at all. I am giving here only a few typical sessions, which might not convey a proper picture of this tediousness.

Max began one session by remaining silent. It was a long drawn out silence where I had no idea whatsoever of his thoughts. I asked him what he was thinking about. He said "nothing". He then added that "just now" his father's face came to his mind. Again, there was a long silence. I asked him what his feelings were when he had seen this face. He replied that it was just the face. There were no feelings.

After another long silence he said that he avoided using the front staircase because some boys stood there. He felt that if they saw him they might think him odd. He therefore used the back staircase.

I found it difficult to understand the jump from the father's face to these boys. It was clear that between the two associations he had thought of something but had said nothing about it. I again asked him a question: what made him think of these boys just now. He said "nothing". He just had this thought. I further asked him what he had meant when he said "they might find me odd". Max said that he did not know. People did find him odd and often said so. How they did this, he could not know.

There was yet another long silence. Then he said that the day before, while going home he had seen a boy pissing on the footpath. He was compelled to stare at this boy. When I asked him what his feelings were, I met with the same “nothing”.

We had another long silence. He then said that on the bus he had stared at a girl's breasts. This time, anticipating my usual question, he quickly added that he did not know why he did all this staring, because he derived no pleasure out of it.

I finally pointed out to him that by talking in the manner he did and by remaining silent for long stretches, he was setting up a specific situation between us. I was being forced to ask him questions without which I would not know what went through his mind. In this way, I was made to behave exactly like his father, who asked so many questions.

Max seemed to be a bit startled at this, but I noticed that he had not planned it to be so. He had just followed my instructions to tell me all his thoughts.

I said that when I had pointed out the similarity with the father .he did feel a bit surprised. He got rid of this surprise very quickly. Max said yes, it was true that I did ask him all these questions. With the father part of it, he did not agree. My questions were genuine, unlike his father's. I did not mean to interfere with him. He was therefore, a bit surprised that I should say such a thing. He did not like me asking him so many questions, but he did not mind them because I was analyzing him for his own good.

I had to end the session here but the point I want to draw attention to, is, how, in this manner, I was literally driven to behave like his father

As I said before, this is only one of a long series of such sessions. At times, I was at the end of my wits to find out some other method apart from asking questions to get any material from Max. Realizing the total futility of questions I decided to remain silent and see what emerged.

As I had feared Max remained totally silent for the entire sessions. I allowed this to happen for quite a long time. I was surprised that in spite of practically nothing being discussed in the sessions, Max continued to come for analysis with almost religious

regularity. It was clear the he was communicating something quite important in these silent sessions.

In my counter transference I noticed that I was never bored with Max. I felt extremely frustrated and angry. I also felt terribly rejected thinking that here I was, trying to understand this man so earnestly while he seemed to be removed from the sessions.

I finally pointed out to Max that when he remained silent like this he seemed to be so remote and detached. It was as if I did not exist in the room. Perhaps, he was trying to make me experience what it was like to have a father who got so engrossed in his newspaper. Perhaps, he wanted me to know how frustrated and angry it had made him feel. He must be feeling that no words could describe such an experience. The only way out was to make me suffer it.

Max was visibly moved by this interpretation. In near-panic, he rushed to say “no, no, no”. He did not want me to feel so bad. He did not speak because he had no thoughts. I must not feel so burdened.

In spite of his conscious denials, I felt that Max was quite touched. The evidence for this was that after the above session Max actually began to give a lot of information about his daily life. His speech which was so abrupt and fast showed a marked change. He became lucid and understandable. We seemed to have entered a new phase in analysis. The daily experiences that Max described revealed a new phenomenon, which I think, related to his relationship with his “stupid” mother.

In one such session Max reported that he had a bad day in the office. The head-clerk asked him to type a sales report. In this some sales figures were missing. Max had pointed this out to the head clerk who had said that he himself would put in these figures when they were available. After typing the report Max had given it straight to the Director of Sales. Naturally the Director was furious and had shouted at Max for giving him an unfinished report. Max told him what had taken place. The Director had got more furious and told Max that he was stupid. He should have given the unfinished report to the head-clerk- could he not understand such a simple thing?

When he finished describing this, Max asked me what his Director could have meant. While listening to this episode I had been feeling that Max was being really quite dumb. I felt quite irritated when he asked me this question.

Now, my question was, why he was behaving in this fashion. From my experience with him I knew that Max was not devoid of intelligence. This definitely meant something. There were described, a whole series of such incidents, which left one left wondering how a man of his age could be so stupid. In all such situations one fact was quite conspicuous. People around him felt irritated and angry with him – just as I felt in the session.

I then pointed out to Max how he became apparently stupid by identifying with his mother. When he asked me the question, “what did the Director mean” he had tried to produce in me exactly the same kind of anger as he would feel with her.

Max agreed with me. He said that he did take after his mother but he had not realized how closely his behaviour resembled hers. I again pointed out that his idea was to make me experience the annoyance that he felt with his mother.

After I gave the above interpretation Max once again became silent in the sessions. This came to me as a surprise because he had now been talking a great deal and I had not anticipated these new silences.

I think that these new silences were quite different from the earlier ones. Due to our earlier experience, I did not ask him questions but on closer thinking I realized that I would sound so silly asking him what he was thinking about. He would say “nothing”. In a way therefore, these silences were there to for me to be like his mother- stupid and ridiculous.

I pointed this out to Max. He responded by saying that he was pretty fed up with his mother because she always answered all his questions saying, “I don’t know”. He wondered how anybody could be so daft. I said that he had been behaving quite daft lately with me but he did not seem to notice it.

I think that in the above material it is evident that on one hand, Max was trying to make me experience his own feelings as a child by alternately identifying with both

his parents. On the other hand, I too, was identified with them. It is also clear that he had no words to express his experiences. He simply had to act them out in order to communicate.

One result of this was that Max began to feel terribly confused about both his and my sexuality. His need to stare at penises and breasts increased frantically. Understandably, this produced a great deal of anxiety in him. I suggest that he dealt with this by projecting into me both his little-boy-Max anxieties. I shall demonstrate this now.

On a Saturday night Max dreamt that he saw a girl of about six near a hut behind his house. She was urinating on the pavement. He went close to her to watch. He noticed that she had a boy's genitals. He felt very confused and woke up.

Typically, he did not give any associations. I interpreted that the girl behind his house was me behind the couch in the session. During the work by identifying alternately with his parents he had made me feel his childhood feelings. Due to such identification he must have felt terribly confused about his own sexuality. In the dream he had projected this confusion into me. I was therefore a little girl with a penis. This is why, perhaps, he was forced to watch penises and breasts alternately.

This led us into what to me, was the most difficult and tedious phase of Max's analysis. It lasted for more than a year. In this we again had long silences, which lasted for months. I had to contain Max's frustrations and analyze his defense of identification. When he spoke I had to meticulously sort out his sexual confusions. I felt convinced that this was the only way in which Max could be helped.

Max seemed to be quite aware of this, because once he said that he was amazed at my capacity to tolerate him. He said that it must be very tiring for me to analyze him. He appreciated that I was taking so much trouble to help him sort out his problems.

It was a completely new experience for Max to have somebody who took a patient interest in his life. I had hoped therefore, that he might show some improvement. I soon discovered how wrong I was.

In spite of his appreciation and his admission that he felt understood by me, we were caught up in these never-ending silences. In fact, now the silences began to be more unbearable.

In one such silent session I pointed out to Max that analysis was becoming increasingly painful to both of us. It was as if we were engaged in some sort of mutual torture.

To my utter surprise, Max said that actually when he was silent he had some fantasies in which he was tortured most cruelly. In one of them, he imagined that a group of boys caught hold of him and took him to the terrace of his house. They then beat him up with long sticks. In another fantasy, a girl from his office, called Ann, kept insulting him in the most humiliating fashion in front of the whole staff. He said that he could go on with these fantasies for hours.

I said here, that by getting into these tormenting fantasies, he had avoided getting properly analyzed. It was as if he had been frustrating our analytical intercourse. I also added that it was quite a surprising thing to do, when he had begun to feel understood by me.

Max responded by telling me that he had these fantasies right from childhood. He then gave me a long list of these fantasies. I shall give a few of them here.

- a) I taunted him for being impotent
- b) I talked about him to my colleagues in order to laugh
- c) I told his parents that they should give up all hope of Max improving because he was too dumb
- d) I beat him up mercilessly
- e) He was cheated of large sums of money by various types of con men.
- f) He got married and his wife ran away with another man. He came to me and cried. I told him that he deserved this.

Max told me that all these were pure fantasies since he did not believe a word of them. He felt filled up with them. They ran through his mind like a movie, and he enjoyed watching them.

I think that this was a very important revelation for both of us. He had begun to get engaged in these masochistic fantasies exactly when he had felt better understood. I had not been aloof like his parents. Why was he spoiling a good experience with me? Why was he frustrating this intercourse between us?

I shall now quote from a session where Max gave four dreams, which demonstrate comprehensively this new situation between us. Max did not give any associations for any of them as was his habit.

First Dream: Max was at the ticket counter of a railway station. The counter however, was that of a theater. He gave some money to buy his tickets but his money was not enough. He was very excited because it was a Film Festival where he expected to see films which would show people making love. When his money fell short, he did a strange thing. Apparently he had five tickets with him already which he gave at the counter instead of money. Still the man at the counter did not give him anything. Max moved away to the railway platform. There he met a man. Max told him that the man at the counter was a rascal.

A train came and Max boarded it with this man. He then felt very anxious that he was in danger without a ticket.

I interpreted that he wanted to be on this analytical journey. Instead of doing the straightforward thing of giving me proper information (not enough money) he remained silent. In his silence during the sessions (five tickets-sessions) he turned analysis into a movie of his masochistic fantasies. Instead of getting analyzed, he treated his session as a Festival of sexual films where he watched my intercourse with him getting frustrated.

In this he found that I refused to respond (the man at the counter did not give him any tickets). This made him feel furious (he said that I was a rascal.)

In spite of his behaving in this manner, I continued to analyze him (he did board the train) but this made him feel anxious (like the ticket-less traveler).

Second Dream: Max was in Jill's (an acquaintance) house. He was alone and saw Jill's underwear. Then he saw Jill's husband's underwear. He wanted to go on staring at these but he remembered in the dream that he might have to report this to me so he stopped staring.

I interpreted that instead of allowing his needy self (Jill) and myself (Jill's husband) to have an intercourse he kept staring at breasts and penises (which were under the "wears" – the clothes). But now he knew that I might notice it. Hence he decided to stop staring.

Third Dream: Max was watching a fight between two professional fighters. One of them gave huge blows to the other. This other chap was so very strong that he did not even feel these blows. Max felt a great deal of admiration for him.

I interpreted that these two represented him and myself engaged in a constant battle. He gave blows after blows (session after session) to me trying to hurt and frustrate me. He avoided feeling any responsibility for this by assuming that I was so strong that I felt no pain.

Fourth Dream: A woman who stays behind his house was urinating on the road. Max went close to her when he found that it was not she, but her son who was urinating. I interpreted that so far he had believed that his parents were messing up his life, but now when he looked closely at the situation in analysis (woman behind his house), it was clear to him that it was he himself – the son – who was messing up their intercourse.

I think it is evident from the above material that Max was using these movie-like masochistic fantasies to prevent any proper analytical intercourse to take place. He did this precisely when he felt understood by me. In the transference I represented his helpful, creative parents who had taken so much trouble over him. If he allowed this thought to develop Max was bound to feel guilty. Masochistic fantasies helped him – like an addiction – to avoid this sense of guilt.

After the above session Max began to get very depressed. In one session he spoke of his parents with a lot of sorrow in his voice. He said that he could understand his father's anxieties about himself. The father was so old now and Max was the only child

who did not earn enough. The father wanted to leave all his savings and his house to Max but naturally he was worried because Max did not have any real capacity even to look after the inheritance.

He said that the father had worked hard to become a senior government official. He came from Goa and had no influence whatsoever. Yet, due to his own merit he had achieved much. Max added that he could now understand that the father might have been frustrated with his mother. He was so highly educated but he was forced to marry a girl that his parents had chosen. It must have been awful for him. Yet, he supported the woman so well.

Towards the mother too, Max became more sympathetic. He said that obviously she must have been quite aware of the gap between the father and herself. What could she do to bridge the gap? She must have felt pretty helpless. Yet she too, had put up with her difficulties and had supported the father in his early days of poverty and struggle.

In this new description of his parents I could see that Max's image of them had altered considerably. They were not at loggerheads with each other. The father was no longer detached but was actually concerned about Max's future. The mother was no longer an object of ridicule. There certainly was an intellectual gap between the two but now they were supportive. As a consequence of this, Max's relationship with the outside world improved a great deal. He started dating girls. Here he had a big problem – his pain in the testes. Whenever he had any sexual contact with his girlfriend e.g. when he kissed her, Max would develop this pain. A dream from this time of analysis revealed Max's fears connected with having any sexuality now.

In this dream Max was traveling in a taxi to keep an appointment with a friend. When they approached the appointed place, he saw his friend standing at a bus stop waving at him to stop. Max told the taxi driver to stop but he did not. The taxi driver was engaged in his own thoughts. Max felt very frightened because he noticed that the taxi was headed towards a mountain cliff. Soon the taxi lifted in the air and was going to fall in a valley. Max wokerk up almost screaming with fear.

Now he gave some associations. He said that I was the only person he saw with a prior appointment. About driving in the taxi he said that the previous evening he had

dropped his girlfriend home in a taxi. He had kissed her but then had developed his pain.

I was able to show him that the taxi driver was the part of himself that got engrossed in his masochistic fantasies. I was the analytical friend who waved at him to stop these fantasies. He himself in the dream represented the part that did not want to get engrossed in this manner but wanted to form a proper relationship with a girl.

He was now afraid that since he had so far frustrated his internal good parents by getting self-absorbed in his fantasies, he would meet with their fate himself. The taxi rising in the air and then heading for a fall was like a penis rising in an erection and then meeting with a disaster. He feared that when he tried to have intercourse with a girlfriend he might get an erection but would not be able to perform properly because his penis would fall flat. This is why perhaps, he had the pain the testes while kissing her.

After this dream we were able to work fruitfully on Max's castration anxiety. Due to this the pain in his testes reduced considerably.

At the end of the third year of analysis Max became much more relaxed and free. His speech was no longer abrupt and fast. He began to relate to myself in a more intense and direct fashion. His relationship with his parents became quite warm and friendly. The pain the testes became a rare thing, and even when he got it, he was able to work it out within himself till it stopped.

Conclusion

I have tried to demonstrate how by remaining silent, Max identified alternately with his parents whom he felt to be detached. By this process he projected into me his own frustration and pain.

This process created in him confusion about his own sexuality forcing him to watch penises and breasts alternately.

When I was able to contain his frustration and sort out his sexual confusions in transference, Max began to feel anxious. He was then faced with his sense of guilt towards his good internal parents. Max used these masochistic fantasies, like an addiction, to avoid his guilt.

This insight helped us to understand Max's pain in the testes. This pain represented his anxiety that his own efforts at forming a mutually supportive relationship would meet with failure.

When Max was able to pull out of his addiction it was possible for him to feel compassion for both the parents. This finally freed him from his castration anxiety – the pain in the testes.