

# **The Masochistic Woman Does Not Exist: Freudian and Lacanian Perspectives on Love and the Other Jouissance: A Clinical Case**

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**Scientific Meeting**

**Toronto Institute for Contemporary Psychoanalysis**

**February 4, 2009**

**NOTE: For reasons of confidentiality, the clinical material is not being circulated in advance of the February 4 meeting. Dr Almagor will present the clinical material at the meeting. Dr Thomson's introductory remarks are included here and he will also discuss the case briefly, following Dr Almagor's presentation.**

**Introduction**

**Dr Clive Thomson**

Before I deal with the specific topic of feminine masochism and before you hear Doron Almagor's case presentation, let me begin, as a way of setting the stage, so to speak, by indicating briefly some of the ways in which Lacan speaks about women. I am assuming that Freud's positions on women and women's sexuality are familiar enough. In *Seminar X (L'Angoisse)*, Lacan talks about women, jouissance, love, and anxiety. Lacan rarely discusses his own cases in his writings but he reports in *Seminar X* that one of his analysands, a woman, tells him she doesn't care if her husband desires her or not, as long as he desires no other woman: "Peu importe qu'il me desire, pourvu qu'il n'en desire pas d'autres" (219). This woman's love amounts to taking care of the desire of her husband; in other words, her priority is taking care of the desire of the Other: "C'est le désir de l'Autre qui l'intéresse" (221). Lacan concludes: "That's love for her" ("Qu'elle y tienne, c'est ça l'amour", 222). The main point of Lacan's discussion of his case is that women are freer when it comes to the desire of the Other because they lack nothing, particularly when it comes to jouissance ("Il n'y manque rien." 221) and because they have a different relation to the object ("... cette présence n'est pas liée au manque de l'objet cause du désir...", 221).

The case that you will hear about in our paper raises theoretical questions about love, feminine jouissance and masochism. To begin, I will briefly outline some theoretical considerations based in the work of Freud and Lacan. These considerations are designed to provide a context for Doron Almagor's case presentation. I will conclude our paper with some ideas for a discussion of the case.

## Freud and Lacan on Masochism

In “‘A Child is Being Beaten’: A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversions” (1919), Freud’s main purpose is to describe the genesis of masochism. After the careful analysis of a beating phantasy in four cases involving young females, he concludes:

Little light is thrown upon the genesis of masochism by our discussion of the beating-phantasy. To begin with, there seems to be a confirmation of the view that masochism is not the manifestation of a primary instinct, but originates from sadism which has been turned round upon the self – that is to say, by means of regression from an object to the ego. Instincts with a passive aim must be taken for granted as existing, especially among women. But passivity is not the whole of masochism. The characteristic of unpleasure belongs to it as well, – a bewildering accompaniment to the satisfaction of an instinct. (172)

Guilt is the key ingredient in masochism, according to Freud, because guilt turns sadism into masochism: “The transformation of sadism into masochism appears to be due to the influence of the sense of guilt which takes part in the act of repression” (172). Freud adds that he has not been able “to get so far in (his) knowledge of the beating-phantasies in boys...” (174). He concludes his study, however, with an enumeration of the “similarities and differences between beating-phantasies in the two sexes” (176): “In the case of the girl the unconscious masochistic phantasy starts from the normal Oedipus attitude; in that of the boy it starts from the inverted attitude, in which the father is taken as the object of love” (176). In “The Economic Problem of Masochism”, Freud posits three kinds of masochism (erotogenic, feminine and moral masochism), but goes on to blur the distinctions among the three kinds when he writes: “The feminine masochism which we have been describing is entirely based on the primary, erotogenic masochism, on pleasure in pain” (277). Freud devotes the largest part of his study to moral masochism and thus appears to be more interested in this kind of masochism than the two others.

What are we to make of Freud’s discussions of masochism in these two studies? If we pay close attention to his use of certain turns of phrase, such as “appears”, “seems”, “bewildering”, we could say, at the very least, that the principal value of this work lies in the way questions and hypotheses are formulated and explored. Freud does not provide definitive answers to the question of feminine masochism. He takes care to refer several times to his “Three Essays on A Theory of Sexuality”, thus leaving the impression that the foundations of his thinking on masochism had been laid several years earlier and that he was well aware of how little real progress he had made since then.

Our hypothesis is that Freud returned to the question of masochism in “A Child is Being Beaten” as a result of the various deadlocks and impasses in his clinical experience. For example, in connection with his work on masochism in boys, he writes: “my material was unfavorable” (174). Freud’s difficulties can be seen in his earliest work and they are present throughout, as he is repeatedly confronted by a remainder that lies outside of analysis. This limit is present already in the Interpretation of Dreams, where

the dream analysis ends with the thing (*das Ding*) that resists analysis, the navel of the dream. This residue appears in the question of the negative therapeutic reaction and the question of masochism, and ultimately, in what lies beyond the pleasure-unpleasure principle, the death drive. Freud sums up his dilemma with the question: “What does woman want?”

Lacan spoke about masochism, *jouissance*, and feminine desire in his *Seminars X* and *XX*. We will not speak here about how his thinking on these matters changed over his career. Rather, we will draw upon these two seminars briefly in an effort to shed light on the clinical material that follows. Like Freud, Lacan maintains an intimate connection between masochism and sadism, although the connection does not appear to be a necessary one. Whereas Freud tends not to mention one without the other, Lacan often talks especially about masochism without referring to sadism. Lacan appears to distance himself from Freud’s tripartite classification of masochisms (erotogenic, feminine, moral) with the ironic comment that it leaves a little to be desired: “Cela nous laisse tout de même un peu sur notre faim” (125). For Lacan, we can conclude, in a preliminary way, that there is no feminine masochism, as such. We will come back to this question at the end of our paper.

In contrast to Freud, Lacan posits masochism as primary and, consequently, sees the sadist as performing a denial or disavowal for the benefit of the masochist. In this sense, sadism is derived from masochism. In *Seminar X*, Lacan affirms that the objective of the sadist’s rituals is not to provide the other with a certain *jouissance* through suffering but rather to make the Other anxious: “Ce n’est pas tellement la souffrance de l’autre qui est cherchée dans l’intention sadique, que son angoisse” (123). The masochist, on the other hand, seeks the impossible, that is, to identify with a common object or an exchange object (“... son identification à l’objet commun, l’objet d’échange.” 124). Lacan adds that anyone who recognizes himself as the object of his desire is a masochist: “... se reconnaître comme l’objet de son désir, c’est toujours masochiste” (125). The masochist is incapable of realizing what he is – a : “Il lui reste impossible de se saisir pour ce qu’il est, en tant que, comme tous, il est un a” (124). The masochist acts out his desire on a stage: “Mais le masochiste ne le fait que sur la scène...” (127). Lacan extends the metaphor of the stage as he discusses how the masochist is always pulling the strings, leading the dance, orchestrating a scenario, and, ultimately, propping up the Other’s desire. In this process, although he is in need of a certain separation from the Other, no genuine separation occurs and he will always be giving up a certain *jouissance*.

Lacan identifies two different types of *jouissance*. First there is phallic *jouissance*. This is a *jouissance* that is linked to the signifier and made possible by castration. It is a *jouissance* of the unconscious. It is sexual, and may be linked to men, but available to women. Second, there is the ‘Other’ *jouissance*. This is a *jouissance* that is not symbolized or symbolizable. It is linked to the gap in the Other, S(A). It is not sexual, but may be linked to femininity. It is important to remember that for Lacan, ‘men’ and ‘women,’ are pure signifiers and that feminine structure does not exist in a one to one relationship with biological women.

In the clinic, we are faced with difficult and intransigent clinical problems which have come under the heading of masochism or the Other jouissance. If for Freud, this lies at the Beyond of the Pleasure Principle, and for Lacan, in the Other jouissance, which is beyond signification, then how can analysis ever reach this place of no being? Does this case tell us anything about how this can be done? Do we see something of this Other jouissance in the treatment? If something is beyond signification, how can it be brought into a discourse of analysis? We will take up these questions and others in our discussion of the case material.

### **Clinical Case Presentation**

**Dr Doron Almagor**

### **Discussion of Case Material**

**Dr Clive Thomson**

### **References**

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