Bonds That Shackle, Ties That Free

Margaret Mahler's pioneering work highlighted the central developmental importance of the process of self-differentiation—the evolving sense of oneself as a demarcated and distinctive human being with a unique affective life and an individualized array of personal values and aims. She observed that this process “reverberates throughout the life cycle. It is never finished; it remains always active; new phases of the life cycle see new derivatives of the earliest processes still at work” (Mahler, Pine, and Bergman, 1975, p. 3). Although, in her formal developmental scheme, the phase of separation-individuation begins at the age of four to five months, arising out of the matrix of an undifferentiated “symbiotic phase,” passages in her work point to the presence of self-differentiation processes at birth (see also Stern, 1985). Mahler’s observations support the view that a tenacious striving for self-delineation powerfully organizes the developmental process throughout its course.

Mahler also identified the specific affective states that color the self-differentiation process, as well as those that result from its derailment. The dominant mood accompanying self-differentiation was one of unmistakable elation, manifesting itself in a quasi-delusional but age-adequate sense of grandeur, omnipotence, and conquest. This mood of the junior toddler—at the crest of mastery of many of his autonomous functions, the paradigm of which is locomotion—necessarily had to give way to a more realistic appraisal of his smallness in relation to the outside world [Mahler et al., 1975, p. 213].
The infant's experience of relative helplessness punctures his "inflated sense of omnipotence," forcing him to recognize that he is small and powerless and that he has to cope with overwhelming odds because of his separateness. Thus, the dominant mood shifts to one of soberness and even temporary depression. From these observations it can be concluded that elation is dominant when self-differentiation processes are engaged, whereas depression is preeminent when these processes are obstructed.

Kohut's (1984) formulation of the role of selfobject functions in the developmental process led him to a view of psychological development that was distinctly different from Mahler's. Specifically, he objected to the postulation of separation as the supreme goal of development and regarded it instead as an indication of developmental failure. As an alternative, he proposed a lifelong need for selfobject experiences and a developmental line of continuing, maturationally transformed selfobject relations:

Self psychology holds that self-selfobject relationships form the essence of psychological life from birth to death, that a move from dependence (symbiosis) to independence (autonomy) in the psychological sphere is no more possible, let alone desirable, than a corresponding move from a life dependent on oxygen to a life independent of it in the biological sphere. The developments that characterize normal psychological life must, in our view, be seen in the changing nature of the relationship between the self and its selfobjects, but not in the self's relinquishment of self-objects [p. 47].

In this chapter we offer a resolution of the apparent theoretical antithesis between separation-individuation theory and the concept of changing selfobject relationships throughout life, by stressing that specific, maturationally evolving selfobject experiences are absolutely necessary for facilitating, consolidating, expanding, and sustaining the development of individualized selfhood during the entire life cycle. This developmental progression becomes disrupted when the requisite selfobject experiences are absent or unsteady. We are contending that the process of self-differentiation, as well as its derailments, always occurs within a specific intersubjective system or context.
A key question of current psychoanalytic interest concerns the relationship between developmental failure and the formation of psychic conflict. Mahler recognized the importance of the mother in “shaping, promoting, or hindering the individual child’s . . . development” (Mahler et al., 1975, p. 202), and she specified the contribution of the mother’s personality structure, her parental functioning, and, especially, her unconscious expectations of her child. However, in discussing the conflicts that accompany the self-differentiation process, Mahler tended to conceptualize them in exclusively intrapsychic terms:

Here is the conflict: On the one hand is the toddler’s feeling of helplessness in his realization of separateness, and on the other hand is his valiant defense of what he cherishes as the emerging autonomy of his body. In this struggle for individuation, and the concomitant anger about his helplessness, the toddler tries to reflate his sense of self, to approximate the forever lost illusion of omnipotence . . . [p. 222].

The conflict that we believe to be central to the process of self-differentiation and to the emergence of individualized selfhood is not the one described by Mahler. A toddler’s protracted feeling of helplessness in the experience of separateness would, to us, indicate a failure in essential caregiving functions. These necessarily include not only resonance with and sharing of the child’s buoyant enthusiasm and pleasure in the emergence of his own particularity, but also attunement to and containment of his disappointment in his limitations and failings, coupled with a sustaining confidence in his growing abilities and ultimate success. When such resonance and attuned responsiveness accompany the various facets of the child’s differentiating processes, unbridled expansiveness will gradually be modulated and a sense of confident efficacy in the vigorous pursuit of individualized goals will be acquired. Once the attunement of the caregiving system has resulted in a stable and positively toned sense of self, limitations that the child inevitably experiences in himself and in the surround are generally not seriously threatening. Under these circumstances, experiences of limitation may actually mobilize the child’s determination, resourcefulness, and creativity. When the requisite selfobject experiences are absent, by
contrast, the child's sense of self will oscillate between sequestered grandiose fantasies and painful feelings of smallness and depletion, which necessitate the lonely efforts at restorative inflation so accurately described by Mahler. This latter child is recognizable in the adult patient whose sense of self remains threatened by any limitation or setback and who therefore must repeatedly close down channels of interest and opportunity in order to avert tormenting descents into preoccupations with what he is not or cannot do.

Mahler's explanations of obstructions to the process of self-differentiation often placed primary emphasis on the conflictual aggression that awareness of separation was presumed inevitably to mobilize:

Throughout the whole course of separation-individuation, one of the most important developmental tasks of the evolving ego is that of coping with the aggressive drive in the face of the gradually increasing awareness of separateness. The success with which this is achieved depends on the strength of the primitive ego . . . [p. 226].

Such accounts leave out the specific intersubjective contexts in which the experiences are taking place—exuberant distinctiveness, for example, occurring as an emerging and shared experience within an intact self-object tie, as opposed to lonely and isolated separation when the child's vigorous assertion of his own perceptions precipitates an experience of loss of a vitally needed bond. The trajectory of individualized selfhood encompasses differentiated perceptual, affective, and cognitive spheres of experience and includes such developmental accomplishments as self and object boundary delineation, intentionality and the sense of personal agency, and a continuity of purposeful movement toward the achievement of goals of increasing particularity. A primary source of conflict is the clashing of emergent affect states, rooted in developmentally imperative self-differentiation processes, with equally imperative needs to maintain vital ties inimical to such differentiation.

When patients whose strivings for differentiated selfhood have been aborted enter analysis, they seek a safe milieu in which the conflicts that have obstructed, derailed, or compromised their development can emerge. An indispensable feature of such an environment is the analyst's commitment to a stance of sustained empathic inquiry. Espe-
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cially important are the understandings to be attained from the close observation of the patient’s perception of the analyst and of the analy-sist’s impact on the patient’s sense of self—of how the evolving tie to the analyst is experienced as freeing, or further shackling, the patient’s strivings for self-delinement. Such inquiry enables the patient to form a therapeutic bond in which gradual access can be gained to those reg-regions of his self-experience that have been repressed and disavowed, sequestered in their archaic forms.

The reinstatement of aborted differentiating processes may be sig-saled in many ways and take a wide variety of forms; for example, a change in appearance or a tentative musing about a new interest or discovery. Commonly, such reinstatements occur in a form that makes the analyst’s understanding of and approach to the problem of resistance crucial. In an especially pertinent passage, Kohut (1984) wrote:

Defense motivation in analysis will be understood in terms of ac-activities undertaken in the service of psychological survival, that is, as the patient’s attempt to save at least that sector of his nuclear self, however small and precariously established it may be, that he has been able to construct and maintain despite serious insufficiencies in the development-enhancing matrix of the self-objects of childhood [p. 115, emphasis added].

This conception of resistance is invaluable in the analysis of conflicts over self-differentiation as these become engaged in the analytic transference, for it is often in the manifestations of the patient’s “resistance” that we find the clearest evidence of the thwarted strivings for self-demarcation, now reactivated in the analytic situation. Once such resistances are recognized not as malignant opposition to the analytic process, but as efforts by the patient to protect the organization of his self-experience from encroachment and usurpation, then it becomes critical to explore as fully as possible how, from the patient’s perspec-tive, the analyst has come to embody such a threat to the patient’s es-sential selfhood. That information can become available only to the extent of the patient’s belief in the analyst’s readiness to receive it.

Among the most noxious of early pathogenic situations are those in which a child’s attempts to communicate an experience of being psychologically injured or undermined by a caregiver result in a pro-longed disruption of the vitally needed tie. When the child consist-
ently is unable to communicate such experiences without perceiving that he is damaging or unwelcome to the caregiver, a watershed in the relationship occurs whereby a painful inner conflict becomes structuralized. It is this pathogenic process that is repeated in analysis when critical information concerning the impact of the analyst on the patient is interpreted as reflecting malignant intrapsychic mechanisms within the patient, such as splitting, projection, or aggressive devaluation. Such ideas generally occur to an analyst when his own feeling of well-being is threatened by the patient’s expressions, and interpretations of resistance under these circumstances serve primarily to reconstitute the analyst’s own sense of self. Such reactions, if uncorrected, weld more tightly the shackles that the patient is attempting to throw off. It is at such points of potential stalemate that dedication to a stance of sustained empathic inquiry produces the greatest yields, by inviting detailed investigation of the elements in the analyst’s activity to which the patient has been selectively responding, and of which the analyst may have been unaware. Exploration of the specific meanings that the analyst’s activities have for the patient, together with reconstructions of how these meanings were acquired developmentally, then become possible. It is the full and continuing articulation of the patient’s affective experience of the analyst that establishes an intersubjective context in which the arrested process of self-differentiation can become reinstated.

We contend that derailment of the self-differentiation process occurs in an intersubjective situation in which central affect states associated with the development of individualized selfhood are consistently not responded to or are actively rejected. A fundamental psychic conflict thereby becomes enduringly established between the requirement that one’s developmental course must conform to the emotional needs of caregivers and the inner imperative that its evolution be firmly rooted in a vitalizing affective core of one’s own. Several outcomes of this basic conflict are possible. One is a life of relentless, tormenting ambivalence, endlessly torn between inner aspirations and needed relationships that seem irreconcilably opposed. This is the path of wrenching indecision and noncommitment. Or the child may attempt to preserve and protect his core of individualized defiance at the expense of object ties by adopting a pattern of resolute defiance and rebellion. This is the path of isolation and estrangement. Alternatively, the child may abandon or severely compromise central affective strivings in or-
experiences without perceiving caregiver, a watershed in the inner conflict becomes structured is repeated in analysis when act of the analyst on the patient intrapsychic mechanisms section, or aggressive devaluation of his own feeling of expressions, and interpretations serve primarily to self. Such reactions, if uncorrected, the patient is attempting to tame that dedication to a duces the greatest yields, by reins in the analyst's activity responding, and of which the function of the specific meanings patient, together with reacquired developmentally, continuing articulation of the analyst that establishes an assisted process of self-differentiation.

If differentiation process occurs, central affect states associated selfhood are consistently A fundamental psychic connected between the requirement form to the emotional needs that its evolution be firmly own. Several outcomes of few of relentless, tormenting aspirations and needed resisted. This is the path of. Or the child may attempt maximized vitality at the expense of defiance and rebellion. Alternatively, the child's affective strivings in order to maintain indispensable ties. This is the path of submission and chronic depression.

In an earlier contribution (Brandchaft, 1986), clinical material was provided illustrating the developmental origins of a pattern of submission and depression—the bond that shackles. The nature of the evolving transference experience that eventually brought about a liberating realignment was also discussed. We now present an illustration of the derailments that can occur when a different pathway, that of rebellion, is chosen in order to safeguard a precariously differentiated self.

**CLINICAL ILLUSTRATION**

Martin is an engaging and handsome young man who made several previous attempts at psychoanalysis. He entered the present treatment with a number of complaints, including a virulent hypochondriasis, a diffuse vulnerability, a tendency to violent rage, and a marital and interpersonal life marked by discontent and strife. Although he was dedicated to his work and to his children, he experienced very little pleasure from life, and his difficulty establishing limits for himself left him chronically exhausted.

Soon after the treatment had begun, a striking pattern of behavior emerged that signaled the engagement of archaic differentiating processes within the transference. Martin began regularly to come late for his sessions. The lateness would vary from about 10 minutes to 30 or more. Not infrequently he would miss sessions altogether. Sometimes he would call to cancel; at other times he would not. He also began running later and later in the payment of fees. For some time, any attempt to investigate this behavior might bring about the payment but would also evoke a response clearly indicating that it was imperative for the analyst to recognize that Martin could not be compelled or coerced to do anything to please the analyst or fulfill any of the analyst's needs. If the analyst communicated any expectations of Martin, this automatically provoked an intense negative reaction. Martin invariably responded by distancing himself and by resorting to enactments that reinforced boundaries he experienced as under threat. The lateness and missed sessions, the latter in strings of as many as six weeks, continued for several years.
Early in the analysis, Martin also began to experience the emergence of intense, archaic selfobject needs. These were frequently presented in a demanding and aggressive form that seemed overwhelming to the analyst, and when the analyst failed to meet them, Martin reacted with intense disappointment. For example, on one occasion after Martin had failed to appear for the first 35 minutes of the session, the analyst left the office and returned to find him furious at being kept waiting. Martin had felt a physical reaction to the door between the waiting room and consultation room being shut. It was later learned that when he was a child he had been besiegged by unimaginable terrors when put to bed alone in his room. He would make his way into his parents' bedroom, urgently wanting to be comforted. However, they apparently felt intruded on and attributed his behavior to an inordinate need for attention, which they were afraid would result in his forever having to have his own way. So they locked their door and in this way attempted to cure him.

On another occasion in the analysis, Martin entered through an open door some 15 or 20 minutes late and found the analyst answering a telephone call. He was outraged that the time he felt belonged to him had been given to someone else without his having been consulted, and he insisted that the justice of his position be acknowledged. Later, the significance of this demand as a precondition for the establishment of a continuing bond would become more understandable. It then emerged that the early context from within which Martin's passionate arbitrariness had crystallized was one in which his caregivers believed, and required him to believe, that everything of value that Martin possessed came from them, to be given, taken away, or redistributed as they saw fit. In reaction against this requirement, Martin chose a course of chronic rebellion.

The most difficult problems posed for the analyst involved sorting out his own reactions and their impact on Martin. This was especially exacting because Martin had developed an unusual acuity of perception, especially for dissonant, unattuned, or misattuned responses, and a directness and intensity of expression that were equally unusual. These characteristics were particularly dominant during the early phase of the analysis, as Martin was extremely vigilant and guarded in order to protect himself against the primary threat that increasing engagement posed for him. He was firmly convinced that the price of a harmonious tie to the analyst would be submission to the analyst, a be-
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trayal of his trust by the analyst, and abandonment of his own striv-
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compelled him to limit, control, or withdraw from every previous rela-
tionship. This solution had left him feeling alienated and alone, en-
dowing every achievement with an unbearable hollowness and every
victory with a growing sense of empty isolation.

A crucial episode contributed importantly to the analyst’s under-
standing of his own reactions and to his ability to decelerate from these
in order increasingly to attune himself to Martin’s experiences. One
day Martin sauntered into the session, unusually late, having spent
much of the last session deploring some insensitivity and lack of con-
sideration on the part of the analyst. Such diatribes had often elicited a
genuine feeling of admiration in the analyst for the unerring and flaw-
less quality of Martin’s perceptions and for his forthright expression.
On this particular day, however, the analyst felt irritated and put upon
by Martin’s complaints of the previous day and by his lateness. Before
the patient could begin speaking, the analyst asked him if he was not
aware of any lack of consideration in keeping the analyst waiting so
consistently, when he, Martin, so much hated to be in that position
himself. Martin sat upright, looked squarely at the analyst, and said
calmly:

Listen. If you are asking if I am upset about being late, the answer
is yes. And if you are pissed off with me, tell me so and don’t pre-
vent what you are doing is part of the analysis. I have lived all my
life with people being pissed off with me, and then saying they are
not and always that it is for my own good! What I don’t under-
stand and don’t like in you is not that you are upset but your sub-
terfuge. You can insist that I have to come on time in order to
keep you from getting out of joint and I will try to do it. If I can’t,
as I expect, then I will quit. But whether I came on time or
whether I didn’t, make no mistake about it, nothing fundamental
about me would change!

Behind Martin’s incessant and escalating demands the analyst grad-
ually came to recognize a well of unfulfilled yearnings. These did not
necessarily have to be satisfied, but it was critical that they be re-
ponded to with acceptance, respect, and an effort to understand
them, however provocatively they were expressed. Martin had a vol-
canic, thundering rage—the result of repeatedly exposing his needs, especially his needs to have his experience understood, to impenetrable caregivers. He massively repudiated his longings for connection with others, in consequence of his automatic anticipation that conflict and submission would be their inexorable outcome. It was this anticipation that continued to shape the intensity and direction of his wishes and his reactions.

Until Martin could experience the analyst as accepting his lateness or absences, this behavior could not be analyzed. Martin was exquisitely attuned to any irritation, harshness, or dissatisfaction with him and to any attempt to seduce or compel him to fit in with the analyst's psychological or practical requirements. To any such misattunement to Martin's subjective state and to the legitimacy of his underlying motivation, Martin reacted with rage or with an intensification of his staying-away behavior, sometimes accompanied by other enactments designed to restore a sense of distinctness. Martin's sensitivity to the quality of the analyst's affect as opposed to the content of the analyst's words was particularly striking. The interventions that Martin experienced as most noxious were those in which he sensed defensiveness on the analyst's part or any attempt to repudiate Martin's perceptions of the analyst's out-of-tune state. In such instances, florid symptoms would emerge that concretized the patient's experience of the assault on his sense of self. These included severe hypochondriacal anxiety and paranoid-like fears of thugs, burglars, and other environmental dangers.

The analyst was able to decenter from his own reactions to Martin's lateness and absences through his growing understanding of the developmental process the patient was attempting to revive and of his own indispensable role in that process. Specifically, the analyst had to accept Martin's sense that it was essential to reinforce self-boundaries by staying away when he felt them threatened, rather than to attend for fear that the analyst would be displeased with him and throw him out. The meanings of Martin's lateness could then emerge, and change could come about through genuine transformational processes, rather than compliance.

Similar enactments are frequently regarded by analysts as "acting out," supposedly arising from fears of commitment to the analytic process, hostility toward and depreciation of the analyst, pathological entitlement attitudes, and a variety of other reactions deriving from
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projections of or displacements from archaic parental imagoes. Such
interpretations are apt to occur to the analyst when the patient’s be-
havior constitutes a threat to his own sense of self. Under such pres-
ures, the analyst is inclined to wish to put a stop to the behavior,
which, when not understood from within the patient’s perspective, is
mistakenly regarded as being detrimental to the patient and to the an-
alytic process. All such responses from the analyst are likely to be expe-
rienced by the patient as part of a bond that shackles, because they
superimpose an alien and extrinsic organization of experience onto his
own, thereby derailing the self-differentiating process and depriving it
of a sustaining matrix.

We wish to emphasize a finding that became unmistakable as the
analysis progressed. Even in those instances in which Martin’s lateness
could definitely be linked to some experience of misattunement in the
preceding session, it was neither the earlier asynchrony nor the late-
ness, nor any other reaction on Martin's part, that resulted in serious
disjunction. Rather, it was invariably a subsequent failure by the ana-
lyst to connect empathically with Martin’s dysphoric state of mind,
and to appreciate the impact of the prior misattunement on Martin’s
sense of self and hopes for himself, that would lead to a marked in-
crease in his guardedness and avoidance behavior and to a feeling of
unending despair.

Careful focus on the intersubjective context in which Martin’s late-
ness was occurring made possible a deeper understanding of its mean-
ings. One aspect concerned Martin’s state of mind as he attempted to
get up to attend his session each morning. His alarm clock would ring,
hut he could not respond. He described his mind as a clouded, incho-
ate, unorganizable haze that he could not shake clear. His eyelids were
ead weights. Sometimes he would drag himself to the shower and turn
hot and cold water on himself at full volume, but he felt no sense of co-
herence, no connection to goals, and especially no sense of the passage
of time. What he thought was five minutes could turn out to be thirty
The first thoughts that formed were automatic and familiar. Once
more he had “fucked up!” Once more he was going to be late! The ana-
lyst then materialized in his thoughts as yet another person he had dis-
appointed. The analyst, in his stoical way, might say nothing, but
Martin would be able to detect, in the unsmiling and stereotyped
greeting, in the weariness, arched eyebrow, and turned down corner of
the mouth, a dreary resignation at having him as a patient. It became
clear that although Martin's initial motivation was to get to his sessions on time, he was unable, without analytic understanding, to sustain that goal. What interfered was the erosive impact on his sense of self of the particular difficulties he kept encountering, as well as his perception that the analyst's confidence in him was being similarly eroded by his failures. The devastating impact of any limitation, setback, or failure on Martin's basic definition of himself was emerging as a primary area of developmental derailment that had shaped the course his life had taken.

As a child, Martin had experienced severe problems in getting out of bed and readying himself for school. He had to be constantly prodded by his parents, and the more they prodded and chastised, the more he clung to the pillow, which made no demands on him and which he could mold to his needs. Martin's parents had chosen him, their first-born son, to bring honor and glory to the family. He was to endow it with the recognition and admiration they themselves had failed to elicit. Thus, they found their son's aberrant behavior utterly incomprehensible and frightening. They could not understand how he could possibly be afraid of going to bed or of going to school, or of the teasing and cruelty of other children, which so terrified him. Fear and aversion to school in the young hero-to-be was for them an "excuse" for his weakness and an unmitigated humiliation and symbol of their failure. When his behavior persisted, they would call him a boy made of mush, never to amount to anything, a child who brought dishonor to his father, a man who worked so hard without a murmur of complaint and got up each morning raring to go! Martin's parents believed that if he would only go to bed on time and eat the right foods, he would have no trouble getting up in the morning. They could not understand his wish to stay up a little longer before facing the terrors of being alone and feeling banished. They did not understand that, for Martin, being alone was not merely being alone. It was being alone with the reflection of himself acquired throughout the day and reinforced just before he entered his room—alone with all the bad things he was and had said and done, and with all the good things he had failed to do and be. His parents could not understand that the threat posed by their relentless disparagement of him became concretized in agonizing fears of boogey men, kidnappers, and terrifying apparitions. Instead, they wistfully told stories of how little Martin, at one year of
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ll Martin, at one year of 
age, had lifted himself above the crib bars, climbed out of bed, and sat 
at the head of the stairs, and of how they added two feet to the height 
of the crib to keep him in.

A second feature of Martin's lateness surfaced. It was one that per-
vaded his entire existence—the absolute necessity of controlling his 
own world and his own course. His need not to give in to someone 
else's wishes had become hypertrophied as his only means of estab-
ishing and maintaining his self-boundaries against constant erosion 
and violation.

Martin's mother emerged in his memories as a beautiful woman who 
had never wanted to marry and who, before she quite knew what had 
happened, found herself with four squalling, quarrelling, clamoring 
boys assaulting her. Martin remembered her as a brooding, lurking pres-
ence, always trying desperately to train them so as to unburden herself 
and gain some relief. She tried unsuccessfully to toilet train Martin 
when he was eight months old, because urine and feces represented 
everything odious, disgusting, and enslaving about him to her. She tried 
again when he was two, but again with no success. He early became a 
chronic irritant, a constant reminder to her of her failures and of her 
own bondage; and she became the same to him—a nagging, screaming, 
fusilade of “don'ts,” “why can'ts,” “can't you ever,” and “when will 
yous” that often began the moment he came into her presence.

Martin's mother seemed to him to live at the junction between wear-
riness and icy withdrawal on one side and reproachfulness on the 
other. Most upsetting was her utter unpredictability. He could never 
know at what moment she would interrupt a conversation with him to 
slap him in the face because he was fidgeting too much, or reach into 
the back seat of the car and whack him because he was making too 
much noise. His childhood, Martin recalled, was like waiting for a Nazi 
siren to go off. Yet occasionally his mother would flash a smile, her eyes 
emit a glint or a gleam, when he did something that really pleased her. 
He could, without protest, put on the clothes she had picked out for 
him and thereby show he cared about her and not about the boys at 
school, who would tease and humiliate him. He didn't have to make 
such a fuss about the chafing that the Brooks Brothers trousers would 
inflict on his wool-sensitive legs. He remembered that she would beam 
with pride when, hoping to evoke through him the glow she had never 
been able to extract for herself, she cleaned, polished, and dressed him
in the uniform for his weekly parade before her parents. “Everything about this boy is beautiful,” his mother would then say, “I just want to eat him up.”

One other experience brought heavenly serenity, that smile of pleasure to Martin’s mother’s eyes. She loved jewelry, fine furs, and silverware; these made the difference between feeling cherished or deprived. The only consistently intense interest that he had ever observed in her was shopping. That made her come alive and brought a glow to her face, except when he spoiled it by being a pest about waiting when she took him with her. He would come home with her from shopping and watch as, magically transformed, she paraded her day’s treasures and recited her accomplishments before his father.

The grandiosity and expansiveness fostered by his mother’s showing him off came to serve important defensive and restitutive functions for Martin. Sometimes he would go to his room and there, in his own, protected space, dream the dreams of glory that enabled him to repair a battered and undermined sense of himself. These dreams would materialize a world in which he could do anything, make millions, be acclaimed, and then triumphantly appear before his parents to show how wrong they had been in telling him so many times that he would be a nothing. He imagined laying his treasures at his mother’s feet, wiping away her black moods and sullen withdrawals. Once and for all he would reclaim his heritage by restoring her world, which—he was forever being told with a thousand cues, raised eyebrows, and turned down corners of a mouth—had collapsed because of something he had done or failed to do.

Martin acquired several lasting characteristics from his relationship with his mother, which also came to structure his experience of the analyst. He learned to stay away as the only certain means of protection. He developed and retained a burning ambition to become as rich as Croesus so that he would never again be helpless to produce the glow of admiration for which he continued to yearn. At the same time, he showed stubborn opposition to paying for anything, including his treatment. Every bill from the analyst was an exquisitely painful reminder of the limits of the relationship and therefore of his own limitations. For Martin, the analyst’s fee seemed to confirm a principle that had come to dominate his inner life—that every relationship was contingent on his performing and that he had to pay in order to be liked. Thus, to pay was unendurably degrading to him, and so he devised myr-
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iad ways to drag his heels, to postpone payments, to pay in driblets, to
pay and not to pay in the same act.

Perhaps the most damaging consequence of Martin's early relation-
ship with his mother was a severe developmental arrest in the area of
self-differentiation. He could not, on his own, maintain any positive
self-definition, and his sense of himself had come to be entirely depend-
ent on the availability of admiring and responsive women in his envi-
nronment. Correspondingly, he remained extremely vulnerable to
alterations in the mood of partners he had chosen, which could pro-
duce devastating collapses in his self-esteem. This extreme vulnerab-
ility had already begun to have an overriding effect during his child-
hood. When he had been put to bed and was alone, he could not
counteract the pictures of himself as bad, selfish, or defective that
would begin to overwhelm him. It was that intersubjectively induced
view of himself that lay behind the night terrors for which he had
sought to be comforted by his parents. This feature of his self-
experience emerged in the analysis when Martin disclosed the tor-
menting self-reproaches that accompanied any failure or disappoin-
tment and that underlay a persistent and severe insomnia.

From the unsatisfactory alternatives presented to Martin in his rela-
tionship with his mother—bondage or isolation—the young boy
turned to his father, an earnest, hard-working man. His father was un-
usual in many ways, and they had a special relationship. He was fre-
cently a source of comfort for Martin, particularly when Martin
looked up to him and asked for advice. But his father could also sud-
denly and unpredictably change. He could not bear to see anything go-
ing wrong without attempting to fix it, and for much of what went
wrong he found Martin to be the cause. He especially blamed Martin
for his mother's bad days. "What's the matter with you," his father
would say, "How come you don't listen to your mother? I slept in a cel-
lar with rats and I loved my mother, and your mother keeps such a nice
house, slaves for you, and you don't appreciate anything." If his
brother and he had a fight, Martin was the older and therefore re-
ponsible. If he had a stomach ache, it was because he had eaten "all that
crap." Every deviation established anew that Martin was not a member
of the clan—his hair, his disrespect, his willfulness, his fearfulness, and
his proneness to illness. Martin needed to do things his own way, and
his father regarded him as a threat to his power and to his own peace of
mind. Mostly his father attempted to control Martin with withering
sarcasm and continuous teasing. Sometimes it went further, and Martin was often threatened with being cast out—to an orphanage or to military school. Once Martin’s older cousin had been caught taking drugs. “If I ever catch any of you becoming an addict,” his father threatened, “I swear to God I will feed you a poisoned meatball. And if they catch me and send me to the electric chair, I will die a happy man because I will have cleansed my conscience by ridding the world of a scourge I brought into it.”

Even after a stable transference tie had become established, the missing of sessions continued. For a time, if there was an unusually productive session, Martin was even more apt to miss the following session than if it had gone poorly. He continued even more urgently to need the time and space, to counteract the increasing threat to his boundaries that the greater engagement posed. As he became more secure, he felt the analyst’s displeasure acutely whenever he would depart from the code he was convinced the analyst expected him to follow. He must stop his “acting out,” be understanding to his wife, take care of his children, and lead a “clean life.”

One day he appeared at the office quite late. He spoke about his lateness, saying that he had risen at 6 a.m. and could have taken a shower and come on time. But he was tired. He recounted a number of incidents during the previous day that he had come to recognize as having an enfeebling effect on his sense of himself. Following such experiences, it was always hard for him to get out of bed the next day. It was a chore, and he had to concentrate to do it. He experienced a constant battle with exhaustion. With the analyst, he went on, he was recreating his early childhood. His ambitions had been tied to the expectations of his father and they always exceeded his abilities. He was a constant disappointment to his parents.

When I take a day off, I lie around in bed. I read. I lunch at my leisure and then I go to a bookstore. I want to lie in my crib and not be expected to perform. In the morning I am in a dreamlike state in which I am recovering from the demands that have dehumanized and exhausted me. If I don’t sleep well, it has a terrible effect on me. I was never permitted to lie in bed. “Why are you always tired?” my father would ask. I was always exhausted and I always got the impression that there was something intrinsically not right. Always I was pushed by external regulation—to go to
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school on time, to wear the clothes they wanted me to wear. I
wanted to control my environment, but my mother and father
kept pushing me.

My lateness is a present-day manifestation of having been con-
stantly invaded and usurped, of having my space violated. Late-
ness is the last stall; it is a desperate measure that comes from
being put on a schedule that is not my own, being sold on it and
having to abide by it in order to exist. The real reason is that I
have lacked an environment in which there is a sense of protec-
tion of my own time and my own space. If I objected seriously to
my mother’s and father’s infiltration, I could be thrown out, sent
to an orphanage, or later to military school.

Lateness is my inability to embrace the day ahead because I have
been sold into conscription. Each day only holds an endless series
of engagements, each of which is marked by what I should do. I
have adopted this life form in order to survive. But then survival
itself has become of dubious value.

As the analysis continued, it was marked by periods of regular at-
tendance, punctuated by other periods in which for five or six weeks
Martin would stay away. Nonetheless, many significant changes were
occurring. One was the reappearance of a gentleness and caring, which
had been all but crushed by his wall of defensiveness. An interest in ar-
tistic and poetic expression also took form and began to produce a feel-
ing of peaceful pleasure within him. Martin slowly became able to
accept limitations in himself and in others. Succeeding sessions
clarified what the stance taken by the analyst had meant to Martin. In
the fifth year of the analysis, after suffering a serious financial setback,
Martin withdrew from treatment and missed about 25 sessions. The
following is the note the analyst recorded after Martin had returned:

Martin returned this week after an absence of six weeks. There
were two sessions in which he told something about what had
kept him away, then one session missed, and then he returned
again: He began by saying that he wanted me to know how im-
portant it was for him to be able to come back after he had stayed
away and to be greeted with a smile and a gesture of warmth. He
said that all the times when he had been welcomed back without
being made to feel bad about not having been here had had an irradicable effect. Those experiences had catapulted him over a jungle of thickets and had enabled him to begin to feel whole and hopeful. And he wanted me to know that these interruptions reflected not a limitation of the treatment but, as he increasingly recognizes, its expansion; and a limitation in a self that is healing and also expanding.

In the sessions that followed, Martin was able to articulate and reflect upon the feelings of apprehension that automatically accompanied the development of a stronger tie to the analyst. "For me," he said, "this tie to you is like a biopsy I keep sending to the lab to see whether a cancer has yet appeared."

While distancing and rebellious behavior had characterized Martin’s attempts to differentiate himself from the analyst, threats to such self-differentiation had been pervasive in Martin’s experience of the transference bond. He was afraid that his critical perceptions of and affective reactions to the analyst would create an unbridgeable separation, as we have described. Similar fears extended to his choices of companions, to his sources of pleasure and aesthetic interests, and to the goals and ideals that he had come to embrace. He was always scanning the face and posture of the analyst for signs of uneasiness or disapproval whenever he reported an act or idea that he felt diverged from what the analyst expected of him. He was convinced that the analyst would feel damaged or disaffected by the success for which Martin yearned and of which he felt he was capable. Searching the analyst’s face, he said one day:

I know I ought to trust you, but I don’t, and now I feel like running out of here. I feel like I’m up against a stone wall and I shouldn’t go on. "Why do you want to hurt this man?" I ask myself. "He’s been so good to you, here all the time, made it easier when you had trouble paying the bill, helps cure you of your hypochondria. What do you want of him?" I need encouragement to continue, but either we are going to get this out in the open once and for all, or it will just get covered over and over again.

I don’t believe you. I don’t believe you will help me do what I want to do. I don’t believe that when I lose weight and become trim and handsome you won’t think about your own youth and your
not being a good athlete. I don’t believe that when I’m with a beautiful lady you won’t be sad that it’s not you with her; that if I have ten million dollars and work three days a week you won’t be eating yourself up with disappointment with what you do. I know this because I see you sometimes tired and depressed.

Through such forthright communications it became possible to bring out into the open the different facets of the development of Martin’s selfhood that had been interrupted and become intensely conflictual. It also became possible to illuminate the underlying conflict in all its ubiquity—the conviction pervading every developmental level that resonant responsiveness could be elicited from his environment only at the price of alienation from the affective core of his own essential self. Increasingly, the analytic work became centered on investigating the experiences with the analyst that kept this conviction alive and on unearthing the encoded developmental contexts that had imparted to this nodal organizing principle its invariant and heretofore unchallengeable character.

CONCLUSION

Specific, maturationally evolving selfobject experiences are required for sustaining the development of individualized selfhood throughout life. Pathogenic derailments of this developmental process occur in intersubjective situations in which the central affect states that accompany self-differentiation are consistently not responded to or are actively rejected. A fundamental inner conflict thereby becomes established between the requirement that self-development must mold to the needs of caregivers and the imperative that it take root from a vitalizing affective core of one’s own. Patients enter analysis with hopes for an intersubjective context in which thwarted strivings for differentiated selfhood may become liberated (the tie that frees) and with fears that the violations of self-experience encountered in childhood will be repeated with the analyst (the bond that shackles). As seen in our clinical illustration, resistances in such cases encapsulate the patient’s truncated efforts at self-delineation, and it is crucial for the progress of the analysis and for the patient’s development to investigate in detail all the ways in which the patient experiences the analyst as a threat to his essential selfhood.