

The Many Meanings of Play

**Verbalization and Play
in the Treatment of
a Five-Year-Old Boy**

Laurie Levinson

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Andrew's recollections of his psychoanalytic treatment from five to nine years of age were written nine years after the completion of his analysis, when he was eighteen.

Patient's Introduction

I remember myself as a very different little boy before my analysis. I kept all my feelings inside, and I didn't know at all what I was feeling. I remember that it took me years and years to really let myself be angry at anyone. I was sure that only a good boy would be liked, and I desperately needed that approval. A good boy, I thought, did not cause problems. The normal kid made demands and made life hard for adults, but I, on the other hand, strove to act just like an adult, to be someone to admire and call mature. I was very quiet, and whenever a question was asked me, my answer was, "I don't care." Whether it was what flavor ice cream I wanted or what I wanted to do with someone, I never wanted anything myself and always accommodated others.

My analytic sessions with Dr. Levinson, whom I called Laurie because I was only five, were where I could begin to find and accept my reactions to the world. The analysis made me want to take the risks of feeling, so I could enjoy the pleasures of being a human and not a robot. I slowly started to understand that I *did* crave and want, and that fulfilling my wishes could make me happy.

Mostly, I talked in my sessions, creating stories. That seemed to be the adult thing, the *right* thing to do. Only through the stories I created could I let Laurie in on my feelings. As I told them, Laurie never forced me to realize that I was talking about myself. Had I realized that the adventures were peepholes to my life, I would have plugged them up.

I imagined good guys battling bad guys, and usually these bad guys represented the thoughts and feelings I thought were "worst." Bad guys had to be punished by the supercharacter, the big, conscious, censoring me.

I developed routines that I returned to regularly, each story developing a structure and characters with which I could create new adventures. My play was based on imagining situations in which I created one world after another, capturing aspects of my own life, as if writing them down to be able to look at them from the outside.

My stories allowed me to have Laurie on my side. Together we would find criminals and punish them. Each story let me play out a fantasy, chastise myself for it, and also test to see what Laurie's reaction to it would be. I began to see that though she knew what the bad guy had done, she was not so intent on punishing. She didn't say, "Oh what a terrible man!" and so I started to wonder whether my angry feelings were really so dangerous. I could see a glint of fun in her face, when I dared to say things like, "I think fires are exciting." The criminals were people like me, with whom I could eventually laugh, and say, "I love you, because you're normal, and you're me, and you will help me get pleasure from and love life." Laurie's warm, forgiving heart, which taught me to accept my feelings, was crucial, but so was her sense of humor, and willingness to play along, because she became a kid with me, a friend of mine, with whom, if I wanted, I could share my troubles through my characters' exploits.

I had to hide my feelings in real life, but in the stories that I made up, I knew I would not be punished. Everything was "just a story," which I could pretend was not really about me, anyway. Telling an adventure was easy because it was just like talking about someone else. The characters were exciting and real and important to me.

It was a wonderful feeling being completely free in my stories. I was suddenly given the creative power to make whatever I wanted to happen, and so usually my character had power that I, a little boy, didn't have. Whether I had machines that could punish people or move me places or make me know everything, or whether I had a strong, magical body that would make people belong to or care for me, my stories gave me a chance to rule. Whatever pains were impossible for me to heal in real life, I could cure in my sessions with just a thought, just a snap of the fingers.

My stories helped me to associate fantasies and wishes with the feelings inspired by life. I began to notice that when something bad had happened to me, a character in my story would want

to kill or punish someone. Like this, I learned what was happening within me. If a friend in school hurt my feelings, then I'd want some bad guy to get hurt. I'd be angry. I actually had to *find* my angry thoughts in messages my stories were giving us, because those "awful" feelings were so hidden from me. But slowly, as I felt safer to experience more, I felt freer and happier in life. Now eighteen, I look back on my analysis, grateful for how it helped me to grow.

In the pages that follow, you will find examples of how we discovered my reactions, and how Laurie helped make me more accepting of my feelings. You will see how I used the props of the office (chairs, a Boy-Girl doll, and a Sherlock Holmes puppet) and the two real characters available to us, to create stories that mirrored my outside life, and whispered to Laurie the stories of my heart, stories that she taught me to tell louder and louder.

Introduction

In Andrew's introduction, he directed his memories of his analysis to the stories he created with me. These stories, always accompanied by elaborate and quite theatrical enactments, represented Andrew's unique form of playing. Traditionally, we think of adults in analysis communicating through words, and children, through less verbal and often nonverbal playing. The subject of this chapter is the role of Andrew's precocious use of language in his play and the manner in which he used verbalization more as one might expect of an adult. One question that may be posed is: to what extent is such a verbal precocity a hindrance to development, leading to such maladaptive defenses as isolation of affect, intellectualization, and denial? One might just as well wonder whether such an unusual verbal capacity represents a gift that can lead to the enhancement of creative potential, in that more access exists to unconscious thoughts and fantasies.

Because of Andrew's talent with words, his analysis differed in a technical sense from the analyses of many young children. With the majority of early latency children, we tend to devote a large part of the treatment to observing and labeling play activity. Once understood by the analyst, the action of the play is translated into words for the child. In Andrew's case, what he was feeling was found in the stories he told rather than in nonverbal play. Therefore the task at hand was to connect Andrew with the feelings embodied by his fictional characters, whose conflicts were of

course his own, and to undo his excessive use of maladaptive mechanisms of defense.

Another aim of the treatment was to encourage and support his capacity for play, both a therapeutic and a development-promoting activity. This process was interwoven with the therapeutic action necessary for Andrew's recovery from neurotic inhibitions and for the resumption of progressive development.

Case Presentation

Background

Andrew entered analysis at the age of five with a joyless and purposeful air that expressed a determined attempt to ward off eruptions of feelings and thoughts too uncomfortable for him to tolerate. Of particular interest in the initial months was the entrenched and ubiquitous gender identity focus of his play, with rapid reversals and quick shifts between active and passive modes of relating. One could see the tyranny that these preoccupations had assumed over his external and internal worlds. As his play developed in the course of treatment, other elements made their way into its alterations. The gender identity character of their vicissitudes was consistent in conflictual and defensive expressions.

Andrew was referred to me by his father's therapist, who felt the boy needed analysis because of anxiety dreams, enuresis, asthma attacks, and general apprehensiveness. In addition, Andrew was an only child who was being deeply affected by the stormy nature of his parents' relationship, one that was marked not so much by open battles as by a constant sniping at each other over their mutual grievances. Any story told by one parent would invariably be disparaged and contradicted by the other.

Both parents were born and raised abroad, having come from families who set a high premium on learning. Having met at the university during tumultuous political events, they may have been rebelling against their families, and it is possible that the relationship was based on their being accomplices in this rebellion. From the time I met them, the marriage was openly unhappy. The father's professional activities took up a great deal of his time and were used to justify his frequent

absences. The mother saw his career as a rival for his love and interest. Andrew was the sole focus of the unambivalent love of each parent, and they stated that they were making attempts to work things out for his sake. Essentially, however, the parents led quite separate existences, coming together only when an activity involved their son. The burden for Andrew of his centrality in this relationship was evident and manifested itself in many ways—both in and out of the treatment.

Andrew was born in this country. The mother had a normal pregnancy and delivery; Andrew's developmental milestones were all precocious, save for his nighttime enuresis, which persisted until he was six. It was typical of this child that he asked his father, "*Why* do I wet my bed?" He spoke early, first in his parents' native language. By the age of two and a half he was able to understand English but refused to speak it. When he entered nursery school at three, his teachers remarked that they were unable to discern that his first language was not English. Quietly and vigilantly listening to babysitters and to television, he had speedily acquired a meticulous command of the language, and from the beginning of our relationship he took great pride and pleasure in the use of *words*. His English was a rather formal one, punctuated occasionally with certain foreign constructions. Andrew's intellectual endowment and the ease with which he acquired language skills facilitated a precocious use of languages for defensive purposes. In his play during sessions he devised complicated fantasy games, rich in subtlety and complexity for such a young child. His strong need for step-by-step verbalization and explanation of his play afforded him the reassurance of retaining the interest and attention of the object. Words conferred upon Andrew magical powers to regulate his affects and his instinctual strivings, both libidinal and aggressive, and, most important, to control his anxiety regarding overwhelming feelings of helplessness. Games for this boy tended to consist of lengthy narratives with varied and elaborate subplots, digressions, and subtexts—but always with Andrew retaining his fantasied, dramatized position as master of the universe.

Treatment

When we were introduced in my waiting room, I saw a rather shy and delicate-looking little boy with a serious and gentlemanly demeanor. Andrew was clearly a child of exceptional manners, which I came to see as a reflection of his basic character. In general he related to most people in a considerate and genuinely polite way. Our first session proper got underway with drawings of

designs that reminded him of an octopus, and then a monster, which in turn reminded him of his frightening dreams of monsters, in which Andrew's father would phone the police, who would put the monsters safely in jail. Andrew informed me that he knew, of course, that there were no such things as monsters in real life—only in scary dreams. I agreed, adding that even dream monsters could be very frightening and that the work we would do together would be to understand the hidden worries that caused such problems. Andrew's response to this introduction to treatment was to nod knowingly: "I knew that already." The material that followed the monster discussion was his announcement that he wanted to draw his family. He drew a huge father and laughed merrily, telling me how very big his father was. He then drew himself, examined the drawing carefully, and blurted out, "It's a girl! I don't know how to draw boys." He told me that it was the long hair that made it a girl, or that "It could be a boy pretending to be a girl." Andrew put no arms on this picture of the "boy-girl" drawing. In his picture of his mother one could see a definite resemblance to his self-drawing. He referred to his mother as "he." This ambiguity was also evident in his lack of "boyishness" at the start of the analysis. He was not actually girlish, but rather overly gentle and quite nonassertive.

Referring back to the subject of hair, he spontaneously remarked that he used to have blond hair, but that for some unknown reason it had changed to its current light brown, which he did not like as much. His best friend, Johnny, had very blond hair, which Andrew thought was much "prettier." I later came to know that Johnny was an extremely effeminate little boy who openly expressed his wish to be a girl. At the end of this session Andrew observed the drawing of himself, saying, "I wonder why I chose the brown crayon. I wasn't thinking of my eyes, but they *are* brown." I started to say, "You are a boy—," but before I could add "who is curious," he interrupted me to ask with incredulity, "How do you *know*?" I responded that he certainly had many questions and perhaps even doubts about himself and that together we could explore the sources of and reasons for his perplexities.

It was not long into the treatment before Andrew introduced a fantasy game, the focus of which was a baby doll. This doll possessed the unique ability to be both a boy and a girl; when the eyes were open, it was a girl; when they were closed, it was a boy. He referred to this doll as the "Him-Her" or "Boy-Girl" doll, a conflictual aggressive wish, often associated with separations. In one story

Andrew had the baby crying, declaring how unfair it was that the parents could leave the baby out of their grown-up activities, like staying up late or going out for the evening. He made the baby cry “so loud that the parents will have to come to her.” Andrew told me to be the mother and he played the father; we were to be extremely angry at this pest of a baby who was either keeping us awake or preventing us from being alone with each other. At this point Andrew called the doll “He- She.” I described the doll as feeling quite fortunate to be able to switch from boy to girl and back again. Andrew added, “But really it’s best to be both.” He continued, telling me that to be both a boy and a girl gave a person a great deal of power. He agreed with a resigned expression to my comment that real children often were completely without power to control the world of the grown-ups. One could see in this material how Andrew’s feelings of helplessness and rage, coming from all levels of development, converged in this particular solution to his fears of separation and loss; he could maintain the illusion of being in control by never staying with one gender for too long. Only he knew whether he was a boy or a girl, and this was part of his secret power.

Soon Andrew was taken up with many games of good guys fighting bad guys, or good animals fighting bad ones. His anxiety was manifest in his repeatedly asking me, “What? What?” He wanted to know what I was thinking. Could I read his mind? He wanted to know and at the same time was afraid of it. I told him I thought he wanted my help in mastering his fears, but also was frightened that I might not think well of a boy with all this fighting on his mind. Would I think him a good guy or a bad guy? He drew a good guy crocodile and had him bite off the tail of a bad crocodile. Andrew declared, “Now he can’t hurt anybody.” The theme of castration as a solution to anxiety and retaliation as punishment for exciting aggressive impulses was to prove a prominent one in this treatment. This example of rendering himself impotent by projecting onto the bad crocodile his own incestuous and aggressive strivings and impulses represented a retreat to safety, consonant with earlier fantasy play with the Boy-Girl doll, and found reinforcement in what had been instituted against his fears of separation and loss.

I drew a picture of a person who had a terrible fight going on in his mind: good thoughts versus angry bad thoughts. Andrew became quite involved. “This is Mr. Muddle,” he said. “He is so confused and does everything wrong. He has so many questions he’s afraid to ask and so many bad feelings.” I volunteered to help Mr. Muddle with this confused state of affairs. Andrew was adamant:

"No! You can't help him. He is too bad, and he thinks you think he is bad. You won't ever like him." This session took place prior to a weekend and Andrew was morose. He said that while we were apart Mr. Muddle would do everything wrong. I asked if Mr. Muddle got especially confused when he was angry—just as he (Andrew) was always so angry with me for being unavailable on weekends. He replied, "I will put my shoes on my nose and my hat on my ears and make everything topsy-turvy." I told him that I supposed he was mad at me for my neglect and letting me know he would neglect himself to try to make me feel as bad as he felt. To criticize me, a grown-up, was experienced by Andrew as a terrible crime, deserving punishment.

Andrew's reaction to the idea of being angry with me for not being with him was to turn the baby doll into its female persona. She screamed and cried and demanded so much of her parents that they (we in the play) eventually became so fed up that they went off and abandoned her altogether. Suddenly the baby turned into a monster baby who tried to kill me, her mother, for the crime of leaving her. I pointed out to Andrew that he wished he could sometimes be like that monster baby and thereby intimidate the grown-ups into doing his bidding. Then he became frightened that if he were to be found out—if his parents were to discover that he was not the perfectly good boy he so wanted to be—they really would flee from him, if not physically then emotionally. Andrew reassured me that this was all just a bad dream the two of us were sharing; it was all right though, because the dream had a good ending in which the monster baby usurped all the power and bossed around the grown-ups. This scenario, in which the baby doll went from being a boy to a girl to a monster-girl-baby, often came into the play when Andrew was unable to contain his wishes to hurt the objects of his disappointments. We later understood his need to "play the girl" as a protective device. If he was already castrated, then no one could punish him in that way; if boys were not permitted to be angry, then perhaps girls were allowed this luxury; if his parents stayed up arguing over him and spoke of separating, then maybe they would stop fighting and stay together for a girl—or at least for a boy who could pretend to be a girl. Like a magician, Andrew tried to pervert the attention of his parents from the issue of their unhappiness and possible separation by playing gender-switching games in fantasy.

The ability of the baby doll to change sexes at will was strongly linked to Andrew's wish for magical powers. For months we played many fantasy games in which Andrew was a great magician,

or investigator with special powers, capable of the most magnificent feats. His strength lay in what he termed his “magic fingers.” All he had to do was to touch or point at people or objects and they would conform to his wishes.

The ability of the baby doll to change sexes at will was but one manifestation of Andrew’s longing for magical powers. For the first few years of treatment he played various games in which magic and omnipotence figured prominently. The purposes of his play were many and were certainly overdetermined in relation to his developmental sequence; but here I shall focus specifically on his use of language as one crucial aspect of his intellectual precocity, which skewed his defenses toward an obsessional constellation characterized by isolation of affect and the pressing need to “explain away” the deeper meanings of his play.

Andrew informed me with great conviction at the beginning of treatment that he definitely believed in magic. To my inquiry, he said, “Well, maybe there isn’t *really* magic, but there is make-believe!” He added, “I have magic fingers. If I want, I can touch you and turn you into ice cream or candy. To get rid of my worries all I have to do is snap my fingers and they disappear.” Andrew’s introductory remarks about the magic residing in his fingers, in his thoughts, and in his actions reflected the major themes of his play.

One afternoon Andrew arrived for his session and went immediately to his drawer, from which he extracted some magic markers, a tin pencil box, and a sheet of paper; he told me that he would draw a map of the world. This was the introduction of an ongoing activity that alternated with the Boy-Girl doll and that he referred to as “World.” The play (which he insisted was real, not a game) consisted of the Mind, which he pretended resided in a tin box in the playroom and knew more than anyone; the Examinizer, a particular black pen, the function of which was to determine the precise location of the trouble spot of the moment; and the Ray-Gun Shooter, a wooden block used as a gunlike weapon possessing a plethora of magical destructive powers. Andrew informed me that it was his intention to record our adventures in the World and ultimately send them to a newspaper, where they would be printed for all to read. As one would expect with the play of a child moving into latency, Andrew’s World changed over time in both form and content, with all sorts of elaborations, additions, and subtractions.

In a session when Andrew bitterly related that his best friend, Johnny, had told him that he had a new best friend, Andrew began our first adventures featuring the two of us as ace detectives who had been called in by the police. They wanted our help with a particularly difficult case involving a burning and exploding volcano located in a remote mountainous region of the world. Andrew, as always, was chief detective, and he cast me in the role of his assistant. Our initial task was to consult the Mind, who informed us that the explosion had been caused intentionally by a criminal who enjoyed setting fires. The Mind suggested that the directions to this place could be found in a special toilet, the whereabouts of which were well known to the Examinizor. We easily found the toilet, only to discover that it was inhabited by a school of vicious sharks. Andrew was undaunted. The sharks were there to protect the Mind and to help us. Our directions were to head to Peru, where we would be given further instructions. Off we flew on a private jet to the Peru airport, where we were met by a representative of the Mind, a Mr. Magooshy, who led us at once to the site of the burning volcano. Andrew used his Ray-Gun Shooter to put out the fire and then turned his interest to the criminal. Where was he hiding? As luck had it, the criminal was crouching behind a large boulder, laughing with glee at his exciting and destructive fire. Andrew sneaked up behind the man and dusted him with a special fainting powder. This adventure ended with Andrew's triumphant exclamation: "And now I will jail this bad criminal forever at the bottom of the volcano!"

During the action, Andrew's speech was pressured and tense as he ordered me to obey his commands. He literally dashed from corner to corner of the consulting room, enacting the stages of our journey. As he described the burning volcano, his eyes were bright with excitement: "It's yellow and orange and green and has a giant cloud of smoke coming out. I don't know if I have the power to put it out—I *do* have the power! I *do* have the magic dust!" After he had relegated the criminal to the bottom of the volcano, Andrew turned to me with a shy grin and whispered conspiratorially, "I think fires are exciting, too." Within this context it was quite clear to both of us that Andrew had used the World as his designated locale for revenge upon Johnny and punishment for his own pleasure in that very revenge. When the adventure had finished, Andrew, then aged six, suddenly became very affectionate, sitting close to me and putting his head on my shoulder. He said he felt sleepy and asked if I would read him a book called *Mr. Grumpy*. He nodded silently when I commented that killing criminals was a pretty tiring job.

Johnny's rejection of Andrew continued to be a worrying preoccupation. A few days after the session described above, Andrew came in looking pale, wheezing, and complaining of fatigue and weakness. He reported that he had bumped his head at school while racing with Johnny. Johnny had won the race, and Andrew had run into the wall. He was obviously feeling hurt by and angry with Johnny, but on this occasion was unable to turn to his usually available source of words—either for defensive purposes or to vent his feelings. In passing, Andrew mentioned that he had been to the circus on Saturday and had seen some clowns splashing water on a burning house. He laughed merrily as he recounted this incident, but quickly stopped himself when I wondered what about the scene had been funny to him. He looked me square in the eye and said, "That is a secret I can't tell you." There followed a pause of perhaps a minute, while the two of us sat in silence. Andrew then jumped up, apparently having regained his lost energy, and said, "Let's do World. Today we are going to visit the real Mind. He lives downtown and only I know where. You can come with me, but you are not allowed to see him—that is only for me." We set off in a special high-speed car (two chairs in my office), but were quickly smashed broadside by a "crazy driver." Andrew was enraged. "Now our plans are spoiled. I'll never get to the real Mind." He summoned the police using a special button on his Ray-Gun Shooter and a policeman instantly appeared. Andrew addressed the policeman in haughty and imperious tones: "You *will* fix our car for free, right? . . . No?! Then who are you anyway? The police always obey me. You must be a bad-guy criminal in disguise." Just at that point, a real police officer came along. Andrew was now having a mild temper tantrum and yelled that the real policeman must arrest the impostor at once. "Take him to jail and lock him up! He is going around tricking people to make them think he is nice, but he's just a bad guy." Andrew then turned to me and said in a stage whisper, "That guy with the disguise deserves to get punished." With a note of resignation Andrew spoke of being mad that we missed visiting the real Mind, who could have helped us out of this World problem. When I asked how, he said, "Well, he would never have let us get hit by that car." Andrew, as usual in such circumstances, was thus reproaching *me* for not sparing him the painful experiences of abandonment, disappointments in love, and betrayal by adults. He asked me what I was thinking, and I replied, "If only I had been in the school yard with you, then maybe I could have helped you win the race and not bump your head into the wall." Andrew looked surprised: "I wish you had magic to make Johnny like me again."

Andrew's World continued to provide him opportunities to express in play his conflicts, their derivatives, and all kinds of solutions. One day he happened to notice a Sherlock Holmes puppet that had, in fact, been in the consulting room for months. He exclaimed with pleasure at Sherlock's cape and hat, telling me that his father had read him stories about this famous detective. Andrew knew that Holmes had had an assistant, but wanted to know when and where Holmes had lived. What was the name of the assistant? He knew the stories were make-believe, but pressed me for the details, which I provided. Andrew decided that we should invite Sherlock Holmes to join our adventures in the World. I asked what he planned to do about the assistant, and Andrew invented the following adventure.

We phoned the home of Dr. Watson, who, according to Andrew, was not only Holmes's assistant but also his best friend. To Andrew's dismay, Watson was nowhere to be found. The housekeeper answered the phone and told us that Watson was in Vermont, but then he wasn't there either. Andrew opened his eyes wide, and with high drama proclaimed: "How silly of us! Dr. Watson has no housekeeper; this is a trick." We rushed to our private plane, arriving in London with amazing speed, and hurried over to Baker Street, looking first for Holmes. After an exhaustive search, we concluded that no one was home. Andrew had one last idea. With a great flourish, he flung open the door to the closet and there was the wretched Dr. Watson, trapped and surrounded by snapping alligators.

Suddenly Andrew assumed the role of Sherlock, who had changed his mind. Rather than wanting to find Watson to save him and keep him on as an assistant, he decided that Watson had to be killed. Here Andrew had the puppet whisper to him that the assistant had to die because if he stayed alive, he would want to usurp Holmes's power. Andrew's solution was to train the alligators to bite a stick. He then moved the alligators closer to Dr. Watson and, pointing to the doctor's arms, called out, "Bite the sticks! Bite them!" The alligators obliged and Andrew finished him off by shooting Watson in the eye. "Dead! Great! Now there is only me, Sherlock, and I can take over. I've killed my best friend because he wanted to be number one detective and I know that there's only room for *me* to be number one." At this moment, Andrew had me take over the Sherlock role, but provided me with specific directions regarding what to do and say. I, as Sherlock, had to become full of remorse: "I did want to be the only one, but now I feel bad and selfish and greedy." Andrew was

most understanding: “Well, you know we could make Watson come alive again with the special gun; but I think he should stay dead because if he would live, then he would try to kill *you* and take your power.”

I went back to my analytic role, saying that I could see how hard it was when two best friends both wanted to be number one. They seemed to believe that the only solution to the sharing problem was for one of them to be killed. But having then lost his closest and dearest (as well as most envied and hated) friend, the survivor appeared to be feeling very lonely, regretting what he had done. Andrew broke into an atypical huge grin: “I *know* what this is about! It’s about me and Johnny.” I added that I thought that the problems between him and Johnny were rather like those between him and his father, with Andrew always wanting to come first with his mother, but convinced that he stood no chance unless his father was completely out of the picture. Andrew listened carefully and began to laugh, telling me he was glad he had discovered Sherlock Holmes and brought him into the “World.” As he left the session, he turned to call back to me, “Please make sure that puppet is here tomorrow.”

Andrew’s relationship with Johnny was complex in that contained within it were important displacements of his oedipal conflicts, namely, his fears that the consequences of his competitive strivings would redound to him in the form of either direct retaliation or a more insidious withdrawal of love— whether from his father for Andrew’s wishing to triumph over him in brute strength or intellectual prowess; from his mother for his desire to have her all to himself and fear of being spurned or mocked by her; or from me in the transference as I came to represent the unbeatable rival, the unattainable mother, the doctor with no magic powers, and the analyst who made him share me with others.

Seeing another child emerge from my office on a Friday afternoon was a distressing blow to Andrew’s tendency to deny that he ever felt jealous of my other patients. On the one hand, there was almost a denial in fantasy that he was my *only* patient, as he was the only child of his parents. On the other hand, he was all too aware of the constraints of our relationship, evidenced by his frequently lying down on the floor at the end of sessions and informing me that he was staying and I should get rid of the next person. Once his magic took hold, Andrew was able to find new solutions to the Friday

and sharing obstacle. He informed me that he would change me into chocolate (his favorite food) and eat me; I would be in his stomach where he would have me all to himself. Andrew was able to see clearly in this context how his magical powers protected him from his anger at having to share me with others. Bypassing the aggression and jealousy, he simply became Boy Wonder, who could never be disappointed by anyone.

I once asked him just exactly how he was so successful at getting rid of the thoughts and feelings that bothered him so. He smiled broadly: "I only have to snap my fingers; if I do, then *you* won't even mention worries either." I told him that I had no intention of pushing him to talk about anything until he was ready. Andrew looked somewhat taken aback: "But sometimes I want you to ask me—to *make* me talk." I asked whether there was anything in particular he wanted me to make him talk about. "Today I want to know about that Boy-Girl doll and why I sometimes think it's better to pretend to be a boy who would rather be a girl." I wondered what his ideas were, and he replied with great thoughtfulness, "Sometimes I get very scared that my parents will stop living together and that it will be my fault—or at least that I can't stop them. Then I will have to decide who to live with and I don't know and the whole thing makes me very mad!" I commented that it was at such times that he believed being a pretend girl could save him; girls had more power than boys.

Andrew associated to an event of the day. He had fallen at school and had hit his head. With conviction he said, "When that happened I wanted to be a girl, because girls don't hit their heads." Andrew went on to describe how because girls were weaker, people took better care of them, so they did not get hurt as often as boys. We could see his belief that girls' power lay in their vulnerability, an idea that Andrew found more acceptable than his notion of boys' dangerous aggression, which was capable of driving away the objects of his desires. When I linked his angry wishes to hurt his parents with his thought that the fall had been a punishment for these wishes, Andrew agreed. Was this not similar to the day he had bumped his head trying to beat Johnny in a race? Here I was able to show him how he used the girl-boy confusion as one way of avoiding the consequences of his rage—consequences in terms of his own overly strict superego as well as the fear of real abandonment. It was as if Andrew were saying, "Now you see me; now you don't. Now I'm a boy, but I can easily pretend to be a girl." In a somewhat different manner, his World provided him with a way of controlling what he felt to be bad wishes but also allowed him safely to express them and to play

them out. It should be noted that Andrew never evinced any real effeminate behavior, nor indeed any wish really to be a girl. Rather, he was always pretending, adopting a disguise in his attempts to hide his real, helpless, angry, little boy self from the eyes of his own vigilant superego. Thus he alternated between magical omnipotence and feelings of utter helplessness and danger.

The theme of Andrew's need to be safe and all-powerful was continued in a fantasy game in which he lived alone in a house between his two parents, who each had a house of his or her own. Andrew did not need them for anything because he had a special computer with magic buttons that were capable of supplying all his needs. In fact, his parents had to come to him whenever they needed something. Andrew was most gracious and offered to provide anything, from special foods to clothing to fixing things in their respective houses. He was absolutely clear about his own self-sufficiency and his pleasure at living alone; he also spoke openly of preferring that his parents live separately, for that way he would never have to share and never have to choose which he loved best. He could see how turning the tables on reality was his way of ensuring that even if the catastrophe of separation did occur, he would be prepared. He would not feel lonely or bereft—they would need him and he would therefore be indispensable.

Andrew reported a dream that again demonstrated how effective were his reversals in keeping at bay his fears of deprivation and loss. He dreamed that he was alone on a plane going to visit his grandmother across the ocean, when he suddenly realized that the plane did not have enough fuel to reach its destination safely. A "nice man" on the plane phoned his parents, who came to join him. All four of them, Andrew, the parents, and the "nice man, floated down to earth together."

By the end of the second year of treatment the gender identity and "World" preoccupations abated and gave way to a greater awareness and more open discussion of Andrew's feelings of disappointment and sadness. Now aged seven and a half, he composed a poem relating to his treatment and entitled it "My Analysis." Its opening stanzas are as follows:

You'll never believe
How grown-ups deceive
Their children in so many ways.
All their days are filled with plays . . .

But nothing to do with children!

Feeling left out can make children shout;
But nobody dares to do it.
They keep bad feelings inside
Where they think they should hide
In order not to have a fit.

Discussion

This was a long analysis of an intelligent and imaginative boy with exceptional strengths and a rich and supple adaptability. He had recourse and easy access to a large verbal store and fluidity in his gender-ambiguity fantasy play, affording ample avenues for the expression of his fears—all of which provided me with the opportunity of seeing the interaction of instinctual arousal and the defensive work in regulating his anxiety.

Andrew's play was obsessively repetitive, and in the repetition there entered ever new extensions and nuances, closing every chink in the defenses. This richness in imaginative play allowed scope for his feelings, but seemed at the same time to embolden him to overcome his apprehensions against revealing what he had been so intent on keeping secret. From an early point in the treatment there were unmistakable signs that Andrew considered the consulting room a "safe place." In treatment, for instance, he could indulge in playing with dolls, unusual in itself, for nowhere else did he play with dolls or other "girlish" things. It was evident that regardless of the nature and manifest content of what Andrew was preoccupied with at any given moment, he was always intensely engaged, to a greater or lesser degree, sometimes under greater pressure than others, in undoing the ferocity of the "wild" and the "bad" in his created World. He idealized the strong, the fearless, and the good; he invoked and identified with an omniscient and omnipotent moral authority who could observe evil being done anywhere in the world and was swift to punish and exact retribution. He wavered in imposing punishment between destroying the perpetrators of bad deeds or immobilizing the dangerous and evildoer in prison in perpetuity.

Andrew expressed fantasies of possessing magical powers by which he could, at "the blink of an eye" or "the snap of his fingers," change gender; or he might, if he so chose, revert through regression to absolute babyhood—but a baby so special and talented and, above all, so driven to do

good, that he could right all the world's wrongs. This innocent and powerful baby was, on inquiry, totally self-sufficient. It could satisfy the needs and wishes of all others, but itself was independent of needs and desires, untouched by cravings and longings. This was a feature of Andrew's personality; he rarely, if ever, asked for anything, whether for Christmas or birthdays; he often went without lunch, saying he wasn't hungry and that food "meant nothing" to him.

Upon being confronted with anxiety, Andrew would avoid thinking about his great fear, very quickly plunging into fantasies in which he was no longer helpless. One day on seeing a homeless man in the street, Andrew asked his father where he would go if his parents separated. When he reported this in treatment, he said that his father had turned the question back to him. Andrew had answered that first he would live with Mommy and later, when he was older, with Daddy. His father had reassured him that no separation would take place—but that if it did, then Andrew was correct about where he would live. Andrew responded to this episode with an exacerbation of anxiety that was manifest in the session by withdrawal and silence and crawling under a small table. Moroseness, however, soon gave way to a fantasy expressed in play: he now had his own house (under the table), equidistant from that of each parent, and with his magic computer his parents were completely dependent upon *him* for their basic needs. He elaborated this fantasy, explaining to me that in truth he was really a brilliant robot who needed nothing because he could do everything. He added as an aside that of course robots had no feelings—just electrical connections and cleverly conceived wiring.

As the analysis proceeded, his concept of defending against hostile impulses changed from that of the boy-girl to the boy-girl baby to the ruler of his World to an affectless and perfectly constructed robot. The robot represented yet another attempt at trying through disguise to pest himself of the dangerous instinctual pressures by being something or someone else in which he could find refuge from his unacceptable desires. Andrew had pretended to be a girl in fantasy not because he ever truly wanted to be a girl but rather because there were only two choices. If being a boy had such dire consequences, then being a girl or living in his own magical World might solve the problem. When these defenses were analyzed, and he became more aware of what he struggled with, Andrew mounted another attack on his "bad wishes." As a robot, he would be perfect and safe and in a position to approach competition well armed. Yet he was able to see the high price he paid for giving

up his humanness. The idea of being a mechanical robot left him feeling empty and ultimately aware of his very human longings.

The fantasy play during the treatment of this boy, aged five to nine, illustrates special forms of defense. Andrew's frequent recourse to switching gender, both with the doll and with himself in fantasy, served as a defense not against secret feminine wishes and longings to be a girl but rather as a function of grandiosity and omnipotence—a magical solution to the anxieties aroused by his feelings of helplessness. He was able to observe his creation of a World totally under his control and to see that even that had been a protective, if not completely adaptive, choice. The time had come to face the idea that the real world was far from perfect but had many potential gratifications. Entering this new world involved the relinquishing of much-loved and long-cherished dreams of glory. At the age of nine, when the treatment ended, Andrew completed his poem, characteristically wanting everything to be put into words.

Now I can think of new ways to link
The past and the present in me.

I'm neither a robot
Nor am I perfect.
I'm not a magician—
More like a physician.
In fact, it's the analyst in me.