
THE CASE OF SOPHIE

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ABSTRACT: The analysis of a girl from ages 3 to 5 years old offers a clinical illustration of an alternative theory of change. In this theory the process of change is organized around nodal points of exchange between patient and analyst, designated as “now moments” and “moments of meeting.” In the case presented, these moments were preceded by an intensification of affect and were accompanied by a sense of openness and ambiguity. As often as not they were nonverbal and sometimes did not even involve symbolic representation. The process resulted in a progressively expanded repertoire of ways of being together and ways of doing things together. In a parallel and mutually influencing track, the child was telling me a story that gave meaning to her world, and increased the coherence of her sense of self.

RESUMEN: El análisis de una niña de 3 a 5 años de edad ofrece una ilustración clínica de otra teoría sobre el cambio. En esta teoría el proceso de cambio se organiza alrededor de puntos nodales de intercambio entre la paciente y el analista que se designan como “momentos de ahora” y “encuentros momentáneos.” En el caso presentado, estos “momentos” fueron seguidos de una intensificación del afecto y fueron acompañados por un sentido de apertura y ambigüedad. Tan frecuente como nunca antes, fueron “momentos” sin hablar y algunas veces no involucraron representación simbólica. El proceso resultó en un repertorio progresivamente expandido de maneras de estar juntos y maneras de hacer cosas juntos. En forma paralela y de influencia mutua, la niña me estaba contando una historia que le dio significado a su mundo e incrementó la coherencia de su sentido del yo.

RÉSUMÉ: L’analyse d’une petite fille entre l’âge de 3 ans et de 5 ans offre une illustration clinique d’une théorie alternative de changement. Dans cette théorie, le processus de changement est organisé autour de points nodaux d’échange entre le patient et l’analyste désignés comme moments présents et moments de rencontre. Dans le cas présenté, ces moments furent continués par une intensification de l’affect et furent accompagnés d’un sens d’ouverture et d’ambiguïté. Le plus souvent ils étaient non-verbaux et quelque-

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fois ils n'incluaient même pas de représentation symbolique. Le processus résulta en un répertoire progressivement élargi de manières d'être ensemble et de manière de faire des choses ensemble. D'une manière parallèle et à influence mutuelle, l'enfant me racontait une histoire qui apportait une signification à son monde et augmentait la cohérence de son sens de self.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG: Die Analyse eines Mädchens im Alter von 3 bis 5 Jahren eröffnet, anhand einer Fallgeschichte eine alternative Theorie der Veränderung. In dieser Theorie wird der Veränderungsprozeß rund um Knotenpunkte organisiert, die Punkte des Austausches zwischen der Patientin und der Analytikerin sind, bestimmt als "Hier-und-Jetzt-" und Begegnungsmomente. Bei der vorgelegten Fallgeschichte wurden diese Momente von einer Intensivierung der Gefühle vorbereitet und von einer Stimmung von Offenheit und Gemeinsamkeit begleitet. Diese Momente waren genauso oft non-verbal, wie nicht und beinhalteten oft nicht einmal eine symbolische Repräsentation. Der Prozeß resultierte in einem sich stetig erweiternden Repertoire der Art miteinander zu sein und Dinge miteinander zu machen. Parallel beeinflusste uns beide eine Geschichte, die mir das Kind erzählte, die ihrer Welt einen Sinn gab und die innere Struktur ihrer Selbstwahrnehmung verbesserte.

抄録：変化に関するもう1つの理論の臨床的提示として、ある女兒の3歳から5歳までの分析をあげる。この理論は、患者と分析家との間の交流の結節点—それを今のモーメントあるいは出会いのモーメントと呼ぶ—をめぐってオーガナイズされている。この症例において、そうしたモーメントは、情動の強烈化の後に、オープンながら曖昧な感触を伴って起こっている。それはノンバーバルなことがほとんどで、時には象徴的な表象さえ持たないこともあった。このプロセスは徐々に、共にある在り方と、一緒にやるやり方のレパートリーを拡大した。それに平行した相互影響トラックにおいて、その女兒は治療者に、彼女の世界に意味を与えた物語を語り、彼女の自己感の一貫性を高めた。

* * *

The case I am going to describe is that of a little girl I treated in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis for 2 years, between the ages of three and five. She was brought to see me because of painful withholding of her stools and severe oppositional struggles with her mother.

When I treated Sophie I was using a traditional psychoanalytic model to understand my observations. Even at that time, however, I believed that some of what happened in the treatment was not adequately captured by that theory. When I considered the treatment, a number of moments came to mind in which Sophie and I shared a sudden intense emotion. At their occurrence, I registered their importance, but understood them only as my response to exciting parts of the narrative. I knew that these moments were particularly important in our relationship and instrumental in the unique way that we came to make sense out of her experience, but I was unable to find another more satisfying way to explain the interactional element. At this time, I understand these moments as examples of "now moments."

BACKGROUND

Before addressing these "now moments" I will give a brief description of the evaluation and the early treatment, as background. Sophie was the much loved first child of a professional couple. Their marriage had significant conflict. Sophie's birth was a frightening and painful experience for her mother, and the neonatal period was complicated by her mother's mastitis and her father's leaving on a prolonged business trip.

The first evaluation session was a family meeting. Sophie, her mother, and her father joined me in the playroom. Sophie came in hesitantly, clinging to her mother's legs. After some time in which her parents tried unsuccessfully to engage her in play with the toys in the room, Sophie began to make something out of play dough. Her mother asked, "Sophie, what are you making?" Sophie responded quietly, and after a hesitation, "Nothing. I'm not going to tell you." Her mother withdrew, hurt. Later, Sophie identified the "something" as an onion ring,

which she was putting into a pot, which she also made out of play dough. Then, she suddenly became anxious, and said, "It's stuck." The tension in the room rose, as Sophie began to whimper. Mother and father bent over Sophie, trying to help her pull and pry the onion ring from the pot. Finally, they were successful, and with a sigh of relief, Sophie leaned against her mother. "I love you, Mommy," she said. "I love you, too, Sophie," her mother responded.

In the course of this family drama, Sophie retreated from asserting herself against what she clearly perceived as her parents' intrusions, to a panic in which she was afraid she was losing something, and found a solution in which she accepted her parents' intrusions as necessary to avoid the loss. But the solution was a capitulation. Her cry of "nothing" seemed to be a denial of "something." Perhaps it referred to her stool and whatever meaning she attached to it; something she wanted to keep from her mother; something that pulled her troubled family together with painful affect; something special which she could not afford to lose; and something destructive, which elicited the final reassuring exchange of "I love you's."

THE FIRST "NOW MOMENT"

The first of these pivotal moments occurred early in the treatment. After the evaluation, I asked to see Sophie and her mother together in play sessions because I thought that help with this relationship might be a good place to start; mother and child were in a constant, painful struggle at home. In addition to these play sessions, I met with Sophie's mother and father in weekly sessions during Sophie's treatment. The theme of "nothing" emerged in a dramatic context in an early session, which had begun with a tummy ache. Sophie made a mound of play dough, pressed a depression on top, and started to make many little balls, which she called "cherries." She filled the depression with "cherries" until it was full and then dumped out the cherries, over and over. She occasionally fed a cherry to the play dough kitty I had made for her, in between filling her cake. Then she looked at the kitty closely and pronounced the kitty's mouth to be "broken."

Sophie moved her filling up and dumping out activity exclusively to the kitty, feeding cherries into the hole that was its mouth and collecting the "poops" from the hole in its bottom. A transition occurred in which she began to feed the kitty first two cherries at a time, and then three cherries. Of course, the cherries got stuck inside the kitty; she stuffed them in energetically. Sophie started to look stern and preoccupied. For the moment at least, she had lost what I had come to appreciate as her delightful sense of humor. As the sadistic treatment of the kitty escalated, she took the screwdriver and started to poke at the kitty's eyes. I sensed her getting increasingly anxious. While slashing the eyeballs, she knocked the kitty's nose, a ball of play dough similar to the point of being indistinguishable from the cherries and also from the eyes, into the kitty's mouth. Sophie began to laugh hysterically, not with humor, but with terror. Her mother leaned toward her asking, "Sophie, what is the matter?" Sophie continued to whoop, "Nothing! Nothing is the matter! Nothing!"

In contrast to her mother who had been obviously anxious and even apologetic during the desecration of the kitty, I had been interested in the sadistic tone of Sophie's aggression and in knowing the connection between this kitty play and Sophie's fear of going to the bathroom. It seemed to have something to do with being broken, with getting something stuck down your throat, or with being hurt. When she screamed "Nothing!" I felt excitement. I remembered the "Nothing!" in the family meeting, and I thought that the "nothing" she was talking about now referred to her fear; she was saying "The matter is *there is nothing*," that it had to do with loss. Leaning forward in my chair, I tried to get her attention. I recall searching for words to communicate my appreciation of her experience, but being unable to make myself heard over the noise. Yet there seemed to be something in my lack of anxiety and in my persistence that

affected her because she stopped screaming. At that moment we seemed to have the potential of a language between us, a language that could help us talk about her fear. It was in those terms that I understood my excitement. The click of recognition of an important affective theme gave me confidence that she and I were going to find a way of working on this problem together. That was the first “now moment.”

THE SECOND “NOW MOMENT”

In the next couple of months, the theme of “nothing” was elaborated to include the idea of something that you expect to be there, *not* being there. A complementary theme of something appearing where or when you *don't* expect it to be, appeared at the same time. Once Sophie asked me to make a kitty, which I made the same way every time, and she told me there was “no nose” (not true). She was delighted when I picked up on one of her games and replied that she was “tricking” me. Soon thereafter, she began to play with a small plastic animal she found in the dolls house. The dolls house has a little room with a door that opens upwards on a hinge. She put the animal in the room, shut the door, and told me that the “little pet” was not inside his house. I looked, and exclaimed that I saw him right there where he always was! She was delighted. To encourage her to elaborate the play theme, I said, “Show me that trick again!” She closed the door. “Where’s the little pet?” she asked. “Look for it.” After my search—coached by Sophie—was unsuccessful, she threw open the door with a flourish, revealing the pet. “It was hidden!” she said. Her hiding and surprising game had developed into a tricking game. Instead of being a passive recipient of the loss, Sophie was going to be the active agent of the hiding, of the trickery, and *I* was the passive recipient.

A few weeks later another “now moment” occurred. Sophie was snipping at the kitty with scissors. Of course the kitty had to be made new every time. Then she abandoned the mutilated kitty and found a fireman doll for which she made a hose out of play dough. She tucked the play dough hose into the rectangular space of the fire truck that the ladder fits into, effectively hiding it from view. I could see that the idea of something hidden was going to be joined to the idea of something lost. She then took the hose out and tucked it under the fireman’s arm. Again it was invisible. She stated, “Oh, there is a hose under his arm!” feigning surprise. The affect of surprise was related to the notion of something that was hidden but could be found. She now made a house for the fireman out of blocks and she tucked a triangular block into the base of a large chimney. She said, “There is something inside here—a little triangle.” Her mood was contented. Suddenly she giggled mischievously. “He could sleep on top of the little triangle!” she cried. She shoved the blocks over—“Ker-plunk! . . . Blast off!” There was something about the fireman play that freed her to enjoy that burst of aggression.

Next she went over to the doll house. “Can’t fool *you!*” she crowed. I sensed her excitement, and I felt a corresponding sense of anticipation. The many times we had played at tricking and hiding and the increased comfort with sadistic and aggressive actions in the play seemed to prepare us both for some common conclusion, as yet unarticulated and unknown. Sophie opened the pet’s room. “You can’t see him,” she said. I pretended not to see him. Then she displayed him to me. “But he’s there!” A preoccupied look came over her face. “Get the tape!” she commanded. I got it. I was beginning to get an idea of what she was going to do. According to her instructions, we taped the pet to the underside of the door, where it could not be seen. When she was finished, she opened the door, and displayed the apparently empty space. “He’s not there!” She and I both saw that the space was empty, and we both knew that the pet was there. Then, together, we looked up at the ceiling of the door and saw the pet. Neither of us said a word. It was a moment that seemed suspended in time, each of us gazing at the *invisible*

pet. It seemed that we were together in a new context, one that contained ambiguity and potential.

I was full of admiration for her solution, but I felt more than admiration. I felt acutely tuned in to my own emotions. I thought that we had, each in her own way, just gone through a process of discovery. Part of what we seemed to be discovering was a new Sophie. We recognized her as competent in a new sense, in a sense that had less to do with the content of the problem she was solving and more to do with her identity as a problem solver with a particular method and style. I also thought that she recognized my revised understanding of her and appreciated it.

Suddenly, she jumped up and ran to her mother, embracing her. “Mostly I like my Mom instead of my Dad!” Initially, I understood this as a defensive response to the aggressive tricking behavior earlier in the hour and also wondered whether she imagined that a “trick” had been played on her early in her life. Perhaps more significant, however, was the closeness generated by our reciprocal recognition, which triggered her conflicts about loyalty to her mother and caused Sophie to reassure her mother of her love.

THIRD “NOW MOMENT”

The third “now moment” occurred months later. Sophie had just turned four, and her mother had left the playroom some time ago. Sophie was coming four times a week. She and I were playing with two wooden wolf figures. She chose another, a rabbit. Now there were three figures on the table—the rabbit in the middle and one wolf on either side. She surveyed the scene silently and then said reflectively, “A bad wolf and a good wolf.” Again, I had a twinge of excitement. I anticipated that she and I might be able to make something out of this. “What did the bad wolf do to make him bad?” I asked. “He stole the good wolf’s jewels,” she replied matter of factly. She added, “He used to have jewels of his own . . . a beautiful necklace, diamonds and rubies . . . But then someone stole it from him and he felt so bad that he stole the good wolf’s jewels. From now on you can call him ‘the bad wolf who used to be a good wolf.’”

I was intrigued by this. Suddenly the polarized good and bad universe had opened up and allowed for a third position—“the bad wolf who used to be a good wolf.” This offered crucial possibilities. For example, if there were a *bad wolf who used to be a good wolf*, what about a *good wolf who used to be a bad wolf*? I was eager to keep this going but was not quite sure how. Then, I had a mischievous feeling myself. Making a show of searching the table top, I said, “Sophie, I see the ‘bad wolf who used to be a good wolf’ and the good wolf. But what I want to know is who took the ‘bad wolf who used to be a good wolf’s’ jewels?” Sophie replied without missing a beat, “The very, very bad wolf.” Delighted with her comeback, I continued in the spirit of the game and looked under the table. “Sophie, where *is* ‘the very, very bad wolf’?” She paused in reflection and answered seriously, “He’s hiding. He’s so bad he is afraid to come out.” We looked at each other across the table, over the *bad wolf who used to be a good wolf* and the *good wolf* and the *very, very bad wolf*. The universe had clearly expanded. This sense of shared awareness again proved to be too much for Sophie. She pushed her chair away from the table and said, “Okay, I don’t want to play this any more.”

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I think the most useful way of understanding the changes that occurred as a result of Sophie’s treatment is as the result of a series of sequential moments of exchange between us. *Sometimes the moments were captured in words and sometimes not. Sometimes*

the narrative content of the exchanges was central and sometimes not. These “moments of meeting” associated with strong emotion involved both of us as active agents in the process of what we were doing together—we were dyadically expanding our states of consciousness. I felt that we shared a sense of the uniqueness of our partnership and of each other. Through expanding the context in which we were playing and in which Sophie was telling me the story, the story was continuously being revised. During the time I was treating Sophie, my conceptual model dictated an emphasis on the symbolic representations in the narrative of the play. But even then I recognized that the energy of the experience was in the telling and the listening, that the crucial factor was not so much the story she was telling as it was the freedom to revise it from time to time, with my participation in each of those revisions. It was through this progression of moments that change took place.

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