felt that when certain kinds of thoughts and feelings are kept out of our awareness, they come back to haunt us. In my clinical experience, when people come to understand their sexual preferences and fantasies, they not only feel less embarrassment, but gain tremendous insight into other areas of their personalities as well. They realize that the forces that shape the objects of their sexual attraction and that how them to particular sexual scenarios are the same forces that affect their professional ambition, their capacity to love, and their mood states. We do not lose our passion by understanding its sources. By delving into the deepest levels of desire and conflict that generate our fantasies, we can stop feeling as though we are the victims of alien sexual impulses and compassionately appreciate our own needs and foibles. As sexual shame dissolves in response to insight, our capacity to enjoy our sexuality increases. More than that, however, when we understand our sexuality, we understand ourselves.

NOTE ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY
The identities of the patients in this book have been very carefully disguised in order to protect their privacy and the confidentiality of their therapy.
would be intensely connected to her sexual partner and that she could not, under any circumstances, hurt or overwhelm that partner. As I hope to explain, Jenny’s sexual fantasies and practices made it safe enough for her to be sexually aroused.

Safety is the crucial concept needed to decipher the mysteries of sexual passion. Safety is the concept that functions as the key to unlocking the meaning of our fantasies, a kind of Rosetta stone guiding our attempts to translate the language of physical arousal into the language of psychological meanings. The quest for psychological safety is at the center of psychological life. And, as we will see, the unconscious mind is primarily concerned with ensuring our safety. Since our unconscious mind is continually working to help us pursue our aims in the safest way possible and since sexual pleasure is one of our primary aims as adults, we need to look below the psychological surface in order to understand the twists and turns through which our minds lead us in the pursuit of fulfillment and excitement. However, before we can understand how sexual fantasy and arousal are chiefly grounded in safety, we have to take a brief detour into the inner world of children and the complexities of their psychological development.

There are lots of ways we seek safety in our lives. On the most obvious level, we try to avoid situations that are physically dangerous. Safety, however, is also an important emotional state. Threats to emotional safety are as dangerous as threats to our physical safety. As we will see, sexual excitement often triggers feelings that threaten our sense of psychological security and, therefore, leads to sexual inhibitions.

The unconscious management of psychological safety does not begin with the onset of mature sexual desires. It begins in childhood, almost from the moment of birth. A B research now tells us, the newborn baby is wired to form an attachment to its mother. The baby can recognize the mother’s particular voice and face and prefers them over all other voices and faces. Evolution has guaranteed that the baby has the ability and desire to connect to the human being most able to help it survive. Furthermore, our brains and psychological natures are primed to make us love those people who are responsible for our well-being. We become attached, and we &. 11 in love. Without such attachment, psychological research has shown that babies become frantic, disorganized, and depressed. A secure attachment is crucial to healthy human psychological development.

If a secure attachment to a caregiver is crucial to psychological survival, how do we ensure that we keep one? The answer lies in our unconscious ability to read our family environments and to adapt to those environments—to be willing to do whatever it takes to make sure that our parents love and protect us. We bring to this task our intuitive sensitivity to our family’s highly refined ability to sense the moods of our parents and to do whatever is needed in order to stay connected to them. Loving our parents makes us want to do the very thing that we need to do—make our parents happy and avoid a rupture in our bond to them.

When we talk about the need to maintain a secure-attachment to our caretakers, we are talking about psychological safety. An insecure attachment produces feelings of danger. When a parent becomes angry, intrusive, neglectful, or rejecting, the feeling of a secure attachment is threatened, and the child experiences anxiety. Similarly, when a parent appears weak, anxious, or unhappy, the child also registers danger. The child will do pretty much anything to avoid perpetuating these situations and to reestablish conditions of safety. The child’s mind isn’t even consciously even consciously registering these dangers. The child experiences danger on an intuitive level, quickly associating the loss of a 1 t, or of that parent’s love and protection, with a “bad feeling.”

While we may intuit all sorts of thing about the emotional state of our parent& always alert to disruptions in relationships with them
and highly motivated to repair them, how can we, as little helpless children, repair anything? The answer is by changing ourselves. The only things that we have control over are our own thoughts and feelings.

A wide range of such thoughts and feelings are available for changing. As children, we all need not only to connect with our parents, but also to progressively separate from them. We have a need to be admired, the center of our parents' lives; we also need to feel increasingly competent and strong in our ability to overcome obstacles and master challenges. We eventually want to feel able to compete confidently but also to take pleasure in affiliating with peers. As we develop, we will seek—and need—a special acknowledgment for our masculinity and femininity, a sense that our "girlness" and "boy-ness" are recognized and appreciated by our parents. We need to feel that we can have an effect on our parents, that our needs are important, and we also need to feel that our parents can maintain their own boundaries and interests in spite of whatever we might demand. We need to have parents we can admire and proudly identify with, to have happy parents who love themselves and each other.

People have many needs. None of them can ever be met perfectly, but all remain with us, animating our psychological development. However, all these needs are expendable in the service of the need for psychological safety. If we can avoid or repair a rupture in our relationships with our parents by suppressing or altering our feelings, desire, and even our perceptions, we will do it instinctively, naturally, without a conscious thought.

We adapt. Consider a child's experience of parental neglect. Can the child think, "Well, my parents are going through a tough time because Dad lost his job and Mom is an alcoholic. It has nothing to do with me. I'll be able to feel nurtured and appreciated elsewhere in the world?" Obviously not. The child doesn't know any reality other than the one that his or her family creates. The child can't just pick up and go live with another family. He or she has to make it "right" to make the environment seem more normal in order to adapt successfully and safely to it. We develop a belief that deprivation is the normal state of affaires.

We also go one crucial step further: we experience reality uff it were also morality. We begin to believe that any wish for special caretaking and love is forbidden, off-limit, uff it meant asking for too much, for something we aren't "/OSd to have. We not only have to accept neglect, but we must make it seem as if the cult lies with us, not with our parents. It's not that our parents can't give; it's that we need too much. A patient, Mark, recently told me in his first SC88ion that he felt misunderstood and unappreciated by his wife, but he never told her because he felt guilty for wanting something inappropriate. He said his wife had enough on her hands taking care of their three children. He later remembered that his mother had always seemed similarly overwhelmed and that, although he was alone as a child, he often felt guilty about being too needy. Mark blamed himself for feeling neglected.

Why would a child develop such an irrational and self-defeating belief, a belief psychioan Jospeh WeissB termpathogmk because it clearly works against the child's healthy aims and interests? The reason is to maintain the authority and virtue of our parents and, therefore, the safety of our relationship with them. It is well-known that abused children regularly refuse to condemn their abusive parent. Instead they condemn their parents. With their parents safely exonerated, children are relieved of worry about the security of their relationships. It is said that most people would rather be sinns in heaven than saints in hell, continually accusing their parents, taking responsibility for their own mismeasure, and developing private unconscious theories to justify it. It is uff the child is unconsciously saying, "It's all right ... I don't want much anyway. In fact, I probably don't even deserve it. It's not your cult; it's mine."
how hurt them, or they will hurt us. Either way, we lose. Pathogenic beliefs cause psychological problems. Normal goals or developmental aims are sacrificed in order to preserve, maintain, and defend our relationship with our parents and their later proxies. If we have a pathogenic belief that becoming independent will hurt our parents’ feelings, we then have trouble functioning well on our own.

The trouble with pathogenic beliefs is that they are difficult to change. Highly adaptive at the time when they are formed, these beliefs interfere with our lives. However, to give up these beliefs exposes us to the risk of being disconnected from our caregivers or being hurt by them. Consider the following common pattern: We grow up with the pathogenic belief that the arc undeserving of love. Someone then comes along and loves us. Are we likely to see, accept, or value this positive turn of events? No. Instead, we give great weight to negative messages that mirror our self-criticisms and positive ones that might contradict these same criticisms. Because we tend to discredit evidence that contradicts our beliefs and over-value evidence that confirms them, pathogenic beliefs are circular and self-reinforcing. Titls is why they persist into adult life.

Pathogenic beliefs often take a simple form. A man in therapy with me began to stutter whenever he was beginning to criticize me. The meaning of this was: If I’m critical, my therapist will get angry. The man was quite attached to me and highly sensitive to any imagined threat to our relationship. If he is critical, the other person will be hurt and angry, thus jeopardizing the relationship. Other common pathogenic beliefs include such ideas as: If I’m dependent, my parents will feel drained. If I’m independent, my parents will feel left out. If I’m proud, I’ll be humiliated. If I show off, I’ll be criticized. If I’m selfish, others will feel hurt.

Such beliefs begin in childhood and often persist unchanged into adult life. Once these beliefs begin guiding our behavior, we simply
Guilt and worry arc not only instrumental in causing emotional inhibitions, but are prime causes of psychological suffering and self-defeating behavior in general. Many people feel that if they are more successful than their parents, the parents will feel envious or betrayed. Consequently, they feel a tendency to feel guilty and worried about them. This kind of guilt can be aptly called the pathogenic belief that being happier and more successful than those we love will harm them. Survivor guilt wu originally considered the guilt that swivons of war, natural catastrophes, and concentration camp felt, a pervasive sense that one's survival was somehow purcelled at the colt of someone else's death. It is also seen in people who have ctcaped dysfunctional &mi. lies or harsh social conditions. Many of us suffer from the pathogenic belief that our gain is someone else's loss. Leaving family or community behind can create feelings of betrayal of those we love. People tend to deal with survivor guilt by putting a lid on their level of satisfaction. Survivor guilt is frequently seen along with U/I'm/dion, if we leave our families, we will hurt or deplete them. In survivor guilt the crime is hurting our &mi. lies by being happier than they are, while inseparation guilt the aime lies simply inhaving a life of our own.

We all suffer from some form of survivor and separation guilt. Who hasn't felt bad about having more than othcn or leaving othcn and d? Who hasn't or felt a whisper of illegitimacy and fraudulence about success because of the guilty sense that we're over-naching oursclvea? Many people who cannot tolerate succaa unconscionably arrange to fail. A patient of mine from a poor family began moving up the ladder at his law firm. When he finally made partner, he became depCIIICd and beegan drinking. He couldn't enjoy his success becauae he felt he didn't deserve it, a feeling often accompanied by mmoca of his unemployed and ala>holic father. Symbolically, he felt he was putting his father down by his success'.

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Another man I treated finally got married to a woman who adored him. She was sexy and exuberant, the polar opposite of his grim and inhibited mother. Although he was generally thrilled with his wife and had had great sex with her prior to their wedding, on their wedding night he was impotent. He reported to me that he had been preoccupied all day with whether his mother was enjoying herself at the wedding and was comfortable in her hotel room. These thoughts interfered with his sexual arousal and represented his intense guilt over leaving his mother out, as if he was, as he put it, "dancing on her grave."

Often the manifestations of survivor and separation guilt are subtle. A patient of mine, Helen, was constantly worried about her financial security, despite the lack of any solid reason. It turned out her mother was always worried about money. We came to see that Helen was unconsciously identifying with her mother because it made Helen anxious to feel so much better off than her mother had been. If she relaxed in the knowledge that she was financially secure, she would be faced with how sorry she felt for her mother and how guilty she felt for having something that her mother lacked. She did not consciously know this; of course, when worrying. Her subjective experience was that of "I feel I'm not suitable to be around." It was only upon analyzing this trait in therapy that we were able to see its origins.

People "snatch defeat from the jaws of victory" all the time out of unconscious guilt toward their families. They cannot fully enjoy a separate, happier, or more successful life because they imagine that they will feel lonely and disconnected from their families. Because this fear threatens their feeling of psychological safety, they have to work hard to stay connected to their handicapped families by being handicapped themselves. An athlete who escapes the ghetto to achieve success may self-destruct. People who get promotions sometimes get depressed rather than excited. Cliches like "It's tony at the top," or "In bigger they are, the harder they fall," injunctions against "getting a swelled head" or having too much "chutzpah," all suggest this same thing: success makes someone vulnerable to punishment. This reflects the workings of survivor or separation guilt. For someone with guilt pathogenic beliefs, success at work, love, and sex can all trigger unconscious alarms that motivate the person to attempt to restore psychological safety. Ambitions then fail, love sours, and pleasures are inhibited.

When a child feels a survivor guilt because of the unconscious belief that he or she will hurt a loved one by having greater satisfaction in life, is this inference always accurate? Frequently, the child is completely correct. Spurred by feeling of envy, competition, or fears of abandonment, parents often do begrudge their children's success and happiness. The caricature of the martyred Jewish mother tormenting her child with guilt because the child wants to be independent is certainly often really present in milder forms. Parents routinely, and irrationally, hold their children responsible for their happiness. Thus, children are often astute observers of their parents' moods and likely intuit their parents' internal weaknesses. When a child feels guilty about hurting a parent, or is inordinately worried about a parent, happiness, when a child feels that a parent needs to be bolstered, protected, or fixed, that child is often intuiting reality accurately.

But not always. Children also often misunderstand a parent's motives and intentions. Children do not have a fully developed capacity to see their parents as completely separate from them emotionally, and cannot always accurately judge their parents' motives. Child psychologists sometimes describe a child's thinking as "omnipotent" or "egocentric" because, according to their thinking, a parent's comings and goings are primarily related to the child. We cannot easily comprehend the fact that the parent has a separate life that does not always involve us, a life for which we are
not responsible. It is egocentricity is understandable on a number of levels. First, it bears the stamp of the child's cognitive immaturity. Researchers in child development have demonstrated that the capacity to correctly assess cause and effect and to differentiate one's own intentions from those of others is only gradually acquired in the course of growing up. Second, the parents' feelings and actions do, in fact, have a larger-than-life impact on the child. After all, the child needs, and the parents more than the parents need the child. The child's need for the parents is absolute, while the parents' need for the child is only relative. It is adaptive, therefore, to regard the parents' moods in a self-referential way because these moods profoundly influence the child's security. To assume otherwise, that is, to fully and his or her own objective helplessness, would be too dangerous for the dependent child.

Even normal aspects of a child's thinking can lead him or her to make highly irrational inferences. For example, a parent can be deppressed about something unrelated to the child, but the child might infer that his or her independence is the cause of the parent's distress. A parent may get sick, divorced, or even die, and children will regularly feel guilty. Had a patient whose mother died when he was seven years old. As a response to her earlier illness, her son, my patient, had been acting out aggressively in school. After her death, however, he completely suppressed any kind of aggression because he had acquired the pathogenic belief that his behavior in school had contributed to his mother's death. He was, of course, completely wrong, but he did not have the cognitive or emotional resources to know it.

Usually, the child's inferences about the parent combine elements of objectivity and misunderstanding. A patient of mine experienced his father as frequently irritated at home, especially when his son asked him to buy something. These interactions played a part in the development of pathogenic beliefs that my patient wanted "too much" and that his needs were burdens on others. He learned later that his father had suffered several economic setbacks when the patient was small, and that the father had felt terribly guilty about his perceived fail as a breadwinner. The patient's view that his father was burdened by his son's needs both right and wrong. His father was, in fact, taking his disappointment out on his son, even though it had nothing to do with him. His patient did experience his son's needs as burdensome, but the irritation was not because he felt his son's needs were excessive but because he felt his own economic failure made him a bad father. His patient couldn't possibly know this. The son's conclusions were entirely rational from his limited and subjective point of view but were irrational in a broader context.

GUilt, RUTHLESSNESS, AND SEXUAL EXCITEMENT

BcA UBC pleasure is such a highly prized aim, and one frequently misaing from many people's lives, it will come as no surprise that survivor and separation guilt interferes with its experience. But before we explore the centrality of guilt in sexual inhibition and the role of sexual fantasy in overcoming this inhibition, it is important to remember that however much we repress and stifle our sexual desire; it is always with us.bis contradiction present in the mind with an obvious problem for which the solution is sexual fantasy. Th.e function of sexual fantasy is to undo the belief and feelings interfering with sexual excitemnt, to ensure both our safety and our pleasure. Our fantasies convince us that we're not going to harm or betray anyone, and that if we get fully aroused, no one will suffer.

But what exactly are we including under the rubric of sexual fantasy? Because many people report that they don't have sexual fantasies, that in and of nothing very elaborate occurs in their minds.
when they get aroused, one useful approach to this question is to
expand our definition of sexual fantasy. Ordinarily, when we think
of a fantasy, we tend to think of a story. We can easily see that
when my patient got herself excited by imagining being dominated
by a ruthless man, she was having a fantasy. In this sense, fantasies
are like daydreams, mini-narratives that we use to generate excite-
ment. However, fantasies are often hidden and not always obvious
even to the person having them. If someone begins to get aroused
by a particular personality trait in another person, say an air of ar-
rogance or innocence, this trait is playing a role in a hidden fantasy.
One patient I treated was aroused by the image of an innocent young
woman because it negated his normal view of women as bitter and
cynical. His experience of innocence had the same meaning as would
an elaborate narrative fantasy that featured his seduction of such a
woman. In both cases the imagination uses female innocence to
overcome a conflict that was suppressing sexual excitement—namely, his guilt about feeling contempt for unhappy and bitter
women.

The particular ways we like to have sex can also be understood
as being similar to sexual fantasy. We all prefer enacting certain
scenarios in bed—certain positions, seductions, verbalizations, aes-
thetic contexts, states of undress, or role-playing—because the de-
tails of such scenarios play a high symbolic role in counteracting
certain psychological forces that hold back desire. One patient, for
example, always preferred being penetrated by his male partner
rather than being the penetrator because this position reassured him
that his partner was satisfied. He constantly struggled with a grim,
unconscious belief that he didn't have much to offer a man and
who had a great deal about the other's sexual satisfaction. Another
patient got especially aroused when she and her boyfriend had sex
in a semipublic place where there was a danger of being discovered.
She ordinarily struggled with a great deal of sexual guilt that

stemmed from a very repressive family environment. By flaunting
her sexuality, risking exposure but not getting caught, she could
dramatically, though temporarily, defeat her conscience. When we
explore the meaning of sexual fantasy and its role in overcoming
sexual inhibition, we are not limiting ourselves to the explicit nar-
ratives found in masturbation fantasy, sexual reverie, or a collection
of written erotica but are including the entire array of preferences
and inclinations that are central to our usual.

There are multiple ways that guilt can negatively affect sexual
excitement. At the most general and obvious level, sexual feelings
and interests are sometimes simply generically forbidden, first by
one's family, and then by one's conscience and culture. The child
grows up feeling guilty about impure thoughts of any kind. This
is a simple but important form that guilt takes, one in which the
child learns that he or she is not supposed to be sexual at all. It
often easily blends with survivor guilt, in this case the unconscious
belief that one isn't supposed to have more pleasure of any kind than
one's parents had. All of the many familiar injunctions against sex
that have riddled our culture for centuries create and reflect this
general feeling that erotic pleasure is dangerous and forbidden. Ideas
such as that masturbation is bad, children are ascuial, good girls
don't like sex, virginity is good, homosexuality is sin, and premar-
ital sex is bad reflect this generic type of prohibition. Many sexual
fantasies contain elements that counteract or undo these limits.

A Jungian in therapy with me recounted his first sexual daydream,
one he used during his adolescent masturbation. In this fantasy
he had sex with one of his mother's young women friends, who
in his fantasy worshiped him and would do anything to please him
sexually. My patient remembered that he introduced an unusual plot
device into this rather ordinary adolescent daydream. He gave him-

self the magical power to produce, with the snap of his fingers,
amnesia in his partner about their sexual liaisons. We undertook
his fantasy in the following way: This young man had a mother who treated him with indifference and often made him feel very guilty about having too much fun (the mother was quite a dour and depressed woman). He grew up unconsciously inferring three things from their relationship: He wasn't very sexy or desirable, he wouldn't supposed to have fun with girls, and girls didn't really like sex. These pathogenic beliefs greatly inhibited his sexuality. In his masturbation fantasy, he solved the problem by creating a woman who was the "jinny-onle of his mother-a sexy woman who adored him and enjoyed sex, and with whom my patient could lift his inhibitions and get excited. By giving himself the magical power to induce amnesia, his fantasy further protected him from guilt and ensured the safety he needed to get aroused and have an orgasm.

The magical amnesia is a good example of the creative way in which a fantasy attempts to solve a pathogenic belief that one is not supposed to be sexual. A fantasy in which one is forced to have sex is another. It is telling one's conscience, family, and culture "it's not my fault." Men have been using this excuse for centuries. They respond with "make" them lose their sexual control. Women, lib the patient at the beginning of this chapter who fantasized being dominated by a narcissistic and brutal man, open reason to their excuse in their fantasy lives.

Many other fantasies involve ecrcncy, variations on the theme of "getting away with it," as a way of circumventing this kind of guilt. Fantasies of illicit affa.in qualify in this regard. In others, the acton arc pretending they are innocent, but something quite sexual is happening "under the table." A toe is felt inching its way up a pants leg, a hand on a Jenee slowly moves along a thigh, and all the while "proper" conversation is going on above the table. In this way the pathogenic belief that one shouldn't be ec:xual is subvnced, while innocence is maintained. In still other fantasies, authority is being defied. A patient remembered an adoIC8CItl masturbation fantasy in which she and her boyfriend were having ac:x while her mother wc in the room next door. She wc aroUICd by the idea that they were doing something exciting to her mother's no.e. W reflecting again the unconscious intention of fantasy triumphing over guilt. Her fantasy wc a way of rcuiuring herself that ,he could get excited without injuring or offending her mother. Sexual fantasies always find a way of turning the "no" of guilt into the "yes" of pleasure.

The relationship of sexual fantasy to guilt, hormwff is more complicated than this. Beneath broad moral prohibitions against pleasure are more intimate triggers for sexual guilt, triggers often found in the very nature of sexual excitement itself. One of these triggers is the central role of lcfishness in sexual excitement.

Popular wisdom has it that sexual desire is most passionate in the context of an intimate relationship with someone we love. Unbeknown to most people, however, the relationship dimcown of sex is only half the story. Sex/t:itvemt oho rerpntts tht, It is momentarily hcorru selfish and turn away from concerns about the other's pleasure in order to 11Urcndcr to our own, that we momentarily stopworrying about hurting or rejecting the other person. We need to have the capacity to "use" another person without concerns that the other will feel used.

When I refer to "using" another person, I am not talking about actually disregarding the feelings of the other but about a quality of rel&c@dI 11 in which the other person does not need to be taken care of and, thus, can be taken for granted. "Using" the other, then, means that one is not obligated to worry about the other, pleasure and can surrender to one's own selfish excitement without guilt or burdensome feelings of responsibility. One patient dacibcd the most intense moments of her sexual excitement with the t.wet aashing up against a shore that is steady, sturdy, and unyielding. She didn't worry about whether the "Ihore" could take it.

This aspect of sexuality can be aptly dcaibcd as "ruthless." Ruth-
Russell

lessness is necessary for unbridled pleasure. Anything that promotes undue worry or guilt over the other's welfare will diminish excitement. A casual reading of the bestselling collections of sexual fantasies by Nancy Friday (My Secret Garden, Mn in Love, For/Jiddm F!O'Wm, WhU11 on Top) reveals the centrality of the ruthless dimension of sexual excitement. Friday focuses primarily on women, because the kinds of coarse and explicit fantasies described in her books contradict popular notions that women's sexuality is always romantic and caring. Instead, one immediately notices in these stories a rough, urgent, and aggressive edge—either in word or deed—and a relative absence of explicit demonstrations of sensitivity and nurturing empathy. These popular collections of sexual fantasies illustrate the aggressive directness of intense sexual arousal and a notable absence of guilt, worry, or carstalcing concerns for others.

The relationship of ruthlessness to guilt is obvious. We feel guilty about being selfish. Someone burdened particularly by survivor and separation guilt has the pathogenic belief that if he or she enjoys life, his or her loved ones will feel hurt or depleted. Surrendering to your own mounting excitement without regard for the internal state of your partner comes to feel insensitive and disloyal. It becomes difficult to "let go" and get maximally excited.

We can now see more clearly why guilt and worry are incompatible with sexual arousal. Sexual arousal inherently requires a capacity to be selfish, to turn one's back on the welfare of the other, to be all the things that a guilty person grew up unconsciously believing were bad and dangerous. Someone guilty and worried about others has difficulty being ruthless. The self-centeredness necessary for sexual excitement runs squarely into the inhibitions imposed by the forces of guilt, therefore making sexual pleasure problematic.

In emphasizing the importance of selfishness in sexual excitement, two objections will inevitably arise. First, if sexual arousal depends on curbing, rather than expanding, one's empathy, how can we distinguish a healthy sexual ruthlessness from the kinds of objectification of which women in particular are the victims in pornography, advertising, popular television and movies, and everyday social life? Second, since empathy and sensitivity obviously contribute to sexual excitement-connecting with the sexual rhythms of our partner and giving them pleasure are arousing to most people—how is this kind of attachment compatible with a desire to use the other?

To argue that some degree of objectification is necessary for maximum sexual arousal and that the capacity to use our real or imagined partner aggressively is necessary to let go of inhibitions is not to argue that objectification or selfishness should be a sexual ideal. At its best, sexual pleasure is deeply intertwined with a sensitivity to the feelings of our partner, in fantasy or reality, and a pleasurable desire to give him or her pleasure. Love is sexy, and sex enhances love. In other words, there needs to be a tension between selfishness and caring, between using and pleasing the other. If either pole is absent, there can be trouble. Most people would not like to be in an intimate relationship with someone who was only ruthless. The sex would eventually degenerate into an empty and mechanical release-masturbation with someone else in the bedroom. A very common problem appears, however, when one or both partners can't be ruthless. Clinically, we often see sexual excitement breaking down under the weight of worry and guilt precisely because of conflicts over the selfish dimension of desire, conflicts that become won, not better, with increasing emotional closeness. & we'll see in more detail later, familiarity may well promote intimacy, but it can also weaken the human tendency to worry and feel guilty about our loved one.

Selfishness and ruthlessness are often specifically addressed by a wide range of sexual fantasies and behaviors that we see in everyday life and in everyday clinical practice. Some of the most common
erotic scenarios reported in sex surveys involve attempting to resolve guilt and worry-based conflicts, often centering on feelings of selfishness. Both men and women commonly report getting aroused by being dominated or by dominating someone else. Jan, the woman who required a fantasy of sexual domination in order to get aroused, was just such a person. She had grown up with a good deal of survivor guilt. She saw her parents as weak and defensively repressed her own strength and sexual power because of the unconscious belief that her independence and exuberance had been too much for them. Jan had grown up feeling she had to hold herself in check lest she hurt her parents, and now she felt the same with her sexual partner. As a result, she could not get turned on by a man whom she experienced as nice but weak. In her sexual fantasy, however, she solved the problem by creating a male character so powerful and selfish that she knows she can't hurt him. His selfishness gives her a kind of permission to be selfish herself. She doesn't have to worry about him and thus can surrender to her own excitement without guilt or responsibility. Jan has found a way to feel safely ruthless, and her reward is intense sexual pleasure.

**SHAME, HELPlessness, AND SEXUAL EXCITEMENT**

Another set of pathogenic beliefs that arc addressed by sexual fantasy and preferences involve feelings of shame, rejection, defective-ness, and helplessness. These painful feelings are accompanied by ideas that one is bad or undeserving and often accompany states of low self-esteem and depression. Shame is different than guilt. Guilt involves beliefs that we're hurting others, while shame involves beliefs that we're exposed and unworthy in the eyes of others. Guilt arises when we reject others; shame when we feel rejected by others. A sexual excitement is incompatible with guilt, so it is incompatible with shame. But don't some sexual masochists seem to get aroused by being humiliated? As we shall see, the answer is no. In general, if we dislike oneself or expect others to do the same, it is difficult to feel worthy of feeling either sexual desire or sexually desirable.

The frequency with which sexual fantasies seem to counteract in all of us shame and rejection derives from the frequent occurrence of such feelings in normal as well as pathological development. It is impossible to grow up without feeling rejected in some way. Our parents get angry, criticize us, have bad moods, at times want us to go away, or may not even like us. The only question is to what degree. No matter what the degree of rejection, the experience affects us. A child, when we feel alicized or rejected, feels felt and unworthy. We may rebel and struggle against our parents' opinions, but in the end we will always comply with and internalize our rejection because, we've accent, parents have the authority to define reality. When we feel that our parents don't like us or don't want us around, we feel disgusting and unlovable. Our parents, redly knowing us, after all, feeling rejected by those we love and with whom we're so intimate automatically evokes shame.

While shame and rejection arc common in dev-m. Qmmt, every family enacts its own particular variation. Here the line between the normal and pathological power. Sometimes the themes of rejection and shame arc mild. Other times they arc traumatic. When the traumas arc frequent and intense, the child's self-esteem is damaged, and psychopathology results. Itsome families the child's experience of neglect and hostility from the parents is so profound that it chronic of humiliation, worthlessness, and helpless become the child. When a parent is significantly absent-physically or emotionally-the child always feels rejected. This means that the parent's neglect or absence is due to something in the child that is defective or unlovable. When a parent is physically abusive, the child feels physically and desiring of abuse. When the child is sexually
molested, he or she often feels ashamed, believing that something bad about him or herself made the perpetrator lose control.

Most of us have experienced some form of shame and rejection, from the mild to the severe, and as a result, we all have pathogenic beliefs that we are unworthy. A woman in therapy with me remembered a daily ritual during her high school years that she enacted with her mother. The mother was quite depressed and stayed in bed until noon. However, every morning the mother would summon her daughter to the bedroom to inspect her wardrobe choice for that day. And every day the mother would criticize her daughter’s choices. My patient felt ashamed and developed the pathogenic belief that she lacked the wherewithal to make her mother or anyone else happy.

Another patient reported that his brilliant alcoholic father frequently provoked competitions with him. Whether it was playing tennis or debating the relative baseball prowess of Willie Mays and Mickey Mantle, his father made most interactions into "fights to the death" and always prevailed. The son inevitably felt helpless, humiliated, and angry. He loved his father and wanted to be close to him but felt rebuffed and devalued. He grew up with worries about his masculinity and was likely to feel shame whenever he made a mistake.

Sometimes children's sense of shame and personal deficiency derives not only from how they were treated in the family but from identifications with that family. The shame they feel is vicarious. A patient of mine was ashamed of her alcoholic mother, remembering her as a slovenly, sloppy, depressed woman. The daughter grew up determined to be the opposite of the mother and to behave in a polite, controlled, and proper way. Her husband called her a "clean freak." Underneath, the patient was extremely sensitive to feeling shame and responded to almost any kind of criticism by becoming petrified that she was being seen as similar to her mother. It is a common observation of children growing up in chaotic or disturbed families that they feel a shame that properly belongs to their parents. The children borrow the shame of their families.

*States fiction, shame, defectiveness, helplessness, instability, loss of control.* We can't feel ashamed and helpless at the same time. We can't feel weak and helpless while experiencing mounting excitement. We can pretend to feel ashamed or helpless during a pleasurable sexual scenario, but the reality is always otherwise--the manifest shame hides a deeper exultation, and the apparent helplessness is belied by control. The incompatibility of sexual pleasure with low self-esteem is so obvious that the Bible of psychiatric diagnosis, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fourth Edition (American Psychiatric Association Staff), lists the symptom of helplessness as an important criterion in the diagnosis of depression.

Sexual fantasy, then, has the challenge of surmounting these emotions in order for excitement to take place. Because shame and rejection are common experiences, many common sexual fantasies function to negate them. Character must be drawn, detailed a chosen, sexual scenarios plotted, and roles defined to this aim. One woman I treated imagined seducing her very formal and proper professor, falling him behind a podium while he was giving a lecture, eventually causing him to lose control. This woman grew up feeling aitzized by a controlling father and became highly vulnerable to feeling demeaned and controlled by a male partner. In her fantasy she *reventp* the relationship that she once had with her father. The male professor is *NOW* helpless when confronted with her *high* appearance, not vice versa, and her reauration herself that she is not an attractive and rejected woman helplessly longing for attention but unable to draw a man to her. Men frequently have a similar fantasy of reducing
a cold, controlled, domineering woman to someone sexually animalistic in desperate need of the man. He's not the beggar—she is.

Fantasies about genital worship are often solutions to the problem of shame, as are exhibitionist scenarios in general. The fantasy it that the other is enthralled by our body, not repelled by or indifferent to it. Our sexuality drives others wild and insulates us against, shame and rejection. A patient of mine reported a sexual daydream in which she was being ravished by two men on stage in a nightclub, surrounded by excited men masturbating to the sight of her naked body. This woman had grown up plagued with worries about being unattractive, wonies stimulated by her father's rejection of her.

Heterosexual foreplay in which a woman slowly strips for a man is another good example of a ritual unconsciously constructed in order to overcome feelings of shame. For the woman stripping the pleasure is in the reassurance of the man's excitement about her body, an excitement that counteracts any feelings of sexual shame that she might have, thus allowing her to feel pleasure. She's "strutting her stuff," not hiding it. For the man, the striptease is exciting because it features a woman who is shamelessly proud of her sexuality and her body, powerfully counteracting his everyday image of women ashamed of and inhibited about their sexuality. Women to—ward whom he might tend to feel guilty and responsible. Many men develop such ideas about women through their experiences with depredation and inhibited mothers. Their tendency to feel guilty and wonied about women's sexuality is momentarily negated by the clear evidence that the stripper is proud of her body, evidence that the man can use to free himself from his own inhibitions.

In this ICDC we transform the reality of our self-doubt and self-loathing into triumphant displays of sexual power and narcissistic glory. We’ve together clement sofreal experience, cultural norms, wishful thinking, and pure whimsy into fantasies that allow us to feel excited. Pathogenic beliefs are neutralized, inhibitory dangers are circumvented, worries are auaed, and shame-hued insecurities are magically eliminated—all accomplished unconsciously, spontaneously, and in the service of erotic pleasure and excitement.

**IDENTIFICATION, TRANSFERENCE, AND SEXUAL EXCITEMENT**

Thus far, we have a picture of children becoming guilty, worried, rejected, and unharnessed as a normal part of adapting to their familial environment. We see them developing pathogenic beliefs that hold ambition and other developmental aims, as well as pleasure, in check. It must be remembered, however, that children don’t comply with their environments in the same way that adults might. Children comply automatically and unconsciously, and do so, in part, through the auical process of identification.

This process of internalizing our familial environment is obviously most profound when we are very young. Much of what we experience of the world is transmitted through a kind of psychological osmosis in which, because we are not functioning yet as fully separate people, we directly absorb the feelings states and attitudes of our parents. Because we are so immersed in this intense relationship, we can’t even clearly distinguish between internal sensations and external ones. Our caretakers’ moods establish the atmosphere that we breathe, moods with which we are physiologically and psychologically prepared to resonate. Gradually we begin to equate from our parents and claim ownership of our own separate experience. For example, we become inauthentically able, as children, to differentiate between our mother’s moods and our own.

This process of becoming independent, however, is a slow and
uneven one and can often be sidetracked. Often, for example, conflicts in the mother-child relationship can contribute to difficulties in differentiation. Here is one variation of such a conflict. If mothers are ambivalent about their children's separation from them, they may give their children mixed signals about whether they enjoy or dislike their children's autonomy. Children may come to feel guilty about being different from their mothers, guilty about not taking on in their mothers' feelings as their own. To resolve the tension of being different from their mothers, children can and do intensify identifications with them. They try to share their mother's moods. It is an imaginary way of saying, "We're not different; therefore, there's no problem." In general, it has been my observation that if a parent is particularly rejecting, a child may hold on tighter, attempting to feel what the parent feels, becoming more like the parent: In a desperate attempt to retain a connection.

We'll use identification as a way of connecting with our parents. We become "chips off the old block" out of love for and a desire to be close to the parent. In many cases, particularly in response to rejection, this process is exaggerated. It's the only way that, as children, we feel that we can get "inside" a parent who otherwise might not be emotionally available. "HDad is depressed, it may be hard to feel any connection to him if I'm happy. If I'm depressed, too, at least we're inhabiting the same emotional space."

The issues around identification don't end when we become adults. Identification is still a basic way of connecting to others. It underlies healthy processes of empathy. We put ourselves in each other's shoes to understand each other. We identify with the victim when we feel compassion for others. Psychotherapists as a group use identification all the time in their work to figure out what's going on inside their patients. Parents identify with their children, children identify with their parents, partners identify with each other, and we all identify with heroes and role models.

Identification also is an essential ingredient in sexual identity and excitement. Whether in bed or in our heads, we resonate with the energy of our sexual partners. We merge with them a bit, begin to resonate to the same frequency. In fact, sexual contact is often described as an experience of fusion, of losing one's boundaries, of losing oneself inside the other. In this sense, identification work is in the opposite direction of ruthlessness. Identification means feeling separate. Identification means feeling merged. Ruthlessness means objectifying the other. Identification means seeing oneself in the other. Both can heighten sexual excitement. Both can also threaten it.

Identification also interrelates in an important way with idealization. When we get sexually excited about another person, we initially idealize that person. The object of our desire is endowed with rmly positive attributes. His or her body is great, penoty scintillating, manner and style exciting, and so on. Our desire blinds us to the other's flaws and exaggerates the other's virtues. At the same time, this exciting and idealized new partner pulls for even greater identification. We want to be it close it possible to such a person, almost as if six unconscious minds are saying such things: "He's got a hot body, and so my body will get hot with him." "I'll bet she loves aces, so I can really go my inhibitions and love it, too." "He's probably rough with women, so I'm able to be rough with him." "She's gorgeous, so if I have sex with her, I'll be gorgeous too."

At its best, identification fuels excitement; at its worst, however, it dampens it. If our partner is sad, identifying with him or her can lead to feeling sad as well, and sadness is immissible by sexual arousal. If our partner is worried or otheremotes "down," the same problem exist:1. Feeling close to someone by feeling that person, feeling
intimate through sharing the other's moods, opens the door to feelings that directly threaten our capacity for pleasure. We often experience difficulty in being turned on if weIdentify with the unhappy other.

The situation is made even more complicated by the fact that we identify with whom we think and feel the other person is, not necessarily with whom he or she actually is. We might experience our partner as inhibited and, because of a close identification with that partner, readily share his or her moods and feel sexually shut down. In reality, this partner may not be as inhibited as originally assumed but be superficially constrained and eager to open up. People may be inhibited only sometimes but not at other times, or simply be tired and not inhibited at all. Nevertheless, the fact remains that when our partners seem troubled, sexual excitement can be impaired.

One of the main sources of bias in the bedroom is what psychotherapists call transference, the shifting of longstanding images and feelings about a parent onto someone in the present. We partially experience all relationships, including those with sexual partners, against the template of our experience with the significant caretakers in our family. To some extent all people relive the past in the present. Furthermore, the more intimate and familiar we are with our partner, the more the channel of transference open up, and the more we begin to hear the echoes of the past in our present-day relationships. The more people know about each other and reveal about themselves, the more important the other person becomes. The more dependent they feel, the more that relationship will emotionally resemble the dependent relationships of childhood.

Transference becomes a problem when an unconsciously perceived similarity between our sexual partners and our parents leads us to exaggerate and distort certain moods and traits in our partners because they resemble problematic moods and traits in our parents.

When this type of transference occur, as it often docs in intimate adult relationships, sexual inhibitions can easily result. If we had a sad parent, we might be more sensitive to sadness in others. If we had a tired and burdened parent, we might be particularly reactive to such qualities in a loved one. A woman patient told me that her husband was extremely deferential during sex, which turned her off. She felt too responsible for his pleasure and self-esteem to be able to feel free enough to get really excited. However, I knew from her husband's therapist that he strongly wanted to be more aggressive but felt guilty about hurting his wife. His wife, on the other hand, felt that he was hopelessly timid and that this was wired into his personality. As a result of these assumptions, she felt inhibited and despairing. It turned out this woman had a very weak father who didn't let her mother walk all over him. The daughter had grown up with the view that men were weak and easily bullied by women. She felt that she "knew" for a certainty her husband was just such a man and, thus, felt an aversion to him sexually. In fact, she was both right and wrong. Her husband did act deferential. But his deference was only a part of his story, a story that she couldn't ace in its complex entirety. Because of the superficial similarity between certain traits in her husband and father, she transferred the feelings that he'd originally had for her father onto her husband. When she was able to more clearly see her husband's true desire, she was able to begin to open up sexually.

SOLVING THE PROBLEMS OF IDENTIFICATION AND TRANSFERRENCE WITH SEXUAL FANTASIES

Many people use fantasies to unconsciously solve the problem of identification and transference by making sure that everyone in them is happy and aroused. In the unconscious, sexual excitement is in
had grown up with a depressed mother who felt cheated by life. He reported that his childhood home always had a "heavy" feel to it. He chose a woman to marry whom he perceived as similarly beaten down.

So how did his Lolita fantasy solve the problem of feeling pulled down into the dark moods he associated with women? He endowed a young woman with physical and psychological qualities that were the polar opposite of the grim and oppressed women whom he tended to see all around him. While his mother and current partner were weighed down and drained by the burdens of life, his sexual fantasy featured a girl who was sexually exuberant, unblemished by life, and entirely happy. At its deepest level, his sexually exciting identification with this teenage girl's idealized body and youthful spirit reassured him against an anxiety-provoking identification with the negative moods of his dreary mother. He felt safe and encouraged to get aroused.

OVER LAPPING FANTASIES

Sexual excitement, it seems, is exquisitely sensitive to and expressive of the deepest levels of the human psyche. The stories we make up to ensure our arousal reflect the reworking of our core fears and wishes. Some fantasies seem aimed at guilt and wony; some at shame, helplessness, and rejection; and still others at the problem of overcoming and transference.

The real world, however, is rarely this simple. Sexual fantasies and preferences don't usually fall into neat categories. People struggle against many different pathogenic beliefs at the same time. As a result, sexual fantasies often have to serve multiple psychological functions simultaneously. Consider, for example, the patient who fantasized about teenage girls. Once we got to the psychological bottom of things, we could see how this one fantasy simultaneously...
took care of a number of problems. He identified with the girl's youthful exuberance. The image of a happy and bouncy girl about whom he didn't have to worry negated his tendency to feel guilty and responsible for women. And by imagining her responsive adoration, he counteracted his fears of rejection. One fantasy simultaneously served multiple purposes and alleviated multiple anxieties. He was not unusual. There is rarely only one thing going on in any sexual scenario.

Sexualized rescue fantasies are another good example of a type of fantasy that counteracts several pathogenic beliefs at the same time. Many people become aroused by the prospect of healing or fixing a partner. A man saw in therapy, for example, got excited when he thought that he could make a sad woman happy by having sex with her. The frequently seen desire in women to fix men is often acted out in sexual ways with the unconscious intent of making men feel powerful and desirable through various feminine displays of sexual love and responsiveness. And a common dynamic in therapists who have sex with a patient is the arousing, albeit self-serving, fantasy that their sexual attention is helping the patient's self-esteem. In all of these cases a fantasy of repaining someone through sex is tremendously exciting.

Upon analysis, such fantasies are usually serving several functions simultaneously. They are a means to overcome guilt. The hidden logic is: "I'm not hurting you; I'm helping you. I'm a good person, not a bad one." Second, sexualized rescue fantasies are usually a way of feeling important and arc arousing precisely because they negate worries about being unimportant and useless. Having disproved feelings of both guilt and devaluation, rescue fantasies make it safe enough for sexual excitement to emerge.

In some cases the sexual appeal of a rescue fantasy seems to be more related to guilt, while in others, to rejection and shame. Usually, however, the reality turns out to be a complicated combination of both. When we're discussing the issues of guilt, wony, shame, and identification, and trying to understand how they contribute to the formation of sexual fantasies and preferences, we need to keep in mind that there is not a necessary one-to-one relationship between a certain conflict and a particular fantasy. Sometimes we can see cause-and-effect relationships on the most general of levels. Fantasies of being dominated usually have something to do with conflicts over guilt and worry. Exhibitionistic fantasies often involve attempts to defend oneself against feelings of shame and rejection. But to thoroughly understand anyone fantasy in a particular patient thoroughly, we have to allow for a more complex explanation involving the interaction of any issues.

When D. H. Lawrence wrote, "The tragedy is when you've got sex in the head instead of down where it belongs," he meant that analyzing sexual desire can rob it of its proper instinctual intensity. Certainly sexual excitement feels entirely natural and spontaneous, utterly removed from the kinds of unconscious mental machinations I have been describing. Nevertheless, while our lust and capacity for pleasure are instinctual, the road to pleasure is a complicated one. Our families and culture place numerous obstacles along this road: guilt, wony, fear, shame, rejection, and identification all stand in the way of getting to what seems so natural. It is an extraordinary testament to the creative and adaptive capacity of the human imagination that it is able to weave together exactly the right story to overcome obstacles to arousal. Getting turned on involves transcending the put, counteracting dangers, disconfirming beliefs, undoing traumas, soothing pain, and finally, finally, laying claim to pleasure.