The Many Meanings of Play

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Discussions with Oedipal Children

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Aggressivity denotes hostile or destructive actions that attack, hurt, damage, or destroy persons or things. In this chapter we do not attempt to link these observed behaviors to notions about underlying drives, or to tackle the larger theoretical issues concerning aggression that destroys versus aggression that binds or contributes to structure building. Nor do we deal with the treatment of children who come into psychoanalysis because of destructive and oppositional behavior that is typically described as "aggressive" in nature. Instead, we focus on ways in which aggressivity is represented in the child psychoanalytic playroom through language, narrative structures, and play transformations. These surface presentations are markers for, but not isomorphic with, mechanisms that include inner representations and fantasies. In a previous paper (Cohen et al., 1987) we focused on the libidinal aspects of the oedipal phase; in this chapter, we ask: what can be understood about the child's inner world through an examination of these surface presentations, both direct and transformed, of destructive aggression? Are there common elements, themes, and dilemmas as well as characteristic modes of presentation for the "normal" oedipal boy? If so, what is the range of individual variation?

Methodology

As we described in a previous paper (Cohen et al., 1987), twenty children, about five years old, were recruited from a nursery school for a study of children's play during a clinical interview. Each child attended three forty- five minute play sessions with child analysts who knew nothing about the child's history, background, or developmental status. The sessions were videotaped from behind a one-way mirror and transcribed; videotapes and transcriptions were then examined by the research

team, composed of five child analysts and a communications/language specialist. The interviews were analyzed for manifest and latent themes; the construction of the hour was assessed along behavioral, linguistic, and narrative lines.

Although specific presentations of aggressive components varied with the individual child, a number of shared characteristics were apparent. Themes of bodily damage, transformations of the body, and issues of "good" and "bad"; the use of the analyst; sites of displacement; specific language patterns—all emerged as modes of representing aggressivity. Most striking were the boys' attitudes toward their own aggressivity. Each boy relied on a moral construct that operated on the basis of external consequences. There was nothing inherently "bad" or "immoral" about their destructive urges as long as they did not suffer the retaliation of the objects of their aggressivity. Each boy's pleasure in attacking and destroying was matched only by the wariness about what danger he might incur as a result. In order to illustrate these, we will first describe the second research sessions of three five-year- old boys. The second sessions of the series of three were chosen for closer examination because of the relative familiarity of the child with the analyst in the absence of an impending dissolution of this new relationship. Following the descriptions of individual sessions, we will discuss central characteristics of each of the boys and comparisons of the findings.

The three boys, Bobby, Eddy, and Jim, were all five years old, but demonstrated in their play three very different approaches to the presentation of aggressivity.

Bobby told a very coherent story in which his aggression was presented as a highly controlled and justified response to dangers coming from the outside. His story emphasized the harmonious male dyad in which the partners were equal and good; he used himself and the analyst to play the central characters.

Eddy played a series of rapidly shifting stories in which the body and bodily transformations were central themes; in his play the body continually threatened, but the danger was warded off through the construction of larger than life characters. Eddy's operative assumption seemed to be that it was all right to be aggressive as long as you were punished for it. Eddy controlled the analyst, either keeping him outside the play as audience or using him to carry out Eddy's commands.

Jim's play was the most fragmented and unsustained of the three. His play contained eight consecutive sequences in which the theme was his wish to be powerfully destructive and his fear that the expression of the wish would inevitably bring retaliatory injury and punishment. Jim seemed to feel continually threatened from within and without by his aggressive urges. Although directly threatening and attacking the analyst during his play, he viewed the analyst as a powerfully dangerous punisher of his aggressive wishes.

Clinical Material

Bobby

Bobby held onto his father's hand, maintaining physical and verbal contact with him for the first four minutes of his second play session; during this time Bobby spoke in a low voice to his father about various play materials. He then looked at the analyst for the first time and announced, "I still remember what we were playing last week." In a whisper, Bobby told his father that he and the analyst had played robbers. (They had, in fact, built a bank out of cardboard blocks and had protected some play money given to Bobby by his father by shooting at imaginary robbers.) Bobby then picked up a toy eggbeater and warned the analyst of the dangers of "someone's shirt getting caught in it. " When the father left, Bobby continued his commentary on the eggbeater. Suddenly Bobby reminded the analyst: "We weren't finished with the game" from last week. Instead of returning to the theme of robbers, however, Bobby found a second eggbeater, compared the sizes of the two, and suggested that the analyst could use the larger one. Moments later Bobby again reminded the analyst of the shooting game of the previous session, but turned instead to a four-minute play sequence of cooking a meal; he maintained a running commentary on the relative sizes of various pots and pans, making sure these were equally pided between the analyst and himself. This cooking sequence came to an abrupt end when Bobby, searching for more cookware, looked over at the building blocks and announced, "Oh, here's the shooting place."

For the next five minutes, Bobby was busy rebuilding the bank. In contrast to the cooking sequence, Bobby was not satisfied unless the analyst was actively involved in his preparations. As he built the protective wall, he asked the analyst, "Aren't you going to help me?" and described all the

preparations for the shooting play in terms of "we"—what he and the analyst needed to do together. Bobby was pleased to find the gun he had used the previous week but then warned the analyst about its potential dangers. As he put his gun into his back pocket, he explained, "We'd better not put guns in our pockets because you might shoot and go right through the pants." Although Bobby assigned the analyst and himself positions behind the protective wall, he seemed uncertain about how actually to enter into the shooting action of the game. After several moments of aimless movement as he talked about the play, Bobby abandoned the story line. The carefully built fortress was turned into a house in which Bobby and the analyst were to cook a meal together.

In the middle of the second cooking sequence, Bobby discovered the second gun and exclaimed excitedly, "Now we both have guns!" and he invited the analyst to return with him to the story about shooting the robbers. Bobby explained that he had better put away the eating utensils quickly because "we're being robbed." At this point Bobby once again insisted on the analyst's active participation, and they both hunkered down on the floor behind the protective wall. Bobby explained that the robbers wanted their money and that the analyst better start shooting or he would get shot.

The shooting game, lasting thirteen minutes, constituted the longest play sequence in this session. The theme of big and little, seen in the earlier cooking sequences, was now expressed in the context of power and safety. Bobby explained to the analyst that they could not use their fingers because "fingers don't shoot anything." With gun in hand, however, Bobby quickly "ran out of bullets." In an apparent effort to maintain parity with the analyst, he suggested, "I think you ran out of bullets, too." A remedy was found when Bobby discovered that he not only had extra bullets, but they were also special "blowing-up bullets"; he shot one of the robbers who then blew up. Throughout the shooting, Bobby continued to run out of ammunition, each time discovering increasingly greater supplies, the destructive potential of which grew exponentially. When the analyst commented on how powerful his gun was, Bobby suggested they take a brief break from the shooting; he reported that most of the robbers got killed but added, "I think my arm got shot." Again, maintaining equality, he proposed that both he and the analyst had sustained the same kind of wound. When the analyst pointed out how dangerous the robbers were, Bobby agreed, referring to his diminished supply of ammunition.

Throughout the shooting sequence, Bobby compensated for danger and vulnerability by introducing increasingly powerful armaments. Soon he not only owned a much larger gun than the analyst, but in the face of diminishing supplies of ammunition he discovered an inexhaustible and potent source. Moving to another part of the room, Bobby spied a lion and decided that the lion's sharp bones and sharp teeth would be even better, more destructive than the bullets. He not only easily defeated the dangerous lion but became a robber himself, in order to steal its teeth with which to load his gun. With the bigger gun and more powerful ammunition, Bobby's fantasies about his destructive power and any possible dangers grew more elaborate. He now explained that his gun shot ten thousand bullets, teeth, missiles, and special dynamite caps, adding as an aside to the analyst, "We have different guns." He turned his attention from shooting robbers to killing poisonous snakes. He warned the analyst, "You need to shoot them when they're not looking and to shoot them ten times," because, he added with much gravity, "I think they have five hearts." Bobby then combined the two sources of danger that he needed to overcome and shot at bad guys who had poisonous snakes as pets.

Finally, the scene was set and all dangerous contingencies appeared to be covered adequately. Bobby could move from narrative preparation into the action of the fight. He lay on the floor with the analyst next to him and fired his gun furiously from behind the wall. After forty-two seconds of shooting, Bobby stopped and announced, "That's enough shooting for today." For a moment just prior to his return to cooking play, Bobby became a robber himself, stealing a doctor's kit in which to keep his money and guns.

Bobby now returned to the kitchen to prepare food for guests who were to join him and the analyst for dinner. In this final play sequence using the last nine minutes of the session, Bobby again became the sole player, although he kept the analyst informed of his progress in preparing for his guests. While searching for more plates, he spied a small piece of Plasticine on the shelf and told the analyst, "There's only one thing; there's some kind of doo-doo in there. Look for yourself." He immediately announced that the guests were not coming after all: "They changed their mind." Explaining that there would have been too many guests anyway, Bobby now set the table for two. The dinner partners ate their meal until the analyst announced the end of the session.

Bobby reminded the analyst, "We have to put everything back where it was," and before leaving, he surveyed the room to be sure they had done the job right.

Analytic Perspectives. Bobby utilized two very different modes in representing the aggressive fantasies of his inner world. These two modes or domains were distinguished by play themes, his relationship to the analyst, and his use of language and affect. The two were also quite different in the degree to which aggression was shown directly. The cooking play appeared to be "nonaggressive": Bobby's main concern in this play was cooking for the analyst; the analyst was clearly a grown-up and Bobby was clearly a child. The world in this play was neat and orderly, with the emphasis on the equal distribution of supplies. Bobby's fantasy seemed to be of a harmonious dyad in which concern with good, bad, and dangerous intrusions was unknown. Although the story narrative emphasized the harmonious dyad, Bobby's affect was subdued and he made little eye contact with the analyst. We thought the constricted affect and limited eye contact hinted that the cooking play and the shooting play might be linked at a latent level. The effect of the cooking play was to keep the analyst carefully controlled in space and in his relationship to Bobby. It was as if this play functioned as a denial in fantasy of the aggression given more direct expression in the shooting play. Bobby's sense of the potential danger of more direct aggressive expression was suggested by his initial inability fully to enter into the shooting story and his retreat to the second cooking sequence. Aggressive concerns, however, fleetingly appeared in this apparently nonaggressive narrative: the discovery of the eggbeater stimulated the thought that "someone's shirt" could get caught in it. Throughout the hour, Bobby followed a pattern of introducing a potential danger and then developing an immediate solution (the eggbeater could be oiled; dangerous poisonous snakes could be tricked and killed, and so on). When he was unable to find reliable solutions, he became dysfluent or simply brought those sequences to an abrupt end.

Bobby introduced this second narrative both linguistically and through the activity of demarcating the story space by constructing a wall. In this mode Bobby emphasized the friendly, cooperative dyad together against aggressive intrusion and attack. His and the analyst's aggression was justified as the reasonable response of good men to outside badness. Bobby's frequent references to comparative sizes and quantities and the need for equal distribution of armaments may have served his need for reassurance that the analyst would remain an ally. Although Bobby at first

emphasized the equality between himself and the analyst, as the play continued he began to express the wish to be more powerful than the analyst. In the manifest story narrative goodness and badness were absolute and clearly differentiated: the robbers were trying to steal Bobby's money and so he was good to fight them off. The latent image in the story, however, was of Bobby as robber—the money he brought to the play session was really his father's, and Bobby stole both the doctor's kit and the lion's teeth. One might speculate that Bobby wished to steal the power and potency of the big men but was afraid of their dangerous retaliation should they discover these secret wishes. The specificity of his fears was presented in the shooting play: he would be wounded, his body pierced; he would be killed.

Bobby's discomfort in recognizing his own badness was given its most vivid presentation when he imagined he had encountered a piece of "doo-doo" during the cooking play: he became visibly anxious and then was able to continue the play only by excluding the invited guests. But it was during the shooting play when aggression and danger were clearly and elaborately represented as coming from outside the dyad that Bobby was most directly engaged with the analyst, conveying pleasure in their companionship.

He utilized multiple transformations of the properties and functions of objects, rather than of characters, in the service of maintaining a balance between his wish for aggressive prowess and his wish for safety. He relied on his imaginative transformations to maintain a feeling of safety for himself in his particular role and let it be known that he wanted to be the most powerful only after he had forged a companionable, equitable alliance with the adult.

Bobby's concepts of good and bad were highly stable but required a good deal of justification for his increasingly elaborate attacks; and so the attacking robbers also became more ferocious and dangerous. As he finally let loose with a volley of gunfire, Bobby appeared to reach the bounds of his clear delineation between his identification with the good guys and his repudiation of the bad robbers, and he stopped shooting abruptly, announcing, "That's enough shooting for today."

Eddy

Eddy's interest in bodies and bodily transformations was a central theme. His concerns about his own body and its integrity were presented in the context of his recognition of, and confusion about, anatomical differences between the sexes, experiences of toileting, and theories about birth and babies. From the beginning of his second session, Eddy invited the analyst into the play on his own terms—instructing the analyst what to do and responding only to those queries that added to the elaboration of *his* story. After he made some squiggle drawings in which he repeatedly listed body parts, Eddy drew a lion, explaining, "Lions roar and eat people." In a reference to toy "transformers," he distinguished between "robot" lions and "real" lions. In the process of drawing, he noticed a broken toy giraffe and suggested that a lion had broken its neck. Eddy wanted to repair the giraffe and earnestly offered, "Mommy could fix it with her new tape."

As Eddy turned his attention to building a tall robot with blocks, he instructed the analyst to draw a robot. In this sequence he illustrated a crucial concern: who would be the powerful attacker and who would be the victim of bodily damage. As he piled the blocks higher, he alternated between his description of the robot eating the lion, the lion eating the robot, and the robot becoming the lion. He glanced at the analyst's drawing and arrived at a compromise: "*You* draw a lion robot!" As he put the final block onto his creation, the structure swayed and Eddy was momentarily frightened. He protected his face with his hands, shaking and arching his body away from the robot. When the robot did not fall, Eddy regained his composure and admired his creation. With some bravado he commanded the analyst to "put *my* name on *this* robot!"

Eddy elaborated on this theme of transformations, bodily damage, and anatomical differences in the next sequence as he explored the contents of the dollhouse. Spotting a small toilet among the furniture, he interspersed comments about pieces of furniture he described as broken with questions about the toy toilet and statements about "poo." He returned to attacking the robot with an airplane while stating that robots "poo and pee." Suddenly, as an aside, Eddy asked, "How do girls pee?" When the analyst did not respond to his question, Eddy introduced "two ladies doing poo and a boy doing poo." The boy was then put into a drawer, and Eddy again turned his attention to the "broken" pieces of dollhouse furniture.

Eddy's discomfort at the perils of being small and vulnerable—as opposed to being big and powerful—was elaborated further when he introduced a baby into the play. This baby doll climbed into the big robot. When the robot began to think about "broken arms, legs, and feet," Eddy quickly dismantled the block structure and asserted, "I'm not the robot!" He then fixed the broken parts and constructed a new and improved robot that was not only taller but had guns "to shoot bad guys." When the analyst persisted in questioning Eddy about the identity of the bad guys, his queries were at first ignored and then the gun-toting robot was entirely abandoned. Quite suddenly, Eddy announced that his father had bought him a transformer and moments later instructed the analyst to build a mother and a father robot. After only one had been completed Eddy dubbed it the "bad robot" and attacked it with a jet plane. He backed away as the "bad robot" tumbled down and quickly returned to talking about the different sizes of the dollhouse furniture.

Eddy's retreat from attacking and crashing was, however, short-lived. Perhaps now confident about his safety with the analyst, Eddy engaged him physically for the first time. After assigning hand puppets, Eddy had his duck bite the analyst's doctor puppet and then, with much laughter, reversed the roles. The doctor was easily transformed into a daddy who hit a boy puppet, who in turn beat up the daddy. A pig and mother puppet repeated the same sequence of reversals as the analyst continued to carry out Eddy's enthusiastic instructions. The fighting became increasingly exciting as a boy hit a girl puppet; the original duck bit the pig's nose; and the boy returned to repeatedly banging the girl puppet while Eddy jubilantly announced, "Little boy is now big!" As if to insist on his power regardless of size, Eddy introduced a baby puppet who not only smashed the daddy but then wildly jumped onto the mommy puppet and hit her. With glee, he stated that the mommy was scared. Throughout this sequence Eddy did not allow any of the analyst's questions about the puppet's motivation to interrupt the pleasurable exchange of hitting, biting, and jumping.

Just prior to the end of this second session, Eddy shifted away from the puppets to pumping gas, first into cars and then into the dollhouse. As the analyst signaled the end of the session, Eddy again built a "high-up" robot. Just before leaving the room, he presented a complete identification with invincible power as he pointed to the robot and said, "Now I'm inside."

Analytic Perspectives. The theme of the body—its integrity and power—was central to Eddy's

narrative. Although his body was in perpetual danger, Eddy consistently warded off potential injury by constructing figures that were both bigger than life and capable of reparative or compensatory transformations. Relying on the elaborate displacements of robots, drawings, and puppets, Eddy was free to represent the dangerous as well as the exciting aspects of aggressive actions. The latter was best illustrated in his story of the hitting mother and father and the boy baby who wanted to be powerful enough to intrude on this exciting activity. Although Eddy gave specific representation in play to his wish to be powerful, the fear of the powerful retaliatory attacker was also apparent. Both occurred continuously in his play as if realization of the wish inevitably entailed a dangerous consequence.

In addition to simply ending play sequences in which aggressive acts might lead to injury, Eddy relied heavily on turning passive into active and identifying with the aggressor. In one sequence he built a robot that became invulnerable to the lion's attack by becoming powerful enough to devour the lion. Perhaps in response to his identification with the now endangered lion, Eddy executed another play transformation by combining the two characters. He introduced a lion robot who did not wish to eat anyone. When a fight between characters was enacted, Eddy often assumed the role of the healing doctor or fixer who could repair any damage incurred.

It was during the play sequence of the gun-toting robot fighting off bad guys that Eddy made his only reference to his father. This reference in which Eddy linked his father and the transformers suggested that the latent conflict for Eddy involved his wish to usurp his father's power and his fear he might be punished as "the bad guy."

In his play, Eddy was able to represent the various themes associated with aggressive urges in the context of exercising tremendous control over the attributes of his constructions and their transformations as well as over the activities of the analyst. Throughout the session Eddy responded to the analyst's clarifying questions either by ignoring them entirely or by contradicting any of the analyst's observations of the action (for example, analyst: "What is the mouse doing?" Eddy: "Talk"; analyst: "What is the mouse saying?" Eddy: "No talk, just eating"). Sometimes this response suggested that Eddy felt the analyst was trying to control him by his questions. At other times, his reversal of the "facts" of the play seemed to reflect his ease in transforming the roles and properties

of the characters within the story. In addition, by making use of the analyst as a functional prop and directing his activities in the play, Eddy could turn to him as a safe ally. By neutralizing the potentially dangerous powers of this adult, Eddy achieved some freedom in presenting the locus of aggressivity as continually shifting, thereby becoming able to explore the more destructive aspects of aggression.

Although Eddy's play was dominated by his wish for power, his fear of retaliation and damage to his body, and his pleasure in the excitement associated with aggressivity, he was able to sustain his play and his affectionate relationship to the analyst by placing the danger and badness outside himself. References to the father as the vanquished bad guy—during sequences involving the robot constructions and puppet fights—suggested Eddy's specific wish to usurp father's power and his fear that he would in turn be punished for his own aggressive, bad guy attacks.

Although Eddy was anxious at moments, his imaginative play remained coherent throughout the hour. Although the central themes were sustained over the course of the session, his preoccupation with changes in the shape, form, and function of bodies seemed to stimulate some of the rapid shifts in his story line. Transformations, for Eddy, were presented for the purpose of expressing his own wishes for increased power, and rapid bodily changes were used to reestablish safety in the face of potential retribution for aggressive acts. In addition, transformations allowed Eddy the opportunity to represent and master the anxiety associated with his questions about anatomical differences between boys and girls, children and adults.

Eddy seemed very clear in his notions about good and bad and struggled with his expectation of swift retaliation for his aggressivity. Relying entirely on robots, lions, and puppets to express his attacking wishes, Eddy always branded this cast of characters as "bad" and required that they be punished. His adherence to displacement and to a pattern of harsh response toward the aggressors in play seemed to reflect the conditions under which he felt aggressivity was "acceptable"; exciting urges for aggressive action could be portrayed as long as they were repudiated with equal vigor. In turn, Eddy was able to give expression to aggressive wishes both directly and through harsh punishments while maintaining a firm sense of right and wrong, good and bad.

While Eddy directly ascribed the wish to be powerful to characters within his narratives, in a less dramatic way he exerted his power directly by relegating the analyst to the predominantly passive role of onlooker. Eddy used transformations of the body to express his wish to be big and powerful, the destroyer, not the destroyed, as well as to ward off his fear that permanent injury would be the consequence of these wishes. In addition, bodily transformations provided a vehicle for representing his awareness of anatomical differences and his associated anxiety. Although one could describe his rapid shifts in play between "broken, damaged, little, vulnerable" and "whole, repaired, big, powerful" as unstable, Eddy's use of these shifts formed a consistent pattern that could be summarized as "It's okay to be the powerful attacker as long as you're punished for it and as long as any damage that results from either attack or punishment can be repaired instantly."

Jim

Jim entered the session carrying a transformer toy that could change from a robot to a plane. He said the toy was damaged and demonstrated its transformations, pointing out that the plane's wing was broken and stating emphatically that he preferred the toy as an intact robot. As he flew the plane around the room he repeatedly asked the analyst which transformation he liked best, simultaneously pointing out its deficiencies. He remained preoccupied with the transformations and with the analyst's opinion about which figure was the "best" for the first five minutes of the session, ignoring his mother's presence and subsequent departure from the room. After many crash landings of the plane, Jim made clear his identification with its power and vulnerability as he crash-landed himself on the floor. This was followed by an aside as to where he should put his jacket and where "the guy" (referring at once to the transformer and himself) should sit. When the analyst suggested the chair as a place for the jacket and for sitting, Jim sat on the table instead, grinning at the analyst as if waiting for a response. After a few moments, he got up, and flung his jacket onto the table.

This "naughtiness" was followed by multiple plane crashes and Jim's rediscovery of the eggbeater used in the previous session to attack the analyst. In this episode Jim seemed to struggle with his urge to engage in exciting attacks on the analyst and his fear of retaliation. At first Jim explained that he was keeping the eggbeater away from the bad guy robot so that he would not crash. But when the analyst queried whether the robot ever got hurt, Jim anxiously grinned and

again went at the analyst's face with the eggbeater. When the analyst backed away and put his hand up to stop the attack, Jim talked about "that guy" who wanted to be bad. His confusion and defensive reversals of attacker and victim were dramatically represented as he used the robot to attack the analyst's face and announced, "I'll stop ya!" He explained that the robot wanted to attack the analyst because the analyst wanted to attack him. And why did the analyst wish to attack? "Because he was attacking you." He alternated between describing the analyst as the "biggest bad guy" and imprisoning the evil robot to "keep him out of mischief."

Jim abruptly moved to another part of the room, grabbed some puppets and again attacked the analyst. With increasing intensity he bounced each of the puppets on the analyst's shoulder because "it's fun." He then punished the attacking boy puppet, however, by putting him in "the trapper" and dousing him with hot and cold water. Announcing the end of the boy's punishment, Jim moved further away from the analyst and anxiously clutched at his genitals. Continuing his frenzied movements about the room, Jim went to a stack of cardboard building blocks. As he attempted to lift the entire stack, the blocks fell on top of him; with much dramatic vocalization and excitement, Jim threw himself to the floor. Again, he made a direct attack and tried to dump blocks on the analyst's head. In an apparent effort to ward off retaliation from the analyst, Jim referred to the robot/bad guy as needing to hide from the analyst. Following three episodes of hiding the attacking robot, Jim excitedly built a "secret" hideout with the blocks, lay down in the middle of it in plain view of the analyst, and invited him to look for him. When the analyst finally "found" him, Jim looked confused about whether he had really hidden himself. His repeated question, "Did you really see me?" suggested his difficulty at this moment in determining the difference between "pretend" and "real."

Jim's precarious balance between being the powerful attacker or the victim vulnerable to injury was again demonstrated as he crashed his body onto the secret hideout and then immediately upended the nearby table while commenting on this feat of strength to the analyst. He then lifted a folding chair on top of his head, announcing, "I can even lift *this* up!" When the analyst commented on his wish to show him how strong he was, Jim's frenzied activity subsided briefly. He sat in the folding chair and clutched his genitals just before suggesting that he put the chair on top of the analyst's head. After moving toward the adult with the folded chair, Jim let the chair fall on top of his tumbling body and asked excitedly, "What fell on me?" This was repeated two more times until he

returned the chair to its place up against the wall. His involvement in both the excitement of crashing and the fear of damage was apparent as he carefully leaned the folding chair against a rubber doorstop so "it won't hurt the wall."

Jim continued to play with the possibility of danger and injury with repeated attacks on the analyst's body. While briefly using the evil robot as an agent, Jim then went for a cardboard block and with a smile lifted it high over his head before dropping it on the analyst's. As Jim grabbed the block, the analyst leaned toward Jim with an irritated, puzzled expression. Jim stared back briefly before getting another block for a second attack. When the analyst said, "I don't really like having blocks dropped on my head," Jim moved away and again took up the "evil" transformer, flying it toward the adult's head while intently watching the analyst's face for a reaction. On the second flyby, he again crashed himself to the floor, grabbing a toy giraffe which he used as a baseball bat. As he swung the bat, Jim expressed his wish for competency and power *and* his feelings of inadequacy and vulnerability by first stating that he always hit the baseball and then that he could never hit it. Jim articulated his explanation for his lack of success by having the toy animal say that he was missing his body and feet: "They were chopped off." Here, the associations between Jim's aggressive wishes, his fear of retaliation in the form of bodily injury, and his worries about being incompetent and vulnerable were especially clear. Apparently in compensation for its bodily deficits, the toy giraffe bashed blocks onto the bad boy robot, squashing him under the blocks to "keep him from being bad." To the robot's angry question about why he was being squashed, the animal replied, "To keep you out of mischief!"

Jim again took hold of the "broken" giraffe and began kicking wildly at the blocks. He boisterously proclaimed that he was a good kicker in spite of various body parts being "chopped off." After bending the animal's legs and assuring himself that these could not be chopped off, he threw it into the dungeon for kicking and being bad. The psychological distance Jim achieved in these fleeting displacements was very limited, and in this instance he followed the bad giraffe by throwing himself between the analyst's arms and legs, announcing, "I'm in pungeon!" Giggling and anxious, Jim rolled out of the "pungeon" and writhed on the floor. The analyst commented that all of the exciting mischief made for worries about being bad and punished. He wondered if the giraffe had had its head chopped off for being bad. Jim responded with an enthusiastic, "Yeah!" and

immediately displayed his strength by again upending the table. Jim then maneuvered close to the analyst, fingering the buttons on the analyst's jacket. When the end of the session was announced, Jim abandoned this more subdued and affectionate bid for contact and engaged in a frenzied cleanup of the room. As he left, Jim made a last comment about the need to repair the damaged giraffe and then went out without his jacket.

Analytic Perspectives. This session contained eight consecutive play sequences that presented in play Jim's notion that he is bad because of his wish to be powerful and destructive and his fear that the expression of the wish inevitably will bring retaliatory injury and punishment. He identified himself with the robot plane that did not work right and with the broken toy giraffe, identifications that suggest he experienced his aggressive urges as profoundly dangerous and destructive. He was not able to preserve the integrity of his body but was continually threatened from within and without by his aggressivity. He vividly presented the frighteningly destructive and annihilating aspects of aggressivity in which the whole body and the whole person can be destroyed or irreparably damaged. No reparation appeared possible, only punishment in kind.

Jim's play suggested his wish to have the analyst recognize him as the best and most powerful and his associated fear that the analyst would damage him because of his wishes. Jim seemed unable to sustain a consistent location for the source of his aggressivity; whether it was in him and was his justifiable response to the analyst's dangerousness or it was the analyst who was the source were possibilities that continually shifted. Jim was not able to sustain any trusting alliance with the analyst, instead using him as an object for his own projections. His reliance on projection, a defense employed probably in the service of managing the anxiety aroused by his aggression, interfered with his ability to ally himself with the analyst and probably contributed to his inability to locate and sustain a source for the aggressive actions and intentions. In using the analyst to represent his own aggressive fantasies, Jim experienced himself as continually in danger of destruction and/or punishment. Shifts between characters, attributes, and roles were both dramatic and frenzied; though strongly demarcated, none held up for long or seemed to bind his anxiety sufficiently. Frequent switching of roles and attributes of various characters dominated Jim's narrative and was most often apparent in the context of themes of aggressivity, "good and bad," and punishment. These changes were especially confusing because Jim used pronouns inconsistently when he assigned

roles to various characters in the play. Jim's rapidly shifting pronominal use and unclear referents increased the analyst's difficulty in following the narrative accompanying his play. For example, in the play sequence involving a giraffe, he stated, in succession: "I'm gonna kick her if I had a head. See, he's a bad kicker and she's a bad hitter [referring to the giraffe]. But they [legs] were chopped off I gather, I gather. So he gets to bend his leg because she's not supposed to be chopped off, right?"

Although Jim seemed to have specific ideas of his own, he showed little interest in or awareness of the listener's perspective, failing to provide enough information to enable the adult to follow his script of the play. The constant projection onto the analyst of the locus of aggression placed Jim in a psychologically intolerable position to which he responded by repeatedly relocating the aggression in himself. Perhaps some of the shifts could be understood as a wish to protect simultaneously himself and the analyst, by presenting himself as alone in the playroom, both the attacker and the object of attack, both powerful and impotent, both invulnerable and damaged. Jim rarely used language to talk about the aggressive acts he portrayed and instead relied heavily on accompanying noises to dramatize them.

Anxiety was Jim's dominant affect, at moments giving way to reveal his excitement and pleasure in his fantasies of being the aggressive destroyer.

Jim most often referred to the changing and fragmenting parts of toys, fantasy figures, and his own body. This apparent ease of transformation in his play constructions increased the level of anxiety associated with aggressivity. Bodily damage and loss of body parts were the expected consequences of his own attacking behavior. The anxiety accompanying aggressive actions was additionally intensified by his seeming inability clearly to differentiate between himself and others as either the source or the intended victim of his wish to attack. Although he attempted to reassure himself by relying on his notion of the body as transformable (in the ease of its repair), Jim's anxiety seemed instead to be heightened. This was presented in his many scenes of dismemberment and destruction.

In this respect, Jim displayed a level of moral uncertainty that threatened the stability of his ego organization: he was unable to delineate between his own goodness or badness and anyone else's.

In turn his presentations in play were equally unstable and confused.

In contrast to Bobby's and Eddy's solutions, Jim's were characterized by inconsistency and instability. The attacker became the attacked; the source of badness shifted rapidly from inside the self to outside; and bodies and objects were threatened continually with complete destruction. Jim's one stable pattern was that he always experienced power as catastrophically destructive and that its expression must be met with swift and equally catastrophic punishment.

Aggressivity in the Mind of the Oedipal Boy

These boys appeared to struggle with central dilemmas concerning destructive aggression. The dilemmas reflected both the wish to be powerful and invulnerable and the fear that to be powerful and invulnerable might put one in jeopardy. For each boy the capacity to suspend disbelief, to try on a variety of possibilities through the transformations of play, and the availability of reality as an escape created a psychological domain in which different aspects of aggression could be explored. For these boys play became the central vehicle through which to represent the dilemmas generated by aggressive wishes and to try out solutions. Play made it possible for each boy to represent his various views about the expression and regulation of aggression in a continual dialogue within the self.

The language skills of the three boys seemed to reflect their capacity for, and ways of, relating to the analyst in the research settings. Bobby, for example, was most intent on keeping the analyst involved in his play. His statements were usually intelligible, and numerous revisions or clarifications of utterances suggested his intent to keep the analyst informed at all times. Eddy's speech was also clear, but he used shorter, directive statements, had fewer revisions or clarifying comments, and contradicted or ignored the analyst's comments. These characteristics reflected his different style of involvement with and use of the analyst as a prop and object of control in the play. Jim's frequently unintelligible and chaotic language matched his equally fragmented play. Dysfluencies in Jim's speech, in contrast to Bobby's, did not facilitate his subsequent language formulations or appear to be related to an intent to maximize clarity of communication with the analyst.

Although all three boys were concerned with destruction and bodily damage, Bobby and Eddy were better able to employ language to change the story line and attributes of character in order to forestall potential dangers. Language did not adequately serve Jim in similar efforts; direct action of attacking and being attacked was far more prominent in his session.

These three boys struggled with three dilemmas concerning their aggressive wishes. Each boy employed notions about the "flexibility" of the body. Not only could one body part be substituted for another as needed, but body parts could be damaged and instantly fixed. But the "benefits" of such body flexibility at times seemed to be outweighed by a substantial "risk"— if the body was so easily transformed, perhaps it could be too easily damaged.

The second dilemma had to do with "morality," or goodness versus badness, especially the question of where badness should be located. If badness was kept too firmly outside the child, he might then feel in danger of attack from the bad guys, but if the child located the badness inside himself, the environment might then be seen as potentially retaliatory. The boys' presentation of things as good or bad was variable with regard to both the location and the intensity of moral judgment. The relative stability of these concepts allowed for a greater degree of flexibility in the representation and assignment of aggressive actions in play. When the notion of who was good and bad became more blurred and inconsistent, aggressive urges seemed to be experienced as more frightening. Without the clear delineation of good versus bad, the child may be unable to maintain a necessary distinction between the source of aggression and the dangerous consequences of its expression.

Finally, each boy struggled with his wish for "power" and his fear of retaliation for actions intended to win or demonstrate powerfulness. The questions of who has power and what it is to be used for were reflected in each boy's play. The dilemma here seemed to be that if the child presented himself as having all the power, then he feared the adult's retaliation; but if the child attributed all the power to the adult, then the child felt too vulnerable.

Perhaps one of the more striking features in these boys' presentations of aggressivity was the apparent absence of guilt either in the inhibition of activities or as a source of subsequent anxiety.

Close scrutiny of these research hours helps clarify the status of the superego while the child is still in the midst of the oedipal phase and lends credence to the psychoanalytic concept that internalization of moral aims and imperatives occurs as the result of negotiating the oedipal phase and not before. The boys in this study were able to recognize the differences between right and wrong and good and bad, but moral judgments concerning their own aggressivity continued to be determined by an external set of rules and fears of retaliation. Psychoanalytic views of the postoedipal structuralization of the superego (A. Freud, 1965; Sandler, 1960; Kennedy and Yorke, 1982) and developmental psychologists' conceptualizations of stages of moral development (Kohlberg, 1973; Rest, 1983; Leslie, 1987) are consistent in suggesting that it is not until well into latency that children begin to rely on internal and internalized rules and expectations as an *independent* source of behavior and good or bad feelings about the self. The prominence and pleasure seen in the representation of destructive urges—as in the boys discussed—may be possible only prior to the consolidation of this subjective and autonomous sense of morality. Although they know the difference between right and wrong, the experience of prohibitions and potential dangers as *external* may, in fact, allow oedipal children to give rich expression to aggressivity as long as the perceived consequences are suspended or controlled in imaginative play.

The boys in this study presented a view of their bodies as being easily transformable. The belief that body parts could be readily lost and/or changed not only served as a powerful source of the boys' fears of castration and damage, but also fueled magical solutions concerning easy reparation of bodily injuries. There was substantial variation in the degree to which the children's play employed a notion of bodily transformations for its restitutive or reparative advantages, as opposed to its stimulation of fear of damage.

These boys demonstrated characteristic and stable patterns in their attempts at resolving these three dilemmas as well as characteristic relationships among the three dilemmas. All three boys seemed to equate power with notions of destructive and attacking activities, and all judged such destructive attacks as dangerous to the integrity of the body. It was not just that they wished to be the best, the most potent, and the most skilled— and to be admired for these characteristics; rather, it was as if they experienced their power *through* the destruction of the other. It appeared that it was the wish to attack the body of the other that made them so concerned with the integrity of their own

body. All three boys presented their attacks as justifiable self-defense. And all three suggested via their affect that exercising the capacity to attack and destroy was pleasurable in its own right, even if morally "bad."

Aggressivity was richly presented in the play of these three oedipal-aged boys. Indeed, it was probably the most consistent and boldly choreographed story line. If one had only the script and surface descriptions, one might imagine that they were aggressive bullies and tyrants in their daily lives. Yet all were children whose teachers and families considered them to be "within normal limits"; during their sessions as well as in their school and home lives, they displayed a capacity for concern and empathy.

When caught up in their presentations of aggressivity, each boy was capable, within a range, of suspending disbelief and generating for himself and the analyst a pretended reality in which attack and destruction were enacted with a sense of conviction. For Bobby and Eddy, the use of displacements and of checks and balances on aggressive presentations seemed to be more available than for Jim, who was more immediately threatening and threatened and less able to move between pretending and doing.

Theoretically, the touchstone of the oedipal phase is triadic relationships—internal mental structures in which the child represents himself in relation to his parents. In the archetypal situation, the boy internally views himself in a rivalrous relation with his father, toward whom he expresses hostile and competitive behavior and from whom he anticipates retaliation. The boy represents himself in an affectionate relation with his mother toward whom he expresses tender and longing feelings and from whom he wishes exclusive love. In a previous report (Cohen et al., 1987), we described ways in which such phenomena were observed in the play activities of children in this study. Our present focus, however, is not on the triadic phenomenon but on the presentation of aggressivity. From this perspective, it is of interest that even in the oedipal phase, a good deal of the displays of aggressivity retains preoedipal configurations in which the child becomes the ally of the father-analyst against an external danger or threat. Thus, some of the aggressivity within the play of these children may seem more phallic than oedipal, having to do with the display of potency. In addition, although the alliance with the adult male may defend against the

dangers that would arise from the full expression of rivalry, it may also reflect precursors of the boy's more complete identification with his father that will be the heir of the Oedipus complex.

The dominance and vividness of the play lines of aggressivity seemed heightened because they were presented in relative isolation from other themes associated with the oedipal phase. It was as if, in their play, the boys had embarked on telling the story of the inner experience of aggressivity in all its variations, and that the other complementary oedipal themes became overshadowed or lost. We believe that this presentation of aggressivity in isolation—and in bold relief—is a major characteristic of the oedipal-aged boy. Indeed, it is found at the beginning of Sophocles' dramatization of the Oedipus myth when the young Oedipus attacks and kills his father at the crossroads for failing to yield to him. Oedipus' destructive, unbalanced rage occurs in the drama as an offstage event. For these boys in the oedipal phase such characteristics occupied center stage.

The dominance, vividness, conviction, and isolation of aggressive presentations were marked out as being within play by the conventions of play and by the relationship between the child and the analyst.

The children entered into the aggressive dramatizations by indicating both verbally and behaviorally that they knew it was play and by recognizing the presence of the analyst ("Let's use . . ."or "Let's pretend . . ."). In a complementary fashion, they terminated the display of aggressivity by clear verbal or behavioral markers of transition. Jim moved closest to actually attacking the analyst; however, he used the conventions of play to permit real attacks that exceeded the bounds of pretend. Although these bounds could be recalled for him and he could pretend to be playing, he was more like those children who enter treatment because of their disruptive behavior and who bring actual attacking behavior, rather than imagined attacks, into the treatment situation.

For the oedipal boys of this study, the murder and shooting in the play were strongly experienced while simultaneously being highly contained. The most powerful container of aggressivity was the recognition by the child that he was playing in the presence of, and quite often with, another person whose feelings he monitored and whom he brought along in the unfolding

drama. We believe that such containment by internalized objects is a hallmark of the achievement of oedipal-phase regulation of aggressive presentations in the inner life of children.

Aggressivity defines one of the story lines within the full configuration of the Oedipus complex. Previously, we have described the child's presentations in play of aspects of oedipal love and curiosity, particularly primal scene fantasies (Cohen et al., 1987). There are deep, underlying structures of experience relating to size, bodily integrity, goodness and evil, danger and safety, love and hate, life and death, which appear to find their expression in the various story lines of the oedipal drama. These additional dimensions of the Oedipus complex include the variety of ways in which children relate to their parents as individuals and as a couple, their attempts to create an increasingly useful and accurate picture of adult relationships and their place among them, their worries and desires, and their picture of their own bodies and the bodies of others.

The overarching developmental task of the oedipal phase is to bring together these multiple story lines in a preliminary integration and structuralization that can be characterized as a theory of mind. The play of the oedipal child involves hypothesis testing about how the mind works. How, why, and whom do we love and hate? How do we regulate the expression of these primary affects? What does it mean to hate someone you also love? Does hate destroy? This early oedipal theory of mind is reworked again and again in the course of a lifetime. From the perspective of this study, we can see how the child's play itself creates such integrations, thereby moving development forward. The play of the oedipal child can be seen as thought experiments in which derivatives of unconscious fantasies are given representation along with the accompanying powerful affects. By portraying in play the wish for power, the wish to destroy, fears of retaliation, fantasies about the body and gender, and by trying out different combinations or relations between these affects and fantasies, the oedipal boy begins to understand how his mind works and how the minds of others work.

The study of children's play in a clinical setting gives us an opportunity to explore the relationship between the child's implicit theory of his mind and our theory of the oedipal mind.

Bashing, attacking, killing, hurting, and other destructive activities presented in the play of

oedipal-phase children should not be understood simply as a response to frustration or as a gauge of their capacity to control impulses. Rather, these dramatizations and activities reflect the children's attempt to portray in play their dilemma negotiating the valence between loving and destructive feelings in the context of object relationships, mastery of the environment, and development of a self. A crucial dilemma of the oedipal phase is created by children's newly acquired capacity to recognize themselves as an active agent of aggressive wishes. That is, their urges to dominate, hurt, and vanquish are directed at those figures they love most intensely. It is their response to these urges that generates conflict and their attempts at resolution.

Oedipal children struggle to find a balance between aggressive urges and the moral imperatives they develop in order to protect those they love. In addition, they must negotiate the balance between the pleasure associated with power and the potentially dangerous consequences associated with possible retaliation. Their use in play of language, displacement, the analyst, and the setting for representing aggressivity offers a view of the degree of comfort, security, and self-reliance they have achieved in these negotiations.

The study of the play of oedipal children reveals central characteristics of the oedipal mind. The capacity to suspend disbelief and the ability to generate large narrative structures allow them to explore aspects of their own mind and, as they confront the core oedipal questions, to develop an integrated theory of how their mind works.

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