

## Sadomasochism in the Perversions: Some Thoughts on the Destruction of Reality

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### ABSTRACT

The author summarizes and develops some of her viewpoints on the perversions (outlined in several of the books and articles she has written). For her all the perversions, whatever their content, develop against an anal sadomasochistic backdrop. Their aim is to destroy reality. Reality, from a psychosexual perspective, may be defined as resulting from the existence of the father separating the mother and the child. This may be formulated in another way: reality is recognition of sexual and generational differences. Or, yet again: mother and father have a procreative sexuality, whereas the child does not. This leads to the idea that the destruction of reality is equivalent to destruction of the paternal universe. Clinical case illustrations are provided, one of which centers on the assassination of an old man who, besides representing a paternal oedipal image, also represents reality itself. This case illustrates in concrete form the murder of the father, and hence of reality, accomplished by the pervert when he eradicates the paternal dimension of psychosexuality by regressing to the anal sadomasochistic dimension.

I AM NOT GOING TO TOUCH on general theoretical issues related to [sadism](#) and masochism, the question as to which of the two is primary, for instance, or their relation to the death instinct. It seems preferable to summarize some of my personal hypotheses, incomplete though these may be, and to go on from there. This paper constitutes an application of views which are set out in greater detail elsewhere, particularly in *Creativity and Perversion* (1984b).

First, I should like to state that in my experience I have never encountered a case of perversion that is devoid of sadomasochistic elements, even though their presence in the clinical picture may be very discreet.

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Presented at the panel on "Sadomasochism in the Perversions," Fall Meeting of the American Psychoanalytic Association, New York, December 17, 1988. Accepted for publication March 18, 1990.

- 399 -

Close observation of any case of fetishism thus invariably reveals the existence of sadomasochistic elements. Let us take, for example, the case described by Glover (1927), which, in my opinion, is still one of the most remarkable essays on perversion, principally fetishism, of all psychoanalytic literature. Briefly, in the course of the ritual, the fetish—high-heeled and preferably white shoes—has to be *soiled and ruined*. After masturbating, the patient angrily discards them, saying: "Now go to the devil." At the same time he is excited by the idea that the feet in the shoes (a solid object within a hollow one) mutually inflict pain on one another (this is just one of the many sadomasochistic elements in this patient's material).

Jean-Jacques, one of my own patients with a complex clinical picture, presented a variety of sadomasochistic elements. During coitus, he used to tie his wife to the bed with a rope, besides engaging in many fetishistic activities. His first homosexual partner was a one-legged man. The artificial leg served to ban the genital penis. As I have stated in a study devoted to the analysis of "falsehood" (1984a), imitations—an artificial leg is an imitation—are anal in nature. The goal is to recapture the universe, described by Freud (1917), in which the objects and erogenous zones of the anal phase prefigure the objects and erogenous zones of genitality: the fecal stick anticipates the genital penis, the anus is a substitute for the vagina, the primal scene is reduced to feces in the anus, parting with stools is the prototype of castration, defecation is identified with the act of giving birth to a child. After genitality has been reached, these precursors of the anal phase are no more than pathetic imitations, similar to an artificial limb which goes under the pretense of totally replacing the once living limb. Additionally, the patient's excitement with a disabled person is clearly of a sadistic nature. The transference,

however, was dominated by masochistic provocation (aimed at exciting my sadism toward him), a mechanism to which I shall return.

Rather than dwell on the sadomasochistic *contents* of the perversions, I shall examine the basic sadomasochistic nature

- 400 -

of the perversions. My hypothesis is that even when the sadistic or masochistic nature of these contents is not obvious, the back-drop of perversion against which the various contents are enacted is *always* sadomasochistic. In this respect, my views come close to those of Stoller (1975), for whom perversion is an erotized form of hate. The object is to act out a fantasy of revenge which transforms an infantile trauma into an adult triumph. I believe, however, that his conception still provides us with an explanation of the *contents* of perversion, despite the generalization that is introduced in considering these as the expression of a unique mechanism.

I believe, in fact, that the perversions sweep the *genital dimension* of human sexuality from the scene, or, to put it another way, the very idea of fertile adult sexuality, i.e., the sexuality of the parents, is denied and abolished. The pervert's hatred is aimed at reality in general. This is essentially composed of differences, as I have pointed out elsewhere (1973), (1982), (1984b), (1984c): differences between man and woman, child and adult, between the appearance of the need (or the wish) and its satisfaction. In short, acceptance of reality, for the small boy (and I shall keep to the male example)<sup>1</sup> means acknowledging the need to wait until he has the psychosexual maturity to satisfy an adult woman (a substitute for the mother) and to give her a child. This means admitting the need to grow, to develop, and to *identify with the father* in order, like him, to possess a fertilizing genital penis. This is to admit that the father is endowed with prerogatives that the child will only acquire later; it is acceptance of the fact that the genital primal scene and the adult's powers of procreation lie beyond the child's reach.

In this respect I consider that penis envy (envy of the father's penis) is "normal" in the young boy, as is the accompanying unconscious wish for homosexual rapprochement, the aim of which is to introject the adult's sexual attributes. This

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<sup>1</sup> I am not suggesting that sadomasochistic perversion is only found in men, or that perversion in general is infrequent in clinical experience.

- 401 -

marks an important stage in masculine psychosexual development, which can be seen at work in Little Hans (Freud, 1909)—the story of the plumber, and is reexperienced in the course of analytic treatment. Conversely, in perversion this envy of the paternal attributes is rejected.

Following a Ferenczian line of thought, I think that the desire to return to the maternal matrix underlies the incestuous wish. The fully developed (classical) Oedipus complex is therefore preceded by what I consider is an inborn and immediate wish to clear from one's way all obstacles that prevent a return to the intrauterine state—the father, his penis, the babies peopling the mother's body. Reality is that upon the child's birth the mother's body *ceases* to be accessible. I have called the wish to destroy every obstacle opposing the return to the maternal body the *archaic matrix of the Oedipus complex* (1984a).

In "normal" or neurotic cases, the dosage of gratifications and satisfactions provided by the mother and those around the child leads him on to seek new satisfactions which help him to develop without becoming too strongly fixated at any one phase. He is thus "pulled" toward the fully developed Oedipus complex and genitality. The implication of such a process is that the child has chosen the father as his identification model and that feelings of rivalry coexist with feelings of admiration for his father.

If the mother denigrates the father, or to use Bak's (1968) expression makes an "outsider" of him, if the father slides into the background or, inversely, asserts his presence with violence, vulgarity, sadism and threatening behavior, then the child becomes the mother's favorite, her consolation and her hope. In both cases, the father's genitality is disqualified and the mother maintains her son in the illusion that with his prepubertal penis and just as he is, he is an adequate, even ideal sexual and narcissistic partner for her. He has nothing to envy in so insignificant, or brutal and disgusting a person as his father. Such a constellation leads to the organization of perversion and the reversal of the scale of values that emerge in the course of

- 402 -

normal psychophysiological development, i.e., in progressing toward adult fertile sexuality. Inversely, the aim of the pervert is to place pregenitality above genitality, to rank infantile sexuality higher than adult sexuality.

This inversion is equivalent to the *destruction of reality*. Here we find the principal explanation for the inevitable sadomasochistic nature of all perversions. This inversion justifies taking the writings of Sade as a focal point not only for understanding sadism—that goes without saying—but also for understanding the perversions which, when viewed in this light, become more clear.

I am going to briefly examine this destruction of reality, looking at both its sadistic and its masochistic sides. My starting point will be a summary of elements from previous studies (1973), (1978), (1984b) in which my aim was to show that the regression characteristic of perversion in general is specifically anal-sadistic. I shall then approach the issue of masochism by linking it to the same attempted destruction of reality.

## The Anal-sadistic Regression of Perversion and the Assassination of the Old Man

More than once I have turned to the works of Sade to corroborate my own hypotheses. Let me simply say here that the Sadian universe is one of confusion, chaos, mixture, inverted and abolished values. I have emphasized that such a universe amounts to an eradication of the genital dimension, rooted in differences and a scale of values. At the same time, it is a world established as the exact counterpart of the world of the Bible, based on division, separation, and differentiation.

We find that in the works of Sade the erogenous zones have become interchangeable: there is defecation into the mouth and the vagina, milk is introduced into the anus, etc. The woman's vagina is repulsive, and she is sodomized (as if she were a man). Man is penetrated (as if he were a woman). Marriages take place between children. Boys and girls are

- 403 -

dressed "in the opposite fashion" (Sade's own words). One has sexual intercourse with the aged. Mother, daughter, son, sister, brother, and father are raped. There is profanation of the Host and God is blasphemed. It is as if everything—the body, parts of the body, men, women, children, values—has been thrown into a gigantic grinding machine and reduced to identical homogeneous particles. This is a process that I, like B. Grunberger (1959), identify with digestion, the end result of which is fecalization.

To illustrate this reduction of the procreative genital world to particles of undifferentiated fecal matter, I shall present clinical material of a patient I have written about elsewhere (1978). The central dream in this material was connected to an approaching short break in the treatment due to a holiday. The patient was a very interesting and engaging drug addict, near the limit of perversion and psychosis, but with some anchoring points in reality.

He was seized with great excitement, to the point of orgasm, when he read accounts of capital punishment. His sexual life was impoverished and unsatisfactory. He linked his taste for stories about capital punishment to the memory of his mother reading, when he was seven or eight years old, to all her children (he belonged to a large family) the novel by Gertrud Von Lefort, *Dernière à l'Échafaud*<sup>2</sup> from which Bernanos derived *Le dialogue des Carmélites*. He adored his mother, a sensitive woman, cultured and musical, who herself adored her little boy. At the beginning of his analysis (it was his second attempt) he dreamed about the favorite subject of his erotic fantasies, i.e., capital punishment. A young girl, dressed in white, was to be guillotined at dawn. At the beginning, the dreamer did not know very clearly what was afoot. There were preparations, whisperings; it was still dark. Everything took place very slowly, and his excitement reached its peak when he understood what was going to take place. Guards seized the girl; her head was cut

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<sup>2</sup> The last to go to the guillotine.

- 404 -

off by the executioner in a great flood of blood, and this was accompanied by a strange murmuring. I could perceive through the detailed account of this dream that it was in fact a primal scene: whisperings, mysterious preparations, strange murmurs, the spectacular nature of the execution, everything combined to make the victim and the executioner the representatives of the parents during coitus. Nevertheless, this did not explain the specific character of the scene. If it had been a question of a commonplace sadomasochistic representation, it would, of course, have presented a problem, but the repetition of a scene where the victim's throat was cut ritually remained unexplained.

The hypothesis of a hatred of mother concealed behind adoration was not to be rejected, but did not explain the particular way in which it manifested itself. Then the patient revealed that his father was an ear, nose, and throat surgeon, and told of operations on the throats of patients and on the analysand himself: removal of tonsils, lancing of abscesses. It became clear that it was easier for the little boy to imagine that his father was cutting his mother's throat during sexual intercourse than to accept the idea that he penetrated her with his penis. Besides, he himself had played at being a doctor with a little neighbor girl. On returning home, he had found a baby brother. It may be said that playing doctor is a variation

of playing Mommy and Daddy. It is easy indeed for a little boy to play that game, but it cannot be said that it is easy for a little boy to cut his mother's throat. This is the prerogative of the executioner, recruited for his strength and his vigor.

Another dream occurred which clarified the problem. The patient was on a train. It passed the station of a town where, in reality, an execution had taken place which had been of passionate interest to the patient. In the dream the patient knew he was the inventor of a process for making chocolate truffles. This process would bring him a fortune; it utilized a small metallic circle that narrowed to allow moulding of the chocolate. He feared his precious and marvelous secret would be

- 405 -

stolen. In other words, the manufacture of chocolate truffles, in which it is easy to recognize the action of the anal sphincter, became mixed up with the hangman's axe or the guillotine which severs the head from the trunk. The guillotine scene, identified with the primal scene, is simply a transposition of the dividing of feces by the anal sphincter. The father thus does not do anything to the mother that the little boy of the anal phase cannot do.

The "secret" kept by the patient, the manufacturing of chocolate truffles, contains the germ of mental activity directed toward technology. In reality my patient had an occupation which gave him the opportunity to practice his sadism and his taste for research. Unfortunately, inadequate sublimation made for frequent professional failures. The "secret," which in his dream is worth a fortune, is that of the transmutation of the genital activity of the parents into an anal activity, the reduction of coitus to defecation. The aura which surrounded these representations of capital punishment, the precious and marvelous character of the secret, imply that these defecatory activities were subjected to a process of idealization. Thus anality took the place of genitality and became superior to it. The patient could transform gold into excrement (black magic) and excrement into gold (white magic). The secret he possessed was like the philosophers' stone.

My account of this case ended here. Soon after, the patient told me, with embarrassment, that as a student he had taken care of an old gentleman, in return for which he received a small sum of money. Twice a day he was required to give him medicine in the form of drops. He found the old man and the work particularly boring. One day "by error," he measured out a very strong dose of the medicine, and the old man died. The patient said he was very happy to have been able to tell me this. I was dumbfounded and said nothing. The patient never returned.

- 406 -

If perversion consists of the eradication of the adult paternal world, assassination of the father (or his substitute) is fortunately not always enacted in the external world. On the contrary, it is most likely a failure of perversion, a gradual slipping into a borderline organization or psychosis, which transforms sadism into pure violence with, in addition, loss of the ability to symbolize (see Glasser, 1979).<sup>3</sup> Of course this does not mean that perverse acts are not frequently directed at the mother (or her substitute). Once the anal-sadistic dimension is established it becomes a matter of brandishing a whip rather than of genital penetration, or inflicting pain, that is, of using a fecal penis which sullies and poisons rather than of giving pleasure with a penis which satisfies, nourishes, and repairs; of ruining, humiliating, and castrating rather than of engendering a baby who will grow and develop. At the same time, sexuality becomes a tool of vengeance (Stoller, 1975). In every case, the mother has indeed deceived her child; he is not her sole possessor, and the truth lurks in a corner of his mind: his perverse world is not superior to his father's world; the "ideal" child is, in fact, a child who has been outrageously fooled.

## The Archaic Matrix of the Oedipus Complex and Masochism

The archaic matrix of the Oedipus complex is possibly a universal primal fantasy which tends to take the place of more evolved wishes in certain structures. In my experience, patients with borderline organizations are those most liable to be dominated by this apocalyptic fantasy which aims at turning Mother Earth into a "Wasteland" (as in T. S. Eliot's poem). The aim is to

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<sup>3</sup> In the case of my patient, this is not to be considered a "sadistic" murder. He expressed his sadomasochism in fantasies of beautiful young women being decapitated at the guillotine (maternal figures). In my opinion the old man's assassination is equivalent to (concrete) eradication of the father and his universe, which adds up to the destruction of reality rather than oedipal murder. The deep-seated motivation behind such destruction in the perversions is of an essentially narcissistic nature, namely the wish to efface the wound linked to infantile helplessness and insufficiency.

- 407 -

empty the mother's body of its contents and to render it completely smooth in order to regain the place one once occupied. In describing this fantasy as it appears in clinical practice, I (1984a) went so far as to advance that the person in whom this fantasy is active identifies his own contents with the contents of the maternal body and with her thoughts (thoughts which

do not center entirely on the child, just as in the transference the patient fearfully suspects that the analyst's thoughts are not completely devoted to him). The individual's identification of his body with that of the object has the effect of arousing hatred for the contents of his own body. Such hatred is liable to provoke psychosomatic illnesses and can lead to suicide. However, the archaic matrix of the Oedipus complex mobilizes aggression, not sadism or masochism.

Perversion acts as a buffer where destructiveness and self-destruction are concerned. The pervert is able to erotize aggression on a durable basis (whereas with the borderline patient this can only be short-lived). The parental constellation with the mother's complicity in disqualifying the father and encouraging the child in the illusion that, as he then is, he satisfies her every desire—in short, disappearance of the adult genital dimension of sexuality—is characteristic of perversion and allows aggression to be transformed into sadism and/or masochism, a process which is seldom found in other psychopathological organizations. Another important fact which I can only mention in passing is that through her attitude the mother makes it possible for the future pervert to *idealize* pregenitality and the objects, erogenous zones, and satisfactions that are inherent to pregenitality, therefore enabling him to magnify his own pregenital ego.

In his *Three Essays*, Freud (1905) states: "A sadist is always at the same time a masochist" (p. 159). In the works of Sade, the "Sadists" are alternately tormentors and the tormented. This is confirmed by clinical experience. Earlier on, I mentioned the case of Jean-Jacques who used to tie his wife to the bed when making love to her. As a child he took to exposing

- 408 -

himself before his demented grandmother (his father's mother) and, safe in the knowledge that she was unable to denounce his goings-on, played many a nasty trick on her. In the same way, he spent his time provoking me in one or another fashion and to such an extent that I began to have sadistic fantasies. He was profiting from my obligation to remain neutral just as he had made the most of the grandmother's inability to protect herself. Sometimes I would imagine the pleasure I would have in showing him the door, and once or twice I even visualized myself hitting him. His sessions caused me pain, and I felt more like the person under attack than an assailant. He used to arrive looking like a beaten dog, which made me want to react like a mother whose child has been sobbing for no apparent reason and who smacks it, saying: "Now at least you'll have something to cry about." He said things like: "I didn't come last time. I spent the time with my mistress. I told my wife I was at my session. Since I'm paying you ..." Admittedly, he was trying to make me his accomplice in relation to his wife (as his mother had been his accomplice in relation to his father), but at the same time it was obvious that he was trying to immobilize me, to bind and paralyze me since he was "paying" me. He was keeping to the rules; I could not reproach him for anything. But his ultimate goal was to receive a thorough spanking, as my affects and countertransference fantasies indicated, corroborated by the patient's dreams of being beaten and manhandled.

Babys was impotent. After several months of analysis he began a sexual relationship with a young woman. He was not grateful, however, either to me or to this young woman. It was rather the opposite, for he began to hate her, accusing her of "clinging" to him. This was related to his maternal imago. He dreamed that he was drowning in the sea.<sup>4</sup> He was in fact the only living child of three, the two others—girls—having died at

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<sup>4</sup> In French, the word sea (*la mer*) and the word mother (*la mère*) are pronounced the same way.

- 409 -

birth. He had managed to overcome his fear of the deadly, engulfing female sex, but this claustrophobic fear now colored the sexual relationship he had established as well as the transference. Every one of my interventions, for example, was greeted by a stifled laugh. This was interpreted as a defense against whatever came from me and which, were it not isolated and deprived of its weight and force through derision, might ensnare him in unyielding claws.

Shortly after, he had a dream in which I was pursuing him with a needle to give him an injection. Homosexual material was abundant, and I interpreted his dream as a sexual wish to have me penetrate him. This resulted only in reinforced resistances and redoubled laughter. At the same time I started to feel roughly the same affects and fantasies toward him as I had experienced toward Jean-Jacques when, for example, rather than telling me my interpretations were incorrect, he said they "did not please him." When I intervened, I found myself raising my voice. This put me on the alert, and I began to watch for possible masochistic aspects in his material. Apart from the way he irritated me, I found nothing. Now I hesitate to form an opinion about what is going on in a patient based solely on the countertransference, without this being confirmed by the material.

The patient had the following dream: He was in a car and there was someone in the back seat. At the same time, he was in a room, turning around in circles holding in his arms a man of his own age who was being knocked against the walls. The person in the back of the car wanted to intervene, but he told him to keep quiet. He associated to the man being spun around, saying that he was probably his double. The person in the back of the car must have been me. Then he

remembered the dream of the injection. It was from then onwards, he felt, that the analysis has ceased to move forward. At this point I intervened, showing him how he was trying to prevent me from changing his autoerotic and homosexual relationship, a relationship in which he enjoyed giving and receiving blows. I prevented him

- 410 -

from "turning in circles." And the dream of the injection probably also represented the same conflict: both the fear and the wish that I would inject a new element into the fantasied sexual relationship which functioned in a closed circuit.

It can be noted that the wish to hit and to be hit, i.e., his sadomasochistic relationship, was enacted in the transference and that as a result the narcissistic, autoerotic aspect of his fantasy was defeated. Likewise, his heterosexual activities activated homosexual wishes which therefore constituted a defense against the wish to return to the maternal womb, in his case ridden with the anxiety of annihilation. However, it may be inferred that his sexual success had awakened a need to be punished by the superego, now reincarnated in the analyst.

Rather than true erogenous masochism, here we are able to detect the effects of moral masochism in which the links between the superego and the ego are resexualized (Freud, 1924), for these patients seek to receive blows and punishment without any conscious enjoyment. But it is to be noted that although Jean-Jacques and Babys were driven by unconscious guilt to provoke the analyst into maltreating them, this need for punishment came very close to perversion in both cases, since Jean-Jacques had a perverse organization and Babys, who was probably borderline, had erogenous sadomasochistic fantasies which were expressed through dreams.

I suggest (1989) that moral masochism is closer to perversion than to the neuroses, where guilt brings no pleasure—an opinion I share with Rosenberg (1982). It involves *disqualification of the father* (the superego) who is enticed into taking part in sexual games with the subject (the ego). This disqualification of the father brings us back to the schema of perversions.

In my opinion, behind the sufferings of the truly erogenous masochist lies in an even clearer way the process of degradation to which the father and his attributes have been subjected. The masochist's own body is identified with the body of the mother, with whom he fuses. This feminine identification is, we know, central to erogenous masochism, but a position in

- 411 -

which the subject, who is one with the mother, is humiliated and affronted, constitutes the means of masking the treatment inflicted by the subject on the father, and if we are to understand masochism this mask must be lifted.

With his partner, the masochist gives material form to the fantasy of a primal scene reduced to a whipping or torture session, i.e., a scene that here again takes place in the anal-sadistic register. (In this respect, I think it is necessary to introduce the fantasy of a sadomasochistic primal scene into Freud's [1919] development of the subject in "A Child is Being Beaten.") Here, too, the genital penis is swept from the scene. Transformed into a whip, humiliation, and insults, it undergoes a strange metamorphosis. It is this metamorphosis which in both masochism and sadism contributes to the pleasure obtained, a mixture of sexual pleasure and narcissistic triumph.

By putting one's own or the other person's body to "unnatural" uses, changing the destination of the erogenous zones, by subjecting the parts of his own or the other's body to novel treatment, the masochist and the sadist alike achieve the "impossible." The masochist frequently submits to a dominating woman, or plays the part of the passive homosexual. In both cases, he casts himself in a so-called "feminine" role. Even when he is a downright homosexual, he nonetheless reduces his partner to *an undifferentiated pregenital phallic figure. Only the pregenital characteristics of the father in his own history remain.* Though he may seem eager to incorporate the father's penis (in concrete form), owing to the fact that, as a boy, he had not introjected it (in unconscious fantasies), his acting out of the missing homosexual rapprochement with his father often results in a never-ending engulfment of penises, reduced to anal or anal-sadistic phalluses.

In Jouhandeau's (1988)<sup>5</sup>*Tirésias*, we find the following passage:

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<sup>5</sup> A French writer who died several years ago. He was a homosexual, and kept a journal which provides us with information on his childhood and, above all, about his quarrels with his wife.

- 412 -

When he told me for example, after having scoured my entrails, spinning me around impaled on his axle of iron, like one tortured on the wheel; when he told me for example, after having stood up without releasing me and having spun me from left to right and as many times again from right to left, my body still attached to his flank, my limbs spread like the wings of a windmill; when he had told me for example, after having made me aware of how closely welded together we were by a shaft of steel; when he told me for example,

almost with hatred, his slobbering mouth close to my eyes: "Ha! See what I am doing to you..." Well, it was not just a case of what was happening, what seemed to be happening between us; it was what happens in forests between wild beasts, or in hell between the demons and the damned; and in the firmament too, between the stars [pp. 29–30; trans. Janet Cheng].

Behind this description of a terrible and grandiose copulation, we can guess, I think, the author's fantasy as a child, identifying with the carcasses of meat strung on steel hooks by his butcher father (Jouhandeau's father was in fact a butcher, whereas his mother, according to his description of her, was a beautiful and refined woman with a love of literature and poetry). But to reduce the attributes of one's father to a steel hook—butcher though he may have been—is the way the small boy, who is incapable of satisfying his mother and of giving her a child, deludes himself that the father is equally devoid of the capacity to satisfy and fertilize the mother, that he can only scour her with a big knife, like the meat he quarters in his butcher shop.

This schema does not apply to all forms of masculine homosexuality—though it can be found in numerous cases. (In fact we should speak of *homosexualities*, since there is a whole spectrum of homosexual disorders, ranging from those close to neurosis to others bordering on psychosis, with in between, pervert forms of homosexuality where the chief aim is to destroy and debase fertile genital parental intercourse.) I believe

- 413 -

it does apply to all forms of perversion, however. Where, in certain instances, a case is entirely dominated by sadomasochism, this is probably for reasons connected to the patient's personal history. In such cases, the contents of the perversion are analogous to the backdrop against which they are enacted.

It has not been my intention to say that it matters little whether the subject is more of a masochist than a sadist, or vice versa. My aim has been to show that we are justified in speaking of sadomasochism insofar as the goal sought by both members of the couple is identical in essence and has its place at the heart of the perversions.

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- 415 -

## Article Citation [\[Who Cited This?\]](#)

Chasseguet-Smirgel, J. (1991). Sadomasochism in the Perversions: Some Thoughts on the Destruction of Reality. *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn.*, 39:399-415

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