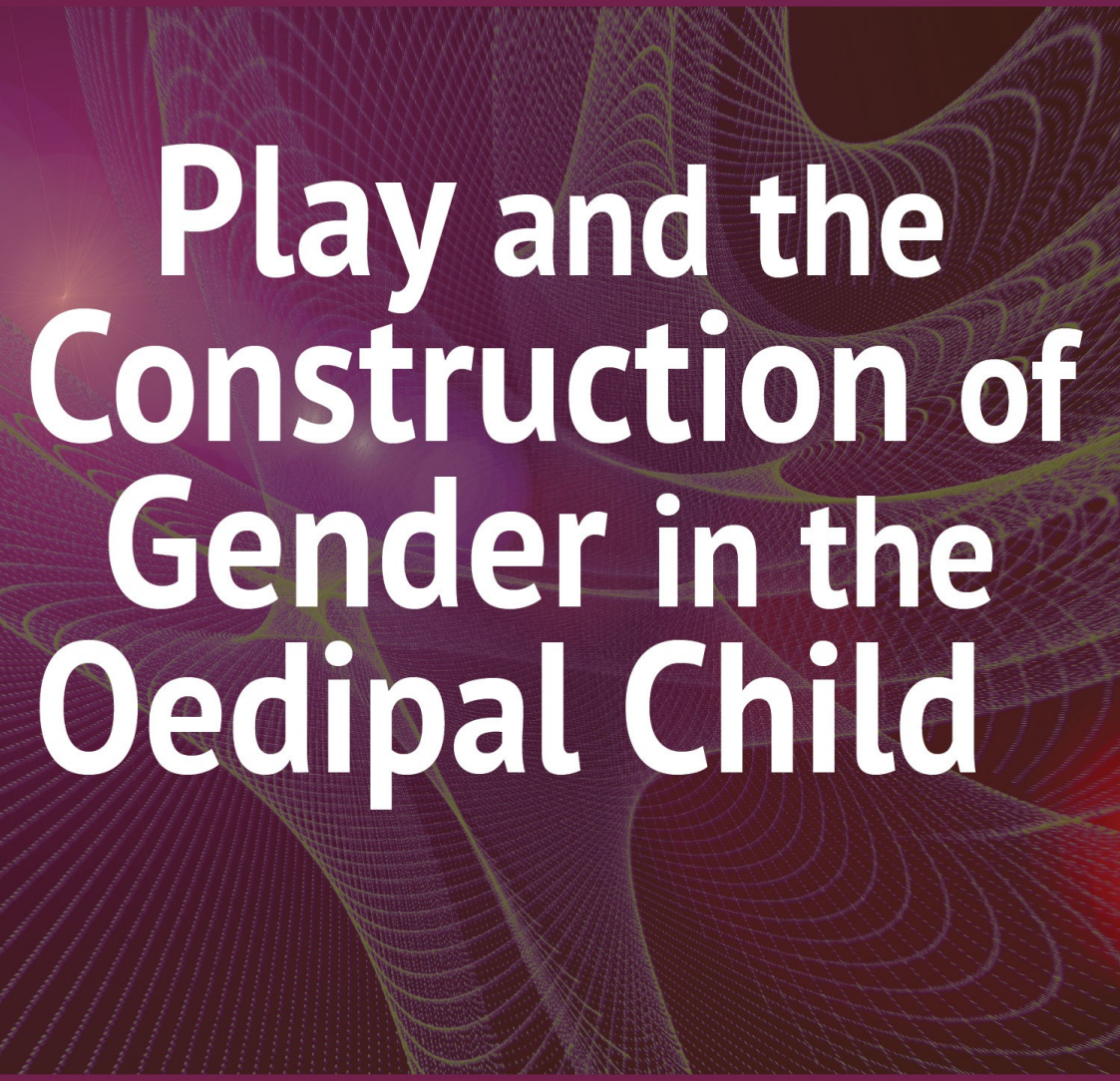
The Many Meanings of Play



Play and the Construction of Gender in the Oedipal Child

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Table of Contents

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Popular opinion and child development research stress pervasive and significant differences in the pretend play of boys and girls. Nonpsychoanalytic studies demonstrate sex differences in activity level, thematic content, characters, and toy choice (see Rubin et al. [1983] for a thorough review of child development research concerning sex differences in children's play). Psychoanalytic theory has argued that manifest differences in the imaginative play of boys and girls result from latent substantive intrapsychic differences in the construction of gender. For example, Erikson (1950) believed that the differences he observed in the use of the play space by ten- to twelve-year-old children had been centrally influenced by the subjective experience of anatomy. Erikson's conviction that the child's sense of spatial organization is dominated by the biological genital schematization has frequently been used to argue that significant differences in the play of boys and girls reflect a bisexual construction of gender with the predominant emphasis closely tied to anatomical morphology.

In this chapter, I intend to show that though on its surface the play of oedipal-age children does appear to illustrate such a dichotomous, categorical expression of gender, when the manifest content is examined for latent fantasies the multidimensional nature of children's notions regarding gender emerges. I contend that it is the flourishing of imaginative, symbolizing play during the oedipal period that allows the child to construct a more complex, densely layered, and highly individual sense of gender. This oedipal psychological construction involves a retroactive transformation of an earlier, dichotomous, biologically rooted gender identity that is more closely linked to anatomy. One of the central story lines that engages the oedipal child involves the internal dilemma created when the child hates and wishes to destroy those objects who are also loved (see chapter 18 for a fuller discussion of such thematic content). This chapter explores the ways in which the vicissitudes of aggression both drive and are reflected in gender construction. Although I recognize the contribution of libidinal issues to the development of gender, it is not my intention to investigate that contribution here.

I begin by examining the play of six boys and four girls of oedipal age who participated in a study of normal children's play during a clinical interview. Differences in the thematic content between the sexes are explored to demonstrate that "gendered" fantasies are given surface presentation in the play of oedipal-age children. These surface presentations permit the observer to think of gender as a dichotomous, categorical variable.

I shall then consider the play from early in the psychoanalyses of a boy and a girl. The surface of the pretend play of these two analytic patients is quite similar to the play of the study boys and girls. But when the play of the two child patients is examined through the microscopic lens provided by their psychoanalytic treatment, we are able to see the ways in which both children entertain multiple possibilities across multiple "subvariables"; these eventually become organized into a complex gender fantasy structure that is personal, nondualistic, multileveled, and multidimensional.

The Play Study

Methodology

As described previously (Cohen et al., 1987), twenty children were recruited from a nursery school for a study of children's play during clinical interviews. Each child attended three forty-five-minute play sessions with a child analyst who knew nothing about the child's history, background, or developmental status. The sessions were videotaped from behind a one-way mirror and then transcribed. This report draws on the data generated during a study designed to test the validity and reliability of a scoring protocol developed to analyze the videotapes and transcripts. The videotapes of the second sessions of the first ten children to participate in the study were selected. Because data analysis focused on determining the validity and reliability of the coding protocol, no effort was made to pide the sample equally between boys and girls. The protocol specified the minute-by- minute coding of thirty predetermined imaginative play themes organized along six dimensions: the body; interpersonal relations; morality; aggressivity; secrets, birth, and babies; and techniques for structuring the play.

Data

The play themes of the boys and girls in this sample were more similar than dissimilar. Across all thematic dimensions, boys and girls were sharply differentiated along only two of the six dimensions. The boys were much higher than girls on all themes pertaining to aggressivity, and girls were much higher than boys on all themes having to do with birth and babies.

Within thematic dimensions, however, there were some notable differences. Of those themes pertaining to the body, the play of the boys tended to be organized around themes having to do with the power, size, and capacity of the body; their play reflected a concern with how big and powerful the body was and what the body could do. In contrast, when the girls' play presented themes having to do with the body, the content concerned bodily functions: eating, sleeping, and toileting. The girls made more references to their bodies and those of their characters and touched their own bodies more than did the boys.

In keeping with the girls' narrative emphasis on themes involving bodily functions, birth, and babies, their play was significantly different from the boys' in the use of family members as story characters; these were the predominant characters in the girls' narratives and virtually absent from the boys'. Along this same line, the girls' narratives reflected a concern with loss of the object, with comings and goings of significant others, and with the notion of two characters excluding a third. These themes were very weakly represented, if at all, in the boys' play.

Given the boys' narrative focus on aggressivity, it is not surprising that their stories were sharply differentiated from the girls' by the presence of themes having to do with destruction; the tearing down, crashing, bashing, and blowing up of inanimate objects and property were frequent story lines in the boys' play and virtually absent from the girls'.

A characteristic story narrated by one of the girls began with an elaborate, detailed setting up of a dollhouse and then a placement of the family dolls in the interior of the house. The family dolls would be described in terms of their family relationships: mommy, daddy, big sister, little sister, baby, and so on. Much of the play might consist of moving the characters around the interior of the house in precise, quiet domestic play. Gradually this domestic scene would give way to a more

dramatic scenario.

Linda, age five, began her second interview by engaging the analyst in conversation about family life. She spoke regretfully of not having enough time with her daddy and about her anxiety concerning attending kindergarten in the fall. She then narrated a long story about kite flying with her parents, describing animatedly how big her kite was and how high it flew. With some excitement Linda described telling her daddy to run as fast as he could so the kite would not fall down. As she chatted, she began to play with the toy kitchen utensils, ending her kite narrative to explain that her mom did not let her help in the kitchen because of "things that are sharp and cutting."

Linda then began to pretend she was preparing soup, cutting up vegetables and garlic; four times she "cut" her finger, exclaiming "Ouch!" dramatically each time. Repeatedly utensils and cans became stuck, and Linda pretended to fix them. As she struggled to fix various "complicated machines," Linda chatted about ethnic differences between her mom and dad. As she talked, she moved from her cooking play to the dollhouse, examining toy furniture. Looking at a dollhouse toilet, Linda commented forcefully, "Things are all scattered around," and she then began to tidy up the dollhouse. As she continued setting the scene, she periodically spoke with mock irritation of how messy the house was as she reflected with pleasure how well she was "organizing" it.

As she arranged the dollhouse, Linda placed the small family figures in the various rooms, beginning with the mother in the kitchen, whom she described as not wanting anyone "bugging her." She put the father in the bathroom taking a shower, while the two sisters took a bath in the same room. She placed the baby in "his walking thing." A little later she stated that the mommy and daddy had their own private bathroom. Having arranged all the rooms and all the family figures (a mommy, a daddy, two sisters, a brother, and two babies), Linda began to speak for her characters. The story she narrated concerned one of the sisters, who was eight years old and was told by the mommy to watch the baby. Linda had the sister carry the baby upstairs and wash "his" hands. As if to suggest how hard the sister worked to take care of the baby, Linda described her as too little to reach the sink, and at another point she spoke for the sister, "I'm tired." Abandoning the apparently too difficult work of caring for the baby, Linda had the sister go off to play hide-and-seek with the other sister.

The remainder of the session, fourteen minutes, was occupied with dramatized variations on the theme of hide-and-seek. The longest play sequence, lasting four minutes, was at this point as Linda concentrated on an elaborate game of hide-and-seek between the two sisters, Karen and Lucy. Although Linda described Karen as becoming tired from the game, Lucy continued to hide; Linda then made the father yell at Lucy not to hide. Lucy disobeyed her father and hid herself excitedly as the father and brother searched. For three minutes, Linda had the father search in and out of the house for Lucy, who finally shouted, "Daddy!" and came home. Immediately following Lucy's return, Linda dramatized the family's discovery that their baby "is lost!" In this sequence, Linda focused on the dad's actions; the house was very dark as the dad searched and yelled for the lost baby, now referred to as a girl, Ann. Although the father was depicted as joyfully finding Ann, he then turned angrily on Karen whom he blamed for losing the baby. Linda dramatized Karen "being snotty" to the dad. Linda said in an excited whisper, "She's in trouble," adding with a giggle, "That must be fun for Karen!" Linda drew her story to a close as the session ended by having the daddy spank Karen; Karen cried and the dad, sending Karen to her room, said affectionately, "That was just a spanking, honey." Throughout this fourteen-minute narrative sequence, Linda sustained an intense, animated involvement with her imaginative play, speaking dramatically for each character and conveying a broad range of imagined affects. During the final sequence as first Lucy hid from the dad and then Karen teased and was spanked by him, Linda's affect was one of excited and amused pleasure. Through language, affective communication, and eye contact, Linda made sure that the female analyst understood her narrative.

The theme of family members hiding from, teasing, and excluding other family members was a common one for the study girls. Susan, age five, told a story in which the kid, a little boy, was sent up on the roof by his parents. Giggling, Susan excitedly described the boy as wearing "a summer dress in the ice-cold snow." Susan told a later version of this story in which the kids were throwing out the mommy and daddy "because they don't like them."

A typical story told by the study boys was quite different. Themes of bodily integrity and bodily damage, transformations of the body, and issues of good and bad were prominent. The characters were primarily nonfamily figures, frequently robots, robotic vehicles, policemen, or robbers. With mounting excitement, a study boy would describe how big and powerful the characters were;

demonstrations of the characters' power involving crashing or attacking behaviors followed such enactments. The narrative sequences reflected a concern with the possibility of bodily injury or damage and wishes for bodily transformations in the service of increased potency or repair of damage. Issues of morality were also explored, particularly with reference to the goodness or badness of wielding destructive power over others. The wish for power was presented as a wish for absolute power over another's body, and this power was inevitably experienced as hostile and destructive. The expressed wish was to attack, damage, or destroy the body of another in the service of exercising total power.

There was nothing comparable in the play of the girls. When the body was given representations in the girls' play, they were often fleeting, hidden in stories presenting complicated, sometimes obscure, relationships between people, usually family members. Sometimes these ephemeral references to the body took the form of questions about what could be seen and not seen, as in Linda's and Susan's stories about hiding. Linda's brief, playful references to cutting herself were also typical.

Although none of the narratives told by either boys or girls involved direct presentations of or statements about gender, the surface differences in thematic content can be understood as being partially shaped by underlying fantasies having to do with gender. The boys' stories appeared to reflect an almost directly expressed concern with the integrity of the body and the wish to be big and powerful; this wish seemed to be driven both by the wish to ensure bodily integrity and by the wish to exercise absolute power over other bodies. The fantasies generated by the wish for a potent, big, intact, invulnerable body were experienced by the boy as both exciting and frightening. Relationships with other people were presented in their narratives in terms of access to power over others, as if people were defined in terms of whether or not they were powerful. People were described as embodying dichotomous characteristics: big or little, intact or damaged, powerful or vulnerable, good or bad. Aggression was directly expressed in the boys' narratives and was experienced as hostile and destructive, in the service of winning and sustaining power over another's body.

In marked contrast, the girls' narratives were concerned with complex, emotionally laden

relationships between family members. Their narratives seemed to be driven by questions having to do with the nature of ambivalent attachments, separations and reunions, and triadic relationships in which one of the three was potentially excluded. Much like the boys, although in a very different context, the girls attributed dichotomous qualities to their story characters; people were presented as big or little, loving or angry, loved or ambivalently cared for, included or excluded. Aggression in the girls' narratives was masked; although the hiding or throwing out of characters in the story was often accompanied by excited laughter suggestive of mild sadism on the part of the playing girl, within the play the actions were presented as "teasing."

It is tempting to read the differences in the play of these boys and girls as reflective of a sharply differentiated sense of gender identity. The boys' stories seemed to reflect fantasies organized around fears of bodily damage and wishes for potency and power; the girls' narratives might be understood in terms of fear of the loss of the object and wishes for an exclusive loving relationship. Perhaps one could even argue, as Erikson (1937) did, that a gendered sense of body is represented in this play: the study boys' play reflecting presentations of phallic power, castration anxiety, and various compensatory strategies, and the study girls' play suggesting a sense of inferiority, hidden passages, and a concern with what can be seen and not seen. On the surface the presentations of aggressivity seem to be absolutely differentiated by sex, with the boys illustrating the vicissitudes of destructive aggression quite directly and, in stark contrast, the girls alluding to the possibility of hostile aggression only in the episodes of teasing.

Although the stories presented by the children in this study were richly detailed, the nature of these data is not of the same order as that generated during a therapeutic psychoanalysis. The study child's relation to the analyst, although friendly and relaxed, did not have the communicative depth of a child in the middle of an analysis, nor could the research analyst understand the study child's inner world with the microscopic precision available during analytic treatment. These research narratives suggest that, not surprisingly, the oedipal-age child is certainly preoccupied with thoughts about his or her body and the bodies of others, his or her objects and the drives; they also reflect the stamp of a genitally schematized body ego. The nature of the data, however, does not tell us how the manifest play has been shaped by underlying fantasies and does not answer whether the stories about gender told by oedipal-age children are as simple as they seem.

Analytic Material

I turn now to the play of an oedipal-age boy and girl during their psychoanalyses. Neither child had been brought for treatment because of concern about their gender identity; both had been referred because of parental concern about specific symptoms exhibited by the child. Evaluation revealed both children to be struggling with conflicts primarily oedipal in nature. In exploring the play presented by these two children in their initial treatment hours, narrative structures and themes similar to those presented by the study children can be seen. But the data generated in the course of the entire analytic treatment allow us to examine the play under a more powerful lens in the service of exploring what latent fantasy configurations may find representation in the manifest play.

Clarissa

Four-and-a-half-year-old Clarissa was brought for psychoanalytic treatment by her parents because of her shyness, inhibition of activity, elective mutism at nursery school, and her anxious preoccupation with death.[2] Clarissa was described by her parents as an intelligent, articulate child who enjoyed playing imaginatively.

Although Clarissa did not speak during the beginning sessions, she turned to play readily as a mode of communication with me. During the first sessions Clarissa introduced a series of characters: a sad little girl who was always thrown away because her mother did not like her; exhibitionistic twin boys who could do "fancy" tricks; a hungry and angry dolphin and wolf who ate me while cuddling with me.

In her third session Clarissa sorted all the small figures into two piles: male and female. She made the nurse and the sad girl figures stand up. One of the twin boys grabbed the girl and then angrily threw her away. Then Clarissa threw all the girl characters away. The sad girl cried, but no one paid any attention. The boys stood high above all the other characters and did special tricks and everyone clapped enthusiastically. Looking cross, Clarissa knocked over all the special boys. Using gestures, she connected the sad, thrown-away girl character to the story of Gretel (of Hansel and Gretel) being sent away by her father and eaten by the witch.

Three sessions later Clarissa presented a similar, but slightly altered story. This time when the twin boys began to do their characteristic exhibitionistic tricks, they were suddenly surrounded by wild, angry animals. Clarissa then introduced the hungry wolf and dolphin who, she emphasized, had *big* mouths and *big* teeth; she demonstrated how the wolf and dolphin were always hungry and never felt "filled up." The wolf and the dolphin wanted to eat me up and at the same time be cuddled by me. In the next hour, Clarissa played the following story. The sad, thrown-away girl was really very special. Her name was "First Class" and she was "fancy," just like Clarissa's therapist and unlike Clarissa herself. Clarissa loved the sad girl very much because she was so fancy and special. First Class was friends with the wolf and dolphin who obeyed her command to eat up all the people she did not like. Everyone except First Class was afraid of the wolf and the dolphin. The only *person* First Class liked was Papa. Papa loved First Class back and kissed and cuddled her. Papa and First Class ran away together, but Mama angrily dragged them home. Then First Class furiously ordered wolf and dolphin to eat up all of Mama's babies.

As Clarissa played out this story, she looked increasingly anxious, pointing out various broken places on the dolls. She was especially disturbed by the policeman doll, who, she noticed, had a small hole in his neck. She insisted that this doll be put away before she continued the story.

At the end of this hour, Clarissa was very animated and became quite adventurous in her explorations of the office and hall.

On the surface of this play taken from early in Clarissa's analysis, she appears to insist on a dichotomy between boys and girls: boys have penises, can be active, and are admired; girls have "nothing," are passive, despised, and discarded. There are elements in this play, however, that do not fit such neat categorization, suggesting instead alternative fantasies of female activity and power: the angry, hungry, affectionate wolf and dolphin are presented as friends of the sad girl, under her active control; the sad girl is transformed as First Class—beloved by Papa and capable of excited activity. Certainly we can understand this play as representing unacceptable wishes significantly transformed by secondary processes and defensive activity, but only the data from Clarissa's full analysis can help us untangle the strands of this apparently seamless construction in play.

The unfolding story of First Class occupied much of Clarissa's three-year analysis. Clarissa used this character to represent complex fantasies about herself as a girl. First Class was active and powerful; she could be angry and punishing, as well as sexy and affectionate. Although First Class did not have a penis like the fancy twin boys, her body was intact, not defective or castrated. First Class was presented as enjoying being admired, playfully exhibitionistic, and proud of her body. If she was not grown-up like Mama, she was not little either. Although Clarissa frequently presented First Class as losing the oedipal battle for Papa's exclusive love and as the target of Mama's jealous rage, First Class often won Papa's admiration and affection. In time, Clarissa invented a second female character, "Little Nothing-at-All," who was employed in the representation of primarily negative features—little, angry, hungry, discarded, and passive; and then a third female character, "Sexy," who represented pleasure in the female body and the capacity to contain genital excitement. As Clarissa developed her play stories over time, aggression not only was represented by the fancy boys but was expressed directly by the female characters as well. This aggression was in the service of display and exhibitionism, and, in a fashion similar to the play of the study boys, it was employed by female characters to crash, bash, and destroy other characters who threatened to check their power.

Through her play involving such characters as First Class, Nothing-at-All, Sexy, Mama, and Papa, Clarissa was able to engage in extended discussions with herself concerning such questions as: What is the nature of the female body? What does it mean to have one's genitals hidden from sight or to have "outside" genitals? Is there a position between being grownup and big or a baby and little? How does one experience sexual excitement while sustaining a sense of bodily integrity? How can one be both active and receptive? What is the meaning of the anatomical difference; is it good or bad? Can you have a penetrating mind and a penetrated body? As the analysis drew to a close and Clarissa became established in latency, it was possible to see via the window provided by her play how she organized her answers to these questions into a highly personal, complex, bisexually gendered fantasy construction through which she was able to keep in an integrated suspension multiple possibilities concerning her body and the drives: active, receptive, whole, admired, and admiring; loving and hating as well as loved and hated; neither grown-up nor too little; aggressive without destroying or being destroyed. For Clarissa, this unconscious complex fantasy configuration

was what informed her notion of what it meant for *her*, as an individual, to be female as well as her ideas about what it meant to her to be male. Her play made clear that her sense of "femininity" involved associated notions of "masculinity," not simply externalized to the real world, but held via fantasy as aspects of herself.

Max

Max began psychoanalysis at the age of four years ten months, because of the increasing restriction of his daily life as a result of his two phobic preoccupations, lightning storms and leaky pipes. His parents described their only child as an intelligent, verbally precocious, but imperious little boy who was afraid to be out of their sight at home and who played by himself in a very inhibited manner at nursery school. Max had no friends, and his parents felt that he was anxious and depressed much of the time.

During his first analytic hour, Max looked solemn and anxious, walking stiffly to my office, talking continually in a high-pitched voice about his concern that there might be unseen leaky pipes in the ceiling. Max's verbal capacities seemed those of an older child; although sometimes his statements seemed defensively intellectualized, frequently his language was surprisingly apt and emotionally vivid. Once in my office, he quickly set to work arranging a fire station with elaborate hoses, many fire engines "ready to go," and lots of busy little firemen.

At first the firemen seemed eager to go put out a fire "someplace else." They scurried around getting their equipment ready, lining up their trucks. With sirens blaring, the firemen in their trucks raced off across the room searching for the dangerous fire. Each time they thought they had discovered it and prepared to put it out with their hoses, they would find, "It wasn't so big after all." Suddenly one of the men shouted, "Our firehouse is on fire!" In a panic, they all rushed back to the fire station. The fire grew bigger and bigger. The firemen seemed helpless to put it out. Max himself looked more and more anxious. The more water the firemen squirted on the fire station, the more leaks began to appear in the roof. Max repeatedly "interrupted" his play to Scotch-tape over the leaks. When I commented that the firemen seemed to be squirting out an awful lot of water, Max went white, stopped playing, and began to dismantle the scene. Having put everything away, he

turned to me and said, "Now that I've told you all about my worries, what will you do about them?"

Over the next sessions, Max elaborated this story. In some versions, the fire would break out immediately at the fire station, threatening to engulf the firemen themselves. He spent more and more time trying to repair the leaky roof caused by the firemen's unsuccessful attempts to put out the fire. Frequently Max would turn from this play to pretending to repair other objects in my office; he was acutely aware of seemingly minor damage of office equipment. He also developed a second story presented in play. There was a land of Little People. The Little People lived in constant fear of the Big People. The Little People wanted to steal the Big People's land, but they were too little. If the Big People found out about this wish, they would come and kill the Little People, so the Little People were always trying to shrink down and be even littler so the Big People would not see them and would not know what they wanted. It was especially hard for the Little People to stay hidden because the Big People were always stringing up bright lights all over the place. Sometimes the lights would go out, and then the Little People would sneak out, creeping into Big People Land, and try to destroy buildings and people. The Big People inevitably spotted these destructive Little People and would pursue them in a fury, turning on huge, powerful spotlights so that they could not get away.

During these sessions, Max, apparently unable to conclude the story in play, would begin to behave in an imperious manner toward me, ordering me to get him more supplies or assist him in some specific activity of construction. Often he would turn from the battles between the Little People and their enemies to making elaborate drawings of the lighting systems employed by the Big People; these were notable for the immense poles from which the ovoid lights projected and the elaborate wires connecting the poles and lights.

The themes represented in play during these hours early in Max's two-and-a-half-year analysis were reminiscent of some of the study boys' narratives. Max appeared to be quite anxious about bodily integrity; expressions of aggression were direct and appeared as a wish for absolute power; and themes of retaliation for phallic wishes were prominent, as were apparently compensatory fantasies of superpower and superstrength. Like some of the study boys, Max turned to technological inventions to enhance the power and invulnerability of the body. In play he created

a phallic world in which males battled for ultimate superiority; at times his castration anxiety appeared virtually undisguised.

As the analysis proceeded, the two play stories of the firemen and the Little and Big People were superseded by more complex play about a little boy named Pretty Kitty and his mother and father. Through the displacement afforded by this play, Max was able to detail his oedipal wishes and fears and give representation to the various defensive strategies he characteristically employed. At the same time, this play became an avenue for Max's discussions with himself about what it meant to him to be a boy. Initially Pretty Kitty's feminine name seemed to represent a defensively employed disguise through which his erotic longings for the oedipal mother could be expressed safely. As the play unfolded over many hours, however, it was possible to observe how Max struggled to integrate his wishes to be creative and nurturing, wishes he identified as being like his mother, with his longings for phallic power; he asked poignantly in one session, "How can one be a *boy* and love Vivaldi, too?" Many of Max's "discussions via play" focused on exploring what it meant to be little or big and whether an acceptable "big enough" could be achieved. Questions concerning the meaning of size were associatively linked to his concerns about power; aggression could be used not only to ensure continued bodily integrity but to protect his creative, nurturing capacities as well. If he could not give birth to real babies, could he create music, pictures, or ideas? If he did not have an "inside like girls," how could he contain or hide his fiery, aggressive, and sexual feelings?

Max's capacity for play allowed him to try out many different narrative solutions as he explored these questions; play allowed him to hold in suspension contradictory answers as he searched for still other alternatives. Via play he could be simultaneously the "pretty" but phallic boy, the actively seductive mother, and the terrifying but forgiving father. These characters could be destroyed, resurrected, transformed, and transmuted, and it all could be played over again. Although these characters were composed in part from identifications with his mother and father, their creation drew in equal measure on fantasies generated by Max himself as he explored what it meant to him to be a "boy who loved Vivaldi."

Discussion

Freud believed that the child's development of a sense of "masculinity" or "femininity" is a crucial precipitate of the Oedipus complex and is driven by the child's discovery of the genital difference (Freud, 1905, 1925, 1931, 1933). Deutsch (1930, 1932) and Brunswick (1940), elaborating Freud's formulations, emphasized that central to the construction of "femininity" is the transformation of active strivings to a relatively more receptive mode; a crucial dilemma for the girl was thought to lie in relinquishing activity without succumbing to the dangers of masochism. In this classical formulation of gender construction, the acquisition of "femininity" is complicated by the linked questions of how and why the girl relinquishes the early tie to the active, preoedipal mother, how the girl achieves a relatively more "passive" orientation toward the oedipal love object, and how the girl achieves a sense of bodily intactness constructed from a perception of lack or absence. More recent psychoanalytic scholarship (Panel, 1989; Stoller, 1985; Tyson, 1982, 1989) has emphasized the preoedipal roots of gender construction beginning as early as the second year of life. This view posits the atraumatic development of a core gender identity through identifications with the parents. In this formulation the acquisition of "masculinity" is complicated by arguing that initially both the boy and the girl, via identification with the preoedipal mother, construct a sense of themselves as "feminine"; the central question then becomes how and why the boy relinquishes this preoedipal "feminine" identification with the mother in favor of a "masculine" identification with the father. Tyson (1982, 1989) proposes a developmental progression from the acquisition of the early core gender identity through the later, oedipally driven construction of gender. Critical to both the classical and the more recent psychoanalytic formulations regarding the construction of gender is the assumption that gender is a dichotomous, categorical variable: "masculine"/"feminine."

The data presented in this chapter show that during the oedipal period the child begins to elaborate a psychological gender identity that is multidimensional rather than a simple dualism. It is during this period that the child begins to "fill in" the earlier core gender identity, generating meaning as the child repeatedly imagines, intuitively and in exploratory or pretend behavior, what it is to be "masculine" or "feminine. " This process of filling in results in the establishment of a psychological identity that is no longer categorical but a dynamic fantasy configuration that is an oscillating, shifting, albeit by the close of the oedipal period relatively stable, fantasy organization of

gender for the particular child. Gender as constructed by the oedipal child usually is a complex variable composed of several superficially dichotomous but actually continuous terms such as big-little; powerful-weak; intact-damaged; something-nothing; active-passive; masculine- feminine. This highly personal construction involves fantasies concerning the body, objects, the drives, and the interrelationships between mind and body and inner and outer reality. These fantasies not only draw upon identifications with the parents but originate as well in the matrix of bisexuality, thereby preserving the capacity to resonate with fantasies of being the other sex (Dahl, 1988).

As we have seen in the play of the study children as well as that of Clarissa and Max, the vicissitudes of aggression and activity play a crucial role in the construction of gender. The play of the study boys presents the clearest form of one of the central questions the oedipal child entertains: what will happen to me and to my body if I succeed in my wish to be big and have power over people? In the play of the study girls, this question is posed in a slightly different version: who is "big enough" or has sufficient power to ensure an exclusive tie to the loved object? The study boys present in play their fantasies of what appears to be an almost exclusively phallic world—wild, untamed aggression, hate, absolute power, destruction, and bodily mutilation. This phallic world appears to be one in which tenderness and love are unknown; the body is either in danger of being damaged or already mutilated; one is either tyrannically powerful or weak and humiliated. The play of the study girls presents a sharp contrast, almost an obverse of the boys' phallic world—as long as one remains safely "inside," all is tenderness; aggression is concealed behind domestic care; the body is already crippled or damaged; activity is dangerous. Although the study girls' concern with themes having to do with achieving an exclusive tie to the loved object might be understood as deriving from the central oedipal conflict, their muted presentations of aggression, hate, and interpersonal conflict suggest a preoedipal valence: anxiety about object loss. When the play of the study boys and girls involves themes associated with aggression, it is as if the imaginative world becomes starkly phallic; and in this imaginative phallic world gender is construed as dichotomous and biologically rooted.

When, however, we examine themes pertaining to aggression and activity in the light of Clarissa's and Max's analytic material, we can see how defensive maneuvers have shaped the play of the study boys and girls. The study boys appear to mute or disguise both the aim of absolute power

and its object; in contrast, the study girls emphasize aim and object but conceal the destructive intensity of the aggressive wish behind a facade of teasing. The play of the study children suggests that the phallic world, with its insistence on a dichotomous gender identity rooted in castration fantasies, may be employed defensively during the oedipal period.

In contrast to the study girls, Clarissa's play gives direct expression to destructive, hostile, aggressive wishes through the wolf and dolphin characters, and Max, in contrast to the study boys, through the Pretty Kitty narrative gives creative shape to both the aim of destructive power and its objects. Both Clarissa and Max struggle with the questions of whether activity and aggression must always be employed destructively and whether all activity must be relinquished as a defense against destructive wishes. As each explores possible answers to these questions in play, further questions arise. What if *I* am big and my parents are little? What if I am good and they are bad? What is it to be little; does little necessarily imply broken, weak, passive, anatomically female? What is it to be big; does it necessarily imply intact, destructive, anatomically male? Each of these questions then leads via associative pathways to further questions.

The capacity to entertain such complex, associatively linked dilemmas and to hold in suspension multiple potential answers is made possible by crucial developmentally elaborated capacities of the oedipal period, most especially the capacity to play imaginatively. Imaginative play permits the child to engage in conversations with different aspects of herself or himself; play allows the child to hold in mind many different possibilities simultaneously as well as to try out differing combinations of and balances between and among various fantasies. Play gives the child a method for representing the continually shifting dimensions in a way that permits the construction of, and a tolerance for, a multidimensional notion of gender. Through the integrative function of play, new organizations of fantasies occur. Some of this internal dialogue is generated by the tension between the developmentally older, "categorical" core gender identity and the more recently elaborated explorations of a multidimensional gendered self that is ushered in with the capacity to play imaginatively. Clarissa's play presents destructive aggression under First Class's control; wolf and dolphin destroy those who attempt to abridge First Class's power. Clarissa wondered via play whether such a wish for destructive power meant that a girl must have a penis, and if she does not, must the girl be "nothing at all," passive, and isolated? Max entertained the question of whether a

creative boy could also be destructive. Was his creativity "feminine"? Did his wish to create render him weak or vulnerable? How could a boy contain his creative longings if he had no "inner space"? As the oedipal period wanes, these multidimensional fantasies gradually become consolidated into an apparently integrated, unique whole.

We can understand aspects of the play narratives presented by the study boys and girls as reflecting, much as Erikson (1950) proposed, the stamp of the body ego; to the degree the body ego involves schematization of the actual genital morphology, we can expect the play of oedipal boys and girls to carry a biologically grounded dualism: male/female. But as gender refers primarily to psychological experiences and attitudes, rooted in the archaic matrix of bisexuality, the play of oedipal children entertains multiple possibilities across a number of dimensions.

The contrasts between the play of the study children and that of Clarissa and Max appear sharp as if the play of the former was more forcefully shaped by a dualistic conception of gender. The narrative lines of both the study boys and the study girls are distinguishable along a number of dimensions: direct expression of aggression; representations of the body and its capacities; nature of the relationships between characters; use of toys to set the stage. The stories of the study boys revealed undisguised aggression in the service of representing fantasies of powerful or vulnerable bodies, absolute control over other bodies, and the explosive power of sexual excitement. Their story characters' relationships centered on the uses and abuses of power; the fact that their characters were generally unrelated by family ties, were instead depicted as mythical, supernatural, or inanimate objects, may have enabled the boys' direct expressions of destructive aggression. In contrast, the study girls located their narratives within the home and within family relationships; destructive aggression was disguised, emerging as an exclusion or rejection of one character by another. It may be that the girls' creations of family-centered narratives served to control and defend against more aggressive fantasies; certainly the frequent story theme of people hiding or being lost suggests a wish to keep some story elements hidden. If taken at face value, these play narratives of the study children lend plausibility to the notion that gender identity is rooted in body morphology and constructed from identifications with the same-sex parent.

If, however, we turn to the play Clarissa and Max presented early in their analyses and

examine it in the light of the play that unfolded as their analyses progressed, we see that the surface clarity of the play of the study children is illusory, concealing highly condensed, dynamically complicated narratives shaped by multiple forces: the body ego, the drives, object relations, and defenses. The play of Clarissa and Max illustrates how personal, subjective, and idiosyncratic is the construction of gender. The development of a sense of what it means to be a boy or girl does not occur along a linear, normative path but involves for both boys and girls engagement with a series of intrapsychic dilemmas in which various possibilities are entertained. The question for the observer is not only how the terrain was traversed but also which solutions were entertained; what has been gained and what has been lost in the final construction (Grossman and Kaplan, 1988)? Imaginative play not only *reflects* how a given child is traversing the dilemmas inherent to gender construction; the capacity to play imaginatively *enables* the child to explore what may be gained and at what cost in the traversal of a particular dilemma. It is through the creative possibilities inherent in play that the oedipal child can entertain and keep in suspension multiple, potential solutions to the problem of gender, only gradually weaving these potentialities into a unique, apparently seamless, whole.

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Notes

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2 One theme found in this case material has been reported elsewhere (Dahl, 1983).