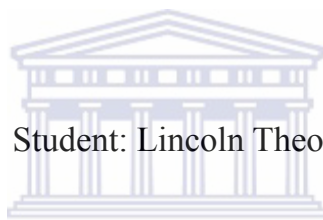


UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Faculty of Arts

Women's and Gender Studies Program

**MALE IDENTIFIED SAME-SEX SEXUAL FETISH IN SOUTH AFRICA:  
(RE)DEFINING SEXUAL RELATIONS BETWEEN PEOPLE AND THINGS**



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Doctor of Philosophy

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## DECLARATION

I declare that *Male Identified Same-Sex Sexual Fetish in South Africa: (Re)Defining Sexual Relations between People and Things* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Lincoln Theo

May 2010

Signed.....



**Keywords:**

Sexuality, Psychology, Politics, Body, Embodiment, Dualism, Materialism, Gay, Male, Queer, South Africa, Postcolonial, Postmodern, Fetish, Same-Sex



## ABSTRACT

Historical ethnographic and early psychoanalytic epistemologies on 'fetishism' focus primarily on the fetish 'object', whereby the subject of 'fetish practices' was identified, pathologised and/or socio-culturally invalidated primarily on the basis of affiliation with a taboo object. Such uncritical reliance on dualist, oppositional thinking and divisive, psychopathologising tendencies attenuates subjectivities and agency, and is inconsistent with contemporary postcolonial and queer scholarship.

Contemporary discourses around (gay male sexual) 'fetishism', lodged in the definitions and diagnostic criteria of sexual 'fetishism' in the World Health Organisation's International Classification of Diseases, efface the subjectivities of sexual subjects who incorporate material objects into their sexual scripts. I argue that these classifications should be completely revised, since more appropriate subject-oriented epistemologies on sexuality incorporating material objects should acknowledge the constitution of the subject as phenomenologically taking place through intersections between materiality and discourse. This implies that no separate psychopathology of 'fetishism' can exist, since subjects, material objects and discourse cannot be effectively separated from each other.

In contradistinction, a subject-oriented approach should, I suggest, be adopted, oriented around the (non-essentialist) constitution and lived experiences of sexual subjects, rather than on human or inanimate objects of sexual attention. This approach focuses on the necessary role of the human (sexual) body, which is neither entirely discursively nor materially constructed, but rather is engaged in a complex interaction with subjectivities, discourse and the phenomenal world. The (non-unitary) 'self' is him/herself subject, object and part of a cultural environment, experientially delineated through 'embodiment', with the phenomenological paradigm allowing for validation of sexual expression from an inclusive perspective, to develop complex cartographies of subjectivities.

Based on this foundation, the thesis argues that the embodied sexual experience of the 'gay male fetishist' subject therefore serves to link him, objects and environments dialectically. Rather than being the 'object' of supervening drives, he is a valid agent, exploring his subjectivity and orienting himself in relation to his environment through his embodied experience. 'Sexual fetish' practices therefore function as connecting (rather than divisive) forces in human relations with the world. At the same time, consensual, non-harmful 'gay male fetish' sexualities are potentially self-transformative and socially-transformative practices, called on as resources for recognising personal value.

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# Table of Contents

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
<b>OPENING PARENTHESIS: POLITICAL CONTEXTS</b>	1
<b>Rationale</b>	2
<i>The Political Question: Essentialism vs Discourse, or Something Else?</i>	2
<i>Metatheory for a New Wave of Political Action</i>	5
<b>A Brief Context for 'Gay Male Sexual Fetish' in South Africa</b>	7
<i>Terms of Reference &amp; Descriptions: 'Fetish'- Variations on a Term</i>	7
<i>'Sexual Fetish Practices' (relations with material objects) vs BDSM (relations between people)</i>	10
<i>'Sexual Fetish': Personified Bodies, Classifications, Relationships and Phenomena</i>	11
<b>Research Question</b>	12
<b>Thesis Argument</b>	13
<b>Beyond the Immediacy of 'Gay Male Fetish Sex'</b>	15
<b>CHAPTER 1: LOCATING AND CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH: ADVENTURES IN REFLEXIVITY</b>	16
<b>1.1 Unusual Beginnings: Developing a Research Question</b>	17
<i>1.1.1 The Research Question Unfolds</i>	18
<b>1.2 Tying Down Disciplines, Epistemologies and Methodologies</b>	19
<i>1.2.1 Scholarly Reflexivity</i>	20
<i>1.2.2 Quality Standards: Connecting 'Un-Discipline', Epistemologies and Methodologies through Reflexivity</i>	26
<i>1.2.3 Discourse and Narrative Analysis: Linking Metatheory and Participant Perception</i>	27
<b>1.3 Field-Work Methods and Reflexivity: Participant Contributions</b>	30
<i>1.3.1 Identifying the Participants</i>	30
<i>1.3.2 The Impact of Personal Experience: Insider Trading</i>	36
<i>1.3.3 Preparing for the 'Interview' Process: A Focus on Ethics</i>	38
<i>1.3.4 Developing Interview Schedules and Conducting Dialogic Conversations</i>	41
<b>1.4 Transcribing, Analysing and Writing: Reflexivity in Interpretation</b>	44
<i>1.4.1 Calling on Language</i>	44
<i>1.4.2 Models of Analysis</i>	46
<i>1.4.3 Writing Up</i>	48
<b>1.5 Conclusion</b>	50

<b>CHAPTER 2: LOCATING 'GAY MALE FETISH SEXUALITIES': DIVISIVE IDENTITY POLITICS, COHESIVE QUEERNESS AND RECOGNISING SUBJECTIVE VALUE</b>	51
<b>2.1 Problematising Gay Rights Identity as Divisive</b>	53
2.1.1 <i>The Complexity of Sexual Identities</i>	53
2.1.2 <i>'Queer Locations' not 'Gay Identity'</i>	57
<b>2.2 Sexual Politics and Locating 'Gay Male Fetish Sexuality'</b>	65
2.2.1 <i>The Political Playing Field</i>	66
2.2.2 <i>The Limits of Liberalism and Human Rights</i>	68
2.2.3 <i>Toleration and Difference: the Lock(e) on Sexual Liberation</i>	71
2.2.4 <i>Claiming Queer Cultural/Social Transformation</i>	74
2.2.5 <i>'Gay Male Sexual Fetish' as Pragmatic Queer Activism</i>	77
2.2.6 <i>Pragmatic Activism: Unities of Process and Identity</i>	80
2.2.7 <i>Rephrasing 'Gay Male Fetish Sexuality' as a Resource for Recognising Subjective Value</i>	82
<b>2.3 Conclusion</b>	86
<b>CHAPTER 3: THE (FETISH) OBJECT OF MY AFFECTION: A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF HISTORICAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND PSYCHIATRIC DISCOURSES ON 'FETISHISM'</b>	88
<b>3.1 Anthropological Discourses on the 'Feitiço': Encounters with (Perceived) Difference</b>	89
3.1.1 <i>The Genesis of the Term 'Fetish' as Cross-Cultural Encounter</i>	90
3.1.2 <i>Colonialist Tropes of People and Things: Dialectics of Power</i>	92
3.1.3 <i>Dialectics, not Domination</i>	98
<b>3.2 Psychoanalytic 'Fetish': the Conflation of Presence and Absence</b>	100
3.2.1 <i>Object-Focused Freud</i>	103
3.2.2 <i>The 'Fetish': Dominating (Male) Subject, Passive (Female) Object</i>	105
3.2.3 <i>The Substitution of the Object for 'Reality': Normative Concerns on Over-Valuation</i>	111
3.2.4 <i>Shoring up Freud with Discourse</i>	116
3.2.5 <i>'Lack' and Agency</i>	121
<b>3.3 Conclusion</b>	124

<b>CHAPTER 4: CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOPATHOLOGIES OF 'SEXUAL FETISHISM'</b>	127
<b>4.1 From Freud to the 21st Century: Unpacking Contemporary Psycho(patho)logy</b>	128
<i>4.1.1 Contemporary 'Sexual Fetish': the ICD and DSM Classifications</i>	129
<b>4.2 Psychiatric Definitions of 'Fetishism': Beyond Contemporary Simplistic Constructions</b>	132
<i>4.2.1 The Vestigial Tails of Freudian Categories</i>	133
<i>4.2.2 The Underlying Categorical Normativity</i>	138
<i>4.2.3 Defining 'Fetishism' Beyond Strict Person/Object/Practice Distinctions</i>	140
<b>4.3 Psychiatric Diagnoses of 'Fetishism': Problematising Pathological vs Non-Pathological Practices</b>	143
<i>4.3.1 Morally and Statistically Normative Paradigms for Diagnosis</i>	144
<i>4.3.2 Distress and Impairment: Effacing Agency</i>	153
<b>4.4 From Psychopathology to Psycholiberation</b>	159
<i>4.4.1 Alternatives to Classification</i>	161
<b>4.5 Conclusion</b>	162
<b>INTERJECTION: RE-ORIENTING SCHOLARSHIP TOWARDS THE 'SUBJECT' OF SUBJECTIVITIES</b>	165
<b>Heteronormative Dualities</b>	167
<i>'Fetish': Conflating Homophobia And Heteronormativity</i>	168
<b>Discursive Description vs Metatheoretical Construction</b>	172
<i>The Role of Participant Narratives: Radical Constructivism</i>	174
<b>Revising Metatheories Beyond Binaries of 'Same' vs 'Other'</b>	179
<i>Moving Forward</i>	180
<b>CHAPTER 5: RE-ORIENTING THEORY TOWARDS COHESIVE SUBJECT-ORIENTED PARADIGMS FOR 'FETISH SEXUALITY'</b>	182
<b>5.1 Towards Subjective Orientations: Recognising Materiality and Discourse</b>	183
<i>5.1.1 Acknowledging 'the Body' and Re-Invigorating Experience</i>	184
<b>5.2 The Subject-Self: Internal Coherence of Mind, Body and Discourse</b>	187
<i>5.2.1 The Body, Language and Discourse</i>	190
<i>5.2.2 Embodiment and Discourse</i>	195
<b>5.3 The Subject: External Coherence through Transactional Relations</b>	201
<i>5.3.1 The Organisation of Mind/Body and Environment</i>	201





<b>5.4 Towards 'the Subject' in 'Fetish' Sexualities: Beyond the Reification of Things</b>	209
<b>5.5 Conclusion</b>	211
<b>CHAPTER 6: SUBJECTIVITIES AND AGENCY: SEXUALITY INCORPORATING MATERIAL OBJECTS AS A RESOURCE FOR RECOGNISING PERSONAL VALUE</b>	213
<b>6.1 Agency</b>	214
<i>6.1.1 Subjectivities: Dialectics between Discourse and the Phenomenal</i>	215
<i>6.1.2 Agency: From Present Subjectivities to Future-Orientations</i>	219
<i>6.1.3 Agency: Conclusions</i>	229
<b>6.2 Same-Sex Sexual Practices Incorporating Material Objects as Recognition of Personal Value</b>	230
<i>6.2.1 Personal Re-Orientation through Human Interaction</i>	231
<i>6.2.2 Re-Orientation through Embodied Experience of Material Objects</i>	238
<i>6.2.3 Re-Orientations Conclusions: Relations between Learning and Materiality</i>	250
<b>6.3 Conclusion</b>	251
<b>CLOSING PARENTHESIS: REPHRASING SAME-SEX SEXUALITY INCORPORATING MATERIAL OBJECTS</b>	253
<i>The Subject is Present</i>	255
<b>The Explicit Argument: 'The Subject is Present'</b>	259
<i>Chapter Summary</i>	259
<i>Personal 'Transformation'</i>	266
<i>The Role of Psycho-Medical Practitioners</i>	272
<b>Implicit Arguments: A Personal Present vs A Political Future</b>	274
<i>Interrogating Materiality and Discourse</i>	274
<i>Locating Scholarship and Responsibility</i>	275
<b>Closing Thoughts</b>	278
<b>CITED REFERENCES</b>	280
<b>ADDENDUM 1: FREUDIAN FETISHISM</b>	306
<b>Ego-Splitting, Disavowal and Fetishism: a Brief Explanation of the Process</b>	306
<b>Defense and Repression</b>	308
<b>ADDENDUM 2: THE ICD-10 CLASSIFICATIONS OF MENTAL AND BEHAVIOURAL DISORDERS</b>	310

<b>ADDENDUM 3: PARTICIPANT RECORDS OF HOMOPHOBIA AMONGST MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS</b>	312
<b>ADDENDUM 4: NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS</b>	314



## OPENING PARENTHESIS: POLITICAL CONTEXTS

“classificatory end-products to which the word 'fetish' has been applied cannot be understood simply as special kinds of objects, or defined in terms of their generic functional attributes. Neither do they reflect a particular mental condition. Rather, they reveal a variable combination of three universal underlying features of categorisation and representation: concretisation, animation or anthropomorphisation; conflation of signifier with signified; and an ambiguous relationship of control between person and object. All lie on a processual continuum which begins with identification of categories, relationships and phenomena, and proceeds – via reification and iconification – to their personification.”<sup>1</sup>

We face a curious set of circumstances in the South African politics of sexual orientation. The country boasts one of the world's most progressive constitutions, which successfully protects marginal sexualities and underscores legislation affording lesbians and gay men equal rights in such areas as marriage, inheritance, insurance, medical aid and so on. Yet some sixteen years into democracy, the society remains disturbingly conservative, and popular discourses continue to marginalise gay men and lesbians, who face approbation, exclusion and the threat of violence on a daily basis<sup>2</sup>. At best, South African society is only becoming marginally more tolerant of unusual sexualities<sup>3</sup>. At worst, prevalent negative, heteropatriarchal discourses construct non-normative sexualities as ills to be exorcised or 'cured'<sup>4</sup>.

It is politically desirable to develop a society which supports growth and the achievement of happiness and fulfilment. Yet such a society is not yet one in which we live. Clearly, simply shifting social and legal policies, principles and regulations from authoritarianism to human rights has not been sufficient to thwart the menace of conservatism and create a space in which non-normative sexualities can thrive. More fundamental change must surely be actioned in order to dismantle heteronormativity and move beyond the legal imperative imposed on the broader populace to merely 'tolerate' non-normative sexuality. To achieve an environment in which *all* sexual activity and identification (which includes both the normative and non-normative sexuality) can flourish, more effective political action should be identified. This research suggests more appropriate metatheoretical constructs on which to base such political action.

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen, R.F. (1988, 2006) *Fetishism: A Cognitive Approach*. In *The Categorical Impulse: essays in the anthropology of classifying behaviour*. Oxford & NY: Berghahn Books 166-189 at 166

<sup>2</sup> As well as bisexual, transgendered and intersexed people. See chapter 2

<sup>3</sup> See chapter 2

<sup>4</sup> See chapter 2 re homophobic discourses and violence aimed at gay, lesbian and transgendered people.

## Rationale

Legal protection of human rights and the mere tolerance of minority sexual variation is, I suggest, a problematic aspiration. Although necessary in the short term to prevent danger to life and limb, and to ensure fair disposition of resources, it appears to be insufficient as a basis on which to acknowledge that all people are both different and similar, and are both individuals and part of a wider world. It appears further to be an insufficient starting-point from which people can learn and gain positive value from each other.

### ***The Political Question: Essentialism vs Discourse, or Something Else?***

#### *Essentialism*

Part of the problem appears to lie in prevailing identity politics paradigms which essentialise human experience and personal growth. Such frameworks insist on characterising lesbians and gay men as discrete entities, somehow fundamentally different to the heterosexual population<sup>5</sup>. They largely and often unintentionally bind human experience to the prescribed sexual identities of 'straight' or 'gay' in order to qualify for rights and validation. This tends to tie people into essentialist, dualist roles and performances, marginalising those who live beyond singular 'identities', and those who choose rather to attribute their individual value to diverse experiences or relations<sup>6</sup>. It tends to preclude fluid and multiple identifications: a 'homosexual' cannot be anything else, whether or not he/she wants to be.

The cancer of absolutist and essentialist thinking is, I suggest, further not only alive and well in the problematic diatribes of political and legal 'equality' in contemporary democratic discourse<sup>7</sup>. It permeates at a deeper level, in the interstices of metatheoretical constructs against which people measure physical and emotional health, and therefore adjudge the value of human experience. Such constructs tend to assume people primarily to be a variation of 'things' in the Cartesian mould: physical objects with separate minds. This often leads to the widespread belief that individuals are somehow fundamentally different to each other, and separate from the material world around them.

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<sup>5</sup> See chapter 2. Note that this thesis speaks specifically to sexual orientation, rather than gender identity, and therefore does not deal specifically with challenges to gender normativity, although similar principles apply.

<sup>6</sup> See Butler, J. (1999) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* NY, Routledge

<sup>7</sup> See chapter 2 re challenges to identity politics and the reliance on 'equality' as a basis for political change

This unfortunate perspective is, I suggest, often unwittingly perpetuated by many lesbians, gay men and gay rights activists, who claim rights based on such discrete sexual identities<sup>8</sup>. It perpetuates pre-existing heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy, and therefore persistently marginalises 'unusual' sexualities, notwithstanding well-meaning but arguably often misguided political and social pleas for some kind of equality based on difference. Contemporary forms of political action therefore seem to aggravate the problem, or at least maintain the negative status quo, by calling attention to the 'otherness' of gay men and lesbians rather than dissolving it.

### *Discourse vs Essentialism*

Yet postmodernist, deconstructionist thinking has shifted political thinking. In the social sciences and humanities, both modernism and the historical reliance on essentialist presumptions is dead. Or at least ailing. The Foucaultian idea that discourse constructs 'reality' is now well-established, allowing increasing recognition that social structures are permeable. It acknowledges that 'identities' are fluid and mutable, and deconstructs essentialist ideas of 'otherness'.

But, I suggest, it is folly to rely on discursive accounts to fully explain social circumstances, and therefore to underpin political action. Discourse may account for the warp and weft of historical power relations, but it is often insufficiently detailed to predict or prescribe the future. Discursive accounts do not foretell the unfolding of events, which depend on a range of variables which include the choices people individually and collectively make based on their personal experience in a material world, however that materiality might be socially constructed.

Indeed, I suggest that both essentialist and discursive frameworks inadequately reflect the circumstances of the human condition in similar, foundationalist ways. Identity politics effectively assumes all people to have some kind of essential material identity, while discursive constructions often assume people to have no material identity and to be entirely constructed through discourse. Neither of these constructions recognises individual active enjoyment of personal value outside of overarching inherent constraints or power dynamics. Both tend to challenge notions of valid agency, through claims that choice is limited by the external controlling forces of bounded identity and discursive power relations respectively.

The possibility of political action is therefore in different ways attenuated or nullified, since individuals are effectively denied an active 'presence' in their lives, and therefore the agency to

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<sup>8</sup> The constitution appropriately speaks of 'sexual orientation', not 'sexual identity', but most people conflate the two ideas. In the same way that 'gender' is read as relating primarily to women, 'sexual orientation' is seen to identify gay men and lesbians, while 'bisexuals', 'a-sexuals' and other categories seem to remain virtually invisible.

change them. Neither framework therefore seems to propose adequate solutions to homophobia and heteronormativity on either the personal or social front, since they assume that the power of the majority is either 'right' or unassailably dominant.

### *A Third Political Option?*

To achieve more effective change, political action should, I suggest, be based on more complex understandings of how the variables of materiality and discourse interrelate, so as to avoid fictions of both the essentialist 'self' existing in an unproblematised Cartesian 'natural body', and woolly broad-stroke statements of a disembodied discursive constitution of social and personal experience.

Political activity should, I suggest, also look beyond the power of numbers, which underpins both essentialist and discursive accounts of human experience (which translate into homophobic and gay rights discourses respectively). As I will discuss, both accounts tend to assume that problems and solutions lie in the *numbers* of adherents of a particular viewpoint. The solutions to heteronormativity and homophobia is therefore seen inherently to lie in changing the minds of, or protecting sexual minorities from, the large numbers of homophobes. By implication, the solution lies in mass action and oppositional political organisation.

This is perhaps valuable in the short term to deal with immediate concerns of violence and access to material resources, but I suggest that the long-term ramifications should also be taken into account. Identity-politics aims political activity at either defending discretely labelled 'homosexuals' from homophobia, or to change the minds of the majority to accommodate such people. Discursive constructions often only focus on large-scale discursive shifts, not concerted small-scale or individual activity, and thereby to merely deal with how the majority speaks about minorities.

Either way, political action remains reactionary. This is problematic, since to be reactionary is to perpetuate dominant, discriminatory discourses by recreating them in an oppositional way. Yet surely the cycle of discrimination should rather be broken and dissipated, not simply re-written through the same lenses? Surely *all* categorical distinctions between 'straight' and 'gay' (indeed all categorical distinctions at all), and not merely heteronormative value-judgements, should go the way of the dinosaurs? Surely the very idea of 'alterity' on an individual (as well as a discursive/collective) level should be deconstructed to engender appreciation and celebration of embodied life itself, something from which *all* people benefit, while not being bound to fatuous assumptions that they are in some essentialist, foundationalist or determinist way the same?

Following from this, it makes sense that political challenges in the realm of sexualities should seek neither mainstreaming, nor mere 'accommodation' for unusual and non-normative sexual practices as some kind of rational political necessity based on minority toleration. It also makes sense that political activity should not be left to large-scale discursive shifts, poked at in piecemeal fashion, but should be lodged with the individual in his/her own socio-political context<sup>9</sup>. I therefore suggest that political activity should look beyond the power of systems, and towards how individuals within social systems contribute to shifting undesirable normativity through living their lives outside of purely reactionary actions and identifications. I suggest that political activity should therefore rely on well-conceived metatheory underlying relationships between people and things.

### ***Metatheory for a New Wave of Political Action***

'Gay men' and 'lesbians' clearly need protection in the face of opprobrium and violence. But I suggest that longer-term plans should also be laid to transcend 'protection' and encourage a world in which there is no necessary difference between people, and no value-laden basis on which to hang discriminatory discourses. For this, mechanisms should be identified to move beyond the categorical separation between entities and identities, and to recognise the positive value of unusual ways of living and the world-views associated with them.

This implies that political activists should unpack metatheories, and interrogate the philosophical assumptions to human experience. In this respect, twin Butlerian propositions are an appropriate tandem starting-point:

- recognising the 'dis-identification' of certain bodies, which are excluded on the basis of sex, ethnicity or age, whereby the idea of the material, which is made immutable, is used in discourses of power<sup>10</sup>; and
- critiquing the cultural construction of the material, whereby "a culture or an agency of the social. . . acts upon a nature, which is itself presupposed as a passive surface"<sup>11</sup>.

Calling on these notions, essentialist fictional boundaries between people *inter se*, between people and things, and between practices, can, I suggest, be reconceived. At the

<sup>9</sup> However that 'individual' might be construed. Note: this thesis speaks of the power of the individual, but does not advocate an essentialist conception of the 'self'. See chapter 5 in this regard

<sup>10</sup> Butler, J. (1993) *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York: Routledge, 1993 pp4

<sup>11</sup> Butler, J. (1993) *ibid*

same time, discursive accounts can be factored in without relying on assumptions that people are exclusively constructed by discourse. Clearly, if better metatheory is to be identified than the foundationalist either-or propositions of essentialism or discourse, the human being should be interrogated as *both* a social *and* physical/emotional entity. This entails exploring the nexus between body, mind and society, which nexus this thesis addresses.

### *'Gay Male Fetish Sex': Both Question and Answer*

In a delightfully perverse and amusing way, a convincing response to the conundrum of identity politics, discourse and the validation of non-normative sexualities emerges neither from normative heteropatriarchy, nor from the diatribes of more mainstream 'gay liberation' discourses. Such a location is, I suggest, revealed in the lives and practices of a group of people whose activities are not primarily political, and who remain largely marginalised by both hetero- and homosexuals, yet at the same time are understandably empowered, thanks to their socio-economic status: the men of the gay male 'leather' community whose sexual 'fetish' interests incorporate material objects<sup>12</sup>.

Their practices are so marginal that most of the broader population aren't even aware of their existence. When attention is paid to them, they are discounted as psychopathological, and derided or pitied, often even by their 'homosexual' compatriots<sup>13</sup>. They themselves in many ways perpetuate heteronormativity and discursive power relations through their practices. Yet in some ways at the same time they challenge social and institutional pressure both to conform to or reject heteronormative consensus morality. Albeit not without difficulty, and although they often reject the assertion, proudly claiming their singular 'gayness'.

Even more than navigating a reprieve for themselves from restrictive heteropatriarchy, they also re-frame alterity as a potentially *good* thing. Not simply because alterity is inherently a positive value, but because their unusual world views and experiences add functional value to their lives and the world around them.

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<sup>12</sup> Even though this thesis deals only with male fetishists, similar statements could be made about lesbian and heterosexual 'fetishists'. As will be discussed in chapter two, the choice of research participants is primarily pragmatic, rather than theoretical, since gay male 'fetishists' have been the easiest resource on which to call for the purposes of this research. However, that 'leathermen' in South Africa are arguably more publicly visible than lesbian or heterosexual 'fetishists' makes the former a group more representative of the metatheoretical argument around enabling public and personal transformation through relations with material objects (see chapter 6). The group's 'maleness' also gives them a particularly multiple experience, being both empowered as (predominantly 'white') men, and yet also disempowered as a highly marginalised and frowned-upon sexual subculture.

<sup>13</sup> Note that I use this term to denote how people identify themselves, not as a label imposed from the outside. See chapter 3 and 4 re psychopathology, and chapter 2 re the marginalisation of sexuality

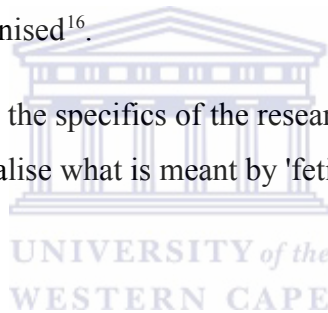


In so doing, they implicitly and often unconsciously challenge the normative and prescriptive separation between people *inter se*, and between people and things. In actively seeking out material sexual objects, they inadvertently and in surprising ways call attention to the mutability and fluidity of both human and material 'identity', and I suggest that their practices hold a key to dismantling essentialist assumptions around the 'thingness' of sexual orientation as a category itself, and therefore around the validation of heteropatriarchy<sup>14</sup>.

Ironically, their practices also reflect an alternative to the necessary primacy of discourse in the construction of reality and of the individual, and of notions of subjective human value, through their interesting materially-based exercise of agency and choice.

Supported by participant narratives, the thesis unpacks and rephrases the metatheories underlying 'gay male fetish sex', which is thereby located as a powerful disruptive and contested site which reframes both essentialist-based heteronormativity and the failings of determinist discursive constructions<sup>15</sup>. In so doing, the thesis locates gay male fetish sex as a site at which more effective political activity can perhaps be organised<sup>16</sup>.

However, in advance of dealing with the specifics of the research question, and discussing the thesis argument, it is necessary to contextualise what is meant by 'fetish'.



## **A Brief Context for 'Gay Male Sexual Fetish' in South Africa**

### ***Terms of Reference & Descriptions: 'Fetish'- Variations on a Term***

In polite (and impolite) conversation, people often have only a woolly sense of what 'fetish' entails. They discuss it in hushed tones with a glint in their eyes, nodding in a worldly fashion or looking embarrassed, as if it is something they should know nothing about, but feel as though they do. Perhaps, for many, it is a reminder of their fantasies, or of the inconsistencies between desires, experience and propriety. They often assume it is something to do with leather, rubber and sex toys, and/or in some undifferentiated way to do with carved idols, bones and feathers.

In scholarly contexts it is similarly Janus-like and multi-faceted.

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<sup>14</sup> See chapter 5 re the constitution of the subject in relation to that of physical objects

<sup>15</sup> See Butler, J. (1993) *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York: Routledge, 1993 pp4

<sup>16</sup> See Butler, J. (1993) *ibid*

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary describes the 'fetish' as:

- Psychology: a thing abnormally stimulating or attracting sexual desire, and
  - a) an inanimate object worshipped by primitive peoples for its supposed inherent magical powers or as being inhabited by a spirit
  - b) a thing evoking irrational devotion or respect<sup>17</sup>

Even at a cursory glance it is clear that the definition focuses on the 'thing', without which, by implication, there can be no 'fetish'. And not just any 'thing': a value-laden standard underlies this definition, imposing normative limits on the extent to which it is appropriate to appreciate sexual desire, worship or devotion. The term reels under the weight of associations with psychopathology, fictions of 'the primitive' in its Western superiority, and dualist assumptions about the power of 'the rational'<sup>18</sup>. Yet a dictionary definition is merely the tip of the proverbial iceberg, and belies profound discursive constructions on both 'fetish' and Western materialist frameworks.

### *'Fetish' as Object*

'Fetish' in one sense means 'charm' or 'sorcery', coming from the Portuguese *feitiço*, meaning 'charm' or 'thing made by art'. It is etymologically related to 'factitious' and was used to describe the sculptures, figurines, trinkets, and religious objects of West Africans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>19</sup> Through various moves and shifts in consciousness, 'fetish' slowly adopted different associations and meanings. In particular it branched out in two directions, describing the commodity, (specifically through Marx<sup>20</sup>); and sexuality, (especially through the

<sup>17</sup> The Concise Oxford English Dictionary (1990) RE Allen (ed) Eighth edition, Clarendon Press, Oxford

<sup>18</sup> See chapter 4 in respect of psychopathologies

<sup>19</sup> Young, H (2005) The Black Body as Souvenir in American Lynching *Theatre Journal* 57, The Johns Hopkins University Press pp639–657

<sup>20</sup> Marxist fetish is largely beyond the scope of the thesis, since it relates to commodification rather than sexuality. (Note the comments in the thesis Conclusion). Yet certain Marxian concepts are worth noting. Marx understood 'capital' as a kind of fetish in its being the material form of a particular kind of social system. This idea linked the conception of the fetish with the capitalist social process. He explained fetish as "The commodity-form...[which] is nothing but the determined social relation between humans themselves which assumes here, for them, the phantasmagoric form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take a flight into the misty realm of religion. Here the products of the human hand appear as endowed with a life of their own, entering into relations both with each other and with humans". (Marx Capital p. 165)

Marx first used the idea of fetish in terms other than the religious, relating mysticism and the meaning of fetish to economy, and proposing commodity fetishism as taking place when something which has use value is taken away from its original setting to enter the market place, where it gains exchange value. Importantly, this move from one state to another results in the human element in the thing's production (i.e. the labour) disappearing while the 'object' appears, substantial and separate, or 'real and final' (see Gemerchak, C.M (2004) *Fetishism, desire and finitude: The artful dodge*. In Gemerchak, C.M. (ed) (2004) *Everyday Extraordinary: Encountering Fetishism with Marx, Freud and Lacan*. Leuven: Leuven University Press pp 29)

Marx's commodity fetish demonstrates the power of commercial goods to seem desirable in and of themselves (see Marx, K (1967) *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (3 vols.) New York), thereby distracting awareness from the conditions of their production. (See Taussig, M (1980) *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*.

nineteenth-century sexologists such as Krafft-Ebing and then Freud<sup>21</sup>).

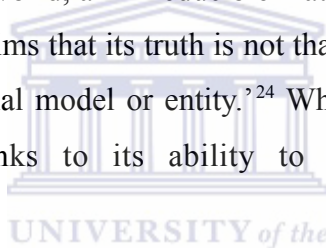
These shifts are complex, multi-faceted and at times contradictory, leaving the fetish

...an idea-thing which brings with it, from the beginning – when it ‘was god,’ so to speak – into the present, the trace residue of its etymology: What is left, active and powerful, is the word itself – enigmatically incomplete. Just the signifier, we could say, bereft of its erased significations gathered and dissipated through the mists of trade, religion, witchcraft, slavery, and what has come to be called science – and this is precisely the formal mechanism of fetishism (as we see it used by Marx and Freud), whereby the signifier depends upon yet erases its signification.<sup>22</sup>

Nonetheless, there is a certain fixity to it. Pietz views fetish as ‘always a meaningful fixation of a singular event; it is above all an “historical” object, the enduring material form and force of an unrepeatable event’<sup>23</sup>.

He claims that 'the fetish' has four essential traits:

- It has a basis in the material world, an “irreducible materiality”, its truth held by its status as ‘material embodiment’. He claims that its truth is not that of the idol, which relates an ‘iconic resemblance to some immaterial model or entity.’<sup>24</sup> Whereas the idol holds no power itself, the 'fetish' is magical thanks to its ability to resemble or reference something else<sup>25</sup>.



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Chapel Hill, pp1–38) The Marxist commodity fetish sees fetish as a ‘sensuous supersensuous thing’, which approximates singularity and autonomy, but at the same time conceals itself in social construction and definition in an almost naturalistic way. (See Pels, D, Hetherington, K & Vandenberghe, F (2002) The Status of the Object: Performances, Mediations, and Techniques. In *Theory, Culture & Society* (2002) Vol. 19(5/6): 1–21, (SAGE, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi) Pels et al argue that this has been analogous to the reversal involved in religious consciousness, which has made ‘the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life’ which entered into relations both with one another and with their human producers.” (Marx, 1977 [1867]: 77) They note that both the personification of things and the reification of persons were conceptually embedded in concepts of material production, “while the reification of cultural and political forms was seen as a secondary result of this primordial alienation.”(Pels et al ibid)

One important connecting point between Marxist and Freudian 'fetish' is related to desire, whereby capitalism revolves around the desire for what is missing in similar ways to that which Freudian and Lacanian fetishism does (see chapter 4).

<sup>21</sup> See Krafft Ebing R. (1895) *Psychopathia Sexualis*. 8th edition. Paris: G. Carre; Freud S. (1905) *Trois essais sur la theorie sexuelle*. Paris: Gallimard; (French, 1987); Freud, S. (1977) *On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*. Trans. And ed. James Strachey. Comp. and ed. Angela Richards. *The Penguin Freud Library* Volume 7. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977.

For a re-evaluation of the emphasis on the ‘homo/hetero binary’ appearing in discussions of sexuality since the late 19th century, in relation to European sexological texts and their classifications of sexual desire between men, see Brickell, C (2006) Sexology, the Homo/Hetero Binary, and the Complexities of Male Sexual History. In *Sexualities*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 423-447

<sup>22</sup> See Alter, J.S. (2006) Yoga and Fetishism: Reflections on Marxist Social Theory. In *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 12, 763-783 pp769; Apter, E (1993) Fetishism and Materialism. In Apter, E & Pietz, W (eds) (1993) *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press pp 225

<sup>23</sup> Apter, E (1993) Fetishism and Materialism. In Apter, E & Pietz, W (eds) (1993) *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press pp 3.

<sup>24</sup> Pietz, W (1985) The Problem of the Fetish I. In *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 9 (1985), 5–17 pp7

<sup>25</sup> Young, H (2005) The Black Body as Souvenir in American Lynching. In *Theatre Journal* 57, The Johns Hopkins

- It connects multiple elements within a single body, with “an ordering power derived from its status as the fixation or inscription of a unique originating event that has brought together previously heterogeneous elements into a novel identity.”<sup>26</sup>
- It has social value, not necessarily broadly accepted or universally comprehended, but holding meaning for those who own or want to own it<sup>27</sup>.
- It must affect the physical body, requiring “the subjection of the human body (as the material locus of action and desire) to the influence of certain significant material objects that, although cut off from the body, function as its controlling organs at certain moments.”<sup>28</sup> In extreme circumstances, the 'fetish' has a physical effect upon the corpus, able to heal the sick or help cure infertility.

### *'Fetish' as Practice*

'Fetishism', *qua* practice, has similarly had a variety of incarnations, ranging from “assumed primitive beliefs, false consciousness, or the magic of consumer goods, to forms of perversion in a subject fixated at an infantile level of behavior”<sup>29</sup>. In this way, 'fetishism' betrays social relations and perspectives on people's orientations towards each other, and on both social and sexual locations and priorities.

### ***'Sexual Fetish Practices' (relations with material objects) vs BDSM (relations between people)***

Consensual 'sexual fetish'<sup>30</sup> is associated with BDSM (bondage, discipline and sado-masochism), but, as Martins and Ceccarelli note, neither is easily defined<sup>31</sup>. These terms can be differentiated

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University Press pp639–657. Young notes that “The fact that the word “fetish” was used to describe the religious objects of the West Africans rather than “idol” points to the ethnocentrism and, perhaps, racism of the Portuguese traders who refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of African spirituality. Their bias/prejudice prompted the creation of a new, separate word. I find it interesting that the black body was always already a fetish- the word was created with blackness in mind.” See Chapter 3 in this regard

<sup>26</sup> Pietz, W (1985) The Problem of the Fetish I. In *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 9 (1985), 5–17 pp7

<sup>27</sup> Pietz, W (1985) *ibid*

<sup>28</sup> Pietz, W (1985) *ibid*

<sup>29</sup> Brisson, U (2005) Fish and Fetish: Mary Kingsley’s Studies of Fetish in West Africa. In *Journal of Narrative Theory* 35.3 (Fall 2005): 326–340

<sup>30</sup> Gay male 'fetishists' have developed specific socially acceptable/desirable 'fetish' practices and the concomitant terms for these practices. It is important to have a basic understanding of these terms of reference in order to better comprehend both the experiences and perceptions of the research participants, and the discursive and political assumptions related to them. See Moser, C (2006) Demystifying Alternative Sexual Behaviors. In *Sexuality, Reproduction and Menopause*, Volume 4, Issue 2, Pp 86-90. Moser helpfully and simply summarises terminology and usages for the edification of both the lay person and medical professionals. He explains the nomenclature of sexual minorities, who often refer to themselves as queer, perv, pervert, kink, kinky, or fetish, and amongst which are counted 'fetishists'

<sup>31</sup> Martins, MC & Ceccarelli, PR, The So-Called “Deviant” Sexualities: Perversion or Right to Difference? <http://www.reviseF65.org/cuba1.html>

through the relative focus on the object of attention<sup>32</sup>. With 'sexual fetish', sexualised attention is focused on an inanimate material object. BDSM, on the other hand, prioritises the human sexual partner as the object of attention. In 'fetish', there is no real question of the presence or absence of consent, whereas in BDSM, there is very often a voluntarily unequal power relation between impliedly consenting and otherwise socially equal human partners.

Certain 'fetishists' enjoy both, while others do not take part in the sexual power play of BDSM, preferring the 'fetish' of object-relations. Yet the experiences are intertwined, and often the term 'fetish' is used interchangeably with 'BDSM' relating to the subculture, rather than the practices<sup>33</sup>.

In this thesis I call on the term 'fetish' primarily to describe the object of interest. For ease of reference I use the term 'fetishist' to describe the person engaging in an interaction with the object, and terms such as 'fetishism' or 'fetish play' to describe the relationship between person and object<sup>34</sup>. I therefore specifically do not deal with what 'fetish' *as* sexual bondage, discipline and sado-masochism (BDSM) power relations between people.

### ***'Sexual Fetish': Personified Bodies, Classifications, Relationships and Phenomena***

'Fetish' is however not simply about value-neutral categorical differentiations between object and practice, or between person and object-choice. These categories in themselves imply a process of personification of classifications, relationships and phenomena. As Ellen argues, the classifications of 'fetish' do not simply reflect the objects, generic functions of these objects, or mental

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<sup>32</sup> Although this is not necessarily a widely-used distinction. See Chapter 4 re how 'fetishists' have reclaimed the term

<sup>33</sup> See Chapter 4 BDSM has a range of associations which are connected, but not identical to 'fetish'. See Moser C (2006) Demystifying Alternative Sexual Behaviors. In *Sexuality, Reproduction and Menopause*, Volume 4, Issue 2, Pages 86-90:

BDSM is an acronym for Bondage and Discipline (B&D), Dominance and Submission (D/S), and Sadism and Masochism (SM or S&M); it describes people (players) who eroticize bondage, a power differential, physical, or psychological pain (sometimes called intensity). BDSM play is called a scene. Leather can be a fetish object and is also synonym for BDSM, especially Gay BDSM. Players who take the active role are called dominant, dom, domme, domina, top, master, mistress, and sadist. Players who take the passive role are called submissive, sub, subbie, bottom, masochist, boy or girl, and slave. (In some SM interactions, it may not be immediately obvious which partner identifies as the top and which as the bottom, although the practitioner may feel strongly about the label.) Switches can take either role.

There is intense debate concerning the distinctions among these terms; for example, someone may say "I am a masochist; I will be submissive if my partner enjoys it, but I am no one's slave." Simplistically, a masochist primarily seeks physical sensations. The submissive primarily enjoys the psychological aspects, but maintains options to control the intensity and duration of the scene. The slave wishes to serve and/or give up as much control as possible. Other sexual minorities use the term bottom to describe the one penetrated or the receiver of the intensity or play, without implying a BDSM relationship. Similarly, a Top is the one who penetrates or applies the intensity. Mixed play implies a BDSM interaction between people who would not usually have sex together (a gay man with a lesbian, for example). BDSM partners engage in negotiation, the process of agreeing on what will constitute the specifics of their scene. They decide upon a safe word (a word or gesture that will stop the scene), and mutually define the limits (activities not to be included in the scene). Violating someone's limits is a serious faux pas.

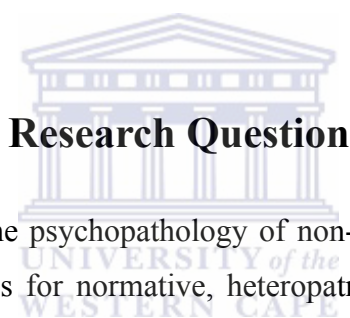
<sup>34</sup> See chapter 4 which details how 'fetishists' have reclaimed the word 'fetish' in positive ways

conditions<sup>35</sup>. Rather, they display three features of categorisation and representation, which proceed from categorical, relationship and phenomenal identification to personification, through reification and iconification:

“concretisation, animation or anthropomorphisation; conflation of signifier with signified; and an ambiguous relationship of control between person and object”<sup>36</sup>

As will emerge from the thesis argument, the resultant personification is particularly problematic in a sexual context, since it supports further heteronormative marginalisation: the 'fetish' is not only identified as an object, it is also often used to marginalise and/or demonise 'fetishists', who often themselves unconsciously perpetuate the discourses of otherness<sup>37</sup>.

To deal with this, I suggest that scholars of 'fetish' should unpack this object-focus by looking not to the 'fetish' object itself, but to the socio-political relationships between object and person, and between people inter se, as mediated by the body doing the relating.



## Research Question

The research question centres on the psychopathology of non-normative sexual proclivities. More particularly, it interrogates the basis for normative, heteropatriarchal approaches which bind and judge people on the basis of their unusual ('fetish') sexual identities/practices.

Central to this question is the ICD-10 International Classification of Diseases (ICD), which is the internationally accepted classification and diagnostic system of the World Health Organization (WHO), and which is of influence in contemporary South African psychology and psychiatry practice<sup>38</sup>. The ICD-10 diagnoses 'fetishism' as a psychopathology, a paraphilia disorder requiring psychiatric intervention.

Much contemporary leftist sexualities theorising appropriately assumes that psychopathologising sexuality is inappropriate<sup>39</sup>. Yet it doesn't often explain the metatheory justifying such an

<sup>35</sup> Ellen, R.F. (1988, 2006) Fetishism: A Cognitive Approach. In *The Categorical Impulse: essays in the anthropology of classifying behaviour*. Oxford & NY: Berghahn Books 166-189 at 166

<sup>36</sup> Ellen, R.F. *ibid*

<sup>37</sup> The thesis focuses on the marginality of fetish practices, rather than the ways in which unusual sexualities are demonised on the basis of moralising or religious opprobrium, which nevertheless feed into such marginalising.

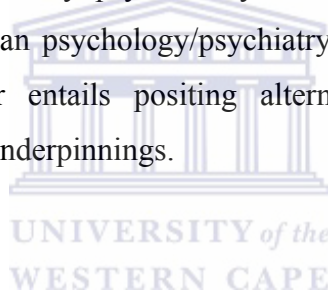
<sup>38</sup> World Health Organization. (2004). *International Classification of Diseases 10* (2nd ed). Geneva: WHO. ICD-10, and American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders 4-TR*. Washington DC: APA.

<sup>39</sup> In particular, see Chapter 4

assumption, beyond stating that all people are equal, and that sexuality is diverse and variable. This is important, but beyond prioritising individualism and looking at its impact on others it doesn't expand on when sexual activity is helpful or when it is dysfunctional. Compare these two assertions:

- 'We think you're weird and what you do is sick and wrong, but we have no say over your life if you aren't hurting anybody else, so we'll leave you alone', and
- 'what you do is interesting and adds value to your life and to the world around you, so we'll leave you alone to enjoy your life experiences, and we may even learn something from them'.

There is a vast difference between them, although they both entail nominal 'acceptance'. In order to differentiate them, I suggest that it is therefore imperative to explore how psychopathologising is both socio-politically divisive and personally destructive. This entails identifying the problems which run through the underlying perceptions, assumptions and constructions of 'sexual fetish' inherited from anthropological and early psychoanalytic thinking. As will be discussed, these influence contemporary South African psychology/psychiatry practice and spill over into popular and political discourse. It further entails positing alternative frameworks based on more theoretically sound metatheoretical underpinnings.



## **Thesis Argument**

The argument is not simply a linear comparison of present circumstances (i.e. what 'fetish' 'is', or what 'fetishists' 'do') to a stable, unproblematic pre-existing body of theory.

Rather, the argument challenges dualist metatheories on the subject which both describe and construct sexualities, and thereby calls on 'fetish' as both constituted and exemplified by competing metatheoretical constructs. It critiques the metatheory underpinning contemporary psychological and psychiatric epistemologies on 'fetish', and advocates more functional epistemologies which avoid 'fetish-object-focused' divisiveness and suggest 'subject-oriented' cohesion. This approach points to the powerful roles of 'gay male fetish sexuality' (which is neither objectively identifiable nor delineable) as a resource subjectively viewed by the 'fetishist' as being available to re-orient the individual towards a sense of personal value. It is further, as I will argue, a resource which potentially has a function for both the 'fetishist' and the world in which he lives, both directly and symbolically. As I will argue, this conception does not prescribe political activity, nor how the

'fetishist' does or does not perpetuate heteronormativity, but is a relatively value-neutral safe space in which individuals can gain a sense of personal meaning in the face of normativities.

This argument is conducted through three broad thesis sections, comprising two chapters each, which address the following:

- Section 1: the research context

Chapter 1: my methodological relationship with the research

Chapter 2: a political epistemological framework for sexualities scholarship

- Section 2: problematic historical object-focused discourses around 'fetish'

Chapter 3: a critique of historical anthropological and Freudian psychological constructs of 'fetishism'

Chapter 4: a critique of contemporary psychopathological assumptions on fetish sexuality

- Section 3: towards a more appropriate subject-oriented approach to 'fetish'

Interjection: contextualising a shift from a Foucaultian genealogical analysis to a forward-looking metatheoretical reconfiguration

Chapter 5: re-configuring essentialist, foundationalist and determinist constructions of the 'subject'

Chapter 6: revising conceptions of subjective agency and productive, transformative roles of 'fetish' sexuality

I argue for a revision of historical 'object-focused' metatheories on which contemporary conceptions of fetish sexuality are based, which metatheories are patently unstable and theoretically inadequate as a platform for understanding the lived experiences of unusual sexual practices. I further argue that they are inappropriate as bases for challenges to heteronormativity and homophobia in contemporary South Africa.

In place of the 'object-focused' paradigms, I advocate a more appropriate 'subject-oriented' approach viewing 'fetish', which framework addresses concerns about both materialism and discourse as metatheories for sexualities scholarship.



## **Beyond the Immediacy of 'Gay Male Fetish Sex'**

I suggest that these revisions could be extrapolated beyond the immediate concerns of sexual 'fetishists'. Calling on this kind of thinking, more functional re-constructions can be made of 'homosexuals' and 'heterosexuals' (and a range of other essentialist, foundationalist and determinist categorical identities) as being complex and valid emotional and physical life forces, rather than as discrete (yet heteronormatively not quite equal) entities. At the same time, it perhaps opens doors to ways forward beyond unhelpful foundationalist, circular and backward-looking arguments on the discursive nature of power. This argument paves the way not only to ameliorating the marginalisation of 'fetishists' in a local context, nor of marginal sexualities more broadly, but to approaches to all sexuality.

Moreover, it links in with global developments in sexualities scholarship which seek to find more functional and stable theoretical bases for a society in which flourishing is encouraged, rather than where difference is merely tolerated. Such a progressive society is not an unrealistic utopian ideal, based on fictive static social relations. Rather, it is potentially a space of flow and interconnection, where sexuality is not to be shunned, vilified or marginalised, but can be recognised as a valuable resource for complex individuals and their socio-cultural environment.

By focusing on bodies constituted through exclusion, and by exploring the potential benefits of non-normative sexual practices, scholarship and activism can aim for political re-alignment beyond human-rights-based constitutional rights which simply serve to entrench 'difference'. Armed with revised notions of human-object relations, socio-political policies can be re-considered, and the choices and practices of government, health professions, and the media can be re-focused towards effective and non-reactionary political action aimed at shifting popular discourses.

I suggest that re-defining relations between people and things, and focusing on psycho-social support systems such as psychiatry and psychology is not about justifying 'gay fetish' to homophobes. Rather, it is about acknowledging and co-creating a self-validating space in which non-normative experiences can be celebrated as being actively and productively beneficial, even though (not despite) that subjects often substantially repeat damaging heteronormative scripts. Such an approach does not require majority support for the acknowledgement of 'alterity', but demands a recognition of the inherent value of living beyond the bounds of 'normality' while still recognising the complexity of the subject and the complexity and confusion involved in being human.

# CHAPTER 1

## LOCATING AND CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH: ADVENTURES IN REFLEXIVITY

“some colleagues I respect consider it risky to link a personal journey to an intellectual interest, because doing so reveals a personal ‘bias’. If by ‘bias’ we mean a ‘mental leaning or inclination’- which is one definition *Webster’s New World Dictionary* suggests- then yes, it does. The self is an instrument of inquiry. In the end we have no other. To understand the childhood origins of an intellectual passion is to understand the possibilities and limitations of that instrument, the better to see what other instruments one needs to know the world. But such subjectivity- what, it turns out, *drives* us- does more than just that. It shapes what we expect and wish, and so it shapes how the world surprises us. So, our subjectivity, with the wealth of comparisons it implants in us, transforms us into tourists of ourselves, visitors of the odd sights of everyday life. It removes the dull sense that anything at all is obvious.”<sup>40</sup>

It is somewhat unusual to situate methodologies as the first substantive chapter in a thesis. Yet in this instance it is the most appropriate place, since to deal with methodological issues first is to open the door to the thesis focus: the problems of simplistic classification and the fictions of the stability of metatheory. The thesis is primarily a metatheoretical and epistemological critique, not an exploration of participant experiences compared to a purportedly stable body of theory. It therefore seems inappropriate to separate the document into neatly compartmentalised units comprising an analysis of existing literature, followed by a description of methodologies, a study of participant contributions and a discussion of the findings<sup>41</sup>. Instead, it felt more appropriate to let the flow of the argument progress based on a firm grasp of how the problems posed both influence and are influenced by methodological concerns.

Like all research, my journey has not been linear, but rather a round-about journey of exploration of theory and practices which coil back onto themselves and feed into both the argument and the methodologies. The result: a thesis document which reflects an enticingly complex interplay between paradigms, perspectives and experiences, through both its argument and the methodologies employed to arrive there<sup>42</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> Hochschild, A.R. (2003) *The commercialization of intimate life- notes from home and work*. University of California Press: Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, p6

<sup>41</sup> See Russell, G.M. & Kelly, N.H. (2002). Research as Interacting Dialogic Processes: Implications for Reflexivity. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 3(3), Art. 18, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs020318>.

<sup>42</sup> See Willig, C (2001) *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology: Adventures in theory and*

## 1.1 Unusual Beginnings: Developing a Research Question

Sexually and emotionally I am predominantly attracted to men, and I have first-hand experience of the leering face of heteronormative and homophobic derision and opprobrium<sup>43</sup>. I was therefore determined to conduct doctoral research aimed at addressing the prejudices experienced by marginal sexualities. Yet the preliminary information-gathering and thinking for the research goes further back and is more personal than a desire to explore politics and epistemologies<sup>44</sup>.

In some ways the genesis of the research lies as far back as puberty, more than twenty-five years ago. During my teen years I was vaguely aware of my (homo)sexual desires, which I spent many years hiding so as to appear 'normal'. I was even less aware of how these desires involved physical objects, and I overtly acknowledged my 'fetishes' only in my mid twenties, when I lived in London and would join similarly-minded men in the 'leather scene'<sup>45</sup>. Yet it was not the pain and domination of BDSM which interested me<sup>46</sup>. To the contrary, violence vaporised any sexual rush, discombobulated me and unleashed a deep, visceral anger. Rather, I enjoyed the sexualised environment itself, surrounded by the promise of the mighty titans parading around me, and the fantastical prepossession of their exposed and adorned bodies. I came to put special stock in the material objects and accoutrements associated with 'fetish' sexuality, more than with the men wielding or wearing them.

When I returned to South Africa, I became involved in the local 'scene'. But my interest had waned. It no longer promised the prospect of a foray into the 'unknown', nor fulfilled my desires for transgression. Over the next decade I became a bystander, content to remain on the sidelines and

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*method*. Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press. She notes that researching is a kind of adventure, rather than just as the application of recipes. Research is no longer a mechanistic process, but is now a creative way to find things out.

<sup>43</sup> I am loathe to identify myself as 'gay', which is a rather restrictive category, since this does not describe me in any useful way. In this regard, see Chapter 2 re unpacking essentialist categories.

By heteronormativity I mean the ways in which the social discourses presume heterosexuality as a norm to which all people are meant to conform, failing which they must justify themselves.

See Marecek, J., Fine, M. & Kidder, L. (1997) Working between worlds: methods and social psychology. In *Journal of Social Issues*, 53, 631-644 at 634. They note that good research questions come from how we see the world and what interests us.

<sup>44</sup> See Russell, G.M. & Kelly, N.H. (2002). Research as Interacting Dialogic Processes: Implications for Reflexivity. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 3(3), Art. 18, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs020318>. They note that once the research question is decided on, we need to link it to the 'real' world and other people, and that in so doing our gathering of text, observations, interviews etc require a focus on dialogic interactions with the question.

<sup>45</sup> Chaps are crotchless black leather trousers worn over jeans, inspired by the protective gear worn by cowboys to protect themselves from saddle sores

<sup>46</sup> BDSM: Bondage, discipline and sado-masochism. See Introduction

watch. Eventually I left the scene almost completely, and lost touch with most 'fetishists', save for a few stalwart friends who remained companions because of our similarly iconoclastic world views. Yet I wanted to know more about how this 'fetish' thing worked, the better to explain a sexual interest in material objects (my own as much as anything else). So I turned to academia.

### ***1.1.1 The Research Question Unfolds***

My research question initially emerged vaguely as revolving around the transgressive role of 'fetish sexuality'<sup>47</sup>. At first I wanted to explore how 'fetish' practices could be re-read through contemporary psychology as a 'healing' modality<sup>48</sup>. But this initial research motivation soon proved to conflict with the perspective that one can't 'know' anything, despite many pervasive positivist paradigms which prescribe 'appropriate' actions and lives, based on fictions of what is 'normal', 'right', 'logical' or 'healthy'<sup>49</sup>. The more I explored the anthropology and psychology of 'fetish', the more I realised that they framed it inappropriately as something 'understandable' in comparison to fictive, arbitrary and discriminatory psychological norms<sup>50</sup>. These diatribes, which construct fetish in terms of a 'bad, mad or sad' paradigm<sup>51</sup>, were at odds with my own experiences of 'fetish', and those of my erstwhile friends. And at odds with my queer political beliefs<sup>52</sup>. I realised that my unfolding research goals did not match my research objectives, nor what I thought I could discover on the research journey within those epistemological parameters<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> See Russell, G.M. & Kelly, N.H. (2002). Research as Interacting Dialogic Processes: Implications for Reflexivity. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 3(3), Art. 18, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs020318>. They argue that the first step in the research process is to formulate a research question. They see this as a dialogue since it is based on an understanding of the world as much as with academic theory.

<sup>48</sup> See Cheek, J (1999) Influencing practice or simply esoteric? Researching health care using postmodern approaches. In *Qualitative Health Research*, 9(3), 383-392.

<sup>49</sup> Willig, C (2001) *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method*. Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press

See Kirk, J. and Miller, M. (1986) *Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research*. London: Sage. They say that positivism assumes that there is only one correct perspective of things available through inspection, and this perspective is independent of the processes involved in inspection. Yet comprehension of any given circumstances are necessarily partial and biased, and research undertaken is necessarily infused by the perspectives of the researcher.

See Chalmers, A.F. (1999) *What is this Thing Called Science?*, 3rd ed. Buckingham: Open University Press on the constitution, limitations of scientific knowledge and on empiricism. Note that contemporary empiricists argue that acquiring knowledge depends on collecting and analysing data. See below re the interconnectedness of the research process and the metatheoretical argument of the thesis.

<sup>50</sup> See Dowsett, G. (2007) The Health of Sexual Minorities: Public Health Perspectives on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Populations. In Meyer, I.H. & Northridge, M.E. (2007) *Researching Gay Men's Health: The Promise of Qualitative Methodology*. Springer. Pp419-441 re the move in public health research from the use of cross-sectional population surveys as dominant and default research methodology, towards qualitative methodology.

<sup>51</sup> See the arguments below on psychopathologising and heteronormative assumptions

<sup>52</sup> See chapter 2

<sup>53</sup> See Kvale, S. (1995) The social construction of validity. In *Qualitative Inquiry*, 1(1): 19-40

At the same time I became increasingly frustrated with expectations to be some kind of 'independent researcher'. Partly because I already knew these people and some of the complexities of the 'scene', and could not view them as a simplistically-defined 'group' of research subjects, like so many protozoa in a petrie dish. Also in part because my academic interest in 'fetish' derived not from a voyeuristic desire to explain away the lives of 'others', but to explore my own emotional relationship to the material world as (nominally, or at least at one point in my life) one of them. As a result, the research developed organically, unaided and unforced, in its own time, and in tune with my emotional and intellectual readiness to face the questions that arose.

As I progressed, I realised that it was rather more fruitful to explore the scholarly presuppositions on which 'fetish' epistemologies are based. So, rather than focusing particularly on the 'fetishists' themselves or their practices, I determined to explore political relationships between the epistemologies of 'fetish' and the people these discourses describe as 'fetishists'. I decided to ask how discriminatory metatheory can be revised to enable more appropriate scholarship and policies on 'fetish'. This, in turn, required me to clarify my position on disciplines, epistemologies and methodologies, since I could clearly not rely on pre-existing clarity in any of these areas.



## 1.2 Tying Down Disciplines, Epistemologies and Methodologies

It has been challenging to find appropriate methodologies for philosophical and political research work drawing on various different disciplines and theoretical strains, and focusing primarily on unpacking and re-phrasing unstable metatheoretical underpinnings. It seemed important to clearly specify disciplinary, epistemological and methodological frameworks, yet during the initial research process it soon became clear that my organic research route and niche subject-area was antithetical to strict disciplinarity and 'scientific' methodologies and methods<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> Note the difference between 'method' and 'methodology'. Whereas 'methodology' posits a general approach to research topics, 'method' is about specific research techniques. Methodology is more directly informed by epistemological positions than method. In the present instance, social constructionist methodology is incompatible with methods which measure variables, since social constructionism problematises such constructs as 'psychological variables', arguing against their validity. In this regard, the measurement of psychological variable is another way of constructing them.  
See Willig, C (2001) *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method*. Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press

### 1.2.1 Scholarly Reflexivity

It also became clear that the research hinged on one clear focus serving as the glue holding it all together: reflexivity *qua* researcher, which clearly applied to two primary areas:

- the need to apply the same kind of thinking to both the epistemological stance underpinning the research methodology *and* the unfolding substantive thesis argument (i.e. a 'methodological recursiveness'<sup>55</sup>); and
- the need to remain acutely aware of the relationship between me and the research participants both professionally as scholar and personally.

I had to be explicit about the operation of power in the process of researching and representing people, in order to remain honest about my power as researcher<sup>56</sup>. I had to acknowledge the multiple levels on which this power manifests: via hegemonic cultural viewpoints implicit in the language available, via subject positions, and via specific individual relationships with participants and the area of research<sup>57</sup>. This meant that I was under pressure to retain a self-critical introspection while undertaking both literature analyses and fieldwork, and that I had to review the research question as I went along<sup>58</sup>. Eventually I lodged the research in appropriate yet fluid and multiple disciplinary spaces, both theoretically/epistemologically and methodologically.

#### 1.2.1a) Disciplinary Reflexivity and Flexibility: Working in the Interstices

Although commencing my exploration in psychology, I soon realised that psychoanalytic theory did not successfully lend a rounded and focused perspective on 'fetish' applicable to local conditions. Rather, it perpetuated grand explanatory frameworks which "...have been only partially successful in explaining the intricate range of meanings carried by the data they use."<sup>59</sup> Not only do these assume a common experience and 'reality' for all people over the centuries, but they buy into the "forces of globalization [which] seem to have won the global battle

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<sup>55</sup> See below

<sup>56</sup> Alldred, P (1998) *Ethnography and Discourse Analysis: Dilemmas in Representing the Voices of Children*. In Ribbens, J & Edwards, R.(eds)(1998) *Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research: Public Knowledge and Private Lives*. London: Sage.

<sup>57</sup> Alldred, P (1998) *ibid*

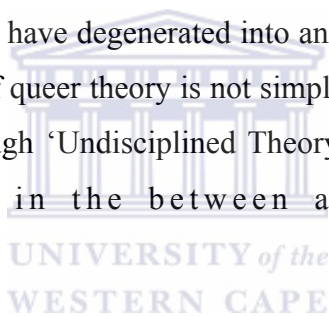
<sup>58</sup> See England, K.V.L. (1994) *Getting Personal: Reflexivity, Positionality, and Feminist Research*. In *The Professional Geographer* 46 (1), 80-91. See also Barry, C.A., Britten, N., Barber, N., Bradley, C. & Stevenson, F. (1999) *Using reflexivity to optimize teamwork in qualitative research*. In *Qualitative Health Research*, 9(1), 26-44. For strategies to call on reflexivity, see Ahern, K. (1999) *Ten tips for reflexive bracketing*. In *Health Research*, 9(3), 407-411

<sup>59</sup> Bernault, F (2006) *Body, Power and Sacrifice in Equatorial Africa*. In *University of Wisconsin-Madison Journal of African History*, 47, Cambridge University Press pp. 207–39.

without being informed by the thick layers of the local histories they – or so scholars argue – cross, combine and connect.”<sup>60</sup>

In taking account of this, my research led away from exploring 'the mind' as a separate entity, to an awareness of the body/embodiment, which has historically resided in sociology and anthropology, but where there is no clear ‘last word’ on how best to approach knowledge production<sup>61</sup>. Yet simply relocating the focus from psychology to sociology seemed inappropriate, given the pull of queer theory and practice within a social constructionist framework<sup>62</sup>. In considering discipline-specific critiques of queer locations, in particular from sociology, and queer critiques of discipline-specific locations, I realised that no single discipline could provide all the answers<sup>63</sup>. Rather, I found the appropriate place for the research in an interstitial space between various discourses, traditions and disciplines, both covering and falling between psychology, sociology, anthropology, and political studies, all under the umbrella of sexuality studies<sup>64</sup>.

In considering what might otherwise have degenerated into an unrelated melange of discourses and disciplines, I realised that the core of queer theory is not simply a starting point, but the glue which holds the argument together<sup>65</sup>, through ‘Undisciplined Theory’, which is a reflexive location that “understands its position in the between as an occasion to theorise ambivalence”<sup>66</sup>.



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<sup>60</sup> Bernault, F (2006) *ibid*

<sup>61</sup> Some useful insight on methodological issues in this regard is addressed by certain anthropological methodologies, especially an anthropology of the body, as developed through the work of Mary Douglas, Marcel Mauss and Robert Hertz. See Neumann, M (1996) *Collecting Ourselves at the End of the Century*. In Ellis, C & Bochner, AP (eds) (1996) *Composing Ethnography- Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing*. Altamira Press, Walnut Creek, London, New Delhi

<sup>62</sup> See chapter 2 in this regard.

See Willig, C (2001) *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method*. Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press

See also Burr, V. (1995) *An Introduction to Social Constructionism*. London: Routledge.

<sup>63</sup> See Berg, M (2009) The “cyberqueer” option: a sociological take on queer qualitative methods. Proc. feminist research methods - an international conference (femmet'09), Stockholm, Sweden, Febr. 4-6, 2009, Halmstad University/School of Social and Health Sciences (HOS) Berg argues that there are questions pertaining to tensions between sociological and queer modes of inquiry. See Seidman, S (1995) *Deconstructing Queer Theory or the Under-Theorization of the Social and the Ethical*. In Nicholson, L & Seidman, S (eds.) (1995) *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 116-41.

<sup>64</sup> Pryse, M (2000) *Trans/feminist methodology: Bridges to interdisciplinary thinking*. In *NWSA Journal*. Bloomington: Summer 2000. Vol. 12, Iss. 2; pg. 105. Pryse argues that strict disciplinarity, with its depth of detail, risks overspecialisation and insularity, while interdisciplinarity offers scope but risks superficiality and rootlessness. She argues that a hybrid methodology would create a balance between free-standing interdisciplinarity and Women's Studies (and I would argue Queer Studies) reliance on disciplinary methodologies. She suggests a 'rooting' and 'shifting' model of cross-disciplinary dialogue, both politically and academically, as a means of dealing with methodological socialisations and prejudices

<sup>65</sup> See chapter 2

<sup>66</sup> Genosko, G (1998) *Undisciplined Theory*. Sage: London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi

As Genosko notes, 'ambivalence' is a creative response to 'being in the between', and is not a resolution, but a way of occupying distress and making it live-able<sup>67</sup>:

“The task of theory in the between is to think through the problematic of ambivalence in relation to discipline and the challenge of becoming undisciplined, as well as the consequences of moving towards interdisciplinary pursuits, theoretical and otherwise, perhaps even becoming extravagant”<sup>68</sup>

Through the research process I found myself organically adopting the role of such an 'undisciplined theorist', of necessity being uninhibited and critical of the disciplinary bases on which I was calling, but at the same time not dismissing nor attempting to destroy them<sup>69</sup>. I found myself most comfortable focusing on subtleties, and open to unexpected eventualities<sup>70</sup>. In so doing, I was not trying to wage war, but happily to sow instability, discomfort, hope and mistrust<sup>71</sup>.

This multi/inter/undisciplined approach matches my social constructionist world-view, which acknowledges that human experience is historically, culturally and linguistically mediated. It has thereby enabled me better to argue against essentialist assumptions on fetish, which do not adequately reflect the complexity of human experience<sup>72</sup>. It has further enabled me to argue in favour of more appropriate approaches to both 'fetish' and human (sexual) experience more broadly<sup>73</sup>. This approach is in concert with methodologies appropriate to both 'doing' the metatheoretical research and approaching the participants' contributions.

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<sup>67</sup> Genosko, G (1998) *ibid*

Discipline-specific theory is established as road-markings for mental activity, and “hangs in the axes of disciplinary differentiation which structure it, signifying, within a given discipline, a recognizable concept, practice, text, name or group, and in the between, it relies upon the disciplines that surround it and other few-and-far-betweens.” (*ibid* pp2)

Yet theory is inherently unstable, which instability is celebrated within each discipline. There is no absolute truth in any discipline. The academy thrives on disagreement and differing viewpoints, and in recent years the concept of interdisciplinarity has gained ground, having become

“...subject to a widespread institutional orthodoxization that transforms the between into a discipline in its own right., with its own codes, specialists, and graduates, who may have little or no interest in theory... In such cases, theory becomes relatively stable. In other cases, theory, with its new modifiers, becomes a specialisation admitted- on the basis of friendly gestures that may not entail a full welcome- into traditional disciplinary practices and bureaucracies.” (*ibid*)

<sup>68</sup> Genosko, G (1998) *ibid*

<sup>69</sup> Acknowledgements to Genosko, G (1998) *ibid*, pp10, recalling Roland Barthes.

<sup>70</sup> Acknowledgements to Genosko, G (1998) *ibid*

<sup>71</sup> Acknowledgements to Genosko, G (1998) *ibid*. To be honest, though, it is a kind of war, notwithstanding my pacifist position. However, rather than being combative, it is more like a peaceful sit-in demonstration.

<sup>72</sup> See chapters 3 and 4 re the object-focused approaches historically located in anthropology and psychoanalysis

<sup>73</sup> See chapters 5 and 6 re more appropriate subject-oriented influences inspired by phenomenology



### 1.2.1b) Epistemological Reflexivity and Recursiveness: 'The Research is the Research'

The complexity of managing a disciplinary instability encouraged me to be especially aware of epistemological bases for both the metatheoretical argument *and* the participant contributions. At some point I realised that the work was 'epistemologically recursive'. By this I mean that the epistemologies for the methodological approach to the work were the same as those for the substance of the metatheoretical thesis argument. In other words, 'the research is the research': the subject of the research is actually the object of the research, and vice versa, where subject and object are indivisible and the same thing, and both occupy the subject position<sup>74</sup>.

In a sense, this is a kind of Buddhist 'it is what it is' proposition, which applies to both the relationship between the research methodology and thesis argument, as well as between the researcher and the researched:

- firstly, the thesis argues for a revised, inclusive, incorporative approach to viewing sexualities, to replace the old, 'scientific', divisive pathologising metatheory which pervades scholarship. The thesis is therefore a kind of exhortation to shift epistemologies in the psychology and scholarship of sexualities. By implication it is therefore a road-map for shifts in methodological approaches too; and
- secondly, I, as the researcher, and the participants, as 'objects' of research, are in some ways the same: people interacting with material things by way of embodied experience, thereby deriving emotional meaning from the world<sup>75</sup>. Relational connectedness, (as opposed to positivist hierarchical superiority) in the research process therefore implies that researcher and participant are intimately connected, and that the relationship between the two is not that of subject-object, but of subject-subject<sup>76</sup>.

Put another way, this thesis argues that discourses and (embodied) practices at the same time both come from and perpetuate the substance of personal practices and the narratives which describe them. This non-linear thinking mirrors the methodological intersections between Ethnography and Discourse Analysis on which I call, in a hybrid position which effects the discourse of

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<sup>74</sup> Again, though, not in any essentialist way

<sup>75</sup> As I will discuss later, by 'object' I don't mean some kind of entity under a microscope, but rather the people around whose lives the research revolves. I also do not mean that people and objects are essentialistically separate entities, but that people and objects are interconnected. See chapter 5

<sup>76</sup> See Bradley, L. (1995) Psychotherapeutic discourse analysis. In *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 49(3), 371-382

voice<sup>77</sup>. In this way, participants are not given authenticity outside of a dominant culture, but find their voice within the means and meanings available to them, whilst at the same time resisting and transgressing dominant meanings attributed to them<sup>78</sup>. This entails unpacking the ideas around the constitution of the psychical subject and re-visioning notions of voice and agency<sup>79</sup>.

The thesis argument reflects the methodological approach, since both are based on complementary ontologies. In this way, the research methodology and substantive argument of the thesis are attached to each other in a moëbius strip of confluence: each are part of a continuous feedback loop, linking into and substantiating each other. As such, the thesis becomes part of the critical theory school which, as Denzin frames it, calls on a merging of ethnographic and textual approaches, exploring how cultural interpretation is acted upon and given meaning in concrete circumstances<sup>80</sup>.

It was therefore imperative that I engage with the unfolding research in ways which supported the theory-orientation of the research, rather than reflecting a grounded problem-orientation as would be appropriate in grounded theory<sup>81</sup>. It also needed to reflect the resulting substantive ontological argument about the interconnectedness and 'oneness' of things, as opposed to the dualist thinking which so often predominates<sup>82</sup>.

### 1.2.1c) Methodological Appropriateness: Qualitative Research

This kind of recursive thinking matched my desire to explore how people make sense of their environment and experiences, and therefore the quality and texture of such experience. It therefore supported a focus on working with 'how and why' questions, which qualitative work engenders<sup>83</sup>.

<sup>77</sup> Alldred, P (1998) Ethnography and Discourse Analysis: Dilemmas in Representing the Voices of Children. In Ribbens, J & Edwards, R.(eds)(1998) *Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research: Public Knowledge and Private Lives*. London: Sage.

<sup>78</sup> Alldred, P (1998) *ibid*

<sup>79</sup> See chapter 5 and 6

<sup>80</sup> Denzin, N. (1994) The Art and Politics of Interpretation. In Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, pp. 500–15. London: Sage, pp509

<sup>81</sup> In this regard, it was important for me to call on discourse analysis as theoretical framework for both the metatheoretical discourses (such as the psychological ICD and DSM classifications of fetish) as well as the participant perceptions. Given the epistemological framework for the thesis, and the tenor of the argument as social constructionist, from the beginning it was entirely inappropriate to call on empiricist approaches such as grounded theory. Yet note the Interjection on under what circumstances discursive approaches cease to be useful

<sup>82</sup> See Harding, G. & Gantley, M (1998) Qualitative Methods: Beyond the Cookbook. In *Family Practice*, 1998, 15: 76-79. The authors draw a distinction between problem-oriented and theory-oriented research, of which this is the latter.

<sup>83</sup> I do not assume a single idea of qualitative methodology. See Kopala, M.A. & Suzuki, L (eds) (1999) *Using Qualitative Methods in Psychology*. Sage Publications. Thousand Oaks. London. New Delhi. Rather, I

The 'how many' questions of quantitative work, which is primarily based on postulating something and then proving or disproving it, were clearly inappropriate<sup>84</sup>. Incorporating quantitative approaches into the qualitative was just as inappropriate, given the main 'anti-positivist' thrust of the unfolding research<sup>85</sup>.

Qualitative research appealed to me on a range of visceral levels too, based on needing to acknowledge my role in the research process. I knew that claiming to be a 'separate' researcher, whether ontologically, epistemologically or methodologically, would be disingenuous and counterproductive, given my personal stake in the philosophical and political direction of the work, and given my personal involvement in the research process<sup>86</sup>.

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recognise that there are 'qualitative methodologies'. My concerns about quantitative research have bound me to other researchers who prefer 'qualitative methodology' in the singular. See Willig, C (2001) *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method*. Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press.

See Jensen, C., Lauritsen, P (2005) Qualitative research as partial connection: bypassing the power-knowledge nexus. In *Qualitative Research*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 59-77 (2005). Appropriate to this research, they argue that qualitative research and methods are often conceived as pertaining to a problematic (the power-knowledge nexus). They suggest that the power-knowledge dichotomy, specifically as located in postmodernist thinking, is theoretically and empirically problematic. They explore theoretical and practical consequences of suspending this power-knowledge nexus, and suggest a need for looking anew at qualitative research, which they begin by calling on contemporary feminist theory and science and technology studies.

On the growth in qualitative research, see Bryman, A. & Burgess R. (1994) *Analyzing Qualitative Data*. London: Routledge.; Denzin, N. (1994) The Art and Politics of Interpretation. In Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds)

*Handbook of Qualitative Research*, pp. 500-15. London: Sage; Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. (1999)

*Designing Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed. London: Sage; Morse, J. (1994) *Critical Issues in Qualitative Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

<sup>84</sup> See Willig, C (2001) *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method*. Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press. Qualitative research can produce many results, including descriptions or explanations, voicing perspectives of the marginalized, and interpreting people's perceptions. It can link micro-processes, macro-structures, and can reflect a subjective 'feel' of an experience or condition. It can also identify recurring patterns of experience within groups. The kind of knowledge a methodology produces depends on its epistemological position, which in turn depends on the ontology relied upon.

See the early conversation around the issue in Bryman, A (1984) The Debate about Quantitative and Qualitative Research: A Question of Method or Epistemology? In *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 35, No. 1. (Mar., 1984), pp. 75-92. Bryman discussed the main thrusts of the debate on quantitative vs qualitative methodology speaking of the philosophical issues underlying it. He distinguishes between epistemological and technical issues, highlighting three areas that show a tendency towards oscillation between epistemological and technical elements. He concludes that a neat correspondence between them can probably not be attained.

See supra re the difference between epistemology and methodology/method

See Jordan, S (2003) Who Stole my Methodology? Co-opting PAR. In *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, Vol. 1, No. 2, July 2003. Jordan argues that qualitative approaches are both technically and ideologically appropriate. Technically, they render a more rounded and holistic angle, with more fullness, and work better in small-scale, local research, where communities can participate and are less likely to be subject to outside 'expert' colonisation.

<sup>85</sup> See Hanson, B (2008) Wither Qualitative/Quantitative?: Grounds for Methodological Convergence. In *Quality and Quantity*, Volume 42, Number 1 / February, 2008, Springer Netherlands, Pages 97-111

Note that Hanson speaks of the qualitative/quantitative issue in sociological scholarship, and argues that the impetus for the issue is primarily political rather than intellectual, thanks to the exigencies of sociological practice: diverse intellectual heritages, that quantitative sociologists dominate in teaching methods and writing methods text books, that computer technology has recently proliferated, and that theory and method are separated. She argues that developing sociological methods will entail transcending the quantitative/qualitative issue and considering issues such as science, validity, causality and the multiverse.

<sup>86</sup> See Willig, C (2001) *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and*

### 1.2.2 Quality Standards: Connecting 'Un-discipline', Epistemologies and Methodologies through Reflexivity

The demands of rigorous qualitative work demanded that I carefully reflect on my assumptions at all stages of the research<sup>87</sup>. This would ensure the reliability of answers to the 'how' and 'why' questions, which entailed focusing on a different set of standards to those applicable to statistical methods aimed to neatly prescribe the 'right' or 'wrong' answers.

In turn, I had to question what counts as 'quality' in qualitative research. This led to interrogating how the research question has defined and delimited what can be 'found', how research design and analysis methods have 'constructed' the data and findings, how it could have been approached differently, and whether this would have resulted in different conclusions<sup>88</sup>.

Given the fluid nature of qualitative research, and given my starting-point in psychology, I focused on my research aim, which was to enable a more solid epistemological basis from which to better understand and reflect people's daily experiences and activities<sup>89</sup>. Throughout the process it therefore remained important to pay careful attention to certain useful qualitative research guidelines<sup>90</sup>:

1. Owing one's perspective;
2. Situating the sample and providing information such as gender, age and social status, while not assuming such information to define the participants in any essentialist way;

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*method*. Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press. Qualitative methodologies acknowledge the researcher as part of the research process, as opposed to an independent onlooker. The extent to which the researcher is seen as the author, rather than the witness, of the research differs between methodologies, some of which see the researcher as central since he/she constructs the findings. Others see the researcher as using their skills to unpack the evidence. See Ellis, C., Bochner, A., Denzin, N., Lincoln, Y., Morse, J., Pelias, R., Richardson, L (2008) Talking and Thinking About Qualitative Research. In *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 254-284 (2008). The piece comes from an edited transcript of a session titled "Talking and Thinking About Qualitative Research," presented at the 2006 International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign on 4-6 May 2006. It featured scholars informally speaking about their personal history with qualitative methods, what attracted them to qualitative work or changed their viewpoints, ethical crises, etc.

<sup>87</sup> Willig, C (2001) *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method*. Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press. Personal reflexivity is about reflecting on how the researcher's own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider life aims and social identities arrange the research. It also entails considering how the research may affect and changed the researcher as a person and as a scholar. Some qualitative researchers focus on both personal and epistemological reflexivity for both the research process and the research report. Others recognise the necessity for reflexivity but do not provide in-depth consideration of it in the research report.

<sup>88</sup> Willig, C (2001) *ibid*

<sup>89</sup> Elliott, R., Fischer, C.T. & Rennie, D.L.(1999) Evolving guidelines for publication of qualitative research studies in psychology and related fields. In *British Journal of Clinical Psychology* (1999), 38, 215-229

<sup>90</sup> Elliott, R., Fischer, C.T. & Rennie, D.L.(1999) *ibid*

3. Grounding in examples: using data to illustrate analytic procedures and the resultant understanding;
4. Providing credibility checks: checking the themes, categories or accounts derived from analyses with participants, using an extra 'auditor' or multiple qualitative analysts, and verifying the research;
5. Coherence: representing the research in way which is integrated and coherent, while maintaining nuances to the data
6. Accomplishing general vs. specific research tasks: relying on a range of instances on which to base a general understanding of phenomena, and relying on systematic and comprehensive study and description to reflect specific understanding
7. Resonating with readers: constructing a document which will resonate with readers, while not adversely affecting the accuracy of the subject<sup>91</sup>.

### ***1.2.3 Discourse and Narrative Analysis: Linking Metatheory and Participant Perception***

Focusing on quality led to my basing the research in Foucaultian discourse analysis<sup>92</sup>, which has taken on a range of different guises<sup>93</sup>, thanks to its historically marginal position<sup>94</sup>. It is currently being called on increasingly in qualitative research, particularly in critical psychology in South Africa and elsewhere<sup>95</sup>, and I found it especially useful in three

<sup>91</sup> Elliott, R., Fischer, C.T. & Rennie, D.L. (1999) Evolving guidelines for publication of qualitative research studies in psychology and related fields. In *British Journal of Clinical Psychology* (1999), 38, 215-229

<sup>92</sup> See Hook, D (2001) Discourse, Knowledge, Materiality, History/ Foucault and Discourse Analysis. In *Theory & Psychology*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 521-547 (2001). Hook notes that there is really no strictly Foucauldian method of analysing discourse. He argues that a close reading of Foucault's 'The Order of Discourse' enables a correction of incorrect applications of Foucault's work, and enables issues of knowledge, materiality and history to be addressed. In developing a better comprehension of Foucaultian discursive analytic method, Hook explores a four-step discursive critique method.

<sup>93</sup> See Potter, J., Wetherell, M., Gill, R. & Edwards, D (1990) Discourse: noun, verb or social practice? In *Philosophical Psychology*, vol 3, no2, 1990, pp205-217. The authors comment on different conceptions of the idea of 'discourse' and overview the basic elements of a coherent discourse analytic program in psychology. See also Potter, J. (1996) Discourse Analysis and Constructionist Approaches: Theoretical Background. In Richardson, J.T.E. (Ed.) (1996). *Handbook of qualitative research methods for psychology and the social sciences*. Leicester: BPS Books. Potter resolves that discourse analysis focuses on talk and texts as social practices and on the resources called on to enable those practices. Foci of discourse analysis are often concerns of stake and accountability, and reject historical cognitive explanations of psychology.

<sup>94</sup> See Cheek, J (2004) At the Margins? Discourse Analysis and Qualitative Research. In *Qualitative Health Research*, Vol. 14, No. 8, 1140-1150 (2004). Cheek questions the location of discourse analysis at the margins of qualitative research, and if so, if that matters and how it might shift the margins themselves

<sup>95</sup> See Macleod, C (2002) Deconstructive discourse analysis: Extending the methodological conversation. In *South African Journal of Psychology*, 32, 17-25. She argues that it should not be viewed as bounded and uncontested, since it is intertwined with theoretical issues. Rather, it is dynamic and constantly being revised. She speaks of ways that CDA can be better worked with by calling on Derrida and Foucault  
In regard South African critical psychology, the work of Ian Parker, Erica Burman, Margaret Wetherell and Jonathan

arenas<sup>96</sup>, which link together through the literature analysis<sup>97</sup>:

- the professional discourses of psychiatry and psychology<sup>98</sup>,
- popular heteronormative discourses of South African culture, often rendered in the media<sup>99</sup>, and
- participant narratives.

### 1.2.3a) Coming to Conclusions about Discourse and Social Processes/Structures

Calling on discourse/narrative analysis in these three arenas necessitated clarifying how much of the analysis is restricted to the conclusions about the discourse itself, and how much is aimed at drawing conclusions about social processes or structures<sup>100</sup>. The metatheoretical argument, which forms the core of the thesis, calls on the former, and is substantiated by the experiences and perceptions of the participants through the latter.

Discourse analysis enables me to unpack the metatheoretical inconsistencies and heteronormative political sub-texts to dominant discourses on 'fetish'<sup>101</sup>, while at the same time to explore a more

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Potter stand out.

See Painter, D & Terre Blanche, M (2004) *Critical psychology in South Africa : looking back and looking ahead*. In *South African Journal of Psychology*, Volume 34, Issue 4, p.520-543, looking at the development, current status and future prospects of critical psychology in South Africa. See also Hook, D, Kiguwa, P & Mkhize, N (2004) *Critical psychology*, Juta. Parker, I. (2004) *Psychoanalysis and critical psychology*, in D. Hook (ed.), with N. Mkhize, P. Kiguwa and A. Collins (section eds) and E. Burman and I. Parker (consulting eds)

*Critical Psychology*, pp. 138-161. Cape Town: UCT Press. Parker, I (1998) *Social constructionism, discourse, and realism. Inquiries in social construction*, SAGE. Parker, I (1999) *Critical psychology: critical links*. In *Annual Review of Critical Psychology*, Vol. 1, pp. 3-18. Goodley, D & Parker, I (2000) *Critical psychology and action research*. In *Annual Review of Critical Psychology*, Vol. 2, pp. 3-16. Burman, E (2006) *Analytic Third or Law? Reflection vs. Regulation in Psychotherapy Case Notes*. In *Feminism & Psychology*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 445-450 (2006). Wetherell, M, Taylor, S, Yates, S.J. (eds) *Discourse theory and practice: a reader* Published in association with The Open University SAGE, 2001. Potter, J, Ashmore, M & Edwards, D (1999) *Regulating criticism: some comments on an argumentative complex*. In *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol. 12, No. 4, 79-88 (1999)

<sup>96</sup> See van Dijk, T. A. (ed) (1997) *Discourse Analysis as Social Interaction*. London, Sage; Tonkiss, F. (1998) *Analysing discourse*. In Seale, C.(ed) (1997) *Researching Society and Culture*. London: Sage; Gee, J.P.(1999) *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: theory and method*. London: Routledge; Wetherell, M., Taylor, S., & Yates, S. (eds) (2001) *Discourse Theory as Practice*. London: Sage.

See McGregor, S.L.T. (2003) *Critical Discourse Analysis- A Primer*. In *Kappa Omicron Nu FORUM2003,(1)*, 2003. She notes that critical discourse analysis attempts to unite and express relationships between three levels of analysis: the text itself; the discursive practices, which include the processes of creation, writing, speaking, reading, and hearing, and the larger social context.

<sup>97</sup> See Denzin, N. (1994) *The Art and Politics of Interpretation*. In Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, pp. 500–15. London: Sage pp509 re the role of textual analysis in critical theory.

<sup>98</sup> See chapters 3 and 4

<sup>99</sup> See chapter 2 in particular

<sup>100</sup> See Hammersley, M. (2003) *Discourse Analysis: a bibliographical guide*. from <http://www.cf.ac.uk/socsi/capacity/Activities/Themes/In-depth/guide.pdf>

<sup>101</sup> See McGregor, S.L.T. (2003) *Critical Discourse Analysis- A Primer*. In *Kappa Omicron Nu FORUM2003,(1)*, 2003. She notes that critical discourse analysis is aimed at uncovering ideological assumptions hidden in discourse so as to become aware of and therefore resist power relations so that non-transparent relationships, power imbalances, social

functional basis for theorising human-object sexual relations<sup>102</sup>.

I cannot, however, assume a level political playing field from which to 'read' participants' social experiences, nor can I pretend to adopt a value-neutral approach<sup>103</sup>. Rather, critical discourse analysis<sup>104</sup>, aligned with positioning analysis<sup>105</sup>, enables me to acknowledge the avowedly political dimension of the argument relating to the psychiatric discourses on fetish and their heterosexist and damaging effects for non-normative sexualities<sup>106</sup>.

At the same time, calling on textual/discourse analysis enables my better understanding of the 'real-life' world of the participants in ways which enable a multi-vocal, collaborative process, based in their lived experience, and organised by interpretive theory<sup>107</sup>. By connecting the participant narratives with the critical discourse analysis, I acknowledge the context in which discourses are

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inequities, non-democratic practices, and other injustices can be addressed and corrected

See also Fairclough, N. (1993) *Language and power*. New York: Longman.

<sup>102</sup> My analysis argues in favour of moving beyond psychoanalytic pathologies and towards recognising that both discourse and phenomenology have a part to play in understanding how 'fetish' intersects with people's lives. In particular, see chapter 4 re psychopathologies and the role of discursive psychology in revealing the relations between people and objects.

See Korobov, N. (2001). Reconciling Theory with Method: From Conversation Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis to Positioning Analysis. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 2(3), Art. 11, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0103119>. Korobov looks at tensions between Critical Discourse analysis and Conversation Analysis, and posits Positioning Analysis as a middle-ground to reconcile them.

See also Potter, J (2003) Discursive Psychology: Between Method and Paradigm. In *Discourse & Society*, 2003; 14; 783. Potter argues that discourse analytic work is connected to various theoretical ideas, specifically through its theorising of discourse itself as a medium related to action.

See also Potter, J (2003) Discourse analysis and discursive psychology. Qualitative research in psychology: Expanding perspectives in methodology and design. In Camic, P.M., Rhodes, J.E., Yardley, L. (Eds) (2003) *Qualitative research in psychology: Expanding perspectives in methodology and design*. Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association. (pp. 73-94). Potter notes that discourse analysis is about how talk and texts are used to perform actions, while discursive psychology is about how ideas from discourse analysis are applied to psychology. The latter is focused on analysing interaction in detail, while it aims to give a new perspective on a wide range of psychological phenomena. It is therefore not strictly a method, but a perspective which includes meta-theoretical, theoretical, and analytical approaches.

<sup>103</sup> Such as is the case in conversation analysis. See Hammersley, M. (2003) Discourse Analysis: a bibliographical guide. from <http://www.cf.ac.uk/socsi/capacity/Activities/Themes/In-depth/guide.pdf>

<sup>104</sup> See Caldas-Coulthard, C.R. & Coulthard, M.(eds) (1996) *Text and Practice: readings in critical discourse analysis*. London: Routledge; Hammersley, M. (1997) On the foundations of critical discourse analysis. In *Language and Communication*, 17, 3, pp237-48; Chouliaraki, L. & Fairclough, N. (1999) *Discourse in Late Modernity: rethinking critical discourse analysis*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; Wodak, R. & Meyer, M. (eds) (2002) *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Sage.

See also Potter, J (1996) Discourse Analysis and Constructionist Approaches: Theoretical Background. In Richardson, J.T.E. (Ed.)(1996) *Handbook of qualitative research methods for psychology and the social sciences*. Leicester: BPS Books. Potter notes that discourse and conversation analysis are similar and yet different

<sup>105</sup> See Korobov, N. (2001). Reconciling Theory with Method: From Conversation Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis to Positioning Analysis. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 2(3), Art. 11, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0103119>. Korobov looks at tensions between Critical Discourse analysis and Conversation Analysis, and posits Positioning Analysis as a middle-ground to reconcile them.

<sup>106</sup> See chapter 2

<sup>107</sup> Denzin, N. (1994) The Art and Politics of Interpretation. In Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, pp. 500–15. London: Sage

produced and perpetuated, and can recognise that the conversations of the participants are not something existing outside of the discourses constructed through psychiatric and psychological frameworks, but develop in relation to them, and indeed, as will be discussed in the Interjection, support and perpetuate them<sup>108</sup>.

## 1.3 Field-Work Methods and Reflexivity: Participant Contributions

### 1.3.1 Identifying the Participants

Finding appropriate research methods for participant contribution was a troublesome journey in itself, and finding the most appropriate participants became a roundabout process. At first I wanted to explore and map some kind of conceptual and scholarly location for people who specifically enjoy the sexual company of material objects. I wanted to research more broadly than those I had come to know in the 'gay leather scene'. I wanted to interview all kinds of people who identified with a 'male' sexual role, whether homo- or heterosexual, male, female, transgendered, and who may not be attracted to the strict dress-codes and BDSM overtones of the 'leather' environment<sup>109</sup>. Yet I realised that such people, even if identifiable, are often reticent about their desires, and are difficult to come by since they don't collect in well-organised or -advertised groups outside of the internet<sup>110</sup>. I knew that 'leathermen' are only one group amongst a plethora of people with varied and non-normative desires, and who explore what psychoanalysis would label as 'fetish' interests. Yet these people are conspicuous in their invisibility in South Africa, and appropriate research subjects eluded me.

I considered conducting research through internet chatrooms and websites, but soon rejected this option since I was not comfortable with the implicit voyeurism and positivism of this idea<sup>111</sup>. I wanted to find the people behind the façades, and explore personal perceptions and

<sup>108</sup> See chapters 4, 5 and 6, and in particular the Interjection

<sup>109</sup> I soon realised that just defining what I meant by a 'male' role was too complex and convoluted for this work, and would require a whole new thesis, so I quickly revised this to refer to biological 'men'

<sup>110</sup> Where, for example, does one come across men whose 'fetish' is to wear a suit and sit in a bath of baked beans while being urinated on. I know of just one such person in New York, and many more with similarly unusual interests scattered around the world. But I know few such people locally.

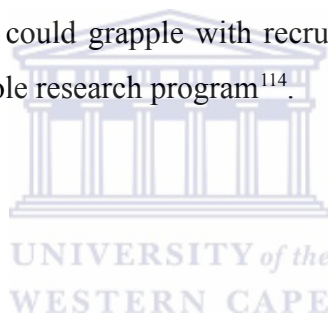
<sup>111</sup> Information such as the number of internet users and where they go would only be tangentially important for the thrust of the research. In this regard, see, for example, Chaney, M.P. & Dew, B.J. (2003) Online Experiences of Sexually Compulsive Men Who Have Sex with Men. In *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 10:259–274, 2003. The authors identify that internet growth and the increasing number of users indicates that more individuals will engage in sexual behaviours. They call on research indicating that 200 sexually explicit websites are daily added to the internet (Cooper, A., Delmonico, D. L., & Burg, R. (2000). Cybersex users, abusers, and compulsives: New findings and implications. In *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 7, 5–29.) they also report that sex is the most frequently searched term on the internet (Cooper, A., McLoughlin, I. P., & Campbell, K. M. (2000). Sexuality in cyberspace:



perspectives, rather than to quote statistics or detail online fantasies. Further, online research may reflect 'virtual' sexuality in a fantasy world, but does not adequately reveal sexuality as it plays out in the material world<sup>112</sup>.

After a period of reading, I realised that the research question was not 'who are these people', nor 'what do these people do', but 'what are the discursive alternatives to restrictive historical paradigms on 'fetish' applicable to *any* people exploring unusual sexual interests?' By rephrasing the research question, I was freed up to focus more on epistemologies and discourses than on the constitution of the people themselves, since I did not need a sample representative of all 'fetishists', which would be impossible anyway. Rather, I merely needed examples of people who sexually enjoy contact with material objects, i.e. 'fetishists'. I was therefore liberated to return to my original point-of-reference: the one group of people who *were* accessible, available, open and 'out', yet remain discursively marginal: certain men of the 'gay male BDSM/fetish' community.

In recruiting gay men, I could engage in a dynamic process, which is the best way of enabling research validity and reliability<sup>113</sup>. I could grapple with recruitment not as a static event, but as a dynamic process influencing the whole research program<sup>114</sup>.



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Update for the 21st century. In *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 3, 521–536.) They note that 20% of internet users take part in some form of online sexual activity.

<sup>112</sup> Which is, after all, the cornerstone of the idea of 'fetish': the intersection between desire and materiality

<sup>113</sup> See Filiault, S.M. & Drummond, M.J.N. (2009) Finding the Rainbow: Reflections upon Recruiting Openly Gay Men for Qualitative Research. In *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*, Volume 4, Issue 3, pp.183-192.

<sup>114</sup> See Russell, G.M. & Kelly, N.H. (2002) Research as Interacting Dialogic Processes: Implications for Reflexivity. In *FQS: Forum: Qualitative Social Research/Sozialforschung*, Volume 3, No. 3, Art. 18 – September 2002. They argue that the dialogic process encompasses all stages of the research, and the idea of collaboration starts before interviews. Questions and potential participants are developed at the same time, along with anticipation of positive or negative circumstances potentially involved in the process. During the interaction with participants the rules of interaction are negotiated, albeit often not explicitly

This recruitment process was conducted in a 'snowball sampling' fashion<sup>115</sup>, and resulted in the participation of the following (names are pseudonyms for anonymity):

Participant	Estimated Age Range	City	Primary Language	Citizenship
'Brian'	20's	Jhb	Afrikaans	SA
'Donald'	unknown	Jhb	Afrikaans	SA
'Henry'	60's	CT	Afrikaans	SA
'Jacques'	30's	CT	Afrikaans	SA
'Joseph'	40's	Jhb	English	USA (SA Permanent Resident)
'Jason'	30's	Jhb	English	SA
'Jared'	40's	Jhb	English	SA
'Karl'	50's	Jhb	Afrikaans	SA
'Lawrence'	50's	Jhb	English	SA
'Simon'	unknown	Jhb	English	SA

### 1.3.1a) Reflexivity: Researching Participant Interests, not Identities

But there remained the eternal injunction: to remain flexible, reflexive and conscious of my political position, which does not seek to represent a 'community' of participants as if there really is one, yet still calls on the perceptions of participants who organise themselves in a group<sup>116</sup>. I had to remember that identifying a single community is dangerous, even though the

<sup>115</sup> See Biernacki, P & Waldorf, D (1981) Snowball Sampling, Problems and Techniques of Chain Referral Sampling. In *Sociological Methods and Research*, Vol 10, No 2, November 1981, pp141-163; Heckathorn, D.D. (1997) Respondent-Driven Sampling: A New Approach to the Study of Hidden Populations. In *Social Problems*, vol 44, no 2, May 1997, pp174-199; Muhib, F.B., Lin, L.S., Stueve, A., Miller, R.L., Ford, W.L., Johnson, W.D. & Smith, P.J. (2001) A Venue-Based Method for Sampling Hard-to-Reach Populations. In *Public Health Reports*. 2001 Supplement 1 . Vol 116 pp216-222; Kemper, E.A, Stringfield, S & Teddlie, C (2003) Mixed Methods Sampling Strategies in Social Science Research. In Tashakkori, A & Teddli, C (2003) *Handbook of mixed methods in social & behavioral research*, Sage

<sup>116</sup> Note the arguments made in chapter 2 about my political position as a researcher, whereby I position the thesis with a political location, while at the same time engaging in discourse analysis around lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and intersex (vs queer) politics. See Koopmans, R & Statham, P (1999) Political Claims Analysis: Integrating Protest Event and Political Discourse Approaches. In *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, Volume 4, Number 2 / Fall 1999, 203 – 221. They critique protest event and political discourse newspaper analysis, and suggest a methodological approach with the quantitative coverage of event analysis and which also deals with qualitative discursive portions of claims. They

participants may call themselves 'gay fetishists'. As a researcher I could not perpetuate the essentialist labels of 'gay men' or 'fetishists', nor assume that the participants see themselves as a collective, rather than as a group of individuals collecting for various purposes<sup>117</sup>.

Like all people, the participants are not necessarily fully-integrated selves<sup>118</sup>, nor do they necessarily adopt coherent identities, but range from having particular to authentic identities<sup>119</sup>, as well as multiple identities<sup>120</sup>. The variations are potentially very confusing. Even within the supposedly stable category of 'gay male fetishist', I had to remind myself that not all 'gay male fetishists', although they might self-identify as 'gay' (rather than 'transgendered'), 'fetishise' objects in binary and gendered ways<sup>121</sup>. In corollary, not all 'same-sex male fetishists' identify as 'gay'<sup>122</sup>. Further, some biologically male 'fetishists' are gender-nonconformist in their public and/or sexual lives<sup>123</sup>. And some men are sexually attracted to animals, with no specific preference as to the sex-identity of the animal, making it difficult to identify their sexual orientation, which itself becomes confusing in cross-species sexuality<sup>124</sup>. In any case, 'fetish' revolves around sexual activity relating to material objects, which are generally gender-neutral, and identifying 'sexual identity' in relation to an inanimate

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locate protest and social movements methodologically in a broader framework of political claims-making, rather than merely theoretically. Using this approach, they thereby forge integrated approaches which locate protest in multi-organisational arenas and link it to political circumstances while being sensitive to the discursive message of protest.

<sup>117</sup> See chapter 2

<sup>118</sup> However one might define 'self'. In this regard, see chapter 5 re the constitution of the subject

<sup>119</sup> Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Taylor sees identity as relating the idea of self as an orientation in a moral space, and that the individual's attempt to recognise their space in the matrix of life is what makes up identity. Here moral space is identified with physical space, which he locates in two aspects: knowledge of the physical space and placing the self in the known space, which requires spatial awareness and using navigation to obtain comprehension and meaning. This is more than getting information or knowledge, which are value neutral enterprises, but also figuring out where the individual is in relation to space, which is a value-oriented idea. This is, to Taylor, the foundation of human aspiration. For Taylor, the importance of identity is '... the need to be connected to, or in contact with, what they see as good, or of crucial importance, or of fundamental value. And how could it be otherwise, once we see that this orientation in relation to the good is essential to being a functional human agent? The fact that we have to place ourselves in a space which is defined by these qualitative distinctions cannot but mean that where we stand in relation to them must matter to us. (1989, p. 42)

<sup>120</sup> See Miller, D. (2000). *Citizenship and national identity*. London: Polity Press.

See Golmohamad, M (2004) World Citizenship, Identity and the Notion of an Integrated Self. In *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 23: 131–148, 2004.

<sup>121</sup> Some gay men enjoy cross-dressing, but don't want to change their male gender identity. Other gay men are sexually attracted to breasts, or are interested in the 'male vaginas' of transgendered men. Note: female-to-male transgendered people are referred to as FTM's. Many elect to have 'top surgery', i.e. mastectomies, in order to appear more masculine, and often undergo hysterectomies but prefer not to surgically alter their vaginas, which often remain sexually functional.

<sup>122</sup> Some are bisexual, while other men-who-have-sex-with-men (MSM) identify publicly as heterosexual, but may enjoy anal sex or dildo-play with a man. Other heterosexual men enjoy anal penetration by a woman using a dildo or a strap-on penis extension, or are attracted to pre-operative transgendered women (so-called 'she-males')

<sup>123</sup> 'gender benders'/'cross-dressers'

<sup>124</sup> Note: this thesis very consciously does not deal with bestiality, and does not seek to address questions of the 'object-status' of animals or the ethical/moral considerations of cross-species sexual preferences

object defies logic<sup>125</sup>.

There can therefore be no essentially unifying front to the participants, whether politically, psychologically or socially, and I could not approach the research as if exploring a necessary or essentialist identity-based grouping<sup>126</sup>. The narratives of the participants of necessity do not reflect the fullness of participants' desires, interests, political and social positions beyond their sexual practices<sup>127</sup>.

By recognising this diversity and complexity of participant constitution, even within the putatively coherent group of middle-class, (predominantly 'white') 'gay male fetishists', I could partially liberate myself from fears of *a priori* partiality, since I was calling on the participants as representative not of their 'identities' (of 'gay', 'male', 'fetishist' etc.), but of their self-identifications and interests<sup>128</sup>. I was therefore free to interview individuals who self-identify as gay men for some purposes, while still recognising that their 'identities' inform and are informed by their experiences in a social constructionist way. I could therefore recognise and work productively with the notion that no research participants are wholly defined by their sexual orientation, or by any of the other scripts they adopt in the panoply of social or sexual self-identifications. Rather than being delineated by a 'unity of identity', I could see the research participants as connected through their 'unity in diversity'<sup>129</sup>, and I could remain both personally and epistemologically reflexive<sup>130</sup>.

### 1.3.1b) Heterocentric and Normative Biases

In response to the impossibility of definitively 'identifying' research participants, and the need to focus on their interests and practices, rather than their 'identities', I therefore opted for a

<sup>125</sup> Despite that certain languages such as German and French allocate gendered pronouns to inanimate objects. See Introduction re defining the boundaries of 'fetish'

<sup>126</sup> See chapter 2

See Koopmans, R & Statham, P (1999) Political Claims Analysis: Integrating Protest Event and Political Discourse Approaches. In *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, Volume 4, Number 2 / Fall 1999, 203 – 221.

<sup>127</sup> See chapter 2. For example, certain participants are demonstrably transgressive in their sexual interests, but are at the same time rather conventional and conservative in their wider political views and social identifications

<sup>128</sup> See chapter 2

<sup>129</sup> Golmohamad, M (2004) World Citizenship, Identity and the Notion of an Integrated Self. In *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 23: 131–148, 2004. at 131. Golmohamad notes that, even though science has been able to move beyond the limitations of previous frameworks of knowledge, there remains amongst many ordinary people a kind of need to identify a 'bounded' kind of identity linked to national pride and patriotism, and therefore to classify who does and doesn't belong where

<sup>130</sup> See Willig, C (2001) *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method*. Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press. Willig notes the two types of reflexivity: personal and epistemological reflexivity. The former entails reflecting on the researcher's own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider life aims and social identities and how they intersect with the research. The latter deals with the assumptions placed on the research by the researcher

methodological approach which takes account of heterocentric and normative biases in the research itself, rather than focusing on the participants' group constitution<sup>131</sup>.

In order to do this, I called on queer theory, which aims to negate stability, and to focus on possibility and the subversion of categorical thinking<sup>132</sup>. Queer theory unpacks identity, rather than perpetuating it, and works productively with the absence of an essential 'natural' sex, gender or sexuality. I could therefore avoid heteronormative, androcentric or ethnocentric perspectives, and was free not to essentialise 'gay fetishism' as a 'thing' specifically restricted to 'gay men' and different from any other kind of 'fetishism'. Rather, I could see it is one part of the gamut of sexuality, where the participants explore *an* element of their wider desires, rather than necessarily defining themselves in terms of an identity.

This was appropriate for the broad strokes, since Queer Theory clearly indicates which research methodologies are inappropriate. But it doesn't necessarily prescribe methods for obtaining participant contributions<sup>133</sup>. To move in a productive direction I looked to non-normative creative methodologies<sup>134</sup>. Feminist theories promised some assistance, since they critique normative assumptions about research and the norms against which it is measured<sup>135</sup>. Further, proactive research methods, linking feminist and queer methodologies<sup>136</sup> have been helpful in working

<sup>131</sup> See Wittig, M (1981) One is not born a woman. In *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, New York: Routledge: pp103–109 re heterosexist assumptions. See also Seidman, S (1997) *Difference Troubles: Queering social theory and sexual politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press re the effects in sociology.

<sup>132</sup> See Norton R. (1999) A Critique of Social Constructionism and Postmodern Queer Theory, updated 24 October 2002. Available at <http://www.infopt.demon.co.uk/extracts/htm>

<sup>133</sup> Queer theory also means not relying on numbers arguments in the way that identity-politics-based theories, such as gay and lesbian theories, do, which in turn obviates reliance on positivist methodologies: See chapter 2

<sup>134</sup> See Emke, I. (1996) Methodology and Methodolatry: Creativity and the Impoverishment of the Imagination in Sociology. In *The Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers canadiens de sociologie*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Winter, 1996), pp. 77-90. Emke argues that there is a tension in sociology between a reification of conventional research strategies, which allow little creativity, and a deification of creative and interpretive sociologists. He discusses structural and individual impediments to creativity, and suggests how limitations might be overcome through the alteration of research goals and researcher's roles.

<sup>135</sup> Willig, C (2001) *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method*. Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press

Some critiques are that the male is the norm against which research is compared, since most studies were carried out with male subjects; and that male science claimed to be 'objective', whereby researchers were meant to be impartial and detached

See also re methodologies and issues pertaining to researching sexualities: Crimp, D. (1992) Portraits of people with AIDS. In Grossberg, L., Nelson, C. & Treichler, P. (eds.) *Cultural Studies*. London and New York: Routledge, 117-33.; de Lauretis, T. (1991). Queer theory: Lesbian and gay sexualities. In *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 3, iii-xviii. ; D'Emilio, J. (1992). *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics and the University*. London and New York: Routledge.; Grosz, E. A. (1989). *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

See Diamond, L.M (2006) Careful What You Ask For: Reconsidering Feminist Epistemology and Autobiographical Narrative in Research on Sexual Identity Development. In *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 2006, vol. 31, no. 2

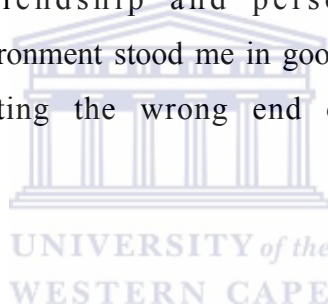
<sup>136</sup> See Hammers, C & Brown, A.D. (2004) Towards a feminist–queer alliance: a paradigmatic shift in the research process. In *Social Epistemology*, Vol. 18, No. 1, January–March 2004, pp. 85–101. They argue that there is fertile ground to build on feminist advances in methods, methodology and epistemology, and that feminist and queer theory

towards a feminist-queer alliance in methodology, where perhaps none as yet exists<sup>137</sup>.

### ***1.3.2 The Impact of Personal Experience: Insider Trading***

Linking queer and feminist methodologies provided insight into interactions with participants approached from an 'insider' perspective, informed by my own experience of and intersections with 'fetishists'<sup>138</sup>. I called on feminist methodologies which generally approve of reciprocal relationships calling on empathy and mutual respect, rather than a hierarchical priority of the researcher's purportedly superior knowledge<sup>139</sup>. I thereby acknowledged my reliance on the participants to help me to understand the multiple meanings of their perceptions, narratives and daily experiences<sup>140</sup>.

I focused on sharing meanings and developing the research process as equals in partnerships based on intersubjectivity, flexibility and reflexivity<sup>141</sup>. I could thereby call on the strengths of being an 'insider', by calling on friendship and personal contacts as a method. My intimate knowledge of the environment stood me in good stead with 'getting in' to interview participants, and with not getting the wrong end of the stick while speaking to them<sup>142</sup>.



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should meet to talk, in order to challenging 'scientific' approaches to researching minority sexual orientations and adopting reflexivity in relation to subjectivity and sexuality. This approach does not privilege essentialist, categorical and reductionist binary conceptions and moves into thinking sexualities in terms of inclusivity and multiple identities.

<sup>137</sup> See Hammers, C & Brown, A.D. (2004) *ibid*. The authors call for an alliance between feminist social science and queer theory, through the challenge to traditional scientific approaches to research on sexual minority groups. The 'queer' approach advocated suggests a reflexive position on subjectivity and sexuality celebrating inclusivity and multiple identities, rather than reductionistic categorical thought. This is as opposed to essentialist conceptions which privilege gay/lesbian, man/woman, and object/subject

<sup>138</sup> In regard to positioning as a researcher, see Acker, S (2000) *In/out/side: positioning the researcher in feminist qualitative research*. In *Resources for Feminist Research*. Toronto: 2000. Vol. 28, Iss. 1/2; pg. 189. Acker looks at concerns of "insiderness" and "outsiderness", and at certain problems around figuring out who is an insider and who an outsider, and which of those positions affords greater insights in different situations. She argues that this question cannot be definitively answered, but that creative work can be done between the tensions. Questions need to be asked about the problems created by relative 'insiderness', which changes and shifts as the researcher becomes more knowledgeable about the area of research and the research participants.

<sup>139</sup> See the points on feminist and queer epistemological positions later

<sup>140</sup> 'supplication': See England, K.V.L. (1994) *Getting Personal: Reflexivity, Positionality, and Feminist Research*. In *The Professional Geographer* 46 (1), 80-91.

<sup>141</sup> See England, K.V.L. (1994) *ibid*

<sup>142</sup> See Tillmann-Healy. L.M. (2003) *Friendship as Method*. In *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 9, No. 5, 729-749 (2003). Tillmann-Healy discusses friendship as a method of qualitative research, defining friendship as a kind of fieldwork. She posits that friendship as method entails researching with the practices, at the pace, in the ordinary contexts, and through adopting an ethic of friendship.

Yet it also forced me to manage other considerations for both researcher and participants<sup>143</sup>. My location (at least partially) inside the research resulted in a need to focus clearly on ethics<sup>144</sup>. In particular, I was forced methodologically to distinguish my own political aims from those of the participants, thereby interrogating my own location and relationship to the research work<sup>145</sup>. Was I sufficiently distant from the participants and the research content to be adding intelligent and intelligible value to the scholarship on the topic? Or was I too similar to the participants, thereby merely performing an advocacy role masquerading as theoretical research? Was I really 'researching', or was I rather simply regurgitating my own pre-concretised perspectives? And was I simply (ab)using participants to further my own personal and political manifesto of liberation with limited critical thinking applied to it?

The answer I arrived at: the research was indeed validly conducted *because* of, not *despite*, the personal element to the research process. In the social sciences, a personal narrative element or interest is somewhat unusual, and at times frowned upon, since it is assumed that the researcher must remain objective, disconnected, and unemotional<sup>146</sup>.

This research, however, was undertaken with an auto-ethnographic element which explains the research participants' world in ways that cannot be captured by the externalised, authorial voice of a distant ethnographer/researcher, who cannot hope impartially and independently to capture the subject's 'truth'<sup>147</sup>. There is always an element of the ethnographer's subjectivity implicit in the descriptions of the subject<sup>148</sup>. As Mark Neumann remarks of ethnography:

“As a form of institutional and scientific investigation, ethnographic reports privileged the “neutral” voice of the writer over the authority of subjective and personal experience. Yet, elements of fascination, adventure, romance, and desire leak through, suggesting how ethnographic discourse functions as location for addressing issues of identity, place, and uncertainty in modern life”<sup>149</sup>.

<sup>143</sup> See Tillmann-Healy, L.M. (2003) *ibid*

<sup>144</sup> England, K.V.L. (1994) Getting Personal: Reflexivity, Positionality, and Feminist Research. In *The Professional Geographer* 46 (1), 80-91.

<sup>145</sup> See Pain, R (2004) Social geography: participatory research. In *Progress in Human Geography* 28,5 (2004) pp. 652-663. See also chapter 2 where I engage in news analysis to gauge popular perceptions of homosexuality in South Africa

<sup>146</sup> See Probyn, E (1993) *Sexing the Self: Gendered Positions in Cultural Studies*. Routledge: London & New York

<sup>147</sup> Neumann, M (1996) Collecting Ourselves at the End of the Century. In Ellis, C & Bochner, AP (eds) *Composing Ethnography- Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing*. Altamira Press: Walnut Creek, London, New Delhi. p172 et seq

<sup>148</sup> See Russell, Glenda M. & Kelly, Nancy H. (2002). Research as Interacting Dialogic Processes: Implications for Reflexivity [47 paragraphs]. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 3(3), Art. 18, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs020318>  
See Strathern, M (1991) *Partial connections*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

<sup>149</sup> Neumann, M (1996) Collecting Ourselves at the End of the Century. In Ellis, C & Bochner, AP (eds) *Composing Ethnography- Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing*. Altamira Press: Walnut Creek, London, New Delhi. p172 et seq, pp 176

I focused on productively incorporating these considerations into the research process, by ensuring that the 'interview' process remained consciously conducted and balanced.

### ***1.3.3 Preparing for the 'Interview' Process: A Focus on Ethics***

As a visible part of the research process and setting, I had to factor myself into the research itself<sup>150</sup>. I found Participatory Research to be compelling, since it resonated with my attempts to incorporate new voices into the academy, thereby acknowledging a variety of different perspectives rather than assuming a singular voice of 'alterity'<sup>151</sup>.

I found this thinking particularly useful for exploring relations with accounts of space, place and environment, as well as for ties between cultural identities and place, as is the case with the current research into materialist relations between people and objects<sup>152</sup>. This allowed me to pull together multiple connections between concerns and practices, focusing on local conditions and knowledge, and reflecting complex narratives in a context-specific way. In particular, the focus on context enabled me to make methodological connections between social geography and the present research focus on participants' experiences of their material environment<sup>153</sup>.

#### ***1.3.3a) Dialogic Conversations***

As a result I chose to call on dialogic participation, whereby both researcher and researched are acknowledged as taking part in the process<sup>154</sup>.

<sup>150</sup> Methodologically I have been influenced by geography and spatial theory, since both this arena and the current research deals with phenomenological experience, which is implicitly connected to materiality, physicality and physical location of participants. See Smith, S. J. 1988. Constructing local knowledge: The analysis of self in everyday life. In Eyles, J. & Smith, D. (eds.), *Qualitative Methods in Human Geography*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 17-38.

<sup>151</sup> See Cahill, C. (2004): Defying gravity? Raising consciousness through collective research. In *Children's Geographies 2*. See also Pain, R (2004) Social geography: participatory research. In *Progress in Human Geography* 28,5 (2004) pp.652–663, See also Cieri, M. (2003): Between being and looking: queer tourism promotion and lesbian social space in Greater Philadelphia. In *ACME* 2, 147 – 66.

<sup>152</sup> See McIntyre, A. (2003) Through the eyes of women: photovoice and participatory research as tools for reimagining place. In *Gender Place and Culture* 10, 47 – 66.; Kindon, S.L. (2003) Participatory video in geographic research: a feminist practice of looking? In *Area* 35, 142 – 53; Offen, K. 2003: Narrating place and identity, or mapping Miskitu land claims in Northeastern Nicaragua. In *Human Organization* 62, 382 – 92.

<sup>153</sup> See Pain, R (2004) Social geography: participatory research. In *Progress in Human Geography* 28,5 (2004) pp.652–663. See chapters 5 & 6 for more elucidation on the interaction between materiality and discourse in the lives of (research) subjects

<sup>154</sup> See Russell, G.M. & Kelly, N.H. (2002) Research as Interacting Dialogic Processes: Implications for Reflexivity. In *FQS: Forum: Qualitative Social Research/Sozialforschung*, Volume 3, No. 3, Art. 18 – September 2002. They argue that subjectivity of researchers and participants, as well as inter-subjectivity between researchers and between researchers & participants, can better place research. They call on a framework involving understanding qualitative research as interconnected and mutually influential dialogic processes. This enables each major part of a research program to be seen as enabling synergistic communication between or among participants. This necessitates reflexivity on the part of both researchers and participants.



The research took place through conversations between the participants on the one hand, and me as researcher, (in some cases) friend, and 'co-conspirator' on the other. We were similarly located as equals by our gender, ethnicity, primary sexual orientations, often by our age, and so on. And more importantly, by the confluence of our interests. In this way I located myself as a compatriot, thereby enabling honest and open discussion while acknowledging that I was part of the process and setting.

This meant that my personal characteristics *enabled*, rather than hindered, insights not attainable by a putatively 'independent' or 'impartial' researcher. I understood that the subjectivity in research information would come from both me and the participants, and that we would both bring our personal experiences and perspectives into the research. Our perspectives would “inform and mediate each element of the research project, influencing not only the process and intended goals but also the interaction and attributions found within the event itself.”<sup>155</sup>

Given that qualitative research is an embodied experience for both the researcher and the participants, I had further to acknowledge that we would both have emotional experiences, and that the phenomenological insight I was importing into the research (and the argument) was applicable both to me *qua* researcher, and the participants<sup>156</sup>.

### 1.3.3b) Research Impacting the Researcher

I wanted to learn something new, which is why I undertook an arduous PhD study. And it has indeed delivered what it promised: a kind of personal transformation through knowledge<sup>157</sup>. Participatory research enabled a process of learning about both me and others, and I confronted new feelings about myself<sup>158</sup>. Consciousness of this process enabled me to carry out effective, solid research while constantly remaining reflexive, since I was not merely recording but actively processing information by comparing how it related to my own experiences.

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<sup>155</sup> See Russell, Glenda M. & Kelly, Nancy H. (2002). *ibid*

<sup>156</sup> Dickson-Swift, V, James, E.L., Kippen, E, Pranee Liamputtong, P (2009) Researching sensitive topics: qualitative research as emotion work. In *Qualitative Research*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 61-79 (2009). The authors provide a grounded theory analysis of researchers working on qualitative research, and explore theoretical and empirical evidence of emotional involvement in research projects. They highlight certain consequences of emotion work and provide suggestions for researcher self-care. See also Barnacle, R (ed) (2001) *Phenomenology: Qualitative Research Methods*. Melbourne: RMIT University Press

<sup>157</sup> See Brydon-Miller, M & Tolman, D.L. (1997). Engaging the process of transformation. In *Journal of Social Issues*, 53, 803-810.

<sup>158</sup> Freire, P (1993) *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

### 1.3.3c) Research Impacting the Participants

Concerns of power and empowerment are central to participatory research and there is a strong need to minimise separation between researcher and participants<sup>159</sup>. Participant experiences are impacted on by the researcher's presence and their response to the researcher's presence<sup>160</sup>. I called on this thinking to avoid a paternalistic relationship between me and the participants, and to focus on the idea of self-empowerment in the face of the marginality of their sexual practices<sup>161</sup>, whilst researching the participants as a marginal group<sup>162</sup>.

The participants in this research, however, occupy multiple social locations and, as predominantly 'white', middle-class men, are not substantially disempowered<sup>163</sup>. They are therefore more able to push their own political agendas and empower themselves wherever necessary in ways not readily accessible by others<sup>164</sup>. Their dual role of 'empowered' and 'disempowered' (and their concomitant ability to push their own political empowerment agendas) linked into my intention not to 'transfer' power in some magnanimous way to the participants, as if I had it to give<sup>165</sup>. Rather, I wanted to enable a space in which self-empowerment could take place wherever possible, through giving the participants a non-judgmental platform to express themselves unfettered in ways they otherwise would not.

### 1.3.3d) Ethics: Practical Implementation

This self-expression at the same time placed a burden on me to maintain the highest standards of research ethics. I had to enable the participants to drive both the process and content of their contributions, and to remain comfortable throughout the participation process.

<sup>159</sup> Pain, R. (2004) Social geography: participatory research. In *Progress in Human Geography* 28,5 (2004) pp. 652 – 663. See also Karnieli-Miller, O, Strier, R & Pessach, L (2009) Power Relations in Qualitative Research. In *Qualitative Health Research* 2009; 19; 279 re tensions between commitments to power redistribution inherent in qualitative research and the ethical and methodological complexity of clinical research. Qualitative inquiry seeks to reduce power differences and to encourage researcher-participant disclosure and authenticity. This raises ethical dilemmas and methodological challenges, which the authors propose to deal with by a developmental analysis of power relations across the different stages of the research process.

<sup>160</sup> See Pain, R (2004) Social geography: participatory research. In *Progress in Human Geography* 28,5 (2004) pp. 652–663. This is subject to the caveats above about the identities of the research participants

<sup>161</sup> See for example in respect of empowering disadvantaged communities. See eg Leyshon, M. (2002) On being 'in the field': practice, progress and problems in research with young people in rural areas. In *Journal of Rural Studies* 18, 179–91.

<sup>162</sup> See Pain, R (2004) Social geography: participatory research. In *Progress in Human Geography* 28,5 (2004) pp. 652–663. This is subject to the caveats above about the identities of the research participants

<sup>163</sup> See supra

<sup>164</sup> See chapter 2

<sup>165</sup> See Wilton, R. (2004) Keeping your distance? Balancing political engagement and scientific autonomy with a psychiatric consumer/survivor group. In Fuller, D. and Kitchin, R. (eds) (2004) *Radical theory, critical praxis: making a difference beyond the academy?*, ACME e- book series, 116 – 31

To facilitate this I gave each participant a written copy of an ethics statement, as well as a written summary of the nature of the study, together with contact details for me, my supervisor and the university. I made copies of the proposal available, and preceded all participation by obtaining informed written and oral consent. I gave each participant the opportunity to ask questions on the issues, and each was free to discontinue their participation at any time.

I offered participants transcripts of all conversations in which they took part, and they could ask to modify or delete any element of the conversation. I discussed with them how I was intending to call on the conversations in the study, from which they could withdraw at any time.

I assured participants as to the complete confidentiality and anonymity of all contents of discussions, which took place at safe, confidential and convenient spaces agreed between all parties. All interview recordings were done by me, and will remain under my control and in my safekeeping. I altered the participants' names and other pertinent details in transcriptions, which were done by me. No subsequent translations or concomitant transcriptions were necessary from other languages to English, which obviated the need to call on others who would become privy to the participants narratives before pseudonyms were allocated.

None of the participants expressed marked psychological or social problems around their 'fetish sexuality', and I was honest about my role as researcher rather than psychologist or counsellor. Even though no professional (psychological) assistance has been necessary as a result of the participation, if any subsequently becomes necessary, even after the conclusion of the research, I will put participants in touch with professional individuals or organisations able to assist them.

### ***1.3.4 Developing Interview Schedules and Conducting Dialogic Conversations***

#### ***1.3.4a Focusing on Language awareness***

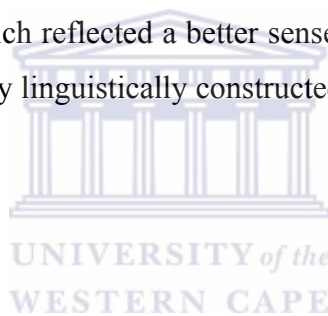
With these imperatives in mind I prepared a set of questions which I forwarded to the research participants for their perusal. This enabled them to mull over what they considered important about their own experiences in advance. Some participants simply provided written answers, while others responded in a one-on-one dialogic interview/conversation process, discussing feelings and perceptions.

I consciously constructed questions ('guidelines for interviews') to reflect the themes I wished to explore. Through open-ended questions, they covered issues around 'fetish practices', the body, power relations, emotional space and social space. The framing of these questions necessitated a

reflexivity and a critical awareness of language as a part of the meaning we give experiences<sup>166</sup>.

Language constructs, rather than simply mirroring reality, which means that categories and labels shape research findings. This necessitated my asking a range of questions relating to social, psychological and political space, and not presuming that I had the answer to those questions.

The research was conducted through what Kidder and Fine distinguish as open-ended, inductive methodologies relating to the generation of theory and meaning exploration ('big Q'), rather than non-numerical data incorporated hypothetico-deductive research ('little q')<sup>167</sup>. The interviewing was undertaken with a view to obtaining a sense of the participant narratives and perspectives, which the interview questions in general sought to elicit rather than ensuring that each participant answered the same question in exactly the same way. In interviews I was thereby free to ask slightly different versions of the questions than appeared on the questionnaires, depending on the overarching tenor and sensibility of the conversation in the moment. This resulted in a range of different responses which reflected a better sense of narrative continuity, rather than a sense of absolute answers to carefully linguistically constructed questions which could be compared in a hypothetico-deductive way<sup>168</sup>.



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<sup>166</sup> This relates both to the words used during the interview process, and the participant responses, the latter to be discussed below

See Willig, C (2001) *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method*. Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press

<sup>167</sup> See Kidder, L.H. & Fine, M. (1987) Qualitative and quantitative methods: When stories converge. In *New Directions for Program Evaluation*, Volume 1987 Issue 35, Pages 57-75, Special Issue: Multiple Methods in Program Evaluation. The authors argue that qualitative measures used in a quantitative framework can reasonably result in triangulation, but that independent qualitative and quantitative evaluations are more problematic for triangulation, while enabling greater discovery.

See Kidder, L.H. & Fine, M. (1997) Qualitative Inquiry in Psychology: a radical tradition. In Fox, D & Prilleltensky, I. (eds) (1997) *Critical Psychology, an Introduction*. London: Sage

<sup>168</sup> See the critique of inductivism by Karl Popper, and his formulation of hypothetico-deductivism, which is now considered the basis of mainstream experimental psychology. Popper, K.R. (1959) *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. Hutchinson: London. Popper, K.R. (1963) *Conjectures and Refutations*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London; Popper, K.R. (1972) *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach*. Clarendon, Oxford. Observation of similar circumstances cannot ensure the same outcome without exception. Popper suggested that induction and verification should be replaced with deduction and falsification, whereby theories are tested through hypotheses which can subsequently be tested by experiment or observation, thereby looking for dis-confirmation or falsification which eliminates claims. Hypothetico-deductivism was challenged in the '60s and '70s for its non-acknowledgement of the role of historical, social and cultural factors in the formation of knowledge. The bases upon which the critique can be voiced is that it does not provide enough space for the development of theory, it is elitist, and is a myth. In this regard, see Willig, C (2001) *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method*. Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press

### 1.3.4b) The 'Interview' Process

Some questionnaires were answered in the privacy of participants' homes at their leisure. The dialogic conversations, however, took place in a 'safe' space: one at my home, one at a participant's place of work where he felt comfortable talking, and the remainder at a pool-party event in Johannesburg, hosted by SA Leathermen<sup>169</sup>. These interview spaces were very different from each other, and I was aware of the potential for participants to be influenced by the environment, and therefore to provide context-dependent answers<sup>170</sup>.

During the conversation process I focused on balancing my role as researcher with my role as confidant, thereby minimising appropriation. In so doing, I avoided leading questions as far as possible, while still being present in the moment of the interview. I tried my best to *follow* the conversation direction, rather than steer it, thereby not angling the research towards what I hoped the answer would be. The dialogic conversations therefore took place by way of a natural interaction<sup>171</sup>. I was not aware of much self-consciousness or reticence in any of the interview environments, and participants successfully represented themselves as much as possible<sup>172</sup>. Indeed, this turned out to be powerful, in that I learned new things from the interactions, and certain participants experienced the process of discussing their sexualities with me as cathartic.

This more comfortable dialogic process resulted in rich and meaningful interactions from which came a range of themes and perspectives which largely matched the kinds of information I was trying to obtain<sup>173</sup>. I was comfortable that it nevertheless did not reflect my preconceptions, but provided me with a valuable body of perceptions coming out of the dynamic of the conversations, and out of personalised responses to the standardised themes<sup>174</sup>.

<sup>169</sup> The not-for-profit organisation which serves as a point of contact for the 'leather' community in SA. See [www.saleathermen.org.za](http://www.saleathermen.org.za)

<sup>170</sup> See Talja, S (1999) Analyzing Qualitative Interview Data: The Discourse Analytic Method. In *Library & Information Science Research*, Volume 21, Issue 4, November 1999, Pages 459-477. Talja notes that participant interpretations are more context-dependent and variable than ordinarily acknowledged, and calls on discourse analysis to enable interview data to lay bare irregular interpretative practices whereby participants construct versions of actions, cognitive processes, and other phenomena in the context of the interview. This allows for the recognition of cultural regularities in participants' accounts so as to deal with the macrosociological level.

<sup>171</sup> See Potter, J. (1996) Discourse Analysis and Constructionist Approaches: Theoretical Background. In Richardson, J.T.E. (Ed.) (1996). *Handbook of qualitative research methods for psychology and the social sciences*. Leicester: BPS Books. This is not to rely on simplistic behaviourism, ignoring the interaction or reducing it to mere movements

<sup>172</sup> Pain, R. (2004) Social geography: participatory research. In *Progress in Human Geography* 28,5 (2004) pp. 652 – 663

<sup>173</sup> See Ryan, M.M., Ogilvie, M & Pettigrew, S (2002) Self-introspection as a Research Method in Exploring Consumption Behaviour at a Special Event. In *Qualitative Research Journal*, vol 2, no 2, 2002 pp47-57. The authors speak of introspection as a data collection method for obtaining experiential data, and revealing rich insights.

<sup>174</sup> See Potter, J. (1996) Discourse Analysis and Constructionist Approaches: Theoretical Background. In Richardson, J.T.E. (Ed.) (1996). *Handbook of qualitative research methods for psychology and the social*

## 1.4 Transcribing, Analysing and Writing: Reflexivity in Interpretation

As Denzin notes: when it comes to the social sciences, there *is* only interpretation<sup>175</sup>. Transcribing analysing and incorporating participant contributions required my paying particular attention to the role of theory and how I was to position myself as writer<sup>176</sup>. Rather than being an 'outside' recorder of 'fact', I had to recognise that I am productive of the 'reality' with which I come into contact in the research<sup>177</sup>. I remained cognisant of issues involved in the transition from the field to the text: sense-making, representation, legitimation and desire<sup>178</sup>. I therefore remained reflexive in the process of choosing what to include and what to exclude, how to represent it, and so on. In avoiding foundationalist epistemological positions, I opted to lodge the writing in local, personal and political representations, allowing the participants as much of their own voice as possible. At the same time I reflected on my own position in the research, unapologetically yet consciously, honestly and ethically inserting it into the body of work while keeping a keen eye on the worth of the content and the 'vitality' of the text<sup>179</sup>.

### 1.4.1 Calling on Language

As is the case with all qualitative research, it was important to recognise that anything I obtained from the participant narratives was mediated by both the language the participants used, and my own interpretation/construction thereof, in a way Denzin refers to as 'interpretive interactionism' whereby the interpretation begins and ends with the life story of the researcher him/herself<sup>180</sup>.

It has therefore been imperative to avoid the pitfalls inherent in discourse analysis, and it has been necessary to make allowances for both miscommunication and

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*sciences*. Leicester; BPS Books. Potter notes that interviews are complex and expressive. In discourse research, interviews allow a standardised range of themes to be addressed with various participants, and they enable a lot of control over sampling. Interviews are seen as a way to identify and explore participants' interpretative practices, not as a way of finding the 'true' reflection of events, attitudes and beliefs

<sup>175</sup> Denzin, N. (1994) The Art and Politics of Interpretation. In Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, pp. 500–15. London: Sage pp500

<sup>176</sup> Re transcription, see Edwards, J.A (2003) *The Transcription of Discourse*. In Schiffrin, D, Tannen, D & Hamilton, H.E. (eds) (2003) *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Blackwell. See also Potter, J. (1996) *Discourse Analysis and Constructionist Approaches: Theoretical Background*. In Richardson, J.T.E. (Ed.)(1996).

*Handbook of qualitative research methods for psychology and the social sciences*. Leicester; BPS Books. Potter notes the need to take into account both the content and the interaction in transcriptions. In this regard, I have transcribed the interviews and conversations myself, and have tried as far as possible to include the nuances and inflections, pauses, laughter etc in conversations.

<sup>177</sup> Denzin, N. (1994) The Art and Politics of Interpretation. In Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, pp. 500–15. London: Sage

<sup>178</sup> Denzin, N. (1994) *ibid*

<sup>179</sup> Denzin, N. (1994) *ibid*

<sup>180</sup> See Denzin, N. (1994) *ibid*

misrecognition of meaning<sup>181</sup>. I could not simply assume that what participants said was a blanket representation of 'truth', but rather that it reflected layers of political, personal and social meaning both in the responses and in my perception of them.

For example, certain participants felt that the local 'leather' scene reflects a wide cultural diversity, representative of the broader South African society. In contradistinction, however, racist sentiments have been expressed to me outside of the formal research itself, and I know that the environment is often not very welcoming to 'people of colour'. There are very few, if any 'black' fetishists in the 'scene', and a smattering of 'coloured' and 'Indian' men<sup>182</sup>. The latter seem to aspire to western cultural and social norms to a greater extent than most 'black African' gay men in South Africa, who to a greater or lesser extent align themselves with more African traditionalist world-views which do not approve of homosexuality or unusual sexual practices<sup>183</sup>. In this regard, my perception is that there is very little cultural diversity in the local BDSM/fetish arena. Perhaps participants' statements to the contrary indicate that they are unaware of the (Western) cultural hegemony of the 'scene'. Perhaps, in wishing for more cultural diversity, they represent the situation as they would like it to be, so as not to appear 'racist'. Perhaps the participants' intrapsychic scripting (perceptions by individuals of how people see them) has influenced the kinds of sexuality they enjoy, skewing their perceptions and what they say<sup>184</sup>. Perhaps the participants simply did not understand the question. Or indeed, perhaps it is more complex than all of these.

Whatever the reasons for the difference in perceptions, I had to remaining reflexive throughout the

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<sup>181</sup> Antaki, C., Billig, M., Edwards, D & Potter, J (2003) Discourse Analysis; Means of Doing Analysis. In *Discourse Analysis Online*, 2003 – hiscc.dk. The authors identify a number of ways of looking at talk and textual data which do not count as discourse analysis. Namely: under-analysis through summary, through taking sides, through over-quotation or isolated quotation, circular identification of discourses and mental constructs, false survey, and analysis made up of merely noting features. They argue that none of these effectively analyse the data.

<sup>182</sup> I use these appellations very uncomfortably, with an eye on how they perpetuate the colonialist and apartheid labeling of 'white', 'black', 'coloured' and 'Indian'. Yet it was clear in the dialogic conversations that the participants identify themselves using these categories.

<sup>183</sup> Note, this is merely a perception, and not borne out by any detailed research. But see Chapter 2 on popular discourses on sexual orientation in Southern Africa  
See Zea, M.C., Reisen, C.A & Diaz, R.M. (2003) Methodological Issues in Research on Sexual Behavior with Latino Gay and Bisexual Men. In *American Journal of Community Psychology*, Volume 31, Numbers 3-4 / June, Pages 281-291. The authors focus on the importance of culture and socio-economic forces in psychological theory looking at sexual behaviour. They argue that social context and internalised sociocultural experiences can have an effect on sexual scripts and definitions and fluidity of sexuality identities, and that gay men's sexuality may be influenced by experiences of oppression, discrimination, racism and homophobia. They further address questions of levels of acculturation.

<sup>184</sup> See Whittier, D.K. & Melendez, R.M. (2004) Intersubjectivity in the Intrapsychic Sexual Scripting of Gay Men. In *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Mar. - Apr., 2004), pp. 131-143 . The authors call on sexual scripting theory as a framework for sexual history. The analysis substantiated claims that intersubjectivity (what people thought others thought of them) commonly affects participants' intrapsychic sexual scripting. Social structures like gender, race, class and age are called on by participants to make sense of their sexual lives. Pertinently, they imply that gay men do not call on such categories as strict 'scripts' prescribed to them, but rather, actively engage with the creation and use of such structures in their sexual lives.

process, including in the transcription and analysis process, and I had to unpick my own preconceptions and contributions to the construction of meanings. I constantly reminded myself to allow participants, wherever possible and wherever there may be a discrepancy in the text, to self-represent, rather than being represented by someone in authority such as the convenor of the fetish organisation<sup>185</sup>, or by me. In this regard, I did not stick to the questionnaire scripts too closely during the 'interview' process. This allowed for the transcripts and analysis to reflect the participant practices in a participatory and self-reflectory way, rather than assuming participants were answering what I expected.

Notwithstanding concerns about the efficacy or veracity of such an approach, it was incumbent on me to acknowledge that some of what I used in the research might not fully reflect the participant perceptions in their fullest, and could be used out of context<sup>186</sup>. I have tried to minimise yet acknowledge this risk, and have therefore tried to cut the participant narratives as little as possible during the transcription process and to mediate them as little as possible during writing up.

#### ***1.4.2 Models of Analysis***

The analysis of information clearly entailed recognising a range of different metaphorical voices, including those which are absent<sup>187</sup>. It was therefore important to restrain myself from coming to conclusions based on participant narratives alone, but rather to listen with my ears cocked to what they *were* saying, what they were *not* saying, and what *I* was saying. The analytic method has therefore been at least as dialogic as the conversations with the participants.

The analytic process for participant narratives straddled a range of models appropriate to narrative analysis of the stories foregrounded in the interviews and dialogic conversations<sup>188</sup>. I took account of the various models available, in particular calling on thematic analysis: how the story is told, rather than what is said. I avoided structural analysis of participant narratives, which is better suited to descriptions of life stories or detailed experiences than to perceptions of specific areas of interest such as the research elicited. I paid more attention to

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<sup>185</sup> The organisation SALeathermen, see above

<sup>186</sup> See Mohan, G. (1999) Not so distant, not so strange: the personal and the political in participatory research. In *Ethics Place and Environment* 2, pp41–54; Cooke, B. & Kothari, U., (eds) (2001) *Participation: the new tyranny?* London: Zed Books.

<sup>187</sup> See Russell, G.M. & Kelly, N.H. (2002). Research as Interacting Dialogic Processes: Implications for Reflexivity. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 3(3), Art. 18, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs020318>

<sup>188</sup> See Riessman, C.K. (2005) Narrative Analysis. In *Narrative, Memory Everyday Life*. University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield, pp. 1-7. from <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/4920>. Reissman notes that the importance in narrative analysis is that “narrative” is about sequence and consequence in that events are selected, organised, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a specific audience.



interactional analysis, with an emphasis on the dialogic processes between me as 'interviewer', and the participants as 'narrators'.

Since I was present at the 'interviews' myself, I was also able to extend the analysis into a certain element of performative analysis, whereby I called on my personal perceptions of participant feelings demonstrated through their body language, ease of communication, tone of voice, etc.

A particular model on which I called was Attride-Stirling's conception of thematic networks, which is a compelling way of approaching the qualitative analytic process by seeing the main themes as networks<sup>189</sup>. The approach seeks not to manage conflicting definitions of a problem, but rather to explore the comprehension of an issue or the signification of an idea. I approached participant narratives analytically through systematising lowest-order premises coming from transcribed texts ('Basic Themes'), followed by categorising basic themes grouped to reflect more abstract concepts ('Organizing Themes'), and 'big-picture' themes covering the main textual metaphors ('Global Themes')<sup>190</sup>. Although not necessarily explicit in the thesis argument, I conceived of these themes as web-like maps covering the three levels and focused on the relationships between them. These themes assisted me in organising the substantive argument, and in deciding which contributions to include, and which to exclude.

When looking at the texts substantiating my argument<sup>191</sup>, and the content of the participant narratives sprinkled throughout the thesis, I also called on more minute levels of textual analysis available in Critical Discourse Analysis, by looking particularly at language use<sup>192</sup>. Since the thesis focuses on discourse in a 'big-picture' sense, I have avoided conversation analysis in its strict formulation, which focuses on the linguistic detail of participant narratives<sup>193</sup>.

<sup>189</sup> Attride-Stirling, J (2001) Thematic networks: an analytic tool for qualitative research. In *Qualitative Research*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 385-405 (2001)

<sup>190</sup> Attride-Stirling, J (2001) *ibid*

<sup>191</sup> for example in chapter 2 when looking at newspaper reports

<sup>192</sup> See McGregor, S.L.T. (2003) *Critical Discourse Analysis- A Primer*. In *Kappa Omicron Nu FORUM2003*,(1), 2003.

McGregor calls attention to various issues pertinent to the minutiae of sentence, paragraph and chapter construction:

1. texts can be framed, whereby the topic creates a perspective influencing the reader's perception
2. sentences convey information about power relations, about who is seen as having power over whom (agency)
3. omission of information, passive verbs, nominalization etc have an impact in terms of the agency of power
4. presupposition about normalisation and normality can have an effect on the reader
5. Insinuations carrying double meanings are powerful, and can be called on to deny any intention to mislead
6. connotations carry powerful meanings
7. tone of the text is created by means of specific words implying certainty and authority (modality)
8. single words can reflect register, and can imply mistrust, skepticism etc through choice of first/second/third person

<sup>193</sup> See Korobov, N. (2001). Reconciling Theory with Method: From Conversation Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis to Positioning Analysis. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 2(3), Art. 11, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0103119>. Korobov looks at tensions between

### 1.4.3 Writing Up

A singular challenge in writing up this research has been to avoid making it tedious to read, while still rendering a solid piece of academic writing. On the other hand, I have also avoided writing up the argument in too 'creative' a way, in order to avoid charges of flippancy in the face of the serious political issues at play<sup>194</sup>. Whilst acknowledging my subjective role and influence as researcher, I wanted to avoid too colloquial a framework for writing up the argument. I have therefore consciously not attempted to create a full-blown 'creative non-fiction'<sup>195</sup>, despite that this would perhaps better reflect the light-hearted and energised ways in which 'fetishists' undertake their play<sup>196</sup>.

#### 1.4.3a) Balancing Accountability and Joie-de-Vivre

In the writing process as much as in the research process, I have rather paid attention to reflexivity, and to the need to remain accountable in reflecting a positioned stance. This is why I lodge the political framework for the research from the very beginning, and consciously focus both the tone and content of the argument on the more serious elements of the sexual play undertaken by the participants, in order to give them as much of a voice as possible, while still recognising the ways in which they perpetuate heteronormativities<sup>197</sup>. This joins postmodernist demands to maintain an astute awareness of the political elements of all actions, including research<sup>198</sup>.

I have therefore paid close attention to who benefits from the research, and my concomitant accountability both to the research participants and to me<sup>199</sup>. My responsibility and accountability lies in honouring the life stories of the participants who, like everyone else, each faces their own

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Critical Discourse analysis and Conversation Analysis, and posits Positioning Analysis as a middle-ground to reconcile them.

<sup>194</sup> See chapter 2 re the problems of heteronormativity in South Africa, dominant homophobic discourses and threats of violence.

<sup>195</sup> Caulley, D.N. (2008) Making Qualitative Research Reports Less Boring- The Techniques of Writing Creative Nonfiction. In *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 424-449 (2008). Caulley calls on creative nonfiction as a means to write qualitative research reports by using fiction techniques. He argues that use of the word 'creative' does not indicate a diversion from the facts, but rather that creative nonfiction is about telling the truth creatively, which can be applied to writing qualitative research reports.

<sup>196</sup> See Gardner, F & Lehmann, J (2002) But Wait! There's Still More In *Qualitative Research Journal*, vol 2, no 2, 2002 pp16-27. The authors speak of the information garnered from interviews and focus groups over an extended period of time, substantial batches of information which is often substantially excluded from the final research product. They call on researchers to contemplate what can be garnered from what is excluded from the final product

<sup>197</sup> See Chapter 2

<sup>198</sup> See Russell, G.M. & Kelly, N.H. (2002). Research as Interacting Dialogic Processes: Implications for Reflexivity. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 3(3), Art. 18, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs020318>. See also Brydon-Miller, M. & Tolman, D.L.(1997) *Engaging the process of transformation*. In *Journal of Social Issues*, 53, 803-810.

<sup>199</sup> See Russell, G.M. & Kelly, N.H. (2002) *ibid*

emotional darkness<sup>200</sup>. Some participant narratives indicate that sexual desires may be linked to earlier life experiences of emotional, physical and/or sexual violence or abuse<sup>201</sup>. However, it is foolish to make direct causal links between childhood experiences and adult propensities, or to assume that adult desires are inherently dysfunctional. Clearly, as I will argue, some of the participants' sexual 'fetish' play exacerbates their demons. At times their play soothes the beast. And at times it is irrelevant to these monsters at all. I have therefore avoided publication of details of a very personal and painful nature gathered through the course of the research. I have honoured the participants' privacy as far as possible, assigning them with pseudonyms and avoiding clearly demarcating their identities. I have provided them with ethically sound recourse such as referrals to psychological professionals should this be needed.

Yet the extent to which the participants are generally self-aware, and balance their actions with a broader sense of well-being is remarkable. Largely they do not define themselves by their sexualities, they do not engage in sexual experiences which render them dysfunctional, and they are aware of their own boundaries. In rendering the thesis and writing up the participants' responses, I have tried to remain true to the spirit of individuals' desires and frame of reference, and therein to acknowledge that their frailties, both individually and as a group, are neither more nor less traumatic than anybody else's<sup>202</sup>.

I have been immersed in this world for the past few years of this research, and involved with unusual sexualities on a personal level for far longer. It is clear to me that the men who take part in 'fetish' sex take themselves and their sexual practices seriously, yet do so in a lighthearted, free and joyous way, with an eye to achieving and living out personal happiness<sup>203</sup>. Clearly the participants call on 'fetish' sexual practices not as the demon, but rather as a way to re-align individual life experiences in a positive light. I have therefore aligned my explicit desires with those of the participants to be allowed a political space in which to explore the world unfettered, rather than being labelled *a priori* 'bad, mad or sad'<sup>204</sup>.

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<sup>200</sup> See Theobald, S & Duckett, P (2002) Flexible Roles and Reflexive Souls in Qualitative Action Research. In *Qualitative Research Journal*, vol 2, no 2, 2002, pp58-79

<sup>201</sup> Which I acknowledge in the Interjection, but do not dwell on in any substantive way, since it does not form part of the argument.

<sup>202</sup> despite what psychopathologies might say. See chapter 4

<sup>203</sup> See Ahmed, S (2007) *The Happiness Turn*. In *New Formations*, Winter 2007/2008; 63; pp 7 et seq. On various philosophical traditions on happiness see also McGill, V.J. (1967) *The Idea of Happiness*. New York, Frederick A. Praeger; Sumner, L.W., (1996) *Welfare, Happiness and Ethics*. Oxford, Clarendon Press.

<sup>204</sup> See chapter 6

In writing up the research and constructing the thesis argument I have focused on balancing the sobriety of the theory with at least some of the life-spark of the participants' narratives. In this way I have written up the research very consciously advocating the attainment of both theoretical/scholarly and emotional balance, rather than the hysteria so often associated with both marginal sexualities and 'fetish'. This reflects the participants' positive sentiments, and focuses on positive living.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

The thesis is not founded on a purportedly stable theoretical base. The argument is not a positivist work of simple hypothetico-deductivism demonstrating straightforward relationships between things and their representations. Nor is it an empiricist unfolding of 'knowledge', pre-existing truths or incontrovertible 'reality', borne of experientially or experimentally derived 'facts'.

Rather, the underlying epistemologies for both the methodology and the thesis argument reflect an exploration of questions of process and relationality. The research has been conducted through an exploration of relational (rather than confrontational) epistemologies around being human, with a focus on plurality and a multiplicity of voices and views. I have therefore been at pains to reflect on the purportedly 'external' observation of circumstances and narratives, acknowledging the subjective nature of the information and perspectives gathered through this process.

The research methodologies anticipate the thesis call to revise the epistemological bases of sexualities research. Divisive and 'scientific' approaches to 'doing' scholarship are inappropriate, specifically in the arena of health and psychological well-being. Rather, cohesive and encompassing approaches do the researcher, the metatheory and the research subjects more justice, since all are implicated in the adventure which is research. The methodology has therefore had to be fluid and internally coherent, reflecting the underlying epistemological approach to the developing thesis argument in a recursive way.

The most appropriate methodology for the research process has therefore been discourse analytic qualitative research which reflects a feminist/queer epistemology and participatory methodologies. The key to this research has, for me, been a focus on epistemological coherence and scholarly ethics, through remaining reflexive on my role at all points of the research adventure.

## CHAPTER 2

# LOCATING 'GAY MALE FETISH SEXUALITIES': DIVISIVE IDENTITY POLITICS, COHESIVE QUEERNESS AND RECOGNISING SUBJECTIVE VALUE

“As I acquired more experience in the S/M community, I realised this, too, was a sexuality that allowed people to step outside the usual rigid boundaries of sexual orientation. I met lesbians who topped straight men for money .... I met straight men who would go down on other men or be fucked by them if their mistresses ordered them to do it. Since the acts took place under the authority of women, they thought of them as heterosexual behaviour. (I also met a lot of bisexuals who didn't need any excuses.) These combined experiences have resulted in a lifestyle that doesn't fit the homosexual stereotype. I lie with my woman lover of five years. I have lots of casual sex with women. Once in a while I have casual sex with gay men. I have a three-year relationship with a homosexual man who doesn't use the term gay. And I call myself a lesbian.”<sup>205</sup>

Few of the research participants feel fully accepted or fulfilled in the heteronormative world or in normative 'mainstream' gay subculture<sup>206</sup>. For fear of judgement and censure, they are often reticent to express their desires publicly in either environment, neither of which entirely endorses their 'fetish' practices. Rather, they prefer to be broadly seen as 'normal' gay men with no 'dark' side:

“I never, never, never spoke to anyone about my fetishes. Because you're the first person I'm actually talking to about fetishes.” ('Henry')<sup>207</sup>

Politically, they want the same rights and options as other citizens, and they therefore rely on a certain level of visibility as 'homosexuals', an identity which links to prevailing gay rights discourses, qualifying them for continued legal and constitutional validation. Yet on other levels they want invisibility: to be left alone to explore their lives and their sexualities unjudged<sup>208</sup>. They escape the prevailing approbrium against the vibrant recesses of their imaginations on the 'fetish scene', where, in the safety of 'fetish' collectives such as SALEathermen<sup>209</sup>, they find a sense of camaraderie and liberation from normative social proscriptions.

<sup>205</sup> Califia, P. *Gay Men, Lesbians and Sex: Doing it Together*. In Morland, I and Willox, A, (2005) *Queer Theory*, Palgrave MacMillan, Hampshire and New York, pp22-27 at 23

<sup>206</sup> See arguments below

<sup>207</sup> During the course of the thesis I will call on participant narratives to support my arguments, which are predominantly focused on the metatheories underpinning sexualities. See chapter 2 and the Interjection in this regard

<sup>208</sup> See argument and participant narratives below

<sup>209</sup> the local organisation representing the 'scene'. See [www.saleathermen.org.za](http://www.saleathermen.org.za)

Although most of the participants identify as 'gay', their fetish practices undermine simplistic categories of 'gay' vs 'straight' in ways paralleled to Pat Califia's perceptions<sup>210</sup>. Such complexity is reflected in contemporary sexualities studies and anti-homophobic analyses which no longer take simplistic constructions of sexual orientation as primary departure points<sup>211</sup>.

I suggest that the basis for an exploration of 'gay male fetish sexuality', and for the validation of and visibility for 'alterity', must therefore be unpacked beyond simplistic identity politics protecting homosexuals. This is important in order to delineate a clear political, and thereafter metatheoretical, basis for the public acknowledgement of the perverse imagination as a valid space for exploration. This basis should, I suggest, be unfettered by norms, expectations and judgment, and should celebrate the complexity of human experience (rather than merely 'putting up' with what many perceive as undesirable people), where the perverse itself is deconstructed.

As I argue in this chapter, Butlerian ideas of queerness and performativity enable a fluidity of identification over time and space, where people are not expected to conform to fatuous dualist gendered or sexualised performances<sup>212</sup>. Queer theories fit more closely with the contradictory desires of 'fetishists' to be both visible and invisible, and with calls to increase access to political rights while encouraging cultural paradigmatic shifts<sup>213</sup>. Further, I suggest, Queer theories tend to be more theoretically sound and socially cohesive.

However, given the identity-bound political and social world in which we live, aspirational utopian queer ideals on their own are often not workable political solutions, and, I suggest, should be mediated by pragmatism. 'Gay male fetish sexuality' should therefore be seen through lenses which acknowledge the personal in the political, by viewing sexuality as a resource on which individuals call for recognising subjective value<sup>214</sup>.

<sup>210</sup> See opening quote, supra: Califia, P. *Gay Men, Lesbians and Sex: Doing it Together*. In Morland, I and Willox, A, (2005) *Queer Theory*, Palgrave MacMillan, Hampshire and New York, pp22-27 at 23

<sup>211</sup> See Sedgwick, E.K. (2005) *Axiomatic*. In Morland, I and Willox, A (2005) *Queer Theory* Palgrave MacMillan, Hampshire and New York, pp81-95 at 81: As Sedgwick notes, there are basic axioms that don't assume fixity of identity:

1. Axiom 1: People are different from each other
2. Axiom 2: the study of sexuality is not co-extensive with the study of gender; correspondingly, antihomophobic inquiry is not co-extensive with feminist inquiry. But we can't know in advance how they will be different;
3. Axiom 3: there can't be an a priori decision about how far it will make sense to conceptualise lesbian and gay male identities together. Or separately;
4. Axiom 4: the immemorial, seemingly ritualised debates on nature versus nurture take place against a very unstable background of tacit assumptions and fantasies about both nurture and nature
5. Axiom 5: the historical search for a great paradigm shift may obscure the present condition of sexual identity

<sup>212</sup> Butler, J. (1999) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* NY, Routledge

<sup>213</sup> See below for a clearer explanation of these terms

<sup>214</sup> This is based on the idea that there is no essentialist and necessarily coherent 'self', but rather that both discursive

These principles form the foundation for this chapter, which, although not introducing anything startlingly new to sexualities discourses, politically locates the thesis, and forms both a context and the beginning of the argument itself by calling on synergistic ontologies. The chapter sets the scene for the detailed exploration of how divisive and object-focused lenses for gay male fetish sexuality should, I argue, be replaced by the subject-oriented metatheory which recognises the importance of bodily experience in sexual fetish practices<sup>215</sup>.

## 2.1 Problematising Gay Rights Identity as Divisive

[A]n understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition<sup>216</sup>.

As I will argue in more detail in the Interjection and Chapter 5, (gay) 'identity' is problematic, since it cannot be pinned down in any useful way, as can't the exact constitution of either the subject, or the 'gay male fetishist' subject. Instead, I suggest, queer fluidity is a more appropriate starting-point from which to view both unusual sexual proclivities (such as 'gay male fetish sexuality') and the relationships between people and objects which these reflect.

### 2.1.1 The Complexity of Sexual Identities

Historically, gay rights discourses and sexualities epistemologies have problematically been based on fictions of relatively simple binary identities of 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual', which, like identities such as male and female, are assumed to be mutually exclusive<sup>217</sup>. Sexual identity is often conceived of as being unitary and coherent, where the sexual 'other' (gay or lesbian) is singular in its otherness. Sexual identity is, however, far from coherent, and indeed never has been<sup>218</sup>. It cannot be externally identified in some essentialist way, but is a

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constructs and materially-oriented experience impact on the meanings and value individuals ascribe to their lives. In regard the constitution of the individual, see chapter 5

<sup>215</sup> This links in to a larger pursuit within sexuality studies of acknowledging the bodily experience.

<sup>216</sup> Sedgwick, EK (2005) *Axiomatic*. In Morland, I and Willox, A, (2005) *Queer Theory* Palgrave MacMillan, Hampshire and New York, pp81-95 at 81. Such critical analysis, Sedgwick suggests, should look at other binaries like knowledge/ignorance and domestic/foreign in ways that queer theory attempts to deconstruct apparently non-sexual binarisms as normative concepts. Sexuality binaries are just as contradictory and determinative as those of sex, class and race, and have "primary importance for all modern Western identity and social organization (and not merely for homosexual identity and culture)" and is "so situated as to enable most inextricably and at the same time most differentially the filaments of other important definitional nexuses". Note that I include the gay male fetish sexuality under discussion in 'Western culture', since most participants affiliate with western gay norms.

<sup>217</sup> See especially Butler, JP (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* New York, Routledge

<sup>218</sup> The genesis of sexual identity lies in nineteenth-century sexual psychology models (See chapter 3, in particular relating to Krafft-Ebing and Freud). Sedgwick argues that the late nineteenth-century crystallization of a homo/

complex interplay between psychosocial, sociocultural and symbolic dimensions<sup>219</sup>. Today there is an endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition in modern western culture<sup>220</sup>. Garlinger, notes that “although it appears to be a seemingly coherent category of sexual orientation, homosexuality is, in fact, riddled with internal contradictions about the relationship between erotic desire, sexual acts, and personal identity. The name given to gay and lesbian relationships will invariably reference, directly or indirectly, the ideological substance of the terms already in circulation for same-sex desire”<sup>221</sup>.

Butlerian arguments on the performativity of such supposedly static and immutable identities are now entrenched in the scholarly landscape, and counter any arguments that identity is unitary or singular<sup>222</sup>. As Lance and Tanesini point out, often the rejection of the existence of identities derives from essentialist assumptions of 'identity' as a concept, through a desire to undermine the dichotomy between homo and heterosexuality, or through a radical libertarian view that constraints are oppressive and limit freedom<sup>223</sup>.

Yet people nevertheless rely on sexuality as an important part of how they self-identify. People locate their political claims in a sense of authentic experience as members of specific identity categories/communities<sup>224</sup>. It is therefore not enough to simply critique anthropological and/or sociolinguistic constructions of identity-politics without acknowledging that people use 'identity' to lodge their real-world experience and political claims. Sexual identity can therefore not simply be

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heterosexual binary created an ontological “world-mapping” of sexual identity where “every given person, just as he or she was necessarily assignable to a male or a female gender, was now considered necessarily assignable as well to a homo- or a heterosexuality, a binarized identity that was full of implications, however confusing, for even the ostensibly least sexual aspects of personal existence. It was this new development that left no space in the culture exempt from the potent incoherences [sic] of homo/heterosexual definition.” (Sedgwick, EK. (1990) *Epistemology of the Closet* Berkeley: University of California Press pp2). As Garlinger notes, these fictionally coherent models added to, rather than overruling the previous religiously-based model of sex acts, which remain in our understanding of identity. See Goldberg, J. (1992) *Sodomities: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* Stanford: Stanford University Press

<sup>219</sup> Foucault argues that sexuality was a recent invention, as a mechanism of organizing bodies and pleasures into comprehensible subjects. See Foucault, M (1978) *The History of Sexuality*. Trans. Robert Hurley. Vol. 1. New York: Pantheon; Garlinger, PP “In All But Name”: Marriage and the Meaning of Homosexuality. In *Discourse* 26.3 (Fall 2004), pp. 41–72. Wayne State University Press, Detroit, Michigan. Also note David Halperin’s contestation of this reading: Foucault set two types of discourses for same-sex sexual relations in opposition but did not maintain that there was no-one not making wider connections between same-sex relations and individual subjectivity beyond the legal system. Halperin views Foucault’s argument as being that a connection between erotic acts and individual subjectivity was absent as social, legal, and political discourse until the nineteenth century (27–29). See Halperin, D. (2002) *How To Do the History of Homosexuality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

See Foucault, M (1978) *The History of Sexuality*. Trans. Robert Hurley. Vol. 1. New York: Pantheon. By saying “The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species”, he is understood to have indicated a new transformation of desire into sexuality as an expression of individual personhood

<sup>220</sup> Sedgwick, EK (1990) *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press pp2

<sup>221</sup> Garlinger, PP “In All But Name”: Marriage and the Meaning of Homosexuality. In *Discourse* 26.3 (Fall 2004), pp. 41–72. Wayne State University Press, Detroit, Michigan

<sup>222</sup> Butler, JP, *ibid*

<sup>223</sup> Lance, MN and Tanesini, A. Identity Judgments, Queer Politics. In Morland, I and Willox, A (eds) (2005) *Queer Theory* Palgrave MacMillan Hampshire and New York pp171 – 186 at 171

<sup>224</sup> Cameron, D & Kulick, D (2005) Identity crisis? In *Language & Communication* 25 (2005) 107–125



denied as if it did not exist, nor discounted<sup>225</sup>. Yet a 'claim-staking' idea of identity is not enough on its own to ground the study of sexuality, or, therefore epistemologies on sexual desires which incorporate material objects<sup>226</sup>.

The implications are complex. To say that certain kinds of people experiencing varied sexuality are "in denial" of their "true" sexuality is to render real-world complexity simplistic, and to fail to acknowledge variety and possibility<sup>227</sup>. It also assumes that human experience and identities are static and unproblematic.

Cameron and Kulick acknowledge that people have a strong mental and emotional involvement with their sexual acts, yet nevertheless often view these acts as as alien or threatening to their 'self-perceived identity'<sup>228</sup>.

Further, individuals often have difficulty articulating their own identities in light of their (at times contradictory) combinations of experiences and multiplicities, which render identities insufficient to encompass human experience. Some married men identify as heterosexual, but have anonymous sex with other men. Some self-identified lesbians have sexual feelings for men. Indeed, the research participants, supposedly singularly 'gay' men, are at times uneasy about identity:

Qu: Would you describe yourself as 'heterosexual', 'bisexual', 'gay', 'queer' or something else? Why?

"Gay in general, queer in disposition, gay with bisexual leanings to myself." ('Joseph')

"Gay. Um, ja, a lot of the above as well, having been married for 18 years... The thing is, do you want to know what I am now or what I have been?" ('Lawrence')

As evidenced by the research participants, people manage multiple (religious, sexual, cultural, social) identities at the same time, some of which seem inconsistent<sup>229</sup>:

"...with my religion, a good catholic boy, I would automatically feel bad about my sexual orientation, but I've come to grips, not... come to an understanding with that. Um, I accept myself as I am." ('Henry')

<sup>225</sup> Lance, MN and Tanesini, A. Identity Judgments, Queer Politics. In Morland, I and Willox, A (eds) (2005) *Queer Theory* Palgrave MacMillan Hampshire and New York pp171 – 186 at 171

<sup>226</sup> Cameron, D & Kulick, D (2005) Identity crisis? In *Language & Communication* 25 (2005) 107–125 pp112. This is discussed in the context of sociolinguistics and sexuality. They claims that it is not sufficient to posit the relationships between sexuality and language either.

<sup>227</sup> Such claims are often made in homophobic claims that homosexuals are merely 'mistaken' or 'ill', and in gay rights discourses claiming that 'bisexuals' are merely closeted homosexuals

<sup>228</sup> Cameron, D & Kulick, D (2005) Identity crisis? In *Language & Communication* 25 (2005) 107–125. In this respect, "sexuality is a social and psychological phenomenon that often exceeds, and sometimes contradicts, the sexual identities people consciously claim or disclaim. What people desire often clashes with, undermines or disrupts who they consider they are or ought to be."

<sup>229</sup> Lance, MN and Tanesini, A. Identity Judgments, Queer Politics. In Morland, I and Willox, A (eds) (2005) *Queer Theory* Palgrave MacMillan Hampshire and New York pp171 – 186 at 171

Qu: and how did you change... how did that acceptance happen?

“I think it was a case of I realised I would never ever be different to what I am. Right? As a good Catholic boy I would say you're gonna have to go to confession every week. But every week you're going to confession, you're saying the same things. You've done the same things. And you're gonna be doing that til the end of your life. Um, when you come down to it, Christ came to die for sinners, not for saints.” ('Henry')

The inconsistencies inherent in real-life experience require commitments on the part of the individual, commitments which indicate that identities are subject to normative constraints and project normatively, rather than causally, into the future<sup>230</sup>. Biology clearly is not descriptive enough of sexual identities, which are instead of social significance<sup>231</sup>. Whereas most ('heterosexual') people attempt to repeat normative performances in order to try to embody the 'proper' in accordance with norms<sup>232</sup>, some refuse to comply with normative heterosexuality<sup>233</sup>. In other words, the repetition of the performances of identity open the door to contestation<sup>234</sup>.

To look a little deeper: 'identities' are made up of an 'ought' proposition: “I ought to take a particular identity as part of my script, and I ought to allow associated scripts in order to claim coherence with other scripts”<sup>235</sup>. Further, one 'ought' to “take this identity to project normatively into the future, and that others ought to assign social priority to facilitating one's living according to the resulting narrative unity of the various scripts”<sup>236</sup>. Claiming 'who one is' is not to describe a hidden nature, since it does not describe it at all, nor is it simply an empty description of how one is treated, since it is a political endorsement. In this respect, to claim a 'queer' (rather than 'gay'<sup>237</sup>) identity is to endorse an exclusion from what is 'proper' and claim that exclusion as an identity<sup>238</sup>.

As Sedgwick notes, the idea of 'difference' incorporates varied forms of sexuality, which are nevertheless carelessly lumped together under the heading 'sexual orientation'<sup>239</sup>. Sexuality is a pragmatic and simplistic way of differentiating between people,

<sup>230</sup> See chapter 6 re the role of agency in sexuality

<sup>231</sup> See Cameron, D & Kulick, D (2005) Identity crisis? In *Language & Communication* 25 (2005) 107–125, and Butler, JP (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* New York, Routledge

<sup>232</sup> Cameron, D & Kulick, D (2005) *ibid*

<sup>233</sup> Butler, JP (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* New York, Routledge

<sup>234</sup> Butler, *ibid*

<sup>235</sup> Lance, MN and Tanesini, A. Identity Judgments, Queer Politics. In Morland, I and Willox, A (eds) (2005) *Queer Theory* Palgrave MacMillan Hampshire and New York pp171 – 186 at 179

<sup>236</sup> Lance and Tanesini, *ibid*, pp179

<sup>237</sup> See below

<sup>238</sup> Lance and Tanesini, *ibid*, pp179

<sup>239</sup> See Sedgwick, E.K. (2005) Axiomatic. In Morland, I. and Willox, A. (2005) *Queer Theory* Palgrave MacMillan, Hampshire and New York, pp81-95 at 82 for a very compelling explanation as to how sexuality is not useful as a category denoting 'difference'. She notes how experiences, bodies, sexual acts, sexual objects mean different things

whereas more logically conceived and true-to-life differences transcend sexuality and gender categories<sup>240</sup>.

Cameron and Kulick note that “consciously claimed or denied identity is not simply or transparently congruent with sexuality”<sup>241</sup>. They differentiate between identity, which they see as “a subject’s more or less conscious allegiance to a particular social position”, and identification, which they see as allowing for “recognition and investigation of conflicting affiliations that may both structure and disrupt a person’s claim to a particular identity”<sup>242</sup>. These ideas can be used to understand the richness and complexity of personal narratives in constructing complex cartographies of social relations and sexualities theorising. In this way, sexuality goes beyond simplistic constructions of identity, and more particularly how identity is denied exclusively or primarily in a ‘claim-staking’ sense.

### 2.1.2 'Queer Locations' not 'Gay Identity'

In contradistinction to 'gay identity', I suggest that queerness is a more compelling political location for 'gay male fetish' sexuality<sup>243</sup>. Penn and Irvine note that much recent work in gay and lesbian studies can be categorised in two distinct but related camps:

- identifying and accounting for homosexual identity formation in a variety of contexts, which often results in case studies of specific homosexualities or homosexuals in relation to race and ethnicity, gender, region, class, historical period, etc.;
- a comprehensive rethinking of the theoretical foundations upon which work is based, resulting in provocative studies exploring reconfiguration of theoretical formulations in the light of evidence provided by emerging case studies<sup>244</sup>.

They point out that an effect of postmodern emphases on “fractured identities, multiple subjectivities, performance, and representations as markers for ever-shifting cultural formations and social practices is to reframe the focus of study from "gay and lesbian" to

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to different people, even within the same sexual identity 'category' and implies that the subjective experience is a more useful way of looking at sexuality, rather than 'objective' identification. In this regard, see the arguments in chapters 3 to 6.

<sup>240</sup> See chapters 3 to 6 for an argument around how these should be seen, calling on lived experiences and discourses

<sup>241</sup> Cameron, D & Kulick, D (2005) Identity crisis? In *Language & Communication* 25 (2005) 107–125 at 112

<sup>242</sup> Cameron, D & Kulick (2005) *ibid* pp112

<sup>243</sup> See Quinn, V & Sinfield, A (2006) Queer Theory. In *The Year's Work in Critical and Cultural Theory* 2006 14(1):143-151. Quinn and Sinfield argue that Queer theory can be read as coming from Russian formalism, since it relies on the idea that to disrupt language and representation in the way that Joyce and surrealism did is similar to disrupting dominant ideologies, and therefore economic and political relations which it secures

<sup>244</sup> Penn, D & Irvine, J. *ibid*

“queer.”<sup>245</sup> This move locates re-mapping of boundaries of inclusion in terms of ‘queerness’, which can be described as “the fractious, the disruptive, the irritable, the impatient, the unapologetic, the bitchy, the camp....”<sup>246</sup>. Queer analyses intentionally disrupt the apparently rigid separation between “normal” and “outcast” and focus on the fluidity of boundaries. They further note that “as an analysis that focuses on shifting boundaries, queer similarly destabilizes the integrity of gay and lesbian as a distinct category, however expansively constituted. Here, queer is intended to remedy what some believe to be the intellectual and political limitations of the identity-based categories “gay” and “lesbian.”<sup>247</sup>”

One of the hinges of this construction of queerness is the question of visibility, an idea paralleled in transgender theory and a useful point of intersection for this thesis since it specifically recalls the concerns of the participants to be both visible and invisible, and both normative and non-normative<sup>248</sup>. More normative strands of trans-theories locate the demands of the transgendered person in the right to fade back into normative society by claiming the gender of their choice. These goals are, I suggest, inappropriate to claims for unitary gay identity, which entail publicly acknowledging and answering for one’s sexuality. The transgendered person, like the ‘queer’, claims his/her ‘identity’ in relation to what they cannot ‘be’, i.e. the gender of their choice, and they emphasise the ‘trans’-ness of their gender.

In particular, queer theory interrogates whether practices are fundamentally transgressive or complicit. Quinn and Sinfield argue that the answer lies with the beholder, in their historical situation<sup>249</sup>. They note that unfixing gender took on the task of undermining heterosexuality’s precedence since all sexualities are constructions that are anxious, iterative and performative<sup>250</sup>.

This thesis locates ‘fetish sexuality’ itself as inherently transgressive and unfixed, even though ‘fetish practices’ can legitimately be read as repeating heteronormative scripts<sup>251</sup>. As I will argue, this is since, although the participants’ ‘fetish practices’ may largely reflect

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<sup>245</sup> Penn, D & Irvine, J. *ibid*

<sup>246</sup> See Dinshaw, C.

(2006) The History of GLQ, Volume 1: LGBTQ Studies, Censorship, and Other Transnational Problems In *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* - Volume 12, Number 1, 2006, pp. 5-26

<sup>247</sup> Penn, D & Irvine, J. *ibid*

<sup>248</sup> See Hausman, B.L. (2001) Recent Transgender Theory. In *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Summer, 2001), pp. 465-490; Halberstam, J (2005) *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York University Press, New York. See also the Interjection in relation to normativity

<sup>249</sup> See Quinn, V & Sinfield, A (2006) Queer Theory. In *The Year's Work in Critical and Cultural Theory* 2006 14(1):143-151

<sup>250</sup> Quinn, V & Sinfield, A, *Ibid*

<sup>251</sup> See the Interjection

problematic normativity (which I suggest is linked to the participants' own assumptions that they are in some essentialist way 'gay'), the relationships between people and objects which underlie such practices indicate a fluidity and an undermining of (normative) assumptions around the fixity of human-object distinctions and thereby the role of sexuality as sense of emotional (re-)location and (re-)orientation<sup>252</sup>. In so doing, I call on functions of queerness as both subversive and pedagogical<sup>253</sup>.

### 2.1.2a) *Queerness as Subversive*

Whereas 'gay identity' replicates the discourses of difference between heterosexual and homosexual, and therefore re-inscribes the idea of 'difference', queerness is a “parodic replication and resignification of heterosexual constructs within non-heterosexual frames.”<sup>254</sup> This parodying subverts the idea of the normative by shifting the frame of reference from the forward-looking 'ought' proposition of homo- or heterosexuality to an 'ought not' proposition<sup>255</sup>. In other words, queerness parodies heteronormativity by denying the identity-based assumptions that people 'ought' to be 'heterosexual', failing which they 'ought' to be 'homosexual'. Rather, queerness says that people aren't inescapably bound to being anything in particular<sup>256</sup>. In this way, Freeman notes the possibility of re-imagining queer as “a set of possibilities produced out of temporal and historical difference”, where we can see the manipulation of time as a way of producing both “bodies and relationalities (or even non-relationality), and thereby develop “a more productively porous queer studies”<sup>257</sup>. This means that if we manipulate the linear and causal thinking of the 'ought' propositions of heteronormativity and identity, we can rephrase the assumptions around time and space implicit in both heteronormativity and identity politics. Both these assumptions propose that people are in some ways bound to reproduce identities/identifications because of both their histories and the physical forms they inhabit. Queerness, however, implies that by acknowledging that there is no necessary causal link from now into the future between historic socio-cultural influences and people's (sexual) performances, we can acknowledge that people choose social performances moving forward in time based both on the dominant discourses and their material experience<sup>258</sup>.

<sup>252</sup> See the Interjection and Chapters 5 and 6

<sup>253</sup> See particularly Chapter 6

<sup>254</sup> Butler, J. (2006) *Imitation and Gender Insubordination*. In *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* Pearson Prentice Hall

<sup>255</sup> See supra: ref Lance, MN and Tanesini, A. Identity Judgments, Queer Politics. In Morland, I and Willox, A (eds) (2005) *Queer Theory* Palgrave MacMillan Hampshire and New York pp171 – 186 at 179

<sup>256</sup> This means in a forward-looking sense, i.e that people can move away from the historical/backward-looking bounds which have constructed their consciousness through discursive constructs. See chapters 5 and 6 in this regard

<sup>257</sup> Freeman, E (2007) Introduction, in *GLQ* Vol. 1, 13:2 – 3 pp159-176

<sup>258</sup> For a more in-depth explanation, see chapters 5 and 6 about the roles of discourse and embodied experience in the

### 2.1.2b) Queerness as Pedagogy

Queerness is also more than merely a reactionary political position in response to heteronormativity. It is also a way of opening the world by challenging essentialist ideas about the subject of unusual and non-normative experiences<sup>259</sup>. In some ways it is about teaching the normative-focused world, which includes both 'heterosexuals' and 'homosexuals' such as some of the present participants who cling to notions of separate sexual identities. As Britzman sees it, queer pedagogy entails risking the self by engaging with multiple, rather than plural, identifications, rather than identities<sup>260</sup>. In other words, “[n]ot that anyone might be queer, but that something queer might happen to anyone”<sup>261</sup>.

### 2.1.2c) Identity and Queerness: Complex Relations

Queerness doesn't necessarily seek to erase identity, but rather to use it in more complex and effective ways. Butler and Patton both argue the need recognise the problematic nature of identity politics in the ways they exclude and reproduce oppressive politics<sup>262</sup>. But they argue that identity categories can be strategically used<sup>263</sup>.

Both Butler and Patton base certain of their reservations on the concerns of identity politics as bases for claims for minority rights. Butler argues that Foucault "in his later interviews, ... suggests that identities are formed within contemporary political arrangements in relation to certain requirements of the liberal state, ones which presume that the assertion of rights and claims to entitlement can only be made on the basis of a singular and injured identity." She further argues that "[i]n this sense,

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development of subjectivity and identification.

<sup>259</sup> In other words queerness isn't merely a reactionary proposition about what 'identity' isn't. It's also a means of shifting dominant paradigms moving forward, using the idea of time and space in innovative ways to potentially empower individuals and their communities to view their worlds differently and therefore to shift discourses. In this regard, see chapters 5 & 6 about how the subject re-orient him/herself

<sup>260</sup> See Britzman, D. (1998). *Lost subjects, contested objects: Toward a psychoanalytic inquiry of learning* Albany: State University of New York Press

<sup>261</sup> Haver, W (1997) Queer Research in Golding, S. (ed) (1997) *The Eight Technologies of Otherness* Routledge: New York, London, p288-291. Haver, calling on Britzman, suggests what we could read as a liberation, depending on our perspective, “a technique or a peisis which does not make the world familiar or comfortable ... but which defamiliarises, or makes strange, queer or even cruel what we had thought to be a world.”

<sup>262</sup> For Patton's arguments about postmodern governmentality see Patton, C. Tremble, Hetero Swine. In Warner, M (ed.) (1993) *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* Minneapolis: University of Minn Press, pp 162.

<sup>263</sup> Butler, J.(1995) Discussion. In Rajchman, J. ed. (1995) *The Identity in Question*, New York: Routledge, at 129; Butler, J (1993) *Bodies that Matter* New York: Routledge pp-226-230.

Butler notes that “particular identities are being produced as contested zones within political discourse all the time, and this is being done in part by right-wing political forces. ... [I]t would be perilous ... to claim or call for the surpassing of particular identities on the Left, since that would be to give over such identities to a reactionary constitution. In the face of the prospective silencing or erasure of gender, race or sexual minority identities by reactionary political forces, it is important to be able to articulate them, and to insist on these identities as sites of valuable cultural contest. ... [I]t is imperative to assert identities, at the same time that it is crucial to interrogate the exclusionary operations by which they are constituted.”

what we call identity politics is produced by a state which can only allocate recognition and rights to objects totalized by the particularity that constitutes their plaintiff status."<sup>264</sup>

Likewise, Patton notes that "the person who takes up a post-Stonewall gay identity feels compelled to act in a way that will constitute her or himself as a subject appropriate to civil rights discourse, and thus, deserving of the status accruing to successful claims to minority status."<sup>265</sup> She posits that "postmodern mini-narratives of individual and collective moral legitimacy are replacing the rational metanarratives... that characterized state legitimation in modernity"<sup>266</sup>.

This is compelling. To add to this, Weeks urges us to read Foucault's contribution more broadly through focusing on the question of identity or subjectivity, the historic present (i.e. "after Foucault," where we are actors), and the question of ethics and values<sup>267</sup>. Weeks claims that queering theory led to social constructionism becoming unfashionable while queer theorists attempted to transcend dichotomies and categorisations. However he maintains that it remained important to understand sexualities in terms of historicity, particularity and universality, without trying to deny the validity of gay experiences, but rather to affirm them without falling back on false or impossible histories or anthropologies. He notes the attempts to understand heterosexuality in the search for unmasking homosexuality, when three questions became important:

"First, how is sexuality shaped, how is it articulated with economic, social, and political structures, and how, in a phrase, has it been invented? Second, how has the domain of sexuality achieved such a critical organizing and symbolic significance in Western culture, and why do we think it is so important? Third, what role should we assign class divisions and patterns of male domination and racism, how is sex gendered and made hierarchical, and what is the relationship between sex and power?"<sup>268</sup>

<sup>264</sup> Butler, J (1995) *Subjection, Resistance, Resignification....* In Rajchman, J. ed. (1995) *The Identity in Question*, New York: Routledge, at 242.

<sup>265</sup> Patton, C. Tremble, *Hetero Swine*. In Warner, M ed.(1993) *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p.174.

<sup>266</sup> Patton (1993) *ibid*

<sup>267</sup> Weeks, J (2005) *Remembering Foucault*. In *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 14, Nos. 1/2, January/April 2005 186-201 at pp187: Like Weeks, my argument seeks

"...neither to engage in a polemical dismissal of Foucault and his legacy nor to find an original Foucault buried beneath a tonnage of overreverence, ancestor worship, and system building. I don't want to find the halo around his head, but neither do I wish to forget Foucault. I want to remember him, to remember why I found his work so important. At the same time I want to query/queery his legacy, not as an act of lèse-majesté or intellectual betrayal nor as a rejection of my earlier self, which grabbed at every bit of Foucauldiana that was published, but as a tribute to the stimulus he provided."

<sup>268</sup> Weeks, J (2005) *ibid* at 188

As Weeks argues, Foucault's History of Sexuality seemed to address these questions. If not directly, then through the underlying question that works its way through the three questions. In other words, if sexuality is constructed by human agency, then how can it be changed? Weeks notes that Foucault seems to offer a framework through the chronology he proposes, and through explanations of the rise of power and bio-power, which Foucault does largely through linking the mechanics of power in relation to hystericising women's bodies, pedagogising child sexuality, socialising procreation and psychiatrising perverse pleasures. In so doing, Weeks argues that Foucault suggests ways of thinking about gender, race, sexuality and subjectivities that challenge easy linearity and progressivism, and challenge a call on sexuality to function merely as a force to counter power. Instead, Foucault recognises the significance of the social whereby sexuality is not subversive, where sexuality becomes more about the practices of friendship and relationships, the body and pleasure<sup>269</sup>.

This more complex conception of Foucault acknowledges both discourse and embodiment, which, as I argue in Chapters 5 and 6, is a precondition to strong LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Intersex) social advance and a progressive agenda, which includes removing antigay legislation, equality in age of consent, anti discrimination measures, adoption, same-sex partnership and marriage legislation, community-based HIV action and provision of gay services<sup>270</sup>. I include calls for depathologising fetish sexuality within these parameters<sup>271</sup>.

However, as Weeks acknowledges, this growth in provision for LGB people is unfinished, in light of conservative politics and fundamentalisms, which refuse dialogue and perpetuate homophobia, heterosexism and heteronormativity<sup>272</sup>. It is therefore imperative that political and theoretical work be done both *with* and *against* naturalized gay identities<sup>273</sup>, and I suggest, through also engaging in queer revolts against tyrannical identities<sup>274</sup>.

Weeks claims that all sexual identities are provisional, showing contingency and problematics of

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<sup>269</sup> Weeks, *ibid*, speaks approvingly, in this regard, of David Halperin and Mark Blasius: Halperin, D (1995) *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press; Blasius, M (1994) *Gay and Lesbian Politics: Sexuality and the Emergence of a New Ethic* Philadelphia

<sup>270</sup> Weeks, *ibid*, pp193. He notes four paradoxes, that sexual identity adopts fixity and uniformity and at the same time confirms the reality of unfixity, diversity, and difference; that identities are personal but inform multiple social belongings, that sexual identities are at the same time historical and contingent; and that they are are fictions—albeit necessary fictions

<sup>271</sup> See chapter 4

<sup>272</sup> Weeks, J (2005) Remembering Foucault. In *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 14, Nos. 1/2, January/April 2005 186-201 at 193

<sup>273</sup> for example the desire to obtain a rationale for gay existence in genes or brains

<sup>274</sup> See Weeks, *ibid*. Ironically, this revolt is often engaged with by creating new identities such as post-gay, post-AIDS, postfeminist identities.



identifications<sup>275</sup>. He points out that sexual identities are troubling, entailing paradoxes, and acting as relay points in networks of differences interconnected and intersected in amongst race, nationality, gender, age and sexuality<sup>276</sup>.

“Perverse sexual identities, in particular, breach boundaries, subvert good order, reveal the worm of transgression at the heart of the normal, and thereby warn us that even the strongest identities are figments of our imagination—which, of course, can make them more, not less, potent.”<sup>277</sup>

He notes four paradoxes:

- Sexual identity adopts fixity and uniformity and at the same time confirming the reality of unfixity, diversity, and difference.
- Identities are personal but are informed by multiple social belongings.
- Sexual identities are at the same time historical and contingent.
- Sexual identities are fictions—albeit necessary fictions<sup>278</sup>.

However, his labeling of sexual identities as fictions is not to undermine their value. He recognizes the power of narratives, and acknowledges that histories are inescapable as a means of holding onto and locating the present. His conception of identities gives a sense of agency and at the same time shows their arbitrariness<sup>279</sup>. As I will argue in more detail in Chapter 6, they are about ‘becoming’ or ‘moving towards’, which is a more cohesive concept than the two-dimensional divisive version of ‘being’, which inherently equates to ‘separation from’<sup>280</sup>.

This more cohesive approach based on a positional and contextualised frame of reference for ‘identity’ (rather than static oppositional location) is more in line with ‘queer’ thinking, which is something different to the presumed static ‘gayness’. Halperin calls on Foucault and notes that we can move away from substantive, and towards ‘oppositional’ constitutions for (homosexual) identity<sup>281</sup>. In other words: “not by *what* it is but by *where* it is and *how* it operates. Those who knowingly occupy such a marginal location, who assume to de-essentialise identity that is purely

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<sup>275</sup> Weeks, *ibid*

<sup>276</sup> Weeks, *ibid*

<sup>277</sup> Weeks, *ibid*, at 188

<sup>278</sup> Weeks, *ibid*, at 193

<sup>279</sup> In this regard, see chapter 6

<sup>280</sup> In this regard, see chapter 6

<sup>281</sup> Halperin, D (1995) *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp61-2

positional in character, are properly speaking not gay but *queer*<sup>282</sup>.

As I will argue in the Interjection, most of the participants seem to see themselves as 'gay' in this regard, since they are largely not aware of the ways in which they repeat heteronormativity and often don't consciously de-essentialise identity. However, as I will argue in Chapters 5 and 6, the relationships which they have with the material world through their 'fetish practices' reflects a sense of 'queerness' through how they work as a (re-)orientation in the face of heteronormative pro/prescriptions. As I will suggest, therefore, rather than using the notion of 'oppositional', we should think of such a location as 'orientational', not constructed by its function as 'in conflict with' heterosexuality, but 'in relation to' it<sup>283</sup>.

Such a more complex mapping of sexualities reveals that identity is problematic but at the same time useful in the context of sexualities, "whether we see it as the effect of reverse discourses, the eruption of subjugated knowledges, or, as Plummer has suggested, the proliferation of new sexual stories"<sup>284</sup>. Identities both call attention to what we have in common as well as our differences<sup>285</sup>.

It also, as I will argue in the Interjection, directs scholarship towards methods of inquiry which reflect both the ways in which subjects repeat normativities and ways in which they undermine them. In this respect, essentialist views of externally defined 'gay identity' are inappropriate for complex cartographies in theorising sexualities. Such essentialist views are based on acts of affirmatively staking claims to 'being homosexual'. These claims are divisively opposed to those of 'being heterosexual'. In contradistinction, 'queerness' is not necessarily a positive proposition, but is about being located (orientationally) 'in relation to' others<sup>286</sup>.

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<sup>282</sup> Halperin, D (1995) *ibid*. He goes on to say: "Unlike gay identity, which, though deliberately proclaimed in an act of affirmation, is nonetheless rooted in the positive fact of homosexual object-choice, queer identity need not be grounded in any positive truth or in any stable reality. As the very word implies, "queer" does not name some natural kind or refer to some determinate object; it acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm. Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers*. It is an identity without an essence."

<sup>283</sup> See chapter 6

<sup>284</sup> Plummer, K (1995) *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds*. London. He notes that identity is often the beginning-point of ethnic cleansings and murder.

<sup>285</sup> A view from which Foucault distanced himself, even though identity was not his main concern: "The purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity, but to commit itself to its dissipation", in other words to refuse categories imposed as though they are truth": Bouchard, D. F. ed (1971) *Michel Foucault, Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* New York at 162.

<sup>286</sup> Hall, D.E. (2003) *Queer Theories* Hampshire & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, at 67. At face value 'queerness' might look like it is 'oppositional', i.e. that 'queer' is located as 'not being gay'. Hall, however, prefers to see it as 'abrasive', calling on Foucault who has been instrumental in the creation of queerness and in relation to the deconstruction and challenge to identities and identity politics. In this way, queerness is more about defining the self 'in relation to' others, rather than 'in opposition to' others. Queer 'identity' thereby serves to challenge the status quo positionally.

Such is the case with the present participants who are largely reactionary and claim to 'be' homosexual, but nevertheless often engage in practices which undermine the essentialism and determinism of such assertions, while at the same time repeating dominant heteronormativity.

## 2.2 Sexual Politics and Locating 'Gay Male Fetish Sexuality'

I firmly believe in the principle of equality and the need for LGBTI people to be liberated from legal and social discrimination. I count this thesis as a tool for furthering such goals by means of shifting paradigms of gay male fetish sexuality from psychoanalytic disease and health models to queer perspectives on sexuality as social product with specific historical practices and meanings<sup>287</sup>. Yet one cannot assume that all members of LGBTI communities have the same concerns, perspectives or life experiences. It is therefore problematic to assume that gay rights discourses are appropriate bases for this liberation.

Simplistic assumptions around the singularity of 'identity' are clearly inappropriate. Gay rights political discourses are similarly problematic since they are premised on unstable Lockean Liberalism, and often mobilise oppositionally-defined sexual identities. They tend to assume essentialist sexualities and experiences, thereby perpetuating oppositional and divisive political strategies.

Queer political approaches, however, do not require consensus morality to justify either the constitution of the (appropriate) sexual subject (*qua* 'identity'), nor the likeness of all subjects. They therefore tend to challenge (hetero)normativities in more relational ways.

Before unpacking this idea in more detail, it is useful to differentiate two main political aims:

- 'political' goals, which I rephrase as 'rights-seeking goals', and which Bernstein refers to as those which entail changing laws and policies to obtain new rights, benefits, and protections against harm<sup>288</sup>. Examples of such goals are obtaining marriage rights and, as I will suggest in Chapters 3 and 4, depathologising 'fetish sexuality'.

<sup>287</sup> Penn, D. & Irvine, J. (1995) Gay/lesbian/queer studies. In *Contemporary Sociology*. May 1995. Vol. 24, Iss. 3 Washington: at 328

<sup>288</sup> Bernstein, M (2002) Identities and Politics Toward a Historical Understanding of the Lesbian and Gay Movement in *Social Science History* 26:3 (fall 2002) pp531-581. Note that I feel it necessary to rephrase the terms 'political goals' and 'cultural goals', since both aiming for acquisition of rights and changes to normativities are inherently political, and further since social change is both political and ideological. These ideas should therefore be better delineated.

●'cultural' goals, which I rephrase as 'social-change goals', and which for lesbians and gays are made up of, inter alia, challenging pervasive constructions of masculinity and femininity, homophobia, and the focus on gendered heterosexual nuclear families, i.e. heteronormativity<sup>289</sup>. Liberation from consensus morality and the validation of 'fetish' practices in ways which I argue in Chapters 5 and 6 is such a social-change goal<sup>290</sup>.

Rights-based arguments are appropriate for achieving 'political (rights-seeking) goals', but are inappropriate for achieving 'cultural (social-change) goals'. As Bernstein notes, “some indict identity movements for mistaking symbolic or cultural concessions for programmatic change, whereas others charge that the focus on narrow minority-based political rights will result only in “virtual equality” rather than in transformative cultural change (i.e., that identity movements reinforce rather than challenge dominant cultural norms)<sup>291</sup>. This kind of critique derives mostly from postmodern or “queer” theorists, who view categories such as “gay” and “lesbian” as restrictive, and who view the adoption rather than deconstruction of the categories as reinforcing, not challenging the heteronormative system that labels 'non-heterosexuals' as inferior<sup>292</sup>.

At face value, acknowledging sexualities as 'queer identifications' by abrasive dis-identification rather than 'gay identity' by positive allegiance might seem to contradict arguments that queerness is more cohesive than divisive. Yet, as I will argue, the political frame of reference for queerness is one that is complex and relational, rather than simplistic, dualistic, oppositional, and exclusionary.

### **2.2.1 The Political Playing Field**

According to Weeks, in reviewing the ‘contemporary sexual battlefield’, sexual and intimate life is undergoing a transformation via a dual process of de-traditionalisation and individualization<sup>293</sup>. He notes that modernity has slowly done away with traditional institutions such as forms of civility and class that historically sustained sexual

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<sup>289</sup> Bernstein, M *ibid*. See the Interjection in terms of how heteronormativity works

<sup>290</sup> See below for more indepth discussion on the political relationships between these two goals

<sup>291</sup> Bernstein, *ibid* referencing Vaid, U. (1995) *Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation*. New York: Anchor.

<sup>292</sup> See Britzman, D, (1998) Queer Pedagogy and Its Strange Techniques. In Ristock, J.L. & Taylor, CG, eds.(1998) *Inside the Academy and Out: Lesbian/Gay/Queer Studies in Action* Toronto: University of Toronto Press at 85: For example, certain queer theorists claim that the search for 'rights' (political change) such as same-sex marriage results in “exorbitant normality,” which locates gays and lesbians who seek assimilation in the mainstream so they can become legitimate and respectable subjects

<sup>293</sup> Weeks, J (2005) Remembering Foucault. In *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 14, Nos. 1/2, January/April 2005 186-201 at 194

morality<sup>294</sup>. This is added to by the media impact on sexuality, as increased secularization has weakened links between faith and morality<sup>295</sup>.

Notwithstanding these shifts, however, political activity in sexualities tend to rely on rights-based identity politics, which, as Bernstein notes, revolves around the view that

“homosexuality is seen as fixed, whether it is conceived of as a result of nature (genes, hormones, etc.) or of nurture—etched indelibly in early childhood socialization resulting in a unitary identity that cannot be altered. Defenders view identity politics as a strategy necessary to obtain liberal political goals of freedom and equal opportunity in order to gain entry into the political mainstream on the same level as other groups, without altering the structures of society .... Critics of identity politics, by contrast, see the result of embracing an essentialist identity as a limited and flawed politics because it relies on claims to a racial- or ethnic-like minority status.”<sup>296</sup>

She notes that neither view explains why activists both use and fail to use these politics.

Leftists charge reliance on fixed identities as the reason for an absence of statements of a universal vision for social change. Since identities splinter and fragment, the social movements cannot hold onto anything other than opposition to the enemy, which is seen as omnipotent white heterosexual males. “By targeting white heterosexual men, identity politics leaves no space for them to participate politically, resulting in an unproductive defensiveness”<sup>297</sup>. This results in inability to form coalitions that could result in progressive or revolutionary change. She notes that when gays and lesbians left fixed identities behind, other groups still refused to work with them<sup>298</sup>.

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<sup>294</sup> Weeks, *ibid* pp 194 referencing Anthony Giddens and Dennis Altman in relation to global sexuality: Giddens, A (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* Cambridge; Altman, D (2001) *Global Sex* Chicago.

<sup>295</sup> See later re the media

<sup>296</sup> Bernstein, M (2002) Identities and Politics Toward a Historical Understanding of the Lesbian and Gay Movement in *Social Science History* 26:3 (fall 2002) pp531-581 at 532. In this regard she references Altman, D. (1982) The gay movement ten years later. In *Nation*, 13 November: 494–96; Paul, W. (1982) Minority status for gay people: Majority reaction and social context. In Paul, W. Weinrich, J. D. Gonsiorek J. C., and Hotvedt, M. E. (eds.) (1982) *Homosexuality: Social, Psychological, and Biological Issues*. Beverly Hills: Sage: 351–70; Escoffier, J. (1985) Sexual revolution and the politics of gay identity. In *Socialist Review* 81/82: 119–54. Epstein, S. (1987) Gay Politics, Ethnic Identity: The Limits of Social Constructionism. In *Socialist Review* 93/94: 9–56; Epstein, S. (1999) Gay and Lesbian Movements in the United States: Dilemmas of Identity, Diversity, and Political Strategy. In Adam, B. D., Duyvendak, J.W., and Krouwel, A. (eds.) (1999) *The Global Emergence of Gay and Lesbian Politics: National Imprints of a Worldwide Movement*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press: 30–90; Seidman, S. (1993) Identity and politics in a ‘postmodern’ gay culture: Some historical and conceptual notes. In Warner, M (ed.) (1993) *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 105–42; Gamson, J. (1995) Must identity movements self-destruct? A queer dilemma. In *Social Problems* 42 (3): 390–408.; Vaid, U. (1995) *Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation*. New York: Anchor. See also the argument re multiculturalism, *supra*

<sup>297</sup> Bernstein, M *ibid* referencing Kauffman, L. A. (1990) The anti-politics of identity. In *Socialist Review* 90 (1): 67–80.

<sup>298</sup> Bernstein, *ibid*

Identity politics is also criticised as not resulting in meaningful social change<sup>299</sup>. These arguments conceive identity movements seeking rights (i.e. requests for inclusion into existing frameworks) as being in opposition to those seeking cultural and social transformation, (i.e. wanting to remain outside of existing frameworks). Therefore, movements seeking rights-based change are seen as being outside of politics, since they mistake new laws and policies for persistent cultural change. However, those looking for cultural transformation are often accused of misreading symbolic concessions as being change<sup>300</sup>. In this way, identity politics becomes a-political since it becomes consumption politics, whereby protest is commodified, and lifestyle or consumerism becomes the goal.<sup>301</sup>

### **2.2.2 The Limits of Liberalism and Human Rights**

The problematic divisiveness implicit in gay rights politics tracks through from their genesis as a product of Liberal belief systems and their foundation for the modern trend towards identity-politics and human rights discourses. Rights claims, which are based on fictively static and divisively-conceived identities, can easily be denied on the basis of consensus morality. They are therefore, I suggest, insufficient and cannot securely lodge validation for both sexual minorities *qua* subject ('political'/rights-based goals) *and* free spaces for unusual and contentious sexual practices ('cultural'/social change goals).

Liberalism has now become 'the defining doctrine of self and society for modernity', where the idea of rights is central in moral, political, and legal vocabulary<sup>302</sup>. All people are seen as having an inalienable right to individual choice, as well as the right to conduct their lives without negatively affecting others: "Respect for individual subjects may be considered simply as respect for their rights, as recognizing their capacity to assert claims"<sup>303</sup>.

Liberalism is founded on a universality uniting people on a moral basis, ideas which inappropriately posit an essential human nature that transcends specific local historical and social differences<sup>304</sup>. This universality problematically assumes a singular 'truth' to oppression and a

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<sup>299</sup> Here the idea of 'meaningful' depends on the context and who is being asked. Bernstein, *ibid* referencing Vaid, U. (1995) *Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation*. New York: Anchor. See notes *supra*

<sup>300</sup> see Bronner, S. E. (1992) *Moments of Decision*. New York: Routledge.

<sup>301</sup> See Evans, D. T. (1993) *Sexual Citizenship: The Material Construction of Sexualities*. New York: Routledge.; Kauffman, L. A. (1990) The anti-politics of identity. In *Socialist Review* 90 (1): 67–80.; Hennessey, R. (1993) *Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse*. New York: Routledge.

<sup>302</sup> Goldberg, D (1993) *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Press at 19.

<sup>303</sup> Goldberg, *ibid*

<sup>304</sup> Goldberg, *ibid* at 5 note 22

homogeneity that is unbounded and uncomplicated by social forces and power. As Lenon notes, it “requires the production of a subject transcending social differences and its social location(s).”<sup>305</sup>

Goldberg notes that liberalism is a core set of ideas which include commitment to individual claims over those of the collective, together with commitment to equality motivated by rational reform and progress<sup>306</sup>. The deep underlying approval of individualism indicates that individual desires must take precedence over collective will and the right to privacy is more important than public morality<sup>307</sup>.

As a product of liberalism, human rights are

“a set of internationally agreed upon moral principles that have been set down in various United Nations human rights instruments. In the aftermath of the documented atrocities of World War II, these instruments were designed to ensure that crimes against humanity, such as policies of genocide, would not happen again”<sup>308</sup>.

As Kallen argues, international human rights principles are prior to law, as moral guidelines, and represent global standards to which laws and public policies of all countries should adhere<sup>309</sup>. Yet there is no prior identity-based protection on a global scale for non-normative sexualities, which is significant since identity-based rights premise that, in order to qualify for protection, the object requiring protection needs to be identifiable and identified<sup>310</sup>. LGBTI people must therefore problematically rely on negotiations between activists and the proponents of localised consensus moralities.

In Southern Africa such moralities unfortunately remain conservative, reactionary and homophobic<sup>311</sup>, notwithstanding the long history of gay liberation

<sup>305</sup> Lenon, S.J. (2005) *Marrying Citizens! Raced Subjects? Re-thinking the Terrain of Equal Marriage Discourse*. In *CJWL/RFD* Vol. 17 2005 at 409

<sup>306</sup> Goldberg, D (1993) *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Press at 19.

<sup>307</sup> Howard-Hassmann, RE (2001) *Gay Rights and the Right to a Family: Conflicts Between Liberal and Illiberal Belief Systems*. In *Human Rights Quarterly* 23 (2001) 73–95 The Johns Hopkins University Press

<sup>308</sup> Kallen, E, (1996) *Gay and Lesbian Rights Issues: A Comparative Analysis of Sydney, Australia and Toronto, Canada* In *Human Rights Quarterly* 18.1 (1996) 206-223 at 206, referring to United Nations, *International Bill of Human Rights* (1978).

<sup>309</sup> Kallen, E, *ibid*

<sup>310</sup> This should not be broadcast too loudly, for fear that the 'moral right' gets wind of it and uses it to the detriment of LGBTIQ people

<sup>311</sup> See Howard-Hassmann, RE (2001) *Gay Rights and the Right to a Family: Conflicts Between Liberal and Illiberal Belief Systems*. In *Human Rights Quarterly* 23 (2001) 73–95 The Johns Hopkins University Press. See also Sanders, D *Getting Lesbian and Gay Issues on the International Human Rights Agenda*, in *18 HUM. RTS. Q.* 67 (1996) for reference to the international campaign for gay and lesbian rights.

For perspectives on sexual orientation in an African context, see Hoard, N.W. (2007)

*African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization*. University of Minnesota Press. Hoard calls on the historical and social narratives on homosexuality as cultural signifier while exploring the relationships between

movements<sup>312</sup>. As can be seen all over sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Zimbabwe and Uganda<sup>313</sup>, political and economic circumstances can lead politicians, the right-wing press and other leaders to call on widespread public homophobic fears at will. Consequent to its historical apartheid history, South Africa has constitutional protection on the basis of sexual orientation and a slew of laws granting gay rights<sup>314</sup>. Yet we remain subject to conservative views and periodic vitriolic denunciation of LGBTI people in the press. One such recent example is that of Jon Qwelane, who states: “There could be a few things I could take issue with Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, but his unflinching and unapologetic stance over homosexuals is definitely not among those”<sup>315</sup>. He damns the move amongst churches to accept homosexuals and ordain women, and he likens homosexuality to bestiality, hoping that “some day a bunch of politicians with their heads affixed firmly to their necks will muster the balls to re-write the constitution of this country, to excise those sections which give license to men “marrying” other men, and ditto to women.”<sup>316</sup>

This is a disconcerting constitutional possibility if a prevailing party with an overwhelming parliamentary majority so chooses, a state of affairs from which we are not so distant<sup>317</sup>. This is especially given such recent responses to homosexuality as the Minister of Arts and Culture's refusal to provide the opening speech at an art exhibition portraying female same-sex

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homosexuality and the material and discursive production of Africa. This is not a linear history of homosexuality in Africa, but rather a look at how certain moments of crisis relate to ideologies and signifying practices in terms of, amongst others, imperialism and nationalism.

See particularly Roberts, B. & Reddy, V. (2008) *Pride and prejudice: public attitudes toward homosexuality*. *HSRC Review*. 6(4):9-11. (from [http://www.hsrc.ac.za/Research\\_Publication-20926.phtml](http://www.hsrc.ac.za/Research_Publication-20926.phtml)) The authors analyse the the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) and discuss contemporary attitudes to homosexual behaviour. They argue that, even though South Africa has progressive legislation upholding lesbian and gay rights, discrimination and violent hate crimes against them are rife, and that there remains a negative attitude about and reluctance to accept homosexuality.

See also Epprecht, M (2004) *Hungochani: A History of a Dissident Sexuality in Southern Africa*. Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press; Epprecht, M (2008) *Heterosexual Africa*. Ohio: Ohio University Press, University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Press.

See also Mthethwa, B (2008) “It's still not ok to be gay in SA: Survey shows 80% of population is prejudiced against same-sex relationships”. In *Sunday Times*, 23 November 2008, Page 24 (Addendum 4a)

<sup>312</sup> See Hoad, N.W., Martin, K & Reid, G (eds) (2005) *Sex and Politics in South Africa*. Juta and Company Ltd

<sup>313</sup> Recently, the Ugandan government has been considering passing laws to further criminalise homosexuality, and Robert Mugabe is well-known for his homophobia

<sup>314</sup> See Hoad, N.W., Martin, K & Reid, G (eds) (2005) *Sex and Politics in South Africa*. Juta and Company Ltd

<sup>315</sup> Qwelane, J (2008) Call me names, but gay is NOT OK, *The Sunday Sun*, Sunday 20 July. (See addendum 4b)

<sup>316</sup> Qwelane, *ibid*

<sup>317</sup> Fundamental human rights are entrenched in Chapter 2 of the 1996 Constitution in sections 7 to 39. The Bill of Rights cannot be changed by a simple parliamentary majority, but needs a Bill passed by the National Assembly on the vote of at least two-thirds of the members of Parliament, plus the vote of at least six provinces from the National Council of Provinces. On the face of it changing the equality clause is virtually impossible, given the onerous requirements entrenched in the constitution. However, in the recent national election, the African National Congress took 65.9 percent of the vote. As a result it obtained 264 seats, which are three seats short of the 66% consensus required for amending the South African constitution. The ANC is currently in control of 8 of the 9 South African provinces. This means that the potential for constitutional change is real. Further, reading these clauses restrictively or loosely, thereby impacting on the practical implementation of equality, is possible, subject to legal fiat and consensus morality.



intimacy, which the Minister denounced as 'pornographic'<sup>318</sup>.

The liberal equality paradigm is the main resource called on to oppose such conservatism, adding to the conception of “lesbians and gay men as a discrete minority community, whose ‘difference’ should not result in prejudice and discrimination.”<sup>319</sup> As Howard-Hassmann argues, in this paradigm, diversity is more highly prized than conformity to public morals, and private lives are protected from public interference<sup>320</sup>. This results in opposition to gay-rights calls for public acceptance of homosexuality from both western conservatives and non-western traditionalists<sup>321</sup>. As Howard-Hassmann argues, these conservatives find hard to swallow the implicit public rejection of sex roles, the heterosexual family, and society’s normative underpinnings, as well as a rejection of fundamental religious beliefs<sup>322</sup>. Whereas traditionalists expect all people to restrain their activities and stick to the social rules, liberals encourage self-fulfillment, choice (even in sex role behaviour) and public exhibitionism. Gay rights movements therefore attack traditional social morality more fundamentally than any other human rights movement, thanks to its defiance of orderly oppositions between male and female which is arguably central to all contemporary cultures<sup>323</sup>.

### **2.2.3 Toleration and Difference: the Lock(e) on Sexual Liberation**

However, gay rights discourses are, arguably, problematically based on mere toleration (not necessarily acceptance) of LGBTI people and their non-normative practices by the (conservative) majority, toleration which Katznelson explains as the institutional guarantee that we not be required to give reasons for our differences<sup>324</sup>.

<sup>318</sup> Evans, S (2010) Minister Slams 'Porn' Exhibition, *The Times*, Monday 1 March, see <http://www.timeslive.co.za/local/article332784.ece>. See also Times, 2 March 2010. The Minister responded by claiming that her actions came from her desire to protect children from 'pornography', rather than a distaste of images representing same-sex behaviour. See [http://www.dac.gov.za/media\\_releases/2010/04-03-10.html](http://www.dac.gov.za/media_releases/2010/04-03-10.html). Given that the images do not appear to represent sexual activity at all, but rather to show women in emotionally intimate poses, the implication is that this official statement is merely a political response to cover up negative publicity and homophobia. (Addendum 4c)

<sup>319</sup> Lenon, S.J. (2005) Marrying Citizens! Raced Subjects? Re-thinking the Terrain of Equal Marriage Discourse. In *CJWL/RFD* Vol. 17 2005 at 408. referencing Herman, D (1994) *Rights of Passage: Struggles for Lesbian and Gay Legal Equality* Toronto: University of Toronto Press at 5.

<sup>320</sup> Howard-Hassmann, RE (2001) Gay Rights and the Right to a Family: Conflicts Between Liberal and Illiberal Belief Systems. In *Human Rights Quarterly* 23 (2001) 73–95 The Johns Hopkins University Press

<sup>321</sup> In regard human rights in Southern Africa, see Hoad, N.W. (1999) Between the White Man's Burden and the White Man's Disease: Tracking Lesbian and Gay Human Rights in Southern Africa. In *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1999 5(4):559-584

<sup>322</sup> Howard-Hassmann, *ibid*

<sup>323</sup> Howard-Hassmann, *ibid*

<sup>324</sup> Katznelson, I (1996) *Liberalism's Crooked Circle: Letters to Adam Michnik* Princeton: Princeton University Press. Note that 'toleration' is broadly equatable to 'tolerance', although 'toleration' indicates the allowance or sufferance of something with which one disagrees, whereas 'tolerance' implies a liberal approach to the views and actions of others.

Toleration is a defining issue in the relationship between liberalism and cultural pluralism<sup>325</sup>. It is a central tenet of multicultural life and key to the future of liberal democracy in that liberal democracy prioritises the toleration of diverse people<sup>326</sup>.

### 2.2.3a) *Difference and The Threat of Violence*

Holland argues that toleration must be reconsidered, acknowledging that conflict in a political space is inevitable<sup>327</sup>. Lockean liberalism has tried to define "a secure place for the recognition of difference inside liberalism's doctrinal edifice," but ultimately

"[its] portrayal of difference tends to be rather too orderly and sanitized, downplaying the remarkable interlacings and amalgamations of human life, the rich varieties of cultural traditions, positions, and relationships, and [the] ever-present possibilities for ugliness and unspeakable brutality exercised in the name of difference."<sup>328</sup>

Holland argues that Lockean thinking assumes the acceptance of "facts" of difference with no further inquiry into processes where difference produces and is produced as politics<sup>329</sup>. Toleration is premised on a doctrinal potential for violence as a 'structural condition' and an (albeit unintended) effect<sup>330</sup>. This inherently divisive potential further calls in question the ability of toleration to encourage the shared moral framework which Katznelson encourages<sup>331</sup>.

<sup>325</sup> Holland, CA (2000) Giving Reasons: Rethinking Toleration for a Plural World. In *Theory and Event*, 4:4 2000, Johns Hopkins Press. Note, however, that Holland's argument relates to multiculturalism, rather than to sexual alterity.

<sup>326</sup> Importantly, multiculturalism is sometimes used by LGBTI theorists as a way out of the morass of self-defeating, circular essentialist identities. However, see Binnie, J (2004) *The Globalisation of Sexuality* Sage Publications: London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, pp69. He notes that this is problematic in the context of sexualities. Looking at 'queer people' as a quasi-ethnic group, although on the surface appealing, tends to perpetuate the assumptions of a universal gay identity, thereby further marginalising LGBTI people from marginal communities. Binnie notes that reading LGBTI people as an ethnic group implies reading 'racial'/ethnic' identity on the opposite side to LGBTI identities. He calls attention to the inherent problems of referring to gay culture as hybrid, in the mould of postcolonial thinking. This implies that gay culture is becoming more homogeneous. In this respect, Binnie, *ibid*, pp69, refers to Sinfield, A (1996) *Diaspora and Hybridity: queer identities and the ethnicity model*. In *Textual Practice*, 10(2): 271-93. Notwithstanding cogent arguments against comparing sexuality and multiculturalism, I suggest that arguments on the limits of toleration are nonetheless apposite to arguments against calling on identity politics to support social change.

<sup>327</sup> Holland, CA (2000) Giving Reasons: Rethinking Toleration for a Plural World. In *Theory and Event*, 4:4 2000, Johns Hopkins Press

<sup>328</sup> Katznelson, I (1996) *Liberalism's Crooked Circle: Letters to Adam Michnik* Princeton: Princeton University Press at 149, 155; see also Rawls, J(1993) *Political Liberalism* New York: Columbia University Press; Kymlicka, W. (1995) *Multicultural Citizenship* Oxford: Clarendon

<sup>329</sup> Holland, CA (2000) Giving Reasons: Rethinking Toleration for a Plural World. In *Theory and Event*, 4:4 2000, Johns Hopkins Press at 26. In setting up toleration in relation to the right not to give reasons for differences, Locke at the same time "displaces what is most political about the social "fact" of conflict in multicultural society". Locke calls attention to the ways in which social and historical processes enable group differentiation, while downplaying the extent to which they make up a "common ground". This is the case even where such common ground is only recognizable by shifting perspective from established "facts" to processes that establish them.

<sup>330</sup> See Holland, *ibid*

<sup>331</sup> Katznelson, I (1996) *Liberalism's Crooked Circle: Letters to Adam Michnik* Princeton: Princeton University Press

### 2.2.3b) On Universal Moral Standards: Political Claims

Locke further implicitly defers to universal moral standards to deal with inevitable moral conflict<sup>332</sup>. Further, Locke sees some form of belief in a god is a pre-requisite both for social cohesion and for toleration<sup>333</sup>. In a modern, Western secular society which premises the complete separation of religion and state, this, and the concomitant exclusion of atheists<sup>334</sup> poses problems for the acceptance and tolerance of sexual orientations and practices such as 'gay male fetish sexuality', which are inimical to many, if not most formal religions, and are often viewed as 'evil'<sup>335</sup>.

In this way, toleration is fundamental to Locke in that comprehension thereof takes for granted a common (religious) moral framework not inherent in contemporary liberal formulations. Toleration is further fundamentally divisive in that expectation and encouragement of failures thereof are incorporated into the founding principles of liberalism. This is particularly pertinent in the context of marginal sexualities which are almost by definition consistently excluded from religiously-lodged conservative (hetero)normative frameworks.

### 2.2.3c) On Religious Concerns: 'Cultural' Claims

Lockean liberalism is premised on a rigid distinction between state and civil society, and on state neutrality, whereby 'difference' is allowed into public discourses while downplaying its less beneficial effects, notwithstanding the existence of inequality and cultural conflict<sup>336</sup>.

Debate, which is central to Lockeanism, cannot relate to non-religious concerns about public life<sup>337</sup>. Such debates are “to Locke's logic governed by an empiricist and objectivist denial of the

<sup>332</sup> Holland, CA (2000) Giving Reasons: Rethinking Toleration for a Plural World. In *Theory and Event*, 4:4 2000, Johns Hopkins Press.

<sup>333</sup> Holland, CA (2000) *ibid* at 30. As Holland notes: “In this way, the political mechanism of toleration assures that religion, and religious tension, are maintained and even institutionalized by virtue of the secularization of the political sphere, yet by the same token Locke's doctrine of toleration offers no clear means by which that tension can be engaged as politics. Failures of toleration are thus an essential component of Locke's formulation.”

<sup>334</sup> Locke, J (1990) *A Letter Concerning Toleration* Buffalo: Prometheus Books at 64., referenced in Holland, CA (2000) Giving Reasons: Rethinking Toleration for a Plural World. In *Theory and Event*, 4:4 2000, Johns Hopkins Press at 29: Locke refuses atheists access to debates on toleration, since they are purportedly too great a threat to the survival of a civil authority, noting “Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society can have no hold upon an atheist. The taking away of God, though but even in thought, dissolves all.”

<sup>335</sup> Fundamentalist Christian opposition to homosexuality is well documented in sexualities research. See also Chapter 3, pertaining to the religious underpinnings of constructions and demonising of 'fetish' practices.

<sup>336</sup> See *John Locke, Two Tracts on Government*, ed. Philip Abrams (1967) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; and (1990) *A Letter Concerning Toleration* Buffalo: Prometheus Books

<sup>337</sup> Holland, CA (2000) Giving Reasons: Rethinking Toleration for a Plural World. In *Theory and Event*, 4:4 2000, Johns Hopkins Press at 25. Locke viewed teaching, admonishing and debate as excellent means of activating intellectual discussion and political debate. He advocated giving reasons and relating publicly in terms of

very existence of normative perspectives on civil matters.”<sup>338</sup> This implies that coercive power from the state cannot be countered by Lockean liberalism in areas of ethnicity, race, sexuality or gender where these discussions are not politically significant, “not because they reflect subjective convictions, but instead serve as registers of civil injury, “accounts of the political weight and meaning of social 'facts.’”<sup>339</sup> Technically, Locke does not accommodate intellectual and political disagreements on issues other than religious doctrine, nor does his doctrine of toleration protect political dissent from the coercive power of the state since he locates religious toleration in the set-up of political dispute as epistemologically impossible.

In this regard, Lockean Liberalism is (perhaps) an appropriate frame of reference for political claims premised on difference/social division, but not for 'cultural'/social change claims premised on similarity/coherence.

#### **2.2.4 Claiming Queer Cultural/Social Transformation**

This thesis is a progressive/radical acknowledgement of 'homo-fetish' desire, and is a call for both 'political' (rights-based) *and* 'cultural' (social) transformation. Through locating the research in a complex reading of queer theory, it argues for freedom from policing and pathologising (political goals), *and* at the same time for validation (cultural goals). Motivating for depathologising gay male fetish sexuality (Chapters 3 and 4) locates the research as a call for equality of opportunities and rights, where “[t]he burden of becoming equal thus rests on whom and what is outside and wants to be “in.””<sup>340</sup>. Calls for re-visioning the premises for 'fetish sexuality' as validation (Chapters 5 and 6), however, are to reconceive 'fetish' as by definition validated and justified in being left “out”.

Calls to depathologise 'fetish' sexuality function as a political claim inasmuch as they insist on institutional shifts, i.e. for both government and psychiatric institutions to deal with (gay male) sexual 'fetish' in the same ways they deal with (heterosexual, non-fetish) psychiatric dysfunction: by

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differences. He also called for obtaining social peace by “delegating these necessary tasks to private individuals who command not the power of the state or the church but the art of reason.”

<sup>338</sup> Holland, *ibid* at 25

<sup>339</sup> Holland, *ibid*, at 25 referencing Kirstie McClure: McClure, K.M. (1990) Difference, Diversity, and the Limits of Toleration. In *Political Theory* 18 (August 1990), 361-391 at 385. Holland further notes that “Careful readers of Locke may contest this formulation, and there are certainly grounds for doing so. After all, in his Second Treatise, Locke guarantees the people the right to rebel against unjust rulers (even though he assures us repeatedly that rebellion is almost never undertaken for light or trivial reasons). Surely, then, it is overstating the case to suggest that Locke characterizes disputes about civil matters as epistemologically impossible. But I would remind readers of Locke's notoriety for altering his own positions, particularly in the case of toleration, and suggest that his 1689 *Letter* promotes religious toleration at the expense of the political disputes his *Two Treatises*, written approximately a decade earlier, allows.”

<sup>340</sup> Lenon, S.J. (2005) Marrying Citizens! Raced Subjects? Re-thinking the Terrain of Equal Marriage Discourse. In *CJWL/RFD* Vol. 17 2005 at 411, referring to same-sex marriage rights

dealing with the psychical discomfort of a person based on the underlying psychical issues, rather than by psychopathologising non-normative practices<sup>341</sup>. At the same time, such calls function as cultural claims in that they call for validation of sexual practices, which I argue should be based on the recognition of the role of the body/embodiment in sexual practices<sup>342</sup>.

On the face of it these two approaches conflict in terms of locating the sexual subject in a stable way. Political (rights) arguments, such as those advocating gay marriage, tend to assume a 'desexualised' legal subject aligned with (heteronormative) monogamy and conjugal love. However, validating sexual fetish as cultural (social) phenomenon seems to posit something quite different: a subject defined by sexual choices, rather than love, romance and respectability<sup>343</sup>. As I will explain in Chapter 5 and 6, there is a third option, which supports social change through refusing to define the subject in any objective sense at all.

Rights arguments attempt to 'include' a sexual minority into a pre-existing set of rules and socially approved practices which are primarily created and perpetuated through heteronormativity. In so doing, rights-debates try to 'iron out' and minimise the extent to which the marginal sexual practices do not conform to heteronormative values. Through this, such debates try to lodge the (homo)sexual subject as stable, identifiable and controllable, falling strictly within the bounds of heteronormatively approved or approvable behaviour. Since the corollary to 'rights' is 'responsibilities', rights-based calls for equality implicitly promise to the heteronormative population that the included group ('homosexuals') is inherently identifiable and therefore controllable by (i.e. responsible to) the ordinary legal and social systems of the courts, medicine, psychiatry and so on. Rights-based claims thereby seek to expand the bounds of existing heteronormativity to include marginal groups, and thereby merely to increase the scope of

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<sup>341</sup> See the argument in chapters 3 and 4 on moving away from historically demonised and psychopathologised conceptions of fetish sexuality.

<sup>342</sup> See the arguments in chapters 5 and 6 on the importance of the lived body in validating subjectivities and practices in fetish sexuality

<sup>343</sup> Lenon, S.J. (2005) Marrying Citizens! Raced Subjects? Re-thinking the Terrain of Equal Marriage Discourse. In *CJWL/RFD* Vol. 17 2005, notes that "This bid for respectability via the positioning of a "de-sexed" subject in lesbian and gay equality rights discourse is critically discussed by a number of authors" In particular see Boyd, S & Young, C.F.L. (2003) From Same-Sex to No Sex? Trends towards Recognition of (Same-Sex) Relationships in Canada. In *Seattle Journal for Social Justice* at 757; Butler, J (2002) Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual? In *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 14; Cossman, B (2000) 'Canadian Same-Sex Relationship Recognition Struggles and the Contradictory Nature of Legal Victories. In *Cleveland State Law Review* 49; Eaton, M (1994) Lesbians, Gays and the Struggle for Equality Rights: Reversing the Progressive Hypothesis. In *Dalhousie Law Journal*; Phelan, S (2001) *Sexual Strangers: Gays, Lesbians, and Dilemmas of Citizenship* Philadelphia: Temple University Press; Richardson, D (2004) Locating Sexualities: From Here to Normality. In *Sexualities* 391; Valverde, M (2003) *Law's Dream of a Common Knowledge* Princeton: Princeton University Press; and Vaid, U (1995) *Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation* New York: Doubleday

acceptable sexual practices, with the majority controlling the decisions. On the surface, this does not challenge the bases of heteropatriarchy, such as assumptions around monogamy, sexual propriety, respectability etc., nor do they do not explode heteronormativity in total.

On the other hand, seeking appropriate 'cultural/social' change is to acknowledge that *no* people, whatever their identities/identifications, can be adequately described through labelling processes which seek to identify them as essential, unitary selves. 'Cultural change' seeks to bypass the surface changes to legal and regulatory systems. It thereby enables the possibility of multiple ways of practising sex not restricted only to the marginal group in question, but potentially open to *all* people, including the (heteronormative) majority. This entails suggesting that, rather than defining the sexual subject by sex (or the by the promise of the control of that sex by a heteropatriarchal majority), the subject can validly be *explained* in an impartial/value-neutral way which does not rely on heteronormative aspirations to monogamy, procreation and conformity, rather than *justified* through their choice of sexual practices.

Yet in this instance, I suggest, pragmatism determines that the tools of rights-based politics be mobilised to effect cultural/social change, without relying on (and, as I will explain, by transcending) the assumed stability and essentialism of static 'identity'.

#### 2.2.4a) Rights Claims and Equality: Problematising 'Empowered' vs 'Disempowered'

In order to deal with these conflicts, and track how this 'both-and' approach should work, we should, I suggest, first unpack the power dynamics of 'in' and 'out'. In this respect, as Johnson argues, identity politics is about the construction of powerful, majority and "mainstream" identities as much as it is about disempowered, marginalized identities<sup>344</sup>.

Rights claims are made on the premise of a demand from a presumed disempowered group to an assumed empowered subject majority. However, contrary to assumptions about the 'top-down' nature of the claims made, the relationship between the 'empowered' (those 'granting' rights) and the disempowered (those 'claiming' rights) is really dialectical, and expresses a more complex desire for self-expression and agency, both collectively and individually. Lenon argues that maintaining a commitment to an image of equality for lesbians and gay men in a heterosexual culture is possible,

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<sup>344</sup> Johnson, C (1997) Visiting the Margins: Revenge, Transgression or Incorporation -- An Australian engagement with theories of identity. In *Theory and Event*, 1:3. Johnson notes that more attention should be paid to the construction of "mainstream" identities and the roles taken on by forms of incorporation and/or assimilation which deny group identities. The "mainstream" can be constructed as much by inclusion or assimilation as by exclusion, while the "revenge of the mainstream" can be seen as a response to identity fragmentation involving a retrospective challenge to attempted incorporation of marginalized groups into "mainstream" identity.

while at the same time critiquing the emancipatory narratives and discursive strategies put forward in the name of equality<sup>345</sup>.

What is required, I suggest, is to revise the discourses that require that such equality and legitimacy should be obtained. Unlike the demand for equality via depathologising 'fetish sexuality' (i.e. political claims to equality in 'presence'), the demand for the right to practice fetish sexuality unfettered, (if you'll excuse the pun), is a demand to be excluded from majority morality. Not merely to be excluded, but to be allowed a voice/location which conflicts with the moral majority.

In other words, as well as arguing for equal access to heterosexual, 'non-fetish' privilege, (i.e. the right to equality in the law and psychiatric definitions), 'fetishists' should, I suggest, argue for exclusion from heteronormative (specular) control and restriction, and thereby argue for the right to be *personally* present, rather than politically monitored. As Garlinger argues, rights are but one element of equality<sup>346</sup>.

On the one hand, gay men and lesbians are coded in many human-rights based discourses as 'lacking' full equality and social legitimacy, while their claims for equality are framed in terms of 'desire', which in conventional psychoanalytic narratives is defined as an absence or a lack<sup>347</sup>. A more appropriate approach is to rephrase such 'desire' and 'lack', as 'voice'. This turn-around rephrases a divisive, objectified substrata for calls for equality into a proactive one based on the assumption of equal agency amongst different yet equally valuable social agents.

### **2.2.5 'Gay Male Sexual Fetish' as Pragmatic Queer Activism**

As I will argue in Chapter 6, 'Gay male sexual fetish' challenges or distorts conceptions of what many perceive as 'legitimate sexual relations', by reconstituting or revisioning the meanings of corporeal and shared sexual expression<sup>348</sup>. Yet it is problematic to find appropriate political locations for sexual 'fetishists' (as opposed to scholarly/political locations for the thesis itself,

<sup>345</sup> Lenon, SJ (2005) *Marrying Citizens! Raced Subjects? Re-thinking the Terrain of Equal Marriage Discourse*. In *CJWL/RFD Vol. 17 2005* at pp408

<sup>346</sup> Garlinger, PP (2004) "In All But Name": Marriage and the Meaning of Homosexuality. In *Discourse* 26.3 (Fall 2004), pp. 41–72. Wayne State University Press, Detroit, Michigan. At 65  
"the gay and lesbian struggle for legal recognition is not only a struggle to obtain specific benefits but also to exercise some control over the power to name oneself. Discourses of sexuality often reflect a profound conflict between majoritarian labels and subcultural denominations that emerge from within specific communities. The reconfiguration of the term "queer," for example, was a deliberate strategy of appropriating a pejorative term for political ends to blunt its negativity and reinvest it with more affirmative connotations. The capacity to name oneself is a powerful privilege, in part because the choice of names indelibly shapes a person's identity. ...In this respect, the linguistic debate is not simply a semantic "name game" but rather a profoundly significant debate on the meaning of homosexuality. One of the fundamental dimensions of a pro-gay movement is articulating a positive meaning for homosexuality and same-sex practices."

<sup>347</sup> Grosz, E (1995) *Space, Time, and Perversion* New York: Routledge at 177.

<sup>348</sup> See chapters 3 to 6

discussed in Chapter 1). A political claim for equality is imperative, as is a cultural claim for 'fetishists' to be left in peace to explore their sexualities unhindered. Yet, as discussed above, these aims are at face value contradictory.

Yet arguments such as this thesis, which motivates for both political and cultural change, contribute to a 'new sexual movement', which Weeks argues is characterized by two moments; transgression and citizenship<sup>349</sup>. The transgressive moment occurs by challenging traditions and institutions that attempt to exclude the sexual 'other', challenges that derive from creation of "new sexual subjectivities, which transgress the norms of hegemonic heterosexuality"<sup>350</sup>. The challenge is an attack and a demand for recognition, respect and rights, which challenge therefore becomes the second moment: of citizenship and belonging. At the same time it is the flip-side: responsibility to and respect for other citizens and community<sup>351</sup>. Langdrige et al point out that "if the first of these two moments is seen as a utopian mechanism for challenging and extending the (frequently conservative) ideological responsibilities that result from rights claims politics, through the act of transgression, then we have the potential for a radical queer politics of citizenship"<sup>352</sup>.

Like the Netherlands, South Africa has extremely progressive legislation protecting same-sex action and sexual identities. Public life and sexual location for middle class (predominantly white) gay men such as the participants in this research is no longer fraught with claims for legal and social equality in the way they were during apartheid<sup>353</sup>. So the kind of subversive activism engaged in by SALeathermen<sup>354</sup>, in some ways reflect what Hekma notes about queerness in the Netherlands:

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<sup>349</sup> Weeks, J. (1995) *Invented Moralities: Sexual Values in an Age of Uncertainty*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

<sup>350</sup> Langdrige, D & Butt, T (2004) A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Investigation of the Construction of Sadomasochistic Identities. In *Sexualities*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 31-53 (2004) at 34

<sup>351</sup> Bell, D. and Binnie, J. (2000) *The Sexual Citizen: Queer Politics and Beyond*. Cambridge: Polity Press. & Gamson, J. (1995) 'Must Identity Movements Self-Destruct? A Queer Dilemma' *Social Problems* 42(3): 390-407. as discussed in Langdrige et al, *ibid*

Weeks' points are criticised by Bell and Binnie who claim that arguments about moving from transgression to citizenship are conservative or assimilationist. However the points are nevertheless valid if we take account of Gamson's conclusions that the lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (as opposed to queer) communities need to engage with both identity movements *and* queer politics to achieve political success. Real political accusations of conservatism can be voiced if Weeks' viewpoint is related as a movement from awareness-raising, to transgression, to rights, responsibilities and citizenship. However, if the argument is rephrased as a relationship of dialectics, we can recall the relationship between ideology and utopia put forward by Ricoeur, where ideology is about identity preservation while utopia is about rupture, novelty and difference (Ricoeur, P. (1986) *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*. Edited by G. H. Taylor. New York: Columbia University Press)

<sup>352</sup> Langdrige, D & Butt, T (2004) A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Investigation of the Construction of Sadomasochistic Identities. In *Sexualities*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 31-53 (2004) at 34

<sup>353</sup> This is patently not the case for working class and black gay men and lesbians in South Africa who face discrimination and prejudice, and even violence, 'corrective rape' and death daily. Merely one example is the untimely death of twenty-five year old Desmond Dube, a drag queen fondly known as Daisy, who died in a shooting in Yeoville in June 2008.

<sup>354</sup> the social organisation which brings the research participants together around sexual pleasure



“Gays and lesbians may have come out of their closets, but most people find that sexual orientation has little relevance in public life. The Dutch may be beyond the closet, but they have created a new one.”<sup>355</sup>

An important strategy in the creation of queer space has been the process of developing gay and lesbian visibility. Now, since there are clear rights in place, Hekma argues that sexual orientation only matters in the bedroom, and not in public. “In the past”, he says, “silencing was directed at public homosexuality and private homosexuals; now it is directed at anything queer beyond personal identities”, and that normalization, naturalization and privatization of sexuality was a priority for most gays and lesbians, which they now have.<sup>356</sup> However, now people are not judged for their private actions, but are assumed to be non-sexual and non-gendered in public. He notes that transgendered and queer people do therefore not have a public home in daily life. South Africa is in some ways similar to the Dutch case, at least in the context of middle class gay men and their social and political world. Hekma notes that, thanks to high-profile media coverage of child abuse (and paedophilia) scandals, there is an increase in Puritanism, which results in the acceptance of homosexuality in private, but a rejection of the “filthification” of society by such public expressions of sexuality as gay parades and prostitution<sup>357</sup>. And, I would add, public acknowledgement of 'fetish sexuality'.

Various forms of gay and lesbian, gender, transgender, and queer studies have criticized the normalization of homosexuality; the naturalization of gender performances, sexual preferences, and gender and sexual dichotomies; and the privatization of desires. On the positive side, these academic fields have demonstrated the queerness of straight culture; on the negative side, they have not fundamentally changed traditional, not-so-queer ideas and practices.

As Hekma asks, how do we obtain more widespread appreciation of multisexual, polymorphous and transgender pleasures, and how do we move beyond the idea of there being only two genders and that marriage, love and sex ‘belong’ together? He notes that “Queer studies may have provoked much brainwork in academe, but its results in the everyday lives of queer people are too invisible.”<sup>358</sup> As he says, the marginal work of queers and women’s studies advocates have a hard time finding common ground, and complacency has slowed much political action.

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<sup>355</sup> Hekma, G (2004) *Queer: The Dutch Case*. In *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* Volume 10, Number 2, 2004, pp. 276-280 at 277

<sup>356</sup> Hekma, G, *ibid*

<sup>357</sup> Hekma, G, *ibid* at 278. I would suggest that the same be said for the public representations of same-sex intimacy. See the arguments on Qwelane and the Minister of Arts and Culture, *supra*

<sup>358</sup> Hekma, G, *ibid* at 278

### 2.2.6 Pragmatic Activism: Unities of Process and Identity

As discussed above, social theorists often criticise gay and lesbian social movements as narrowly and naively engaging with identity politics in essentialist ways, based on perceived difference to the majority and without interrogating the limitations and functioning of toleration. The critics often accuse such essentialism of preventing coalition building and reinforcing hegemonic and restrictive social categories. Bernstein argues that the proponents of such arguments see “identity movements” as 'cultural'(social) more than 'political'(rights-based) movements, where goals, strategies, and mobilisation forms are better explained by static ideas of identity than by other factors<sup>359</sup>.

In so doing, she integrates political process and identity theories to construct a ‘political identity’ approach to social movements, thereby demonstrating that LGBTI movements alternately and at the same time emphasise both political *and* cultural goals. In this way, she argues that structural and contextual factors, rather than essentialist conceptions of identity, demonstrate a movement’s focus on political change.

Part of the problem around identifying what makes up ‘real change’ lies in the difference between ‘cultural’ and ‘political’ found in debates between new social movement and identity theorists on the one hand<sup>360</sup>, and resource mobilization<sup>361</sup>, political opportunity<sup>362</sup> and political process theorists<sup>363</sup>. Identity movements are seen as new social movements, in contradistinction to labour

<sup>359</sup> Bernstein, M (2002) Identities and Politics Toward a Historical Understanding of the Lesbian and Gay Movement. In *Social Science History* 26:3 (fall 2002) 531-581

<sup>360</sup> She differentiates new social movement and identity theorists, on the one hand, from political process (PP/PO) theorists on the other. The former include Touraine, A. (1981) *The Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.; Kriesi, H., Koopmans, R, Duyvendak, J.W. and Giugni, M. G. (eds.) (1995) *New Social Movements in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.; Cohen, J. (1985) Strategy or identity: New theoretical paradigms and contemporary social movements. In *Social Research* 52: 663–716.; Melucci, A. (1985) The symbolic challenge of contemporary movements. In *Social Research* 52: 789–816, and Melucci, A. (1989) *Nomads of the Present*. London: Hutchinson Radius. The latter include McAdam, D. (1982) *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

<sup>361</sup> She notes sources for resource mobilization (RM) theory: McCarthy, J. D., and Zald M. N. (1977) Resource mobilization and social movements: A partial theory. In *American Journal of Sociology* 82: 1212–39.

<sup>362</sup> She refers to sources for political opportunity (PO) theorists: Gamson, W. A., and Meyer D. S. (1996) The framing of political opportunity. in McCarthy, J., McAdam, D., and Zald, M.N. (eds.) *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 275–90.; Kitschelt, H. (1986) Political opportunity structures and political protest: Anti-nuclear movements in four democracies. In *British Journal of Political Science* 16: 57–85.; Tarrow, S. (1988) National politics and collective action: Recent theory and research in Western Europe and the United States. In *Annual Review of Sociology* 14: 421–40.; (1993) Cycles of collective action: Between moments of madness and the repertoire of content. In *Social Science History* 17 (2): 281–307. (1998) *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>363</sup> McAdam, D. (1982) *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

movements, Marxism and socialism, since for identity movements class is not central to politics.

Bernstein notes that cultural movements and strategies are also best seen as political, while others focus on the relationship between collective identity and political circumstances. Activists look to obtain both cultural and political goals. Theorists should therefore, I suggest, move away from assuming a dichotomy between political and cultural movements.

This approach is informative and compelling, given that in

“so-called identity movements (action) is not the result of internal or essentialist features of movements but of social networks, resources, and political conditions. Thus what I call “identity strategies” should be considered one aspect of a movement’s strategic repertoire but only one aspect.”<sup>364</sup>

Bernstein further argues that identity can be called upon as a strategy for change. Activists can call on their 'identities' (i.e. what I call 'identifications': the categories, values and practices assigned to and chosen by them, not any essentialist conceptions of 'identity') to ensure that they become the subject of debates, and to criticize dominant essentialist identities or to forward views of minorities that challenge dominant perceptions. Such 'identifications' can be used to educate or to focus on differences to the majority in order to exercise cultural critique.<sup>365</sup> Breaking 'identity' into 'bite-sized chunks' of 'identification' allows for debates on the effectiveness or advisability of these politics to become more or less polemical or analytical. In this way, identity politics can be rephrased as complex, fluid and multidimensional.

Further, enacting toleration as a political practice among citizens rather than as a state doctrine provides opportunities to 'give reasons' by way of mechanisms to transform identity from “a privileged domain that is immunized against politics into a site of critical contest itself.”<sup>366</sup> In this way, providing reasons becomes a pragmatic and proactive way of shifting dominant (heteropatriarchal) discourses, rather than a self-justificatory and placatory way of asking permission for entrance to heteropatriarchal systems.

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<sup>364</sup> Bernstein, M (2002) Identities and Politics Toward a Historical Understanding of the Lesbian and Gay Movement. In *Social Science History* 26:3 (fall 2002) 531-581 at 536, referencing Tilly, C. (1978) *From Mobilization to Revolution*. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley; (1993) Contentious repertoires in Great Britain, 1758–1834. In *Social Science History* 17 (2): 253–80; Tarrow, S. (1993) Cycles of collective action: Between moments of madness and the repertoire of content. In *Social Science History* 17 (2): 281–307.

<sup>365</sup> Bernstein, *ibid* at 539

<sup>366</sup> Holland, CA (2000) Giving Reasons: Rethinking Toleration for a Plural World. In *Theory and Event*, 4:4 2000, Johns Hopkins Press. She discusses the possibility and ways of developing a postfoundationalist liberalism abstracted from foundationalist distinctions (such as between darkness and light, reason and unreason, rule of law and resort to violence). She also notes that “neither administrative procedure nor universal moral standards can supply us with a single measure by which differences might be appraised or domesticated”

In this way, difference and dispute stop being a threat to democracy, but rather its substance, in that dispute makes political meaning unstable, and shifts focus from identity as a finished product to the process of political identification, which are indeed at least partially cohesive rather than divisive principles<sup>367</sup>. As I will suggest, politics does not need to be bound by identity as 'closure', but can be seen as a locus of 'disclosure' and 'engagement'<sup>368</sup>.

A more pragmatic approach at least partially deals with concerns about identity politics and foundational inconsistencies in Lockean logic<sup>369</sup>. It further, I suggest, benefits the location of 'gay male fetish sexuality' as a public, but not necessarily institutional concern, and paves the way to arguments around the validation of social/cultural space in which 'fetish' can flourish.

It does not, however, necessarily and conclusively shift paradigms from political divisiveness to social cohesiveness<sup>370</sup>.

### **2.2.7 Rephrasing 'Gay Male Fetish Sexuality' as a Resource for Recognising Subjective Value**

The thesis seeks to rephrase 'gay male fetish sexuality' as a resource for positively recognising the subjective value of the individual as he/she lives in his/her community, rather than as a set of sexual practices needing to be vilified/justified in a reactionary way. This should, I suggest, take place through re-constituting the assumptions of pathology for 'fetish sexuality'.

Instead of being a marginalised form of sexual expression as rights-based identity politics might suggest, I argue for a view of 'gay male fetish' as a body-based/embodied sexual exploration of the material world. These explorations are central to *all* human experience, and are available as means of accessing and expressing the value of a lived life. I argue that this is a variation of a queer

<sup>367</sup> Holland refers to further development of this line of thinking in Euben, JP,(1997) *Corrupting Youth: Political Education, Democratic Culture, and Political Theory* Princeton: Princeton University Press. esp. Chapter Six.

<sup>368</sup> In a sense, this latter Katznelson (Katznelson, I (1996) *Liberalism's Crooked Circle: Letters to Adam Michnik* Princeton: Princeton University Press) recalls Hannah Arendt's address accepting the Lessing Prize conferred by the city of Hamburg. For her acceptance speech, see Arendt, H (1968) "On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing." In *Men in Dark Times*, New York: Harcourt Brace, pp.3–31. For an excellent and nuanced reading of Arendt, see Disch, L.J. (1995) On Friendship in 'Dark Times,' In *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt* ed. Bonnie Honig University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995, 285-311.

<sup>369</sup> Holland argues in favour of "redefin[ing] toleration as the expectation that we must give reasons and thereby engage others in a public conversation about the differences that form the basis of our common life. To do so is not to rely on personal goodness nor is it to assume the inherent goodness of human nature. Nor is it to discard the concept of a common public order and the commensurate, if mobile, distinctions between public and private that it entails. (See Galeotti, A.E., (1993) *Citizenship and Equality: The Place for Toleration*. In *Political Theory*, vol.21, no. 4, at 601.) On the contrary, it is to show how the very concept of toleration relies on a common public life that, in its conventional Lockean form, it cannot allow. Without that public life where we must give reasons for our differences and engage those of others, toleration is a politically unintelligible demand." (Holland, CA (2000) *Giving Reasons: Rethinking Toleration for a Plural World*. In *Theory and Event*, 4:4 2000, Johns Hopkins Press.)

<sup>370</sup> either on the level of multiculturalism or in relation to sexualities

framework seeking both to achieve political goals of equality *and* to challenge heteronormativity by way of 'cultural'/'social' change. However I do not suggest that 'gay male sexual fetish' should merely be located within queer (non)identification, rather than within gay rights identity politics. Rather, I suggest that paradigms be widened substantially, incorporating the principles of queer identification, to incorporate influences not often called on in sexualities scholarship: the idea of subjective value which challenges normative assumptions and is lodged in the phenomenological.

Skeggs notes Jon Dovey's identification of 'extraordinary subjectivity', which entails a shift from grand narratives as the ground for truth statements to claims that the world has no meaning unless grounded in the personal, subjective and particular<sup>371</sup>.

In contradistinction to identity politics, Skeggs argues against seeing gender and sexuality as an object or property of identity. Instead, she favours approaching them as resources to which one is granted or refused access, and therefore as means of accessing value in the 'self'<sup>372</sup>. Notably, and as I will explain in Chapters 5 and 6, this is not a wholesale embracing of commercial/capitalist doctrine, since it is not based on the idea of 'sale' for profit, but on 'exchange' of value which reflects subjectivities and what individuals are aiming for reflected through pragmatic language which acknowledges that people make sense of their lives through the material.

Seeing 'resource' as a subjective rather than capitalist notion enables a view of using the resources of gender and sexuality as persistently reproducing both. Rather than being an essentialist unit, the

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<sup>371</sup> Skeggs, B (2004) *Uneasy Alignments, Resourcing Respectable Subjectivity*. In *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 10(2): 291–8 referencing Dovey, J (2000) *Freakshow: First Person Media and Factual Television*. London: Pluto

Whereas Lauren Berlant refers to this as 'intimate citizenship', Nick Rose refers to 'governing the soul'. See Berlant, L (2000) *The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy, Politics*. In *Transformations: Thinking through Feminism*, ed. Sara Ahmed et al. London: Routledge, 33–48; Rose, N, (1989) *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*. London: Routledge

According to Skeggs, the move to personalising political expression and experience is linked to the rise in the 'psy' sciences, the phenomena of taking 'expertise' into practices of work, and vocabularies in popular culture, together with capitalist search for profit from new practices of consumption which results in new kinds of marketing such as 'emotional branding'. These are linked to neoliberal governance that encompasses contradictions relating to a collective-minded citizenry which contradictorily is at the same time made up of individualist consumers. Skeggs argues that these elements shape how gender and sexuality are evaluated, and how the individual is deemed worthy and valuable.

<sup>372</sup> Skeggs' language implies an uncomfortable affiliation with enlightenment and humanist thinking, and therefore in some ways belies assumptions around some kind of essentialist 'self'. Her argument also imports unpleasant associations with commercialisation and commodification discourses. Yet, her thinking is compelling if we look past these implications, and use her argument as a starting-point to reconnect the sexual 'identification' (as the affiliations people have with certain sexual practices, rather than a static 'identity') with materiality and experience. In other words, we should acknowledge that there is no essential 'self', but that people choose to identify themselves multiply by associating themselves with various categories (such as those of gender, class and sexual orientation). At the same time we should acknowledge the role of discourse in the construction of the human being. However, we should factor in the role of the material in how people ascribe value to their lives: people value themselves in relation to their environment and dominant discourses. This results in sexuality being a symbolic/metaphoric system, yet lodged in the material/physical.

'self' becomes a metaphoric space where resources can be stored and displayed, and where a symbolic system of exchange grants value to specific practices and positions, and allows people to know how to use gender and sexuality. Or not. This symbolic system, Skeggs argues, is 'ubiquitous across sites of inscription and representation, but is also contested', for example through queer resignification<sup>373</sup>. Skeggs notes that "the embodiment of gender or sexuality can be a forced visible display or an inevitable essentialising"<sup>374</sup>.

Skeggs calls on Bourdieu's views of class as a starting-point, wherein he uses economic metaphors to assert that the kinds of capital (i.e. cultural, social, economic and symbolic) settle in the body, creating the dispositions he calls 'habitus'. The ability to collect different kinds of capital allows bodies to move in social space with ease and a sense of value, or to be "fixed in positions and ascribed symptoms of pathology"<sup>375</sup>. Although Bourdieu's construction is based on class, Skeggs argues that adding sexuality, gender, race and nationality to how it is made up calls attention to the disruptions rather than repetitions and habits<sup>376</sup>. She notes that there isn't a clean sequence process between positions into which we are born and that we re-fabricate through experience. Instead, they remain uneasily aligned.

Access, use and display appear as personal dispositions rather than necessarily resulting from differentiation, classification and inscription, and become central in construction of public subjectivity<sup>377</sup>. Further, the resources in themselves do not reflect social value, but rather the uses to which they are put.

She further notes that even though identity politics might be discredited, they are often the means by which people coalesce for the purposes of attaining public credibility, a process that relates to the

<sup>373</sup> Skeggs, B (2004) Uneasy Alignments, Resourcing Respectable Subjectivity. In *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 10(2): 291–8 at 292

<sup>374</sup> Skeggs, *ibid.* She notes how heterosexual men call on their gendered positioning to gain advantage in the sexual division of labour, and to call on aspects of their femininity in order to resource themselves as 'new managers', seeming more friendly and caring. The use of femininity by women does not grant them the same benefits, since for women femininity is normative: they can't be 'enterprised up' in the purported remaking of gender. In similar ways people perform blackness while white, for example certain contemporary 'white' hip-hop artists. At the same time, essentialist constructions of blackness remain as markers in films such as *Pulp Fiction*, where Samuel L Jackson plays and 'is' black, and is therefore denied the use of the classification of blackness since he is positioned as black and is fixed thereby.

<sup>375</sup> Skeggs *ibid* pp292

<sup>376</sup> Bourdieu, P (1987) What Makes a Social Class? On the Theoretical and Practical Existence of Groups. In *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* (1987): 1–17. On habitus see Mauss, M (1979) *Body Techniques*. In *Sociology and Psychology: Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 54–67; Merleau-Ponty, J (1965) *The Structure of Behavior*, trans. Alden L. Fisher. London: Methuen. See also feminist work on Bourdieu by Lovell, T(2000) Thinking Feminism with and against Bourdieu. In *Feminist Theory* 1 (2000): 11–32; Moi, T (1991) Appropriating Bourdieu: Feminist Thought and Pierre Bourdieu's Sociology of Culture. In *New Literary History* 22 (1991): 1017–49.

<sup>377</sup> Skeggs, B (2004) Uneasy Alignments, Resourcing Respectable Subjectivity. In *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 10(2): 291–8 at 292

potential for public visibility. People want to be seen to have an identity that is valuable and respectable in public forum. For example, the current research participants self-identify as 'gay men' and collect on that basis to explore their individual 'fetish' interests. Calling on the classification of 'men', they obtain privileged access to public forums. With this access, they state their claims as 'gay' to address the marginalisation of sexual orientation<sup>378</sup>. Under certain circumstances, they also call on the classification of 'gay men' to stake their claims for equality in the face of both heteronormativity and the normative subcultures of mainstream gay life. They thereby navigate their multiple locations privilege (male, gay), while still being marginalised<sup>379</sup>.

This kind of thinking appeals to queer politics inasmuch as queerness becomes more 'respectably marginal' (rather than mainstream) and therefore acceptable. Only those who can gain access to and use the appropriate resources can increase their visibility in public<sup>380</sup>.

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<sup>378</sup> See Skeggs, B (2004) *Uneasy Alignments, Resourcing Respectable Subjectivity*. In *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 10(2): 291–8 at 295: “The responsibility of resourcing one’s gender, sexuality, class, and race “in the right way” is a responsibility of the neoliberal individual. This responsibility relies on access to the “right” cultural resources and is read on the body as a sign of value and/or pathology. It is how gender and sexuality are made and seen in the present.”

<sup>379</sup> Whether and to what extent they are marginalised depends on the direction in which their activities and identifications are oriented. See arguments in chapter 6 re orientation

<sup>380</sup> Using this kind of thinking allows for a re-evaluation of the positioning of 'gayness' as cultural marker and as a new class relation where alternative forms of exploitation are introduced. The branding of gayness as user-friendly in effect creates a new construct which lodges a kind of 'homonormativity', by which I mean the compulsory scripts of 'gayness' acceptable in Western commercial gay subculture. These differ from place to place, and are more or less prescriptive depending on their broader social frameworks, but they broadly reference aspirational images of homosexuality made in advertising aimed at and about gay men (and to a lesser extent lesbians) pertaining to holidays, products, lifestyle products etc, as well as the assumptions relating to a 'gay bourgeoisie'. These scripts marginalise performances and people that are deemed unacceptable. As one participant notes:

L: Do you feel excluded from the LGBT community as a result of your fetish interests? If so, how and why?

Donald: Yes. The LGBT community in SA is very prejudiced amongst themselves. I am myself – I cannot and will not stand any effeminate guy – they embarrass me. There are certain groupings such as the “metro-men” who grooms and so on, then of course the “queens”, etc. Groupings, including certain fetish groups, group together and it sometimes difficult for an outsider to get in and be accepted.... Yes we are forced to be in groups. “Others” in the gay community sometimes frown upon it. I think some are afraid of burly leather men, haha. I am athletically built, although I look a bit aggressive in my demeanour. I am not aggressive though, yet I feel outside the mainstream LGBT community.

Joseph: Yes. The first time SAleathermen participated in Pride, they wanted to put us #36 out of 37 (37 failed to show up for the orientation) and only back down when I questioned their decision, placing us at 28. On the other hand, media partners have expressed support, partly perhaps because they hope for something of a freak show. Is that fair? On a personal level, it has affected some of my partner’s previous friendships because I was no longer “acceptable” in their circles. It may not have just been my “outness” about leather/BDSM, but it certainly played a part. And the worse part is the hypocrisy amongst those who call me up stoned for “pig sex” then ignore me publicly, or make up stories about outrageous encounters that they most likely are secretly aroused by.

In this respect what is a resource empowering one can fix, essentialise and pathologise another. Sexual fetish can be seen as the latter, and 'homonormative' gay male scripts as the former.

## 2.3 Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the social and political locations of 'gay male fetish sexuality', arguing that simplistically conceived gay rights discourses are inappropriate lenses through which to view political and social claims for validation. Such paradigms, which are often simplistically premised on essentialist views of identity as unitary and coherent, are perhaps (partially) useful when applied to political claims for access to rights denied to sexual minorities. They are, however, I suggest, inappropriate for cultural claims for recognition of value and for exclusion from policing.

I suggest that a more coherent framework for understanding complex arguments for social change, in this instance for recognition of unusual sexual practices, is that of queer theories, which conceive of identity as multiple and complex. In general, queer theories need to be mobilised pragmatically in concert with gay rights discourses, based on a re-assessment of potentially fatal flaws in the latter's liberalist foundations. I therefore suggest that 'gay male fetish sexuality' should, in particular, be approached by calling on complex, resource-based theories in concert with queer conceptions of 'identification-based' location as a resource for recognising individual value.

Moving away from the fictions of static identities through to framing sexuality as a resource for recognising individual value acknowledges the queer complexity of political location for South African 'gay male fetish sexuality'. It is both an expression of the empowered, as an experience accessible to the privileged elite, *and* of the disempowered, as a pathologised practice of a disdained sexual minority who, as I will discuss in the Interjection, both support and challenge heteronorms.

As such the thesis approaches 'gay male fetish sexuality' neither exclusively in the mould of individualist, identity-bound, divisive 'gay rights' in search of equal political access to resources, nor exclusively as collectively-oriented 'queer identification' in search of cultural change. Rather, the thesis combines the two in a dialectical way, by positing a political citizen who is *both* an individual *and* part of a collective made up of mind, body and environment, all of which are in relation with each other and connected through embodied experience. Key to this conception of 'relatedness' is the agency and responsibility of the individual to mobilise resources for the benefit of both him/herself and the world in which he/she lives. In this way it is not some essentialist 'identity' which labels him/her as marginalised, nor his 'outsider' status which labels him/her as challenging and therefore valuable, but rather his/her choice to live consciously and in harmony with both his political and social world which marks him as beneficial citizen.



By way of riding the fine line between the subversive radicalism of queer theory and the ameliorative reform necessarily involved in achieving change within contemporary identity-based political paradigms, this framework allows the thesis, as political tool, to enjoy a dialectical relationship with the lived reality of the research participants, whose political perspectives and aims it neither wholeheartedly represents nor denies. Politically the thesis doesn't claim to speak entirely on their behalf, but rather to acknowledge their varied and at times contradictory personal and political aims, while still following its own political agenda, which is to assist in theorising liberation and empowerment for unusual sexualities.



## CHAPTER 3

# THE (FETISH) OBJECT OF MY AFFECTION: A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF HISTORICAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND PSYCHIATRIC DISCOURSES ON 'FETISHISM'

“All human beings are fetishists to some degree. In Brazilian culture, buttocks are the object of national adoration, while in American culture, breasts are extremely valued. In China, small female feet are extremely sexy. This demonstrates that different cultures elect their own fetishes<sup>381</sup>.”

The idea of 'the fetish' and 'fetishism' come to us through an historical trajectory of colonialist, followed by Freudian psychoanalytic epistemologies which, I argue, prioritised the 'fetish' object as the definitional nexus for categorising 'fetishists'. That these frameworks are 'object-focused' might seem obvious and of no concern, since 'fetishism' is, after all, about objects and people's relations with them. It *is* obvious, yet problematic, since a single-minded object-focus tends discursively to obscure subjectivities and therefore to attenuate subjective agency<sup>382</sup>.

In a value-laden way, I argue, such discursive frameworks inappropriately skew priorities in favour of foundationalisms, which attenuate the agency of people undergoing complex emotionally-driven lived experience<sup>383</sup>. Such frameworks hide the personal under the political, and the importance of embodiment under impermeable rules of psychology. They thereby fail to acknowledge a fluidity between consciousness and environment, mis-recognising the complexity of human emotional processes driven by a vast range of influences, both internal and external, personal and political, rational and emotional. In other words, they obscure the importance of bodily experience and subjectivities, thereby reducing the potential for valid agency. This is antithetical to more useful queer-based frameworks for theorising sexualities<sup>384</sup>.

This chapter looks more closely at the foundationalist discourses underlying 'fetish', discourses which developed through colonialist assumptions around culture and were brought into the modern era through Freudian psychoanalytic theory. I suggest that unpacking them reveals the seeds of the reconfigurations of metatheory for 'sexual fetish', which I explore in chapters 5 and 6.

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<sup>381</sup> Brame G, Brame W & Jacobs (1993). *Different Loving. The World of Sexual Dominance & Submission*. Villard Books: NY at 358.

<sup>382</sup> The problems with psychopathology will be discussed more fully in chapter 4

<sup>383</sup> See chapter 5 re non-foundationalist conceptions of the human subject, and chapter 6 re agency

<sup>384</sup> See chapter 2

### 3.1 Anthropological Discourses on the 'Feitiço': Encounters with (Perceived) Difference

“the genealogy of the fetish reflects a deep encounter with difference. People need to make links between themselves and others – economic and political, for the most part, and of course personal, while maintaining distinctions.”<sup>385</sup>

The 'fetish' can be seen as “the personification and ‘agent-ification’ of material objects, ... thought to be possessed by spiritual, even supernatural forces, and command[ing] a unique reverence as a result of this magical attribution”<sup>386</sup>, which view I argue has informed both the historical and contemporary metatheoretical bases for the (sexual) relations between people and objects.

Early definitions of 'fetish' emerged from colonialist domination of West African people, based on the colonial desire for resources not available in Europe<sup>387</sup>, matched with stereotyped racialised and racist perceptions<sup>388</sup>. These early definitions reflect colonialist discourses which prioritised Western Christian paradigms and perpetuated contemporary dysfunctional discourses on power and the body, thereby ignoring indigenous paradigms<sup>389</sup>.

A closer reading of colonial discourses reveals that this simple object-focused idea of fetish was more complex. It came out of cross-cultural encounters imbricated with mutual misunderstanding, and through intersections between colonial religion and capitalism which sought to control individuals and their bodies. These linked in with complex and competing juxtapositions of colonial fetishism and reification discourses, which demonstrate the underlying colonial discomfort with its own discursive premises and its parallels with the colonised.

<sup>385</sup> Alter, JS (2006) Yoga and fetishism: reflections on Marxist social theory. In *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (N.S.)* 12, 763-783 Pp770-771

<sup>386</sup> Pels, D, Hetherington, K & Vandenberghe, F (2002) The Status of the Object: Performances, Mediations, and Techniques. In *Theory, Culture & Society*, SAGE, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, Vol. 19(5/6): 1–21, referencing Pietz, 1985, 1987, 1988

<sup>387</sup> The colonial 'scramble for Africa' is about the commercial relations around natural resources such as land, agriculture, mining etc. It also about human resources obtained through racial segregation and slavery. In this regard, see Klein, M.A. (1998) *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa*. New York and England: Cambridge University Press. See also Müller, Max. "Is Fetishism a Primitive Form of Religion?" 1878. Reprinted in *The Essential Max Müller: On Language, Mythology, and Religion*, edited by Jon R. Stone. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002; Müller, Wilhelm Johann. *Die Afrikanische auf der guineischen Gold Cust gelegene Landschaft Fetu*. 1673. Translated and reprinted as "Müller's Description of the Fetu Country, 1662–9." In *German Sources for West African History, 1599-1669*, edited by Adam Jones, 134–259. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1983.

<sup>388</sup> See Bhabha, H. (1994) The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism. In *The Location of Culture* New York: Routledge. 66-84, where Bhabha critiques colonial authorial integrity by calling attention to the anxiety underlying postures of mastery and certainty that underpin stereotype assertions.

<sup>389</sup> For a background on categorisation, see Ellen, R.F. (1988, 2006) Fetishism: A Cognitive Approach. In *The Categorical Impulse: essays in the anthropology of classifying behaviour*. Oxford & NY: Berghahn Books 166-189 at 166

Through better understanding the complexity of colonialist conceptions of 'fetishism' we can understand the ways in which the 'object-focus' of early epistemologies on 'the fetish' manifested, and were transposed into later psychoanalytic conceptions of the notions. Through revealing the dialectical relations between coloniser and colonised through Foucaultian discursive readings of power and 'fetish', we can track back to the colonial failure to acknowledge the religio-cultural and personal frames of reference of both the colonisers and the colonised, which obscured the subjectivities of both, thereby denying real agency to both<sup>390</sup>.

These failures remained unexplored during the colonial era. Unfortunately, early psychoanalytic theory did not problematise the object-focus it inherited. Psychoanalytic theory therefore inscribed psychological frameworks for 'fetishism' with fictions of difference, which, like its colonial counterpart, it at the same time acknowledged and disavowed, perpetuating assumptions that people are essentially different to other people and to the objects around them. This fed into later psychological discourses on 'fetishism', and through to contemporary metatheory on the subject which, as I will argue, remains object-focused and problematic<sup>391</sup>.

Yet at the same time, I suggest, these failures grant insight into more functional metatheories for notions of fetish as (sexual) relations between people and objects<sup>392</sup>.

### **3.1.1 The Genesis of the Term 'Fetish' as Cross-Cultural Encounter**

The term 'fetish' finds its genesis in encounters between sixteenth-century Portuguese trader-sailors and West Africans<sup>393</sup>. This implies that the term is linked to colonialist labelling and expropriation discourses inappropriately demonising indigenous cultural practices. Pietz, who has exhaustively interrogated anthropological 'fetish', notes that

<sup>390</sup> For a more in-depth look at late-colonial post-World War 1 approaches in colonial ethnography, See Wilder, G (2003) Colonial ethnology and political rationality in french west Africa. In *History and Anthropology*, 1477-2612, Volume 14, Issue 3, 2003, Pages 219 – 252. Wilder looks at the circular and mutually reinforcing relationship between professional anthropology and new technologies of administration. He reviews how the contradictory characterizations of African social relations by ethnologists and contradictory native policies were inherently related to one another, rather than merely influencing each another

<sup>391</sup> See later in this chapter re Freudian fetish, and chapter 4 re psychopathologies

<sup>392</sup> See chapters 5 and 6

<sup>393</sup> Pietz, W (1985) The Problem of the Fetish, I. In *Anthropology and Aesthetics* 9 (Spring, 1985): 5-17; The Problem of the Fetish, II. In *Anthropology and Aesthetics* 13 (Spring, 1987): 23-45. For a broad overview of the history of fetish as linked to the anthropology of religion, see Ellen, R.F. (1988, 2006) *Fetishism: A Cognitive Approach*. In *The Categorical Impulse: essays in the anthropology of classifying behaviour*. Oxford & NY: Berghahn Books 166-189 at 167 et seq., where he argues that scholars like Charles De Brosses in the 18th century argued that religion, as a more highly evolved immaterial concept, came out of 'fetishism', which reflected a 'primitive' need for a tangible object to focus on, and only with further development could the 'savage' mind move to concepts of abstraction and animation. This was widely accepted until the mid-nineteenth century. Comte viewed 'fetish' as being the first in the evolution of religion from 'fetishism' to polytheism to monotheism. In this regard, see Comte, A (1856) *Système de logique positive, ou traité de philosophie mathématique*. In *Oeuvres D'Auguste Comte. Vol. 12*. Paris

'*feitiço*' is a corruption of a medieval term for witchcraft and/or a derivation of some un-enunciated African term<sup>394</sup>. It therefore refers to both a repudiated medieval past, and a spiritual investment in the material in ways the European explorers could not explain<sup>395</sup>.

As Pietz further notes, however, the word 'fetish' is not of African origin but is an import of the Portuguese traders<sup>396</sup>. Even though the word comes particularly from European discourses which therefore claim a sense of 'ownership' over that which they label, its referent is located elsewhere, and it therefore takes on a position in-between cultures and discourses<sup>397</sup>. Contrary to expectations and assumptions, he argues, the idea of 'fetish' therefore does not belong specifically to either African or European societies, but is based on “a cross-cultural situation formed by the ongoing encounter of the value codes of radically different social orders”<sup>398</sup>. As such, the history of 'the fetish' (and the notions underpinning it) is largely the history of the first encounters between the old world and the new, i.e. Europe and Africa/the Americas, and is related to the idea of cross-cultural encounters<sup>399</sup>. It is therefore deeply implicated with assumptions around inferiority, difference and 'otherness', and belies complex dialectical relations rather than mere domination by one group.

### 3.1.1a '*Fetishism*' as Intersection between Colonial Religion and Capitalism

The '*feitiço*' was laden with associations with the mysterious and the unknown, the exotic and the dangerous. In its original incarnation, it was as much about fictions of cultural superiority as about the colonial enterprise imposing its socio-economic value-systems onto the colonised, and the 'fetish' could only come into being along with the birth of “commodity forms in relation to social values and religious ideologies of two different types of societies. Both differed strongly when they encountered each other in the contact zone”<sup>400</sup> 'Fetish' was about how the material world represented

<sup>394</sup> See Pietz, W (1985) The Problem of the Fetish, I. In *Anthropology and Aesthetics* 9 (Spring, 1985): 5-17; (1987) The Problem of the Fetish, II. In *Anthropology and Aesthetics* 13 (Spring, 1987): 23-45. (1988) The Problem of the Fetish IIIa: Bosman's Guinea and the Enlightenment Theory of Fetishism. In *Res* 16 (autumn 1988): 105–123. That we can locate the idea's etymological roots more or less specifically from the European perspective, yet not from its African origins itself indicates the historical priority of European thinking over the indigenous

<sup>395</sup> Pietz, *ibid*

<sup>396</sup> Pietz, *ibid*

<sup>397</sup> Brisson, U (2005) Fish and Fetish: Mary Kingsley's Studies of Fetish in West Africa. In *Journal of Narrative Theory* 35.3 (Fall 2005): 326–340. The 'in-between' position is one which references neither the Portuguese cultural norms, nor the African cosmological conceptions to which it purportedly refers. As such, it is a word without a clear referent, since the Portuguese appear to have judgmentally meant it to refer to what their cultural norms *weren't*, while the Africans implicitly wouldn't have used the idea at all, since it formed an integral part of their practices, not needing a definition and justification from the outside

<sup>398</sup> Pietz, W (1985) The Problem of the Fetish, I. In *Anthropology and Aesthetics* 9 (Spring, 1985): 5-17; (1987) The Problem of the Fetish, II. In *Anthropology and Aesthetics* 13 (Spring, 1987): 23-45. (1988) The Problem of the Fetish IIIa: Bosman's Guinea and the Enlightenment Theory of Fetishism. In *Res* 16 (autumn 1988): 105–123.

<sup>399</sup> Pietz, *ibid*

<sup>400</sup> Pietz, W (1985) *ibid*, quoted in Brisson, U (2005) Fish and Fetish: Mary Kingsley's Studies of Fetish in West Africa

immaterial 'facts' to the colonisers, such as the supposedly 'God-given' right to colonial domination, and the rape in and theft of human and material wealth from the New World.

The colonisers labelled 'the fetish' as mysterious and dangerous because they couldn't understand the relationships to the material world which 'fetishes' represented to the colonised. The colonisers couldn't understand, for example, why Africans happily traded gold, which they respected highly, for jewellery and cheap beads. African senses of the value of commodities did not conform to the European capitalist frames of reference<sup>401</sup>, and the colonisers associated fetish with cultural arbitrariness, the primitive, irrationality and mystery concerning African relationships to materiality and economics<sup>402</sup>. To proscribe 'fetishism' was therefore to support the colonialist enslavement of Africa, both because its people were black and, more importantly, because Africa was not Christian or capitalist<sup>403</sup>. Indeed, "[a]s an irrational relation to objects, fetishism was not just an abomination in the eyes of the Lord; it was also a damned nuisance to market activity"<sup>404</sup>. Pietz describes 'fetish' as a barrier to trade, and as "a perversion of natural processes of economic negotiation and legal contact. Desiring a clean economic transaction, seventeenth century merchants unhappily found themselves entering into social relations and quasi-religious ceremonies that should have been irrelevant to the conduct of trade"<sup>405</sup>. Fetishism was therefore a symbol that both related between and obscured socio-economic relationships in a display of both orientalism and méconnaissance<sup>406</sup>.

### **3.1.2 Colonialist Tropes of People and Things: Dialectics of Power**

However, colonial 'fetish' discourses run deeper than simple colonial domination for material gain, or the head-scratching incomprehension of Europeans in the face of perceived difference. Böhme's

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(2005) *Journal of Narrative Theory* 35.3 (Fall 2005): 326–340

<sup>401</sup> Pietz, *ibid*

<sup>402</sup> See Pietz *ibid* and Winokur, M (2004) Technologies of Race: Special Effects, Fetish, Film, and the Fifteenth Century, in *Genders Online Journal*, Issue 40 . One such example is the ways in which the early European traders in Africa could not understand how Africans could so easily part with their gold in return for cheap beads and jewellery, even though the Africans held gold in high esteem. These traders expected the Africans to automatically have the same proto-capitalist views on the gold as being valuable in itself, whereas it appears that Africans looked beyond the commercial value of gold to what it could and did represent from a religious and social perspective in the objects they made from it. As a result of the misunderstanding about what gold (and other artifacts) represented in indigenous cultures, the traders and colonisers outlawed the use of material objects in indigenous cultural ceremonies, since the colonisers viewed these as representations of non-christian deities, and forbade idol-worship.

<sup>403</sup> Acknowledgements to Winokur, M, *ibid*

<sup>404</sup> Foster, H (1992) "The Art of Fetishism", in *Fetish, Princeton Architecture Journal*, p8

<sup>405</sup> Apter, E (1993) 'Fetishism and Materialism', in Emily Apter and William Pietz, (eds), *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, pp 22-23

<sup>406</sup> See Said, EW (1978) *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* Pantheon; Lacan, J (1951) Some Reflections on the Ego. In *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, vol. 34, 1953 p. 12; Lacan, J. The Seminar. Book I. Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953-54. Trans. John Forrester. New York: Norton; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. p.167; Lacan, J. (1966) *Écrits*. Paris: Seuil, 1966. p.165

unsure stance on whether 'fetishism' signifies “the spoken utterance or the speaker; the described object or the describing subject” demonstrates that 'fetish' serves at the same time to exclude it from consciousness, or at least force it to remain peripheral to discourse in any real sense.<sup>407</sup> Such exclusion or relegation to the periphery implies discursive parallels between the world-views of the colonised 'fetishists' and of the colonisers as to the nature and function of the 'fetish object' and the power dynamics of colonial relationships *inter se*.

### 3.1.2a) Discourses of 'Fetishism' and 'Reification'

From a contemporary vantage-point, discourses of 'fetishism' did not necessarily imply either a top-down colonial domination of the colonised by the coloniser<sup>408</sup>. Nor do they imply simple constructions of people and objects. As Brisson notes, a closer look at 'fetish' tells us more about the (dialectical) nature of cultural encounters<sup>409</sup>, through a “three-sided interplay between materiality, immateriality, and sociality” in the context of the life of the object.<sup>410</sup>

Colonisers worshipped an immaterial God and defined their lives in terms of material wealth which they felt justified in taking from the material world (and from the colonised). They relied on two assumptions: that spiritual wealth could not be attained in the material world (Christian heaven was only attainable after death); and that they were entitled to claim the resources in the colonies (through fictions of 'racial' superiority), which resources, they claimed, could not encompass spiritual wealth. They thereby prioritised the immaterial over the material and called on discourses of 'fetishism' to target “the illegitimate confusion between things and non-things” through colonial suppression of witchcraft and the proscriptions against idol-worship<sup>411</sup>.

However, these discourses nonetheless reflected their own reification discourses which both acknowledged and disavowed a sameness of the coloniser and the colonised<sup>412</sup>. Notwithstanding the colonial proscriptions against 'fetishism', European religion, desires for wealth and reverence for the material were themselves reified, in that *their* social interactions, ways of going about things, performances and ideas were inappropriately

<sup>407</sup> Böhme, H. (2001) Das Fetischismus-Konzept von Marx und sein Kontext. In Gerhardt, V (ed)(2001) *Marxismus: Versuch einer Bilanz*. Magdeburg: Scriptorum-Verlag. 289–319. 30 August 2004 <<http://www.culture.huberlin.de/HB/volltexte/texte/fetisch.html>>. Quoted in Brisson, U (2005) Fish and Fetish: Mary Kingsley's Studies of Fetish in West Africa. In *Journal of Narrative Theory* 35.3 (Fall 2005): 326–340

<sup>408</sup> Brisson, *ibid*

<sup>409</sup> Brisson, *ibid*

<sup>410</sup> Pels, D, Hetherington, K & Vandenberghe, F (2002) The Status of the Object: Performances, Mediations, and Techniques. In *Theory, Culture & Society*, SAGE, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, Vol. 19(5/6): 1–21

<sup>411</sup> Pels et al *ibid*

<sup>412</sup> See later re Freudian conceptions of disavowal from which these notions evolved

imposed onto impersonal, non-human objects<sup>413</sup>. Pels et al argue that this reification is analogous to the necessary reversal involved in religious consciousness, which has made ‘the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life “which entered into relations both with one another and with their human producers.”’<sup>414</sup>

Through this blind spot in correlations between reification and fetishism, the colonisers failed, or refused, to see the parallels between their own world views and those of the colonised, whereby both viewed spiritual connection as mediated through the material world<sup>415</sup>. Through antagonistically focusing on the 'fetishes' of the colonised as 'inappropriately' revered objects, colonisers avoided acknowledging their own discursive practices, and the ontological connections between coloniser and colonised. The protestations of colonial discourses against the similarities between coloniser and colonised in some ways therefore recognised that the two supposedly separate groups *were* similar. By protesting against similarity, the colonialist discourses supported that similarity through discursively perpetuating dualism.

They failed to recognise that both the colonisers and the colonised inscribed discourses on 'fetish', religion, economics and colonial power with new meanings, through negotiation and borrowing from each other, in politically and socially paradoxical and complex ways<sup>416</sup>. Indeed, political relations were complex and dialectical, rather than being a simple enforcement of colonial belief systems onto an unwilling populace<sup>417</sup>. For example, colonised subjects incorporated Christian ideals into traditional practices for their own purposes<sup>418</sup>, in ways comparable, I suggest, to Lee conceptions of tactical

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<sup>413</sup> Pels et al *ibid*

<sup>414</sup> referring to Marx, K (1977 [1867]) *Capital*. Vol.1. Moscow: Progress Publishers. At 77, and speaking of modern conceptions of the commodity fetish, described as a ‘sensuous supersensuous thing’, which approximates singularity and autonomy, but at the same time concealing itself in social construction and definition in an almost naturalistic way.

<sup>415</sup> Pels, D, Hetherington, K & Vandenberghe, F (2002) The Status of the Object: Performances, Mediations, and Techniques. In *Theory, Culture & Society*, SAGE, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, Vol. 19(5/6): 1–21. Pels et al note that both the personification of things and the reification of persons were conceptually embedded in concepts of material production, “while the reification of cultural and political forms was seen as a secondary result of this primordial alienation.”

<sup>416</sup> See Cinnamon, JM (2002) “Ambivalent Power: Anti-Sorcery and Occult Subjugation in Late Colonial Gabon” in *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 3:3 at 2. This negotiation, patently skewed in favour of the colonisers, enabled, “an anti-sorcery movement intimately concerned with culturally embedded understandings of power [which] paradoxically served to reinforce colonial power.”

<sup>417</sup> Cinnamon, *ibid*. One such example is the complexity of traditional witchcraft, sorcery and power practices in the face of Christian conversion of indigenous communities, as Cinnamon discusses referring to ‘anti-sorcery and occult subjugation’ in late colonial Gabon

<sup>418</sup> Cinnamon, JM (2002) “Ambivalent Power: Anti-Sorcery and Occult Subjugation in Late Colonial Gabon” in *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 3:3 at 18. Records detail how Emame Boncoeur rephrased cultural understandings of fetish in his time by removing ‘evil fetishes’ from villages in his area, causing fetishists to “recognize their fault and mend their ways.” In this way he furthered his own personal/political/social needs and desires, which may or may not have been linked with trying to impress the colonial powers, or trying to garner political and/or social support



citizenship<sup>419</sup>. In this way, instead of 'fetish' merely appearing to be 'bad' to the colonisers and 'good' to the colonised, both 'good' and 'bad' 'fetishes' were clearly part of the cultural landscape on both sides of the colonial divide, and a variety of complex and often incongruent views on the value and meaning of fetish co-existed and competed<sup>420</sup>.

These amalgamated and dialectical discursive formulations deny any fictions of homogeneity in the colonialist Western dualist framework of humanity, personification, the supernatural and magic, which may simply have been incredible in traditional non-Western social structures<sup>421</sup>. They also deny any fictions of singularity or coherency in the construction of the term 'fetish' in its colonial context, and therefore attenuate such meanings subsequently adopted in later psychological contexts<sup>422</sup>.

### 3.1.2b) (Assumed) Material Differences between Colonial Bodies

Colonial discourses assumed that colonial and indigenous societies were essentially different, and they demonised 'fetishism' in an attempt to call attention to those differences. In so doing, they

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See also Stoller, P (1995) *Embodying Colonial Memories: Spirit Possession, Power, and the Hauka in West Africa*. New York: Routledge. Stoller looks at the West African *Hauka*, which are spirits in the body of (human) mediums that mimic and mock colonial Europeans, combining narrative description, historical analysis, and reflections on the importance of embodiment and mimesis to social theory. He considers the cultural sentience of the body, the dynamics of colonial resistance movements, and the political discourses of West African postcolonies, arguing that mimicry is about the diversion of European power.

<sup>419</sup> Lee, C.T (2006) Tactical Citizenship: Domestic Workers, the Reminders of Home, and Undocumented Citizen Participation in the Third Space of Mimicry. In *Theory and Event* (2006) 9:3

Albeit speaking of contemporary undocumented workers rather than of historical colonised peoples or sexual fetishists, Lee identifies four conventional theoretical citizenship constructions as "proper ways of participating as citizens", which render difficult conceptions of alternative means and forms of citizen participation: 1. the in-or-out dichotomy of citizenship; 2. civility and law-abidingness; 3. politics as the supreme activity of citizenship (and its simultaneously "public" and "collective" character); and 4. system-subject correspondence.

He calls on Homi Bhabha, Michel de Certeau, James Scott, and Robin Kelley to frame an imaginary of alternative citizenship in which these four features are shifted to become 'tactical citizenship' by each of them corresponding, being translated and re-narrated by undocumented subjects into four "other ways of participating as citizens":

1. the "neither/nor" and "both/and also" of the third space of mimicry; 2. calculated conformity; 3. hidden transcripts, and 4. the Greek notion of *metis* (i.e. tricks and cunning intelligence)- alternatively understood as Levi-Strauss' idea of *bricolage*.

<sup>420</sup> Incidentally, such beliefs in witchcraft still subsist in contemporary Central Africa and are prosecuted through the penal code of the Central African Republic. See Special Assignment, Tuesday 21 July 2009, broadcast on SABC 3. The program indicated that such accusations are often motivated by petty squabbles and personal priorities by members of the community. See also Miguel, E (2005) Poverty and Witch Killing. In *The Review of Economic Studies*, Vol. 72, No. 4 (Oct., 2005), pp. 1153-1172. Miguel argues that poverty is a key underlying cause of the murders of elderly women as "witches" in rural Tanzania. He also makes correlations between the decrease in the number of accusations of witchcraft in Limpopo province in South Africa and the institution of a social grant for the elderly.

<sup>421</sup> Pels, D, Hetherington, K & Vandenbergh, F (2002) The Status of the Object: Performances, Mediations, and Techniques. In *Theory, Culture & Society*, SAGE, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, Vol. 19(5/6): 1-21, referencing Pietz, W (1985) The Problem of the Fetish, I. In *Anthropology and Aesthetics* 9 (Spring, 1985): 5-17; (1987) The Problem of the Fetish, II. In *Anthropology and Aesthetics* 13 (Spring, 1987): 23-45. (1988) The Problem of the Fetish IIIa: Bosman's Guinea and the Enlightenment Theory of Fetishism. In *Res* 16 (autumn 1988): 105-123.

<sup>422</sup> See argument later in this chapter re psychodynamics

called on 'fetishism' to distinguish the colonisers from the colonised in both form and substance.

The colonial enterprise was at pains to separate people, justifying institutionalised colonial domination through fictions of essentialist, racial superiority, and through assumptions that the bodies and minds of the colonised were fundamentally and essentially different to those of the colonisers. This resulted in the objectification and negation of specific ('colonised, othered') bodies by the colonising imagination, and fed fictions of distinct and discrete 'types' of bodies and cultures. These categories were largely defined in terms of the 'racial otherness', which partly relied on distinguishing between (African) 'fetishism' and (European) 'non-fetishism'<sup>423</sup>. This essentialist view in turn perpetuated the colonisers' wilful ignorance and divisive obscuring of the world-views and subjectivities of the colonised in other areas.

Yet colonial social interactions were dynamic, and the colonising cultures *were* influenced by the colonised, (and vice versa). Bernault agrees with analyses that tend to explain the interest in the body in terms of the destructive integration of Africa in the global economy, together with the commodification of the body<sup>424</sup>. However she argues that Western secular views on materiality, power, and the human body have not been consistent. From the eighteenth century, secular views had changed the body from the subject of religious discourses to an object of medical attention; an organic, technical machine. At the same time as these discourses disallowed the physical body from exerting power, they continued to use them as key political ammunition<sup>425</sup>.

The colonial enterprise concealed gaps between the assumptions of Western conceptions of the body's materiality and the immateriality of public power, perhaps in contradistinction to indigenous conceptions of materiality<sup>426</sup>. Dominant colonising tropes of the body insisted that the body was only a 'sign', i.e. that although material, the body merely signals but does not hold power<sup>427</sup>. This power was itself colonially conceived as an immaterial fact only to be held by the

<sup>423</sup> See argument supra on reification discourses

<sup>424</sup> Bernault, F (2006) Body, Power and Sacrifice in Equatorial Africa. In *Journal of African History*, 47, Cambridge University Press pp. 207–239

<sup>425</sup> Bernault, *ibid* at p228-229 referencing Bourdieu, (1979) *La Distinction, critique sociale du jugement*. Paris: Minuit. This translated, she argues, into modern bureaucratic states' strategies of regulating citizens, and targeting individuals' bodies as resources for producing and inscribing public power. Referencing Bourdieu, she notes that constructing people's bodies as social identity markers, and masking this process in naturalised or inherent physical traits, indicates how modern Western visions have not make clear distinctions between the materiality of the body and the social meanings it symbolised or displayed.

<sup>426</sup> Although it is now difficult to identify what those conceptions may have been, since the colonised voice was effectively silenced, and since colonialist discourses obscured the differences in world-view between locals from different places, incorrectly assuming that 'all Africans are alike'.

<sup>427</sup> Bernault, *ibid* at p228-229 referencing Bourdieu, (1979) *La Distinction, critique sociale du jugement*. Paris: Minuit.

colonisers, divinely ordained and/or supported by ideas of superiority fed by (mis-)readings of evolutionary theory. The colonised, in contradistinction, reflected a materiality in and through their bodies while at the same time holding the body to be 'sacred'<sup>428</sup>.

The colonisers assumed both that body and spirit were separate, and that 'white' and 'black' bodies were essentially different<sup>429</sup>. The colonisers assumed that the colonised were ineluctably 'primitive', and justified 'white' colonial presence through fictions of its educative and 'civilising' role. They therefore assumed that they had an automatic 'right of domination', and that the 'white' body was the sign of social forces such as military, technical and economic superiority<sup>430</sup>. The 'white' body was seen as larger than itself, rather than as merely the embodiment of the colonizers' material rule.<sup>431</sup>

By implying a direct engagement with the material nature of power, however, equatorial 'fetishism' threatened to disclose internal contradictions between claims of the colonisers' superiority and indigenous inferiority, and threatened to allow uncomfortable parallels between the philosophies of the colonised and the coloniser. In other words, through 'fetishism', whereby sacred power was held in material bodies and objects, the colonised appeared to turn to material objects to gain and manipulate power in similar ways to the colonisers<sup>432</sup>.

In order to support the fictive 'right' to domination, the colonisers also turned to the fictions of 'difference' between their own 'white' bodies and the 'black' bodies of the colonised, and to the material objects of military, technical and economic technology which they claimed the colonised were unable to develop themselves. Through this dual layer of thinking the colonisers constructed fictions of African bodies as being 'fetish objects' in themselves, while purportedly 'non-fetishised' European bodies were used as tools of domination<sup>433</sup>.

Clearly, therefore, 'fetishism' was used to mask relations between the body and meaning which both Europeans and Africans shared. By the 1880's, both Europeans and Africans were calling on the body as a kind of 'fetish', whereby power could be established and maintained by manipulating sacred power held in material bodies<sup>434</sup>. Both fought to establish coherent ideas about the location, mobilization and representation of power, and about how to enforce authority by means of physical

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<sup>428</sup> Bernault, F *ibid*

<sup>429</sup> Bernault, F *ibid*

<sup>430</sup> Bernault, F *ibid*

<sup>431</sup> Bernault, F *ibid*

<sup>432</sup> Bernault, F *ibid*

<sup>433</sup> Bernault, F *ibid*

<sup>434</sup> Bernault, F *ibid*

violence. It was primarily the colonisers' refusal to recognize this similarity which prevented any conscious or acknowledged points of commonality<sup>435</sup>.

### **3.1.3 Dialectics, not Domination**

As I have suggested, colonialist discourses assumed that the immaterial took priority over the material. This favoured antagonistic and oppositional views of relationships between people, and obscured the substantive and political similarities between colonisers and colonised, thereby ignoring the dialectical nature of relationships. The denial of colonial subjectivities through reliance on discourses on 'fetishism' obscured points of connection and similarities between the colonisers and the colonised. Essentialist constructions both of 'fetishism' and of the difference between colonial and indigenous bodies allowed colonisers to avoid recognising their own subjection and subservience to fictions of the immaterial over the material, thereby obscuring the subjectivities of *both* the colonised *and* the colonisers, and mis-recognising the dialectical role of agency in social interaction.

Simply put, from its genesis 'fetishism' has been an unstable concept, subject to shifts and changes depending on the prevailing exigencies of political power and on consensus ontologies of the constitution of people. This is notable, and runs contrary to contemporary classifications which lodge it as some kind of determinist 'truth', capable of being classified, for example through the ICD classifications<sup>436</sup>.

More complex readings of colonial relations reveal that the colonialist discursive proscriptions of 'fetishism' (which were defined by reference to the material objects of interest) were underpinned by assumptions that the use of material 'fetish' objects inherently challenged the immateriality of both colonial power and the colonial God, and in turn that the objects were epistemologically more important than the subjectivities of those who incorporated them into their lives.

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<sup>435</sup> Bernault, F *ibid*. Yet both Africans and Europeans engaged in a progressive “re-enchanting of the human body” during the colonial era (Bernault, F *ibid* at p228). Conceptions of the body in Central Africa were key to crafting and reproducing power. These conceptions were disrupted by colonialism, which based assumptions of colonisers' superiority on fictions that power and the body are disconnected. The colonial enterprise nevertheless laid bare important contradictions in Western assumptions around materiality and the body. Both political and moral transgressions were set in motion by colonisation, on the part of both colonisers and colonised. The Europeans themselves saw political survival as a ‘positive exchange’ intimately connected to the ‘body-fetish’. Questioning the historical colonial tendencies to mark boundaries between Western and African imaginaries, Bernault argues that both coloniser and colonised bodies became ‘re-sacralised’ as political resources. ‘Resacralised’ implies that that the body had in some ways lost its function as a sacred space through the colonial imposition of Cartesian thinking around corporeality. However, Bernault argues that the similarities in world-view between the colonisers and colonised resulted in the body to regain a sense of the sacred.

<sup>436</sup> See chapter 4

However, contrary to suppositions and on closer inspection, colonialism was not about a mere top-down domination of colonial subjects by colonisers, or the priority of humans over material objects. Rather, it was made up through dialectical relations between coloniser and colonised whereby both called on mind and body (as well as the material world) as political resources. This implies that both colonisers and colonised used both the body and the material world in dialectical, rather than hierarchical ways, and that people, the material world and discursive power were not ontologically separate<sup>437</sup>.

This more complex understanding of the mutable relations between the material, immateriality and power gives some insight into how we can view contemporary 'fetish sexuality', by recognising the relationships between discourse, materiality and the body in contemporary metatheories on 'fetishism', rather than by simply re-applying determinist assumptions that some people (for example the 'mentally well') are inherently more 'viable' than those who are constructed in foundationalist ways ('fetishists')<sup>438</sup>.

This complexity, in turn, implies that individual agency was being employed by both the colonisers and the colonised in order to navigate their relationships *inter se*. This further lends some insight into how we can see contemporary fetish sexuality as entailing, rather than denying agency<sup>439</sup>. In turn, this implies that (sexual) relations with material objects do not inherently mean an ontological primacy of humans, *qua* putatively immaterial beings, over each other or the material world. Nor does it imply that subjects are normatively pathologisable through an epistemological focus on the material objects they use to give meaning to their lives<sup>440</sup>.

Through colonial force and domination, the colonial enterprise nevertheless refused the role of materiality in human life, and to acknowledge this agency. Despite the clearer conception we now have of how the *feitico* interacted with discourses in colonial times through reification of power and the body, object-focused and essentialist/determinist assumptions around both 'fetishism' and the constitution of humans flowed unquestioned into late colonial constructions. The human subject continued to be seen as separate from other human subjects, and from the world and its constituent objects, foundationalist frameworks which were perpetuated into the modern era, in particular into the psychoanalytic discourses around fetish sexuality.

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<sup>437</sup> See Chapter 5

<sup>438</sup> See Chapter 5 re the constitution of the subject

<sup>439</sup> See chapter 6 re agency and the functions and workings of fetish sexuality

<sup>440</sup> See below and chapter 4 re normative concerns.

## 3.2 Psychoanalytic 'Fetish': the Conflation of Presence and Absence

Fetishism used to be a question of gods. ... Now fetishism seems to be a question of the gods' disappearance, in more than one sense a crisis of faith. The fetishism commemorates the crisis, marking the space of this disappearance. Fetishism is no longer seen as the immediate presence of an embodied force, but is rather fetishism *de la chose perdu* [of the lost thing], a nostalgia for lost essence and significant relations, and a displacement of this fetishized essence onto an object-screen.<sup>441</sup>

Like their colonialist counterparts, late nineteenth-century sexologists, in particular Binet and Krafft-Ebing, adopted inherently object-focused discursive constructions of the *feitiço*<sup>442</sup>. Freud followed suit in theorising psychodynamic frameworks<sup>443</sup>, which form the basis for contemporary psychoanalytic discourses around 'fetishism'<sup>444</sup>.

This fundamental 'object-focus' is clearly visible, I suggest, in two areas:

- Freudian psychoanalytic constructions of the psyche are framed in patriarchal, heteronormative terms, which perpetuate the assumption of the male as dominant subject, and the human sexual partner as passive (female) 'object'<sup>445</sup>. This in turn frames the sexual subject

<sup>441</sup> Gernerchak, CM (2004) Preface, in Christopher Gernerchak (ed), *Everyday Extraordinary: Encountering Fetishism with Marx, Freud and Lacan*, p. 7.

<sup>442</sup> See Nye, RA (1991) The History of Sexuality in Context: National Sexological Traditions. In *Science in Context* (1991), 4:387-406 Cambridge University Press. He argues that sexology developed historically differently in France than elsewhere in Europe, and that even though the modern idea of "sexuality" came about in the last half of the nineteenth century, the older idea of "sex" persisted in French science and medicine for longer through fear of the threat of non-reproductive sexual behaviour deepening the local population crisis. He argues that scientific and medical concepts of the sexual 'perversions', especially homosexuality, were seen by French sexologists as abnormal deviations from heterosexuality. On the other hand, certain English, German, and Austrian sexologists, including Freud, were more tolerant of the 'perversions' as natural variations of the norm. He approaches the inadequacies of historical developmental accounts favouring Foucaultian discursive ruptures, rather stressing social and causal historical explanations. See also Money, J. (2003) History, causality, and sexology. In *The Journal of Sex Research*. Vol. 40, 2003; Béjin, A and Giami, A (2007) Une histoire de la sexologie française / A history of French sexology. In *Sexologies* Volume 16, Issue 3, July-September 2007, pp 170;

<sup>443</sup> See Armstrong, R.H (2005) *A Compulsion for Antiquity: Freud and the Ancient World*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Armstrong argues that we should not forget Freud's construction of human psychology in relation to antiquity, so as to remember the cultural continuity between antiquity and modernity.

See Hoad, N.W. (1998) *Wild(e) Men and Savages: the Homosexual and the Primitive in Darwin, Wilde and Freud*. PhD Thesis. Columbia University. Hoad argues compellingly that late nineteenth century notions of male 'homosexuality' should be located in the context of racial difference and white European imperial expansion. More particularly, he argues that Freud relies on Darwin's arguments around ontogenetic development as linking into phylogenetic primitiveness to locate theories of psycho-sexual development, allowing Freud to conceive of homosexuality as arrested development.

<sup>444</sup> See note supra: Nye, RA (1991) The History of Sexuality in Context: National Sexological Traditions. In *Science in Context* (1991), 4:387-406 Cambridge University Press; Money, J. (2003) History, causality, and sexology. In *The Journal of Sex Research*. Vol. 40, 2003; Béjin, A and Giami, A (2007) Une histoire de la sexologie française / A history of French sexology. In *Sexologies* Volume 16, Issue 3, July-September 2007, pp 170;

<sup>445</sup> In stating this I nevertheless acknowledge that some feminist responses to this kind of critique argue that, even though Freud's theories reflect patriarchy and his own sexism, they serve to provide understanding for the psychical reproduction of patriarchy. However, As I argue in chapters 3 and 4, these arguments have largely not been taken into account in contemporary thinking about and metatheoretical underpinnings for fetish sexuality

hierarchically in implicitly power- and object-focused terms, whether to human or 'fetish' object; and

- Freudian fetishism is constructed as the (inappropriate) adult response to castration anxiety, which serves to narrow/eliminate the gap between 'pathological' and 'non-pathological' categories of 'fetishism', through relying on normative standards.

As I will argue, these concerns can superficially be addressed by re-reading Freud's reliance on unequal gender-role power relations, and by referencing 'fetishism' through poststructuralist theories which explain society in terms of discursive construction and power. However, such scholarly sleights-of-hand do not address the fundamental concern that both Freudian and poststructuralist psychoanalytic theory are inherently based on 'lack', whether conceived through the absence of an essentialist and material object (Freudianism) or through the absence of a foundationalist discursively-described symbol (post-structuralist psychoanalytic theory such as Lacan).

These concerns cannot, I suggest, be adequately addressed through existing psychodynamic theories, which attenuate the role of the subject (and his/her constitution as an embodied being), and therefore the role of agency. Psychodynamic assumptions therefore remain unstable and inappropriate as metatheoretical bases for contemporary thinking on 'fetish' sexuality, which, as will be more fully discussed in chapter 4, serves to obscure subjectivities, and reduce the scope for validated agency. This is of particular concern for non-normative (or partially-normative<sup>446</sup>) individuals exploring unusual sexual practices, such as 'gay male sexual fetishists'.

### 3.2a) *The 'Perversions'*

Nineteenth-century sexologists such as Binet found the concept of 'fetishism' in Rousseau, Darwin and the ethnography of the time, and translated it into the sexual sphere<sup>447</sup>. Von Krafft-Ebing in particular engaged in the debate through classifying perversions in

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<sup>446</sup> See the Interjection

<sup>447</sup> For a compelling insight into the connecting points between colonial and psychoanalytic fetish, see Cheng, A.A. (2006). Josephine Baker: Psychoanalysis and the Colonial Fetish. In *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 75:95-129, where a path is tracked connecting racial fantasy, aesthetic judgement and the cultural concern of intersubjective recognition. Cheng looks at sexual and racial fetishism in an historical colonial context, thereby unpacking disturbances around the racial fetish. As Cheng notes, "there are both structural and functional justifications for thinking about racial stereotypes as specifically a form of fetishism. [T]here are nonetheless several unresolved remainders left by this equation"

See also Bauer, H (2003) "Not a translation but a mutilation": The Limits of Translation and the Discipline of Sexology. In *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, vol 16, no2 (2003): 381-405. Bauer notes that translations from the original German into English of Krafft-Ebing's work served to obscure the original meaning, and bought into dominant homophobic British Imperialist norms, subtly losing the belief that homosexuality was a 'normal' variation of human sexuality like variations in eye colour. Bauer also explores similar concerns relating to the work of Magnus Hirschfeld and Karl Heinrich Ulrichs.

## *Psychopathia Sexualis*<sup>448</sup>.

Freud's classification, picked up from Krafft-Ebing in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, has become discursively central, being widely used and found in many dictionaries<sup>449</sup>. For Freud, 'perversions' are improper sexual activities that either

- *extend*, in an anatomical sense beyond the regions of the body that are designed for sexual union, or
- *linger* over the intermediate relations to the sexual object which should normally be traversed rapidly on the path towards the final sexual aim.<sup>450</sup>

The classification relates to two distinct categories:

- perversions relating to objects, where the subject finds pleasure in partners not conforming to (hetero)norms, including homosexual partners, animals, children, non-consenting persons, dead bodies and substituted objects;
- perversions of aim, in which pleasure is gained exclusively through activities that are ordinarily secondary or less important in sexual relations, such as looking, touching and stimulating<sup>451</sup>.

<sup>448</sup> Krafft Ebing R. (1895) *Psychopathia Sexualis*. 8<sup>th</sup> edition. Paris: G. Carre. See Ellen, R.F. (1988, 2006) *Fetishism: A Cognitive Approach*. In *The Categorical Impulse: essays in the anthropology of classifying behaviour*. Oxford & NY: Berghahn Books 166-189; Nye, RA (1991) *The History of Sexuality in Context: National Sexological Traditions*. In *Science in Context* (1991), 4:387-406 Cambridge University Press. He argues that sexology developed historically differently in France than elsewhere in Europe, and that even though the modern idea of "sexuality" came about in the last half of the nineteenth century, the older idea of "sex" persisted in French science and medicine for longer through fear of the threat of non reproductive sexual behaviour deepening the local population crisis. He argues that scientific and medical concepts of the sexual perversions, especially homosexuality, were seen by French sexologists as abnormal deviations from heterosexuality. On the other hand, certain English, German, and Austrian sexologists, including Freud, were more tolerant of the perversions as natural variations of the norm. He approaches the inadequacies of historical developmental accounts favouring Foucaultian discursive ruptures, rather stressing social and causal historical explanations. See also Money, J. (2003) *History, causality, and sexology*. In *The Journal of Sex Research*. Vol. 40, 2003; Béjin, A and Giami, A (2007) *Une histoire de la sexologie française / A history of French sexology*. In *Sexologies* Volume 16, Issue 3, July-September 2007, pp 170; See also Bonnet, G (2002) *Pour une nouvelle classification des perversions sexuelles*, *Evol Psychiatr* 2002 ; 67 : 496-505, in the exploration of the insufficiencies of traditional classifications of sexual perversion.

<sup>449</sup> Freud, S. [1905](1977) *On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*. Trans. And ed. James Strachey. Comp. and ed. Angela Richards. The Penguin Freud Library Volume 7. Harmondsworth: Penguin. See Bonnet, G (2002) *Pour une nouvelle classification des perversions sexuelles*. In *Evolutionary Psychiatry* 2002 ; 67 : 496-505. See also Apter, E (1991) *Feminizing the Fetish: Psychoanalysis and Narrative Obsession in Turn-of-the-Century France*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press; Apter, E and Pietz, W, (eds) (1993) *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press esp: Nye, RA. (1993) *The Medical Origins of Sexual Fetishism*. In *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, edited by Emily Apter and William Pietz. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press

<sup>450</sup> Freud, S. [1905](1977) *On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*. Trans. And ed. James Strachey. Comp. and ed. Angela Richards. The Penguin Freud Library Volume 7. Harmondsworth: Penguin

<sup>451</sup> Bonnet, G (2002) *Pour une nouvelle classification des perversions sexuelles*. In *Evolutionary Psychiatry* 2002 ; 67 : 496-505 pp497. Bonnet notes that these kinds of distinctions are used increasingly infrequently



### 3.2.1 Object-Focused Freud

I can only repeat over and over again – for I never find it otherwise – that sexuality is the key to the problem of the psychoneuroses and of the neuroses in general. No one who disdains the key will ever be able to unlock the door.<sup>452</sup>

I suggest that Freud adopted a singular object-focus for his construction of 'fetish', which implies “subjection of the human body . . . to the influence of certain significant material objects that, although cut off from the body, function as its controlling organs at certain moments”<sup>453</sup>. Early views of the idea of 'the fetish' often constructed it as a fabricated item worn on the body, which, although not part of the body, effectively becomes part of it and takes control of it. Pietz' argues that this understanding has continued to relate in subsequent formulations of 'the fetish', noting that psychoanalysis “develop[s] most fully this theme of the effective symbolization of the sexual human body as ‘fixated’ in relation to certain material things”<sup>454</sup>.

Whereas the colonial 'fetish' is focused on the proscribed the devotional 'fetish object', Freudian psychoanalytic 'fetishism' is based on notions of disavowal<sup>455</sup>, the absence of a penis/phallus<sup>456</sup>, and the Oedipal Complex<sup>457</sup>. Yet, I suggest, both are based on an antagonistic

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lately. When used, however, the classification usually refers to genital sexuality, where perversion is seen as an inversion or an aberration related to pleasure-seeking norms, whether through object or aim. However, whether this means statistical or moral norms is not generally clarified.

<sup>452</sup> Freud (1905) Dora

<sup>453</sup> Davidson, G (2007) Ornamental Identity: Commodity Fetishism, Masculinity, and Sexuality in The Golden Bowl *The Henry James Review* 28: The Johns Hopkins University Press 26–42

<sup>454</sup> Pietz, W (1985) The Problem of the Fetish, I. In *Res* 9 (1985): 5–17.

<sup>455</sup> Freud's Ego-Splitting and Disavowal relate fetishism as an inappropriate adult response to castration anxiety. For a brief description, see Addendum 1

<sup>456</sup> For a brief explanation of Defence and Repression, see Addendum 1

<sup>457</sup> For a brief explanation of the Oedipal Complex, see Freud, S. (1924). The Passing of the Oedipus Complex. In the *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 5:419-424. Freud, S (1925) Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes. In Adams, R & Savran, D (2002) *The masculinity studies reader*. Wiley-Blackwell. Reprinted from (1925) *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*, trans. Strachey, J. New York: Collier Books, pp183-193

See also Laufer, M.E. (1993) The Female Oedipus Complex and the Relationship to the Body. In

Breen, D (1993) *The Gender conundrum: contemporary psychoanalytic perspectives on femininity and masculinity*, Volume 18 of New library of psychoanalysis. Routledge; Loewald, H.W. (2000) The Waning of the

Oedipus Complex. In *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, vol. 27, 1979, pp. 751–775; Swan, J (1974) Mater and Nannie: Freud's two mothers and the discovery of the Oedipus complex. In

*American Imago*. Vol 31(1), Spr 1974, 1-64. Simon, B (1991) Is the Oedipus Complex Still the Cornerstone of Psychoanalysis? Three Obstacles to Answering the Question. In *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, Vol. 39, No. 3, 641-668 (1991). Simon addresses questions of the political controversies, the definitions and boundaries and criteria for evidence to prove or disprove it.

Note that this chapter does not deal with the Oedipus Complex in detail, since the arguments critiquing it are largely addressed by points made in this chapter on the object-focus of metatheories on fetish as pertaining to disavowal.

The primary argument of this chapter is not around how patriarchy is perpetuated (which is often well argued in relation to the Oedipal Complex), but rather how (hetero)patriarchy has often refused a (nonessentialist) sense of 'self' and agency to individuals through the discursive constructs such as Freudian psychoanalysis.

oppositional definitional nexus between person-and-object, whereby the idea of 'fetishism' and 'fetishist' are defined through a focus on the 'fetish' object, in divergent or conflictual terms.

In both colonial and Freudian psychoanalytic constructions, 'fetishism' implies both presence and absence, which in turn defines both the 'fetish' object and the 'fetishist' in terms of neurosis. In both instances, the relative focus has historically been on the object rather than the relationship between the two. This, I suggest, results in epistemological constructs of psychoanalytic 'fetishism' which both over-prioritise the object and under-prioritise embodied, experiential, processual notions of living<sup>458</sup>. This in turn leads to the marginalising of subjectivities and the attenuation of the power of subjective agency.

In this regard, theories of psychoanalytic agency distinguish between 'non-pathology' as the practices which engage a sense of agency on the one hand, and 'pathology' on the other, which is mediated through the desire to achieve agency by means of the psychoanalytic therapeutic process<sup>459</sup>. However, I suggest, discursive constructions of 'fetishism' blur this distinction through normative sexual assumptions. In particular, I argue that:

- Freudian psychoanalytic constructions of the psyche are framed in patriarchal, heteronormative terms, which perpetuate the assumption that the sexual subject is inevitably male, and the sexual object female, in ways paralleled to a disapproved-of inanimate object. This in turn frames the sexual subject hierarchically in implicitly power- and object-focused terms, whether to human or 'fetish' object.
- Pathological adult 'fetishism' is seen as a childish psychological attachment to the presence/absence of the penis. This is problematic since such an assumption does not ground the distinction between pathology and non-pathology sufficiently firmly, since both rely on normative and therefore variable distinctions. This implicates so-called 'non-pathological fetishism' with the same pathologising associations as its 'pathological' counterpart.

At first glance, this could perhaps be remedied by re-working Freudian premises, and/or by

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<sup>458</sup> See chapter 4

<sup>459</sup> In this regard, see Pollock, L., Slavin, J.H. (1998). The Struggle for Recognition: Disruption and Reintegration in the Experience of Agency. In *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 8:857-873. They note that classical psychoanalytic models see treatment as enabling subjects to reclaim their own agency and to take responsibility for themselves as agents in respect of their own motives and impulses, but that agency is less clearly understood developmentally and as part of the treatment process. They suggest that obtaining the ability to experience the self as an agent comes out of complex interpersonal and intrapsychic processes in infancy and early childhood. It represents a binding force which founds a feeling of personal coherence. They also argue that the development of a sense of agency is based on the childhood negotiation of recognition and mutual impact with parents, and that when these negotiations go wrong, the child's capacity for agency can be disturbed.

rephrasing the object-focus by calling on linguistic/discursive constructions. However, doing so does not address the abiding concern that psychoanalysis is premised on 'lack', a premise which is itself, I suggest, inherently object-focused and foundationalist through the description of the human psyche as irretrievably defined in relation to the absence of an object, whether physically, psychically or discursively described. This 'not having' implies an attenuation of agency, in contradistinction to 'having' which implies that the subject-agent has psychological choice.

Such antagonistically object-focused constructions are, I suggest, problematic both for women and 'gay male fetishists', whose subjectivities are obscured by psychoanalytic constructions which negate the complexity of psycho-social agency<sup>460</sup>, and ignore the central role of sexual embodied experience in sexuality<sup>461</sup>.

As will be discussed later, a more functional psychological approach is to conceive of 'fetishism' in subject-oriented ways. In other words, it is more appropriate to conceive of 'fetish' sexuality as taking place within a context dialectically defined in relation to the sexual subject who is in turn conceived as being oriented in-relation-to-object (and environment) in convergent or cohering terms<sup>462</sup>.

### **3.2.2 The 'Fetish': Dominating (Male) Subject, Passive (Female) Object**

Freud's assumptions around the primacy of the male, heterosexual psyche, and his views of the sexual 'other' are, I suggest, both theoretically and politically problematic in that Freudian 'fetishism' assumes a heteropatriarchal social framework whereby the 'fetishist' is by definition male and heterosexual. Further, they assume both a passive female human sexual object, and the hierarchical subjection of the material world to the desires of the (dominating) subject through subjection of material ('fetish') objects to the agency of male sexuality in ways paralleled to the heteropatriarchal treatment of the female socio-sexual object.

This has troubling implications when viewed through feminist and queer lenses, since it perpetuates the problematic invisibility, and at the same time specularising of people other than heterosexual

<sup>460</sup> The concept of agency in sexuality is associated with the concept of the agency of the psychoanalytic subject in the process of psychoanalysis. For an overview and intersection with this idea see Moran, F.M. (1993) *Subject and agency in psychoanalysis—Which is to be Master?* New York and London: NYU Press. See also Ogden, T.H. (1992). *The Dialectically Constituted/Decentered Subject of Psychoanalysis. I. the Freudian Subject*. In *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 73:517-526. He looks at the theme of the 'splitting of consciousness' and the question of the location of the subject within this 'dual consciousness'.

See also Borch-Jacobsen, M. Porter, C. Trans Porter, C (1989) *The Freudian Subject*. Stanford University Press; see also Domenici, T; Lesser, R.C; Harris, A (1995) *Disorienting Sexuality: Psychoanalytic Reappraisals of Sexual Identities*, Routledge

<sup>461</sup> See chapters 5 and 6

<sup>462</sup> See chapters 5 and 6

males. In particular, Butlerian conceptions of performativity undermine assumptions of the static and immutable nature of both gender and sexuality<sup>463</sup>, which de-centres the idea of essentialist sexual locations: in this instance the notion of men always being dominant in essentialist ways. Such assumptions are problematic in view of the inherent patriarchal power-dynamic assumed/created by Freudian psychoanalysis which defines the 'fetishist' antagonistically in opposition to the object, whether human or inanimate, rather than dialectically connected *in relation to* him/her/it. This serves to obscure both the 'fetishist's' subjectivity and his psychodynamic orientation as taking place *'in relation to'* complex socio-political and emotional circumstances, rather than *'in opposition to'* an assumed static, foundational psychodynamic location. The former, I argue, grants a psycho-sexual agency, which the latter attenuates.

Feminist critics have dismissed Freud's work as sexist because of his premise that women are mutilated and must accept the deformity from which they suffer in their lack of a penis<sup>464</sup>. Other scholars have addressed concerns about the primacy of the penis. Bass, for example, goes further than Freud in suggesting that 'fetishism' is the problem of substitution for a disturbing reality<sup>465</sup>. Bass sees it as allowing consolation in the material while retaining unconscious what has been registered but nevertheless is disavowed or "defended against"<sup>466</sup>. He suggests that any material things that serve as transitional substitutes for "magical, relieving objects" can serve as a basis for "fetishistic formations"<sup>467</sup>. In this way, the mother's breast can be 'fetishized' as much as the maternal phallus.

Other feminist critics have robustly criticized Freud, but argue that psychoanalysis is imperative to the feminist project and must, as with other theoretical traditions, be adapted by women so as to be freed from its sexist premises<sup>468</sup>. Firestone, for example, talks of how Freudianism is substantially accurate but that the word 'penis' in his work should be replaced with 'power'<sup>469</sup>. Further, many feminists, such as Mitchell and Rose, have approached Freudian analysis in general, and the Oedipal Complex in particular, as the process by which patriarchal power is reproduced at a subjective psychodynamic level<sup>470</sup>.

<sup>463</sup> In particular see Butler, J. (1999) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* NY, Routledge.

<sup>464</sup> See Schor, N. (1992) Fetishism. In *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, edited by Elizabeth Wright. Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell; Grosz, E. (1991) Lesbian Fetishism? In *Differences* 3, no. 2 (1991): 39–54; Butler, J. (1993) *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge

<sup>465</sup> Bass, A. (2000) *Difference and Disavowal: The Trauma of Eros*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press at 48

<sup>466</sup> Bass, *ibid*, at 51

<sup>467</sup> Bass, *ibid* at 207–208

<sup>468</sup> for example Juliet Mitchell, Nancy Chodorow, Jessica Benjamin, Jane Gallop, Bracha Ettinger, Shoshana Felman, Griselda Pollock and Jane Flax

<sup>469</sup> "Freudianism: The Misguided Feminism"

<sup>470</sup> See Mitchell, J & Rose, J (1982) *Feminine Sexuality*, Macmillan; Lacan, J, Mitchell, J & Rose, J (1985)

These kinds of arguments, although compelling in terms of explaining how patriarchy is perpetuated as a discursive practice, do not adequately address the constitution and role of the individual subject as he/she relates to the material world, and as he/she manipulates the discourses to which he/she is subject, since such constructions are, as I will argue, based on foundationalist assumptions<sup>471</sup>.

Similarly, there is no single feminist analysis of 'fetishism'<sup>472</sup>. Perhaps the closest connecting idea is that feminist scholars tend to understand the function of the phallus as a signifier being conflated with material reality, to which it inherently refers<sup>473</sup>. Certain feminist critiques argue that sexual 'perversions', which include 'fetishism', are symptoms of a strained effort to subscribe to gender stereotypes. Others note the theoretical impossibility of female 'fetishism', and yet call on it to understand women's and lesbian desire. De Lauretis, for example, posits the fetish, rather than the substitution for a "real" lack, as a fetish of a fetish and the material marker of a fantasy that marks both an "object" and its absence, through the fetishising of the female body or something related to it in lesbian desire<sup>474</sup>. This allows feminist theorists to conceive non-heteronormative and phallogocentric theories of sexuality, specifically for women<sup>475</sup>.

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*Freud and Beyond: A History of Modern Psychoanalytic Thought*. WW Norton & Co; Mitchell, J (1991) Commentary on "Deconstructing Difference: Gender, Splitting, and Transitional Space". In *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 1:353-357; Mitchell, J (2000) *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*. Basic Books; Mitchell, J (2004) The Difference Between Gender and Sexual Difference. In Matthis, I (2004) *Dialogues on sexuality, gender, and psychoanalysis*. Karnac Books; Rose, J (2005) Femininity and its Discontents. In *Feminist Review*, No. 80, Reflections on 25 Years (2005), pp. 24-43; Rose, J (2005) Sexuality in the field of vision, Volume 9 of *Radical thinkers*. Verso, 2005

See also Nasser, A.G (1998) Psychoanalysis, Paradigm Shift, and Theoretical Reflexivity: the Case of the Oedipus Complex. In *Psychoanalytic Review*, 85:225-251; Jones, G.Y. (1999) 'Beyond the oedipal complex': Freud and Lacan revisited. In *Psychodynamic Practice*, Volume 5, Issue 4 November 1999, pages 453 – 463; Smith, J.C. (1990) *The Neurotic Foundations of Social Order: Psychoanalytic Roots of Patriarchy*. New York: New York University Press; Freeman, T (2008). Psychoanalytic Concepts of Fatherhood: Patriarchal Paradoxes and the Presence of an Absent Authority. In *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 9:113-139; Rohde-Dachser, C (1992). Do We Need a Feminist Psychoanalysis? In *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought*, 15:241-259  
Izzard S.(2002) Deconstructing Oedipus. In *European Journal of Psychotherapy, Counselling & Health*, Volume 5, Number 1, 1 March 2002, pp. 1-12(12) Izzard notes that historically the Oedipus complex has been central to psychoanalysis relating to human growth and development, and understanding relationships. The paper argues that it remains powerful since it is a lens through which gender relationships, sexuality and social structure are seen. The paper proposes reasons for questioning it, followed by ways in which it has been responded to.

<sup>471</sup> This is comparable to how anthropological notions of 'fetishism' obscured colonial subjectivities  
See arguments such as those of Butler: Butler, J (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York:Routledge; Butler, J (1993) *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of "sex"*  
New York: Routledge.

In this regard, see later in this chapter re charges of psychoanalytic lack, and further see chapters 5 and 6

<sup>472</sup> Morris, R *Fetishism - Overview - Feminist Criticism And Poststructuralist Readings*, from <http://science.jrank.org/pages/9366/Fetishism-Overview-Feminist-Criticism-Poststructuralist-Readings.html>

<sup>473</sup> Morris, R *ibid*

<sup>474</sup> See De Lauretis, T (1994). *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press

<sup>475</sup> Morris, R *Fetishism - Overview - Feminist Criticism And Poststructuralist Readings*, from <http://science.jrank.org/pages/9366/Fetishism-Overview-Feminist-Criticism-Poststructuralist-Readings.html>

These approaches do not, however, successfully address how 'fetish' applies specifically in male same-sex sexual contexts, although allegiances can be made for where 'fetishism' is employed in a passive sense, i.e. when the 'fetish object' is used to dominate a male object. However, such re-organising still tends to assume that the role of sexual subject is active (and therefore 'masculine'), albeit not necessarily dominating<sup>476</sup>.

### 3.2.2a) Heteropatriarchal Assumptions

Freud's views, although perhaps in some senses compelling, create an implicit hierarchical construction of the relation between sexual subject and object, whereby subject and object are separate and the one prioritised over the other. This links to feminist concerns about both Freud and his constructions of 'fetishism'.

According to Miyasaki, there are two central problems relating to the Freudian model of sexual relation. Gender roles and relations generally associated with (compulsory) heterosexuality are already built into Freud's conceptions of sexual instinct and aim<sup>477</sup>. Variations from the 'normal' sexual object and aim therefore demonstrate hierarchically opposed masculinity and femininity, and Freud's theory of sexuality thus implies that erotic bonds are inescapably those of domination: that human relations can only take place as relations of subject and object, activity and passivity, whole and part, or owner and property<sup>478</sup>.

The first problem he identifies is that the other is overvalued, "(found pleasurable as both active stimulus and passive satiation) *only given its continued utility* as passive recipient in the sexual aim", which he calls the 'problem of domination'<sup>479</sup>. The other is seen as not-valuable and a source of pain, and the subject therefore must continue to possess and subordinate the other to his pleasure.

The second problem is that the overvaluation fails to motivate the subject to recognise the other's subjectivity, and the subject sees the overvalued other only in terms of the other's pleasure and utility to the subject. Miyasaki calls this the 'problem of property' whereby the other's very existence is seen in terms of a function of being dominated.<sup>480</sup>

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<sup>476</sup> as will be discussed below, domination is a central problem pertaining to agency

<sup>477</sup> Even though Freud rejects biologically defined connections between instinct and object, which assists him in avoiding labeling all variations from heterosexuality as "degenerate" or "pathological". See Miyasaki, D (2003) The Evasion of Gender in Freudian Fetishism. In *JPCS: Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture & Society*, Volume 8, Number 2, Fall 2003, pp 289-298 Ohio State University Press, calling on *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*.

<sup>478</sup> This addresses arguments that Freudian concepts are useful in describing how patriarchy is reproduced

<sup>479</sup> Miyasaki, D (2003) The Evasion of Gender in Freudian Fetishism. In *JPCS: Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture & Society*, Volume 8, Number 2, Fall 2003, pp 289-298 Ohio State University Press, pp291

<sup>480</sup> Miyasaki, *ibid*

Further, the perceived inability of the subject to acknowledge the subjectivity of the sexual other not only locates the other in terms of domination and property, but disallows the 'fetishist' from taking a passive, dominated or owned position, which many gay men desire in their role-play<sup>481</sup>. This in turn renders his own subjectivity irrelevant, thereby negating his agency in negotiating his world psychodynamically<sup>482</sup>. I call this third concern the problem of agency.

Miyasaki argues cogently that another reading of Freud and 'fetishism' is possible, enabling a revision of preconceptions of gender-bias, and oppositional, hierarchical gender roles in Freudian thinking<sup>483</sup>. Even though Freud views 'sexual fetishism' as a particularly masculine enterprise, his text also supports a reading of the 'non-pathological fetishist' as escaping gender and sexual roles. This implies that 'fetishism' can be seen as a critique of the Freudian masculine model of sexual instinct and relation.

In order to avoid the problems set out above, an alternative view to sexual relation must be found. Firstly, "the subject's overvaluation of the other as pleasurable stimulus must be independent of the other's continued utility for satisfaction", which means that the subject must be able to enjoy desire in itself. The other must be appreciated for its capacity to provide both desire and "satiated desire"<sup>484</sup>. Secondly, I suggest, the subject should have the understanding to acknowledge the other as subject. In other words, the (human) object must be granted agency, thereby enabling full unfettered and equal agency to be exercised by the subject, described in terms of connectedness to the sexual object, rather than antagonism.

Miyasaki sees Freud's theory of 'non-pathological fetishism' as containing the seeds of this perspective, which avoids the gender role construction divided by castration, unlike Freud's constructions of other forms of 'perversity', including both hetero- and homosexuality<sup>485</sup>. He argues that disavowal really means the disavowal of the 'fact' of the female body. In this way, Freud does not consider that the fetishist's disavowal of a perceived reality is that of a misperceived reality, since the 'fetishist' does not actually disavow 'reality' at all. Rather, he transposes attention and displaces value from the penis to another object<sup>486</sup>. The 'fetishist' doesn't disavow the woman's real lack of penis, since female genital

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<sup>481</sup> See chapter 4 and the Interjection in particular

<sup>482</sup> In this regard, see Butler, J (1999) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, NY, Routledge

<sup>483</sup> Miyasaki, D (2003) The Evasion of Gender in Freudian Fetishism. In *JPCS: Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture & Society*, Volume 8, Number 2, Fall 2003, pp 289-298 Ohio State University Press

<sup>484</sup> Miyasaki, *ibid* pp292

<sup>485</sup> Miyasaki, *ibid* pp292

<sup>486</sup> Miyasaki, *ibid* pp292 referring to Freud, S "Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defense." *The Standard Edition*, Vol. 23. at 277

construction is acknowledged. Rather, the 'fetishist's' interest is changed. He acknowledges the other's subjectivity in a desire to protect his own penis, whereas 'non-fetishists' do not need to, since the belief in castration leads to a deprecation of femininity<sup>487</sup>.

Miyasaki argues in favour of the fetishist's "sexual wholeness and subjectivity to the sexual other generally and women specifically. In the fetishist's view, women must, like himself, actively and passively experience sexual desire, pleasure, and satisfaction"<sup>488</sup>. Further, 'fetishism' prevents assigning the roles to biological gender. The 'normal' subject relinquishes the parent as sex-object, but retains the identification with the parent's sex-role. But the 'fetishist' does not have a distinct gender-role-identity. The castration issue implies lack of sexual subjectivity, of which lack the female body is a sign. But the Oedipus complex also means being dominated and having autonomy removed by the father. Therefore the male body represents domination over something lacking subjectivity, and male sexuality implies inherent domination. The 'fetishist' however avoids gender differentiation, therefore women are not fundamentally passive or able to be owned. As Miyasaki notes, this solves both the 'property problem' as well as the association of sexual role with biological gender.

However, the issue of the masculine role of domination subsists, since the 'fetishist's' subjectivity still results in displeasure. In this respect, Miyasaki suggests that even though overvaluation of the object conditional on its utility are implicit in perverse tendencies, 'fetishism' involves 'object over-valuation' with the ability to obtain pleasure from an object even when the utility is not there<sup>489</sup>. The 'fetishist' is pleased by desire itself, which means that he does not need to dominate.

In this way, the sexual role of the 'fetish object' then becomes akin to that of the female in ordinary heterosexuality- a relation to an appropriated thing<sup>490</sup>. 'Pathological fetishism' may be seen as a variant of normal heterosexuality by means of the (male) 'fetishist's' refusal of acknowledgement of the other's subjectivity. The 'pathological fetishist' abandons the other in favour of an object or body-part by taking the feminine phallus as sexual object<sup>491</sup>. This, however, does not deal with the 'property' or the 'domination' problems, only allowing an interpretation of the masculine role of domination as being auto-erotic and therefore narcissistic<sup>492</sup>. In so doing, the 'fetishist' abandons the

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<sup>487</sup> Note the assumption that the fetishist is a male with a penis, and that he wants one. Many fetishists are female, while other (male) fetishists desire to have their penis removed, or for it to be unusable.

<sup>488</sup> Miyasaki, D (2003) The Evasion of Gender in Freudian Fetishism. In *JPCS: Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture & Society*, Volume 8, Number 2, Fall 2003, pp 289-298 Ohio State University Press pp293

<sup>489</sup> Miyasaki, ibid

<sup>490</sup> Miyasaki, ibid at 295-6

<sup>491</sup> Miyasaki, ibid at 295-6

<sup>492</sup> In relation to narcissistic personality disorder, see Vaknin, S (2003) *The World of the Narcissist*. Narcissus Publishing



masculine role, which is about overvaluation of the object on the condition of its utility for the sexual aim<sup>493</sup>. The 'pathological fetishist' allows the 'fetish object' to take the place of the normal aim, and therefore his appreciation of the other *qua* 'other' is not conditional on utility, and he must appreciate the other as such, not as dominated possession. Miyasaki notes that in 'pathological fetishism' the aim is replaced by the object. He notes further that the appearance of auto-eroticism in 'fetishism' leads Freud and others to presume its masculine nature, but that really it is a non-masculine variation of narcissism. The subject doesn't view the 'fetish object' as the same as the other. In fact, the other is absent, which is admittedly a heavy-handed solution to the issue of dominating relations<sup>494</sup>.

These arguments are compelling in that they rephrase the problems of 'property' and 'domination' and therefore partly deal with gender-bias.<sup>495</sup> In so doing, they however refer to *either* pathological *or* non-pathological fetishism to address gender-bias, rather than dealing with how 'pathological' and 'non-pathological fetishism' are related to each other, and therefore whether they can exist as separate notions. They further do not deal with the assumption that the fetishist inherently adopts a masculine role which precludes the possibility of a 'feminine' fetishist (meaning a receptive, if not passive sexual partner). They do not thereby resolve the problem of agency, which is integrally linked to concerns over the distinction between 'pathological' and 'non-pathological fetishism', and which idealises the 'non-pathological fetishist' as being focused only on desire rather than on the attainment of the object of desire, thereby remaining outside of the relations of domination.

### ***3.2.3 The Substitution of the Object for 'Reality': Normative Concerns on Over-Valuation***

For Freud, adult 'fetishism' is a childish psychological attachment to the absence of the female phallus (*qua* object). This problematic assumption does not ground the distinction between 'pathological' and 'non-pathological fetishism' sufficiently firmly without reference to normative factors which, as many commentators have noted, underpin distinctions between proper and improper erogenous zones<sup>496</sup>. This is despite Freud's opinion that all sexuality is a 'perversion' of

<sup>493</sup> Miyasaki, D (2003) The Evasion of Gender in Freudian Fetishism. In *JPCS: Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture & Society*, Volume 8, Number 2, Fall 2003, pp 289-298 Ohio State University Press at 295-6

<sup>494</sup> Miyasaki, *ibid* pp 295-6

<sup>495</sup> See feminist arguments above re the female fetishist, which can be aligned with passive sexual roles of certain gay men in instances where the fetish object is used as a tool of domination. This, however, does not deal with issues of agency, which is seen as an active/male process, unless revised in light of Lacanian power relations. Yet see below re agency

<sup>496</sup> See Laplanche, J (1976) *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*. Trans. and introd. Jeffrey Mehlman. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins. He says that Freud saw the exception, in other words the perversion as taking the rule along with it in that the exception should presuppose the existence of a preexisting sexual function, but results in an undermining and destruction of the idea of biological norms. See also Dollimore, J (1991) *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, at 169-204, who extends this into homosexuality. See Davidson, G(2007) *Ornamental Identity: Commodity Fetishism, Masculinity, and Sexuality in The Golden*

human biological function<sup>497</sup>. 'Fetishism' which is 'non-pathological' in certain times and places is therefore 'pathological' in others, depending on prevailing social norms and circumstances<sup>498</sup>. 'Non-pathological fetishism' is therefore inappropriately liable to be pathologised in much the same way as its pathological counterpart.

Freud admits that 'fetish' interests are part of 'normal' sexual love in that over-valuation of the object of love or of their body parts viewed separately can open sexual interest in the other partner. These body parts are ordinarily seen as part of a broader relationship wherein the relationship is the primary focus, rather than the body part<sup>499</sup>.

Yet Freud still distinguishes between 'pathological' and 'non-pathological fetishism'. He does not make this distinction firmly, saying no more than that 'fetishism' becomes pathological when the desire for the 'fetish object' moves beyond a necessary condition connected to the object and takes the place of the normal aim and becomes the sole sexual object<sup>500</sup>.

### 3.2.3a) *Pathological vs Non-Pathological 'Fetishism'*

The problem is that the difference between 'pathological' and 'non-pathological fetishism' is not, despite appearances, variations of the same issue seen on some kind of continuum<sup>501</sup>. In 'pathological fetishism' the original aim of undermining the threat of castration is done away with completely through the erasure of the relation to the object. This means that the relation to an 'other' is erased, and the auto-erotic relation of a child to its body-parts is mirrored. In 'non-pathological fetishism', however, the threat of castration remains.

The problem lies in the ideas of 'necessary condition' and 'normal aim' as grounds for distinction between 'pathological' and 'non-pathological fetishism', which terms indicate socially-mediated normative specifications for what counts as pathology<sup>502</sup>.

Freud ceased equating stimulus with displeasure, even before writing on 'fetishism'. However, this

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Bowl. In *The Henry James Review* 28: The Johns Hopkins University Press 26–42

<sup>497</sup> See Davidson, G, *ibid*

<sup>498</sup> See chapter 2 on queer theory and the exigencies of identity politics

<sup>499</sup> Steep, I (2007) 'GWM ISO GAM': Mediated identities and ethnicity fetish, In *Queer Space* "Centres and Peripheries, UTS 2007 referencing Moyaert, P & Gernerchak, C.M (2004). 'Fetishism and the vicissitudes of the object in sublimation according to Freud and Lacan', in Gernerchak, CM (2004) *Everyday Extraordinary: Encountering Fetishism Marx, Freud and Lacan*, Leuven: Leuven University Press, at 53.

<sup>500</sup> Miyasaki, D (2002) The Confusion of Marxian and Freudian Fetishism in Adorno and Benjamin. In *Philosophy Today*, Winter 2002 pp429 et seq at pp294 referring to *Three Essays* at 154

<sup>501</sup> Miyasaki, D (2003) The Evasion of Gender in Freudian Fetishism. In *JPCS: Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture & Society*, Volume 8, Number 2, Fall 2003, pp 289-298 Ohio State University Press

<sup>502</sup> As I will argue in Chapter 4, this assumption which contemporary constructions of 'fetishism' have adopted results in the prescription of heteronormativity.

did not lead to revisions of conceptions of over-valuation and object-libido in relation to 'fetishism'. Notwithstanding his abandonment of the idea of pleasure, Freud retained his explanation of 'fetishism' as a 'displacement' of value to a pleasure aimed at preserving the sexual aim and requiring the disavowal of reality<sup>503</sup>.

This lacuna in logic suggests that over-valuation be re-assessed in its entirety, in order to clarify the distinction between pathology and non-pathology and to clarify the question of subjective agency. In this regard, four concerns must be laid out, all of which compound each other.

### 3.2.3b) *Four Concerns*

Firstly, Freudian over-evaluation contradicts itself. Freud links over-valuation to the transferral of narcissistic libido to an object, required by excess libidinal energy which derives from a continuous instinctual source of stimulation<sup>504</sup>. The subject is thereby motivated to relate to a world which is external to him and can only be experienced in an antagonistic way as a source of increased stimulation. However this explains neither 'pathological' and 'non-pathological fetishism', nor the distinction between the two. In 'pathological fetishism', the subject renounces the sexual aim, thereby removing excess stimuli, yet he does not renounce the other. This creates additional stimuli, thereby increasing dissatisfaction. To the contrary, however, the Freudian theory of instinct indicates that the subject should completely repress the instinct, regress to auto-eroticism or give up the object while preserving the sexual aim. As Miyasaki argues, this implies that the subject does not necessarily experience external world stimulus and the other as displeasure, which in turn implies that we should reject Freud's early position on pleasure and instinct. Since increased stimulus can be seen as pleasure, over-valuation is not a 'displacement' or 'extension' of instinctual pleasure, and should be reviewed in relation to non-pathological fetishism and other 'perversions'<sup>505</sup>.

Secondly, the idea of 'over-valuation' relies on the idea of 'normal aim' which distinguishes 'pathological' from 'non-pathological fetishism', and, as mentioned above, indicates a normative relationship between 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' valuation of the object. The point at which the one shifts to the other is fluid, and depends on prevailing social

<sup>503</sup> Miyasaki, *ibid* pp296, where he notes "For example, despite his suggestion in the 1924 essay "The Economic Problem of Masochism" that pleasure and unpleasure "depend, not on this quantitative factor, but on some characteristic of it which we can only describe as a qualitative one", he nevertheless insists upon explaining "femininity" in terms of a "feminine masochism...based on the primary, erotogenic masochism, on pleasure in pain"—in other words, a connection of femininity to the "death instinct". This connection is quite peculiar, since it is precisely the narrow, "masculine" sense of pleasure that makes the erotic bond so difficult to comprehend."

<sup>504</sup> Miyasaki, *ibid* pp 295, referencing Freud, S "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes." The Standard Edition, Vol. 14. at 120

<sup>505</sup> Miyasaki, *ibid* pp 295, referencing "Instincts" *ibid* at 120

exigencies<sup>506</sup>. This indicates that the definitions both of when adult 'fetishism' exists, and the appropriate point at which 'normal' 'fetish' interests are declared pathological, is inherently socially, rather than psychodynamically dependent. In a predominantly heteropatriarchal social structure, the dominant paradigm of 'normal' sexual practices is that these take place between a single male sexual subject and a single female sexual object. 'Gay male fetish sex' therefore implies a challenge to heteronormative assumptions about the primacy of (heterosexual) monogamous relationships<sup>507</sup>. It further implies a challenge to the hetero-patriarchal prioritising of procreation, contrary to assumptions that normative sexuality must be goal-oriented towards procreation, failing which it becomes non-functional and thereby potentially pathologised.

In the face of the challenges of normativity, the only linking factor between the definitions of 'pathological' and 'non-pathological fetishism' can, I suggest, be that of a focus on the object made by automatically excluding the value of it's attraction. In other words, the focus is on normative assumptions around 'necessary' conditions and 'normal' aims, since human sexuality is ordinarily defined in terms of normative frameworks of goal-directed human-human relations aimed at productive, presumably procreative, success<sup>508</sup>. The (physical) object is therefore *a priori* excluded from the ambit of sexuality, except where it aids the normative processes of copulation, whereupon an exception is made to include the 'fetish' object within the bounds of norm under 'non-pathological fetishism'. In this respect, normativity is theoretically imposed on a subject in a hierarchical way: 'fetishist' practices are to be assumed to be pathological unless the subject can demonstrate that his practices conform to normative ideas around propriety in terms of the sexual aim. The implicit theoretical problem that impacts on questions of agency in this construction is that the onus of demonstrating 'non-pathology' lies on the subject. The result is that 'non-pathological fetishism' is squeezed out of a valid place by normative assumptions (whether statistically or morally defined) that most people are not fetishists, on the one hand, and that fetishists are by definition pathological, on the other. This concern is increased by the role of the psychological professional in the diagnosing process<sup>509</sup>.

Thirdly, and following on from point two above, the distinction between pathology and non-

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<sup>506</sup> See more on this in chapter 4

<sup>507</sup> See the Interjection and Chapters 5 and 6. See also Riggs, D.W. (2008) The blighted germs of heterosexual tendencies: reading Freud in (be)hindsight. In *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* Volume 18 Issue 2, Pages 131-139 Special Issue: Psychoanalysis and Social Psychology: Historical Connections and Contemporary Applications. He argues in favour of Freud's queer contributions to social psychology, and speaks in favour of the ongoing utility of psychoanalysis for developing social psychological approaches to same-sex identities and heteronormativity, thanks to Freud's implicit critiques of heteronormativity and explicit support for the rights of non-heterosexuals.

<sup>508</sup> See below for more on this

<sup>509</sup> For more on this point, see chapter 4

pathology is made without accounting for the subjective understanding, processes and perspectives of the psychological subject, i.e. it is seen to be an automatic or essential aspect to the subject's psychology, defined in terms of the castration complex, ego-splitting and disavowal<sup>510</sup>. As Miyasaki notes, “the Freudian theory of fetishism emphasizes, not alienation, but the illusion of a relation.”<sup>511</sup> The 'fetishist' substitutes the object for the ‘maternal phallus’, thereby seemingly preventing a loss of social relation through preventing alienation from the opposite gender<sup>512</sup>. Authentic relations are substituted for false relations, which are false due to their loss of authentic satisfaction in social relationships. The 'fetish' is ‘degraded’, since it is a thing with no direct relation to the desire of a human subject. However, the subject is unaware of alienation or loss since he is reassured that the relation he desires is being achieved through the 'fetish object'. Freudian 'fetishism' is therefore a substituted satisfaction (or false reconciliation) rather than resignation to a substitute that is not satisfying. This unawareness on the part of the subject indicates that an external ('professional psychoanalytic') identification/'diagnosis' of 'fetishism' must take place for the label 'fetish' to be applied to any given set of circumstances. This in turn indicates that the process of diagnosis ignores the internal (subjective) exigencies of the 'fetishist', which become secondary to the focus on the 'fetish object' and on the ability of the psychoanalytic professional to 'correct' the 'fetishist's' misperception through diagnosis and psychotherapy.

Fourthly, the idea of the '*sole* sexual object' implies that 'fetishism' cannot be both pathological and non-pathological at the same time. Yet, as will be discussed in chapter 4, individuals are at certain times focused on the sexual 'fetish object' to the exclusion of human sexual relations in what Freudianism constructs as pathological, but at others are more centrally focused on the human sexual partner, in a 'non-pathological' way.

These four concerns on how pathological and non-pathological fetishism are distinguished serve theoretically to illustrate internal contradictions in the construction of 'fetishism', and obscure subjectivities of the 'sexual fetishist' (thereby rendering him/her discursively invisible and denying him/her a valid space) through normatively prescribing the nature of the relationship between the subject and the object, while at the same time inherently alienating the subject from the object. The question arises as to whether the dynamic between sexual subject and inanimate sexual object must be (heteropatriarchally) hierarchically-defined, and as to how much agency the sexual fetishist subject *qua* active and passive participant can enjoy<sup>513</sup>.

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<sup>510</sup> See explanation of these processes supra

<sup>511</sup> Miyasaki, D, *ibid*, at pp 429

<sup>512</sup> See criticisms of sexism below

<sup>513</sup> See chapter 5 and 6

### 3.2.4 Shoring up Freud with Discourse

These concerns are all linked through assumptions that 'fetishism' is primarily about the fetish object and biological imperatives. More recently, however, arguments following the 'linguistic turn' have claimed that the psychical point of reference is discursive, not physical, through the phallus rather than the physical penis. They hold that normative masculinity works in much the same way as Freud postulated, but via substituting the phallic symbol for the penis, which gives the male the fictive permission to use his penis as though by right, thereby perpetuating heteropatriarchy. In this regard, Lacan has often been called on to re-conceive the psychodynamic bases for 'fetishism', and to deal with questions of agency<sup>514</sup>.

According to discursive accounts, the male moves from having a present (as opposed to the Freudian absent) penis to having power through language, from which the Real (i.e. the penis) is excluded. In this way 'fetishism', which is also seen as a way of gaining access to power, is seen as a function of language, taking place when language is literalised and its fully symbolic elements are refused<sup>515</sup>. This is said to happen through the sexual expression of the displacement which is made possible by making language into image<sup>516</sup>. The displacement is one in which the subject purportedly tries to make an image real<sup>517</sup>. The resulting interstitial situation results from the anxiety

<sup>514</sup> See Lacan, J & Granoff, W. (1956) "Fetishism: The Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real." In *Perversions, Psychodynamics, and Therapy*, edited by Sándor Lorand, 265–276. New York: Random House, 1956.

<sup>515</sup> Lacan's theory of sexualisation arranges masculinity and femininity in terms of different unconscious structures, whereby both male and female subjects take part in "phallic" organization, where the feminine side of sexualisation is "supplementary" rather than opposite or complementary. Lacan insisted that the maternal figure is phallic for the boy through the power she has over him, which is only possible because she has no penis. Notably, Freud's Satisfaction and Lacan's *jouissance*, together with the Lacanian conception of the Mirror Phase, link Freud and Lacan in relation to 'sexual fetishism'. Both Freud and Lacan approach 'fetishism' as the investment of meaning in a specific object which is substituted for another. Whereas Freud views psychical activity as taking place in relation to the idea of 'Satisfaction', Lacan sees it in terms of the process of *jouissance*. (see Diatkine, G (2007) Lacan. In *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 2007;88:643–60 pp650). When adults look at themselves in the mirror they do not see the 'marvellous child' they should have been in their parents eyes, since the mother sees that the child cannot gratify her absolutely, and is more excited by the father's phallus than by the child. Lacan sees the Phallus as that which only appears in the form of what the Other lacks, through castration. The Lacanian Phallus is not less literal than the Freudian Penis. The mother lacks the phallus and the subject can therefore identify himself with it in fantasy so as to make himself the cause of the mother's desire. In this castration fantasy, the subject loses an important section of his 'specular image'. At the same time he identifies with fecalised objects which will encourage the other's *jouissance*. *Jouissance* is distinguished from orgasm. The former is more satisfying than the latter, and relates couples and parent-child relationships in terms of the fecalised object rather than in terms of a mutual relationship. In Lacan's view, the subject renders himself desirable by making himself the cause of *jouissance*. This happens by the subject identifying with what appears to be a degraded part-object (fecalised matter).

<sup>516</sup> See Lacan, J, and Granoff, W. (1956) "Fetishism: The Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real." In *Perversions, Psychodynamics, and Therapy*, edited by Sándor Lorand, 265–276 at pp272. New York: Random House

<sup>517</sup> See Kaplan, L.J. (1991). *Female Perversions*. New York: Doubleday. At 11-13. Discussed in Dervin, *ibid*, 370. Dervin quotes Grossman, L. (1996) 'Psychic Reality' and Reality Testing in the Analysis of Perverse Defences. In *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*. 77: 509-17. As Dervin notes, Lacan's concepts are not equatable with Freudian drive theory, thanks to his disconnecting biological location for the drives. The Lacanian subject does not achieve integration, but the self-images are split into idealised illusions and imperfect body images, then locked into

that comes from loss, linked to the guilt associated with the (paternal) 'law'<sup>518</sup>. This is said to result in an incapacity to fully take part in social relationships mediated by the presence of a sexual partner.

Lacan's redirection of Freud's focus on the penis (the material object) to the language constructing the penis as a phallus appears to divert attention away from the Freud's (hetero)patriarchal assumptions<sup>519</sup>. Further, Lacan makes the sexual act more public through his focus on the shared meaning involved in discourse, rather than the individual meaning based in the inward-looking absence-presence dichotomy of the Freudian fetish-object focus.

This is a powerful antidote to certain criticisms of Freud, as detailed above, particularly his essentialist assumptions and his reliance on biology. Yet it is not powerful enough to avoid accusations from theorists such as Elizabeth Grosz who accuse Lacan of supporting psychoanalysis's sexist tradition<sup>520</sup>.

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the Imaginary. Dervin further argues that "For the fetishist, it is not so much splitting of the ego or disavowal of castration that distinguishes him as seeing how much he can get away with by evading reality testing when he "blurs the distinction between the fetish and the penis" (Grossman 1996, 511). In fact, Lacan's now-you-see-them-now-you-don't phallic signifiers underwrite the sexual masquerade by sliding from man to woman; so doing, they also fulfill the "perverse strategy" of deception that "obliterates sexual differences" as well as those between the child and adult generations (Kaplan 1991, 41). Ideally the strategy requires a script or scenario, occurs in a public display or performance that includes risks plus moral defiance, and parades a phallic masculine facade while shielding forbidden feminine strivings; while everyone is "concentrating on a presumably erotic performance, what is being sneaked in is hatred and vengeance"

<sup>518</sup> The mother's desire for a phallus/penis substitute pre-dates the child's desire for the mother and the incest drive disappears among other signifiers. As Dervin notes, "to avoid castration he accepts its symbolic form and becomes human by being constituted through language", indicating that the Lacanian subject could be passive, which could be seen to cover up perverse defensive systems set in place against paranoid fears

Dervin, D (1997) Where Freud Was, There Lacan Shall Be: Lacan and the Fate of Transference *American Imago* 54.4 (1997) 347-376 at 370, referencing Smith, J. (1991). *Arguing with Lacan: Ego Psychology and Language*. New Haven: Yale University Press at 43; Mitchell, J & Rose, J. (Eds). (1983). *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*. New York: Norton. At 5

<sup>519</sup> Note, Critics like Judith Butler and Jane Gallop have referred to Lacan to develop gender theory. Gallop, J (1985) *Reading Lacan*, Ithaca, Cornell Univ Press, and (1982) *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis*; Ithaca, Cornell University Press, and Butler, J (1999) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, NY, Routledge

<sup>520</sup> See for example Grosz, EA (1990) *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*, Routledge. Also, in relation to masculinities, see Frosh, S, (1994) *Sexual Difference: Masculinity and Psychoanalysis*, Routledge See also Grosz, E, (1993) "Lesbian Fetishism?" In *Fetishism As Cultural Discourse*, edited by Emily Apter and William Pietz, 101–115. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

Ettinger, from the viewpoint of late Lacanian theory, exposes blindspots in both Freud and Lacan related to the feminine, the maternal and femaleness in the Real related to the body. See for example Ettinger, B (1992) *Matrix and Metamorphosis*. In *Differences*, Vol. 4, 1992, (2004) *Weaving a Woman Artist with-in the Matrixial Encounter*. In *Event Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 69-94 (2004); (1997). *The Feminine/Prenatal Weaving in Matrixial Subjectivity-as-Encounter*, *Psychoanalysis Dial.*, 7:367-405.

She helps develop conceptions of subjectivity and transforming the Symbolic, laying out sexual difference on a 'matrix'-basis of the feminine, pre-maternal and maternal. Locating a border-space unconscious, she conceives of a space, starting from the child's primordial contact with the female body, fantasy and trauma, of 'subjectivity as encounter', where the 'I' and the 'non-I' come out connected without rejection or symbiosis. This is a feminine difference where subjectivity is structured with a 'trans-subjective' flavour through jointness-in-differentiation. Here, primary access to the maternal takes place via aesthetic proto-ethical 'fascinace'. The idea is that 'primary compassion' takes place before and beside 'abjection'

Indeed, replacing a biology-focus with a discursive focus merely opens another cans of worms, since using language as the psychodynamic reference point is problematic on a number of fronts<sup>521</sup>:

- neither language nor the unconscious can be understood as 'structured'
- words have a signifying and signified side, but Lacan's idea of an autonomous signifier without a signified is ridiculous
- in structural linguistics, the signifiers are not what is meant by 'structure', but the important characteristics of the phonemes looked at as a whole
- unconscious representations can't be seen to be like signifiers, but rather to be 'in' the unconscious, and as only able to be brought out by means of interpretation. This leads to questions around the very existence of the 'internal world', since psychic events happen between the subject and the Other, and thereby challenge the idea of inside/outside. In this respect, Lacan substitutes models without such an inside or outside for Freud's ego, id and superego, such as Klein's bottle or the Möbius strip<sup>522</sup>.

### 3.2.4a) *Psychoanalytic Lack*

These concerns feed into what is possibly the central issue attenuating psychoanalytic theory: the foundationalist assumption of lack, which underpin both Freud and Lacan. These concerns are central to re-visioning frameworks for 'fetishism', since they feed directly into assumptions around the psychical functions of 'fetishist' desires, and therefore into the value of those desires as pathological or not.

Psychoanalytic theory assumes a foundationalist basis for psychical activity: 'lack', which I suggest is the node at which contemporary psychopathology meets the problems of object-focus. Psychoanalytic theory assumes that the psychical drive to use material objects sexually is an attempt to replace what is psychically missing<sup>523</sup>. In other words, something

<sup>521</sup> Diatkine, G (2007) Lacan. In *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 2007;88:643–60. Diatkine reveals the following concerns relating to Lacanian theory

<sup>522</sup> In this regard, see object-relations and spatial theory, which followed from Freudian and Kleinian models of psychotherapy. In particular Vygotsky, Winnicott and Bakhtin for object-relations theory. For a partial overview, see Guntrip, H. (1996). My Experience Of Analysis With Fairbairn And Winnicott: (How Complete A Result Does Psychoanalytic Therapy Achieve?) In *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 77:739-754.

<sup>523</sup> See Lacan, J. *Seminar X, Anxiety*, June 5, 1963, unpublished seminar. Cited in Renata Salecl, "Love Anxieties," in *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan's Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality*, ed. Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 93-97. Lacan, in Seminar X explains: "The fact that the phallus is not found where we expect it to be, where we require it to be. . . is what explains that anxiety is the truth of sexuality. . . The phallus, where it is expected as sexual, never appears except as lack, and this is the link



psychically fundamental must be missing in order for fetish to exist. However, this missing 'something' which defines 'fetish sexuality' misdirects the discourses on 'fetishism' away from the agency of the subject, and towards the inevitability of never achieving the object or its symbolic representation<sup>524</sup>.

Freudian lack comes about when the child notices the absence of his mother's penis, and fears the loss of his own penis, or alternatively fears that that he will not get a penis from the mother<sup>525</sup>. Lacanian notions reframe psychical activity as relating to the phallus *qua* discursive and power-related symbolic construct. The child undergoes psychic transformation, from needing the mother/caregiver to understanding that he is dependent on her. This implies a lack in the child which the caregiver cannot fulfil. The mother's lack is the subject's original lack, which feeds the ongoing lack of satisfaction, which in turn is the lack of a substitution object (such as a 'fetish')<sup>526</sup>.

Robinson notes that Badiou, Butler, Mouffe, Stavrakakis and Žižek all take approaches traceable to Lacanian conceptions of existence as being constructed around the repression of a fundamental, un-presentable and impossible negativity<sup>527</sup>. Lacan's Real makes any sort of social fullness impossible, since it haunts the symbolic order. The social order, or Symbolic, makes an illusion of completeness, but only by the symbolic exclusion and psychological repression of the Real, which exclusion is enabled by the master signifier which covers the field of discourse and reality by situating a specific element in discourse as universal. The exclusion of this element allows the possibility of a stable symbolic apparatus<sup>528</sup>.

The Real must be repressed for all symbolic structures, but because the Real is impossible and unreachable, the symbolic order cannot be established. The Lacanian conception is based on the assumption of an inevitably recurring structure of discourse which is reactive, exclusionary, and

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with anxiety.”

<sup>524</sup> A fuller exploration of psychoanalytic subjectivity through Lacanian theory can be seen in Fink, B (1996) *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*. Princeton University Press, dealing with the development of psychoanalytic subject and psychosis.

<sup>525</sup> This feeds into the Oedipus Complex. As noted above, Freudian theory is based on the study of the male child, who inevitably is the subject in question

<sup>526</sup> Kripps, H (1999) *Fetish: An Erotics of Culture* Cornell University Press.

<sup>527</sup> Robinson, A (2004) The Politics of Lack. In *BJPIR*: 2004 VOL 6, 259–269, reviewing Badiou, A (2001) *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. London: Verso; Butler, J, Laclau, E and Žižek, S (2000) *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*. London: Verso; Mouffe, C (2000) *The Democratic Paradox*. London: Verso; Stavrakakis, Y (1999) *Lacan and the Political*. London: Routledge; Žižek, S & Lenin, V. I. (2002) *Revolution at the Gates: Selected Writings of Lenin from 1917*. London: Verso; Žižek, S. (1997) *The Plague of Fantasies*. London: Verso

<sup>528</sup> See Robinson, *ibid*

founded on negativity<sup>529</sup>.

Badiou's view of the symbolic order is of 'opinion', polite discourse and normal science, where every symbolic system is underlain by a void which is its Real<sup>530</sup>. Laclau and Mouffe's view is that political stability needs a political order to be constructed, but the construction thereof is based on political antagonism and created through exclusion and violence<sup>531</sup>.

The Lacanian return of the Real is always disruptive and revolutionary, and destroys the social created around its exclusion, which destruction is premised on a single nodal point which must remain, failing which, collapse<sup>532</sup>. Lacanians are in favour of becoming reconciled with the exclusion of the Real and the inevitability of lack, rather than resolving or removing violence and antagonism<sup>533</sup>. Mouffe takes issue with deconstructive and dialogic approaches to ethics that do not deal with political confrontation<sup>534</sup>. In this way, Robinson argues, Lacanian thinking becomes almost immune to analytical critique in its own terms, and has tendencies to make detailed restatements of ontological positions, rather than supplying substantive frameworks for political theorising<sup>535</sup>. These issues demonstrate the problematic essentialising function of lack which is treated on an ontological level, abstracted from specific points of conflict and scarcity as it arises, indicating that lack is a metaphysical entity with a positive force in the world<sup>536</sup>. Lacanian theorists “therefore take a contradictory position, offering precisely the kind of complete theory-without-remainder they declare to be impossible by reinscribing the remainder as a positive element given the name of negativity”<sup>537</sup>

Ahumada agrees that Lacan's thinking centres around the void<sup>538</sup>. He argues that, according to Lacan and Laplanche, sexuality arises from traumatic lack, and disallows continuities but merely allows for momentary filling of the void<sup>539</sup>. This follows Heidegger's view of the Grund as being a bottomlessness. The violence released is connected to the individual's identity and solitariness which allows for the possibility of full, limitless, continuous being, abstracted from the particularity of the love object. He recalls Bataille's view of the object or sexual partner as being about

<sup>529</sup> Robinson, *ibid*

<sup>530</sup> See Badiou, A (2001) *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. London: Verso

<sup>531</sup> See Butler, J, Laclau, E and Zizek, S (2000) *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*. London: Verso and Mouffe, C (2000) *The Democratic Paradox*. London: Verso

<sup>532</sup> Robinson, A(2004) The Politics of Lack. In *BJPIR*: 2004 VOL 6, 259–269

<sup>533</sup> Robinson, *ibid*

<sup>534</sup> See Mouffe, C (2000) *The Democratic Paradox*. London: Verso

<sup>535</sup> Robinson, A(2004) The Politics of Lack. In *BJPIR*: 2004 VOL 6, 259–269

<sup>536</sup> Robinson, *ibid*

<sup>537</sup> Robinson, *ibid* pp261

<sup>538</sup> Ahumada, JL. (2001) The Rebirth of the Idols: the Freudian Unconscious and the Nietzschean Unconscious. In *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* (2001) 82, 219

<sup>539</sup> Ahumada, *ibid*

discontinuity and interruption, and that sexuality is no different from the perversions, and is to be seen in terms of perversion<sup>540</sup>. He further recalls Lacan's assertion that there is no sexual relationship, which I would translate into meaning that the sexual relationship is merely one with the 'self', rather than any other person<sup>541</sup>.

### 3.2.5 'Lack' and Agency

Premising psychoanalysis on an ineluctable 'lack' is not merely a question of an intellectual instability in the metatheory of psychoanalysis. It has a very real impact on the extent of agency creditable to individuals. If an individual is psychically dependent on an object which he/she can never obtain, he/she cannot make fully independent choices<sup>542</sup>.

In the context of the psychodynamics of 'gay male fetishism', the 'fetishist' can therefore never be said to really *choose* his 'fetishes' (whether 'pathological' or 'non-pathological'), or indeed his sexuality *in toto*. He can further never be said to enjoy his 'fetishes' fully without being in some ways psychically dependent on them, since psychoanalysis premises his desires on some kind of inherent compulsion<sup>543</sup>.

The central metatheoretical problem of lack must therefore, I suggest, be resolved in order to approach 'gay male fetish sexuality' in more epistemologically sound ways. Alternatives should, I suggest be found, beyond the assumptions that sexuality is merely defined in a negative way in response to the pre-existing foundationalist lack, such as in Freudian constructions of the penis or the Lacanian absence of the phallus. We need to explore the possibility that sexuality is instead working 'towards' something, based on what subjects *have*, not what they *don't have*.

One key to finding this alternative appears to lie in Foucaultian notions of discourse, which can be mobilised in anti-foundationalist ways to enable a kind of dialectical relationship between the subject and the world around him through the acknowledgement that discourse is collectively constructed and at the same time constructs 'reality'<sup>544</sup>.

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<sup>540</sup> Ahumada, *ibid*

<sup>541</sup> Ahumada, *ibid*

<sup>542</sup> See Kripps, H (1999) *Fetish: An Erotics of Culture* Cornell University Press. Kripps brings an unusual perspective to theorising about fetishism, which he sees as a paradoxical refusal to follow up on one's desire, rather than as being about what is socially unacceptable or about unusual desires. This implies that 'the fetish object' is not simply a substitute for the desired object but rather is an obsession with an object that prevents the subject from obtaining his/her/its desired object, whereby 'fetishism' is a substitute for an unobtainable object

<sup>543</sup> See chapter 4

<sup>544</sup> In other words, 'reality' is not outside of the purview of human influence, and therefore people can impact and change it. This is a kind of agency, although bounded by the collective choices. See chapter 5 and 6. Yet see above re the concerns about discursive accounts and the notion of psychical reality

As one such approach, Discourse Psychology resists the notion of a clear division between the social and the psychic, through claims that to study public discourse is itself to study the mind rather than being a substitute for it. This idea is supported by Billig who demonstrates that thought is a kind of inner speech that supports the dialogic character of social discourse<sup>545</sup>. This implies that the complexity, dynamism and inconsistent nature of subjectivity is some kind of Bakhtinian 'polyvocality' or 'heteroglossia', not the product of the unconscious. These voices interrelate rhetorically, which in turn indicates that processes like 'repression' are discursive rather than psychodynamic in that they are what is unspoken rather than what is removed from consciousness<sup>546</sup>.

In this way, discursive accounts encompass Western notions that humans have their own mind and biography, and should be held accountable for deviations from patterns. This implies that there is no 'inner' psychodynamic organisation, and in Western thought it is central to discourse practice that people produce themselves (in other words, that they have agency). Further, the contradictory nature of culture gives the impetus and resources for all social and subjective interactions, whereby there is no need for a separate space such as the unconscious to take account of people's actions and opinions, since enough creative tension exists in culture itself<sup>547</sup>.

However, as will be addressed in more detail in the Interjection and Chapter 5, discourse-based approaches on their own are inadequate, largely because they lack an appropriate 'ontology of the self'<sup>548</sup>. Indeed, many discourse theorists agnostically refuse to identify the 'self', instead analysing debates on the 'nature' of people as played out in daily discourse<sup>549</sup>.

<sup>545</sup> Billig, M. (1987). *Arguing and Thinking*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.; Billig, M., Condor, S., Edwards, D., Gane, M., Middleton, D., & Radley, A. (1988). *Ideological Dilemmas: A Social Psychology of Everyday Thinking*. London, UK: Sage.

<sup>546</sup> In this respect, see Derrida, J. (1973). *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. See also Billig, M. (1997) The dialogic unconscious : Psychoanalysis, discursive psychology and the nature of repression. In *British Journal of Social Psychology* 1997, vol.36(2), pp.139-159, which discusses possible links between discursive psychology and psychoanalytic theory. Billig argues that Discursive psychology follows its Wittgensteinian and conversation analytic underpinnings and focuses on the social and discursive make-up of psychological phenomena, rather than on supposed inner motivations. However, the idea of the 'dialogic unconscious' suggests how processes of repression can be approached discursively. This argument suggests that conversation can be repressive and expressive, which discursive psychology has overlooked, concentrating on presence rather than absence in discourse.

<sup>547</sup> Edley, *ibid*

<sup>548</sup> In the same vein, identity is 'sticky' and subjectivity is 'bounded', which claims are antithetical to discursive constructions. See Edley, N (2006) Never the Twain Shall Meet: A Critical Appraisal of the Combination of Discourse and Psychoanalytic Theory in Studies of Men and Masculinity *Sex Roles* (2006) 55: 601–608. In this respect, see chapter 2 on gay rights vs queer political frameworks

<sup>549</sup> See Edley, N (2006) Never the Twain Shall Meet: A Critical Appraisal of the Combination of Discourse and Psychoanalytic Theory in Studies of Men and Masculinity *Sex Roles* (2006) 55: 601–608. In this way, the 'reality' of men and masculinity is dealt with in Discourse Psychology as both a topic and an outcome of discursive practices. As Edley notes, the value of certain criticisms of Discourse Psychology, in particular that things like attitudes, memories and emotions should not be dealt with as facets of social action, and that certain poststructuralist theorists have de-centred the Cartesian subject too much. These arguments point out that the self is studied only as terms of

While useful in challenging foundationalisms, discourse psychology appears inappropriately to allow subjects to make completely strategic or executive decisions about the identities they take on, and agency is exaggerated<sup>550</sup>. Alternatively, as will be discussed in the Interjection, discursive accounts assume that the subject is constituted entirely through discourse and has no agency.

One attempt at an alternative has been to merge Discourse Psychology with Psychoanalytic theory<sup>551</sup>, on the premise that the latter are often thought to fill the gaps in the former, which are broader in scope<sup>552</sup>. However, discourse and psychoanalytic theories have incompatible metatheoretical bases, and most attempts to combine them result in a running of the theories side by side rather than a synthesis<sup>553</sup>. These incompatible metatheoretical bases demand that *alternatives* to psychoanalytic theory be found, rather than trying to shore up psychoanalytic notions in one or other way by calling on discourse to supplement it, or vice versa, or trying to replace psychoanalysis with discourse theories.

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individual discursive acts undertaking social activities like presenting the self, excusing, blaming and so on, resulting in conceptions of self where subjective experience is flexible to the extent that there seems to be little to personal psychology beyond moment-to-moment located experience. The self is encompassed within language, and the self is too far removed from phenomenological or experiential reality (See chapters 5 and 6 in relation to embodied, experiential approaches, especially phenomenology ).

<sup>550</sup> Edley, *ibid.* On the other hand, psychoanalysis grants detailed models of structures and processes of the psyche that allow exploration of how and why identities are discursively created. Yet, see above for criticisms in this regard. At face value, combining discourse and psychoanalytic theory by taking discourse as constitutive of the psyche while constructing a metatheoretical basis for such processes allows for a location of agency both within the world and in relation to (non-essentialist) internal psychic mechanisms.

<sup>551</sup> See Harré, R & Stearns, P.N. (1995) *Discursive psychology in practice*. SAGE; Wetherell, M (2003) Paranoia, Ambivalence and Discursive Practices: Concepts of Position and Positioning in Psychoanalysis and Discursive Psychology. In Harré, R & Moghaddam, F.M. (2003) *The self and others: positioning individuals and groups in personal, political, and cultural contexts*. Greenwood Publishing Group; Hepburn, A & Wiggins, S (2005) Developments in Discursive Psychology. In *Discourse & Society*, Vol. 16, No. 5, 595-601 (2005)  
See also Frith, H & Kitzinger, C. (2001) Reformulating Sexual Script Theory: Developing a Discursive Psychology of Sexual Negotiation. In *Theory & Psychology*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 209-232 (2001);

<sup>552</sup> See Edley, N (2006) Never the Twain Shall Meet: A Critical Appraisal of the Combination of Discourse and Psychoanalytic Theory. In *Studies of Men and Masculinity Sex Roles* (2006) 55: 601–608; He notes that Discursive Psychology entails reconsidering the relationship between words and the world. Rather than seeing the world as reflected in language, discourse theorists view it as made up in and through discourse, primarily in an epistemic sense (how we develop knowledge or understanding of the world is shaped by discourse). He notes, however, that discourse is also seen as onto-formative. He refers to Kosík, K. (1976). *Dialectics of the concrete: A study on problems of man and the world*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel; I.e. , it is seen as able to bring objects and events into being. In relation to the central assumptions behind and major developments of Discursive Psychology he also refers to Edwards, D., & Potter, J. (1992). *Discursive Psychology*. London: Sage; Potter, J. (1996). *Representing Reality*. London: Sage. and Edwards, D. (1997). *Discourse and Cognition*. London: Sage. In relation to studies of men and masculinity, Edley cogently argues against the use of psychoanalytic theory, and advocates for remaining in the arena of discourse. Edley argues that central to the recent work on taking a discourse approach to studying men and masculinity is the assertion that masculinity is not something which can be viewed outside of discourse as an essentialist way, but is constructed in and through discourse. These studies have looked at how the meanings of masculinity are maintained and re-negotiated in discourse and how masculine identities are flexible in construction and set to work in a variety of contexts and settings. Discourse Psychology allows for the flexible use of language resources in the local production of masculinities and can account for patterns of consistency as well as the existence of recognisably individual selves that are socially constructed.

Amongst many other theorists. In this respect he refers to Judith Butler (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

<sup>553</sup> Edley, *ibid*

### 3.3 Conclusion

For Bhabha, the stereotype of the 'racial fetish' perpetuates identities predicated on mastery and pleasure as well as on anxiety and difference<sup>554</sup>. In this chapter I have argued, in similar vein, although pertaining to 'sexual fetish', that the contemporary definitions and discourses of 'sexual fetish' in psychology have come through an historical trajectory of colonialist discourses and Freudian psychoanalytic epistemologies, both of which have focused primarily on the 'fetish object'. This, I suggest, serves to obscure subjectivities and agency in the realm of the 'sexual fetish' through identifying the 'sexual fetishist' through the 'fetish object' of their desire, (i.e. through the recognition and disavowal of sameness) which in turn serves to discursively displace 'fetishists'.

Colonial discourses on 'fetishism' assumed simple hierarchical relationships between dominant and subordinate subjects. These assumptions led to definitions of 'fetishism' based on a focus on the 'fetish object', which definitions are, I suggest, unstable and inappropriate as a metatheoretical basis for 'sexual fetish'. On closer inspection, such discourses derived from cross-cultural encounters based on mutual misunderstanding, and from competing intersections between colonial religion and capitalism, which intersected with colonial fetishism and reification discourses. Unpacking colonial discourses evidences an underlying colonial discomfort with its own discursive premises, and further reveals relations between coloniser and colonised which were dialectical, rather than oppositional. The colonial enterprise failed to acknowledge the colonised's religio-cultural and personal frames of reference. Discourses on 'fetishism' obscured points of connection and similarities between the colonisers and the colonised, and allowed colonisers to avoid recognising their own subjection and subservience to fictions of the immaterial over the material.

Understanding relations between coloniser and colonised in this clearer way opens doors to better comprehension for alternative, non-object-focused platforms on which to base metatheory on 'fetish sexuality'. These notions of connectedness will be explored in chapters 5 and 6.

Nevertheless, the two-dimensional, object-focused idea of 'fetishism' moved beyond the bounds of the colonial enterprise and into Freudian discourses on 'fetishism' which similarly avoided recognition of similarity and commonality. Psychoanalytic premises for 'fetishism' are essentially object-focused, which, as I will argue further in chapter 4, serves to obscure subjectivities and agency.

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<sup>554</sup> Bhabha, H. (1994) *The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism*. In *The Location of Culture* New York: Routledge. 66-84

More particularly:

- Freudian psychoanalytic constructions are heteronormative and sexist, thereby perpetuating assumptions around the priority of the male subject as implicitly power- and object-oriented, whether in relation to human or 'fetish object'; and
- Adult 'fetishism' is seen as a childish psychological attachment taking place through an inappropriate prolonging of normal childhood processes into adulthood. This paradigm however, relies on normative references and fails to ground the distinction between pathological and non-pathological fetishism sufficiently firmly.

These points create a problematic basis for the exploration of practices of non-normative (homo)sexual subjects, whose subjectivities are obscured by the psychodynamic assumption of their adopting the subjectivity of a fictively generic heterosexual male.

These failings are partially remedied by re-working the premises of Freud, and/or by reference to a linguistic/discursive power-focus. Yet they do not address the fundamental psychoanalytic premise of 'lack', which is inherently object-focused thanks to the description of the human psyche as irretrievably and oppositionally defined in relation to the absence of physically or linguistically/discursively described objects, based on a foundational, fictive, singular, universal (object-focused) psychodynamic reference point.

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Attempts to combine psychoanalytic theory with discursive explanations, for example through Discourse Psychology, do not obviate the problem, since psychoanalytic foundationalism is metatheoretically incompatible with discursive accounts. In the context of the psychology of fetish sexuality, the foundationalism of psychoanalysis is further epistemologically problematic since it tends to obscure subjectivities through the inappropriate prioritising of rationality over valid agency. Such a focus hides the personal under the political and under discipline-specific practices, thereby failing to acknowledge the fluidity between consciousness and environment, and the complexity of human processes driven by a various internal and external, personal and political, rational and emotional influences.

It is clear, therefore, that the historical metatheoretical bases for 'fetishism' remain that of an insubstantial and unstable reliance on the assumption that it is appropriate to focus epistemological attention on the 'fetish object' as the definitional nexus for sexual practices involving material objects.

As I will argue in chapter 4, this kind of foundationalist, object-focused thinking is inappropriate in light of the lived experience of 'gay male fetishists', yet it remains the basis for contemporary discourses of psychopathology which inappropriately obscure a focus on subjectivities through their insistence on an antagonistic relationship between subject and 'fetish' object. This, I argue is inappropriate for postmodern ontologies on lived sexual experience, and is antithetical to queer frameworks for theorising sexualities, which should prioritise subjectivities of gay men who incorporate material objects into their sexual practices, and should further create valid and viable epistemological spaces for such people<sup>555</sup>. As I will further argue in Chapters 5 and 6, a more appropriate approach to 'sexual fetish' scholarship is to recognise the role of complex embodied experience in exploring the subjectivities of non-normative sexualities.



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<sup>555</sup> See chapter 2 re queer positioning



## CHAPTER 4

# CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOPATHOLOGIES OF 'SEXUAL FETISHISM'

Persons who respond only or primarily to objects which are remote from the sexual partner, or remote from the overt sexual activities with a partner, are not rare in the population. This is particularly true of individuals who are erotically aroused by high heels, by boots, by corsets, by tight clothing, by long gloves, by whips, or by other objects which suggest sado-masochistic relationships, and which may have been associated with the individual's previous sexual activity.<sup>556</sup>

As internationally recognised classificatory systems, the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) & Diagnostic and American Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), which influence South African psychology and psychiatry practices, codify contemporary psychiatric classifications and diagnoses of 'fetish' sexuality<sup>557</sup>. Like their colonialist and early psychoanalytic predecessors, I argue that they remain focused on the material object involved in sexual practices, and define 'fetishism' (and the 'fetishist') in terms of the desire for that object, rather than by reference to the person doing the desiring<sup>558</sup>.

In this chapter I argue that both the categorisation of 'fetishism' and the guidelines for diagnosis rely fundamentally on normativity and circular arguments, and are therefore inadequate and unstable metatheoretical constructs for unusual sexual practices since they *create* rather than *describe* psychopathology.

In contradistinction, the practices of 'fetishists'<sup>559</sup> and the complexity of the intersections between their sexual orientations, sexual interests and a broader life views transcend simplistic 'pathological' vs 'non-pathological' categories which flow from foundationalist frameworks. Their practices refuse a regularised, 'one-size-fits-all' psychopathology which fails to acknowledge the multiple and complex ways in which 'gay male fetish sexuality' intersects both with marginality and the empowerment stolen in the face of heteronorms. Contemporary 'fetish sexuality' reflects

<sup>556</sup> Kinsey, A., Pomeroy, W., Martin, C. & Gebhard, P. (1953) *Sexual behavior in the human female*. Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Company. pp. 678-679

<sup>557</sup> World Health Organization. (2004). *International Classification of Diseases 10* (2nd ed). Geneva: WHO. ICD-10, and American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders 4-TR*. Washington DC: APA.

<sup>558</sup> See chapter 3

<sup>559</sup> as interviewed in this study. Notably, these are in no way representative of all contemporary 'fetishists' but merely reflect perceptions of those with whom I spoke. Further, I am only now engaging with their voices in any substantive way, since the previous chapters have dealt with the more theoretical and historical frameworks on political locations and 'fetishism'.

participants' willingness to (re-)negotiate complex intimate lives through compelling albeit often uncomfortable desires, while revealing more compelling and complex ways of understanding (and therefore describing) human sexual relations with material objects.

## 4.1 From Freud to the 21st Century: Unpacking Contemporary Psycho(patho)logy

Many theorists have critiqued psychology as a regulatory discourse and practice in the context of gender and sexuality, based on the argument that sexuality is discursively constructed<sup>560</sup>. In particular, gay and lesbian theorists and those advocating queer approaches to identities and practices in general, have coherently argued how psychology serves to legitimise, rationalise, regulate and (where necessary) impose disciplinary intervention to ensure heteronormative and patriarchal gender norms and sexualities<sup>561</sup>.

Unfortunately these compelling post-structuralist critiques have fallen on deaf ears as regards the categories and diagnostic guidelines of 'fetishism' in the ICD (and DSM). Rather, these categories and diagnostic guidelines seem to follow the positivist trajectory of twentieth century psychology practice in the West<sup>562</sup>.

<sup>560</sup> See for example Rose, N (1989) *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*. London & New York: Routledge; Burman, E. (ed) (1990) *Feminists and Psychological Practice*. London: Sage.; Schweder, R (1990) *Cultural Psychology: Essays on Comparative Human Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Parker, I (1992) *Discourse Dynamics: Critical Analysis for Social and Individual Psychology*. London & New York, Routledge; Wilkinson, S & Kitzinger, C (eds) (1993) *Heterosexuality: a Feminism and Psychology Reader*. London: Sage; Parker, I & Speares, R (1996) *Psychology & Society: Radical Theory and Practice*. London & Chicago: Pluto Press; Burr, V (1998) *Gender and Social Psychology*. London, Routledge; Parker, I (1999) Critical psychology: critical links. In *Annual Review of Critical Psychology* Vol. 1, pp. 3-18; Kitzinger, C (1999) Lesbian and gay psychology: is it critical? In *Annual Review of Critical Psychology*, Vol. 1, pp. 50-66; Shefer, T & Potgieter, C-A (2006) Sexualities. In Shefer, T, Bonzaaier, F & Kiguwa, P (2006) *The Gender of Psychology*. Cape Town: UCT Press. Painter, D. & Terre Blanche, M. & Henderson, J. (2006) Critical psychology in South Africa: Histories, themes and prospects. In *Annual Review of Critical Psychology*, 5, pp. 212-235 [www.discourseunit.com/arcp/5](http://www.discourseunit.com/arcp/5)

<sup>561</sup> For more general critiques on essentialist binaries, see for example Butler, JP (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* New York, Routledge; Sedgwick, E.K. (2005) Axiomatic. In Morland, I and Willox, A (2005) *Queer Theory* Palgrave MacMillan, Hampshire and New York, pp81-95 at 81 Sedgwick suggests we should look at binaries beyond heterosexual/homosexual, like knowledge/ignorance and domestic/foreign in ways that queer theory attempts to deconstruct apparently non-sexual binarisms as normative concepts. Sexuality binaries are just as contradictory and determinative as those of sex, class and race, and have “primary importance for all modern Western identity and social organization (and not merely for homosexual identity and culture)” and is “so situated as to enable most inextricably and at the same time most differentially the filaments of other important definitional nexuses”.

See also Sedgwick, E.K. (2005) Axiomatic. In Morland, I. and Willox, A. (2005) *Queer Theory* Palgrave MacMillan, Hampshire and New York, pp81-95 at 82: As Sedgwick notes, the idea of 'difference' incorporates varied forms of sexuality, which are nevertheless carelessly lumped together under the heading 'sexual orientation'

<sup>562</sup> For an overview of psychology, see Goodwin, C.J. (1999) *A History of Modern Psychology (second ed)* John Wiley and Sons; Feigl, H & Scriven, M (2009) *The Foundations of Science and the Concepts of Psychology and Psychoanalysis*. University of Minnesota Press

This desire to regulate and structuralise the psyche through institutionalised practices and such professional codes as the World Health Organisation's psychopathological classification of 'fetishism', continues to mask important ontological questions<sup>563</sup>. In the context of 'fetish sexuality' particularly, this results in a paucity of critical inquiry into the regulatory forms and psychopathologising consequences of psychiatric discourses, which perpetuate (hetero)normativities.

On further inspection, the categories and diagnostic guidelines of psychopathologising discourses prove to discursively reconstruct the 'fetishist' as an essentialist and marginal category of human who is separate to others, and separate to the world around him/her. Subjectivities and agency are thereby effaced, to the detriment of the multiple and complex perspectives of real people who enjoy a diversity of consensual sexual practices.

#### **4.1.1 Contemporary 'Sexual Fetish': the ICD and DSM Classifications**

Contemporary psychodynamic constructions of 'fetish sexuality' come out of the work of early medical profession pioneers who created a vocabulary and classification system of 'unusual' sexual

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See also Bickhard, MH & Campbell, RL (2005) *New Ideas in Psychology*. In *New Ideas in Psychology, Volume 23, Issue 1, April 2005*, Pages 1-4 pp1: Bickhard and Campbell claim that theory was better esteemed early in the development of modern psychology, but was substantially delegitimized in the early 20th century. The 1930s featured neo-Machian positivism and operationism, which left little space for theory.

(See the impact of Machian positivism: Ernst Mach (1838–1916). see Smith, L. D. (1986). *Behaviorism and logical positivism*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.) Operationism was rejected in the 1930s, when Hempel showed that even the most basic scientific conceptions could not be properly defined operationally. (See Hempel, C. G. (1965). *Aspects of scientific explanation*. New York: Free Press.) Behaviourism was subsequently rejected in the 1950s in favour of "the cognitive revolution", where psychologists rejected prohibitions against looking to mental processes that were unobservable. (See MacKenzie, B.D. (1977) *Behaviourism and the limits of scientific method* International library of philosophy and scientific method, Taylor & Francis. Also Mackenzie, B.D. (1972) *Behaviourism and positivism*. In *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, Volume 8 Issue 2, Pages 222-231. Also Costall, A (2006) 'Introspectionism' and the mythical origins of scientific psychology. In *Consciousness and Cognition* Volume 15, Issue 4, December 2006, Pages 634-654 Special Issue on Introspection. He argues that most textbooks specify that modern, scientific psychology took place in three stages, starting with a focus on the study of mind based on introspection. This was rejected by Watson as unreliable and effete, and redefined as the science of behaviour.) Behaviourism and introspection were replaced by the cognitive revolution wherein the mind was seen as the subject of study. Costall argues that these three stages are mythical in that introspectionism was not dominant and introspection remained. He argues that the myth obscures important conceptual problems, for example the contemporary idea of "behaviour". Psychologists were disinclined to follow doctrines such as associationism inherited from the older empiricist schools, yet psychology nevertheless held onto behaviourism, and often saw such new frameworks as the acceptance of postulating computational processes and neural network processes as more powerful ways of framing or summarizing Machian information. Bickhard and Campbell note that "[t]oday they are still being pressed into service to account for local data sets about a few phenomena here and a few more phenomena there, while their underlying ontologies go unexamined", and that proper theorizing requires for psychological theories to be judged as "realistic models of mental and person-level phenomena: criticized as such, explored as such, and tested as such. Genuine theorizing will be in short supply so long as psychologists cling to the inductivist, dust-bowl empiricist picture of what good science is supposed to look like." In many places operationalist rhetoric is still taught to students with little in the way of alternative conceptions of theory and little guidance on examining or exploring theoretical possibilities

<sup>563</sup> such as the Freudian categorisation of psychical 'fetish' in terms of an object-focus, rather than in terms which recognise dialectical complexity in the personal and the socio-political. See chapters 5 and 6

practices, based on psychiatric case studies and 19th century popular novels<sup>564</sup>. Problematically, such systems resulted in the stigmatising of individuals on the basis of their sexual desires<sup>565</sup>.

The first version of the ICD appeared in 1900 with the intention of classifying deadly somatic diseases<sup>566</sup>. It has undergone various revisions, and the list of deadly and non-deadly diseases has proliferated. The ICD included sexual deviation as a general classification in 1948<sup>567</sup>, with subdivisions which have barely changed first appearing in 1965<sup>568</sup>. Today, the ICD-10 is the internationally accepted classification and diagnostic system of mental and behavioural disorders of the World Health Organization (WHO), and embodies contemporary psychiatric classifications of sexual fetishism<sup>569</sup>. It functions as a key reference for mental health professionals in Europe and South Africa, and chapter F65 provides guidelines for the diagnosis of “Disorders of Sexual Preference” requiring psychological assistance<sup>570</sup>. These 'disorders' exclude 'problems associated with sexual orientation', but include the 'paraphilias' of 'fetishism' and 'fetishistic transvestism'.

Section F65.0 describes 'Fetishism' as the reliance on a non-living object for sexual stimulus. 'Fetishes', which may be extensions of the human body or particular textures, may vary in importance to different psychological subjects, and in some cases enhance sexual excitement “achieved in ordinary ways”<sup>571</sup>. As will be argued later, this implies that *any* reliance on a material object *a priori* falls under the purview of 'fetishism'.

An associated category, dealt with in section F65.1, is 'Fetishistic Transvestism', which is classified as the wearing of clothes of the opposite sex principally to obtain sexual excitement<sup>572</sup>. It includes 'transvestic fetishism', although the distinction between the two terms is

<sup>564</sup> Reiersøl, O, and Skeid, S (2006) The ICD Diagnoses of Fetishism and Sadomasochism.” Co-published simultaneously in *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 50, No. 2/3, Harrington Park Press, pp. 243-262; and: Kleinplatz, P.J. and Moser, C (eds) (2006) *Sadomasochism: Powerful Pleasures* Harrington Park Press pp244

<sup>565</sup> See chapter 3

<sup>566</sup> Reiersøl, O, and Skeid, S (2006) The ICD Diagnoses of Fetishism and Sadomasochism.” Co-published simultaneously in *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 50, No. 2/3, Harrington Park Press, pp. 243-262; and: Kleinplatz, P.J. and Moser, C (eds) (2006) *Sadomasochism: Powerful Pleasures* Harrington Park Press pp244  
For a brief overview of the ICD as it pertains to a South African context, see Smit, E (2006) Western Psychiatry and Gender Identity Disorder (GID): a Critical Perspective. In Shefer, T, Bonzaaier, F & Kiguwa, P (2006) *The Gender of Psychology*. Cape Town: UCT Press

<sup>567</sup> (ICD-6)

<sup>568</sup> (ICD-8)

<sup>569</sup> Reiersøl, O, and Skeid, S (2006) The ICD Diagnoses of Fetishism and Sadomasochism.” Co-published simultaneously in *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 50, No. 2/3, Harrington Park Press, pp. 243-262; and: Kleinplatz, P.J. and Moser, C (eds) (2006) *Sadomasochism: Powerful Pleasures* Harrington Park Press pp244

<sup>570</sup> See Addendum 2

<sup>571</sup> World Health Organization. (2004). International Classification of Diseases 10 (2nd ed). Geneva: WHO. ICD-10

<sup>572</sup> World Health Organization. (2004). *ibid*

imprecise<sup>573</sup>. In turn, 'fetishistic transvestism' is distinguished from 'transsexual transvestism' by sexual arousal and the overwhelming desire to remove the clothing after orgasm. The section notes that 'fetishistic transvestism' is often an earlier phase in the development of transsexualism. As will be argued later, this implies that *any* deviation from gender-normative attire is *a priori* 'fetishistic'.

The American DSM is seen as the definitive authority on mental disorder in the USA, and is often called on as a key reference worldwide<sup>574</sup>. Although the DSM influences views on 'fetishism' in South African psychology and psychiatry<sup>575</sup>, it is not as central as the ICD which has direct relevance as a World Health Organisation standard. The ICD and DSM have influenced each other,

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<sup>573</sup> World Health Organization. (2004). *ibid*

<sup>574</sup> Moser, C. & Kleinplatz, P.J. (2002). Transvestic fetishism: Psychopathology or Iatrogenic Artifact? *New Jersey Psychologist*, 52(2) 16-17.

See American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders 4-TR*.

Washington DC: APA. The DSM is regularly revised, and is claimed to be factually correct and up-to date with newly available information. It classifies "unusual and strong sexual interests" (i.e., paraphilias) as psychopathological, a status it claims to be "...supported by an extensive empirical foundation"

See also Watters, E (2010) *The Americanization of Mental Illness*. In *New York Times Magazine*, January 8, 2010. (from <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/10/magazine/10psyche-t.html>) and Watters, E (2010)

*Crazy Like Us: The Globalization of the American Psyche*. Mass. & Washington DC: Free Press. Watters argues that the meaning of mental health globally health has increasingly become 'Americanised': "If our rising need for mental-health services does indeed spring from a breakdown of meaning, our insistence that the rest of the world think like us may be all the more problematic. Offering the latest Western mental-health theories, treatments and categories in an attempt to ameliorate the psychological stress sparked by modernization and globalization is not a solution; it may be part of the problem. When we undermine local conceptions of the self and modes of healing, we may be speeding along the disorienting changes that are at the very heart of much of the world's mental distress."

<sup>575</sup> The DSM does not see the leather-sm-fetish community's style of sexuality as necessarily pathological, and the DSM-IV (1994 [APA94]) notes new diagnostic criteria that do not classify sexual sadism, masochism and fetishism as disturbances solely related to erotic activities

See American Psychiatric Association (1994) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders DSM-IV-TR* Fourth Edition (Text Revision), which categorises Psychiatric Diagnoses. The manual, published by the American Psychiatric Association, covers all mental health disorders for adults and children, as well as listing known causes, gender, age at onset, and prognosis statistics, and research about optimal treatment approaches. Mental Health Professionals use the to gain understanding of illness and potential treatment, as well as for helping 3rd party payers such as insurance companies.

The DSM uses multi-axial/multidimensional approaches to diagnosis, since other personal factors impact on mental health. It looks at five dimensions:

Axis I: Clinical Syndromes (i.e.the diagnosis, such as depression, schizophrenia or social phobia)

Axis II: Developmental Disorders and Personality Disorders (developmental disorders are usually initially evident in childhood, and include autism and mental retardation) (Personality disorders, as clinical syndromes, have long lasting symptoms, entailing impacting on the person's way of interacting with the world, and include Paranoid, Antisocial, and Borderline Personality Disorders)

Axis III: Physical Conditions affecting the development, continuance, or exacerbation of Axis I and II Disorders (including examples such as brain injury or HIV/AIDS, which can result in mental illness symptoms)

Axis IV: Severity of Psychosocial Stressors, as ranked (Disorders listed in Axis I and II can be impacted on by life events such as the death of a loved one, a new job, unemployment, marriage etc)

Axis V: Highest Level of Functioning (the person's present level of functioning and highest level during the previous year, which helps comprehension of how the above four axes affect the individual and the type of changes to be expected)

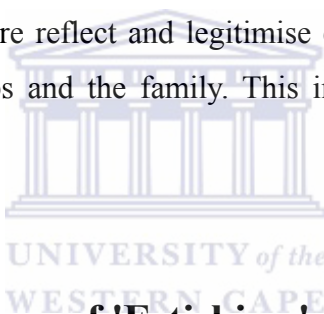
For a short discussion on the DSM in a South African context pertaining to sexualities (albeit paedophilia rather than fetishism, see below re consensual vs non-consensual sexualities), see Bowman, B (2005)

*Children, Pathology and Politics: Genealogical Perspectives on the Construction of the Paedophile in South Africa*. PhD Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, who notes that the American Psychiatric Association receives support from Mental Health Professionals in South Africa. The DSM categories are therefore of influence in local psychiatric discourses.

with very little change in category or content since the early days, particularly in respect of Fetishism and Sadomasochism for at least the last three revisions<sup>576</sup>.

Both the DSM and the ICD qualify the classification of 'fetishism' by stating that the individual must be rendered effectively dysfunctional in an important area of their life to be called 'sick'<sup>577</sup>. This is intended to exclude from the purview of psychiatrists and psychologists people who are not rendered substantially dysfunctional by their 'fetish' interests. On the face of it, this serves to protect 'non-pathological' activity from classification as psychopathology<sup>578</sup>.

Notwithstanding this qualification, however, I argue that the ICD (and the DSM) categories for 'fetishism' are inappropriate, since they discursively recreate psychopathology and inappropriately *prescribe* heteronormative sexual activity, rather than *describing* sexual diversity. This is apparent in two main areas. Firstly, the classifications of sexual dysfunction rely primarily on normative comparisons. Secondly, the diagnostic criteria normatively distinguish 'pathological' from 'non-pathological fetishism'. Both therefore reflect and legitimise existing dominant (heteropatriarchal) discourses on sexuality, relationships and the family. This in turn marginalises a wide range of people, and obscures subjectivities.



## 4.2 Psychiatric Definitions of 'Fetishism': Beyond Contemporary Simplistic Constructions

Taking account of poststructuralist (and in particular queer) critiques of psychology as a regulatory force arguably means rejecting the very notion of psychiatric classification *in toto*, since classification presumes a clarity and certainty about the parameters of human sexual experience and meaning where there can be none<sup>579</sup>. Such classification not only buys into fictions that psychiatry and psychology are fully authoritative 'sciences', but also perpetuates the regulatory

<sup>576</sup> Reiersøl, O, and Skeid, S (2006) 'The ICD Diagnoses of Fetishism and Sadomasochism.' Co-published simultaneously in *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 50, No. 2/3, Harrington Park Press, pp. 243-262; and: Kleinplatz, P.J. and Moser, C (eds) (2006) *Sadomasochism: Powerful Pleasures* Harrington Park Press pp244

<sup>577</sup> See Reid, W.H. & Wise, M.G. (1995) *DSM-IV training guide*, 4th ed, New York: Psychology Press, Brunner/Mazel Publishers

<sup>578</sup> See Chapter 3 in this regard

<sup>579</sup> See Darcangelo, S (2008) 'Fetishism.' in Laws, D.R., O'Donohue, W.T. (2008) *Sexual deviance: theory, assessment, and treatment*. Guilford Press, 2008 at 108 et seq. Darcangelo argues that little empirical work has been done in exploring fetishism, and more questions than answers remain. However, I argue that no more empirical work needs to be done, since it is more appropriate to do away with classifications and replace them with better metatheory. In particular see chapters 5 and 6 in this regard

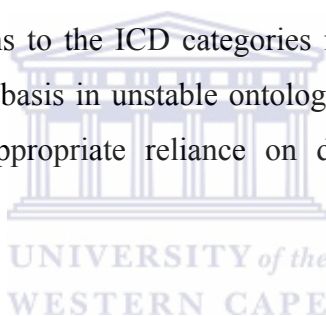
roles of the discourse and practice of psychology revealed by contemporary debates in sexualities and gender scholarship, and in critical psychology<sup>580</sup>.

Classifications of 'fetishism', in particular, conflict with broader poststructuralist debates on contemporary categorisations and classifications of sexuality and sex-based definitions, about which there is also a growing, albeit disquietingly small, sense of popular discomfort<sup>581</sup>. These voices generally approach the argument from the assumption that unusual sexual proclivities are discursively constructed, and should therefore not be pathologised through perpetuating normative assumptions which irrationally prioritise certain value systems over others.

A closer inspection of the classifications indeed reveals that the categories of 'fetishism' and 'transvestic fetishism' rely on normative bases and are therefore ineffective descriptive tools, since they rather function as injunctions prescribing compulsory (hetero)normativity.

#### 4.2.1 *The Vestigial Tails of Freudian Categories*

There are two foundational problems to the ICD categories flowing directly from their historical reliance on Freudian foundations: a basis in unstable ontologies which mistake the constitution of the psychical subject, and an inappropriate reliance on dualist, oppositional thinking which essentialises fetish practices<sup>582</sup>.



<sup>580</sup> See the context of psychology critiques above: See for example Rose, N (1989) *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*. London & New York: Routledge; Burman, E. (ed) (1990) *Feminists and Psychological Practice*. London: Sage.; Schweder, R (1990) *Cultural Psychology: Essays on Comparative Human Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Parker, I (1992) *Discourse Dynamics: Critical Analysis for Social and Individual Psychology*. London & New York, Routledge; Wilkinson, S & Kitzinger, C (eds) (1993) *Heterosexuality: a Feminism and Psychology Reader*. London: Sage; Parker, I & Speares, R (1996) *Psychology & Society: Radical Theory and Practice*. London & Chicago: Pluto Press; Burr, V (1998) *Gender and Social Psychology*. London, Routledge; Parker, I (1999) Critical psychology: critical links. In *Annual Review of Critical Psychology* Vol. 1, pp. 3-18; Kitzinger, C (1999) Lesbian and gay psychology: is it critical? In *Annual Review of Critical Psychology*, Vol. 1, pp. 50-66; Parker, I. (2004) 'Psychoanalysis and critical psychology', in D. Hook (ed.), with N. Mkhize, P. Kiguwa and A. Collins (section eds) and E. Burman and I. Parker (consulting eds) *Critical Psychology*, pp. 138-161. Cape Town: UCT Press; Painter, D. & Terre Blanche, M. & Henderson, J. (2006) Critical psychology in South Africa: Histories, themes and prospects. In *Annual Review of Critical Psychology*, 5, pp. 212-235 [www.discourseunit.com/arcp/5](http://www.discourseunit.com/arcp/5); Shefer, T & Potgieter, C-A (2006) Sexualities. In Shefer, T, Bonzaaier, F & Kiguwa, P (2006) *The Gender of Psychology*. Cape Town: UCT Press.

<sup>581</sup> For example, the website [www.reviseF65.org](http://www.reviseF65.org) seeks to "discuss stigmatizing psychiatric diagnoses as they appear in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD), published by the World Health Organization (WHO)". Their purpose is "to eliminate the diagnoses of Fetishism (F65.0), Fetishistic Transvestism (F65.1), and Sadomasochism (F65.5) from the current version of ICD (ICD-10)". While their stated goal is "not to change the American diagnostic system, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) published by the American Psychiatric Association" themselves, they note that there are people in the US targeting the corresponding (DSM)-diagnoses".

<sup>582</sup> Note: For the sake of clarity and simplicity, and because the DSM is not directly applicable to South African circumstances (although it is influential), I will speak of the ICD classifications and diagnoses from this point, although the arguments also largely apply to the DSM

Firstly, the ICD substantially repeats the Freudian definitions of 'fetishism' and therefore falls into the same ontological traps as its early psychoanalytic counterparts discussed in Chapter 3. It thereby (re)creates problematic categories based on unstable metatheory which is laced with inappropriate foundationalist assumptions around the constitution of the sexual subject as a psychical animal evading an inevitable lack. By simply repeating the 'fetish object'-focused discourses inherited from colonialist and modernist diatribes, the classifications perpetuate inappropriate assumptions and discourses which assume that subjects inherently lack sexual agency<sup>583</sup>.

Secondly, beyond these foundational ontological concerns, the ICD-10 categories retain two implicit and inappropriate vestigial tails of dualist oppositional thinking<sup>584</sup>. These tails emerge from Freud's desire to structuralise the psyche by creating artificial links between categories in order to demonstrate their intimate affiliation and to distinguish them from each other<sup>585</sup>. As I will argue, firstly the ICD implicitly and inappropriately links 'fetishism' to other psychiatric 'isms', and secondly it establishes 'fetishism' as an *a priori* pathological category which needs to be refuted, thereby placing an 'onus of rebuttal' on the alleged 'fetishist'. Both these tails prove to be founded on an inappropriate basis of normativity.

#### 4.2.1a) Connecting People through 'isms': Tarred by the Same Brush

F65 combines unrelated items under the rubric of the 'isms' of unusual phenomena, such as consensual behaviours like 'fetishism' and consensual sado-masochism on the one hand, and non-consensual behaviours like paedophilia on the other<sup>586</sup>. This implies that both share 'maladaptive qualities'<sup>587</sup>. It is, however, inappropriate to class people with abusive intentions with those who have no such intentions, and, as Reiersøl & Skeid argue, the rationale behind this is clearly normative moralising<sup>588</sup>. The ICD's authors patently do not see any ethical difference between consensual and non-consensual behaviour<sup>589</sup>, rather focusing on what they deem as inappropriately

<sup>583</sup> As discussed in chapter 3

<sup>584</sup> I use the term 'vestigial tails' as a tongue-in-cheek reference to Freud's reliance on Darwinian thinking to justify the continued marginalisation. In this regard, see See Hoard, N.W. (1998) *Wild(e) Men and Savages: the Homosexual and the Primitive in Darwin, Wilde and Freud*. PhD Thesis. Columbia University. Hoard argues compellingly that late nineteenth century notions of male 'homosexuality' should be located in the context of racial difference and white European imperial expansion. More particularly, he argues that Freud relies on Darwin's arguments around ontogenetic development as linking into phylogenetic primitiveness to locate theories of psycho-sexual development, allowing Freud to conceive of homosexuality as arrested development.

<sup>585</sup> Bonnet, G (2002) Pour une nouvelle classification des perversions sexuelles. In *Evolutionary Psychiatry* 2002 ; 67 : 496-505, pp497-8. See below on criticisms of Bonnet's argument as being structuralist

<sup>586</sup> Reiersøl, O, and Skeid, S (2006) The ICD Diagnoses of Fetishism and Sadomasochism." Co-published simultaneously in *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 50, No. 2/3, Harrington Park Press, pp. 243-262; and: Kleinplatz, P.J. and Moser, C (eds) (2006) *Sadomasochism: Powerful Pleasures* Harrington Park Press pp251 See below on arguments on descriptions of sexuality as consensual and non-consensual

<sup>587</sup> Reiersøl, O, and Skeid, S *ibid*

<sup>588</sup> Reiersøl, O, and Skeid, S *ibid* see below re normative issues

<sup>589</sup> This is not to say that the distinction is unproblematic, since 'consensuality' is itself a social construct



desired sexual objects, whether these be human or not, consenting or not<sup>590</sup>. The section therefore categorises 'fetishists' with other 'types' of (transgressive) people, thereby essentialising them. This strategy of devaluing and pathologising certain practices by conflating them with abusive practices links directly to issues of the inappropriate normative bases for *diagnosing* (as opposed to *classifying*) 'fetishism', which will be discussed later in more detail.

Further, although the ICD-10 neither connects voyeurism and exhibitionism as did Freud, nor explicitly sets 'fetishism' in opposition to any purported opposite, it does connect sadism and masochism. Similarly, the ICD-10 clearly identifies 'fetishism' and 'transsexual transvestism' as separate psychopathological 'categories'. This implies that 'fetishists' and 'transsexual transvestites' are essentially separate kinds of people<sup>591</sup> by juxtaposing the categories against each other through their relation to normatively proscribed material objects: unusual sexual objects, and gender-non-conformist clothing respectively<sup>592</sup>. Yet it insufficiently distinguishes these '*isms*' from each other, instead relying on normative considerations to fulfil the task<sup>593</sup>.

This inconsistent cross-pollination of categories perpetuates the historical desire to define phenomena through opposites and to call on dualist discourses<sup>594</sup>. The result is that the ICD becomes self-justificatory: it calls on its own categories and normative judgements on approved sexual behaviour, rather than relying on the subjectivities of sexual subjects to explain psychodynamic phenomena. As will be discussed later, this in turn means that the categories effectively *proscribe* normatively disapproved activities ('fetishism'), thereby *prescribing* normatively approved activity ('non-fetishism'), rather than describing sexual subjectivities relating to sexual scripts incorporating material objects as the ICD purports to do.

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<sup>590</sup> See arguments re describing sexuality on consensual vs non-consensual bases later

<sup>591</sup> See later re heteronormative assumptions

<sup>592</sup> In regard gender issues and the performance of gendered and sexual identities, see Butler, J. (1999) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* NY, Routledge.

<sup>593</sup> See above for definitions

See Reiersøl, O, and Skeid, S (2006) 'The ICD Diagnoses of Fetishism and Sadomasochism.' Co-published simultaneously in *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 50, No. 2/3, Harrington Park Press, pp. 243-262; and: Kleinplatz, P.J. and Moser, C (eds) (2006) *Sadomasochism: Powerful Pleasures* Harrington Park Press. In the case of 'transsexual transvestitism', as Reiersøl and Skeid argue, the ICD guidelines do not explain the classification of an individual who does not remove the 'offending' (female) attire immediately after orgasm (a key classificatory indication for 'transsexual transvestitism'), for example because the clothing feels good, or where the subject wants to relax, or "wants to continue sexual activity in anticipation of another wave of arousal". This lack of immediate *déshabille*ment automatically and inaccurately implies that the person is a 'transsexual transvestite', whereas the person may have no transgendered desires, and 'fetishism' would be more apt as a classification. This implies that the boundary between 'fetishism' and 'transsexual transvestitism' are in some senses interchangeable, mutable and therefore not useful as separate categories.

<sup>594</sup> See introduction re the difference between sadomasochism (S/M) and fetish

#### 4.2.1b) Categorical Essentialising of Fetish Practices

The ICD assumes that practices can be identified and pinned down, as if they have some essential construction. Yet, I suggest, this is not the case.

Firstly, F65.0 establishes 'fetishism' primarily as a pathological and therefore an essentialising category of practices through the threat of labelling people as 'fetishists'<sup>595</sup>. By means of a document which classifies psychopathologies, the category of 'fetishism' is codified as identifiable, and is thereby not merely described, but discursively (re)created. This establishes an unintentional *a priori* presumption that *all* sexual practices which incorporate *any* objects fall under the purview of 'fetishism', and therefore that *all* sexual practices are inherently pathologisable. This is problematic, since the implication of the mere existence of an inanimate object of sexual interest discursively implies psychopathology wherever an inanimate object is involved in sexuality, which feeds assumptions of pathology.

Further, only after creating the category of pathology does F65 qualify circumstances where it is not, through the diagnostic guidelines<sup>596</sup>. By labelling it as an identifiable and inherently psychopathologisable practice, F65 implicitly establishes 'fetishism' as a category normatively opposed to 'non-fetishism', which implies that the 'fetish' object (and the 'fetishist's' concomitant interest in it, and in turn, therefore the very identity of 'fetishist') is constituted in opposition to an assumed normatively prioritised absence of a fetish object<sup>597</sup>.

However, as Moser notes, sexual diversity encompasses a wide range of human behaviour whereby virtually anything can have erotic associations<sup>598</sup>. What has erotic associations can surely only be

<sup>595</sup> See chapter 2 re the issues pertaining to identity politics vs queer theory

<sup>596</sup> F65.0 Fetishism: Reliance on some non-living object as a stimulus for sexual arousal and sexual gratification. Many fetishes are extensions of the human body, such as articles of clothing or footwear. Other common examples are characterized by some particular texture such as rubber, plastic or leather. Fetish objects vary in their importance to the individual. In some cases they simply serve to enhance sexual excitement achieved in ordinary ways (e.g. having the partner wear a particular garment).

<sup>597</sup> See note supra. See later for arguments on normative bases

<sup>598</sup> Moser, C (2006) *Sexuality, Reproduction and Menopause*, Volume 4, Issue 2, Pages 86-90

This is borne out by the variety of participants' 'fetishes'. Some enjoy objects with overt BDSM associations, although not all such objects are sexually stimulating:

“Leather, watersports, scat, and BDSM gear related to bondage and pain play. While I enjoy assplay and fisting, I don’t necessarily “fetishise” dildos.... Gloves are a particularly big turn-on. Also, certain floggers, whips, canes. Strangely paddles have the opposite effect in me. No interest whatsoever, associated more with corporal punishment and the whole “school master” head trip than “straightforward” BDSM” (Joseph)

Others incorporate objects with more generally sexualised associations, like underwear:

“If I had a million bucks I guess I would spend at least half of it on underwear and swimwear. I love the feeling of kinky underwear: revealing, slim cut, supportive and lifting... the attention it generates at the gym and comments passed by so-called straight guys are incredible. It’s amazing how many guys love the look of a backless thong or a sheer brief but are too damn butch to admit it or get it. Admittedly I don’t do female underwear.”(Jason)

Or more widely to everyday objects which otherwise have no overt sexual connotations, like food:

“Oh, what a pleasure to experience a paw-paw, or a watermelon, or anything else edible, from ice to tender loin of

subjectively determinable, and is not implicitly visible in the kinds of object in question. In this regard, many ('non-fetishist') sexual practices incorporate material objects, yet remain out of the purview of psychopathology<sup>599</sup>.

In corollary, most 'fetishist' practices do not merely focus on objects, but encompass a broader environment which includes objects, people, fantasies and sexual energy, as in 'Jacques' narrative:

“...the whole package makes a difference. I can't look at a very big dildo and get excited by it. I can't look at a pair of tit-clamps and get (turned on) by it, because it needs positive or negative energy to make it work. I could look at someone and see they have a huge amount of body hair, and I'll go “that is very nice!”. I can see someone... and say 'ooh, they've got a huge crotch' ... but you need the right situation to make it work.” ('Jacques')

Secondly, sexual practices incorporating objects are assumed to be externally and objectively categorisable. This means that the roles of subjectivity and emotional associations in sexual practices are not taken into account. Sexual experience cannot be categorised objectively, and neither the 'fetish' practices themselves, nor the presence of a 'fetish object' in isolation give subjective meaning to the sexual use of material objects:

“Again, depends on the game. With toilet play, smells are vital. For all structured BDSM play, leather is essential. I don't think I could perform in these instances without leather gear and especially boots. On the other hand, I don't so much “get off” on toys as knowing I enjoy the feeling they have up my ass.” (Joseph)

Rather, sexual 'fetish' activity involves a fluid and dialectical connection between subjects and physical objects, and the meaning of sexual experience is subjectively experienced through emotional associations:

“I genuinely like the idea of taking the body, mind and soul to places it may not otherwise experience. I also think it has a lot to do with mindset and how much you are prepared to explore. The thing that appeals most to me is the realisation that I can deal with a lot more than previously thought and the liberation from an otherwise myopic existence.” ('Jason', who includes exhibitionism and being filmed or photographed in his definition of 'fetish')

Therefore the emotional meaning associated with the 'fetish object' in its sexual environment is subjectively more important than externally defined categorisations of 'fetishism', 'fetishist' or 'fetish

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pork (all puns intended!)...” ('Jason')

<sup>599</sup> Hence the success of whole media industries devoted to displaying scantily clad women as sales tools. In this regard, see the many criticisms detailing how men within heteronormative constructions of sexuality are taught to fetishise desired others. Women are thereby dismantled into fetishised and desirable parts, and the desired and othered body is objectified and fragmented, facilitating normative fetish relations in sexuality. See below on normative issues

object', notwithstanding a separate category of 'fetishism'<sup>600</sup>.

Terminologically juxtaposing 'fetishism' against anything else results in practices being artificially boxed into two distinct and oppositional camps: 'pathological' vs 'non-pathological fetishism', 'fetishist' vs 'non-fetishist', or 'fetishist' vs some other pathologised category. The definitions (as well as the diagnoses<sup>601</sup>) of 'fetishism' are therefore lodged categorically in inappropriate essentialist notions that the practice of 'fetishism', people who in some essentialist way putatively are 'fetishists' and 'fetish' objects are objectively identifiable.

As will be discussed later relating to diagnosis, this places the alleged 'fetishist' under an onus to refute an *a priori* allegation of pathology, by reference to normative conceptions of propriety, in order to qualify as 'sane'<sup>602</sup>. He/she must therefore demonstrate that the 'fetish' is either absent or is merely one element of his/her sexual script, forcing him/her to demonstrate that he/she has not renounced the 'normal' sexual aim, whose primary focus must normatively be on a person rather than an object<sup>603</sup>.

#### **4.2.2 The Underlying Categorical Normativity**

The categorising of practices (and the concomitant identifications of 'fetishists' and 'fetish objects') can only take place through an implicit categorical normativity: the ICD classifications assume that all people should in some essentialising way be 'normal'.

Yet 'fetishists' challenge the very category of 'fetishism' through their practices. The participants are marginalised on the basis of their sexual orientations and their unusual sexual proclivities<sup>604</sup>, and are all to a greater or lesser extent non-conformists, with unconventional views of what is/should be socially valuable. Albeit problematically<sup>605</sup>, their 'fetish' practices

<sup>600</sup> See chapters 5 and 6 on this issue

<sup>601</sup> See below on diagnosis

<sup>602</sup> See below on diagnosis

<sup>603</sup> Bonnet, G (2002) Pour une nouvelle classification des perversions sexuelles. In *Evolutionary Psychiatry* 2002 ; 67 : 496-505, pp498 This construction also allows the 'pervert' to change classification by virtue of a shift of focus from object to aim, which negates the principle of classificatory clarity and cohesiveness. See below for arguments on normative issues as relates to diagnosis

<sup>604</sup> See chapters 1 and 2 re the participant constitution and sexual orientation

<sup>605</sup> As will be discussed in the Interjection, although on some level the participants' fetish practices may be underpinned by a resistance to heteronormativity, at the same time their practices reflect dominant masculine sexuality through the 'fetishising' of body parts or their facsimile. Within heteronormative constructions of sexuality men are taught to fetishise desired others, and in this way women are broken up into parts that are desirable and fetishised, which is part of the way in which the desired and othered body is objectified and fragmented. This facilitates normative fetish relations in sexuality.

This is juxtaposed against arguments such as those by Hennen, P. M. (2004-08-14) "Feeling a Bit Under the Leather: Performativity, Embodiment and the Specter of Starched Chiffon" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Hilton San Francisco & Renaissance Parc 55 Hotel, San Francisco, CA. from [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p108280\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p108280_index.html). Calling on Bourdieu and Butler, Hennen argues that gay

challenge both heteronormativity and the fictions of the existence of 'fetishism' as a category, through their notions of masculinity, without which 'fetish' does not exist for them:

“I love men with beards and hairy faces. I love hairy men, and I love men who smoke pipe. I've got a great fetish for leather. ... Uniforms. I'm very kinky on men with uniforms” ('Henry')

“I enjoy leather, the feel of it on the skin, the masculinity of it, the smell of it, the look of it.” ('Simon')

Through transgressively fetishising masculinity as men they challenge the implicit heteronormativity of Freudian fetishism which, as was discussed in Chapter 3 and will be discussed below in the context of diagnosis, sees 'fetishism' as a particularly heterosexual male enterprise.

Further, they undermine the distinctions between the category of 'fetishist' and 'fetish object' by smudging purportedly clear distinctions between the two. In interesting ways they do this through seeing themselves as both subject and object:

“rubber, leather, suspension... so it would be anything to do with that... boots and that. And that's where I think maybe is it not coming back to the trying to show your masculinity. I mean before I came out, when I was a youngster I was trying to grow a moustache, because I had a fairly... not really... feminine, but I wasn't really masculine. And so maybe that was why I started racing motorbikes. Maybe I wanted to get into leather, but certainly I've led that sort of macho lifestyle. So, even now in gay society, I'm not turned on by fems, not turned on by the perfect body, I like a masculine person. And getting back to the fetish, it's anything to do with that: motorcycle boots, motorcycle leathers, it's that kind of thing that turns me on. *It's more the male form, i.e. looking at myself in the mirror.* ('Jared', *my italics*)

They thereby undermine the very category of 'fetishism', which is premised on the essentialist discursive separation of 'fetishist' and 'fetish object'.

Moreover, they are proud of the transgressive nature of their 'fetish' practices, despite expecting disapprobation and at times responding defensively to questions about their sexuality. Indeed they have unconsciously re-labelled these practices as 'fetish' rather than 'fetishism', thereby renaming their practices in terms of their own (reclaimed) values:

“I would say a fetish to me is something that you like to do as part of your sexual expression or sexual behaviour or sexual enjoyment, or whatever that is seen in the broader public eye as wrong, dirty, demonic, bad... you're not supposed to do that.” ('Brian')

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leathermen are uniquely located to understand how gender is radically constructed, since they consciously hypermasculinise themselves. He argues that gay male leather culture (in the U.S, although arguably in South Africa too) should be seen as resistance to consensus associations between homoerotic interest and effeminacy.

“An act or way of sexual conduct that compliments “normal or average” sexual activities... Anything related to sexual intercourse that is done outside “normal or average” sexual limits. Anything extra that enhances the sexual experience.” (Donald)

“Fetish: anything which is different, different being not quite acceptable to the ordinary straightforward person.” (Henry)

“I see a ‘fetish’ as an attraction to acts or objects not generally associated with “traditional” sexual interest or activity, including socially acceptable practices.” (Jason)

'Fetishism' is not, I suggest, some objectively defined notion, but is defined in terms of social value, albeit “not necessarily broadly accepted or universally comprehended, but holding meaning for those who own or want to own it”<sup>606</sup>. Participants use 'fetish' interchangeably as a desirable sexually subversive practice and/or a material object, depending on the context in which it is used. This does not reflect a confusion or lack of education as to 'correct' terminological use, but rather a reclamation and re-labelling of their sexuality and practices in the face of normative prescriptions<sup>607</sup>. They are aware that many people see these practices as 'sick', but they nevertheless navigate taboo sexual exploration both to achieve fulfilment and to challenge (hetero)norms, even though, in that challenge, they inadvertently support dominant constructions of masculinity which serve to 'fetishise' the objects of their sexual desire.

'Fetishists' have reclaimed their power by challenging social norms in (queer) transgressive ways<sup>608</sup> by re-appropriating the psychopathological category of 'fetishism' under the rubric of 'unusual' sex acts, albeit, as Moser qualifies:

Unusual is in quotations because these sexual interests are not really unusual. Although research data on their incidence and prevalence are not available, in practice there are relatively few patients (or physicians), who do not engage in some sexual act that others would view as unusual.<sup>609</sup>

#### **4.2.3 Defining 'Fetishism' Beyond Strict Person/Object/Practice Distinctions**

The ontological concerns detailed in Chapter 3 combined with the vestiges of problematic Freudian thinking detailed above undermine the objective existence of the categories of 'fetishism'. Notwithstanding these concerns, however, the ICD classifications have not appeased Böhme's uncertainty as to whether 'fetishism' signifies “the spoken utterance or the speaker; the

<sup>606</sup> Pietz, W (1985) “The Problem of the Fetish I.” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 9 (1985): 5–17: 7

<sup>607</sup> See chapters 5 and 6 on how this reclaiming and relabeling works

<sup>608</sup> See chapter 2 re social proscription in gay/queer contexts. Yet see also the Interjection re ways in which subjects both support and challenge (hetero)normativities

<sup>609</sup> Moser, C (2006) *Sexuality, Reproduction and Menopause*, Volume 4, Issue 2, Pages 86-90

described object or the describing subject”<sup>610</sup>.

Moreover, artificially classifying 'fetishism' as a discrete category of psychopathology serves merely to rehash the problematic classification of the term ‘perversion’, which McDougal questions as psychiatric and psychoanalytic label<sup>611</sup>. The term has negative connotations, which, like those of ‘neurotic’, ‘psychotic’, ‘psychosomatic’, results in the obscuring of the psychic structures of each clinical category and particularly of people’s remarkable singularity<sup>612</sup>. Classifications of 'fetishism' do not reflect the frames of reference, concepts and categories of the people who enjoy what they call 'fetish'<sup>613</sup>. Indeed, in their attempt to categorise human behaviour, such classifications do not *describe* 'fetish' as played out in the lives of people who enjoy the sexual company of material objects. Rather, such classifications *prescribe* behaviour through normative expectations lodged in the very categories themselves. Even before addressing questions of diagnosis, this renders the classifications nugatory, since, as with colonial and early psychoanalytic constructions, 'fetishists' and their practices are inappropriately shoe-horned into categorical boxes which are divorced from human experience and which derive from a focus on proscribed 'fetish objects' and 'fetish practices', rather than the subjectivities of people who thereby become practically invisible.

In contradistinction, whereas the ICD classification of 'fetishism' implies something to be tied down and judged, the participants prefer to

“go with the moment and not with the label. ... Depends on the guy you're playing with as well. If he's down with something you might not want to explore, and it seems right at the moment, then you explore them. Might find you're missing out on a fetish you didn't know was there.” ('Lawrence')

At face value this fluidity might suggest that such perceptions merely reflect 'non-pathological fetishism': that the participants are not sexually bound to particular 'fetish' objects and are therefore 'not rendered substantially dysfunctional'<sup>614</sup>.

<sup>610</sup> As noted in chapter 3, this indicates that 'fetishism' serves at the same time to exclude it from consciousness, or at least force it to remain peripheral to discourse in any real sense.

See Böhme, H. (2001) *Das Fetischismus-Konzept von Marx und sein Kontext*. In Gerhardt, V (ed)(2001) *Marxismus: Versuch einer Bilanz*. Magdeburg: Scriptorum-Verlag. 289–319. 30 August 2004 <<http://www.culture.huberlin.de/HB/volltexte/texte/fetisch.html>>. Quoted in Brisson, U (2005) *Fish and Fetish: Mary Kingsley's Studies of Fetish in West Africa*. In *Journal of Narrative Theory* 35.3 (Fall 2005): 326–340.

<sup>611</sup> See in particular the concept of "Neo-Sexuality" in McDougall, J (1997). *Las Múltiplas Faces De Eros*. Martins Fontes, SP, 2001, pp 186, 188, 192, p 186

<sup>612</sup> See in particular McDougall *ibid*

<sup>613</sup> This is even after extracting BDSM from the mix. See thesis introduction re distinguishing fetish from BDSM. Although beyond the scope of this research, it is useful to note that Sadomasochism is considered to be “A preference for sexual activity that involves bondage or the infliction of pain or humiliation. Notably, the diagnostic criteria for masochism and sadism indicate similar pathologising tendencies for alternative sexualities

<sup>614</sup> See below re concerns of diagnosis

Yet a closer look reveals something which negates the psychiatric utility of the very identification of 'fetishism' (and indeed all categories): The ICD classifications assume a simple, non-contextualised sexual interest in material objects by an abstracted psychological subject who should not want to overstep the bounds of 'propriety'. In other words, the classifications ontologically assume the essentialist and foundationalist value of (hetero)normativity. Clearly 'fetishism' is therefore a psychopathological terminological construct, not the accurate and useful description of practices it purports to be.

In contradistinction, the participants' 'fetish' is more than the sum of its psychiatric categorical parts, and their practices give insight into the problems with contemporary psychiatric definitions. Yet it also gives insight into alternative metatheories on which human sexual relations with material objects can be based. Whereas the ICD inherently imbues 'fetishism' with pathological associations, the renamed and reclaimed term 'fetish' (*qua* sexual practice itself, either as well as, or disconnected from 'fetish objects') incorporates a broader sense which includes people, objects and environments, subjective perceptions and emotions:

“...The one [meaning of 'fetish'] is material (sic) thing, something physical. The other is emotional. ... Physical is what the person would look like, what I'd like to look like, what I think is nice, what turns me on. Emotional is what I can get out of this situation, what I can give my partner out of this situation. And the feelings that go around with it, that's the emotional aspect of it. And saying that is a fetish... to make someone feel good can be a fetish, whichever way it is, because it goes both ways. You're giving and you're receiving ...” ('Jacques')

Object-focused diatribes around the centrality of the 'fetish object' as the definitional nexus for 'fetishism' as a practice (and therefore the 'fetishist' as a psychopathologised category) must, I suggest, therefore be avoided, while dialectical configurations between the material object of sexual interest, the sexual partner, emotional associations and heteronormative social constructions should be recognised in order to accurately describe 'fetish sexuality' and to found psycho-medical discourses and practices on sexual activity which incorporates material objects.

As will be discussed in Chapter 5, more functional bases for understanding the phenomenon of people-interacting-sexually-with-material-objects therefore lie in epistemologically prioritising the subject, rather than the fetish object, through recognising the relationship between phenomenological experience and discourse.



### 4.3 Psychiatric Diagnoses of 'Fetishism': Problematising Pathological vs Non-Pathological Practices

Psychiatric diagnosis of any kind is problematic, since it can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. As argued above, categories of 'mental illness', of which 'fetishism' forms a subset, are discursive constructs inappropriately relying on normative considerations to distinguish them from 'mental health'.

Nevertheless, people believe in the authority of psychiatry and psychology. Diagnosis as pathological by a putatively authoritative source therefore stigmatises individuals by causing them emotional distress and leading them to believe they are indeed essentially 'mentally ill'<sup>615</sup>. Similarly, negative self-esteem from diagnostic-related stigma can potentially be linked to problems such as alcoholism, drug dependence or suicide<sup>616</sup>. These concerns relate to the reliance on the putative authority of psychiatric professionals who often perpetuate normative considerations of propriety, and sell themselves as the purveyors of ((hetero)normatively defined) 'sanity'.

Further, as a regulatory and structuralising discourse, the ICD-10's diagnostic guidance for psychiatric practitioners as to when and how to determine diagnoses is as problematic as the definitions of 'fetishism'<sup>617</sup>. This is particularly so in the context of marginal (homo)sexualities, where psychology serves to legitimise, rationalise, regulate and impose disciplinary intervention to ensure heteronormative and patriarchal gender norms and sexualities<sup>618</sup>. Indeed, I suggest, the

<sup>615</sup> Reiersøl, O, and Skeid, S (2006) 'The ICD Diagnoses of Fetishism and Sadomasochism.' Co-published simultaneously in *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 50, No. 2/3, Harrington Park Press, pp. 243-262; and: Kleinplatz, P.J. and Moser, C (eds) (2006) *Sadomasochism: Powerful Pleasures* Harrington Park Press

<sup>616</sup> Reiersøl, O, and Skeid, S (2006) *ibid.* For discussion on the stigma of diagnosis see also Birchwood, M., Trower, P, Brunet, K, Gilbert, P, Iqbal, Z and Jackson, C (2007) Social anxiety and the shame of psychosis: A study in first episode psychosis. in *Behaviour Research and Therapy* Volume 45, Issue 5, May 2007, Pages 1025-1037

<sup>617</sup> See the critiques of psychology as a regulatory discourse and practice in the context of gender and sexuality supra. For example Rose, N (1989) *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*. London & New York: Routledge; Burman, E. (ed) (1990) *Feminists and Psychological Practice*. London: Sage.; Schweder, R (1990) *Cultural Psychology: Essays on Comparative Human Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Parker, I (1992) *Discourse Dynamics: Critical Analysis for Social and Individual Psychology*. London & New York, Routledge; Wilkinson, S & Kitzinger, C (eds) (1993) *Heterosexuality: a Feminism and Psychology Reader*. London: Sage; Parker, I & Speares, R (1996) *Psychology & Society: Radical Theory and Practice*. London & Chicago: Pluto Press; Burr, V (1998) *Gender and Social Psychology*. London, Routledge; Parker, I (1999) Critical psychology: critical links. In *Annual Review of Critical Psychology* Vol. 1, pp. 3-18; Kitzinger, C (1999) Lesbian and gay psychology: is it critical? In *Annual Review of Critical Psychology*, Vol. 1, pp. 50-66; Parker, I. (2004) 'Psychoanalysis and critical psychology', in D. Hook (ed.), with N. Mkhize, P. Kiguwa and A. Collins (section eds) and E. Burman and I. Parker (consulting eds) *Critical Psychology*, pp. 138-161. Cape Town: UCT Press; Painter, D. & Terre Blanche, M. & Henderson, J. (2006) Critical psychology in South Africa: Histories, themes and prospects. In *Annual Review of Critical Psychology*, 5, pp. 212-235 [www.discourseunit.com/arcps/5](http://www.discourseunit.com/arcps/5); Shefer, T & Potgieter, C-A (2006) Sexualities. In Shefer, T, Bonzaaier, F & Kiguwa, P (2006) *The Gender of Psychology*. Cape Town: UCT Press.

<sup>618</sup> See comments above, and Butler, JP (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* New York, Routledge; Sedgwick, E.K. (2005) *Axiomatic*. In Morland, I and Willox, A (2005) *Queer Theory* Palgrave MacMillan, Hampshire and New York, pp81-95 at 81. As Sedgwick notes, the idea of 'difference' incorporates

IDC-10 merely serves to codify and perpetuate these norms and sexualities.

The ICD-10's diagnostic criteria for 'fetishism' prescribe that psychopathology occurs when:

- The individual experiences recurrent sexual urges and fantasies involving unusual objects or activities;
- The individual either acts on the urges or is markedly distressed by them; and
- The preference has been present for at least 6 months<sup>619</sup>.

The Diagnostic Guidelines therefore indicate that 'fetishism' should be diagnosed only if the 'fetish object' is the most important source of sexual stimulation or essential for satisfactory sexual response<sup>620</sup>. As with its Freudian counterpart, the ICD-10 constructs fetishistic fantasies as common, and not amounting to a disorder unless they lead to rituals so compelling and 'unacceptable' as to interfere with ('normal') sexual intercourse and thereby cause the individual distress.

However, as discussed in Chapter 3 and above, categorical distinctions between 'pathological' and 'non-pathological fetishism' in the psychoanalytic literature on fetish sexuality are inappropriate since they essentialise sexual subjects and foundationalise sexual practices. Since it provides little clarity on the limits between 'pathology' and 'non-pathology', the ICD-10 does not ameliorate this concern, and indeed perpetuates it in two main areas:

- Through the requirement for 'unusual objects', the diagnostic criteria inappropriately import (hetero)normativity into the diagnostic process ; and
- In the requirement for 'distress and impairment', the diagnostic criteria rely on inappropriate (normative) circular arguments which nullify the notion of the agency of a psychological subject.

#### **4.3.1 Morally and Statistically Normative Paradigms for Diagnosis**

Rather than being descriptive of a broad population, much early input into theory on 'sexual deviation' and the resulting psychiatric diagnostic criteria were informed by anecdotal data and

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varied forms of sexuality, which are nevertheless carelessly lumped together under the heading 'sexual orientation'

<sup>619</sup> World Health Organization. (2004). *International Classification of Diseases 10* (2nd ed). Geneva: WHO. ICD-10

<sup>620</sup> World Health Organization, *ibid*

See above re the categorical problems on defining 'fetishism' in terms of the essentialised 'fetishist' and fetish object  
See Laws, D.R., O'Donohue, W.T. (2008) *Sexual deviance: theory, assessment, and treatment*. Guilford Press, 2008.  
This work, however, does not substantially re-vision the underlying identificatory or diagnostic concerns which turn the very definitions of 'fetish' or 'transvestic fetishism' on their heads. Rather, it merely identifies the difficulty in terminology and diagnosis of the psychopathologies.

methodological shortcomings, together with fictional literature and case-studies of dysfunctional individuals who were in conflict with the law<sup>621</sup>. Such underpinnings are clearly inappropriate bases for diagnosing the 'mental health' of all people, since research of a small group cannot reflect some overarching 'truth'<sup>622</sup>.

Although the *explicit* link between pathology and criminality has now been removed from psychiatric discourses, the *implicit* (normative) connection between legality and mental health often inappropriately remains in psychiatric diagnosis.

Although 'fetishism' and 'transvestic fetishism'<sup>623</sup> are not legally proscribed<sup>624</sup>, the categorical

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<sup>621</sup> Reiersøl, O, and Skeid, S (2006) The ICD Diagnoses of Fetishism and Sadomasochism." Co-published simultaneously in *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 50, No. 2/3, Harrington Park Press, pp. 243-262; and: Kleinplatz, P.J. and Moser, C (eds) (2006) *Sadomasochism: Powerful Pleasures* Harrington Park Press

<sup>622</sup> In this regard, Foucaultian conceptions of the 'Panopticon' and the policing of morality through the criminal system should be taken account of. Like other categories, criminality must not be essentialised.

<sup>623</sup> Moser, C. & Kleinplatz, P.J. (2002). Transvestic fetishism: Psychopathology or Iatrogenic Artifact? In *New Jersey Psychologist*, 52(2) 16-17pp16. Moser and Kleinplatz see 'cross-dressing' as the wearing of stereotypic clothing of the other sex, to be distinguished from '[o]btaining erotic enjoyment from the process of cross-dressing, [which] is known as transvestism"

The diagnostic guidelines specify that Transvestic Fetishism is distinguished from simple 'fetishism' in that 'fetishistic clothing items' are worn to create the appearance of a person of the opposite sex. Under usual circumstances, more than one item is worn, with a complete outfit, wig and makeup often being used. Note the assumption that the wearer is a man dressing in women's clothing, rather than the other way round. See below pertaining to heteronormativity

For an earlier exploration hereof, see Buhrich, N & McConaghy, N (1979) Three clinically discrete categories of fetishistic transvestism. In *Archives of Sexual Behavior* Volume 8, Number 2 / March, 1979, Springer Netherlands. The article discusses and justifies differentiating the clinical syndromes of marginal transvestism and fetishistic transsexualism, and concludes that there appear to be three clinically discrete types of fetishistic cross-dressing: nuclear transvestism, marginal transvestism, and fetishistic transsexualism.

See also Brown, (1983) Paraphilias. Sadomasochism, fetishism, transvestism and transsexuality. In *The British Journal of Psychiatry*. 1983; 143: 227-23

See also Freund, K, Seto, M.C. & Kuban, M (1996) Two types of fetishism. In *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, Volume 34, Issue 9, September 1996, Pages 687-694. The authors attempted to differentiate 'fetishism' proper and 'transvestism', and determine if 'transvestites' are truly 'fetishistic'. They further divided 'transvestites' into gender-conforming and gender-nonconforming as per a score on a gender identity scale. The groups were compared using a self-report scale of 'fetishistic' interests, questionnaires on childhood history, parental characteristics, and emotional closeness with parents. Further, penile responses of 'fetishists' and 'transvestites' were recorded while being presented with images of female and male pubic regions and potential 'fetish' objects such as nylon stockings, shoes, panties, underwear and feet. The report concludes that 'fetishists' and 'transvestites' did not differ on self-reported 'fetishistic' interests, childhood and family histories, nor between penile responses. The conclusion is that 'transvestites' are 'fetishistic', and are difficult to distinguish from 'fetishists'.

<sup>624</sup> In this regard, contemporary research indicates the lack of criminal tendency amongst adherents of 'fetish' and/or S/M, which militates against arbitrary (criminalising) characteristics being allowed to underpin psychiatric diagnoses. Reiersøl, O, and Skeid, S (2006) The ICD Diagnoses of Fetishism and Sadomasochism." Co-published simultaneously in *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 50, No. 2/3, Harrington Park Press, pp. 243-262; and: Kleinplatz, P.J. and Moser, C (eds) (2006) *Sadomasochism: Powerful Pleasures* Harrington Park Press, pp246 note: "Kinsey (1953) indicated that there is no reason to believe that fetishism leads to crime. Indeed, what do we know about law-abiding fetishists? In accordance with Kinsey (1953), demographic studies show that there are citizens in "good standing" who practice SM (Moser, 1995). The psychoanalyst Robert Stoller (1991) conducted an extensive interview study of SM practitioners in the 1980s. His data indicated that there is no evidence for higher prevalence crime rates, psychoses or personality disorders among SM subjects in comparison to the general population. Stoller (1991, pp. 19-20) wrote: And these people, were one to try to apply character diagnoses to them, are as varied as I expect are the readers of this book. Most of my informants are stable in employment; most are college graduates or beyond, lively in conversation, with a good sense of humor, up-to-date on politics and world events, and not more or less depressed than my social acquaintances. The fact that there are SM and fetish practitioners with psychiatric and/or criminal records does not warrant pathologizing these practices. One could pick any group with an arbitrary

assumptions and diagnoses as mental disorders which follow often stem merely from historical precedent<sup>625</sup>, as a short-cut to dealing with mental gymnastics required to distinguish the point at which 'normal' emotional unhappiness purportedly becomes 'psychical dysfunction', which is difficult to determine<sup>626</sup>.

For example, it is difficult to differentiate so-called 'transvestic fetishists' who are subjectively distressed or functionally impaired by their practices from those who are not<sup>627</sup>. Attempts to do so result in clinicians falling back on historical moralising. 'Transvestic fetishism' comes from definitions by Magnus Hirschfeld in 1910<sup>628</sup> at a time when it was illegal in many places for men to dress in women's clothing<sup>629</sup>. In 1936 Havelock Ellis referred to it as "Eonism," but did not distinguish the adherents of the practice from what some would now call "effeminate homosexuals" and those with non-normative gender identities. Kinsey refrained from investigating the practice, defining transvestism simply as 'cross-dressing'<sup>630</sup>. Things have clearly moved on<sup>631</sup>, and sexual practices that were once considered unusual and pathological, such as homosexuality, fellatio and anal sex, are now seen as 'normal'. Today there are a variety of people who 'cross-dress' (whether for explicitly sexual purposes or not), including 'drag-queens' and 'drag-kings', 'transgendered', 'transsexual' and 'transvestite' people, 'she-males' and female impersonators (or 'gender illusionists')<sup>632</sup>. Not to mention heterosexual men attending costume parties such as the Mother City Queer Project<sup>633</sup>. Few of these people are

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characteristic and, provided that the sample is big enough, find psychiatric and criminal cases among them."

<sup>625</sup> Moser, C. & Kleinplatz, P.J. (2002). Transvestic fetishism: Psychopathology or Iatrogenic Artifact? In *New Jersey Psychologist*, 52(2) 16-17pp16. Moser and Kleinplatz argue convincingly that there is no objective support in the literature for believing that it arises from psychopathology

<sup>626</sup> See Bonnet, G (2002) Pour une nouvelle classification des perversions sexuelles. In *Evolutionary Psychiatry* 2002 ; 67 : 496-505, pp498 notes that classifications historically don't take account of the distinctions between 'perverse symptoms' and 'perversion' (i.e.between perversion in the structural sense of the term and problematic perversion), nor between perversions that hardly pose a problem and those that are really dangerous. He does not, however, dismantle the idea of classifications.

<sup>627</sup> Wheeler, J, Newring, KAB & Draper, C (2008) Transvestic fetishism, psychopathology and theory. In Laws, D.R., O'Donohue, W.T. (2008) *Sexual deviance: theory, assessment, and treatment*. Guilford Press, 2008 at pp 273 et seq.

<sup>628</sup> See Bullough, V.L., & Bullough, B (1977). *Sin, Sickness and Sanity*. New York: New American Library.

<sup>629</sup> until the advent of democracy in South Africa it was illegal for men to appear in public in women's clothing, through the Prohibition of Disguises Act 16 of 1969 and its common-law precursors. For an overview of laws relating to sexual orientation in South Africa before democracy See Cameron, E (1994) Unapprehended Felons. In Gevisser, M & Cameron, E (eds) (1994) *Defiant Desire, Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa* Ravan Press, 89-98

<sup>630</sup> See Gebhard, P.H., & Johnson, A.B. (1979). *The Kinsey data: Marginal tabulations of the 1938-1963 interviews conducted by the Institute for Sex Research*. Philadelphia, PA: W. B. Saunders Company; see also Kinsey, A.C., Pomeroy, W.C., Martin, C.E., & Gebhard, P.H. (1953). *Sexual behavior in the human female*. Philadelphia, PA: W. B. Saunders Company. And Moser, C. & Kleinplatz, P.J. (2002) *ibid* pp16

<sup>631</sup> See Benjamin, H. (1966). *The transsexual phenomenon*. New York: Julian Press. Benjamin referred to a continuum between cross-dressers for erotic reasons and people expressing an unusual gender identity (e.g. Transgender).

<sup>632</sup> Moser, C. & Kleinplatz, P.J. (2002). Transvestic fetishism: Psychopathology or Iatrogenic Artifact? In *New Jersey Psychologist*, 52(2) 16-17 pp16. Note that these appellations are not intended to essentialise any identity categories, but are merely called on for ease of reference

<sup>633</sup> A 'queer' party held in Cape Town once a year which attracts a range of people

diagnosable with a psychopathology or markedly disturbed by their dressing habits, although they may be emotionally dysfunctional on other bases.

Yet, whereas diagnostic clarity has progressed for other 'disorders', it has not for 'fetishism'<sup>634</sup>. 'Transvestic fetishists' and 'fetishists' are still pathologised both discursively and through the diagnostic criteria in the ICD-10, particularly through the criterion of 'unusual objects and desires'<sup>635</sup>. Moral and statistical judgements are thereby terminologically conflated, since 'unusual' can refer either to moral definitions of 'weird or bizarre' or statistical conceptions of 'rare and uncommon'. Either way, 'unusual' problematically relies on an inherent normative basis for diagnosing 'fetishism' in ways akin to the discredited arbitrary criminal profiling of 'types' of people on the basis of race, gender and sexuality. This nullifies the diagnostic standards *in toto*, since it is unacceptable to reference morality in diagnosis, and further inappropriate to call on statistical norms to gauge psychical functionality.

#### 4.3.1a) Moral Judgments: Diagnostic Links between Heteronormativity and Psychopathology

It is well documented that psychiatry and psychology (and medicine more broadly) have a long history of diagnosing psychopathology on the basis of dominant constructions of moral reasoning, amongst which diagnosing homosexuality as a mental illness is just one example<sup>636</sup>. Notwithstanding strong poststructuralist arguments against it, homophobia persists

<sup>634</sup> Reiersøl, O, and Skeid, S (2006) The ICD Diagnoses of Fetishism and Sadomasochism." Co-published simultaneously in *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 50, No. 2/3, Harrington Park Press, pp. 243-262; and: Kleinplatz, P.J. and Moser, C (eds) (2006) *Sadomasochism: Powerful Pleasures* Harrington Park Press pp249 "For example, the categories of neuroses and psychoses have been substantially refined over time. Surprisingly, the revision of *ICD-10* omitted *ICD-9*'s suggestion that "It is preferable not to include in this category individuals who perform deviant sexual acts when normal sexual outlets are not available to them" (WHO, 1978, p. 40).

<sup>635</sup> Reiersøl, O, and Skeid, S (2006) The ICD Diagnoses of Fetishism and Sadomasochism." Co-published simultaneously in *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 50, No. 2/3, Harrington Park Press, pp. 243-262; and: Kleinplatz, P.J. and Moser, C (eds) (2006) *Sadomasochism: Powerful Pleasures* Harrington Park Press  
See also Moser, C. & Kleinplatz, P.J. (2002). Transvestic fetishism: Psychopathology or Iatrogenic Artifact? In *New Jersey Psychologist*, 52(2) 16-17 pp16. They note that the "cross-cultural (Ford, C.S., & Beach, F.A. (1951) *Patterns of Sexual Behavior*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers.) and trans-historical (Bullough, V.L., & Bullough, B (1977). *Sin, Sickness and Sanity*. New York: New American Library.) records indicate that cross-dressing is not rare. However, whether erotic arousal from cross-dressing exists cross-culturally and trans-historically is much more difficult to ascertain". Note that it is more difficult to ascertain the historical incidence of 'fetishism' in a cross-cultural context.

<sup>636</sup> See Shorter, E. (1997). *A History of Psychiatry*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Inc  
See also See for example Rose, N (1989) *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*. London & New York: Routledge; Burman, E. (ed) (1990) *Feminists and Psychological Practice*. London: Sage.; Schweder, R (1990) *Cultural Psychology: Essays on Comparative Human Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Parker, I (1992) *Discourse Dynamics: Critical Analysis for Social and Individual Psychology*. London & New York, Routledge; Wilkinson, S & Kitzinger, C (eds) (1993) *Heterosexuality: a Feminism and Psychology Reader*. London: Sage; Parker, I & Speares, R (1996) *Psychology & Society: Radical Theory and Practice*. London & Chicago: Pluto Press; Burr, V (1998) *Gender and Social Psychology*. London, Routledge; Parker, I (1999) Critical psychology: critical links. In *Annual Review of Critical Psychology* Vol. 1, pp. 3-18; Kitzinger, C (1999) Lesbian and gay psychology: is it critical? In *Annual Review of Critical Psychology*, Vol. 1, pp. 50-66; Painter, D. & Terre Blanche, M. & Henderson, J. (2006) Critical psychology in South Africa: Histories, themes and prospects. In *Annual Review of Critical Psychology*, 5, pp. 212-235 [www.discourseunit.com/arcp/5](http://www.discourseunit.com/arcp/5) Shefer, T & Potgieter, C-A (2006) Sexualities. In Shefer, T, Bonzaaier, F & Kiguwa, P (2006) *The Gender of Psychology*. Cape

among medical professionals, which is evident in the research participants' narratives<sup>637</sup>. Through Foucaultian conceptions of surveillance<sup>638</sup>, this kind of moralising feeds into dominant heteronormative discourses which reject unusual sexual interests, pathologising 'perversions'<sup>639</sup>.

It also feeds into the participants' desire to hide their 'fetish' interests:

“I never never, never spoke to anyone about my fetishes. Because you're the first person I'm actually talking to about fetishes.” ('Henry')

Or at least not to broadcast their unusual sexual interests to all and sundry:

“...I'm not scared to talk about it and tell people. But I must re-iterate again, it's part of coming out so late in my life. And you say 'oh, you're gay' and I joke and say 'well, I'm not bisexual, I'm trisexual: I'll try anything'. I joke. And I'm not scared to tell them I'm into leather. I'm not hiding it anymore. *I'm not completely open (my italics)* Whenever I can get a chance to wear leather, I do. If it's slightly overcast I put on leather pants and wear them for the day. I do enjoy that. But I don't hide it specifically” ('Jared').

This reticence to 'come out' is further informed by internalised senses of shame and guilt about fetish desires and practices:

“... worse than coming out was the dismantling of all that we were told were not only bad but pathological. Who could like shit? Who could like being pissed on, tied up, and beaten? But I was lucky to immerse myself in a world (San Francisco's South of Market district) where I was insulated from these thoughts by an organised and (generally) supportive BDSM community.” ('Joseph')

“I suppose in the beginning it used to be and feel strange for me to experiment with myself, so there used to be a fair amount of shame. I think it's just simply a case of me having known that what I was doing with myself, to myself and what I was shoving into myself, wasn't normal. It soon became par for the course after admitting to myself that I really enjoyed it all – and here I am, partaking in this study, a cool lifetime later.” ('Jason')

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Town: UCT Press.

<sup>637</sup> See Addendum 3

<sup>638</sup> See Foucault, M. (1990a). *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1. An introduction*. New York: Penguin Blackwell. Foucault, M. (1991). *Discipline and Punish*. London: Tavistock. Pp192. Foucault notes that “individualisation is descending, as power becomes more anonymous and more functional, those on whom it is exercised tend to be more strongly individualised; it is exercised through surveillance rather than ceremonies, by observation rather than commemorative accounts, by comparative measures that have the norm as reference.”

<sup>639</sup> For example, see Bowman, B (2005) *Children, Pathology and Politics: Genealogical Perspectives on the Construction of the Paedophile in South Africa*. PhD Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. See later re arguments around consensuality and non-consensuality as descriptions of sexuality.

“...I started accepting my desires more and more and then met my second boyfriend who, when I pulled out some rubber gloves during sex one night, stood up and said “I don’t do things like that” with a look of such disdain on his face. I then hid my fetish from him to the detriment of our relationship until he finally after 3 years was willing to start communicating about it and even exploring it with me. Through a number of years I came to accept this is who I am and what I like. It was almost like coming out as being gay all over again and a wonderful sense of peace came over me when I finally accepted and acknowledged myself.” (Simon')

Their fear of judgment links into dominant heteronormative discourses of 'propriety' which feed both the insecurity of participants and the discursive homo- and 'fetish'-phobia of South African society<sup>640</sup> and the psychiatric community more narrowly.

Even though mental illness is no longer evidenced by sexual orientation, and it is no longer acceptable for therapists to try to 'cure' homosexuality, implicit (hetero)normative judgements on which forms of sexuality are appropriate and which are not are liable to infiltrate the processes of diagnosing such psychiatric categories as 'fetishism'<sup>641</sup>. Diagnoses of pathology are therefore unfortunately often implicitly incorporated into diagnoses of 'fetishism' before such diagnosis even occurs. As the recent Consultation note put out by the Lesbian and Gay Psychology Section of the British Psychological Society states:

“It is likely that consensual sexualities beyond being homosexual, heterosexual or bisexual - such as sadomasochism or having multiple partners - are considered by some mental health professionals to be attendant evidence of psychopathology.”<sup>642</sup>

The (hetero)normative tendencies of clinicians are merely supported by the diagnostic guidelines of 'fetishism' which are infiltrated with normative heteropatriarchal associations, potentially leading clinicians, who call on their power to decide which problems are treatment targets, to encourage 'fetishists' to desist from 'abnormal' behaviour. This perpetuates normative assumptions around which sexual practices are appropriate and which are not.

Unfortunately the ICD diagnostic criteria do not take this into account, merely propping up heteropatriarchy, both implicitly and explicitly.

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<sup>640</sup> See chapter 2 and the Interjection in regard homophobia in South Africa

<sup>641</sup> See Richards, C (2007) *Consultation on the Mental Health Act 2007 Code of Practice*. British Psychological Society – Lesbian and Gay Psychology Section. Incorporating moral proscriptions into the diagnosis of mood disorders can be seen in the UK in the report on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual mental health put out by The National Association for Mental Health. The report notes that “18% of gay men, 18% of lesbians, 33% of bisexual men and 13% of bisexual women who had seen a mental health professional for emotional difficulties stated that they had been told that their sexuality was the root of their problems”. See King, M., & McKeown, E. (2003). *Mental health and wellbeing of gay men, lesbians and bisexuals in England and Wales*. London: Mind. p.44

<sup>642</sup> Richards, C (2007) *ibid*

#### 4.3.1a)i. Implicit (Hetero)Normativity

I suggest that the ICD-10 guidelines on diagnosis should be revisited, since they inadvertently pathologise any non-normative forms of sexuality simply because they do not conform to heteronormative discourses of what sexuality is and 'should be'. They do this in three main ways.

Firstly, the distinction between 'fetishism' and 'transvestic fetishism' is problematic since it inappropriately assumes that 'fetishists' are somehow essentially different to 'transvestic fetishists'. This implies that the diagnostic criteria for each should somehow be different from the other, although this distinction is not specified or described. It therefore leads clinicians to rely on dominant heteropatriarchal constructions which assume that (heterosexual) men who want to dress in 'female clothing' are somehow 'sick'<sup>643</sup>. Following from this, 'transvestic fetishists' are therefore discursively assumed to be heterosexual men, despite that, as Moser and Kleinplatz note, "cross-dressers...are virtually indistinguishable from non-cross-dressers."<sup>644</sup> This makes it unlikely for (heterosexual or homosexual) women and homosexual men to be diagnosed<sup>645</sup>. Similarly, 'fetishism', following Freudian constructions, is also assumed to be limited almost exclusively to (heterosexual) men<sup>646</sup>. This reflects that diagnosis relies on the cultural context in which the diagnostic process is located, and in South Africa heteropatriarchal conceptions of masculinity and sexual normativity are rigidly policed<sup>647</sup>.

The second and third concerns on heteronormativity are apparent in 'fetishistic fantasies' being seen as "common, but not amounting to a disorder unless they lead to rituals that are so compelling and unacceptable as to interfere with intercourse and cause the individual distress"<sup>648</sup>.

<sup>643</sup> And since women, homosexual men and lesbians are discursively invisible, the assumption is that 'cross-dressers' are heterosexual men

<sup>644</sup> See Moser, C. & Kleinplatz, P.J. (2002). Transvestic fetishism: Psychopathology or Iatrogenic Artifact? In *New Jersey Psychologist*, 52(2) 16-17 pp16 et seq. Referring to Brown, G.R., Wise, T.N., Costa, P.T., Herbst, J.H., Fagan, P.J., & Schmidt, C.W. (1996). Personality Characteristics and Sexual Functioning of 188 Cross-Dressing Men. In *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disorders* 184, 265-273. They also note the importance of this statement, given that Wise and Schmidt were members of the DSM-IV-TR (2000) Sexual and Gender Identity Disorders Text Revision Work Group, (i.e., the committee responsible for revising this section of the DSM).

<sup>645</sup> None of the present participants indicate an interest in cross-dressing, which opens avenues for more research on the intersections between gay men, fetish and constructs of masculinity beyond the definitional issues around fetish identified above. One question is how normative masculinities in gay male fetish subcultures intersect with heteronormative constructs of masculinity in broader society

<sup>646</sup> See chapter 3

<sup>647</sup> See Morrell, R (2002) Men, Movements, and Gender Transformation in South Africa. In *The Journal of Men's Studies*, Volume 10, Number 3 / Spring 2002 Men's Studies Press; Reid, G, Walker, L (2005) *Men behaving differently*, Juta and Company Limited; Walker, L (2005) Men behaving differently: South African men since 1994. In *Culture, Health & Sexuality: An International Journal for Research, Intervention and Care*, 1464-5351, Volume 7, Issue 3, 2005, Pages 225 – 238; Lemon, J (1995) Masculinity in Crisis? In *Agenda*, No. 24, Monitoring the Changes (1995), pp. 61-71

<sup>648</sup> (my italics) See ICD- WHO, 1993, p. 218 and Reiersøl, O, and Skeid, S (2006) The ICD Diagnoses of Fetishism and



The second concern lies in the guidelines' specification that rituals should be 'compelling and unacceptable', which assumes (heteronormatively) that fetishists cannot undertake sexual activity *without* the 'fetish object'. This seems overly judgmental of 'fetish sexuality', while failing to use similar arguments in other areas of sexuality. More importantly, it fails to recognise sexual diversity which encompasses a wide range of human behaviour whereby virtually anything can have erotic associations<sup>649</sup>. Most heterosexual people do not have sex with either same-sex or what they see as 'unattractive' partners, which is often framed as their being 'unable' to do so. Yet their predilections are not pathologised, since they conform to heteropatriarchal norms<sup>650</sup>. Failing to approach 'fetish sexuality' in the same way indicates a discursive prioritising of heteropatriarchal norms, and an *a priori* pathologising of non-normative behaviour<sup>651</sup>.

The third concern lies in the guidelines' problematic priority of 'intercourse', which implies a heteropatriarchal focus on procreatively-aimed sexuality, or a facsimile thereof in goal-directed ('orgasmic') human-human (penetrative) sexual relations. As Martins and Ceccarelli argue, 'deviancy' appears still to be connected to normative conceptions of sexuality, based on (hetero)sexual activity being seen as the most important biological function, defined by genital penetration with the intention of procreation<sup>652</sup>. This conflicts with post-structuralist and queer conceptions of the functions and roles of sexuality as desire-driven rather than goal-oriented<sup>653</sup>. Further, 'normality' is culturally and socially defined, and notions of 'pathological', 'normal' and 'healthy' are regularly questioned by professionals in sexualities scholarship who agree that sexuality and procreation are not inherently connected<sup>654</sup>.

Non-conventional sexual practices should therefore not be used indicate a diagnosis, since people with specific unusual sexual preferences are only distinguished from others by these practices and not by any essential differences<sup>655</sup>. Diagnostic criteria for emotional dysfunction (as opposed to

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Sadomasochism." Co-published simultaneously in *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 50, No. 2/3, Harrington Park Press, pp. 243-262; and: Kleinplatz, P.J. and Moser, C (eds) (2006) *Sadomasochism: Powerful Pleasures* Harrington Park Press

<sup>649</sup> Moser, C (2006) *Sexuality, Reproduction and Menopause*, Volume 4, Issue 2, Pages 86-90

<sup>650</sup> Moser, C. & Kleinplatz, P.J. (2002). Transvestic fetishism: Psychopathology or Iatrogenic Artifact? In *New Jersey Psychologist*, 52(2) 16-17 pp16 et seq

<sup>651</sup> See argument above in terms of categorising 'fetishism'

<sup>652</sup> Martins, MC & Ceccarelli, PR, The So-Called "Deviant" Sexualities: perversion or Right to Difference? <http://www.reviseF65.org/cuba1.html> presented at the 16th World Congress of Sexology in Cuba in March, 2003. The study explores human sexuality in diverse variations like BDSM (bondage/discipline, dominance/submission and sadism/masochism) and fetishism in Brazilian society.

<sup>653</sup> See chapter 2

<sup>654</sup> Martins, MC & Ceccarelli, PR, The So-Called "Deviant" Sexualities: perversion or Right to Difference? <http://www.reviseF65.org/cuba1.html> presented at the 16th World Congress of Sexology in Cuba in March, 2003. The study explores human sexuality in diverse variations like BDSM (bondage/discipline, dominance/submission and sadism/masochism) and fetishism in Brazilian society.

<sup>655</sup> Martins, MC & Ceccarelli, PR, *ibid*

psychopathology, which, as argued above, is inappropriate) should therefore take account of implicit moralising, since clinicians are likely either explicitly to be homophobic or implicitly to prioritise heteronormativity.

#### 4.3.1a)ii. Statistical (Hetero)Norms

Since they are often schooled in empirical theory<sup>656</sup>, clinicians may automatically rely on statistical comparisons in the diagnostic process, thinking that such comparisons are 'value-neutral' since they purport to presume a level playing field and an absence of moralising.

However, marginalisation takes place even before subjects come into contact with the community of psychologists/psychiatrists. Moral judgement is often politically hidden under statistical norms which, by definition, marginalise minorities<sup>657</sup> through an insufficient focus on “subjective erotic arousal experienced during sexual acts”, whereby “it is easier to observe behavior than to discern individual motivation”<sup>658</sup>.

Activity should not be pathologised simply because it is statistically unusual, and both clinical practice and psychiatric diagnostic guidelines should recognise that the very fact of statistical classification means discursively and arbitrarily to create norms through the choice of what to prioritise, and what to count as statistical comparison-points<sup>659</sup>. Such references are inappropriate, since they assume that psychical concerns of the majority are in some way objectively and essentially different to and more compelling than those of the minority<sup>660</sup>. It is inappropriate in societies that value freedom to pathologise the unusual on

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<sup>656</sup> For an overview of psychology, see Goodwin, C.J. (1999) *A History of Modern Psychology (second ed)* John Wiley and Sons; Feigl, H & Scriven, M (2009) *The Foundations of Science and the Concepts of Psychology and Psychoanalysis*. University of Minnesota Press

See also Bickhard, MH & Campbell, RL (2005) New Ideas in Psychology. In *New Ideas in Psychology, Volume 23, Issue 1, April 2005*, Pages 1-4 pp1: In many places operationalist rhetoric is still taught to students with little in the way of alternative conceptions of theory and little guidance on examining or exploring theoretical possibilities

<sup>657</sup> See chapter 2 about the benefits of queerness as approach to political location. In this regard, statistical comparisons are inappropriate since they seek to acknowledge citizenship on a rights-basis, which is implicitly an empirical and statistical basis. Further on issues of statistical representation, See Sheikh, A (2002) Why Are Ethnic Minorities Under-Represented in US Research Studies? In *PLoS Medicine*, February 2006, Volume 3, Issue 2 pp 49, from [www.plosmedicine.org](http://www.plosmedicine.org); Concannon, L (2008) Citizenship, sexual identity and social exclusion: Exploring issues in British and American social policy. In *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 2008 Volume: 28 Issue: 9/10 p326 – 339. Concannon argues that there is institutional hostility towards LGBT people, through policy-making that characterises difference as abnormal, inferior, of less worth and problematic. He calls on Queer theory to challenge and transform LGBT social exclusion by contributing to the rise in new forms of citizenship.

<sup>658</sup> Moser, C. & Kleinplatz, P.J. (2002). Transvestic fetishism: Psychopathology or Iatrogenic Artifact? In *New Jersey Psychologist*, 52(2) 16-17 pp16

<sup>659</sup> For example, a clinician who deals with a homosexual subject as a member of a minority, even if not being morally judgemental, assumes that homosexuality is somehow different to heterosexuality, which imports qualitative assumptions. In this regard, see Chapter 2 about the problems with identity politics and marginality

<sup>660</sup> It is important to acknowledge that some people might feel psychical discomfort because they are a member of a minority. Here, the clinician should deal with the feelings of alienation, not the minority-status of the subject

normative bases, if there is no interference with the others' enjoyment of life. And further, variety in sexuality is no longer statistically highly unusual in diverse societies, and should not be seen as by-definition dysfunctional where it does not conform to statistical norms.

Therefore processes employed in managing emotional concerns pertaining to sexuality should reflect non-(hetero)normative discourses on what sexuality is and what it 'should be'. And psychical subjects should not be compared to any kind of norms, whether moral or statistical.

Instead, I suggest, clinicians should rather try to help patients deal with discomfort and pain related to underlying emotional issues<sup>661</sup>. In so doing they should assist subjects, as complex individuals, to become more functional on their own terms, and should only be encouraged to find their own subjective sense of well-being, by exploring and dealing with their *subjectively understood* distress or impairment.

#### **4.3.2 Distress and Impairment: Effacing Agency**

Both the ICD and the DSM specify that in order to qualify as a sexual disorder, a sexual 'fetish' interest must result in distress or impairment, meaning that two criteria must be met:<sup>662</sup>

- recurrent, intense sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors must take place over a six month period; and
- The fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviours must cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other areas of functioning.<sup>663</sup>

On the face of it, this is not necessarily inappropriate. Yet, I suggest, the diagnostic criteria misclassify distress and impairment on two levels. Firstly, they call on circular arguments to define distress/impairment, which renders the distress/compulsion criterion nugatory. Secondly, they inappropriately import compulsion into diagnosing distress/impairment, which negates psychical agency in 'fetish' practices.

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<sup>661</sup> See Moser, C. & Kleinplatz, P.J. (2002). Transvestic fetishism: Psychopathology or Iatrogenic Artifact? In *New Jersey Psychologist*, 52(2) 16-17

<sup>662</sup> See Moser and Kleinplatz *ibid* in respect of transvestic fetishism

<sup>663</sup> American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders 4-TR*. Washington DC: APA., p.575. The case is substantially similar in the ICD

#### 4.3.2a) Distress/Impairment: Circular Arguments

A condition is intended to be diagnosed only when the patient is thereby effectively disabled, whether socially or occupationally<sup>664</sup>. On the face of it, this implies a purely subjective exploration of the subject's functionality.

However, this diagnostic requirement fails to account for three main issues: inbuilt normative assumptions as to

- the existence of distress/impairment;
- the extent of distress/impairment; and
- the point at which distress/impairment becomes unmanageable.

Firstly, circular arguments assuming 'fetish practices' to be inherently distressing/impairing are often called on to diagnose the distress/impairment diagnostic element of 'fetishism'. Clinicians faced with a subject who acknowledges a predilection for sexual activity incorporating material objects often (heteronormatively) assume that 'fetishism' is inherently pathological. They thereby assume a pre-existing pathology which takes hold of an individual, causing dysfunction from which he/she should putatively be 'cured' through diagnosis and treatment.

'Fetish', however, is not inherently distressing or impairing. To the contrary, the participants, for example, often obtain a subjective sense of positive benefit from their 'fetish sexuality', taking pride in having moved beyond normative constraints<sup>665</sup>:

“I feel good about it... to sort of know that because you've grown from the mindset where you've been told that 'this is bad, this is bad, don't touch there, this is only supposed to be for certain things... and you realise that what you're taught is not necessarily what is true, what you have to live your life by. And you can have an open mind about your fetishes, and you can sort of live the now, just let it be. Um, it makes you feel empowered, you're expressing who you really are” ('Brian')

“I think it gives me a great satisfaction... in that I can, like, face the world, and I don't have to step back or anything like that. I can be me. I can be me and my fantasies can be me too.” ('Henry')

“Yes, most definitely. I feel more and more liberated and confident in myself, less insecure about my sexual performance and a helluva lot more potent, virile and, well, just plain butch. LOL!” ('Jason')

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<sup>664</sup> See Richards, C. (2007). Diagnosis under fire. In *The Psychologist*, 20 (7), p.413

<sup>665</sup> even though they may be hesitant to express it in broader forum

“Absolutely again. Important to my self-image is my need to feel completely accepting of every part of me; not to segregate my sexual experiences from my social or emotional experiences. It tends help me side-step the easy answer, not only in regards to sex but in all walks of life. To understand what drives me or holds me back emotionally, and what perhaps drive others or hold them back. I rarely have answers for the latter, but it at least helps me to look a little deeper than I might otherwise.” (Joseph)

“Definitely, through my voyage of accepting my fetish, I’ve grown and developed in many facets of my person.” (Simon)

Secondly, even in the absence of assumptions that 'fetish' is inherently distressing, clinicians are likely, on heteropatriarchal bases, to assume that sexual matters are more distressing or impairing, and therefore are more justified in pathology, than non-sexual issues<sup>666</sup>. This, I suggest, is inappropriate, since it ignores life concerns other than the putative 'psychopathology', such as bankruptcy or physical disability, which might cause psychological disturbance or dysfunction.

Further, clinicians are likely inappropriately to assume that 'ordinary' intercourse itself does not result in ‘distress’<sup>667</sup>, and that the distress or dysfunction of non-paraphilic (i.e. normophilic) people is more likely to result from a paucity of supporting partners (for example through being overweight, poor or unattractive) than a (purportedly inappropriate) relation with material objects<sup>668</sup>.

Thirdly, the ICD does not specify the point at which manageable unhappiness becomes distressing/impairing<sup>669</sup>. In a circular fashion, the criterion uses the assumption of inherent distress as the criterion for determining the point at which distress occurs. In this regard, the motive underlying 'fetishism' can change and sexual arousal may dissolve, whereby 'the fetish' “becomes an antidote for anxiety or depression or contributes to a sense of peace and calm”<sup>670</sup>.

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<sup>666</sup> See chapter 2 and the Interjection

<sup>667</sup> Reiersøl, O, and Skeid, S (2006) The ICD Diagnoses of Fetishism and Sadomasochism.” Co-published simultaneously in *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 50, No. 2/3, Harrington Park Press, pp. 243-262; and: Kleinplatz, P.J. and Moser, C (eds) (2006) *Sadomasochism: Powerful Pleasures* Harrington Park Press

<sup>668</sup> Moser, C. & Kleinplatz, P.J. (2002). Transvestic fetishism: Psychopathology or Iatrogenic Artifact? In *New Jersey Psychologist*, 52(2) 16-17

Similarly, when (normophilic) women and minorities who are subject to discrimination are seldom diagnosed as suffering from a psychopathology simply because they may find difficulties garnering support or acceptance amongst sexual partners

<sup>669</sup> See argument supra re the assumed mutual exclusivity of 'pathology' and 'non-pathology'

<sup>670</sup> American Psychiatric Association. (2000). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders 4-TR. Washington DC: APA., p. 574-5

This is borne out by the participant perspectives:

“[I see fetish objects as] tools, fun toys,... I see them often as a necessity of... you need those toys to have fun, to create your universe. And then other times you don't need those items. Where the ... my fetishes evolve all the time, and I won't revert back to the same ones necessarily every time I play. They change... and one of my biggest fears... of being boring. I hate being boring or predictable. That's why my fetishes for me changes all the time. They are definitely a part of me.” (Jacques')

To the contrary, 'fetish sex' is often adaptive, not distressing, and is therefore itself a coping skill:

“... release, most people, they get bored. Most people like to play around, and people open up to ... people would open up and discuss their fetishes, and it's a way of keeping their own sex-life alive, and even coping with things, getting things out of their system. Pain, pain can be a fetish. A lot of people use pain as a method of dealing with things and coping with things.” (Jacques')

Clearly, there is no reason to abandon effective coping skills, yet prioritising certain adaptive behaviours over others is illogical when not compared to the effectiveness of such behaviours on a case-by-case basis<sup>671</sup>.

Clearly, since the current diagnostic criteria for 'distress/impairment' are based on circular arguments and are therefore uncontextualised, the diagnostic criteria for 'fetishism' are unhelpful. This is exacerbated by compulsion being inappropriately imported into diagnostic standards.

#### 4.3.2b) *Distress/Impairment, Compulsion and Agency*

As discussed above, 'fetishism' is defined as an *a priori* psychopathology. This results in the assumption that, unlike heterosexual coitus and masturbation, 'fetishism' is inherently compulsive, and inevitably results in distress and impairment. In turn, the onus of refuting these assumptions lies implicitly on the subject, even though he/she is implicitly denied the agency to do so.

However, for many homosexual and heterosexual adults, 'perversions' like fetishism and sadomasochism do not provoke conflict since they are not compulsive or exclusive conditions for pleasure. In the case of those for whom such practices are the only access to sex, the desires may simply be symptomatic<sup>672</sup>.

<sup>671</sup> Moser, C. & Kleinplatz, P.J. (2002). Transvestic fetishism: Psychopathology or Iatrogenic Artifact? In *New Jersey Psychologist*, 52(2) 16-17

<sup>672</sup> See in particular *Joyce McDougall and the concept of "Neo-Sexuality" in McDougall, Joyce (1997). Las Múltiplas Faces De Eros*. Martins Fontes, SP, 2001, pp 186, 188, 192, p 186

For some participants, 'fetish' features as a more or less constant undercurrent with no real effect on their daily life:

“...I'm not influenced by ['fetish'], but I do constantly think about it, and do go on the internet at night, and I'm surfing the shops that sell rubber and leather, and I look at those kinds of things, and it turns me on just by looking at the pictures. But I'm not really driven by it. But I think I have quite a high sexual desire, and it's not very far away from my thoughts. If I see a pretty boy walking down the street or I see a man in leathers I'll follow him through the supermarket” ('Jared')

For others, 'fetish' has the potential to get in the way of their lives, and at certain times it does:

“...I live a balanced life in general. Too much of anything can be a problem. However, if you do not take care, it can become an obsession or addiction. I know guys who are obsessed with it.” ('Donald')

“Only when I use sex to avoid emotional issues or problems. I will often tell my partner, “Lets get some guy or guys and organize a scene,” just to avoid a problem. It's rarely satisfying and often goes on longer than reasonable.” ('Joseph')

“Sadly yes. I am in a long-term relationship at present but my partner does not share my fetishes. There are certain overlapping elements, but every day, as my interest gains momentum, the chasm between us seems to grow bigger. I often have to be more than discrete about my whereabouts even though we have discussed this at length and I have his “permission” to fulfill my wants and needs.” ('Jason')

For others, however, 'fetish' is a potentially creative and motivating, rather than inhibiting force, and therefore is aspirational:

“ja, it'll occupy your mind, the obsession will drive you to become better at what you do, better at what you like. I don't see it as a negative thing... it can become controlling, that you spend all your time thinking about sex, which is not a bad thing! (laughter) but it's a good thing, it makes me grow as a person, it makes me grow as an entity. It makes me want to explore and exploring more things and more avenues. That obsession would be me being driven enough to reach places, to reach atmospheres that I've never been before. So I think to become an obsession, I see it as drive, to be driven.” ('Jacques')

'Fetish' is therefore clearly not a static orientation to objects true to all 'fetishists' or to each one over time, but, I suggest, is a dialectical relationship which most often does *not* result in compulsion, but rather shifts and changes both form and meaning in the context of the subject's ongoing life<sup>673</sup>.

Following from this, the ICD diagnostic assumption that distress and impairment is inherently linked to compulsion leads to an assumption that 'fetishism' is inherently dysfunctional and that

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<sup>673</sup> See chapter 6 re 'orientations'

'fetishist' subjects (defined as *a priori* psychopathological<sup>674</sup>) have no choice in their practices in that they are irretrievably and irremediably diagnosable as psychopathological.

Yet at the same time it provides the caveat of 'non-pathological fetishism' which serves as the rebuttal to the accusation of being an *a priori* 'fetishist'. This creates an interesting Escherian theoretical conundrum<sup>675</sup>: how can someone presumed to be without agency muster the agency to demonstrate that they *have* agency and are therefore not a 'fetishist'? By implication they cannot, and need an external psychiatric diagnosis to free them of the weight of psychopathology, whereafter they can be acknowledged to express their agency<sup>676</sup>. This in turn, I suggest, negates the idea of anyone having any *inherent* agency.

However, in contradistinction to this assumption, many participants in the present research see their 'fetish interests' as a choice, without the 'assistance' of a clinician.

“No, not a lifestyle, rather a frame of mind. [A] choice, as I can switch it off.” (Donald')

“an interest. I think of it more as an interest than a lifestyle.... I don't feel driven towards it... I'd like to explore it. I mean...” (Henry')

“The desire to explore my fetish sexuality compels me to explore it by choice. I could choose to only have vanilla sex or abstain, just as anyone else. I chose this lifestyle and therefore feel compelled to honour my decision.” (Jason')

They therefore patently exercise the agency implicitly negated/downplayed by the ICD-10<sup>677</sup>.

Further, describing 'fetishism' as something categorisable and psychopathologisable implies that it is a 'condition' which exists from birth onwards and never shifts<sup>678</sup>. This is not the case:

“...For my part, I felt a compulsion to explore it in my youth. I was driven in a way that was again disproportionate to the time I allotted other activities or relationships. Now, it's a little of both. While at times, I do think that it's about recapturing the physical and emotional experiences I had when first exploring various BDSM activities. Which is why I tend to push some of these fetishes more to the so-called “edge” – not to prove anything other than my body can still feel something new.” (Joseph')

This is not to imply that there is no emotional trauma in these participants' lives, or that they are not

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<sup>674</sup> See above

<sup>675</sup> Graphic artist Maurits Cornelis Escher (1898-1972), who created fascinating images of physical spaces which turn in on themselves and could never exist in the material world. See <http://www.mcescher.com>

<sup>676</sup> See chapter 3

<sup>677</sup> See chapter 6

<sup>678</sup> And links into the notion that psychical activity is based on an inevitable 'lack'. See Chapter 3



beset by problems such as compulsive/addictive behaviour or psychological trauma. Rather, however, it implies that their 'fetish sexuality' is made up of more than simple and irrepressible compulsion, and cannot easily be diagnosed as psychopathological on the basis of their 'distress' or 'impairment', which may shift and change.

Clearly, therefore, diagnosing 'fetishism' as per the ICD diagnostic standards provides little clarity on which circumstances constitute pathology and which not. More damningly, to do so inappropriately imports both moral and statistical (hetero)normativity into the diagnostic process through its requirement for subjects to be attached to 'unusual objects'. Further, the diagnostic criteria's reliance on 'distress and impairment' is based on inappropriate (normative) circular arguments relating to prior assumptions of pathology and psychological addiction/compulsion, which nullify the notion of the agency of a psychological subject.

All concerns such as addiction and/or compulsion should therefore be dealt with separately to 'fetish', and none should be psychopathologised<sup>679</sup>.

This means that the ICD's diagnostic criteria do not serve to *describe* the complexity of subjective human psychological states and the multiple and complex ways in which people process their emotions or understand their practices. Instead, the criteria inappropriately serve normatively to *prescribe* sexual activity, thereby inappropriately perpetuating dominant (heteropatriarchal) normative social constructions.

#### **4.4 From Psychopathology to Psycholiberation**

From the foregoing, 'fetish' should clearly not be psychopathologised, since the purportedly 'objective' categories and diagnostic criteria are primarily informed by (hetero)normative assumptions of what sexuality is or should be. 'Fetish sexuality', like homo- or heterosexual sexuality, is, I suggest, no more than another variation of sexual practice, and indeed, as with any sexual practice, cannot be adequately described through categories and diagnoses. To profess to do so merely perpetuates heteronormativities and thereby to prescribe practices while denying the role of choice and agency in sexual practices.

In order to obviate this, the subjective concerns and circumstances of psychological subjects are better

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<sup>679</sup> Moser, C. & Kleinplatz, P.J. (2002). Transvestic fetishism: Psychopathology or Iatrogenic Artifact? In *New Jersey Psychologist*, 52(2) 16-17

served by obviating *all* assumptions pertaining to emotional states and reasons for distress. Yet many contemporary approaches to psychopathologising discourses simply seek to throw light on their problematic nature, with few solutions proposed.

The tendency to focus on reclassifying perversions, rather than reconceiving their bases, or indeed reconceiving the idea of perversion itself, is concerning, since it serves merely to (re)structuralise the psyche in some foundational way, rather than deconstructing it and finding alternative ways to approach a multiplicity of sexualities.

For example, Wheeler, Newring and Draper merely advocate longitudinal clinical research as a way forward, particularly looking at how children's practices extend into adulthood<sup>680</sup>. Loonis proposes redressing classifications of erotic fantasy, which he problematically notes is not a secondary psychical phenomenon, but is at the core the psychic economy and psychodynamics, and always behind sexual behaviour<sup>681</sup>. He however neither addresses how sexuality, 'fetish' or fantasy are discursively pathologised, nor does he propose alternatives to 'treatment'. Rather, he merely advocates replacing the classifications with Freudian and Lacanian theories relating to partial impulse, where sexual perversion should be seen as a perversion of the four underlying constructs thereof: the upsurge, the source, the object and the aim, allowing for a differentiation between fantasy and reality<sup>682</sup>. He suggests that this allows an alternative classification, which takes account of a range of perversions and allows for better distinction between perversions associated with the subject, those needing therapeutic treatment, and those requiring penal sanctions for criminal activity<sup>683</sup>. Yet this merely rehashes the same metatheoretical problems. Similarly, Bonnet does not substantially question the reasons to classify perversion at all, but remains content to reclassify 'the perversions' by separating the ones worthy of psychiatric management from those causing no psycho-social problems<sup>684</sup>. However, as argued above, the classification of 'perversion' pathologises sexual alterity altogether.

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<sup>680</sup> Wheeler, J, Newring, KAB & Draper, C (2008) Transvestic fetishism, psychopathology and theory. In Laws, D.R., O'Donohue, W.T. (2008) *Sexual deviance: theory, assessment, and treatment*. Guilford Press, 2008 at pp 273 et seq at 282-283. Note that they do not substantially re-vision the underlying identificatory or diagnostic issues with regard to 'fetish' or 'transvestic fetishism'.

<sup>681</sup> Loonis, E, (1999) Approche Structurale des Fantasmies Erotiques *Journal of Evolutionary Psychiatry* 1999 ; 64 : 43-60, Elsevier, Paris pp59-60. Loonis, *ibid*, pp43-60: After researching both 'pathological' and 'non-pathological' respondents, he conceives of four basic groups of fantasy: temporal erotic fantasies (with build-up to make-believe, action, oneiric rhythms, and final triggering phases relieving the erotic fantasy); logical (vertical and horizontal fractal structures and contexts fitting into each other); roles (with three entreaties including desire, taboos and diversion); and sets of themes (disobedience, phallic exhibitionism, restraint and humiliation)

<sup>682</sup> See chapter 3 in this regard

<sup>683</sup> Bonnet, G (2002) Pour une nouvelle classification des perversions sexuelles. In *Evolutionary Psychiatry* 2002 ; 67 : 496-505 pp503 et seq

<sup>684</sup> Bonnet, G, *ibid* , pp502

#### 4.4.1 Alternatives to Classification

Given the underlying instabilities to both the categories and diagnostic guidelines of 'fetishism' detailed above, it is important to go beyond merely bandaging a broken system. In line with discursive critiques of psychology, gender and sexualities, the metatheoretical basis of the clinical categories of 'fetishism' and 'transvestic fetishism' must therefore be done away with *in toto*, so as to conceptualise better ways of locating sexuality than through relying on variations of 'perversion', which cannot be abstracted from their (hetero)normative associations.

It is therefore important to remove all references to psychopathology from local, national and international mental health codes or practices<sup>685</sup>. In this regard, Richards suggests that psychiatric definitions be re-phrased as 'transgressive sexualities'<sup>686</sup>, and proposes a psychological/psychiatric code which distinguishes only between coercive and non-coercive sexual activity:

“Sexualities and/or identities that are not coercive in nature - that is where the parties involved are able to, and do give consent - should not be considered to be de facto evidence of psychopathology or attendant to psychopathology. Those sexualities may be, but are not limited to, non-coercive variations of the following: Heterosexuality, Homosexuality, Bisexuality, Asexuality, Polyamory, Monogamy, Non-Monogamy Transsexualism, Dual Role Transvestitism, Fetishism, Fetishistic transvestism, Exhibitionism, Voyeurism, Sadomasochism<sup>687</sup>.

Similarly, sexual diversity could be described as 'neo-sexualities'<sup>688</sup>, thereby obviating the pejorative term and associations of 'perversions', which McDougall suggests only be used to label desires and conditions imposed by sexual agents on others who are not interested in the sexual script, (for example rape, voyeurism and exhibitionism), or for where the agent seduces someone who is non-responsible (such as child or mentally disturbed person)<sup>689</sup>. This kind of approach suggests that the diagnostic categories should be excluded from the ICD and DSM classifications, and should be not be called on as evidence of psychopathology.

Notably, though, merely relying on 'coercive' vs 'non-coercive' as descriptors of sexuality does not address questions of the socially constructed nature of society and culture, and therefore of

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<sup>685</sup> In line with queer thinking on the subject, it would be preferable to do away with all mental classifications *in toto*, yet this is unlikely to happen, and so, in the spirit of pragmatic political practice (see Chapter 2), simply doing away with psychopathological classifications will have to do

<sup>686</sup> Richards, C (2007) Consultation on the Mental Health Act 2007 Code of Practice. British Psychological Society – Lesbian and Gay Psychology Section

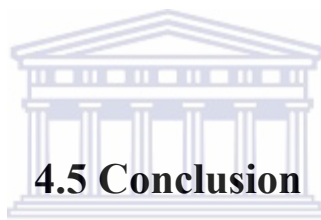
<sup>687</sup> Richards, C (2007) *ibid*

<sup>688</sup> See Joyce McDougall and the concept of "Neo-Sexuality" in McDougall, Joyce (1997). *Las Múltiplas Faces De Eros*. Martins Fontes, SP, 2001, pp 188

<sup>689</sup> McDougall, (1997), *ibid*, p 188. See also Martins, MC & Ceccarelli, PR, The So-Called "Deviant" Sexualities: perversion or Right to Difference? <http://www.reviseF65.org/cuba1.html>

coercion, which arguably relies on dominant moralities and constructions of sexuality and normative standards for definitions of what counts as dangerous or damaging, and what counts as consenting. In this respect, the ways in which Denman<sup>690</sup> and Langdridge<sup>691</sup> distinguish transgressive from coercive sexualities are instructive, since such distinctions would enable questions of agency (and concomitantly choice) to be incorporated into descriptions of sexuality.

These kinds of solutions are politically compelling, since they largely obviate moralising in the description of sexualities<sup>692</sup>. However, they describe sexualities and sexual activities more from an external perspective than through explaining how subjective 'psychical' processes<sup>693</sup> might work in non-essentialist or foundationalist ways. They therefore do not necessarily sufficiently describe how the material, the immaterial and the discursive elements of personal experience interconnect, and therefore the kinds of agency a subject expresses in a sexual context, which description is, I suggest, a *sine qua non* for developing a more functional poststructuralist metatheory for sexuality which incorporates material objects, and metatheory more broadly.



## 4.5 Conclusion

This chapter reviews the notion of psychopathological classification and diagnosis. It thereby opens the door to re-organising existing epistemologies through rejecting those which rely on normative considerations, whether explicitly or implicitly, and finding more functional and forward-looking metatheoretical solutions.

I suggest that psychopathologising 'fetish practices' is inappropriate, since it essentialises human experience and perpetuates heteronormative discourses. In particular, the ICD (& DSM) classifications and diagnostic criteria are, I suggest, in themselves insubstantial.

Firstly, the classifications merely inappropriately repeat the discredited historical classifications of 'perversion', through incorrectly assuming an uncomplicated, non-contextualised sexual interest in material objects by an abstracted normatively-bounded psychical subject. They

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<sup>690</sup> Denman, C. (2004). *Sexuality*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

<sup>691</sup> Langdridge, D. & Barker, M. (Eds.) (2007). *Safe, Sane and Consensual: Contemporary Perspectives on Sadomasochism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>692</sup> Subject to clearly defining what is meant by 'coercive' and 'non-coercive'

<sup>693</sup> See chapter 3 re perspectives in discursive psychology which problematises the notion of a distinct 'internal' vs discursively constructed 'psyche', in conjunction with chapter 5 re the constitution of the subject

thereby ontologically assume an essential value to (hetero)normativity, and fail to *describe* 'fetish' as played out in the lives of people who enjoy the sexual company of material objects. Rather, they *prescribe* sexual behaviour through essentialist and foundationalist normative expectations lodged in the categories themselves. 'Fetishism' therefore becomes a psychopathological terminological construct rather than a functional description of practices.

In contradistinction, however, the participants' perceptions and practices of 'fetish' (which they have reclaimed from 'fetishism') give insight into descriptive epistemologies of 'fetish sexuality', which should clearly not be based on object-focused definitional diatribes around the centrality of the dualistically separated 'fetish object' (as proscribed material sexual object) as the definitional nexus for 'fetishism' as a practice (and therefore the 'fetishist' as a psychopathologised category). In contradistinction, their practices indicate dialectical configurations between material objects of sexual interest, sexual partners, subjective perceptions, emotional associations and heteronormative social constructions<sup>694</sup>.

Secondly, the ICD-10 diagnostic guidelines for diagnosis of 'fetishism' as psychopathology are insufficient in that they provide little clarity on the circumstances which do or do not constitute pathology (which is in itself indefensible). They inappropriately import both moral and statistical (hetero)normativity into the diagnostic process through the requirement that subjects be psychically attached to 'unusual objects'. Further, the requirement of 'distress and impairment' is based on inappropriate (normative) circular arguments relating to prior assumptions of pathology and psychical addiction/compulsion, which undermine the notion of subjects' psychical agency. Since it is inappropriate both to conflate and to psychopathologise issues such as addiction, compulsion and 'fetishism', this indicates that the diagnostic criteria fail to describe the complexity of subjective psychical states and the multiple and complex ways in which people process their emotions or understand their practices. Instead, as with the psychopathological definitions, the diagnostic criteria normatively prescribe sexual activity, thereby inappropriately perpetuating dominant (heteropatriarchal) normative social constructions by rationalising the construction of 'fetishism' as a pathology while valuing other compulsive, repetitive practices like heterosexuality.

In order to obviate this, the subjective concerns and circumstances of psychical subjects are better served by obviating *all* categories and diagnostic criteria, and finding alternative ways to describe sexuality which incorporate both normative and non-normative sexual variety. One compelling

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<sup>694</sup> As will be discussed in Chapter 5, more functional bases for understanding the phenomenon of people-interacting-sexually-with-material-objects therefore lie in an epistemological focus on the subject as he/she interacts phenomenologically with discourse and his/her environment.

approach is to rephrase the historical variations of 'perversity' as 'transgressive sexualities', approaching them as variations of sexual diversity and calling on distinctions between coercive and non-coercive sexual activity, subject to closer definition of coercion, danger, damage and consent, which are in themselves socially constructed notions.

Such solutions, however, merely describe sexualities and sexual activities from an external perspective, and do not successfully explain in detail the ways in which a subject's 'internal' psychical processes<sup>695</sup> interact with his/her environment, and therefore the kinds of agency a subject expresses in a sexual context. As will be argued in subsequent chapters, discursive constructions on their own are not enough to explain subjectivities, agency and the relationships between people and the material world, either in the context of fetish sexuality, or in the context of human experience more broadly. In order to find more functional and theoretically stable bases on which to found complex sexual cartographies which do not merely re-inscribe the 'fetishist' as a poor lost soul hopelessly dependent on pre-existing, foundationalist and dysfunctional drives, or as a creature haplessly subject to discursive flows, it is necessary to look further than merely unpacking and renaming regulatory discourses. As I will argue, psychical discourses on 'fetish' should instead aim at avoiding normative, object-focused psychopathologising sexual categories. Instead, I suggest, they should call on subject-oriented reference points<sup>696</sup>. This of necessity entails exploring the constitution of the subject, together with the extent to which subjects have the agency to make their sexual choices, and the personal and political roles of sexual activity involving material objects.

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<sup>695</sup> See chapter 3 re perspectives in discursive psychology which problematises the notion of a distinct 'internal' vs discursively constructed 'psyche', in conjunction with chapter 5 re the constitution of the subject

<sup>696</sup> See particularly chapter 5 and 6 re the role of the body and embodiment

## INTERJECTION

### RE-ORIENTING SCHOLARSHIP TOWARDS THE 'SUBJECT' OF SUBJECTIVITIES

As discussed in Chapter 3, the historical epistemological focus in the anthropological *feitiço*<sup>697</sup> and in psychoanalytic 'fetishism'<sup>698</sup> was clearly on the 'fetish' object, which was called on to identify, marginalise and pathologise people using material objects for religio-cultural or sexual purposes. As further discussed in Chapter 4, this narrow framework has been perpetuated and codified in the contemporary ICD definitions and diagnostic criteria for 'fetishism', which, similarly to its predecessors, avoids describing the use of material objects in terms of the subject at all. Such definitions and criteria heteronormatively proscribe subjects' use of objects and yet confusingly, also define subjects *in terms* of objects, without the presence of which the subject cannot be classified, and therefore diagnosed and 'cured'. Rather than describing people or practices as ICD classifications and diagnostic criteria respectively purport to do, they discursively recreate and prescribe heteronormativity, thereby failing to acknowledge subjectivities and assuming that there is some objective ontological standard of 'meaning' which subjects should meet, whether religiously essentialist or philosophically foundationalist.

Through inappropriately relying on conceptions of what is 'natural' to define people (and thereby to diagnose practices), these 'scientific' psychiatric discourses have replaced earlier constructions of 'nature', which was used to represent the 'God-given' order of things, with normative conceptions of pathology<sup>699</sup>. Both versions rely on nature as both an aesthetic thing and a moral touchstone, whereby<sup>700</sup>:

- people's behaviour is regulated in terms of what is 'natural', meaning normative, where conformity to the 'natural' is prescribed. In this way, procreative heterosexuality and heteropatriarchal norms of sexual exploration are institutionalised through regulatory norms;

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<sup>697</sup> See chapter 3. Colonialist discourses were premised on pseudo-darwinian ideas of cultural superiority intermingled with Catholico-Christian norms which proscribed 'idol-worship' and circumscribed 'appropriate' psychodynamic human-object relations respectively.

<sup>698</sup> See chapter 3. The psychiatric discourses on 'fetishism' which followed were based on the assumption of a fixed, fictive, singular, universal psychodynamic reference point of 'lack', whereby psychodynamic constructions are inevitably defined in opposition to the (fetish) object.

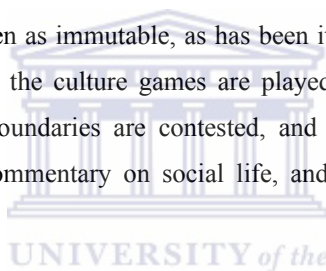
<sup>699</sup> Lock, M (1997) Decentering the Natural Body: Making Difference Matter. In *Configurations* 5.2 (1997) 267-292 pp272

<sup>700</sup> Lock, M (1997) *ibid*

- nature justifies and legitimises medical discourses and practices, e.g. the interpretation of pregnancy and menopause as disease-like conditions, and more specifically the psychopathologising of unusual sexual enjoyment;<sup>701</sup>
- people are regularly morally judged as wild, uncultured or inappropriately proximal to nature, thereby being dangerous. E.g. the purportedly 'unclean' nature of women's bodies, as opposed to the orderly ones of men, and perceptions of BDSM and fetish as dangerous;
- individuals or institutions are regularly encouraged to or discouraged from interfering with nature itself, based on the opposing ideas that we should either improve on nature, or abstain from disrupting the 'natural order'. E.g. 'curing' the psychopathology of fetish is seen as a way to 'fix' what is broken, or to turn the subject into a 'normal' (i.e.'natural') member of society<sup>702</sup>.

However, as Lock notes:

“It is clear that nature cannot be taken as immutable, as has been its dominant representation throughout modernity--the bedrock upon which the culture games are played. Nature is represented by means of cultural categories; nature/culture boundaries are contested, and nature is called upon to do cultural "work"--that is, it participates in commentary on social life, and it forces itself, selectively, into our consciousness.”<sup>703</sup>



Far from being clear and concise tools for assisting individuals to manage psychical functionality<sup>704</sup>, the frameworks for viewing 'fetishism' at our disposal inappropriately base psycho-medical practices on the 'natural', which is an inappropriate location for metatheories on sexual practices, since what is seen as 'natural' is indeed discursively constructed and merely serves to perpetuate damaging normative frameworks.

I suggest that routes to more useful frameworks which avoid determinist reliance on 'the natural' should interrogate the roles of theory, politics and the personal in scholarship, so as to move towards relatively value-neutral epistemological frameworks which take into account variety and diversity in human practices and subjectivities, yet which at the same time recognise and counter (hetero)normativities.

<sup>701</sup> See chapters 3 and 4, and see Conrad, P (1992) Medicalization and Social Control. In *Annual Review of Sociology* 18 (1992): 209-232

<sup>702</sup> See chapter 4

<sup>703</sup> Lock, M (1997) Decentering the Natural Body: Making Difference Matter. In *Configurations* 5.2 (1997) 267-292 pp272

<sup>704</sup> However one might determine this if not in any normative way. See below and chapter 6 in this regard



## Heteronormative Dualities

Following my argument in Chapter 2 on the instability of identities, I suggest that there is an implicit equation which justifies discursive heteronormativity and homophobia through fictions that people who engage in (unusual) same-sex sexual practices must essentially 'be' 'homosexuals', who are assumed to be both qualitatively and quantitatively different to 'heterosexuals'. In turn this is based on fictions that people are essentially discrete entities who are somehow fundamentally separate from each other and from (non-human) objects<sup>705</sup>. This creates/recreates normative proscriptions against 'inappropriate' 'fetish' sexuality.

Heteronormativity relies on the purported ability, in essentialist or foundationalist ways, to distinguish one human being ('the homosexual'/'the fetishist') from others ('heterosexuals'/'non-fetishists'), and from each discrete (fetish) object with which that human is juxtaposed, thereby valuing the purportedly identifiable 'heterosexual non-fetishist' over the 'homosexual fetishist'<sup>706</sup>. Dominant heteronormative discourses perpetuate assumptions through prioritising (procreative) human-human sexuality and marginalising non-normative practices, thereby underestimating the values which subjects attribute to objects, and to the material world more broadly<sup>707</sup>. Such heteropatriarchal normative discourses 'stick' to individuals, through reliance on hyperbolic, distorted or fabricated stories about sexual groups or issues, and through the use of evocative language and imagery<sup>708</sup>, which translate into 'sticky signs': words that accumulate affective value<sup>709</sup>. Discourse is unpredictable, and "the plurality of discourses in operation during any particular conflict may trigger unexpected reactions and counterreactions"<sup>710</sup>. They stress danger and disease, and use provocative language, and symbols, scapegoating and depravity narratives, often exported through the media and public figures<sup>711</sup>.

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<sup>705</sup> This is particularly seen through how historical anthropological views of the feitiço were based on essentialist conceptions of cultural superiority, and how psychoanalytic theory has constructed the human being as being psychically defined through an essential ontological lack (chapter 3)

<sup>706</sup> See chapter 2 in this regard

<sup>707</sup> See chapter 4

<sup>708</sup> See chapter 2. See also Ahmed, S (2004) *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge pp92. Ahmed refers to 'sticky signs': words that accumulate affective value. In this way heteronormativity is discursively reproduced through texts which work emotionally through the 'sticking' of signs onto bodies, and sex panic script language therefore uses cultural and historical meaning attached to broader negative affects in sexual culture, to prompt fears of sexual transgression and perversion.

<sup>709</sup> Ahmed, S (2004) *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* New York: Routledge. Pp92. Ahmed notes that emotions are not in texts. Rather, texts work emotionally through 'sticking' signs onto bodies.

<sup>710</sup> Hochschild, A.R (1979) *Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure*. In *American Journal of Sociology* 85 (1979): 551 – 75, pp557

<sup>711</sup> Specifically perpetuated through sex panic narratives. See chapter 2 in respect thereof

### ***'Fetish': Conflating Homophobia and Heteronormativity***

The media, as primarily a consumer-focused capitalist enterprise, mirrors heteronorms in a somewhat schizophrenic fashion, rather than shifting them. On the one hand, as discussed in Chapter 2, the media represents 'homosexuality' as unitary and calls to attention the ways in which non-normative sexual orientation is marginalised, and how 'homosexuals', as supposedly identifiable entities, are socially maligned because they are assumed to be visible. Yet on the other hand, the media largely fails to represent 'fetish' at all, resulting in the invisibility of both 'fetishists' and their practices<sup>712</sup>.

When 'fetish' *is* depicted, it is framed in contradictory terms: in hushed tones as being something sexy yet at the same time dirty and secret:

“The media projects an image that being “bad” is sexy then turns around and derides the person for being “bad.” It’s okay to be “sick” on Nip/Tuck and get turned on by it, or to make it a joke on Desperate Housewife (sic), but it’s still very much about being “sick” or “ridiculous.” (Joseph’)

Alternatively, it is spoken of with derision, and participants feel self-conscious and/or marginal:

“I think the media takes it in a negative way.... I think they frown on it. Either they frown on it or the make light of it as a comedy. ... I think they should realise it's quite serious, and it's an integral part of some people. They should accept it as such.” (Henry’)

“Fetish seems to always get represented as something perverted or dirty and for the sick minded. It is either viewed from this angle or it is made a joke of. Its upsetting as it creates more barriers to have to break down.” (Simon’)

These normative discourses on fetish sexuality, which are clearly at play in the heteronormative world, also pervade gay communities. Participants often feel excluded from broader gay life, and marginalised within the gay communities:

“...The first time SAleathermen participated in Pride, they wanted to put us #36 out of 37 (37 failed to show up for the orientation) and only back down when I questioned their decision, placing us at 28. On the other hand, media partners have expressed support, partly perhaps because they hope for something of a freak show. Is that fair? On a personal level, it has affected some of my partner’s previous friendships because I was no longer “acceptable” in their circles. It may not have just been my “outness” about leather/BDSM, but it certainly played a part. And the worse part is the hypocrisy amongst those who call me up stoned for “pig sex” then ignore me publicly, or make up stories about outrageous encounters that they most likely are secretly aroused by.” (Joseph’)

<sup>712</sup> This is particularly so in the local media, but also in the American (and to a lesser extent European) popular media on which South Africa so heavily relies

“...we are forced to be in groups. “Others” in the gay community sometimes frown upon it. I think some are afraid of burly leather men, haha. I am athletically built, although I look a bit aggressive in my demeanour. I am not aggressive though, yet I feel outside the mainstream LBGT community.” (Donald)

This indicates that the normative discourses which pervade society more broadly are equally at play in marginal communities, who, as I will discuss later, both perpetuate and subvert normativities.

In the present instance, more mainstream gay communities perceive 'fetishists' in similar negative ways to those represented by heteronormative discourses:

“There seems to be a lot of preconceived ideas of what leather sex is about and people seem scared of it. They seem to think leather sex entails dark, tortured souls wandering around having indiscriminate sex.” (Simon)

“... people are horrified when I tell them that... the twink who start chatting me up in the clubs and they say 'well, tell me your darkest secret' and some of them are horrified cos they are little ... and they're horrified that somebody could be... I'm not into pain, not into spanking, not into whipping, but they immediately think that and say S/m the connotation is pain, blood, torture... when people ask me, or I tell them they immediately think it's all whipping pain domination roleplay kind of thing.” (Jared)

These kinds of perceptions are often covert, yet at other times result in overt negative sentiment against 'fetish' sexuality, surprisingly from within its own ranks:

“All the time, and more often from those within the SA Leathermen community (since I don't often speak about BDSM in such detail outside the group). There remains lot of internal constraints and issues that hold many within the group back. They will talk about what is “acceptable” and what is “sick,” effectively demonising discussions of these thing within our own community. It's sad. There's too much racism and misogyny still, which is something less than subtle. On the other hand, avatars on the website allows for some discussions, albeit brief, on scat, for instance. But for the most part, we remain skittish and negative about the very pursuit we're supposed to be embracing.” (Joseph)

This complex relationship between perceptions appears to be interconnected with many participants' tendency to merely reproduce heteronormative scripts in their practices.

### *Participants' Repetitions of Heteronormativity*

One need not scratch far below the surface to see that, even though they in some ways pride their 'transgressive sexualities'<sup>713</sup>, the participants often fail to question their implicit (hetero)normative assumptions around male primacy and compulsory masculinity.

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<sup>713</sup> See chapter 4 on how they have re-appropriated the term 'fetish' from 'fetishism'

One instance of this is the ways they problematically compartmentalise and 'fetishise' the body parts of sexual partners, reflecting dominant heteronormative discourses around the objectification of certain body parts which stand in for the whole sexual partner:

“...the area from the ear down to the chin, ... and a man's forearms ... , and certain people's under-arms I find very erotic. ... the way a man stands as well. ... The chin area I think has got to do with being shaven or unshaven. It's a hair thing there. I prefer men with moustaches or beards. ... the forearms I don't know, I think it's a strength thing there. Cos I like really strong forearms and hairy ones as well. ...” ('Henry')

“...I like someone who is larger than a normal gay male. ... there is definitely a fetish of bigger in proportion. And that's related in a sense to nipples, cocks, balls... and obviously, anus. Fisting is definitely a fetish, vacuum pumping is a fetish, most body modifications in general... balls, I enjoy small balls and a big cock. ... bigger is good, bigger is nice, bigger is better to work with! I can do a lot more with someone who's got an inflated penis than I can do with someone that you can't find it, type of thing... ('Jacques')

As a result, the partner's validation as a complex human being is effaced:

“Funnily, the one area of the body that 'fades' in importance during BDSM play is the face. I tend to objectify my partner to some degree and identity is most tied to the face. So I instead focus on individual body parts, and funny that includes the eyes, but not the face. ...I don't particularly like masks, but I often find myself covering the mouth and nose with my hands – not only to gag that person but to see the eyes but lose the face.” ('Joseph')

“... if someone had a lot of piercings, that idea would turn me on, by just looking. It doesn't have to lead up to sexual contact. ... I'm a highly sexual person, so I could look at anyone... even a female... with great tattoos, and great body piercing and go... I would never have sex with her, but it's still a sexual turn-on. The fact that her mind has evolved. She's in a different state of mind than what a normal person is, and I associate with that.” ('Jacques')

Further, some participants enjoy bodily functions such as 'barebacking' (sex without a condom), 'watersports' (urine), 'scat' (faeces) and sweat:

“Bare backing definitely, whenever I can get it. ... The sensuality of a bare cock in your ass/ your bare cock in someone else's ass is far far better than condom sex. Water sports, I am interested in and the thought of it turns me on. ... I love the idea of a guy screwing me, ejaculating inside me and then wash it out with urinating in me.” ('Donald')

“I'm into watersports. I love a man to pee on me. It turns me on. The smell again there. It must also smell right. ... I'll even drink it if it tastes right. ... I'm not into scat. That would turn me off totally. His underarm can drive me insane... If certain people have gone jogging, and came home just like that, I'd probably want to lick the sweat off them.” ('Henry')

“Bodily functions/fluids are normal and common to everybody. ... I have recently experienced water sports for the first time and may I say I found it incredible. At present I am not ready to take it in the mouth although seeing it on DVD does appeal. Multiple men pissing all over me while I am fucking or being fucked is a huge turn-on for me and I would love to try it sometime. Semen in and over me is the best – having a man withdraw at orgasm, cumming over my asshole then immediately continue fucking me in his own juice. ...” ('Jason')

“I enjoy watersports – I guess the humiliation factor is what makes this exciting.” ('Simon')

This problematically mirrors a repetition of heteronormative patriarchal fetishising and humiliation of the 'other', by reconstituting the human object as a material one<sup>714</sup>.

From this angle, the participants' practices do not substantially negate dominant heteronormative scripts of compulsory masculinity, nor do they drastically transgress heteronormative boundaries or express vociferous resistance to normative constraints<sup>715</sup>.

Many of the participants seem to see themselves as 'gay' in some essentialist way, rather than 'queer'. As discussed in Chapter 2, this is problematic since it perpetuates dualist conceptions of their practices as some kind of overt reaction to heteronormative roles, which largely seem to reflect dominant discourses. In other words, the participants often tend to see themselves as inherently being gay, which is discursively constructed as some kind of 'second class citizen'. They thereby seem, I suggest, to think of themselves as by definition 'outside' of normative structures, and they call on their 'fetish practices' to set them apart from the society which makes them pariahs in a kind of display of defensiveness bordering on aggressiveness which belies a discomfort at being seen as the 'other' whose desires, as I will discuss in Chapter 6, are seen as a 'failed space'.

In so doing, they consider themselves in some essentialist way to 'be' 'homosexual fetishists', as if that is somehow different to other varieties of 'fetishists'. They thereby assume that their 'fetish' is somehow different to the way other people interact with material objects. Because they focus themselves on how others see their practices as 'wrong', I suggest, therefore, that the extent of their heteronormative repetition remains opaque to them. This may be linked to their largely mistaking

<sup>714</sup> Perspectives on dominance and submission are available in Cosgrove, P (1999) *Edmund Burke, Gilles Deleuze, and the Subversive Masochism of the Image*. In *ELH* 66.2 (1999) 405-437. The Johns Hopkins University Press; Langdrige, D & Butt, T (2004) A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Investigation of the Construction of Sadomasochistic Identities. In *Sexualities*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 31-53 (2004); Knox, J (2005) Sex, shame and the transcendent function: the function of fantasy in self development. In *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 2005, 50, 617-639; Langdrige, D (2005). Actively dividing selves: S/M and the thrill of disintegration. In *Lesbian and Gay Psychology Review*, 6(3), pp. 198-208.

<sup>715</sup> Yet in comparison, pertaining to the queer subversion of masculinities through hypermasculinities and the 'bear' motif, see Palmieri, F.M (aka Warbear) (2005) 21st Century Schizoid Bear: Masculine Transitions Through Net Pornography. In Jacobs, K, Janssen, M & Pasquinelli, M (eds) (2005) *Clickme: A Netporn Studies Reader*. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, Colophon

heterosexuality for heteronormativity, assuming that the ways in which they do transgress heteronorms counts as a rejection of, rather than merely a challenge to and reflection of heteronormativity.

Clearly there is a complex relationship with normativities both within the 'fetish' group and more broadly, which complexity deserves more unpacking in relation to how people and groups incorporate and perpetuate heteronormativities. Yet, as I have indicated in Chapters 1 and 2, to reveal those complex relationships merely through discursive lenses, such as those often applied by scholarship seeking to explore the complex cartographies of subjectivities, can tend, in a predominantly identity-based discursive environment, to create further determinist assumptions which attenuate subjectivities by treating subjects as some kind of spectral object, mistaking discursive flows for the complexity it seeks to unpack.

## **Discursive Description vs Metatheoretical Construction**

Inside (relatively narrow) scholarly environments such as those of sexualities studies which support complex cartographies of subjectivities with a strong awareness of heteronormative underpinnings, purely discursive readings of participant practices make strong theoretical sense, and can be put to good use to guide scholarship aimed at informing (queer) liberatory political action.

Yet an argument such as the present is not primarily intended for queer activists or scholars, but is aimed at furthering some kind of change in a broader social sphere, and in particular in the often conservative and reactionary psycho-medical community which, as I have argued in Chapters 3 and 4, unconsciously repeats the dominant (heteronormative) and very powerful institutionalised and discursively-constructed blindness towards unusual sexual practices<sup>716</sup>.

The psycho-medical community's perceptions of both 'homosexuality' and 'fetishism' are both created through and in turn recreate a sense of shame around sexuality, which is reflected in public discourses, and enables and legitimises specific ways of thinking, talking and feeling about sex in public<sup>717</sup>. Rather than furthering acceptance of sexual alterity, such discourses 'other' unusual sexualities by publicly rejecting them, either explicitly or through feeling and expression rules which are interwoven in the language and symbols of both the general public and

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<sup>716</sup> A key example is the highly-lauded ICD on which most psycho-medical practitioners call as an authoritative source

<sup>717</sup> Hochschild, A.R (1979) *Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure*. In *American Journal of Sociology* 85 (1979): 551 – 75, pp557

conservatives<sup>718</sup>. Such rules govern social interactions and are social guidelines for how people produce and manage effect, and cover daily emotional life<sup>719</sup>. Similarly, norms of expression or display govern emotional behaviour and generally circumscribe the appropriate range and intensity of communication and interpretation of feelings<sup>720</sup>. In this way they ensure that emotions remain within the range of the social. Indeed, emotion, far from being an unmediated response, is a social performance encompassing meaning systems, norms, motivation and social reaction<sup>721</sup>. The often conservative conventions of the psycho-medical fraternity often interact with this repression of sexuality, linked to the socialised sense of shame<sup>722</sup>. Sexuality remains fear-inducing since the biological imperative threatens the symbolic of the socio-cultural world and of personal identity<sup>723</sup>. Sex is frightening and is therefore displaced from discourse, only being acceptable if referred to indirectly. Since sexuality is the direct object of repression, it includes in its purview anything else repressed, which results in the individual's most shameful and unexpressed needs becoming sexualised<sup>724</sup>. Shame is in turn perpetuated through professional discourses such as those of psychologists who refrain from referring directly to sexuality and sex, rather focussing on concerns of attachment, dependence, abandonment fears, aggression and envy<sup>725</sup>.

These concerns imply that a pragmatic approach should be adopted in re-conceiving psycho-medical metatheory in the face of dominant political and social paradigms. Such a re-conception must take account not only of the (heteropatriarchal) discourses at play in society more broadly, but of the complexity of how these discourses are perpetuated both by psychical and social processes of daily life, for example through the participants' practices, *and* by the psycho-medical fraternity in approaching those practices.

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<sup>718</sup> Hochschild, A.R (1979) *ibid*, pp557.

<sup>719</sup> Hochschild, A.R (1979) *ibid*

<sup>720</sup> Thoits, P (1989) The Sociology of Emotions. In *Annual Review of Sociology* 15 (1989): 317–42

<sup>721</sup> See Irvine, J.M. (2004) *Talk About Sex: The Battles over Sex Education in the United*

*States*, University of California Press; Irvine, J.M. (2008) Transient Feelings: Sex Panics and the Politics of Emotions. In *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* - Volume 14, Number 1, 2008, pp. 1-40

<sup>722</sup> Mollon, P (2005) The Inherent Shame of Sexuality. In *British Journal of Psychotherapy* 22(2), 2005, pp167 et seq. pp168

<sup>723</sup> Mollon, P (2005), *ibid*. He argues that the development of the symbolic socio-cultural world may be dependent on sexual repression, which may have resulted in displaced signification and symbol-creation via dreams and language. However, see chapter 4 re concerns pertaining to psychoanalytic theory

<sup>724</sup> Mollon, P (2005), *ibid*

<sup>725</sup> Mollon, P (2005), *ibid*, pp 168. See chapter 4 re concerns pertaining to psychoanalytic theory, and to criticisms of psychoanalysis as pertains to the focus in psychoanalysis of sexuality. Note the criticisms of the psychopathological focus on sex in fetish sex, rather than on underlying issues such as attachment, dependence etc. In this regard, I argue that psychologists and psychiatrists should focus on the subject, rather than the fetish object, and should move beyond the social shame associated with sexuality so as to address these issues, rather than ignoring them through the refusal to discuss sexuality.

### ***The Role of Participant Narratives: Radical Constructivism***

Although in part this thesis is aimed at furthering a political goal of shifting paradigms by condensing liberatory discourses, it is also aimed at serving as a resource for new policies and psycho-medical practices within the dominant heteropatriarchal discourses. In this context it is therefore not only important for me to reflect on how practices reproduce normativities, but also to actively move away from heteronormativity by advocating expressly non-normative frameworks from which to re-conceive future thinking and action. In order to achieve both of these, and to move from pathologising heteronormative liberal humanist discourses to more appropriate queer epistemologies, I must be careful of the kinds of discourses I implicitly reproduce through the scholarship by repeating discursive binaries.

As discussed in Chapter 2, identity-politics-driven gay and lesbian activism is generally taken more seriously than the highly compelling anarchism of queer deconstructivism which is often seen as vague and woolly since it refuses to demarcate clear boundaries. Gay rights voices therefore take priority over and garner more positive responses than more coherent queer approaches, since, as Oksala notes, in its current formulations resistance to normative power only seems possible in the interstices between competing regimes<sup>726</sup>.

Unfortunately, gay and lesbian politics merely re-reinforces heteronormative discourses by failing, in their political claims for non-discrimination, to challenge discursive assumptions that people are both quantitatively and qualitatively different<sup>727</sup>. Instead, they assume that people *are* indeed quantitatively different from each other and the material world, but not qualitatively different (in other words that 'homosexuals', and therefore 'homosexual fetishists', are a different albeit equal species to 'heterosexuals'). They thereby fail to challenge the ontological underpinnings to heteronormative discourses, and only oppose their representations.

In line with queer challenges to normativity, however, 'social' claims for validation<sup>728</sup>, amongst which are included those of (gay male) 'fetish sexuality', should, I suggest, move beyond merely resisting dominant discourses, thereby perpetuating them through accepting their inevitable primacy. Such claims should challenge both discrimination and the essentialising discourses which underpin it, in order to escape circular repetitions of heteronormativity and to move beyond merely resisting it.

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<sup>726</sup> Oksala, J (2004) Anarchic Bodies: Foucault and the Feminist Question of Experience. In *Hypatia* vol. 19, no. 4 (Fall 2004)

<sup>727</sup> See chapter 2

<sup>728</sup> As opposed to 'political claims. See chapter 2



Therefore, I suggest, a 'social' claim for the validation of sexual practices as complex relations should aim to challenge prejudicial practices, heteronormative discourses *and* the underlying metatheory for human sexual relations which support both. Any such revised metatheory should therefore not simply counter the instances of normativity and prejudice in some oppositional way, but should aim to rephrase heteronormativity.

This does not mean that such metatheory should pretend that heteronormative discourses do not exist. Rather, the metatheory should counter heteronormativity on two levels: by countering its primacy, and by carefully laying the groundwork for rendering it impotent. Such epistemologies should, I suggest, remain both value-neutral and explicitly non-heteronormative, thereby serving as a basis for clear anti-normative political action to be undertaken. In other words, if the metatheory underlying psycho-medical practices (for example on 'fetishism') is relatively value-neutral, heteronormativity on the part of psycho-medical practitioners (and scholars) will, I suggest, become explicit, rather than hidden in the folds of implicitly heteronormative classifications and diagnoses. Such practitioners will thereby not be able to rely on normative considerations to either classify or diagnose purported pathologies like 'fetishism' without having to acknowledge their biases, and they will therefore have to become more accountable.

More specifically to the present argument, following Butlerian conceptions of the performativity of identities, all essentialist assumptions of static and immutable identity must be destabilised. This includes assumptions, such as those implied by the ICD classifications/diagnostic criteria and its predecessors, that people are somehow essentially not part of the material world, and that they therefore in some way transcend their material circumstances. These arguments are often used to validate unverifiable religious claims that people have an identifiable 'soul' or 'spirit' which transcends both the body and the material things of the world<sup>729</sup>. They also underlie problematic psychoanalytic arguments that people are driven by foundationalist drives<sup>730</sup>. To assume such is to support and perpetuate essentialist generalisations that people are in some way objectively identifiable, and therefore can/should be normatively controlled, rather than that *all* people are effectively similar, but are (inappropriately) discursively constructed as (heteronormatively) different, and, as discussed above, that people in some ways *choose* to partially support and partially subvert heteronorms.

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<sup>729</sup> Note the difference between the present argument that people are indeed materially (as well as discursively) constructed in a post-structuralist sense, on the one hand, and that they are essentially a Cartesian mind-body duality on the other. I am not arguing the latter, and indeed recognise that the material is itself discursively constructed, by which I mean that the *value* of the material is discursively constructed, whereas discourse cannot construct the *materiality* of the material, which pre-exists culture. See arguments below

<sup>730</sup> See chapter 4

In contradistinction, as I will argue later in more detail, simplistic post-structuralist arguments that people are purely discursively created might, if read in a dualist political or scholarly environment, indicate that people are somehow separate to each other and their environment. Following from this, basing psycho-medical metatheory (which is what this thesis is aimed at re-phrasing) solely on discursive deconstructions of participant *practices* as they relate to normativities (rather than exploring the *relationships* which these practices reveal between people and objects as they relate to ontologies of the 'subject'<sup>731</sup>) merely discursively reproduces notions of an essential difference between people and each other (thereby reproducing identity politics) and between people and objects (thereby discursively prioritising immateriality over materiality and reproducing the problematic discourses of 'fetishism'<sup>732</sup>). Therefore, to discursively recreate the assumed ontological opposition between people and objects by merely redirecting a (heteronormative) epistemological focus on the 'fetish object' to an ('anti-heteronormative') epistemological focus on a presumed unitary 'fetish subject' (which would be the case if I were to take a purely deconstructivist line by constructing discursive readings of participant practices) would recreate foundationalist and/or determinist discursive assumptions about how people in some essential way are not part of the material world themselves<sup>733</sup>.

In this regard, as Butler notes, radical constructivism and poststructuralism are misunderstood in that they are both brought down to linguistic monism and determinism<sup>734</sup>. Such arguments would therefore imply that *all* 'fetishists' are alike, based on the circumstances of specific research subjects, who, like all people, are marked *inter alia* by race, gender, class and sexuality<sup>735</sup>. In the contemporary political identity-politics-based environment this would therefore tend to recreate constructions of 'fetishists' as if they are essentially or foundationally constituted, and indeed would recreate assumptions that 'fetishism' is objectively identifiable, thereby further locking people who engage sexually with the material world into circular definitions as 'fetishists', *qua* separate class, waiting to be classified and diagnosed<sup>736</sup>. This would merely reproduce undesirable determinist discourses through essentialising 'gay male fetish sexuality' as inherently heteropatriarchal, which in turn would tend to essentialise people more broadly<sup>737</sup>.

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<sup>731</sup> See chapters 5 and 6

<sup>732</sup> See chapter 3 in this regard, in particular what ethnological '*feitico*' reveals about materiality and discourse

<sup>733</sup> See below where I argue how people are indeed constructed in the intersections between materiality and discourse

<sup>734</sup> See Butler, J (1993) *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge

<sup>735</sup> Indeed, such arguments would not imply this if read exclusively by those compelled by queer theory, but would not necessarily convince those who still inappropriately cling to binaries, since they would read the participants as being representative of all 'fetishists'

<sup>736</sup> See chapter 4

<sup>737</sup> This is particularly so in the contemporary identity-based political arena. See chapter 2 in this regard

Further, discursive analyses can, unless extremely clear about their parameters, tend to elide the complexities of individual subjectivities with political and/or social groups, thereby inappropriately creating assumptions about common, unmarked pre-personal reference-points<sup>738</sup>, which in turn renders opaque the complexity of subjectivities. Such approaches can easily 'other' people by denying them complexity as subjects through negatively judging their practices as being inherently problematically normative (or, if read through a conservative lens, that normativity is unproblematic), and by mistaking the complexity of their lives as being uncompromisingly and singularly complicit with (or alternatively challenging to) damaging normativities. It therefore risks inappropriately prescribing yet another set of practices through implying a binary and mutually exclusive relationship between normativity and non-normativity and therefore between 'normative' and 'non-normative subjects'. In other words, it can essentialise the idea of 'non-normativity' as an objectively identifiable and opposite category to 'normativity', which is difficult to avoid since, as Perpich notes, there is no readily available terminology that avoids binaries<sup>739</sup>.

In contradistinction, people have complex relationships with normativities, and their practices often at the same time *both* support *and* subvert normative frameworks.

For example, the participants, as 'gay men' implicitly undermine compulsory heteronormative procreative sexuality and concomitantly have re-appropriated the term 'fetishism' as 'fetish'<sup>740</sup>. Through the process of both seeing and not seeing difference in the objectification and fetishising of bodies and non-human objects, they undermine clear distinctions between the role of (human) sexual partners as either person or 'fetish object'. Although on one level this is a replication of heteropatriarchal practices, on another it indicates that participants' relationships with materiality fudges the limits between human and object in ways which undermine heteropatriarchy through undermining normative distinctions between the material and the immaterial, and between objects and people.

Further, as seen above, they engage in humiliating practices, yet render the humiliation patent and view it as a desirable part of their sexual alterity, rather than unconsciously subsuming it into 'ordinary' intercourse. Even though this is not necessarily apparent to them, they are, as Hennen argues calling on Bourdieu and Butler, uniquely located to understand how gender is radically

<sup>738</sup> See below, and Sullivan, S. (2001) *Living across and through skins: Transactional bodies, pragmatism, and feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

<sup>739</sup> Perpich, D (2005) Corpus Meum: Disintegrating Bodies and the Ideal of Integrity. In *Hypatia* vol. 20, no. 3 (Summer 2005) 75-91. See later for argument pertaining to discourse and the connectedness of people and the material world.

<sup>740</sup> See chapter 4

constructed, since they consciously hypermasculinise themselves<sup>741</sup>. He argues that the gay male leather culture (in the U.S, and arguably in South Africa too) should be seen as resistance to consensus associations between homoerotic interest and effeminacy<sup>742</sup>. Some of the participants on some levels thereby challenge normative concepts of what 'should' be 'fetishised' (in other words question the concept of 'reification') by engaging in voluntary humiliation as both dominant and submissive partner, and thereby, I suggest, 'reify' the *practice* of humiliation rather than (/as well as) 'fetishising' a (human) *object*<sup>743</sup>. Further, they are at times the ('Top') humiliator, while at others voluntarily the 'humiliated' 'other' ('bottom'). This implies a *subversion* (albeit not a *rejection*) of heteropatriarchal norms within dominant heteronormative discourses of compulsory masculinity.

Clearly, therefore, sexual enjoyment incorporating material objects is not inherently a reproduction or rejection of heteropatriarchy in an either/or way, but can be explored on various (discursive) levels, and is further dialectically at times about the object and at times about the sensual experience of subjects who both are and are not seen as equals (contrary to the implications of psychoanalytic theory and the ICD classifications and diagnostic criteria<sup>744</sup>).

In other words, I suggest that the value of the participants' contributions to both scholarly/political action and psycho-medical metatheory lies in the relationships between people and objects which underlies their practices. A closer inspection of their practices reveals that, even though the *content* of their practices may largely be normative, the *relationships* between the participants and the material world which underlies the practices reflects that sexuality, whether predominantly normative or transgressive, cannot merely be seen through essentialist mind-body dualities, nor through deconstructivist theorising alone. In other words, the relationships between human, object and discourse which underlie the participant practices reveal alternative metatheoretical constructs for both 'fetishism' and sexuality more broadly which should, I suggest, be explored in order to reframe the existing dualist and divisive psycho-medical discourses on 'fetishism'.

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<sup>741</sup> Hennen, P. M. (2004-08-14) "Feeling a Bit Under the Leather: Performativity, Embodiment and the Specter of Starched Chiffon" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Hilton San Francisco & Renaissance Parc 55 Hotel, San Francisco, CA, Online PDF obtained on 2009-05-26 from [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p108280\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p108280_index.html).

<sup>742</sup> See Hennen, P. M. (2004-08-14) "Feeling a Bit Under the Leather: Performativity, Embodiment and the Specter of Starched Chiffon" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Hilton San Francisco & Renaissance Parc 55 Hotel, San Francisco, CA. from [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p108280\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p108280_index.html).

<sup>743</sup> This arguably relates to their own 'relabeling' of 'fetishism' as 'fetish', which, through a queer lens implies a re-appropriation of heteronormative labels (see Chapter 4), but through another lens implies a misrecognition of the purported difference between people, objects and practices. See chapter 5 in this regard.

<sup>744</sup> See chapters 3 and 4

## Revising Metatheory Beyond Binaries of 'Same' vs 'Other'

This begs the question as to how such relationships *should* be seen beyond deterministic deconstructions of how they perpetuate or subvert normativities.

I suggest that revised metatheory should reflect that political change is not merely collectively driven through overt political action driven by scholarship on how and where normativities is perpetuated<sup>745</sup>. Creating spaces for (queer) subversion of normativity, and more importantly, for the validation of non-normative practices should, I suggest, entail transcending artificially de- or over-valuing 'otherness' (thereby epistemologically recreating it, in the present instance through discursively constructing 'fetishists' as either largely normative or transgressive in an either/or way by conducting simplistic discursive analyses of participants' practices) and should deconstruct the very idea of 'otherness'. Such spaces are thereby not successfully created by generalising about group enterprises, but by encouraging individual exercises of anti-normative challenge, which often takes place furtively, strategically and pragmatically<sup>746</sup>. Social change most often happens through *both* collective mobilisation driven by activists/theorists *and* the individual day-to-day activities of sexual subjects. Through their practices and performances, both partly support normativities<sup>747</sup>, yet partly subvert them, and thereby shift dominant paradigms through their choices, behaviour and how they challenge norms, and rephrase and 'normalise' their practices over time<sup>748</sup>. Enabling the mobilisation of anti-normative activity therefore requires acknowledging the daily circumstances of subjects in which dominant discourses are shifted incrementally and *within* the dominant paradigms of identity politics and compulsory heteropatriarchy, rather than merely by focusing on how subjects repeat (or reject) normativities<sup>749</sup>.

As I have argued, spaces for the queering of sexuality should therefore be established beyond disciplinary and philosophical trajectories which construct people as diametrically opposed to the material world in some essential way<sup>750</sup>, or as foundationally constructed in relation to pre-existing immaterial drives<sup>751</sup>. Following concepts of 'Undisciplined

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<sup>745</sup> See chapter 2 for notions of pragmatic activism

<sup>746</sup> See chapter 2

<sup>747</sup> As discussed in chapter 2, it is virtually impossible to subvert heteronormativity in all spaces and at all times, since to do so would render daily life unmanageable, and would negatively impact on work, home and political life

<sup>748</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). de Certeau corrects Foucault by calling to the importance of individual instances of cultural appropriation. See chapter 6 in this regard. See also chapter 2 re the role of queerness as pedagogy

<sup>749</sup> See chapter 2 for notions of pragmatic activism. See below on the accessible vs the intelligible body  
see also

<sup>750</sup> See chapter 3

<sup>751</sup> See chapter 4

Theory' as a reflexive location that "understands its position in the between as an occasion to theorise ambivalence"<sup>752</sup>, subjects should, I suggest, be conceived of in the intersections between dominant discourses and embodied experience to re-invigorate complex approaches to the (non-essential) subject. In this instance, I suggest that the participants' relationships between the phenomenal and the discursive are more compelling places to look than how their practices may discursively repeat heteronormativity.

### ***Moving Forward***

I suggest that metatheory on 'fetishism' should do more than merely shift focus from the 'fetish' object to a generic (gay) 'fetishist' subject described in purely discursive terms, which serves to perpetuate, rather than undermine, heteropatriarchal discourses. This is particularly important when the task is, as in the current argument, to reframe epistemological metatheory on which to base psycho-medical professional practices.

To focus solely on discursive readings of participant practices in an attempt to clarify metatheory would, I suggest, merely prioritise the ways in which participants do or do not reproduce heteropatriarchy. In turn, this would result in my reconstructing binary oppositions between 'normative' and 'non-normative' sexual practices, which are inappropriate as ontological bases. Instead, I focus on theoretical arguments which unpack the constitution of the subject and sexual practices, calling on participant narratives to support the appropriate points, rather than as scholarly subjects whose narratives are being subjected to rigorous discursive analyses. Although the latter are important, as described above, they are not the main focus of the thesis argument, and I will therefore leave such in-depth exploration for another forum.

Rather, I suggest, what is required is that the idea of both materially-based and discursively-constructed 'identity' be unpacked, and that heteronormativity be understood beyond dualist notions of 'homo-' and 'heterosexual'<sup>753</sup>, and concomitantly 'fetishist' and 'non-fetishist'<sup>754</sup>, and thereby human and object. I suggest that a metatheoretical revision, such as this thesis attempts, should therefore recognise how complexity plays out within dominant discourses, and the future potential for change in reaction to oppositional discourses and heteronormativity rather than readings of how present formulations of heteronormative discourses are repeated: in other words, purely on a discursive deconstruction of the past or present.

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<sup>752</sup> See chapter 1 in this regard, and in particular Genosko, G (1998) *Undisciplined Theory*. Sage: London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi

<sup>753</sup> See chapter 2 re the value of queer theories and the failings of identity politics

<sup>754</sup> See chapter 4 re psychopathological definitions

The remainder of the thesis will therefore be based primarily on theoretical arguments which interrogate the constitution of the subject (Chapter 5), and the extent of agency subjects have and the role of choice in (sexual) practices and social groups (Chapter 6). These arguments will map a way forward for metatheorising sexualities scholarship and psycho-medical practices on two levels.

Firstly, Chapter 5 will clarify the description of 'fetishists', which, as described in Chapter 4, cannot be described by the patently heteronormatively prescriptive ICD classifications for 'fetishism'. Rather, a subject-oriented (rather than either a subject- or object-focused) approach, which enables a departure both from Cartesian dualism and broad-stroke reliance on the generalities of discursive frameworks, serves to acknowledge the complexity of subjectivities<sup>755</sup>. As I will argue, the subject should not be seen as being constituted through essentialising discourses such as the historical frameworks on the *feitiço* and early psychoanalytic foundationalism, as well as the codified object-focused ICD definitions of the 'fetishist'. Rather, I suggest, the constitution of the ('fetishist') subject should be acknowledged to lie not merely in the participants' repetitions of heteropatriarchy, but in the kinds of relationships they have with the phenomenal world, which of necessity require an acknowledgement of how these relationships perpetuate normativities. These relationships reveal that there is an alternative to reproducing heteropatriarchal discourses by merely positing a purportedly singular and identifiable 'subject', thereby obviating essentialist and foundationalist diatribes around the constitution of the subject.

Secondly, Chapter 6 will explore the extent of subjects' agency, in comparison to early psychoanalytic theory and the ICD diagnostic criteria which imply that subjects have limited or no agency. This argument will lead into an exploration of what same-sex sexual practices which incorporate material objects entail, if not what is prescribed by the problematic ICD diagnostic criteria which, as discussed in Chapter 4, specify compulsory heteropatriarchy.

This will, I suggest, challenge the infiltration of heteropatriarchal norms into psycho-medical practices, thereby hopefully assisting in the dissipation of harmful heteropatriarchy both personally and publicly<sup>756</sup>.

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<sup>755</sup> See Hayles, N.K (2002) *Flesh and Metal: Reconfiguring the Mindbody in Virtual Environments*. In *Convergences*, 2002, 10:297–320 at 297 et seq The Johns Hopkins University Press and the Society for Literature and Science. Hayles notes that it is important, yet difficult, to avoid dualistic thinking, but it is important to begin with the idea of relations rather than assuming pre-existing entities. In this way we can acknowledge, in an 'anti-Cartesian' way, that embodied experience comes from the relations between brain and body as well as the ongoing engagement of embodied interactions with environment. See below

See also Damasio, A.R. (1994) *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. New York: Putnam.

<sup>756</sup> Whether and to what extent individuals actively engage with the change in political space enabled by such revised frameworks, and choose to subvert heteropatriarchy through their practices is another question, one over which nobody but they have any control, and one which cannot be 'objectively' determined or predicted. See chapters 1 and 6 in this regard

## CHAPTER 5

### RE-ORIENTING THEORY TOWARDS COHESIVE SUBJECT-ORIENTED PARADIGMS FOR 'FETISH SEXUALITY'

“the givenness of being, the givenness that is given with the very fact that we understand something (whatever it may be and however confused) when we say ‘being’ . . . can be summarized as follows: being itself is given to us as meaning. Being does not *have* meaning, but being itself, the phenomenon of being, is meaning”<sup>757</sup>

It is clear from the preceding chapters that the historical ethnologies of the *feitiço* and psychopathologies of 'fetishism' are highly problematic<sup>758</sup>. Yet, with startlingly little self-reflexivity, the ICD merely reproduces the destructive discourses of its predecessors, classifying 'fetishism' by codifying and thereby essentialising the 'fetishist' *in terms* of the 'fetish object', which itself can only be defined in circular terms: the 'fetishist' is normatively adjudged *a priori* to be inappropriately attached to material objects, which are thereby defined in heteronormative terms as 'fetish objects', which in turn in a circular fashion defines the 'fetishist' in heteronormative terms<sup>759</sup>. The practical (and metatheoretical) value of 'fetishist' as a classificatory term is therefore so internally contradictory and confusing as to be at best questionable and at worst laughable<sup>760</sup>. The result of this catastrophe of circular logic is that, rather than *describing* 'fetishists', the ICD classifications *prescribe* heteronormativity and further marginalise unusual sexual proclivities.

As noted in the *Interjection*, the role of the discursive construction of the individual should be recognised, so as to avoid merely transferring the epistemological focus from a fetish object to a purportedly unitary liberal-humanist subject founded on essentialist and foundationalist discourses. However, a generic poststructuralist subject entirely constructed by discourse is equally inappropriate. Instead, as I will argue in this chapter, the subject is a complex phenomenologically-conceived entity, described both in terms of discursive construction and a matrix of embodied experience incorporating mind, body and environment, which recognises individual political and personal circumstances of the subject, and thereby a more rounded reflection of subjectivities.

<sup>757</sup> Nancy, J-L. (2000). *Being singular plural*. Trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne O'Byrne. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press. pp2

<sup>758</sup> See chapter 3

<sup>759</sup> This is since without the presence of the object the subject cannot be classified or diagnosed in the first place. See chapter 4 and *Interjection*

<sup>760</sup> Apter, E (1993) *Fetishism and Materialism*, in Apter, E and Pietz, W (eds) (1993) *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press pp3



## 5.1 Towards Subjective Orientations: Recognising Materiality and Discourse

As discussed in Chapter 4, differentiating coercive from non-coercive sexual activity is, within certain parameters, a useful way to protect marginalised and at-risk people in our society<sup>761</sup>. Such distinctions between coerciveness and non-coerciveness categorise activity by focusing on (human) sexual objects, thereby appropriately dealing with instances of child molestation/abuse, rape or sexual violence<sup>762</sup>. Yet, arguably, they describe nothing about the sexual subject, who thereby effectively becomes invisible. Nor do they reveal the processes involved in 'non-coercive sexual activity', such as in 'sexual fetish' where the sexual focus is non-human material objects and where there is no necessary human 'object' to protect from damaging actions.

Following both gay rights and queer liberatory paradigms, 'fetish sexuality' *qua* human-object sexual relations should therefore be neither proscribed nor psychopathologised since consent does not enter the equation. Yet, as described in the Interjection, understanding sexual exploration of the material world and including it more functionally in psycho-medical discourses on sexuality requires more than merely avoiding narrow, object-focused diatribes of pathology.

Rather, the shift of focus from object to subject requires a revision of contemporary debates over nature/nurture, biology/culture<sup>763</sup>. Through critical theory we need to 'unmask' apparently inherent "powers of agency as alienated and phantasmagoric representations of human definitions and performances, reducing what appear to be natural properties which emanate from the object itself as delegated actions and properties of humans."<sup>764</sup> Unpacking the constitution of the subject must therefore, I suggest, take cognisance not only of the discursive construction of the individual, but of the materiality of the contemporary social world, in which world 'thing-ness' and 'person-ness' are losing their difference<sup>765</sup>. It is therefore necessary to explore the idioms of reification and fetishism not only as incidences of heteronormative repetition, but as spaces where the relationship between the social and the material can be reconsidered<sup>766</sup>. This requires notions of the subject to be founded

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<sup>761</sup> See chapter 4

<sup>762</sup> In this respect, there are certain arguments for the acknowledgement of childhood sexualities, the sometimes fuzzy line between consensual and non-consensual intercourse, and BDSM where certain expressions of violence are acceptable and others not on a case-to-case basis. In regard to the latter, see the thesis introduction

<sup>763</sup> Oyama, S. (2000). *The Ontogeny of Information: Developmental systems and Evolution, Revised and Expanded*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press. pp92-93

<sup>764</sup> Pels, D, Hetherington, K & Vandenberghe, F (2002) The Status of the Object: Performances, Mediations, and Techniques. In *Theory, Culture & Society* 2002 (SAGE, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi), Vol. 19(5/6): 1–21

<sup>765</sup> See chapter 4 re concerns about coerciveness vs non-coerciveness as a distinguishing factor

<sup>766</sup> Pels et al *ibid*

on politically coherent, non-essentialist, non-foundationalist and relatively value-neutral frameworks<sup>767</sup>, so as to enable forward-looking and non-determinist views of queer sexuality. Yet at the same time, such conceptions should be cohesive enough to inform psycho-medical services within the contemporary identity-politics based environment<sup>768</sup>. As I will explain, this in turn means that a coherent notion of the sexual subject must take account of how 'the body' mediates between discourse and the material.

### **5.1.1 Acknowledging 'the Body' and Re-Invigorating Experience**

The material, and by implication 'the body', is often argued to be produced by culture<sup>769</sup>. Lock notes that fluidity, pastiche and hybrids of postmodernity have been used to replace oppositional thinking, and that subjectivity is not a metaphysical unit opposed to a body which is merely a collection of organic parts. But she also appropriately cautions that recognising this can lead to avoiding responsibility and exchanging politics for the hyper-real<sup>770</sup>. This equates to erasing difference, which especially feminists are loathe to do given the complexities of gendered difference.

Cognisance must therefore be taken of a middle path. Clearly both culture *and* materiality play a role in subjectivities. Cartesian cause/effect and subject/object oppositions are clearly not appropriate as bases for metatheory<sup>771</sup>. Yet, contrary to the fears implicit in much deconstructivist scholarship, creating some kind of epistemological order does not mean merely translating, in reactionary ways, how normativities are discursively reconstituted<sup>772</sup>. Indeed, constructing epistemological order does not necessarily merely equate to the imposition of power-based control through scholarship<sup>773</sup>.

In order to effectively counter (hetero)normativities, it is imperative, I suggest, that we clarify not only what the world 'shouldn't' look like, but how it 'should' in non-determinist ways, so as to make explicit the ways in which essentialisms and foundationalisms are inappropriate, thereby rendering

<sup>767</sup> As value-neutral as possible given the discursively constructed nature of all cultural frameworks

<sup>768</sup> See chapter 2 re political perspectives

<sup>769</sup> See Lock, M (1997) Decentering the Natural Body: Making Difference Matter. In *Configurations* 5.2 (1997) 267-292 pp270.

See Sahlins, M (1976) *Culture and Practical Reason* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp 4 Sahlins assumes that biology is a given but that culture is basically autonomous, thanks to the symbolic systems that create it through meaning rather than the material. Lock notes that "in seeking to counter the empirico-materialist wing of mid-twentieth-century anthropology, Sahlins situates himself firmly on the culture-as-driving-force end of the nature/culture spectrum"

<sup>770</sup> See above re the need to differentiate between politics and metatheory. See Rojek, C and Turner, B.S. (eds.) (1993) *Forget Baudrillard?* London: Routledge

<sup>771</sup> In regard 'fetish', see chapters 3 and 4

<sup>772</sup> See Oyama, S. (2000a). *The ontogeny of information: Developmental systems and evolution, revised and expanded*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press. pp92-93. See also Interjection, supra.

<sup>773</sup> See Oyama, S. (2000). *ibid*. See also Interjection, supra.

their proponents more accountable<sup>774</sup>. Therefore, any conception of a workable political solution to deterministic discourses should entail some kind of *post*-poststructuralist transformation and emergence into a future which has erased (hetero)normativities<sup>775</sup>, which hopefully will one day be relegated to the status of quaint relics of a distant past. Failing this, scholarship runs the risk of merely re-invigorating them through critiquing them and thereby projecting forwards, while failing to come up with viable alternatives. This implies, I suggest, that re-visioning 'fetishism' should entail de-essentialising and de-reifying sexuality, through transgressively reconnecting the material and non-material (human) being by calling on both Pietz' and Marxist readings of fetish-as-capitalist-critique<sup>776</sup>.

This in turn implies that the very idea of 'fetishism' should be unpacked in both scholarly and sexual contexts. Whereas it is useful to identify how practices 'fetishise' sexualities or capitalist frameworks and thereby inappropriately perpetuate normativities, it is equally important not to assume that 'fetishism' is a valid and useful lens in itself. As described in the Interjection, the participants sexually 'fetishise' body parts, and perhaps thereby, in a Marxist sense, 'fetishise' those parts by prioritising them as objects to be 'owned', thereby perpetuating heteropatriarchy through effacing their sexual partners' personalities in favour of body parts. Yet the scholarly depiction of those practices must surely delve deeper in a more self-critical way, exploring what is meant by the analytical use of the term 'fetishising' to describe practices. Scholarship should, I suggest, thereby not merely reproduce assumptions that there is some essential notion of 'fetishism'. Transgressing these two layers means deconstructing more than practices, but unpacking the idioms of materiality which underlie the practices and their scholarly depictions.

To do so entails expanding on notions of re-connecting the material with the non-material in order to critique notions that culture is merely displaced onto ideas or material things, as opposed to that grounded, sensual human experience, through the 'itness' of embodied being, makes material an identity that society reifies<sup>777</sup>. In transgressively reconnecting people and objects beyond essentialist or foundationalist perspectives, the negative history of 'the fetish' can, I suggest, be reconnected "as a synonym for sorcery and witchcraft (*feticaria*) to an outlaw strategy of dereification"<sup>778</sup>. This creates an opening for historical discourses of 'fetishism' to function as points

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<sup>774</sup> See chapter 2 re the difference between gay and queer politics, and the importance of moving beyond mere deconstruction given the primacy of identity-politics.

<sup>775</sup> Oyama, S. (2000). *The Ontogeny of Information: Developmental systems and Evolution, Revised and Expanded*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press. pp92-93

<sup>776</sup> Apter, E (1993) Fetishism and Materialism, in Apter, E and Pietz, W (eds) (1993) *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press pp3

<sup>777</sup> Apter, E (1993) *ibid*

<sup>778</sup> Apter, E (1993) *ibid*

from which to renegotiate the construction of the 'fetishist' through re-visioning the boundaries between him/her and the 'fetish object', which, “in spite of itself, unfixes representations even as it enables them to become monolithic ‘signs’ of culture”<sup>779</sup>.

In this regard, the failings of colonialist discourses on 'fetishism' are instructive points of departure<sup>780</sup>. I suggest that forward-looking metatheory should incorporate notions of the dialectical relations between people (as both material and immaterial entities) and discourses called on to marshal both mind and body as personal-political resources. I suggest that this more complex understanding of the relations between the material, immateriality and power gives some insight into how we can view 'fetish' in contemporary sexual context, by incorporating notions of discourses and the body into contemporary notions of sex incorporating material objects, and thereby (sexual) relations with material objects in ways which do not assume the primacy of humans as immaterial beings in some determinist way, put on the planet to dominate.

#### *5.1.1a) Towards a Non-(Hetero)Normative Constitution of the Subject*

Discursive constructions of practices allow theorists to address questions as to which bodies matter, and why, politically-speaking<sup>781</sup>, and therefore inform political and social approaches for managing issues like heteronormativity, compulsory masculinity, sexism, HIV or STD transmission. Yet on their own I suggest that they do not reveal the constitution of the 'subject' in fetish sexuality in a way which avoids implicit reliance on heteropatriarchy, whether through seeing the individual as an psychopathologisable mind, foundationally defined in opposition to material objects, or deterministically as a discursively described victim (or perpetrator) of heteropatriarchy.

Instead, as I will discuss, subjects should ontologically be understood through the relationships between embodied being, the world around him/her and dominant heteropatriarchal discourses, in order to demarcate a complex locus of subjectivity which does not reproduce heteropatriarchy and does not rely on reactionary essentialist sexual identities<sup>782</sup>. As I will argue, the linkages for this lie not in the contemporary practices of 'fetishists', but in the ontologies reflected by their relationships with the material: the intersections between mind, body, material environment and discourse and notions of subjectively perceived 'meaning', all of which find their connecting point in 'the body'.

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<sup>779</sup> Apter, E (1993) *ibid*

<sup>780</sup> See chapter 3

<sup>781</sup> Butler, J (1993) *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York: Routledge

<sup>782</sup> See chapter 2

## 5.2 The Subject-Self: Internal Coherence of Mind, Body and Discourse

The fictive mind-body split has been challenged by poststructuralist, feminist and queer theories which critique Eurocentric, patriarchal, heterosexist underpinnings of dualist thinking<sup>783</sup>. Following these views, mind and body are not separable in a Cartesian way, and the body is not just physical matter subservient to the mind. Yet conversely, mind and body are not merely a singular notion described from the outside in the mould of liberal humanist anthropocentric constructions. Rather, the notion of 'meaning' should be interrogated as the central point of departure in describing the subject from a poststructuralist (queer) perspective.

Even before the height of poststructuralist thinking, Epstein argued incongruously yet compellingly in favour of subjectively conceived 'meaning'<sup>784</sup>. She argued that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological and Wittgenstein's language philosophies have a common starting-point in assuming that attempts to explain the human subject must transcend the Cartesian dichotomy of Thought and Extension (mind and body) and move into more complex ideas of integrating mental within physical<sup>785</sup>.

Merleau-Ponty replaces the idea of 'substance' with 'form' or 'structure', while Wittgenstein develops an analogy between language and the human body where both get meaning similarly, thereby becoming intelligible<sup>786</sup>. Epstein argued that the two philosophers' views are similar in that:

- the dichotomy between thing and consciousness must be surpassed
- the mental and the physical must be blended to create an expressive body and meaningful structure
- traditional substantial-ontological approaches must be replaced with a functional one
- an in-depth analysis of Meaning is the appropriate way to understand human beings

Merleau-Ponty argues that cognition takes place *through*, rather than *prior to*, the body<sup>787</sup>.

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<sup>783</sup> See Bordo, S (1993) *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press; Butler, J (1993) *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge; Butler, J (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge; Bourdieu, P. Trans Nice, R (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.

<sup>784</sup> Epstein, M.F. (1975) The Common Ground of Merleau-Ponty's and Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Man. In *Journal of the History of Philosophy* Volume 13, Number 2, April 1975 p221-234

<sup>785</sup> Epstein, M.F. (1975) *ibid*

<sup>786</sup> Epstein, M.F. (1975) *ibid*

<sup>787</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M (1945) trans. Colin Smith (1962) *Phenomenology of Perception*. New York: Humanities Press

In this regard, Butler calls attention to the psyche as being

"that which constitutes the mode by which [the] body is given, the condition and contour of that givenness. [But] the materiality of the body ought not to be conceptualized as a unilateral or causal effect of the psyche in any sense that would reduce that materiality to the psyche or make of the psyche the monistic stuff out of which that materiality is produced and/or derived"<sup>788</sup>.

Merleau-Ponty further understands the body as the vehicle of comprehension of the phenomenal world, where objectivity and subjectivity meet<sup>789</sup>. For him, the body is communicative and the means by which we 'have' a world. He argues against empiricist-causal natural science and introspective psychology as means of understanding human beings. Both are

“one-sided and therefore inadequate: empiricist science and objective behaviorism view the body as an object of physical nature, amenable to mechanistic explanation, while intellectualistic and vitalistic psychology work on the assumption of a disembodied mind, a pure subjectivity that dwells over and above physical nature.”<sup>790</sup>

Both approaches see the body as an 'outside' without an 'inside' (a thing) and a mind as an 'inside' without an 'outside' (consciousness)<sup>791</sup>. Human bodies confound this dualism, in their complex and ambiguous psycho-social construction. Merleau-Ponty sees three orders of things: matter (physics), life (biology) and mind (psychology) as structural rather than ontological, with the relation between them being integrated rather than causal/deductive<sup>792</sup>. While the biological can't be reduced to the physical, the mental can't be reduced to the 'vital'. There are always new structures and meanings projected onto the world by consciousness, and people are always introducing new cycles of behaviour through varying cultural objects<sup>793</sup>.

Consciousness neither pre-exists nor is a force added to a material body, and people can't be understood by either psychology nor biology alone. Epstein acknowledges that human beings are not defined according to either a mental (psychological) or a physical (biological) reality only.

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<sup>788</sup> Butler, J (1993) *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York:Routledge, 66

<sup>789</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M (1945) trans. Colin Smith (1962) *Phenomenology of Perception*. New York: Humanities Press

<sup>790</sup> Epstein, M.F. (1975) The Common Ground of Merleau-Ponty's and Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Man. In *Journal of the History of Philosophy* Volume 13, Number 2, April 1975 pp222

<sup>791</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M (1945) trans. Colin Smith (1962) *Phenomenology of Perception*. New York: Humanities Press pp108: "the reflective attitude simultaneously purifies the common notions of body and soul by defining the body as the sum of its parts with no interior, and the soul as a being wholly present to itself without distance."

<sup>792</sup> Epstein, M.F. (1975) The Common Ground of Merleau-Ponty's and Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Man. In *Journal of the History of Philosophy* Volume 13, Number 2, April 1975 pp210 notes: "The integration achieved at the different levels carries with it a relativization of the notions of "body" and "soul"; at the physical level the body is a mass of chemical components in interaction; at the biological, there is the dialectic of the living being and its environment; at the human level there is the dialectic of the social subject and its group. Each of these levels is "soul" with respect to the preceding one, "body" with respect to the following one

<sup>793</sup> Epstein, *ibid* pp222

Rather, they should be explored through integration of the two:

“To explain a person's conduct by the history of his libido (as Freud often does), and to relate his acts only to the universe of biology, is to substitute the pathological for the normal. This explication is valid only in the case of a person who has not integrated his vital energies into a new whole, and in whom the biological forces continue to act independently and autonomously. In a normal case, even instincts are transformed and humanized when integrated into the new whole which is a human being.”<sup>794</sup>

Perception is thereby not a collection of amorphous sensations synthesized in intellect, but integration in a meaningful form bringing together content and form.

“the soul realizes itself through the body and at the same time transforms it into a phenomenal body and transfers it outside of physical space. The connection between mind and body is based on the significance of a structure which confers meaning on a piece of matter and makes it live.”<sup>795</sup>

This incorporates the idea of structure as enunciated in Gestalt psychology, which conceives of the unity of the interior and the exterior<sup>796</sup>.

Wittgenstein, on the other hand, sees language as a tool to achieve meaning, through the analogy between words becoming signs and carrying meaning on the one hand, and, on the other, the physical body that becomes a living human, where a 'soul' is not added to the body but the body has (subjective) meaning that transcends the physical<sup>797</sup>. Thinking is not incorporeal, and neither can what gives life to the body be abstracted from it<sup>798</sup>. This links to notions that the mental/emotional are both seen and 'performed' through physical behaviour<sup>799</sup>.

<sup>794</sup> Epstein, *ibid* pp224. See chapter 4 re problematic issues around psychopathology *in toto*

<sup>795</sup> Epstein, *ibid* pp226

<sup>796</sup> See Koffka, K (1999) *Principles of Gestalt Psychology*, Volume 7 of International library of psychology, philosophy, and scientific method, Routledge. Ellis, W.D (1999) *A Source Book of Gestalt Psychology*, Volume 2 of International library of psychology, philosophy and scientific method. Routledge. Ash, M.G. (1998) *Gestalt psychology in German culture, 1890-1967: holism and the quest for objectivity. Cambridge studies in the history of psychology*, Cambridge University Press

See also Read, S.J.; Vanman, E.J. & Miller, L.C. (1997) *Connectionism, Parallel Constraint Satisfaction Processes, and Gestalt Principles: (Re)Introducing Cognitive Dynamics to Social Psychology*. In

*Personality and Social Psychology Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 26-53 (1997), looking at relations between connectionist modeling and Gestalt principles. Westheimer, G (1999) *Gestalt theory reconfigured: Max Wertheimer's anticipation of recent developments in visual neuroscience*. In *Perception* 28(1) 5–15: This paper looks at Wertheimer's conception of Gestalt theory whereby the properties of any of the parts are circumscribed by the structural laws of the whole. Westheimer argues that neurophysiological research into cortical processing of visual stimuli has opened up a need for organising principles, and ideas such as contour salience and figure segregation, which used to be the arena of Gestalt psychology, are now appealing in light of combinations between neural modeling, and psychophysical and electrophysiological approaches to understand neural mechanisms of cognition; Rock, I & Palmer, S (1990) *The Legacy of Gestalt Psychology*. In *Scientific American*. December 1990, 263 (6) pp48-61

<sup>797</sup> Wittgenstein, L. trans. Anscombe, G. E. M. (1963) *Philosophical Investigations*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Basil Blackwell

<sup>798</sup> By this I do not mean any kind of essentialist or religious conception of 'soul' or 'spirit'

<sup>799</sup> See Wittgenstein, L. trans. Anscombe, G. E. M. (1963) *Philosophical Investigations*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Basil

This kind of approach has flowed, albeit in doctored form, into Butler's re-interpretation of Freud's bodily ego and Lacan's mirror stage, whereby the body is seen to be made up of indissoluble psychic and corporeal elements<sup>800</sup>. Clearly body and mind are interdependent in that both require the other: the body gives itself (signalling its presence) to the psyche, which receives, translates and transforms the signals<sup>801</sup>. This is what Vasterling calls the body's persisting dynamic materiality<sup>802</sup>. This demarcates a kind of relationship between mind and body, but does not take account of political influences which underlie (hetero)normative repetitions, and therefore too closely approximates liberal humanist diatribes.

### 5.2.1 *The Body, Language and Discourse*

Dynamic materiality is not simply constructed between material bodies and minds. Body and mind are not merely physically interconnected. They are in turn connected to discourse and language, which both constructs and is constructed by material relations<sup>803</sup>. Language is both a tool to connect meaning, and is the way in which discourse comes about<sup>804</sup>. Shifting from seeing 'mind vs body' to 'mind/body' must therefore account for political changes which, as Sullivan argues from a feminist perspective, should undercut, rather than reinforce, dominant personal and cultural patterns, by subverting the status-quo<sup>805</sup>. She notes that Merleau-Ponty's focus on an anonymous or pre-personal quality to body experience demonstrates a false universality, while his perspective on bodily intentionality keeps him in a subjectivist philosophy that is not sufficient to account for difference<sup>806</sup>.

It is therefore important to explore how discourse functions in constructing the 'body'.

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Blakewell

<sup>800</sup> Butler, J (1993) *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge Yet see the criticisms of post-freudian thinking in chapter 4

<sup>801</sup> Butler, J (1993) *ibid*

<sup>802</sup> Vasterling, V (1999) Butler's sophisticated constructivism: A critical assessment. In *Hypatia*. Bloomington: Summer 1999. Vol. 14, Iss. 3; pg. 17-40

<sup>803</sup> See Lock, M (1997) Decentering the Natural Body: Making Difference Matter. In *Configurations* 5.2 (1997) 267-292 pp270

<sup>804</sup> See Wittgenstein, L. trans. Anscombe, G. E. M. (1963) *Philosophical Investigations*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Basil Blakewell; Relating to sexuality, see also Foucault, M. trans. Sheridan, A (1979)

*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage; Foucault, M, Trans. Hurley, R. (1978)

*The History of Sexuality. Vol. 1*. New York: Pantheon; Butler, J (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the*

*Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge; Butler, J (1993) *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of "sex."*

New York: Routledge; Butler, J (1997) Performative Acts and Gender Constitutions: An Essay in Phenomenology

and Feminist Theory. In Conboy, K, Medina, N, & Stanbury, S (eds)(1997) *Writing on the Body: Female*

*Embodiment and Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press

<sup>805</sup> Weiss, G (2002) The Anonymous Intentions of Transactional Bodies. In *Hypatia* vol. 17, no. 4 (Fall 2002) pg 187-200, reviewing Sullivan, Shannon. (2001) *Living across and through skins: Transactional bodies, pragmatism, and feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

<sup>806</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M (1945) trans. Colin Smith (1962) *Phenomenology of Perception*. New York: Humanities Press



### 5.2.1a) There Is No 'Body'

The body was historically constructed oppositionally as physical matter, and as sense and sensations<sup>807</sup>. Babb speaks of *Körper* (the body) as something identified/described from the outside, located in terms of spatial relations and categorisation, and linked to time, space and events<sup>808</sup>. This can be clearly seen in the historical anthropological and psychoanalytic constructions of 'fetishism' which separated mind from body, focusing on the former through rejecting the latter's connection to material objects<sup>809</sup>.

Perpich notes that Western philosophical traditions have constructed the body in opposition to speech and language, and as ineffable, passive, impenetrable, unintelligent<sup>810</sup>. More recently, however, postmodernism has viewed the body as primarily a linguistic and discursive construct<sup>811</sup>. Centrally, Foucault re-invigorated interest in embodiment through exploring how the body is formed through social and cultural practices<sup>812</sup>. Other key postmodernists have developed this, arguing that there is no 'body'. Baudrillard's 'body' is constructed as an immaterial informational structure, whereby

"the human body, our body, seems superfluous in its proper expanse, in the complexity and multiplicity of its organs, of its tissue and functions, because today everything is concentrated in the brain and the genetic code, which alone sum up the operational definition of being"<sup>813</sup>.

In similar vein, the Krokers see the body as 'second-order vision' and 'floating body parts' that call attention to the disappearance of the body into a fluid and changing display of signs<sup>814</sup>. They signal that perhaps the body no longer exists, disappearing ideologically (into fashion), epistemologically (into the Cartesian consciousness) and semiotically (into tattoos and 'floating signs')<sup>815</sup>. Deleuze, in conceptions of 'rhizomatic' virtuality, argues that there being no 'body' means that there is no determinate nature or privileged code whose plan is separate and untouched by circumstances<sup>816</sup>. From a feminist perspective, Grosz calls to reject the idea of 'the

<sup>807</sup> Babb, G (2002) Where the Bodies are Buried: Cartesian Dispositions in Narrative Theories of Character. In *NARRATIVE*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (October 2002)

<sup>808</sup> Babb, *ibid*

<sup>809</sup> See chapters 3 and 4

<sup>810</sup> Perpich, D (2005) Corpus Meum: Disintegrating Bodies and the Ideal of Integrity. In *Hypatia* vol. 20, no. 3 (Summer 2005) 75-91

<sup>811</sup> Hayles, N.K. (1993) The Materiality of Informatics. In *Configurations* 1.1 (1993) 147-170 pp147 et seq

<sup>812</sup> Relating to sexuality, see particularly Foucault, M, Trans. Hurley, R. (1978) *The History of Sexuality. Vol. 1*. New York: Pantheon

<sup>813</sup> Baudrillard, J, trans. Schutze, B. & Schutze, C. (1988) *The Ecstasy of Communication*. New York: Semiotext(e) pp 18

<sup>814</sup> Kroker, A and Kroker, M (1987) Panic Sex in America. In *Body Invaders: Panic Sex in America*. New York: St. Martin's Press, pp. 20-21.

<sup>815</sup> Kroker, A and Kroker, M (1987) *ibid*

<sup>816</sup> See for example Deleuze, G, Trans. Patton, P (1994) *Difference and Repetition*. New York: Columbia University

body', arguing that there are only bodies of various kinds<sup>817</sup>.

As Butler notes, the body derives meaning in discourse only through the context of power relations, particularly gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality<sup>818</sup>. Post-structuralist conceptions of experiential embodiment are thereby important for feminist and queer theory, and for understanding the important role of the body in unpacking implicit historical ontological dualisms and resisting normative and prescriptive discourses on gender and sexuality<sup>819</sup>.

### 5.2.1b) *But There Is Embodiment*

Yet simplistic readings of the construction of the body through discourse are problematic in that they can deny or underplay the importance of materiality, thereby narrowing both what is meant by 'subject', and negating the scope for the subject's engagement with the world through his/her agency<sup>820</sup>. In turn, given how such approaches are politically read through the identity-politics lenses which prevail, this tends to create determinist discourses on the subject<sup>821</sup>. More specifically, although discursive constructions of the body are imperative in descriptions of how people have related to dominant discourses in the past and present, I suggest that they do not describe the future, since they cannot prescribe in advance what forms human interactions with the discursive and material world will take. They therefore cannot wholly form the foundation for psycho-medical epistemologies<sup>822</sup>.

In order to better locate the sexual subject, I suggest that it we should look beyond fictions of there being an essential Cartesian 'body' on the one hand, or an entirely-discursively-constructed 'no body' on the other. This implies incorporating more complex notions of embodiment related to discursive power relations, and yet still located in time and space.

Lock notes that the body refuses to be pinned down, whether with or without the soul/mind, and that much of cultural studies thinking speaks of the distinctiveness of human beings, while at the same time denying the distinctiveness of the body<sup>823</sup>.

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Press, pp208-9 relating to virtuality and the real; Deleuze, G and Guattari, F trans. Massumi, B (1992) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: Continuum

<sup>817</sup> Grosz, E (1994) *Volatile bodies: Toward a corporeal feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. pp 19

<sup>818</sup> Butler, J (1997) *The psychic life of power: Theories in subjection*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. pp94

<sup>819</sup> Oksala, J (2004) Anarchic Bodies: Foucault and the Feminist Question of Experience. In *Hypatia* vol. 19, no. 4 (Fall 2004)

<sup>820</sup> See Interjection, supra, and chapter 6

<sup>821</sup> See chapter 2

<sup>822</sup> See above and chapter 6

<sup>823</sup> Margaret Lock (1997) Decentering the Natural Body: Making Difference Matter *Configurations* 5.2 (1997) 267-292

“Discourses about body surfaces ... inform us, often brilliantly and provocatively, about the normalization in popular culture of dominant ideologies for social life and about resistances to them, resistances that at times transcend anomie, and move toward a creative body politics; but the interiority of the body usually remains all the while "black-boxed" (in the idiom of the sociologists of science), a tedious universal, and therefore consigned to the biological sciences.”<sup>824</sup>

She argues that the body is elusive, since it can't be represented fully yet at the same time can't be experienced without representation. Calling on Kirmayer<sup>825</sup>, who addresses concerns about the passivity of the body in contemporary medical practice, she argues for "the body's insistence on meaning": attention should be paid to how the body "presents" itself in "substance and action," rather than simply as an implement for reflection and imagination.

This means that the body should be differentiated from embodiment. The former is an ideological or cultural construct, described *ex post facto* to explain cultural/social circumstances and power dynamics, while the latter is something which people experience and then describe and use in a forward-looking way to give meaning and direction to their lives. Embodiment always destabilises 'the body', yet can be difficult to use, resulting in many theorists problematically preferring the abstraction of 'the body' to the specifics of embodiment<sup>826</sup>. The body is incorporated into culture, whereas embodiment is only so incorporated through relations with the body<sup>827</sup>. Embodiment is not more 'natural' than the body, and does not imply an essentialist self<sup>828</sup>. This is parallel to Buddhist meditation which sees the unified self as an illusion made up of various subsystems, positions which various contemporary theorists in the cognitive sciences have taken up<sup>829</sup>. As a result, theorists uncovering the ideological bases of naturalisation serve to denaturalise 'the body' rather than embodiment<sup>830</sup>. In this way, discourse affects the body, while experiences which take place material circumstances affect embodiment.

The body is always a normative relation to a set of criteria, whereas embodiment is contextual and located in place, time, physiology and culture, making up enactment as a specific thing in a moment in time constituted from the 'noise of difference'<sup>831</sup>. Relative to the body, embodiment is “other and elsewhere, at once excessive and deficient in its infinite variations, particularities, and

<sup>824</sup> Lock, M (1997) Decentering the Natural Body: Making Difference Matter. In *Configurations* 5.2 (1997) 267-292 pp267

<sup>825</sup> Kirmayer, L (1992) The Body's Insistence on Meaning: Metaphor as Presentation and Representation in Illness Experience. In *Medical Anthropological Quarterly* 6 (1992): 323-346

<sup>826</sup> Hayles, N.K. (1993) The Materiality of Informatics. In *Configurations* 1.1 (1993) 147-170 pp147 et seq

<sup>827</sup> Hayles, N.K. (1993) *ibid*

<sup>828</sup> Hayles, N.K. (1993) *ibid*

<sup>829</sup> Varela, F.J., Thompson, E, and Rosch, E (1991) *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press

<sup>830</sup> Hayles, N.K. (1993) The Materiality of Informatics. In *Configurations* 1.1 (1993) 147-170

<sup>831</sup> Hayles, N.K. (1993) *ibid*

abnormalities<sup>832</sup>. It is always infiltrated by culture, and is in tension with cultural hegemonies<sup>833</sup>.

Embodied human experience, and therefore the functioning and exploration of sexual practices, is more effectively described through *Leib* than *Körper*<sup>834</sup>. *Leib* describes the subjective experience of embodiment available to consciousness, and focuses on structures that differentiate elements of experience into comprehensible pieces, allowing people to orient themselves and operate within the world<sup>835</sup>. *Leib* consists of a range of processes, and importantly incorporates sensation coming from external and internal stimuli ('exteroception' and 'interoception'), 'motility', and the parts of experience beyond consciousness or control, such as involuntary visceral processes ('viscerality') and habits ('habitus').

Exteroception is the experience and awareness of external stimuli via bodily surface organs. Visual and aural stimulus leads to awareness away from the body, which leaves a sense of disembodiment. This leads to the perception both of bodily absence and presence, for example, the feeling one has while thinking of something other than what is physically present<sup>836</sup>. Interoception, on the other hand, is the consciously perceptible internal sensations coming from the viscera, such as adrenalin rushes, fatigue and hunger.<sup>837</sup> Whereas exteroception is multi-dimensional and constituted by the five senses which are spatiotemporally and qualitatively different, interoception is singular and made up of 'inner sensation'. It is not easily located spatially within the body, and is a feeling with vague, indistinct borders<sup>838</sup>. Whereas exteroception is continuous yet interrupted, interoception is not. For example hunger comes and goes, but the ongoing process of digestion is unconscious.

Motility is where movement in space is allowed by the perceptions of environment, kinesthesia, internal sensations and control. Subjectively, however, perception of motility is more important than motility itself.

Viscerality, as Leder argues, is of equal importance to consciousness, since the visceral reactions like digestion, circulation and sleep allow the proper functioning of life but are not

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<sup>832</sup> Hayles, N.K. (1993) *ibid*

<sup>833</sup> Hayles, N.K. (1993) *ibid*

<sup>834</sup> Babb, G (2002) Where the Bodies are Buried: Cartesian Dispositions in Narrative Theories of Character. In *NARRATIVE*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (October 2002)

<sup>835</sup> Babb, G (2002) *ibid*

<sup>836</sup> Babb, G (2002) *ibid*

<sup>837</sup> See Leder, D (1990) *The Absent Body*. Chicago:Univ. of Chicago Press; and Leder, D (1999) *Flesh and Blood:A Proposed Supplement to Merleau-Ponty*. In Welton, D (ed) (1999) *The Body:Classic and Contemporary Readings*. Malden:Blackwell Publishers, p200–10

<sup>838</sup> See Leder, D (1990) *ibid* and Leder, D (1999) *ibid*

conscious<sup>839</sup>. Without these, life would not be possible.

Bourdieu's idea of habitus (the habit-forming processes instituted by social processes, like building organisation etc.) ensures spontaneity and situates and shapes conscious perception<sup>840</sup>. Bourdieu and Merleau-Ponty's views diverge in that the former sees the social dimension as a conditioning factor to the perceptual, rather than as second layer on top of perception<sup>841</sup>. Bourdieu notes that habitus and environment can mismatch, causing crisis:

“practices are always liable to incur negative sanctions when the environment with which they are actually confronted is too distant from that to which they are objectively fitted”<sup>842</sup>

In this way, when unforeseen situations, obstacles, and opportunities arise, habitus responds conservatively and prioritises familiar and comfortable practices over radical changes which might be more appropriate<sup>843</sup>.

Further, looked at through the lens of *Lieb*, the 'lived body' is instrumental in developing abstract reasoning, which is supported by various research traditions<sup>844</sup>.

### 5.2.2 Embodiment and Discourse

However, embodiment seems to have faded from many accounts of discursive construction. Oksala suggests that perhaps Foucault's approach to experience (particularly in relation to anarchic bodies), and his references to “the body as the locus of resistance” are “merely naive slippages into the idea of a prediscursive body”<sup>845</sup>. She asks

“Do we have to accept Butler’s reading of the Foucaultian body according to which these passages are implicit contradictions within his thought? Are bodies and pleasures within the same discursive order as sex and sexuality? What can bodies and pleasures as an alternative to sex-desire mean? Do they presuppose an understanding of experience?”<sup>846</sup>

<sup>839</sup> See Leder, D (1990) *ibid* and Leder, D (1999) *ibid*

<sup>840</sup> See Bourdieu, P. Transl. Nice, R (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press

<sup>841</sup> Babb, G (2002) Where the Bodies are Buried: Cartesian Dispositions in Narrative Theories of Character. In *NARRATIVE*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (October 2002) pp206

<sup>842</sup> Bourdieu, P. Trans Nice, R (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press. pp78

<sup>843</sup> Babb, G (2002) Where the Bodies are Buried: Cartesian Dispositions in Narrative Theories of Character. In *NARRATIVE*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (October 2002) pp206. See chapter 6 re agency and how this process works

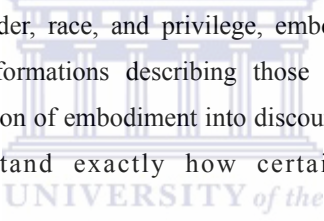
<sup>844</sup> For example, in research into cognitive science, linguistics, historical linguistics, cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, gesture and discourse analysis. See Johnson, M. (1987) *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press

<sup>845</sup> Oksala, J (2004) Anarchic Bodies: Foucault and the Feminist Question of Experience. In *Hypatia* vol. 19, no. 4 (Fall 2004) pp102

<sup>846</sup> Oksala, J (2004) *ibid*

Even though Foucault's conception of the panopticon speaks of the regulation of both body and mind, 'embodiment' as an experiential concept seems to disappear, through the shift of emphasis from physical sensation to mental impression, and the hierarchy of oppression that counts control of mind as more dangerous than power over body<sup>847</sup>. By concentrating on large scale broad-stroke discursive shifts rather than embodiment and individual experiences, Foucault seems to ascribe a kind of universality to 'the body', as opposed to the singularity of subjective embodied experience<sup>848</sup>. In this way, Foucault's concept of the sexual body has been criticised as a naive account of a pre-discursive body in that he fails to show why certain individuals occupy certain subject positions, rather than others<sup>849</sup>. He further unsuccessfully addresses the problem of singularity, where subjects construct their positions, and where some construct them more than others<sup>850</sup>. In this regard, De Certeau corrects Foucault by calling attention to the importance of individual instances of cultural appropriation<sup>851</sup>.

Hayles argues that a focus on 'oppression' as a singular idea obscures the ways in which oppression is perpetuated, i.e. through embodied practices:


  
 “Fissuring along lines of class, gender, race, and privilege, embodied practices create heterogeneous spaces even when the discursive formations describing those practices seem uniformly dispersed throughout the society. The assimilation of embodiment into discourse has the additional disadvantage of making it difficult to understand exactly how certain practices spread through a society.”<sup>852</sup>

Reminding us of the role of action in discursive norms, Hayles argues that the cultural conditions that allow the disappearance of the body are more than merely the (passive) explicit linguistically-mediated discourses around the body, but include changing production, consumption and communication patterns<sup>853</sup>, which are all related to material conditions.

<sup>847</sup> Foucault, M. trans. Sheridan, A (1979) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage, p. 205.

<sup>848</sup> Hayles, N.K. (1993) The Materiality of Informatics. In *Configurations* 1.1 (1993) 147-170 pp153

<sup>849</sup> See Scott, J. (1992). Experience. In Butler, J and Scott, J (eds)(1992) *Feminists theorize the political*. New York: Routledge; Oksala, J (2004) Anarchic Bodies: Foucault and the Feminist Question of Experience. In *Hypatia* vol. 19, no. 4 (Fall 2004). Oksala discusses the trajectory of the importance of experience in feminist theory, from the 1970's position of experience being of paramount importance through Joan Scott's accusation of feminist attempts to make experience visible as being naive.

<sup>850</sup> Oksala, J (2004) Anarchic Bodies: Foucault and the Feminist Question of Experience. In *Hypatia* vol. 19, no. 4 (Fall 2004)

<sup>851</sup> de Certeau, M, trans. Rendall, S.F. (1985) *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press

<sup>852</sup> Hayles, N.K. (1993) The Materiality of Informatics. In *Configurations* 1.1 (1993) 147-170 pp153

<sup>853</sup> Hayles, N.K. (1993) *ibid*. She frames the disappearance of embodiment in terms of informatics, as the material, technological, economic and social structures making possible the information age. The late capitalist issues of overproduction and underconsumption makes necessary the phasing out of workers, and their bodies, through such practices as increased temporary and contract workers, leveraged buyouts which shift focus from the product to the profit, and the creation of increasingly consumable and repeatable events provided by growing service industries in place of the creation of material products that will remain. This necessitates a greater, more accurate and faster flow of information, which in turn feeds multinational corporations that do not need to be geographically close to customers in order to be efficient. This in turn results in a more flexible system of location for production enterprise

The body, however, is indispensable to human life, and the calls of postmodernists to view the exit of the body is rather a new way (or subjectivity) of seeing the very real body<sup>854</sup>. The body's dematerialisation through a focus on discourse indeed depends on the material in complex and specific ways, both politically and personally, and on the circumstances of embodiment which dematerialisation would obfuscate<sup>855</sup>.

Embodiment, seen through the lenses of *Leib* and its intersections with discourse, can clearly be seen in the participant practices. As alluded to above, the participants' desires reflects *both* thoughts *and* the feelings they experience in their bodies, in ways which shift and change. Further, their embodied experience is problematically informed and often driven by heteropatriarchal normative conceptions of beauty and sensuality, and by discursively constructed scripts of compulsory masculinity. Yet, contrary to dualist conceptions, these desires are not merely carried out by bodies instructed by free-floating minds, but are experienced and understood viscerally *in* and *through* their bodies, and indeed *both* support *and* subvert heteropatriarchy<sup>856</sup>. This begs the question as to how conscious this support and subversion are on a metatheoretical level.

#### 5.2.2a) *The Intelligible vs the Accessible Body*

There is a large body of work which has recently attempted to bridge the gap between discursive constructions and lived experience, and thereby to bring back both the body and embodiment into explanations of social processes<sup>857</sup>. In this vein, it is useful to distinguish the intelligible from the accessible body in order better to understand how the material interacts with discourse in the construction of the 'mind-body'.

Contrary to what many post-structuralists might argue, materiality is not entirely a linguistic/discursive/social construct. In this respect, there is a difference between 'appearance' and 'being': while language enables 'being', it does not fully circumscribe 'appearance'.

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infrastructure and human beings who run it, where material constraints seem to be optional rather than given. This results in a decrease in focus on materiality, which implies that direct experience with material conditions is replaced by information.

In contradistinction, see Haraway, D (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge; Balsamo, A (1996) *Technologies of the Gendered Body*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press

<sup>854</sup> See Hayles, N.K. (1993) *ibid*. She frames this in terms of the cross between informatics with the immateriality of information.

<sup>855</sup> Hayles, N.K. (1993) *ibid*

<sup>856</sup> See above

<sup>857</sup> See for example Featherstone, M, Hepworth, M & Turner, B.S. (Eds) (1991) *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*, Sage Publications Ltd; Weiss, G, Haber, H.F. (Eds) (1999) *Perspectives on Embodiment: The Intersections of Nature and Culture*, Routledge; Shilling, C (2003) *The body and social theory*. Published in association with Theory, Culture & Society, SAGE; Coupland, J & Gwyn, R (Eds) (2003) *Discourse, The Body, and Identity*, Palgrave Macmillan; Waskul, D & Vannini, P (Eds) (2006) *Body/embodiment: Symbolic Interaction And the Sociology of the Body*. Ashgate Publishing; Turner, B.S. (2008) *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory* (Published in association with Theory, Culture & Society)(3rd ed) Sage Publications Ltd;

Butler implicitly claims that language is the condition under which materiality can be said to appear<sup>858</sup>. Following Foucault, this indicates that materiality appears when its contingency upon discourse is done away with<sup>859</sup>. Vasterling argues that Butler refers to ordinary notions of materiality as a given, extralinguistic reality<sup>860</sup>. The idea of 'appearance' has a strong phenomenological-ontological tradition, particularly through Heidegger's idea of 'being' as synonymous with 'appearing', i.e. something can exist only insofar as it appears to be there<sup>861</sup>. Appearance is therefore epistemologically dependent but ontologically independent of language, which is reversed into dependence if language conditions the possibility of appearance, i.e. if language enables things to appear and determines the limits of reality<sup>862</sup>. Because language is contingent and varies over time, the limits of 'reality', as perceived and labelled, are also variable and contingent. However, this remains linguistically monist, thanks to its exclusion of ontologically independent, extra-linguistic reality<sup>863</sup>.

In the Kantian sense, 'appearance' is epistemological, with ontological repercussions, in that knowledge of reality is confined to appearances, whereas what things 'are' cannot be known<sup>864</sup>. In this way, knowledge does not determine reality's ontological limits. Vasterling argues, according to this logic, that Butler could be saying that access to ontologically independent extralinguistic reality is possible, rather than denying such a reality<sup>865</sup>. In this way, language determines how reality appears to us, and if materiality appears as a given, extra-linguistic reality, it is still an effect of language, even though materiality and reality are not reducible to linguistic effects or semantic constructions of language<sup>866</sup>. Yet reality cannot be fully captured, and the reach of knowledge is limited.

The relation between intelligibility and accessibility is therefore one-way: that which is intelligible is accessible, but not vice versa<sup>867</sup>. If we understand something we can refer to or name it, which referral or naming is always mediated by language. However, following hermeneutics, we can indeed understand things that we cannot articulate, although such understanding is not independent of language<sup>868</sup>. We need a context of what we understand in order to understand new things that face

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<sup>858</sup> Butler, J. (1993) *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of "sex"*. New York: Routledge. Pp31 & 251

<sup>859</sup> Butler, J. (1993) *ibid*

<sup>860</sup> Vasterling, V (1999) Butler's sophisticated constructivism: A critical assessment. In *Hypatia*. Bloomington: Summer 1999. Vol. 14, Iss. 3; pg. 17-40

<sup>861</sup> Vasterling, V (1999) *ibid*

<sup>862</sup> Vasterling, V (1999) *ibid*

<sup>863</sup> Vasterling, V (1999) *ibid*

<sup>864</sup> Vasterling, V (1999) *ibid*

<sup>865</sup> Vasterling, V (1999) *ibid*

<sup>866</sup> Vasterling, V (1999) *ibid*

<sup>867</sup> Vasterling, V (1999) *ibid*

<sup>868</sup> Vasterling, V (1999) *ibid*



us. This 'context of habitual understanding' requires its own limits, which we register as a lack of the capacity to articulate, rather than just a lack of understanding<sup>869</sup>. This indicates firstly that accessibility is wider than intelligibility, secondly that accessibility does not fully determine awareness of reality, and thirdly that intelligibility matches linguistic capacities.

In this regard, Butler claims that what really persists is the demand in and for language, that prompts and calls to be explained, described, diagnosed etc<sup>870</sup>. This body is accessible, albeit not necessarily intelligible, which results in a demand for language in order to articulate and make intelligible. This body is not yet intelligible, and exceeds the linguistically constructed body and the limits of sexed, gendered and sexualised bodies, which are, of course, not neutral, but defined and regulated by oppressive heteropatriarchal norms. These norms interpenetrate the lived experience of the body and implicate themselves into the normative and 'natural'<sup>871</sup>.

As Vasterling argues, lived experience is not restricted to the intelligible body, otherwise homosexual desires would not manifest, since most social environments compel heterosexuality<sup>872</sup>. She therefore argues that the unintelligible body is both a critical force and a creative resource<sup>873</sup>. People sometimes feel that the intelligible body doesn't fit, and is even oppressive, which indicates a (pre/un-conscious) awareness of an alternative, albeit not an essentially-defined one. Restricting accessibility would make it impossible to enjoy alternative experiences of the body<sup>874</sup>.

Secondly, accessing what exceeds the intelligible body could be a strong motive and resource for criticism and change. As a demand in and for language, the unintelligible body could lead to new meanings and discursive practices with respect to the body<sup>875</sup>.

However, as Vasterling notes, Butler's expression of the body as demand for language is incompatible with her epistemological position<sup>876</sup>. Language, if it defines the limits of accessibility, is restricted to what is nameable, articulable and comprehensible, which position precludes preconscious experience of unintelligible bodies<sup>877</sup>. This is supported by the psychoanalytic influence in Butler, where the normative standards of sex, gender and sexuality initiate the psychic

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<sup>869</sup> Vasterling, V (1999) *ibid*

<sup>870</sup> Butler, J. (1993) *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of "sex"*. New York: Routledge. pp67  
See Vasterling, V (1999) *ibid*

<sup>871</sup> Vasterling, V (1999) *ibid*

<sup>872</sup> Vasterling, V (1999) *ibid*

<sup>873</sup> See chapter 6, and see Vasterling, V (1999) *ibid*

<sup>874</sup> Vasterling, V (1999) *ibid*

<sup>875</sup> Vasterling, V (1999) *ibid*

<sup>876</sup> Vasterling, V (1999) *ibid*

<sup>877</sup> Vasterling, V (1999) *ibid*

function of rejecting the unintelligible body<sup>878</sup>. This precludes pre-conscious experience. Butler applies this to Western culture as a whole, which Vasterling says is empirically not plausible and politically self-defeating, given that norms differ from place to place and person to person<sup>879</sup>. Given these variables, psychic reaction in relation to the unintelligible body might be anything from rejection to celebration.

From the foregoing, the 'subject' is clearly not an essentialist Cartesian separation of mind and body, nor is he/she simply constructed through discourse. Rather, the 'self' and 'being' is about experientially- and relationally-conceived embodiment, dialectically circumscribed both by discourse and materiality, and to be seen primarily through accessibility, rather than mere intelligibility. Constructing metatheory for psycho-medical discourses in this way leads to an explicit recognition of the role of damaging normative discourses in the construction of the individual. This, in turn, enables (yet does not prescribe) a clearer notion of the ways in which normativity is perpetuated, and therefore enables a clearer delineation between the normative/subversive aspirations of sexual subjects on the one hand, and those of the psycho-medical fraternity on the other.

Notably, such a value-neutral framework from which to undertake anti-normative activity does not necessarily encourage or prescribe anti-normative practices and therefore normative shifts. As Vasterling notes, the subversion inherent in the abjected, unintelligible body will probably not change much for the better, because that which is excluded from consciousness merely subverts intelligible reality, rather than disappearing<sup>880</sup>. This subversion requires conscious action to mobilise it to useful ends, failing which it will serve merely to consolidate normative standards regulating the intelligible body, or will result in mental/emotional breakdown<sup>881</sup>.

This construction of the individual combines with the notions of transactional relations which follow and complex conceptions of agency, to enable sexual subjects to make choices about their lives<sup>882</sup>.

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<sup>878</sup> Vasterling, V (1999) *ibid*

<sup>879</sup> Vasterling, V (1999) *ibid*

<sup>880</sup> Vasterling, V (1999) *ibid*

<sup>881</sup> Vasterling, V (1999) *ibid*

<sup>882</sup> As noted above, the participants in some ways consolidate normative standards, and yet in other ways mobilise subversion. As I will discuss below and in chapter 6, through the above construction of the subject, individuals can be informed as to the influence of both materiality and discourse in their own lives. They can thereby realise that they are not essentially, foundationally or deterministically constituted, and, being free from both prescription and proscription, can choose to embrace anti-normative practices. However, they may equally choose to substantially perpetuate normativities as they appear in many ways to do currently, since they are the agency to make their own choices and therefore to prioritise normativities should they wish. Therefore the above construction does not prescribe a way forward for anti-normative political activity

Yet, as mentioned above and will further be dealt with in chapter 6, these constructions describe the parameters of the sexual subject in order to demarcate value-neutral (non-heteronormative) metatheory on which to base complex cartographies of the sexual subject based on what they 'are' (in non-liberal-humanist terms) and what they do. From these cartographies, anti-normative political action can be conceived and undertaken.

### **5.3 The Subject: External Coherence through Transactional Relations**

As I have argued, the subject is an embodied being made up of an experientially-circumscribed mind-body in dialectical relation with discourse. Yet viewing complex conceptions of the self in the abstract, with no further discussion on the nature of that self in relation to the 'non-self' implies that subjective experience is universal and oppositional. Thoughts and desires are not merely 'internal', as has historically been viewed. Rather, as Dewey argues, egocentric Western rationality should be mediated with a more pragmatic approach, whereby the subject is 'in-relation'<sup>883</sup>. In order to ascertain the constitution of the subject in relation to other subjects, material objects and discourse, it is therefore important to unpack what is meant by both 'self' and 'other', and to contemplate the limits or boundaries between bodies and things.

#### **5.3.1 The Organisation of Mind/Body and Environment**

Rather than the self being a distinct and separate 'person' oppositionally located to other people or things, there is, I suggest, a fluid organisation of entities with indistinct boundaries and limits, which are in transactional relation with each other.

In a non-Cartesian way, embodied experience thereby comes from the relations between mind and body as well as the ongoing engagement of embodied interactions with environment. Similarly, abstract ideas of the body come from the relations between prevailing cultural formations and beliefs, observations and experiences that appear to most as empirical evidence<sup>884</sup>. These categories are always defined *ex post facto* and come out of a flux too complex, interactive and holistic to be seen as a single thing<sup>885</sup>. As Hayles notes, we should refuse embodiment a status in advance of relation, which in turn enables environmental changes coming

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<sup>883</sup> Seigfried, C.H. (2002) Shedding Skins. In *Hypatia* vol. 17, no. 4 (Fall 2002) 173-186

<sup>884</sup> Hayles, N.K (2002) Flesh and Metal: Reconcuring the Mindbody in Virtual Environments. In *Con gurations*, 2002, 10:297–320 at 297 et seq The Johns Hopkins University Press and the Society for Literature and Science

<sup>885</sup> A term proposed by Mark Hansen "From Image to Affect: Making Sense of New Media Art," presentation at UCLA, May 2001.

out of systematised and organised flux<sup>886</sup>. In speaking of embodied experience, we must begin with relation rather than pre-existing entities, which often underpin essentialist liberal-humanist discourses around an individual's coherency and singularity<sup>887</sup>.

### 5.3.1a) *Relationality and the Problem of Anonymity*

Such liberal humanist discourses have historically founded the prioritising and essentialising debates supported by the physical sciences, and in particular evolutionary theory which has often been misused to justify essentialising discourses based on presumed 'naturalness' of difference in gender and sexual orientation<sup>888</sup>. To counter such debates around essentialist and modernist conceptions of evolution and inheritance which idealize genes as the hidden truths of nature, and taking the starting-point of 'relation' in a logical direction, Oyama works to build a systems-oriented conception of nature as a 'developmental system' linking organism and environment<sup>889</sup>. She calls on systems theory and Einsteinian relativity to refuse fictions about transcendent coding for mind *and* for body, and argues that a dichotomous construction related to predisposing genes and accidental development serves to reinstate nature-nurture oppositions<sup>890</sup>. In this way, the virtual becomes actual, and questions about genes and the environment often shift to questions about power/control, and desires to clearly distinguish between entities which drive action and those which have things done to them<sup>891</sup>.

If matter is not inert, then, in the construction of form, neither foundationalist conceptions of a mindlike force like a God or a secular stand-in, nor genes with a prescriptive intention imposed on existence need be postulated<sup>892</sup>. Nor need one establish ultimate or centralized control if information is relative or relational in nature. Events are not significant or meaningful, nor diminish uncertainty, (i.e. become informative), except in relation to a larger context or structure.<sup>893</sup> This turns the focus away from the defining characteristics of the material world (i.e. how the 'fetish object' defines the 'fetishist') and towards the subject. Instead of changing focus to a presumed singular subject, this changes focus to the relationship between the subject 'organism' and the developmental system: "the changing complex of interacting influences, some of which are

<sup>886</sup> Hayles, N.K (2002) *Flesh and Metal: Reconfiguring the Mindbody in Virtual Environments*. In *Configurations*, 2002, 10:297–320 at 297 et seq The Johns Hopkins University Press and the Society for Literature and Science

<sup>887</sup> Hayles, N.K (2002) *ibid*

<sup>888</sup> Such arguments are often used in the 'psy' sciences which have in the twentieth century aligned with positivist thinking. See chapter 4 and the Interjection in this regard

<sup>889</sup> Oyama, S. (2000a). *The ontogeny of information: Developmental systems and evolution, revised and expanded*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press. pp92-93

<sup>890</sup> Oyama, S. (2000a) *ibid*

<sup>891</sup> Oyama, S. (2000a) *ibid*, pp12 and 87.

<sup>892</sup> Oyama, S. (2000a) *ibid*, pp14

<sup>893</sup> Oyama, S. (2000a) *ibid*, pp14

inside the organism's skin and some of which are outside but all of which... count as essential contributors to the emergence of form and variation, with both constancy and variation now understood as emerging in the same way"<sup>894</sup>.

Thinking the body as radically open to indeterminacy in this way runs counter to deep assumptions and agendas. In expanding comprehension of the biological body, Oyama's developmental systems theory posits that there is no body. Rather, diverse natures come to the fore as individual bodies route various ontogenetic pathways, where certain aspects are common among individuals, while others are unique<sup>895</sup>.

This is compelling in its parallels to how the individual is constructed through both materiality and discourse detailed above, and to postmodernist approaches such as Baudrillard, the Krokors and Deleuze around there being 'no body'<sup>896</sup>. Yet it risks accusations similar to those levelled at the phenomenologically embodied 'self', as Sullivan argues pertains to Merleau-Ponty: that embodiment is experienced in a (heterosexual) male gendered body that occupies the position of the generic body<sup>897</sup>. Noting that all bodies are marked by race, gender, class, sexuality etc., she argues that a common, unmarked pre-personal body is inappropriate as identifier, and that phenomenology is therefore limited through subjectivism and universalism<sup>898</sup>. It is therefore inappropriate to underestimate the power of discourse by assuming that materiality is merely a kind of inert system, and that culture is not elevated to some reified status itself<sup>899</sup>.

Sullivan understands Merleau-Ponty as speaking of human existence projecting itself onto the environment in cultural objects, which she takes to mean that Merleau-Ponty has a subjectivist position of intentionality where meaning derived from experience comes from the individual alone. Weiss, however, argues that Merleau-Ponty's conception of habits are automatically non-reflective patterns of conduct<sup>900</sup>. Rather than thinking of 'anonymous' bodily experiences, Weiss argues that it

<sup>894</sup> Burlein, A. (2005) The Productive Power of Ambiguity: Rethinking Homosexuality through the Virtual and Developmental Systems Theory. In *Hypatia* vol. 20, no. 1 (Winter 2005) pp36, referring to Oyama (2000a), *ibid* pp33 and 43

<sup>895</sup> Burlein, A. (2005) *ibid*, pp36

<sup>896</sup> *Supra*. See Baudrillard, J, trans. Schutze, B. & Schutze, C. (1988) *The Ecstasy of Communication*. New York: Semiotext(e) pp 18; Kroker, A and Kroker, M (1987) Panic Sex in America. In *Body Invaders: Panic Sex in America*. New York: St. Martin's Press, pp. 20-21.; See for example Deleuze, G, Trans. Patton, P (1994) *Difference and Repetition*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp208-9 relating to virtuality and the real; Deleuze, G and Guattari, F trans. Massumi, B (1992) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: Continuum

<sup>897</sup> Sullivan, S. (2001) *Living across and through skins: Transactional bodies, pragmatism, and feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

<sup>898</sup> Sullivan, S. (2001) *ibid*

<sup>899</sup> See chapter 2 and the Interjection on how culture is called on in South Africa to support heteronormativity and homophobia

<sup>900</sup> Weiss, G (2002) The Anonymous Intentions of Transactional Bodies. In *Hypatia* vol. 17, no. 4 (Fall 2002) pg 187-200, pp193. She calls on Merleau-Ponty Merleau-Ponty, M (1945) trans. Colin Smith (1962) *Phenomenology of*

would be better to talk of 'general experiences', since 'anonymity' can be a positive thing which allows society, institutions and people to flourish<sup>901</sup>. In order to explore a more viable position than these, yet to take the thread of thinking further, it is necessary to explore how such 'general experiences' play out.

### 5.3.1b) Relationality: Transactional Models of Dynamic, Permeable Co-Constitution

Sullivan turns to Dewey's pragmatism in order to work out a 'transactional model' of identity and truth, arguing for replacing traditional dualist thinking about bodies and their relationships with environments with situated perspectives<sup>902</sup>. Alternatively to anonymity in bodily transactions with others, bodies are thereby transactional, which recognises that meaning-creation is socially constructed through an appreciation of differences<sup>903</sup>.

Seigfried also calls on Dewey, as well as Nietzsche, to de-emphasise the hypothetical construction of the body in place of mutual responsiveness and situatedness<sup>904</sup>. Skins are permeable, allowing for movement between inner and outer worlds<sup>905</sup>. In this regard, the participant practices of transmitting body fluids negates explicit boundaries between human subject, sexual partner and material objects:

“...there's something weird for me, or strange for me... how can I put it... there's something that lies on a deeper level that maybe a lot of people's not aware of... is when we exchange fluids... it's... the molecules that was flowing around inside that person's body is now in yours. And that to me in a way symbolises the connection that has taken place between the two people. And if you ... that's how I explain it for myself. Why it is mindblowing to feel hit cum shooting down your throat, and you think OK I'm part of this man, I'm ingesting his molecules” (Brian)

This reflects that the distinction between mind/body and 'fetish object' is fluid (pun intended), and fudges clear distinctions between the subject and urine or semen. It also undermines distinctions between humans *inter se*, neither of whom can lay exclusive claim to the fluid (as 'object'). Further, it questions whether body fluids are 'living' matter and therefore part of the subject, or not living and therefore 'fetish objects' in themselves.

In this way a skin does not function as a metaphor for concealment, but rather is an appeal to live in

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*Perception*. New York: Humanities Press 142–46

<sup>901</sup> Weiss, G (2002) *ibid*

<sup>902</sup> Sullivan, S. (2001) *Living across and through skins: Transactional bodies, pragmatism, and feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

<sup>903</sup> This is not the same as saying that individuals are essentially different and categorisable in terms of their differences

<sup>904</sup> Seigfried, C.H. (2002) *Shedding Skins*. In *Hypatia* vol. 17, no. 4 (Fall 2002) 173-186

<sup>905</sup> Sullivan, S. (2001) *Living across and through skins: Transactional bodies, pragmatism, and feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. See Seigfried, C.H. (2002) *Shedding Skins*. In *Hypatia* vol. 17, no. 4 (Fall 2002) 173-186

it, which is akin to how Dewey tries to avoid the sedimentation of explicit boundaries between body-mind-society-environment<sup>906</sup>. His use of the term 'experience' refers to the interaction between organism and environment, nature and the social, rather than brain action. However, he unfortunately connected experience with 'nature' and 'culture', and Seigfried notes that his 'body' is imbricated with opposition to mind, soul and spirit<sup>907</sup>. As Sullivan points out, bodies have no essential natures but are made and remade through social and cultural environments<sup>908</sup>. Therefore, if we see bodies as transactional, we can avoid the trap of seeing being-in-the-world as an imposition of intentions, value and meanings onto objects and others in the world<sup>909</sup>. On face value, this avoids determinist thinking.

Following Weiss, however, neither Merleau-Ponty, Dewey nor Sullivan think it worthwhile to view the organism as shaping the meaning of its experience, thereby creating the concept of an active organism and passive world<sup>910</sup>. Nor do they conceive of an active world and a passive organism, since neither demonstrates lived experience to its fullest extent. All three see bodies as interacting with their environments, which include people, ideas and institutions in transactions which, for Dewey, are dynamic and co-constitutive. This approach gives neither organism nor environment any logical or ethical priority over the other, but rather an interdependence<sup>911</sup>. In this way, bodies and environments are in non-foundationalist ways in permeable, dynamic relationships with each other, where culture affects bodies and bodies affect culture. Environments are not thereby constituted to fill needs, but organisms have distinctive experiences in those environments<sup>912</sup>. This is in concert with notions of 'fetishism' not in any essential way being identifiable through separating out 'fetish subject', 'fetish object' and the environment in which the practices take place.

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<sup>906</sup> Dewey, J. (1978) Some implications of anti-intellectualism. In *The middle works. Vol. 6*, ed. Boydston, J.A. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press; Dewey, J. (1979) The logic of the judgments of practice. In *The middle works. Vol. 8*, ed. Boydston, J.A. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press; Dewey, J. (1980a) Democracy and education. In *The middle works, Vol. 9*, ed. Boydston, J.A. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press; Dewey, J. (1980b) The need for a recovery of philosophy. In *The middle works. Vol. 10*. Ed. Boydston, J.A. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press; Dewey, J. (1981) Experience and nature. In *The later works. Vol. 1*, ed. Boydston, J.A. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press; Dewey, J. (1984) Affective thought. In *The later works. Vol. 2*, ed. Boydston, J.A. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press; Dewey, J. (1988) Unity of science as a social problem. In *The later works. Vol. 13*, ed. Boydston, J.A. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press. See Seigfried, C.H. (2002) Shedding Skins. In *Hypatia* vol. 17, no. 4 (Fall 2002) 173-186

<sup>907</sup> Seigfried, C.H. (2002) Shedding Skins. In *Hypatia* vol. 17, no. 4 (Fall 2002) 173-186

<sup>908</sup> Sullivan, S. (2001) *Living across and through skins: Transactional bodies, pragmatism, and feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp65

<sup>909</sup> See Seigfried, C.H. (2002) Shedding Skins. In *Hypatia* vol. 17, no. 4 (Fall 2002) 173-186

<sup>910</sup> Weiss, G (2002) The Anonymous Intentions of Transactional Bodies. In *Hypatia* vol. 17, no. 4 (Fall 2002) pg 187-200

<sup>911</sup> Sullivan, S. (2001) *Living across and through skins: Transactional bodies, pragmatism, and feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press

<sup>912</sup> See Seigfried, C.H. (2002) Shedding Skins. In *Hypatia* vol. 17, no. 4 (Fall 2002) 173-186

### 5.3.1c) Indistinct Boundaries and Discourse

These experiences take place corporeally through and between entities with indistinct boundaries (i.e. humans and objects). In this regard, Nancy rethinks corporeality in ways that are important for feminist and queer thinking about the body<sup>913</sup>. He rejects the idea of a unified, integrated body of humanist discourse in favour of disintegrated bodies made up by multiple alterities<sup>914</sup>. This view is of the human body as 'singular plural' through a process of denaturing and de-familiarising, whereby writing excises meaning while at the same time inscribing significations<sup>915</sup>. The body is similarly constantly being excised, allowing the conception of the body beyond the traditional dualisms in their rationalist and a-historical structures. This indicates that bodies are neither exclusively in discourse nor in matter<sup>916</sup>. Nancy addresses questions of proprietary interests in one's body and the attendant questions of what ownership means, and what the body means, looking to issues of whether bodies are natural substances, organic wholes or whether the unity given to the body is merely conventional, arbitrary, or linguistic<sup>917</sup>. With regard to ownership, certain questions arise: What does it mean to 'have' a body? Who is the 'I' who 'has' it, if it isn't *part* of the body? Can one have a body distinct from the 'I'?<sup>918</sup> Nancy conceives of the body as disintegrated, and as a series of contiguous terms or states<sup>919</sup>. It is neither fullness nor void, outside nor inside, part nor whole, function nor finality, but rather a skin “folded, refolded, unfolded, multiplied, invaginated, . . . orificed, evading, invading, stretched, relaxed, excited, shattered, linked, unlinked”<sup>920</sup>.

Nancy develops an ontology inspired by Heidegger, starting from the question of the meaning of being. Further than Heidegger, however, Nancy considers 'being' as co-existing and co-appearance. Nancy considers that “the givenness of being, the givenness that is given with the very fact that we understand something (whatever it may be and however confused) when we say ‘being’ . . . can be summarized as follows: being itself is given to us as meaning. Being does not *have* meaning, but being itself, the phenomenon of being, is meaning”<sup>921</sup>. Questions on 'being' should therefore relate to meaning rather than to the status of the human as a kind of 'thing'. In this

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<sup>913</sup> Nancy, J-L (1992) *Corpus*. Paris: Métailié. See Perpich, D (2005) *Corpus Meum: Disintegrating Bodies and the Ideal of Integrity*. In *Hypatia* vol. 20, no. 3 (Summer 2005) 75-91

<sup>914</sup> Nancy, J-L (1992) *ibid*. See Perpich, D (2005) *ibid*

<sup>915</sup> Nancy, J-L (1992) *ibid*. See Perpich, D (2005) *ibid*

<sup>916</sup> Nancy, J-L (1992) *Corpus*. Paris: Métailié.

<sup>917</sup> Nancy, J-L (1992) *ibid*

<sup>918</sup> Nancy, J-L (1992) *ibid*

<sup>919</sup> Nancy, J-L (1992) *ibid*

<sup>920</sup> Nancy, J-L (1992) *ibid*, pp16

<sup>921</sup> Nancy, J-L, trans. Richardson, R.D & O'Byrne, A (2000a). *Being singular plural*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press. pp2



way, being-in-the-world is inextricably connected to us and is shared between different subjects. In turn, he connects meaning to apophansis: “Meaning begins where presence is not pure presence but where presence comes apart (“*se disjoint*”) in order to be itself *as such*. This ‘as’ presupposes the distancing, spacing, division of presence”<sup>922</sup>. Meaning is plural and at the same time determinate, and the possibility of a thing being itself, i.e. identity, depends on the possibility of its being different from other things, and on being connected to other things and the world. In turn, this is not a shopping list of things connected to each other one at a time. For Nancy, meaning is only possible when meanings are circulated, weblike, which goes in all directions at once. In this way all of being is connected to all of the rest of being.

Nancy differs from Heidegger in his account of bodies. Heidegger still sees meaning in relation to non-material phenomena. Nancy, on the other hand, sees meaning as dependent on bodies, i.e. meanings are the points of connection between heterogeneous bodily surfaces<sup>923</sup>. How a being is intelligible is not in relation to its utility, and meaning is not about intentionality or human aims and possibilities<sup>924</sup>.

Rather, a function of language is attributed to people, where “[t]he speaker speaks for the world, which means the speaker speaks to it, on behalf of it, in order to make it a ‘world’. As such, the speaker . . . occurs as its representative but also, at the same time . . . in anticipation of it, before it, exposed to it as to its own most intimate consideration”<sup>925</sup>. Language doesn't exist outside the world. Rather, speakers represent the world, in the way that they are a representative thereof, and in the way that they give sense to it, having been already exposed to it. Being human is therefore qualitatively different from being 'thing', but this difference is not essential, and the human being is neither superior or primary in respect of the derivative existence of things: “The difference between humanity and the rest of being (which is not a concern to be denied . . .), while itself being inseparable from other differences within being (since man [sic] is ‘also’ animal, ‘also’ living, ‘also’ physio-chemical), does not distinguish true existence from a sort of sub-existence. Instead, this difference forms the concrete condition of singularity”<sup>926</sup>.

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<sup>922</sup> (my italics). See Nancy, J-L, (2000a) *ibid* pp2: “The plurality of beings is at the foundation of Being. A single being is a contradiction in terms. Such a being, which would be its own foundation, origin, and intimacy, would be incapable of Being, in every sense that this expression can have here”. See Perpich, D (2005) *Corpus Meum: Disintegrating Bodies and the Ideal of Integrity*. In *Hypatia* vol. 20, no. 3 (Summer 2005) 75-91 at note 2. Perpich notes “Being, for Nancy, is always being-with-one-another; being cannot be properly said in the singular alone. It is always the plurality of singular beings. Similarly, for him a single meaning would also involve a contradiction or an impossibility and for the same reasons.”

<sup>923</sup> See Nancy, J-L (1992) *Corpus*. Paris: Métailié and Nancy, J-L, trans. Richardson, R.D & O’Byrne, A (2000a). *Being singular plural*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.

<sup>924</sup> *ibid*

<sup>925</sup> Nancy, J-L, (2000a) *ibid* pp3

<sup>926</sup> Nancy, J-L, (2000a) *ibid* pp18

This perspective does not see humanity or human-ness as an essence but as a product of difference, both of linguistic signifiers and of heterogeneous bodies. Nancy notes that we are only human in relation to other (non-human) objects. In other words, by being bodies, rather than just possibilities and purposes, we are shown the world and are representatives of it. He sees being-a-singularity as inherently being with other singularities, while the plurality of “being-with” is to coexist and co-appear as singularities, rather than to be an aggregate or a totality<sup>927</sup>. The body is therefore disintegrated and constituted in a series of contiguous terms or states. Bodies have multiple limits and multiple borders, and the subject is complex rather than unitary<sup>928</sup>. Perpich, addressing criticisms of Nancy, argues for affirming a multiplicity of bodies existing in a multidimensional field, (which she insists on, instead of a continuum) rather than as dichotomously organised in a linear fashion<sup>929</sup>. This is a complex idea, but, as Perpich notes, takes a step in the right direction, even though there unfortunately remains no non-binary terminology<sup>930</sup>.

That bodies have multiple limits means that all bodies divide and relate to themselves and others along multiple borders<sup>931</sup>. This may seem to be in conflict with feminist theories for which bodily integrity is imperative, and Perpich correctly notes that this conception may be seen as a white, heterosexual, male construction related to privilege. She also notes that if contact and contiguity are privileged in construing meaning, Nancy’s theory may not account for psychic formation and the internalization of gender and sexual identity, which in turn intersects with race, class, ethnicity, and other categories necessary for identity formation<sup>932</sup>.

Nancy doesn't address these criticisms. But he does pay attention to bodies ordinarily seen as borderline, neither locating them at the outer limits, nor at the centre<sup>933</sup>. Bodies such as intersexed, surrogate, pregnant, (counter culturally) modified, technologically altered, and 'fetishist' bodies defy traditional binary categories and are marginalized in traditional philosophical discourses, and often also in feminist discourses, not to mention heteropatriarchal normative popular discourses.

The humanist ideal of bodily integrity, and the ideas of 'control' over the body, life and meaning by a rational mind are problematic. On the one hand the idea of bodily integrity is useful to grant rights

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<sup>927</sup> See Perpich, D (2005) *Corpus Meum: Disintegrating Bodies and the Ideal of Integrity*. In *Hypatia* vol. 20, no. 3 (Summer 2005) 75-91

<sup>928</sup> Perpich, D (2005) *ibid*

<sup>929</sup> See Perpich, D (2005), *ibid*

<sup>930</sup> Perpich, D (2005), *ibid*

<sup>931</sup> Perpich, D (2005), *ibid*

<sup>932</sup> Perpich, D (2005), *ibid*

<sup>933</sup> Perpich, D (2005), *ibid*

to marginalised people in order to protect them, but on the other hand they also maintain a fictive fantasy about the essential corporeal nature of people, and the impermeable boundaries between people and things<sup>934</sup>. Yet simplistic discursive conceptions of how people interact with the world, whereby groups of people are subject to normative discourses in determinist ways are similarly problematic. Clearly therefore an alternative must be forged.

## 5.4 Towards 'the Subject' in 'Fetish' Sexualities: Beyond the Reification of Things

As explained above, the boundaries between 'bodies' and 'world' are not explicitly drawn, neither in terms of their material limits or their discursive formation. In this way we can refuse to see the natural and the sociocultural as separate, so as not to make mediation between them invisible<sup>935</sup>. Lock, calling on Latour, argues that a hybrid “object-discourse-nature-society” construction is appropriate, where networks of confluence should be understood and portrayed<sup>936</sup>. This kind of hybrid thinking allows us to look at how nature and society are perceived to be autonomous, and to understand how inanimate things can be seen as actors, thereby avoiding issues of hierarchy, difference and boundary disputes<sup>937</sup>.

Sexuality and corporeality are inseparable. The notion of corporeality as a distinctly labelled concept implies that there are boundaries between people and the things which constitute material culture from which it is impossible to escape<sup>938</sup>. As Graham notes: “[w]e are so reliant on things that we are often inseparable from them”<sup>939</sup>. Yet a clear boundary between things and people cannot be demarcated. People are not conclusively immaterial ideas demarcated by discourse, neither are they discrete physical beings which end at their skins. Rather, from one perspective, are themselves objects which include bodies and things, both constructed by discourse and inhabiting a material world as objects<sup>940</sup>. Looking at people in this way enables sexuality (and marginal sexual interests

<sup>934</sup> See chapter 2, re the failings of identity politics, and how they are a double-edged sword

<sup>935</sup> Lock, M (1997) *Decentering the Natural Body: Making Difference Matter*. In *Configurations* 5.2 (1997) 267-292

<sup>936</sup> Latour, B (1993) *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press

<sup>937</sup> Note further the similarities here between people-world as hybrid, and Bhabha's conceptions of hybridity in the postcolonialist context. See chapter 2 re problems in this regard as pertains sexualities.

<sup>938</sup> Graham, M (2004), *ibid*

<sup>939</sup> Graham, M (2004), *ibid*

<sup>940</sup> See also Deleuze, G and Guattari, F, trans. Massumi, B (1992) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: Continuum; Law, J and Hassard, J (eds.) (1999), *Actor Network Theory and After*. Oxford: Blackwell. Graham, M (2004), *ibid*, calls attention to writings on the cyborg. See Haraway, D (1991) *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*. In Haraway, D (ed.) (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, pp149–81.

like 'sexual fetish') to be unpacked beyond heteronormatively defined 'appropriate' combinations of sexed bodies, beyond 'race', ethnicity, and nationality, and beyond constructions of sexuality in either-or configurations of material vs discursive. Graham argues that we should be more 'artificially literate', since then we could recognise the complexity of the things which surround us. We could therefore better situate sexuality in a material context incorporating objects and thereby opening up sexuality gender and sex to troubling ideas<sup>941</sup>. Rather prosaically looking at its germanic etymology, he notes that the word 'thing' is a reification of time, process, deliberation and dispute, and that both things and the 'things' of which they are part are reifications<sup>942</sup>. They are also sexed, thanks to the etymology of the Latin 'secare', the putative origin of the word sex, which means 'to cut'. In this way, he claims, things are cut from relations with people, places, materials and the history that created them so as to make discrete objects<sup>943</sup>. He warns against sexuality becoming a 'thing' in this way where bodily practices, tastes, pleasures, desires, moral judgements and so on are collected together<sup>944</sup>. To construct such a collection is merely to deterministically demarcate the boundaries between normatively described entities, or physically described objects. Yet people are both.

Contrary to the assumptions underlying the ICD classifications, 'fetish sexuality' cannot be pinned down as 'being' something. Indeed, there can be no such thing as 'fetishism', since the exact point at which the 'fetishist' ends and the 'fetish object' begins cannot be determined. Rather, sexuality incorporating material objects is emergent, multiple, and mobile, and necessitates an understanding of nature, culture and discourse in ways other than through the either/or frameworks of the (psychopathological/cultural) impossible vs the (material) real<sup>945</sup>. Looking at swirls and intersections between discourse, the embodied subject and the material world allows an acknowledgement of more complexity in describing the 'fetishist', (and thereby of 'fetish object' and sexual practices) than is currently enabled through simplistic either/or psychopathological, phenomenological or discursive approaches<sup>946</sup>. At the same time it enables a view of 'things' which helps materialise what we call sexuality, and which, if de-reified, opens them up, making of sexuality an opened-outward and connected function<sup>947</sup>.

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<sup>941</sup> Graham, M (2004) Thinking Sex, Thinking Gender. In *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 2004 10(2):299-303 pp298

<sup>942</sup> Graham, M (2004) *ibid*

<sup>943</sup> Graham, M (2004) *ibid*

<sup>944</sup> Graham, M (2004) *ibid*

<sup>945</sup> See Burlein, A (2005) The Productive Power of Ambiguity: Rethinking Homosexuality through the Virtual and Developmental Systems Theory. In *Hypatia* vol. 20, no. 1 (Winter 2005)

<sup>946</sup> Such a construction of the subject is further an ontologically preferable location for the scholar or psycho-medical practitioner him/herself, who forms part of the discursive/phenomenal environment in which the subject lives, and therefore impacts on both the practices of the subject and the ways in which dominant discourses shift over time.

<sup>947</sup> Graham, M (2004) *ibid*

## 5.5 Conclusion

In order to acknowledge 'the fetishist subject', the object-focused discourses on 'fetishism' should, I suggest, not simply be re-directed to matching ones focusing on an essentially/foundationally-conceived independent or discursively- and deterministically-constructed generic subject. This implies that it makes no difference whether or how a 'fetish object' is or isn't under the control of the 'fetishist', or what function the 'fetish object' serves. Based on this recognition, the ICD's classifications of 'fetishism' clearly cannot be replaced with epistemologies which describe a 'fetishist' subject at all. Whereas the ICD's categories of 'fetishism' heteronormatively prescribe the existence of a separately identifiable 'fetishist', a closer look at the constitution of the human subject reveals that, ontologically-speaking, the subject is not a discrete materially-conceived entity at all capable of being described in absolute terms.

Instead, the object, environment and discourses form an undivided whole which have an effect on a subject and the cultural, social and political system in which practices occur. The subject is created and maintained in the transactional intersections and relations between the embodied being<sup>948</sup>, discourse<sup>949</sup> and environment, the material and discursive limits between which are fluid. These transactional intersections lodge people into a shared spatio-temporal environment which is the context for lived experience<sup>950</sup>. Experience is thereby organised in its own structure, in terms of intentionality, embodiment, intersubjectivity and temporality<sup>951</sup>.

Therefore, to take a more rounded look at subjectivities while developing explicitly non-heteronormative metatheory, I suggest that we should consider 'fetish sexuality' as embodied experience in itself, which yet remains embedded in heteronormative social structures. This epistemological approach should therefore be seen as a 'subject-orientation' towards sexualities, rather than a 'subject-focus', which does not rely on the approval/acceptance of a majority, and therefore is inherently value-neutral<sup>952</sup>.

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<sup>948</sup> See Oksala, J (2004) Anarchic Bodies: Foucault and the Feminist Question of Experience. In *Hypatia* vol. 19, no. 4 (Fall 2004). She notes that Even though the sexual body is discursively constructed as an object of scientific discourses and disciplinary technologies, embodiment is experiential and therefore is capable of multiplying, distorting, and exceeding discursive definitions, classifications, and coordinates

<sup>949</sup> This takes place through embodied experiences which surface in language and affect metaphoric networks in culture, which in turn dialectically impact on the quality and meanings of embodied experiences

See Johnson, M (1987) *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp. 18-35. See also Hayles, N.K. (1993) The Materiality of Informatics. In *Configurations* 1.1 (1993) 147-170 pp153

<sup>950</sup> Wyllie, M (2005) Body Subjects. In *PPP* vol. 12, no. 3 (SEPTEMBER 2005) The Johns Hopkins University Press 209-214

<sup>951</sup> Wyllie, M (2005), *ibid*

<sup>952</sup> See chapter 4. This is either on the basis of moral or statistical norms, and results in an 'anti-normative' construction

With this insight, 'fetishists' are neither static essentialised creatures with inherent pathologies as historical constructs would see them, nor are they psychopathologised entities foundationally defined through their unattainable desire for material objects, as psychoanalytic theory would have it. Yet further, they are not entities deterministically defined by dominant discourses. Rather, 'fetishists' do not exist as discretely identifiable entities at all, whether through definitions which rely on pre-determined normative notions of the 'fetish object', or foundationalist conceptions of the 'fetishist'. Rather, people who incorporate material objects into their sexual scripts *are* themselves a kind of relationship with the world and dominant discourses. In this way they are characterised by mutability and potential, rather than stasis and inevitability.

Founding psycho-medical discourses on such a basis therefore renders heteronormativity more explicit, which in turn means that its discursive repetition and its deleterious effects can be better managed and 'policed'. Rather than relying on compulsory heteronormativity to purportedly 'describe' 'fetishists', scholars and psycho-medical practitioners will therefore have to become explicit about their discriminatory practices, and will thereby themselves become more explicitly accountable for how/whether they perpetuate damaging heteronormative discourses.

If dealt with on this basis, people who enjoy the sexual company of material objects can be schooled to recognise heteronormativities more explicitly, and can move beyond mere reactionary repetitions thereof. They can acknowledge their benefit to the world around them, not *despite* their sexual proclivities (which most people often mistake as 'identities'), but *because* they see the world differently. This means that, far from being strictly definable as either material or discursively-constructed entities, such people are bundles of potential bounded only by the warp and weft of their life experiences.

Chapter 6 explores in more detail what sexuality incorporates material objects, as embodied experience, entails in terms of agency and choice. This dialectical relationship which *is* the 'subject' forms the basis for rethinking agency in ways which address the difficult task of avoiding dualistic thinking, given the predominant binary discursive constructs at our disposal, and given the historical war between monists and dualists about how people and things are arranged<sup>953</sup>. In so doing, this, I suggest, founds alternative and more coherent approaches to what is currently termed 'fetish practices'.

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<sup>953</sup> Hayles, N.K (2002) *Flesh and Metal: Reconfiguring the Mindbody in Virtual Environments*. In *Configurations*, 2002, 10:297–320 at 297 et seq The Johns Hopkins University Press and the Society for Literature and Science. See also Damasio, A.R. (1994) *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. New York: Putnam

## CHAPTER 6

# SUBJECTIVITIES AND AGENCY: SEXUALITY INCORPORATING MATERIAL OBJECTS AS A RESOURCE FOR RECOGNISING PERSONAL VALUE

The central premise [of habitus] is not that the cogitating mind can be certain only of its ability to be present to itself, but rather that the body exists in space and time and through its interaction with the environment defines the parameters within which the cogitating mind can arrive at its "certainties," which not coincidentally almost never include the fundamental homologies generating the boundaries of thought. What counts as knowledge is also radically revised, for conscious thought becomes as it were the epiphenomenon corresponding to the phenomenal base the body provides.<sup>954</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 5, contrary to the ICD definitions of 'fetishism', the 'fetishist' cannot be described in terms of heteronormative circular arguments which essentialise the subject through specifying him/her in terms of 'inappropriate' sexual objects<sup>955</sup>. Such classifications normatively discursively construct the 'fetishist' in essentialist ways, presuming that he/she is implacably subject to undeniable desires which should be 'cured'. This problematically implies that the subject is not really a subject at all. Equally, the 'fetishist subject' is not classifiable purely through discursive (de)constructions, which, in dominant identity-based discourses, can tend to deterministically locate him/her as the object of domineering social structures<sup>956</sup>. Rather, the subject is constituted by dialectical and fluid relations between materiality and discourse<sup>957</sup>. This implies that the construction and functions of agency should also be rephrased, so as to replace the heteronormative prescriptions underlying the ICD's diagnostic criteria for 'fetishism'.

This chapter argues that people who incorporate material objects into their sexual scripts indeed engage notions of agency. Instead of merely being passive recipients of heteronormative discursive constructs, such subjects (who cannot be labelled as 'fetishists') actively engage in the constitution of their world through their sexual practices (which cannot be labelled 'fetishism'). They re-phrase oppressive norms through phenomenological self-re-orientation towards a queer, embodied sense of empowerment, and thereby reconstitute pervasive negative perceptions as a positive, intelligible sense of self-value.

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<sup>954</sup> Hayles, N.K. (1993) The Materiality of Informatics. In *Configurations* 1.1 (1993) 147-170 pp160

<sup>955</sup> See chapter 4

<sup>956</sup> See the Interjection and Chapter 5

<sup>957</sup> See chapter 5

## 6.1 Agency

Historically, 'fetishists' were constructed through religious doctrinal paradigms, and later through what have been seen as inevitable psychodynamic processes appropriate to all places and times<sup>958</sup>. Such constructivist thinking explains the ('fetishist') subject as constituted by pre-existing controlling forces, bound either by essentialist, pre-existing immaterial drives, or by powerful, discursively constructed social formations. Such determinist theories are debilitating to feminist and queer theories, since they do not enable viable concepts of agency<sup>959</sup>.

More recently, Foucaultian Poststructuralist thinking has rephrased the subject as primarily constituted by discourse<sup>960</sup>. However, the problem with Foucaultian conceptions of bodies and pleasures is that they cannot be attained by the intentional subject with conscious choices and practical solutions<sup>961</sup>. In Foucault there can be no real intentional agency, since bodies and pleasures count merely as resistance by means of experimentation on what is necessary and what is historically contingent<sup>962</sup>. In this way, resistance to normative power only seems possible in the interstices between competing regimes<sup>963</sup>.

As discussed in the Interjection and Chapter 5, to transcend this limited version of both personal and political activity, we should go beyond both merely relying on deconstructivist readings of the 'subject', while at the same time not re-invigorating Cartesian discourses which construct the subject as a disembodied mind by assuming that the subject is discursively unconstrained. Such a complex epistemological route forward is revealed through acknowledging not only that the 'fetishist' cannot be 'classified' and thereby demarcated at all, but through recognising the potential in relationships between humans and objects<sup>964</sup>.

Rather than assuming that body and mind are dualistically separated, or assuming that the body is entirely discursively constructed, I suggest that appropriate starting-points for interrogating agency are located in Lock's hybrid Latourian "object-discourse-nature-society" construction of the subject<sup>965</sup>. This implies that networks of confluence<sup>966</sup>, and therefore conceptions of who or what

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<sup>958</sup> See chapters 3 and 4

<sup>959</sup> Vasterling, V (1999) Butler's sophisticated constructivism: A critical assessment. In *Hypatia*. Bloomington: Summer 1999. Vol. 14, Iss. 3; pg. 17-40

<sup>960</sup> See chapter 5

<sup>961</sup> Oksala, J (2004) Anarchic Bodies: Foucault and the Feminist Question of Experience. In *Hypatia* vol. 19, no. 4 (Fall 2004)

<sup>962</sup> See Oksala, *ibid*

<sup>963</sup> See Oksala, *ibid*

<sup>964</sup> as argued in Chapter 5, see Chapter 3

<sup>965</sup> See Chapter 5. Latour, B (1993) *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press

<sup>966</sup> See Chapter 5. Lock, M (1997) Decentering the Natural Body: Making Difference Matter. In *Configurations* 5.2



engages in choice, and how they do so, centre on the subjects locus of relation<sup>967</sup>.

In other words, since the subject is a kind of relationship between materiality and discourse, rather than a stable entity with clear material or discursive boundaries, there can be no material 'centre' to the subject. Rather, the connecting point between subjectivity, discourses and the material world is where agency should logically be located. Such point of connection is the notion of embodied experience (rather than 'the body'), which is the locus of subjectivities, and the connecting point between the multiply constituted subject and the world around him/her.

Yet such embodiment must necessarily take special account of normativities which seek to replace notions of embodiment with those of 'the body', since, as Butler comments, “perhaps the body has come to substitute for the psyche in Foucault—that is, as that which exceeds and confounds the injunctions of normalization”<sup>968</sup>. Such determinist theories negating materiality (and therefore subjectivity) by making it into a kind of linguistic object are inappropriate as a starting-point for theories of the body<sup>969</sup>. Since the subject *is* embodied experience, such theories are, I suggest, equally inappropriate for theories of agency<sup>970</sup>.

### **6.1.1 Subjectivities: Dialectics between Discourse and the Phenomenal**

Re-visioning subjects as complex beings, who relate to both material and discursive influences, acknowledges their having some wiggle-room in the choices they make<sup>971</sup>. I suggest that these choices be described in terms of a sense of agency related to both the present and the future, rather than through a pre-existing set of backward-looking, essentialist or culturally-bounded limitations.

Yet at the same time, the subject does not have unfettered choice, given the complex relations between the mind/body/environment, and given the powerful influence of discursive constructs. Therefore we should not only to unpack what constitutes the subject, but how subjectivity works and the functions it fulfils. This necessitates an interrogation of the constitution of agency, not only through acknowledging *that* mind-body-environment-culture are interlinked<sup>972</sup>, but *how* they are so linked, and therefore what the subject can or cannot do given the constitution of those linkages.

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(1997) 267-292

<sup>967</sup> See chapter 5.

<sup>968</sup> Butler, J. (1997). *The psychic life of power: Theories in subjection*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. pp94

<sup>969</sup> Vasterling, V (1999) Butler's sophisticated constructivism: A critical assessment. In *Hypatia*. Bloomington: Summer 1999. Vol. 14, Iss. 3; pg. 17-40

<sup>970</sup> See chapter 5

<sup>971</sup> See chapter 5

<sup>972</sup> See chapter 5

### 6.1.1a) Re-Framing Foucault: Acknowledging the Dialectics of the Phenomenal

Radical constructivism has been challenged, especially by certain feminists who object that subjectivity and agency are attenuated<sup>973</sup>. Butler, however, speaking of the discursive construction of both body and agency, responds that radical constructivism and poststructuralism are misunderstood in that they are both brought down to linguistic monism and determinism<sup>974</sup>. Vasterling counters charges of linguistic monism by recalling Butler's intention to deconstruct the body as a natural, pre-linguistic given, hence to deconstruct the claim that the body is linguistically constructed<sup>975</sup>. Butlerian referentiability is a general epistemological argument concerning language's relation to reality<sup>976</sup>. The linguistic construction of the body does not mean that it originates, causes or composes it<sup>977</sup>. Rather, references to the body are further formations thereof, and language is always in some way performative<sup>978</sup>. In other words, explaining a body as 'being' something requires a pre-existing knowledge of what that 'something' is (e.g. 'gay', 'male', 'fetishist'). As Oksala argues, Foucault's position, as a counterattack against normalising power, really presupposes an experiential conception of the body<sup>979</sup>.

However this does not mean that the body has some kind of necessary 'being' outside of linguistic constructions. Contemporary constructivism holds that cultural practices are the basic premises on which are built experience and knowledge, from which agency develops<sup>980</sup>. Yet clearly 'natural' elements and events do not take place entirely through material human experience (and the body)<sup>981</sup>. Indeed, 'nature' itself is constructed, through language, conceptual systems, theoretical constructs, ideology, political power, institutional practices etc<sup>982</sup>. In this way, culture defines and

<sup>973</sup> Vasterling, V (1999) Butler's sophisticated constructivism: A critical assessment. In *Hypatia*. Bloomington: Summer 1999. Vol. 14, Iss. 3; pg. 17-40. See also Benhabib, S., Butler, J, Cornell, D, and Fraser, N. (1995).

*Feminist contentions: A philosophical exchange*. New York: Routledge. Pp21 and 111 respectively:

Benhabib accuses Butler of doing away with ideas of selfhood, agency and autonomy, arguing that Butler's concept of performativity cannot explain the make-up of the self and the resistance that the self can make when confronted by power and discourse systems. *ibid* pp68. Further, Fraser criticises Butler's concepts as being structurally incapable of answering normative questions like how to distinguish between better and worse practices of subjectivation

<sup>974</sup> See Butler, J (1993) *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge

<sup>975</sup> Vasterling, V (1999) Butler's sophisticated constructivism: A critical assessment. In *Hypatia*. Bloomington: Summer 1999. Vol. 14, Iss. 3; pg. 17-40

<sup>976</sup> Vasterling (1999) *ibid*

<sup>977</sup> Vasterling (1999) *ibid*

<sup>978</sup> Vasterling (1999) *ibid*

<sup>979</sup> Oksala, J (2004) Anarchic Bodies: Foucault and the Feminist Question of Experience. In *Hypatia* vol. 19, no. 4 (Fall 2004)

<sup>980</sup> Adamson, T (2005) Measure for Measure: The Reliance of Human Knowledge on Things of the World. In *Ethics & the Environment*, 10(2) 2005 175-194

<sup>981</sup> Adamson, T (2005) *ibid*.

See also the Intercession

<sup>982</sup> Adamson, T (2005) *ibid*. See also the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis re linguistic determinism: Sapir, E. (1929) 'The Status of Linguistics as a Science'. In Sapir, E (1958) *Culture, Language and Personality* (ed. D. G. Mandelbaum).

Berkeley, CA: University of California Press; Whorf, B.L. (1940) Science and Linguistics. In

measures nature (by which is meant the 'physiological'), rather than nature defining culture. People are inherently part of the 'natural' world, which pre-exists culture yet which is re-framed and comprehended through discourse.

Neither does it mean that there is nothing but linguistic constructions. Rather, language mediates knowledge of the body. As Butler notes, that language constitutes the subject does not mean that language fully determines the subject<sup>983</sup>. Similarly, that agency results from discursive conditions does not mean that agency is entirely controlled by these conditions<sup>984</sup>.

I suggest that conceptions of agency should therefore be based on something other than either/or constructions of backward-looking, linear causal reaction either to discourses or to materiality. As I will argue, such conceptions of agency should rather be based on understanding that people respond phenomenologically to both discourses and the material world, based on the subjective meaning they perceive, which meaning is obtained through embodied experience<sup>985</sup>.

#### 6.1.1b) *Inscribing and Incorporating Practices*

Embodied experience situates the self as a 'present-being': both as 'not-absent' and as existing in the here-and-now<sup>986</sup>. The subject is 'present' for him/herself partly based on past experiences which determine the subjective meaning of his/her existence, which meaning is dialectically constructed through both discourse and materiality by means of inscribing and incorporating practices.

Inscribing practices are those which define culturally appropriate ways of performing the self, prescribed by discursively-constructed norms<sup>987</sup>. They are simply copied between contexts, and correct and modulate performances incorporated into bodies<sup>988</sup>. Following Merleau-Ponty and Connerton, incorporating practices are actions encoded into bodily memory by repeated performances until they become habitual<sup>989</sup>. Incorporating practices are linked to 'nature' in that they are seen to be a-cultural. Yet examples like walking, talking and moving are culturally specific, and therefore discursively bounded. Incorporating practices include learning, but this doesn't imply that

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*Technology Review* 42(6): 229-31, 247-8. Also in Whorf, B. L. (1956): *Language, Thought and Reality* (ed. J. B. Carroll). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

<sup>983</sup> Benhabib, S., Butler, J, Cornell, D, and Fraser, N. (1995). *Feminist contentions: A philosophical exchange*. New York: Routledge. 135-137

<sup>984</sup> Benhabib, S. Et al (1995) *ibid*

<sup>985</sup> See chapter 5 re the constitution of the subject. See also See also Gallese, V. & Umiltà, M. A. (2002). From self-modeling to the self model: Agency and the representation of the self. In *Neuro-Psychoanalysis* 4:35-40.

<sup>986</sup> See chapter 5

<sup>987</sup> See Hayles, N.K. (1993) The Materiality of Informatics. In *Configurations* 1.1 (1993) 147-170 pp153

<sup>988</sup> Hayles, N.K. (1993) *ibid*

<sup>989</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M (1962) *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith. New York: Humanities Press, pp. 98-115, 136-147; Connerton, P (1989) *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See Hayles, N.K. (1993) *ibid*

what is learned is necessarily consciously understood. Such practices are always performative and instantiated, and therefore are improvised on in specific contexts<sup>990</sup>.

Together, inscribing and incorporating practices form cultural constructs. Incorporating practices are not more 'natural' than inscribing ones, and neither requires a coherent, continuous essential self to explain embodied experience<sup>991</sup>. Both, however, have an effect on the embodied being who recognises the subjective and social meaning of experiences in his/her body (which thereby becomes accessible), yet does not necessarily consciously understand that meaning (which is not necessarily automatically intelligible)<sup>992</sup>. Subjective meaning in the present is therefore dialectically constructed through both inscribing and incorporating practices, and is neither entirely exclusively discursively nor materially constituted.

Both inscribing and incorporating practices promote heteronormativity, which prescribes heterosexuality (or the approximation thereof through the sanitising of sexual practices<sup>993</sup>). As I will argue later, at the same time they enable people who enjoy the sexual company of material objects in a same-sex context ('gay male fetishists') to re-orient themselves by adopting subversive sexual practices which challenge heteronormativity. This takes place through such subjects revising the content of incorporating practices for their own (potentially empowering) purposes, thereby rephrasing what is appropriate and what not. In so doing, they challenge heteronormative notions of which material objects are appropriate to incorporate into sexual scripts, and which not, thereby destabilising more broadly 'sanitised' sexual practices which hinge on heteronormative models of propriety. Notably, however, in contradictory fashion, on some levels the subjects make choices to support and perpetuate such discourses through maintaining their gendered, racialised and otherwise stratified positions, and they thereby buy into dominant discourses on sex, masculinity and hegemonic male sexuality<sup>994</sup>.

Yet to acknowledge this is not to prescribe that subjects will continue to do so, or in what ways. This opens up questions as to how the past, present and future feed into agency.

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<sup>990</sup> Hayles, N.K. (1993) *ibid*

<sup>991</sup> Varela, F.J, Thompson, E and Rosch, E (1991) *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press

<sup>992</sup> See chapter 5 on accessibility and intelligibility

<sup>993</sup> Notably, heteronormativity and what is considered normal sexual practices are broader than heterosexuality. As noted in Chapter 2 and the Interjection, both heterosexual and non-heterosexual practices include clear prescriptions on what counts as acceptable sex. Further, co-opting homosexual sex into heteronormative models through institutions such as marriage can validly be argued to be about diffusing the subversiveness of non-heterosexual forms of sexual intimacy and relationship. In both sexualities, practices are discursively described as appropriate and acceptable, mirroring heteronormative notions of family, love, romance and so on.

<sup>994</sup> See Interjection

### 6.1.2 Agency: From Present Subjectivities to Future-Orientations

The subjective (embodied) assumptions and comprehensions of what a subject's identity or his/her experiences is/are does not describe the future, and therefore does not prescribe the choices subjects make. In other words, subjects do not inherently reproduce normativities in pre-determinable ways. To attempt to predict such repetitions merely results in falling back into deterministic thinking. Such choices and the parameters on what choices *can* be made (in other words agency) are necessarily lodged in the present, and are therefore subject to discursive prescriptions. But I suggest those choices are made as much through a sense of what the subject wants to feel in the future as they are lodged in the discursive constructs of the present. This implies, as Lock points out, that the body, and, I suggest, an embodied sense of agency, should be read as more than just where subjectivity and representation are mediated<sup>995</sup>.

Bodily experience is generally antithetical to empiricist, idealist and determinist perspectives. For example, bodily orientation is too relative and flexible to be the direct result of objective relations in nature, and too dependent on objective circumstances to be located in abstract ideas and principles<sup>996</sup>. Neither naturalism nor idealism are sufficient in themselves, and yet both are instructive<sup>997</sup>. Indeed, I suggest that subjects conceived in complex phenomenal ways are better served by seeing agency as constructed through a radical phenomenology which enables a broader view of both the subject's abilities and construction<sup>998</sup>.

Phenomenology focuses on experience showing itself in its complexity without the imposition of prior theoretical prejudices<sup>999</sup>. Merleau-Ponty realised that the body's complexities are a key to experience, not an obstacle thereto. I suggest that acknowledgement of such complexity should therefore be used as a metatheoretical framework for understanding agency, as lodged in complex discursively- and phenomenologically-conceived subjectivities, influenced by both discursive frameworks and embodied experience. In this regard, subjective experience is not simply a reaction to discourse and practices external to the body.

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<sup>995</sup> Lock, M (1997) Decentering the Natural Body: Making Difference Matter. In *Configurations* 5.2 (1997) 267-292

<sup>996</sup> Adamson, T (2005) *ibid*, pp184. This is similar to concerns over the ambiguities that pervade vision, touch, sexuality, temporality etc.

<sup>997</sup> Adamson, T (2005) *ibid*

<sup>998</sup> Lock, M (1997) Decentering the Natural Body: Making Difference Matter. In *Configurations* 5.2 (1997) 267-292. This is particularly important when talking of agency expressed through the body in interacting with the social, such as when describing 'fetish' practices

<sup>999</sup> Adamson, T (2005) *ibid*. Problematically, these complexities at the same time challenge the Husserlian task of uncovering structures of intentionality that ground experience, which in turn creates the risk of overlooking and distorting experiential complexities. See the Interjection on the need to move beyond theoretical prejudices

### 6.1.2a) Orientations

Rather, the embodied subject takes part in his/her own creation<sup>1000</sup>. People's choices are instead based on dialectical orientations either towards or away from dominant norms and material parameters, in a present- and future-oriented way.

Just as discourse writes the body, the body writes discourse, through its orientation in space and time<sup>1001</sup>. This orientation (e.g. walking vertically) creates a library of experiences encoded in language through pervasive metaphorical networks (e.g. being 'morally upright', 'in/out', contained/uncontained' etc.) which reinforce and re-inscribe social and linguistic norms<sup>1002</sup>.

Following Husserl's second volume of *Ideas*, and his conception of '*Leib*' (the living body<sup>1003</sup>), Ahmed notes how orientations are about starting points, where the ego perceives things in relation to its own domain in a particular orientation<sup>1004</sup>. What is important, according to Husserl, is the space given to the lived body and the intimacy of touch<sup>1005</sup>. When things are in proximity to the body they become more than things, since they can be sensed and touched, and they make and leave impressions<sup>1006</sup>. We experience objects as inhabiting space because we also occupy space,

“such that the boundary between the co-inhabitants of space does not hold. The skin connects as well as contains. The non-opposition between the bodies that move around objects, and objects around which bodies move, shows us how orientations involve at least a two-way approach, or the “more than one” of an encounter”<sup>1007</sup>.

<sup>1000</sup> See Merleau-Ponty, M (1962) *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith. New York: Humanities Press, and Kirmayer, L (1992) *The Body's Insistence on Meaning: Metaphor as Presentation and Representation in Illness Experience*. In *Medical Anthropological Quarterly* 6 (1992): 323-346, who both insist this

<sup>1001</sup> Hayles, N.K. (1993) *The Materiality of Informatics*. In *Configurations* 1.1 (1993) 147-170 pp153. See inscribing and incorporating practices, *supra*

<sup>1002</sup> Johnson, M (1987) *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 18-35.

See also Hayles, NK, (1993) *The Materiality of Informatics*. In *Configurations* 1.1 (1993) 147-170. These norms are informed by practices, which are implicated in their objectification in things. See Graham, M (2004) *Thinking Sex, Thinking Gender*. In *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 2004 10(2):299-303. They are also informed by identities of gender, sexuality, 'race'/cultural origin etc, which Hayles criticises Johnson for paying insufficient attention to.

Sexual practices which incorporate material objects, which are about the performances of identities, are themselves objectified through language. See chapters 2 and 5 for the constitution of the subject, and the mutability of identities: the subject is not a statically conceived identity, and therefore identities are not static, nor essential. This is in concert with queer paradigms. See Butler, J (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge. Thinking of gender and sexuality as an effect rather than a cause is a way of recognising that effect is often not separable from the things out of which effect comes and is expressed

<sup>1003</sup> See chapter 5

<sup>1004</sup> Husserl, E (1989) *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, Second Book, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, pp165.

<sup>1005</sup> Husserl, E (1989) *ibid* pp 155.

<sup>1006</sup> Husserl, E (1989) *ibid* pp 155.

<sup>1007</sup> Ahmed, S (2006) *Orientations: toward a Queer Phenomenology*. In *GLQ: a Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* (12:4) 543-574 pp551

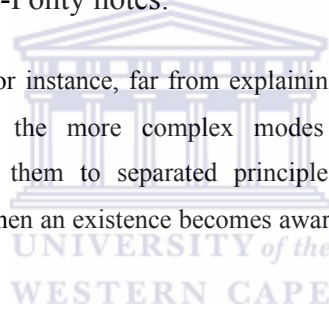
Bodies are shaped by their contact with things and people in an interactional way, whereby people and objects give meaning to each other and affect what bodies can do. The Husserlian 'horizon' is what can be reached (or not) in that "[t]he body becomes present as a body, with surfaces and boundaries, in the showing of the limits of what it can do."<sup>1008</sup> Following Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, these horizons are 'sedimented histories', affected by the history of the body and the society in which it lives<sup>1009</sup>.

### 6.1.2b) Orientation through the Body as Measure

The embodied subject is not merely a static and stable entity, but is constantly negotiating its location in relation to other things<sup>1010</sup>. This takes place through subjects orienting themselves by using the body to measure themselves, surroundings and things<sup>1011</sup>.

Socrates viewed knowledge as a kind of measurement, as did Kant who postulated that perception occurs through a mediation that enables a stable experience of objects, even though it seems to be direct and immediate<sup>1012</sup>. As Merleau-Ponty notes:

The notions of nature and reason, for instance, far from explaining the metamorphoses which we have observed from perception up to the more complex modes of human exchange, make them incomprehensible. For by relating them to separated principles, these notions mask a constantly experienced moment, the moment when an existence becomes aware of itself, grasps itself, and expresses its own meaning<sup>1013</sup>.



<sup>1008</sup> Ahmed, *ibid* pp552

<sup>1009</sup> This terrain is well-trodden through Bourdieu's habitus and Butler's focus on feminist applications for phenomenology, looking at how history influences acts and actions.

See Steinbock, A (1995) *Home and Beyond: Generative Philosophy after Husserl*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press; Bourdieu, P (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, and the idea of habitus as used by Husserl speaking of how habits are acquired and become customary: Husserl, E (1989) *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, Second Book, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, pp118. Ahmed, *ibid*, notes that the term came into social theory mostly through Bourdieu, adding to a social or relational phenomenology. See also Butler, J (1997) *Performative Acts and Gender Constitutions: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*. In *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, ed. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press) pp 406.

<sup>1010</sup> See chapter 5

<sup>1011</sup> a view inspired by Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the body as a measurant of things. See Adamson, T (2005) *Measure for Measure: The Reliance of Human Knowledge on Things of the World*. In *Ethics & the Environment*, 10(2) 2005 175-194; Merleau-Ponty M (1968) *The Visible and the Invisible*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press. Pp136: "It is the body and it alone, because it is a two-dimensional being, that can bring us to the things themselves, which are themselves not flat beings but beings in depth, inaccessible to a subject that would survey them from above, open to him alone that, if it be possible, would coexist with them in the same world." Also, "I was able to appeal from the world and the others to myself and take the route of reflection, only because first I was outside of myself, in the world, among the others, and constantly this experience feeds my reflection".

<sup>1012</sup> Adamson, T (2005) *ibid*

<sup>1013</sup> Adamson, T (2005) *ibid*, pp181 quoting Merleau-Ponty, M (1964) *Eye and Mind*. In *The Primacy of Perception*. Translated by James M. Edie. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press. 10–11

In this regard, Adamson notes that philosophy, in accounting for human experience, must take more account of the ambiguities, overlappings and complexities of bodily experience<sup>1014</sup>.

The body incorporates both nature and culture into experience. As measurant of things, the body locates itself neither exclusively as thing, since it incorporates ideas, nor as idea, since it has axes, depths and measurements<sup>1015</sup>. The body, as a 'thing among things', is therefore in relationship with things and is 'of them', using itself as measurant of both itself and other things<sup>1016</sup>.

Phenomenological experience, as complex, rich and stratified, is always an experience of something<sup>1017</sup>. Measurement therefore takes place by comparison against a norm, which is 'things' not abstract ideas<sup>1018</sup>. The body is therefore a means of 'echo-locating' the self in relation to the world, thereby incorporating both nature and culture, materiality and discourse<sup>1019</sup>.

The body-as-norm, *qua* thing, can in turn be measured, which implies a reversibility whereby the body reverses measurement, and becomes the 'measuree' (thing measured) as well as the 'measurer'<sup>1020</sup>. The hand apprehends movement, texture etc., and is also felt/perceived/experienced by the other hand. It is also felt from both inside and outside the body. This 'reversibility thesis' means that the body is subject to the same properties as other 'things' (visibility, heat

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<sup>1014</sup> Adamson, T (2005) *ibid*, pp181

<sup>1015</sup> More than merely establishing the existence and location of 'non-self' things, through sight, sound, smell, taste etc. the body also functions as a 'natural' measure of attributes such as texture, relative speed etc. See Adamson, T (2005) *ibid*

<sup>1016</sup> See Merleau-Ponty, M (1968) *The Visible and the Invisible*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press. 137: "For if the body is a thing among things, it is so in a stronger and deeper sense than they: in the sense that, we said, it is of them, and this means that it detaches itself upon them, and, accordingly, detaches itself from them. It is not simply a thing seen in fact (I do not see my back), it is visible by right, it falls under a vision that is both ineluctable and deferred. Conversely, if it touches and sees, this is not because it would have the visibles before itself as objects: they are about it, they even enter into its enclosure, they are within it, they line its looks and its hands inside and outside. If it touches them and sees them, this is only because, being of their family, itself visible and tangible, it uses its own being as a means to participate in theirs, because each of the two beings is an archetype for the other, because the body belongs to the order of things as the world is universal flesh."

<sup>1017</sup> Wyllie, M (2005) Body Subjects. In *PPP* vol. 12, no. 3 (SEPTEMBER 2005) The Johns Hopkins University Press 209-214

<sup>1018</sup> This does not deny that how 'things' are perceived is mediated/constructed by discursive norms, but merely notes that it is not the norms/abstract ideas which are used as measures, but the things themselves

<sup>1019</sup> Certain pre-requisites are necessary for seeing the body as measure: 1. the body as a norm or measure is used to describe a thing, rather than an abstraction, idea or category; 2. the body, as a norm, must be 'proximal' to the thing being measured, in order to serve as a measure i.e. It should touch or be near the thing measured; 3. the body which measures and the thing being measured need to be homogeneous as regards the attribute measured. e.g. something without weight cannot measure weight

<sup>1020</sup> Adamson, T (2005) Measure for Measure: The Reliance of Human Knowledge on Things of the World. In *Ethics & the Environment*, 10(2) 2005 175-194



etc.)<sup>1021</sup>. It also means that greater sensitivity and integration of body life with the things of nature takes place<sup>1022</sup>.

The body's general ability to measure is independent of what is being measured. This (organic) ability is by definition meaningful, since measurement is the function of using the things of nature, which include the body, as norms<sup>1023</sup>. The body doesn't insert human norms into the relation with nature, but rather measures by taking the things of nature normatively. This introduces what is seen as a 'natural' mediation of experience<sup>1024</sup>. This argument avoids anthropocentric constructionist or essentialist arguments around the 'naturalness' of people in terms of power relations *inter se* or in relation to other objects, while not denying that human norms are discursively constructed. The body merely describes the form, shape, relative distance, speed, etc. of other things in relation to itself, whereas the personal and social value placed on the things measured is a separate, normative concept. This explains that things have an effect on us, but not the content or extent of that effect, which are reflected through other lenses<sup>1025</sup>.

For example, the fact that the body can be seen has a notable effect on our experiences, and our 'being seen' by others in turn teaches us to see<sup>1026</sup>. This can clearly be 'seen' (pun intended) in the participants' practices. Although they problematically repeat normative power relations of dominance and submission, they also call on the senses in ways most people don't, and thereby dialectically call on their prior awareness and become more aware of their phenomenal experiences.

Some pay particular attention to the role of sight and vision:

“...I could sit at a glory hole and just look at guys peeing and find that very erotic. Peep through the door and watch them pee, without them knowing, and not even having anything to do with them. That I find very erotic...”(Henry')

<sup>1021</sup> See also Dillon, M.C. (1997) *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press; Hass, L. (1999). *Sense and Alterity: Rereading Merleau-Ponty's Reversibility Thesis*. In Olkowski, D and Moreley, J (eds) *Merleau-Ponty, Interiority and Exteriority, Psychic Life and the World*. Albany: State University of New York Press pp. 91–106; Yount, M Two Reversibilities: Merleau-Ponty and Derrida. In Busch, T and Gallagher, S *Merleau-Ponty, Hermeneutics and Post-Modernism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 213–226.

<sup>1022</sup> Adamson, T (2005) Measure for Measure: The Reliance of Human Knowledge on Things of the World. In *Ethics & the Environment*, 10(2) 2005 175-194

<sup>1023</sup> Adamson, T (2005) *ibid*

<sup>1024</sup> Which in turn is used to support normativities. See Interjection

<sup>1025</sup> Adamson, T (2005) *ibid*. For example, through exploring psychodynamic processes.

<sup>1026</sup> See argument later re the role of proprioception in transformation. See also Featherstone, M (2006) *Body Image/ Body Without Image*. In *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 23, No. 2-3, 233-236 (2006) re consumer culture, identity, movement, proprioception, reflexivity

This is so, even though this problematically reinforces dominant 'othering' discourses of voyeurism:

“I remember walking at Sandy Bay, and coming across a man who was having sex with a woman. And it was so erotic to me.... They didn't know I was there. I shot my load and I walked back a little and came whistling, and they were lying there as if nothing had happened! (laugh) It was such a turn-on to me” (Henry')

In contradistinction, despite the dominance of visual influence in our media-driven society, some have become more aware of the role of other senses through their sexual practices:

“touch and smell ...not vision so much. Ja, smell more than anything else. I can stand next to someone who is really unattractive visually, and be turned on. ... If I'm blindfolded, yes, that does heighten my sense of feeling and my sense of smell.” (Henry')

By engaging in 'sensory deprivation', for example through blindfolding, some participants subvert the dominance of the visual in order to broaden their experiences:

“I don't find any interest related to sensory deprivation when I'm dominant. However, it's incredibly important when I'm submissive and the act of using all other senses when vision is deprived is a major component of this.” (Joseph')

Clearly this is not a constant under all circumstances, but is related to the roles adopted during sexual play aimed at 'fooling' the senses in order to enable some kind of alternative awareness of the phenomenal world, and one's (material) place in it. As one participant notes:

“The physical sensation of sex, to me, forms only a part of the whole experience. I think that all one's senses play a collective part in leading to the ultimate climax, which is of course why we all try new things. The senses work so well together that by depriving a person of just one of them enhances the rest. This is where it gets very interesting since the brain isn't equipped to adapt so quickly and is therefore immediately confused by what it is in fact sensing. This phenomenon makes the whole experience of restraint, blind-folding, sensory deprivation so much the more enjoyable for me as it creates a lot more anticipation of the unknown. The brain is after all the biggest and most powerful sex organ....” (Jason')

Although these practices may re-creating dominant (heteronormative) discourses which serve to marginalise the 'other', they are not intended by the participants as such, and are instead aimed at heightening the senses, and thereby gaining subjective value through explicitly relating with the material world through a more 'present' experience of phenomenal relations:

“It's all about heightening senses beyond what we usually experience or are told to experience. It's why pain play is so amazing to me personally. Not as punishment but as an exploration of my body and its often contradictory responses, both physical and emotional.” (Joseph')

At the same time, these experiences do not take place in a vacuum, and play themselves out in a context which the participants see as transgressive:

“It makes my body come to life. Seriously. Again, I think the brain is the most potent sexual organ in the body and by enacting/living out one’s fantasies, you are in the position to take the entire body and elevate it to a much higher level physically and of course spiritually. By living out my fetishes I feel more confident, potent, virile, and sexy and therefore am more aware of, and susceptible to any external stimuli. ... In my case I am not too fond of nipple play and if the guys gets too rough it can actually turn me off big time. More subtle of my fetishes, the CBW and cock rings/weights for example seriously heightens my personal awareness – especially when I wear it to the office or in public. My body does feel more alive than normal which in turn gives me a lot more self-confidence and sexual radiance...” (‘Jason’)

Clearly, participants are highly aware of the sensory nature of their practices, which carry subjective meaning for them both for the sensations themselves and the roles they play in intersecting with discursive norms<sup>1027</sup>. This demonstrates the mediated, normative nature of experience (and knowledge), whereby subjects call on dominant discourses which they both perpetuate and subvert by means of explicitly playing with their senses, in order to heighten experiences, and become more ‘present’. At the same time, this allows for nature (and therefore material things) to play an important role in organising human experience. This implies that experience is neither purely discursively, nor purely phenomenally described, but takes place in terms of relationality between (embodied) materiality, discourse and subjectivity.

Einsteinian relativity uses the same idea of relation<sup>1028</sup>. It underscores shifts from absolute to relative thinking, whereby conceptions of absolute space and time don't locate us anywhere<sup>1029</sup>. Contrary to popular belief, as Adamson argues, this doesn't lead to subjectivist thinking, since the standards of measurement are already part of the space-time we are measuring. This use of a local region allows us to orient ourselves rather than impose our own ideas on the region. In this way, relative and local norms are used to create objective measurements by using the non-absolute, and thereby at the same time avoiding subjectivities<sup>1030</sup>.

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<sup>1027</sup> See below for more on the role of social proscription in transgressive practices

<sup>1028</sup> Yet see comments in chapter 5 re concerns about positing generic pre-personal subjects

<sup>1029</sup> Adamson, T (2005) Measure for Measure: The Reliance of Human Knowledge on Things of the World. In *Ethics & the Environment*, 10(2) 2005 175-194

However, see also chapter 5 for the criticisms of systems theory as a lens to view the subject

<sup>1030</sup> Adamson, T (2005) *ibid*

### 6.1.2c) Dialectical Measurement: Present/Future Orientations

The measurement and reversibility theses support arguments that the body is part of the world<sup>1031</sup>. The relationship between embodied being and the world around him/her is complex, and cannot be adequately described using causal relationships, since they work through processes in an atomistic way<sup>1032</sup>. Rather, relationships between people and things are dialectical. A subject's experience of an object (or person) is not made direct because he/she is causally influenced by the spatial proximity of objects (or people)<sup>1033</sup>. Causal relations are useful to describe 'past learning', but such 'past learning' is not an external cause, and is part of the subject's continuing experience, rather than a determinant thereof<sup>1034</sup>. Having reason to believe that something will/should be in experience (e.g. expecting to see an object in any given circumstances) is not sufficient to explain the experience, or to predict the outcome of an experience<sup>1035</sup>.

In a dialectical relationship, on the other hand, the subject transforms the world of experience into his/her 'own' environment, which grants meaning to the environment for itself<sup>1036</sup>. This is not a kind of idealism, nor does it advocate a transcendental subject<sup>1037</sup>.

A dialectical relationship implies a present and future orientation. Immediate experience is only a small part of what a subject experiences, since he/she can experience absent, impossible, future, past and ideal objects<sup>1038</sup>. 'Lived time' is therefore not completely intersubjective, but is also objective because shared by others, and because it relates to biological and cosmological time<sup>1039</sup>. Experiences of lived time are a combination of cognitive temporal experiences, intersubjective and objective time<sup>1040</sup>.

Since experience is not simply past-oriented, it is as much intentional as it is reactionary. This intentionality presupposes that there are present- or future-oriented reference points beyond the subject's historical experiences, which references are in turn made up of external

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<sup>1031</sup> See chapter 5

<sup>1032</sup> Wyllie, M (2005) Body Subjects. In *PPP* vol. 12, no. 3 (SEPTEMBER 2005) The Johns Hopkins University Press 209-214

<sup>1033</sup> Wyllie, M (2005) *ibid*

<sup>1034</sup> Wyllie, M (2005) *ibid*

<sup>1035</sup> Wyllie, M (2005) *ibid*. Rationality is necessary to assess the validity of the context

<sup>1036</sup> Wyllie, M (2005) *ibid*

<sup>1037</sup> Wyllie, M (2005) *ibid*

<sup>1038</sup> Wyllie, M (2005) *ibid*

<sup>1039</sup> Wyllie, M (2005) *ibid*

<sup>1040</sup> Wyllie, M (2005) *ibid*

relations<sup>1041</sup>. The content of experience is therefore not entirely internally-determined. Experience has a significance beyond itself and is an experience of something other than the self, where subject and object are part of the same world-creating process<sup>1042</sup>. In this way the body is ontological, and is unified rather than divided into theoretical frameworks, where the relationship between cause and effect is dialectical, rather than stratified, in what Merleau-Ponty calls the 'intentional arc'<sup>1043</sup>. In other words, human activities are not immanent, but rather have intentional characteristics<sup>1044</sup>.

In this way, the body-subject actively orientates him/herself under influences of the world, rather than passively being subject to the world. This orientation takes place from a particular subjective perspective. The intentional arc is a closed feedback-loop between body-subject and world, which results in the body-subject knowing (or being able to choose) how to react in coherent ways, making meaningful experience<sup>1045</sup>.

Fuchs speaks of the implicit/explicit distinction of temporality<sup>1046</sup>. When the implicit/explicit context of an experience shifts, the intentional arc can also shift, which might take place when the way a person relates to objects becomes explicit as part of the context where all objects appear in a specific way. For example, where someone loses a loved child, that trauma becomes the context for dealing with other children. All experience is then seen in terms of the one important experience once it is lodged<sup>1047</sup>.

The dialectical yet lodged nature of phenomenological experience can be seen in certain participant narratives which seek to explain specific fetishes or fears. Clearly, these can be explained *ex post facto* as having a genesis, but could not have been projected into the future. Further, such explanations are not necessarily conscious or intelligible to the participant, but become

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<sup>1041</sup> Wyllie, M (2005) *ibid*

<sup>1042</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M (1962) *The Phenomenology of perception*, trans. C. Smith. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd. pp213

<sup>1043</sup> Merleau-Ponty (1962), *ibid*, pp136

<sup>1044</sup> See the conflict between Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty. In this regard, see Lawlor, L (1998) The end of phenomenology: Expressionism in Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty. In *Continental Philosophy Review*, Volume 31, Number 1 / January, 1998, Springer Netherlands, pp 15-34. Looking at Deleuze's *The Logic of Sense* (1969) and Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Lawlor argues that, even though Deleuze's challenge is double through immanence and difference (the paradox of expression), there are similarities between the two in the idea of a past that has never been present. What is needed, however, is an interpretation of expression in Merleau-Ponty's unfinished *The Visible and the Invisible*.

<sup>1045</sup> Wyllie, M (2005) *Body Subjects*. In *PPP* vol. 12, no. 3 (SEPTEMBER 2005) The Johns Hopkins University Press 209-214

<sup>1046</sup> Fuchs, T. (2005). *Implicit and explicit temporality*. In *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* 12, no 3:195–198. at 196

<sup>1047</sup> Dreyfus H. L. (1983). *Alternative philosophical conceptualizations of psychopathology*. A version of a paper given at a Symposium on the Conduct and Framework of Therapy, Harvard Medical School, Department of Continuing Education, June 16–18, 1983.

experientially accessible in the 'intentional arc'.

In their narrations, participants acknowledge and re-perform past experiences, thereby projecting desires into present and future experience:

“... my lover and I, we have a fetish about pipes. I find a man smoking a pipe extremely sexy... always have... I always used to take it back to... there used to be a man in the garage behind our house, and he used to smoke a pipe, and I used to find him very attractive. I used to watch him and play with myself... wank myself... and even come, type of thing like that. But then I go even further back, and I can remember being... my mother sitting on a chair reading a book, and I've got my head just above her knees, cos that's the height I was. And my eldest brother on my father's side, who also smoked a pipe, used to chase me around the chair saying he was going to cut off my cock, and put it in his pipe and smoke it! And ever since then I've been attracted to men with pipes.” (Henry')

“I do think that it often relates to a person's background. Family, social structure, you know... I can tell you my own, ... at school I grew up with corporal punishment, again having corporal punishment done to me. And using a cane on someone is sort of getting back at what people did to you...” (Jacques')

Such descriptions show how these participants have made retrospective associations between sexual desire and particular material objects/fetish practices, and in so doing, have dialectically constructed forward-looking sexual scripts through backwardly-causal explanations. Yet it would be impossible to project these circumstances causally into the future from the present.

Not all examples of experiences are as value-neutral:

“... always in my life I was afraid of long grass. I could never put my finger on it. I could never say: Oh, it's because of this. There could be snakes in the long grass, there could be spiders in the long grass. Um, I mean... I don't like snakes. I avoid snakes. But I'm not that scared of spiders and I'm not that scared of snakes. But I wouldn't go into long grass. And, in my forties I bumped into, or came into contact with a coloured guy who was really... let's say he was, shall we say really low-classed coloured. Very rough, dirty, yucky kind of coloured guy. And he recognised me. And I recognised him too. I could say that he used to live in that area where I live, when I was a child. And he said to me “Ja, ek het jou genaai!”- “ja, I fucked you when you were young!”. And I said “No ways, you never fucked me!” Cos I knew, as far as I was concerned he had never done that. And it was a couple of weeks later that suddenly I remembered that I was walking down a lane. Now the lane was sand and grass and what have you. And there was long grass there. And as this little child, four, five, six years... no, not six years, it must be younger, he made me sit on his lap without a pants, in the long grass. And suddenly I realised why all my life I was afraid for long grass....” (Henry')

“... I have spoken to a guy who was tied up and shoved into a dark closet by his grandmother. And now, he's a very vengeful sadist, who goes out to hurt people. And I don't think is for sexual gratification. His is definitely payback to whoever possible...” (Jacques')

Clearly, abuse can manifest in fears, desires and practices<sup>1048</sup>. Yet simple causal explanations cannot predict how experiences will proceed from an event into the future. Psychopathologising tendencies might assume that the trauma suffered by 'Henry' has rendered him dysfunctional. Yet this is not the case. At 60-something years old, he is at peace about his past, his sexual orientation, and his desires which incorporate material objects. This implies that his personal orientations have intersected in complex ways with discursive constructions, and that his choices have in certain ways countered the normalising forces of his social environment, while affording him elements of personal satisfaction.

Agency is therefore not something simply wrestled from dominant discursive powers. Nor is it simply an uncomplicated 'doing' in response to a causally-defined foundational psychical past. Rather, it is the complex and multiple intersections between personal and political contexts, and is present- and future-oriented in some kind of aspirational way, which can be seen from at least one participant's desire to experience (sexual) variety, as opposed to being obsessively driven:

“... there's obviously a lot of... I wouldn't say they're fetishes, but ideas I want to explore... but definitely to be put in a box, and say 'you're not allowed to think out of the box,' frustrated me. Maybe that's why I explore more now that I did as a child...” (Jacques')

This implies that the embodied agent locates him/herself in relation both to normative constructs and lived experience. Whether or how he/she takes that opportunity up is a question of choice, albeit bounded by powerful discursive imperatives. His/her embodied activities are therefore responsive to circumstances, both 'external' and 'internal' to the subject (however one might delineate those), and may or may not be part of the psychodynamic processing of abuse or dysfunction. They are however dialectically constructed not just in reaction to the past, but towards the present and future. Whether this is a plausible or attainable future or not is another question.

### **6.1.3 Agency: Conclusions**

Clearly, subjects do not merely react, in unconscious knee-jerk ways, to essentialist or determinist notions of pre-existing drives, as proposed by psychopathological constructs. Nor do they simply respond like automatons to pre-existing discursive constructs as proposed by (certain readings of) Foucaultian thinking. Rather, their subjectivity is grounded in phenomenal experience, and their

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<sup>1048</sup> as is implied in psychopathological constructs of 'fetishism'- see chapter 4

agency is borne of the sense of meaning they, as embodied beings, hold of their life, as constituted by their orientations to the world around them. This orientation takes account both of discursively-constructed normative constraints and phenomenological experience.

Rather than deterministically looking backwards in a causal way, and reacting entirely to pre-existing frameworks or deterministic experiences, desires and choices are therefore dialectically oriented towards both the restrictive, past-focused normative parameters of discursive constructions, and embodied experience with absent, impossible, future, past and ideal objects. In this respect, agency is constructive, yet not deterministic.

Such a version of complexity and inter-relatedness of phenomenological orientation, measurement and orientation can be glimpsed in the participants' enjoyment of their senses in their sexuality which incorporates enjoyment of material objects. As discussed in Chapter 5, there is really no such thing as 'fetishism' or indeed 'gay male fetish' in any determinable way which sets it apart from other (sexual) experiences. Therefore, the participants' perceptions reflect similar notions of embodied experience to everyone else, whereby enjoyment shifts and changes and is different for each person. The agency of 'gay male fetishists' is therefore not something which is any different to that of anybody else. Yet clearly the participants choose to see their sexual practices as 'fetish sexuality', and, within bounds, to relish their practices in ways which other people do not, even though all people incorporate material objects into their sexual repertoires, whether sexy lingerie, high heels or butt-plugs.

It therefore remains to ask what function sexual interaction with material objects serves, and more narrowly, how same-sex exploration incorporating material objects may add value to subjects' lives.

## **6.2 Same-Sex Sexual Practices Incorporating Material Objects as Recognition of Personal Value**

Men who enjoy the sexual company of material objects in the context of same-sex practices ('gay male fetishists') do not simply react to dominant tropes. Rather, I suggest, they call on the phenomenal world in order to effect personal emotional re-orientations. They call on their embodied agency to place themselves in socio-emotional and physical locations which support their positive value, which they can thereby acknowledge. As I will argue, and in contradistinction to the



(heteronormative) implications to the ICD diagnostic categories<sup>1049</sup>, such sexual activity does not describe by-definition dysfunctional people lost in their own psycho-dramas, but is rather a process of (partially) enabled subjects recognising a sense of positive self-value.

Queer (or at least non-normative) bodies engaged in transgressive practices, such as those of the participants of this research, refuse to remain hidden<sup>1050</sup>. Yet at the same time, the participants do not all advertise their practices in their everyday intersections with a dominant non-transgressive public<sup>1051</sup>. Their practices in this respect are at times and in some ways transgressive while still supporting heteronormative discourses<sup>1052</sup>. They do not necessarily effect political change, nor are they intended to. However these practices, and the social groups in which they take place, provide safe spaces, away from the specular invasion of dominant discursive prescriptions, in which personal change and transformation can potentially take place. As I will argue, people such as the participants re-orient themselves through both social and sexual affiliations with others with similar interests and sexual practices through interactions with material objects. This re-aligned sense of 'self', which nevertheless cannot be described in essentialist ways, rephrases their subjective sense of self-value away from perceptions of their sexuality as being a failed space, and towards an empowered and functional sense of self-in-community.

### **6.2.1 Personal Re-Orientation through Human Interaction**

That boundaries between the body and the world are not explicit indicates that (partially) transgressive bodies, such as the participants, dynamically, co-constitutively and transactionally interact with their environments, which include people, ideas and institutions<sup>1053</sup>. This gives neither organism nor environment any logical or ethical priority over the other, but rather an interdependence<sup>1054</sup>. Bodies and environments are in permeable, dynamic relationships with each other, where culture interacts with bodies and bodies interact with culture<sup>1055</sup>. In this way, environments are not constituted to fill needs, but organisms have distinctive experiences in those environments<sup>1056</sup>. As I will argue, the distinctive experiences which take place

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<sup>1049</sup> See chapter 4

<sup>1050</sup> See Interjection: even though their practices largely perpetuate heteronormativity, they belie an attempt to redress such normativity through explicit relations with the material world

<sup>1051</sup> See above

<sup>1052</sup> Nor are they necessarily intended to. See chapter 2: in this regard, 'fetish' practices are not necessarily identity-politics-based challenges to heteronormativity, but, as I will argue, are partially queer challenges to normativity

<sup>1053</sup> See chapter 5

<sup>1054</sup> Sullivan, S (2001) *Living across and through skins: Transactional bodies, pragmatism, and feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

<sup>1055</sup> Sullivan, S (2001) *ibid*. See also Weiss, G (2002) The Anonymous Intentions of Transactional Bodies. In *Hypatia* vol. 17, no. 4 (Fall 2002) pg 187-200

<sup>1056</sup> Sullivan, S (2001) *ibid*. See also Weiss, G (2002) *ibid*

between people in the 'safe' spaces of 'fetish sexuality' serve to re-orient people who enjoy the sexual company of material objects. As I will argue, this re-orientation angles subjects away from their sense of dysfunction and marginality, and towards self-value<sup>1057</sup>.

### 6.2.1a) Heteronormative Orientations

Ahmed foregrounds the oft-ignored 'orientation' part of 'sexual orientation', so as to re-theorise the sexualisation of space and the spatiality of sexual desire<sup>1058</sup>. She notes that orientation is important in relation to action, and to objects that can help people find their way. Phenomenological consciousness, as located in relation to objects, is worldly, situated and embodied. Further, bodies take shape through “tending toward objects that are reachable, which are available within the bodily horizon.”<sup>1059</sup> This means that bodies obtain orientations by repetition of certain actions, either in relation to physical objects or to ideal objects with which embodied entities identify.

In other words, orientations are about repetitive 'tending towards' over time, which requires a present state-of-being, an element of desire towards something, and the passage of time. This implies, Ahmed argues, that sexual orientation is not something one 'has', but something one 'tends towards'. So

“to become straight means not only that we have to turn toward the objects given to us by heterosexual culture but also that we must turn away from objects that take us off this line. The queer subject within straight culture hence deviates and is made socially present as a deviant.”<sup>1060</sup>

This is a compelling account of how compulsory heterosexuality is perpetuated<sup>1061</sup>. People are required to tend towards some objects rather than others, in order to obtain familial and social love. In the context of sexualities, people are required to tend towards the opposite gender and the values, capital, aspirations, projects and styles, and physical objects associated with that gender. These form the 'field of heterosexual objects'<sup>1062</sup>. Ahmed further notes that “heterosexuality would be an effect of how objects gather to

<sup>1057</sup> On how individuals experience agency in relation to others, see Farrer, C., & Frith, C.D. (2001). Experiencing one-self vs another person as being the cause of an action: The neural correlates of the experience of agency. In *Neuroimage* 15, 596–603.

<sup>1058</sup> Ahmed, S (2006) Orientations: toward a Queer Phenomenology. In *GLQ: a Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* (12:4) 543-574

<sup>1059</sup> Ahmed, S (2006), *ibid*, pp543

<sup>1060</sup> Ahmed, S (2006), *ibid*, pp554

<sup>1061</sup> See Rich, A (1993) Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence. In Abelove, H, Barale, M.A. and Halperin, D.M. (eds) *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge pp229.

<sup>1062</sup> Butler's term. See Butler, J (1997) Performative Acts and Gender Constitutions: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. In Conboy, K, Medina, N and Stanbury, S (1997) *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, (New York: Columbia University Press)

clear a ground, of how objects are arranged to create a background”, rather than just a grouping of objects<sup>1063</sup>.

### 6.2.1b) Normativity, Invisibility and Marginalisation

As much as this explains heterosexuality, it also describes how queer orientations such as those of the participants are seen as 'failed space'. Although participants are mostly 'out' as 'gay men', there appears to be an invisible line of propriety beyond which participants are not comfortable to advertise their 'fetish' interests, rather opting for privacy:

“...[I am 'out' in terms of my fetish interests]... maybe in order of how perceived perverse they might be, to select people, obviously.” ('Brian')

“Out in the community I move in. Out towards my long time partner. Others no. I see no reason why I should advertise it. The people I want to know and who can have pleasure with me in this regard all knows (sic).” ('Donald')

This is partly through a non-specific fear of censure by normative society which renders non-normative sexualities incorporating material objects invisible and therefore marginal. It is increasingly acceptable in dominant discourses to be seen as 'homosexual', yet arguably, only because the approved 'homosexual identities' and practices have been incorporated into heteronormative conceptions of appropriateness<sup>1064</sup>. Although media influences arguably no longer project taboos on 'homosexuality' as strongly as in the past<sup>1065</sup>, there remains a discursive proscription of and shame associated with sexuality, and a concomitant prescription of sanitised sexual practices<sup>1066</sup>.

Further, in instances where participants are 'out', they expect the topic to be contentious or remarkable, and are therefore self-conscious, in particular in the face of potential judgement by family and friends:

“[I am 'out'] as much as one can be in South Africa. My face is up on my sex profiles and most of my friends know about my interests. To date, my partner’s family don’t know but, while being Jewish, they are very Episcopalian in their ability to turn away and pretend that something doesn’t exist.” ('Joseph')

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<sup>1063</sup> Ahmed, S (2006) Orientations: toward a Queer Phenomenology. In *GLQ: a Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* (12:4) 543-574, pp559

<sup>1064</sup> See chapter 2 and the Interjection

<sup>1065</sup> See chapter 2 and the Interjection

<sup>1066</sup> See chapter 2 and the Interjection

“I am openly gay and to a certain degree out i.t.o my fetishes as I refer to it often in public, whether to gauge a reaction or in jest. My family will not understand so they are kept in the dark. My partner knows very well and so do a very select group of close friends. The topic of sex, let alone sexuality, makes people so very uncomfortable but I have found that the more blatant you are about yourself, strangely, the more they appreciate it (OK, there are limits).” (Jason')

This shame and the resultant desire to hide non-approved sexual practices clearly does not reflect some kind of psychopathology<sup>1067</sup>. Yet neither, in contradistinction, does it reflect wholehearted and proud transgression of norms<sup>1068</sup>. It therefore begs the question as to what function such practices serve for people such as the participants, and more particularly, why they remain comfortable identifying their practices as 'fetish sexuality', notwithstanding the discursive constructions of such practices as failure.

### 6.2.1c) *Queer Re-Orientation*

Oppositional models of reading sexuality postulate that the individual can call on nothing other than him/herself to counter purported threats to autonomy<sup>1069</sup>. Sullivan claims that this model is illusory and harmful since it is based on the principle of exclusion of much of meaning in terms of relationships, objects and institutions<sup>1070</sup>.

In contradistinction, however, calling on transactional models of bodies as a lens through which to view sexual practices involving material objects releases claims to autonomy and epistemological and ethical superiority, calling on other resources to promote flourishing, dignity and worth<sup>1071</sup>. Seen in this way, people such as the participants create 'safe' spaces for themselves, such as parties, events and online communities<sup>1072</sup>. They collect to relax, talk and/or to have sex in these spaces with like-minded people, whether such people are those who share their particular sexual interests:

“...if you have a fetish, I suppose you would want to be in contact with people like-minded” (Henry')

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<sup>1067</sup> See chapter 4

<sup>1068</sup> Which is further supported by how participants implicitly both support and subvert heteronormativity. See Chapter 2 and the Interjection

<sup>1069</sup> Sullivan, S (2001) *Living across and through skins: Transactional bodies, pragmatism, and feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press., 106–109. See chapter 2 re oppositional lesbian and gay identity politics

<sup>1070</sup> Sullivan, S (2001) *ibid*

<sup>1071</sup> Sullivan, S (2001) *ibid*

<sup>1072</sup> Two such local online and real-time communities are SALeathermen ([www.saleathermen.org.za](http://www.saleathermen.org.za)) for gay men, and Collarme ([www.collarme.co.za](http://www.collarme.co.za)) for heterosexual and gay BDSM enthusiasts

Or who don't see them as morally degenerate or 'mentally ill':

“... We need to remove the “sick,” “bad,” “stupid,” “dangerous” and “ridiculous” labels that are attached to normal, productive and honest members of society.” (Joseph)

This is often by way of garnering a sense of liberation:

“...I can only say that [being open about sexualities and sexual interests] helps to set us free.” (Simon)

This re-orientation takes place through the 'queering' (albeit not necessarily a rejection) of (hetero)norms. In a spatially 'straight' world, the oblique is odd<sup>1073</sup>. Similarly, in a heteronormative world, unusual sexualities are odd. But the world is not entirely straight. The slanted things exist, yet are only slanted if the viewer is looking at them from the orientation of the vertical (or if the generally-accepted orientation of vertical is assumed to be the 'norm')<sup>1074</sup>. The slanted world can become the norm for any given viewer, depending on his/her orientation or perspective<sup>1075</sup>. Social spaces in which the participants collect disorient the 'straight', which is otherwise only prioritised in and through heteronormative orientations. As one participant rather defensively notes in an attempt to explain his sexuality:

“you know, when I meet straight guys, they never shake my hand and say 'Hi, I'm Bob and I like to fuck women”, so I don't say “Hi, I'm H..., I like to fuck men” (Henry)

Although in so doing they perpetuate heteronormative scripts, the participants retire from daily compulsory heteronormative performances and the need to justify or explain themselves. This is often primarily a social experience, rather than a political one:

**Qu:** *so [connecting with like-minded people is] a social element?*

“yes” (Henry)

**Qu:** *not a political element...?*

“No, not a political element” (Henry)

They re-organise social and bodily space in their social collectives through practices which create the habitus of which Bourdieu speaks, wherein embodied knowledge is well-structured, coherent and elaborate despite no formal recognition thereof<sup>1076</sup>. The environment creates habitus which is

<sup>1073</sup>Ahmed, S (2006) Orientations: toward a Queer Phenomenology. *In GLQ: a Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* (12:4) 543-574. See also Ahmed, S (2004) *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* New York: Routledge. pp85.

<sup>1074</sup>Ahmed, S (2006) & (2004) *ibid*

<sup>1075</sup> Ahmed, S (2006) & (2004) *ibid*

<sup>1076</sup> Bourdieu, P (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

changed, learned and perpetuated through embodied practices. This habitus is not a set of rules, but rather “a series of dispositions and inclinations which are at once subject to circumstances and durable enough to pass down through generations”<sup>1077</sup>. It is conveyed not only through the observation of bodily movement but also through the orientation and movement of the body through cultural spaces and temporal rhythms”<sup>1078</sup>, which allow thought and action by providing a framework for thinking.

Habitus takes place through the intersection between subjective awareness and the body, which Merleau-Ponty argues are the same (body-subject)<sup>1079</sup>. His 'projective intentionality' is a kind of body intentionality that supersedes conscious awareness<sup>1080</sup>. This is not about a body creating experiential meaning through narcissistic reflexivity. Rather, it means that the body continually projects itself onto the world in multiple transactions, some anonymous and some personal<sup>1081</sup>. These transactions establish habits and in turn establish a sense of self. This is not an imposition of meaning onto others. Rather, people have multiple intercorporeal exchanges with environments and are engaged in body activity which transforms their environments and themselves<sup>1082</sup>.

The social 'fetish' collectives serve to engage what Brennan refers to as “transmission of affect”, whereby social processes have biological and physical effect, and socially induced affect shifts the body and is transmitted to social groups<sup>1083</sup>. Calling on social theories and neuroendocrinology, she further argues that affects call up thoughts and people become emotionally attuned via chemical and electrical exchanges, feeling the atmosphere of a space through unconscious olfaction. Just as where a depressing feeling in a room is transferred to someone entering, a sense of camaraderie and upbuilding shared values is transferred in social collectives.

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<sup>1077</sup> In the present context, this 're-orientation' is passed onto future members of the community, rather than from parent to child. In this way the cultural norms and visual identifiers of the 'leather' scene have been transmitted from Europe and the USA to South Africa. As one participant notes:

“Fetish does follow trend, silly as it may seem, but because of the internet, there’s really no longer “lag” in the development of trends, be they fashion or types of sexual practices.” ('Joseph')

<sup>1078</sup> Hayles, N.K. (1993) The Materiality of Informatics. In *Configurations* 1.1 (1993) 147-170, pp160

<sup>1079</sup> Wyllie, M (2005) Body Subjects. In *PPP* vol. 12, no. 3 (SEPTEMBER 2005) The Johns Hopkins University Press 209-214

<sup>1080</sup> Weiss, G (2002) The Anonymous Intentions of Transactional Bodies. In *Hypatia* vol. 17, no. 4 (Fall 2002) pg 187-200, reviewing Sullivan, S. (2001) *Living across and through skins: Transactional bodies, pragmatism, and feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Weiss, *ibid* pp193, calls on Merleau-Ponty, M (1962), *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith. New York: Humanities Press pp142-46

<sup>1081</sup> See chapter 5 about anonymity

<sup>1082</sup> Weiss, G (2002) The Anonymous Intentions of Transactional Bodies. In *Hypatia* vol. 17, no. 4 (Fall 2002) pg 187-200,

<sup>1083</sup> Brennan, T (2004) *The Transmission of Affect*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. pp1

Such is the case with the participants, who appreciate a space where they can find a sense of safety from normative judgement:

“[a community] helps to create a culture and a network of support to the individuals of the community.” (Simon)

“... we are pack animals and need support in numbers. It’s about the camaraderie and the Brotherhood in my opinion. It’s about a collective mind and interest, just like a book club or rugby team. Soort soek soort, soos hulle sê. We have to stick together and let petty crap go in order for a real fetish community to firstly survive and secondly to thrive.” (Jacques)

They often feel that this 'safe space' is not just for them, but is potentially an empowering facility for others in similar circumstances:

“[the community] also helps younger generations to make the step easier for them when coming to terms with their sexuality.” (Simon)

Collins similarly argues for embodied emotion “and its entrainment in collectivities”<sup>1084</sup>. He argues that human bodies sharing space synchronise and align rhythmically, which results in the group leaving the space with heightened senses of their moral correctness and the need to stick to their symbols and defend them. This is of course applicable to religious and conservative meetings which mobilise reactionary panic-discourses<sup>1085</sup>, but equally, as can be seen through at least one participant's response, in the social spaces where 'fetish' sexuality is both a reactionary response to heteronorms and a pro-active process of self-re-orientation:

***Qu: Do you see fetish sexuality (yours or others) as a rebellion against general social norms?***

“Only in regards to questioning the concept of “fixed” societal ideas, what is wrong and right in a society of constant social turmoil and transformation. So yes, to consider BDSM as a “dirty little secret” is something I’d rather not do. Times only change when you force uncomfortable issues on those around you...” (Joseph)

Clearly, therefore, people such as the participants create social spaces in which to re-orient themselves away from normative effacement, proscriptions and prescriptions, thereby 'owning' their own perspectives and lives. Phenomenological interaction between individuals in the safe spaces of collectivities serves to re-orient people who enjoy the sexual company of material objects, who

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<sup>1084</sup> Collins, R (2004) *Interaction Ritual Chains* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. See See Irvine, J.M. (2004) *Talk About Sex: The Battles over Sex Education in the United States*, University of California Press; Irvine, J.M. (2008) Transient Feelings: Sex Panics and the Politics of Emotions. In *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* - Volume 14, Number 1, 2008, pp. 1-40 pp28

<sup>1085</sup> See chapter 2

thereby have the opportunity to value themselves in the face of prevailing proscriptions. They exercise their powers of agency to challenge (albeit not entirely reject) aspects of heteronormativity which they do not want to support, and to create what they see as safe social spaces for themselves and others like them interested in similar sexual performances<sup>1086</sup>.

### **6.2.2 Re-Orientation through Embodied Experience of Material Objects**

Not only does this personal re-orientation take place through relationships with socio-political spaces, but, I suggest, through phenomenological interaction with material objects, whether in these safe spaces or in private.

Subjects' meaning-creation is socially constituted through bodily transactions with people and the environment, through an appreciation of similarities and differences<sup>1087</sup>. These transactions are not anonymous, but transactional<sup>1088</sup>. Husserlian conceptions of touch imply that bodily proximity is about intimacy in a non-oppositional, dialectical, interactional relation<sup>1089</sup>. It also implies that meaning-creation is dialectical between the subject and the material which is touched<sup>1090</sup>.

This takes place through the interactions between individuals in the environment. It also happens through interactions between the subject and the material object. Rather than Pietz' view of 'fetishism' as "subjection of the human body . . . to the influence of certain significant material objects that, although cut off from the body, function as its controlling organs at certain moments", I suggest that the interaction is dialectical and phenomenological, taking place through the subject's agency and affording the subject a positive self-value<sup>1091</sup>.

The 'self' is something other than a 'core' individual identity remaining the same throughout life<sup>1092</sup>. Rather, people are 'bundles of habits' dynamically emerging through interaction in a shared environment<sup>1093</sup>. In this respect, habits are both will and agency, and people who enjoy material

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<sup>1086</sup> See chapter 2 re issues pertaining to political rights: This collectivity has a different function to identity-politics-based political organisation aimed at acquiring or maintaining rights. Specifically political aims may take place in 'fetish' environments such as pride parades, yet do not necessarily take place in all 'fetish'-oriented environments, such as parties, events and online clubs.

<sup>1087</sup> See Grafton, S. T., Fadiga, L., Arbib, M. A. & Rizzolatti, G. (1997). Premotor cortex activation during observation and naming of familiar tools. In *Neuroimage* 6:231–36.

<sup>1088</sup> See chapter 5

<sup>1089</sup> Husserl, E. (1989) *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, Second Book, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic. pp155.

<sup>1090</sup> Ahmed, S (2006) Orientations: toward a Queer Phenomenology. In *GLQ: a Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* (12:4) 543-574.

<sup>1091</sup> Pietz, W (1985) The Problem of the Fetish I. In *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 9 (1985): 5–17: 7

<sup>1092</sup> See chapter 5

<sup>1093</sup> following Sullivan and Dewey. See chapter 5. See also Sullivan, S (2001) *Living across and through skins:*



objects sexually are able to work dialectically with and against pre-existing (hetero)normative expectations and life narratives by re-orienting themselves towards the present and the future through their sexual play with material objects.

This process is complex, where sexuality interplays with phenomenological embodied experience, physical and emotional orientations, and imagination. As I have argued, the processes enable subjects to re-phrase themselves in ways other than as necessarily 'failed', and to re-orient themselves towards subjectively-conceived empowerment and centrality, through a process of learning and habituating. It further enables them to project desires and aspirations into the future through living their imagination out in the present. They do this by calling on fantasy (often through pornography<sup>1094</sup>) to integrate images and sensations into an internal 'reality'/experience. These serve to establish and maintain a sense of subjective value<sup>1095</sup>.

#### 6.2.2a) *Phenomenological Learning through Material Objects: Present-and Future-Orientations in "Actively Becoming"*

The sexual subject calls on material objects to locate him/herself phenomenologically in the present, through learning which is both experiential and participatory<sup>1096</sup>. People do not learn only what they are formally taught, but experientially through bodily experiences<sup>1097</sup>. Incorporated knowledge is

*Transactional bodies, pragmatism, and feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press., 106–109; Dewey, J. (1978) Some implications of anti-intellectualism. In Boydston, J.A. (ed) *The middle works. Vol. 6*, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press. ---(1979) The logic of the judgments of practice. In Boydston, J.A (ed) *The middle works. Vol. 8.*, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press. ---(1980a) Democracy and education. In Boydston, J.A (ed) *The middle works, Vol. 9*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press ---(1980b) The need for a recovery of philosophy. In Boydston, J.A (ed) *The middle works. Vol. 10*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press; ---(1981) Experience and nature. In Boydston, J.A (ed) *The later works. Vol. 1*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press; --- (1984) Affective thought. In Boydston, J.A (ed) *The later works. Vol. 2*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press; --- (1988) Unity of science as a social problem. In Boydston, J.A (ed) *The later works. Vol. 13*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press

<sup>1094</sup> For more on pornography, see Jacobs, K., Janssen, M. & Pasquinelli, M. (eds) (2007)

*C'LICKME: A Netporn Studies Reader*. Amsterdam: Colophon, Institute of Network Cultures.

<sup>1095</sup> However, as alluded to in the Interjection, this problematically also potentially serves to keep them ignorant of their own normative practices. This implies that such interactions need to be consciously and widely mobilised to effect deeper non-normative change.

<sup>1096</sup> See supra re inscribing and incorporating practices. See also Hayles, N.K. (1993) The Materiality of Informatics. In *Configurations 1.1* (1993) 147-170.

For the interconnections between phenomenology and analytic philosophy, see Smith, D.W., Thomasson, A.L (2005) *Phenomenology and philosophy of mind*. Oxford University Press. This work brings together phenomenology and analytic philosophy, showing they might address each others' central concerns. Topics addressed are consciousness, intentionality, perception, action, self-knowledge, temporal awareness, and mental content.

<sup>1097</sup> See Bresler, L (2004) Knowing bodies, moving minds: towards embodied teaching and learning. In *Volume 3 of Landscapes: the arts, aesthetics, and education*, Springer; Dohn, N.B. (2002) *Roles of the Body in Learning*. Centre for the Interdisciplinary Study of Learning, University of Aalborg, Denmark. Referring to Merleau-Ponty's 'body-schema' and 'affordance', Dohn differentiates 'intentional learning' from 'learning as we go along'. She indicates that the body contributes to learning on three levels: action, body-schematic structure, and body as 'learner';

See also Streeck J. (2002) A body and its gesture. In *Gesture*, Volume 2, Number 1, 2002 , pp. 19-44(26) John

deeply layered into the body, and contains the improvisational, making it contextual rather than abstract<sup>1098</sup>. Such learning resists change, is partly screened from consciousness through its habitual nature, and can define the boundaries of conscious thought<sup>1099</sup>. Dreyfus calls on Merleau-Ponty, Michael Polanyi, Jean Piaget, and other phenomenologists to specify three functions of embodied learning<sup>1100</sup>:

- an "inner horizon" (a partly determined yet partly open idea arranged around anticipation);
- the universal nature of the anticipation, (which relates it to other appropriate contexts in connection patterns that are fluid and shifting); and
- the transferability of anticipation between senses.<sup>1101</sup>

In this respect learning is both present- and future-oriented, and serves to link embodiment and memory in the present. This is apparent in performative rituals, commemorative ceremonies and body practices, which must be enacted to carry meaning and have force<sup>1102</sup>. These enactments create habitual actions and movements which sink below consciousness and settle as individual and group

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Benjamins Publishing Company. Streeck looks at gestures made by a car-mechanic at work, which reflect the grasp that hands have of their life-worlds. Some gestures are recurrent, as part of a set of communicative forms used to understand routine tasks, while others are abstracted from completed instrumental actions. Both demonstrate the knowledge his body has obtained in its daily experience: the body's being-in-the-world;

See further Ruby, P., and J. Decety. 2001. Effect of subjective perspective taking during simulation of action: A PET investigation of agency. In *Nature Neuroscience* 4:546–50.

<sup>1098</sup> For relationships between learning and phenomenology see particularly Zahavi, D (2002) First-person thoughts and embodied self-awareness: Some reflections on the relation between recent analytical philosophy and phenomenology. In *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, Volume 1, Number 1 / March, 2002, Springer Netherlands, pp 7-26. Zahavi looks at certain of the main theses concerning self-awareness in recent thinking on the philosophy of the mind, which overlaps notably with phenomenology. He argues the benefits of more collaboration between these two areas. In this regard, see the work of Bermúdez: Bermúdez, J.L, Marcel, A.J., Eilan, N (1998) *The body and the self*. MIT Press. See also Zahavi, D (2003) Phenomenology of Self. In Kircher, T, & David, A.S. (2003) *The self in neuroscience and psychiatry*. Cambridge University Press; Bermúdez, J.L (2001) Nonconceptual Self-Consciousness And Cognitive Science. In *Synthese*, Volume 129, Number 1 / October, 2001 129-149. He explores areas of intersection between neuroscience and philosophy in the study of self-consciousness, noting that highly conceptual forms of self-consciousness come from foundations of nonconceptual self-awareness, in particular through visual perception, somatic proprioception, spatial reasoning and interpersonal psychological interactions. For intersections between participatory/transformational learning and embodiment, see Ferrer, J.N., Romero, M.T. & Albareda, R.V. (2005) Integral Transformational Education. In *Journal of Transformational Education*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 306-330 (2005) who propose a participatory approach, rather than "cognicentrism", to an integral education incorporating all human dimensions into learning and inquiry, including body, vital, heart, mind, and spirit.

<sup>1099</sup> See Merleau-Ponty, M (1962) *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith. New York: Humanities Press, pp. 98-115, 136-147; Connerton, P. (1989) *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>1100</sup> Dreyfus, H.L (1979) *What Computers Can't Do: The Limits of Artificial Intelligence*, rev. ed. New York: Harper and Row. Referring specifically to those not ordinarily found in digital programs

<sup>1101</sup> Dreyfus, H.L (1979) *ibid*

<sup>1102</sup> See Leistle, B (2006) Ritual as Sensory Communication: A Theoretical and Analytic Perspective. In Köpping, K-P, Leistle, B., Rudolph, M (2006) *Ritual and identity: performative practices as effective transformations of social reality*. Volume 8 of Performances: intercultural studies on ritual, play and theatre, LIT Verlag Berlin-Hamburg-Münster. See Hayles, N.K. (1993) The Materiality of Informatics. In *Configurations* 1.1 (1993) 147-170 pp160 for insight into the connections between ritual and learning

practices which are future-oriented in that they entail anticipation. For subjects, these present- and future-oriented practices entrench a sense of personal well-being both in terms of 'who they are', and 'who they can be', i.e. their aspirations. As two participants note:

“[‘Fetish’ sex] gives me a great satisfaction... in that I can like face the world, and I don’t have to step back or anything like that. I can be me. I can be me and my fantasies can be me too.” (‘Henry’)

“Important to my self-image is my need to feel completely accepting of every part of me; not to segregate my sexual experiences from my social or emotional experiences. It tends help me side-step the easy answer, not only in regards to sex but in all walks of life. To understand what drives me or holds me back emotionally, and what perhaps drive others or hold them back. I rarely have answers for the latter, but it at least helps me to look a little deeper than I might otherwise.” (‘Joseph’)

Clearly, therefore, the embodied-subject learns about him/herself in an empowered light, and thereby (re-)locates him/herself through bodily repetition of the preferred actions and positions of his materially-located desires, which are actions and positions accessible if not necessarily intelligible to him/her<sup>1103</sup>.

This location is linked to the body’s proprioceptive abilities<sup>1104</sup>. Proprioception is transmitted through inner ear and internal nerve endings and defines body boundaries, allowing us to feel that we live in our bodies<sup>1105</sup>. It is therefore present-oriented. Sometimes this can be lost through disease,

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<sup>1103</sup> See above re inscribing and incorporating practices, see also Merleau-Ponty, M (1962) *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith New York: Humanities Press pp. 98-115, 136-147; Connerton, P (1989) *How Societies Remember* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>1104</sup> See De Sousa, R (1990) *The Rationality of Emotion*, Bradford Books, MIT Press, 1990. De Sousa argues that reason and emotion are not antagonists, and that emotions are a kind of perception. The scenarios in which they are learned provide a dramatic structure, whereby they gain an important role in rational beliefs, desires, and decisions.; See also De Preester, H (2007) The deep bodily origins of the subjective perspective: Models and their problems, In *Consciousness and Cognition* Volume 16, Issue 3, September 2007, Pages 604-618. She argues that neuroscience often focuses on ‘visceral’ bodily dimensions to generate hypotheses the establishment of consciousness: the ‘in-depth body’ which is generally not governed by the subject’s intentions. This demonstrates the intimate link between vital and visceral regulatory processes and consciousness/subjectivity. She argues that the subjective perspective makes up itself through auto-constitution, where the ‘in-depth’ body, rather than being the object of brain representations, is built-in to the subjective perspective, in a non-objectified way. The subjective perspective thereby gets ‘interoceptive thickness’.

<sup>1105</sup> See Hayles, N.K. (1993) The Materiality of Informatics. In *Configurations* 1.1 (1993) 147-170 pp166. See also Trifonova, T (2003) Matter-Image or Image-Consciousness: Bergson contra Sartre. In *Janus Head*, 6(1), 80-114, Pittsburgh. Trifonova distinguishes consciousness and matter through looking at the connecting points and differences between Bergsonian conceptions of perception and consciousness, on the one hand, and Sartrean ideas of consciousness and the image, on the other. Trifonova concludes that Bergson’s ‘matter-image’ represents a pure, impersonal state coming before the split/delay which is consciousness, whereas Sartre’s view is obtained by ‘image-consciousness.’ Trifonova argues that it is necessary to go through an intermediary phenomenology of the image to be able to express a phenomenology of consciousness, since Sartrean consciousness is an origin, empty of objects. Consciousness cannot therefore be studied directly, but can only be imagined, since it is not knowledge but being. A phenomenology of consciousness must be mediated by the image, since one must conceive of a metatheoretical move from fullness to emptiness, rather than the other way around. In this way, both Bergson and Sartre see the image as transcendence between consciousness and its objects, and between transparency and object solidity.

On the implicit functioning of the body in everyday experience from a phenomenological perspective, see Fuchs, T

but ordinarily allows a link to be created between the body and habitually used objects<sup>1106</sup>. Sports people and musicians use the tools of their trade, such as golf clubs or violin bows, as if they were an extension of the body, and material resistance to the object is like resistance to the body. Similarly, subjects call on material objects to serve as extensions of their bodies<sup>1107</sup>. The participants similarly use their leather gear, butt plugs, dildos and other 'fetish' accoutrements as extensions of their bodies.

The awareness of this function is complex, in that the body experiences objects intentionally and itself non-intentionally<sup>1108</sup>. The embodied self has pre-reflective bodily self-consciousness, which entails experiencing the body as the location where action and perception converges<sup>1109</sup>. In this regard, neither proprioception nor intention alone underpin self-awareness, which is enabled through sensori-motor integration. This enables sensitivity to the sensory consequences of action via the monitoring thereof<sup>1110</sup>.

Subjects entrench the experiences apperceived through proprioceptive abilities through habitual actions, which over time gives meaning to physical sensations<sup>1111</sup>. The subjective meaning attributed

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(2005) Corporealized and Disembodied Minds: A Phenomenological View of the Body in Melancholia and Schizophrenia. In *PPP*, vol. 12, no. 2, June 2005, pp95-107

On cognition and emotion and how postural embodiment relates to expressive behaviour, emotion and feeling, see also Niedenthal, P.M., Barsalou, L.W., Ric, F. & Krauth-Gruber, S. (2005) Embodiment in the Acquisition and Use of Emotion Knowledge. In Barrett, L.F., Niedenthal, P.M. & Winkielman, P (2005) *Emotion and Consciousness*. NY, London: Guilford Press. Pp29-30. They also deal with how affective imagery is accompanied by emotion processes, relating to stimulus identification and memory (see pp33 et seq)

<sup>1106</sup> For more on the relationship between proprioception and touch, see de Vignemont, F., Ehrsson, H., Haggard, P. (2005) Bodily Illusions Modulate Tactile Perception. In *Current Biology*, Volume 15, Issue 14, Pages 1286-1290. They look at interactions between proprioception and touch as a powerful means of investigating implicit body representations underlying touch. They note that touch differs from other exteroceptive senses, since the body is perceived to be part of the thing being perceived. A primary quality of a material object, such as its size, is directly affected by the perception of the size of the body part which touches it. They created proprioceptive illusions pertaining to the length of subjects' body parts through vibrating the arm tendons. Subjects estimated tactile distances which felt bigger when the touched body parts felt elongated. They conclude that the perception of tactile objects references an implicit body representation, which is contributed to by proprioception.

<sup>1107</sup> See Reynaert, P. A. (2007) A Non-Representationalist Approach to Phenomenal Consciousness. In *Phenomenology 2005*. Zeta Books. Reynaert argues that phenomenology's *noetico-noematic* analysis can help distinguish phenomenal consciousness from qualia (phenomenal properties of the perceived object). Connecting a phenomenology of the lived experience of the body with *noetic* phenomenology can identify bodily self-awareness or subjective experience.

<sup>1108</sup> Legrand, D (2006) The Bodily Self: The Sensori-Motor Roots of Pre-Reflective Self-Consciousness. In *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, Volume 5, Number 1 / March, 2006, Springer Netherlands. On Subjectivity and the Body, see also Legrand, D., Brozzoli, C., Rossetti, Y., & Farnè, A. (2007). Close to me: Multisensory space representations for action and pre-reflective consciousness of oneself-in-the-world. In *Consciousness and Cognition*, 16, 687–699; Gallagher, S (2007) The spatiality of situation: Comment on Legrand et al. In *Consciousness and Cognition*, Volume 16, Issue 3, September 2007, Pages 700-702. See also de Preester, H, Knockaert, V (2005) Body image and body schema: interdisciplinary perspectives on the body, Volume 62 of *Advances in consciousness research*. John Benjamins Publishing Company

<sup>1109</sup> Legrand, D (2006) *ibid*

<sup>1110</sup> Legrand, D (2006) *ibid*

<sup>1111</sup> See Gellhorn E (1964) Motion and Emotion: The Role of Proprioception in the Physiology and Pathology of the Emotions. In *Psychology Review* 1964 Nov;71:457-72; Barrett, L.F., Niedenthal, P.M., Winkielman, P. (2005)

to these actions is entrenched through the relationship between those sensations and the material world in which they take place, which, for the subject, includes material objects.

This relationship may be simply to enjoy the experience or may be intended for, or be perceived as 'healing', which I suggest is the ability to remain emotionally, physically and socially 'present'<sup>1112</sup>.

Learning is therefore both experiential (which includes present-orientation) and intentional (and therefore future-oriented), if not necessarily conscious. Subjects engage their powers of agency to interact with material objects and environments, which they use/occupy repetitively to learn new things. They thereby locate their value in the present and re-situate themselves as empowered/

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*Emotion and consciousness*. Guilford Press; See also the role of proprioception and emotion in Alexander Technique and complementary healing: Davis, C.M. (2003) *Complementary therapies in rehabilitation*. SLACK Incorporated; Bermúdez, J.L, Marcel, A.J., Eilan, N (1998) *The body and the self*. MIT Press, see Kabat-Zinn, J (2003) Mindfulness-Based Interventions in Context: Past, Present, and Future. In *Clinical Psychology: Science & Practice*. 10(2):144-156, Summer 2003.

<sup>1112</sup> Enjoyment of practices, although on the surface 'present-oriented' (i.e. living in the moment), is related to the past, present, future by means of the subject's orientation. Similarly, I suggest, 'healing' entails the emotional processing of the past in order to reach what the subject hopes will be a brighter future. This sense is subjective, not objective. Conceptions of 'healing' which incorporate 'positive meaning' cannot, I suggest, be based on essentialist, foundationalist or determinist conceptions of approval by some deific or foundationalist force, the order of 'nature', or (middle class) normative heteropatriarchal notions of what people 'should' be. It is not a moralistic or deterministic position which prioritises any specific social and cultural pre-requisites in order to enable feelings of self-worth. Rather, 'healing', which can be linked to 'well-being' and 'happiness' are, I suggest, subjective processes contextualised through the subject's relationships and through how dominant discourses intersect with phenomenal circumstances. Following anti-(hetero)normative arguments of queer theory, they are based on a sense of the individual valuing what gives meaning and order to (his/her) human life is important. (See Ahmed, S. (2007–8). The Happiness Turn. In *New Formations* 63, no. Winter: 7–14. For different philosophical traditions of happiness see also McGill, V.J. (1967) *The Idea of Happiness*, New York: Frederick A. Praeger; Sumner, L.W. (1996) *Welfare, Happiness and Ethics*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.) This incorporates conceptions of emotion based on a subject who is not necessarily fully (consciously) 'present' to him/herself, and is therefore not in a perpetual state of calmness, but rather that the subjective has the means to manage feelings of ambivalence, confusion, depression and trauma within a broader discursive/social environment. As I will argue later, these notions are allied to an almost Buddhist sense of 'presence' which both revolve around striving for a subjective sense of peace about one's being-in-the-world, matched with an acknowledgement of the ability and responsibility to make choices and decisions in a non-utopian society. 'Healing' is therefore, I suggest, a pragmatic rather than foundationalist personal embodied psychological functionality, within a broader social sphere conceived of dialogically and dialectically, whereby individuals aim to engage in balanced ways with their community while at the same time mobilising their own resources to create meaning in their lives and behaving in ways which reflect an interdependence between themselves and the world around them, rather than either an independence or co-dependence.

See the role of body-based awareness development in transformational healing, such as yoga: A.N. Singh (2006) Role of yoga therapies in psychosomatic disorders. In *International Congress Series*, Volume 1287, April 2006, pp91-96 (Psychosomatic Medicine - Proceedings of the 18th World Congress on Psychosomatic Medicine, held in Kobe, Japan, between 21 and 26 August 2005); Morley, J (2001) *Inspiration and Expiration: Yoga Practice through Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of the Body*. University of Hawai'i Press; Smith, B.R. (2007) Body, Mind and Spirit? Towards an Analysis of the Practice of Yoga. In *Body & Society*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 25-46 (2007); Singleton, M, Byrne, J (2008) *Yoga in the modern world: contemporary perspectives*. Routledge, Curzon Hindu studies series, Taylor & Francis; Cuomo, N.C. (2007) *Integrated Yoga: Yoga with a Sensory Integrative Approach*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers;

See specifically tantric yoga pertaining to intersections between embodiment and sexuality: Morley, J (2008) Embodied Consciousness in Tantric Yoga and the Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty. In *Religion and the Arts*, Volume 12, Numbers 1-3, 2008, pp. 144-163(20).; For possibilities for incorporating the body into sex therapy, see Kleinplatz, P.J (2001) *New directions in sex therapy: innovations and alternatives*. Psychology Press

present beings validated in their presence<sup>1113</sup>.

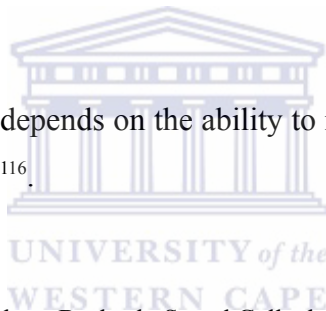
Through embodied interactions with the material, the subject learns more about his/her present/presence and his/her aspirations. I suggest that doing so in the queered environments of private or public 'fetish scenes'/events enables a 'gay male fetishist' subject to re-phrase the dominant perception of his sexuality as a failed space, and thereby to re-orient himself more positively.

#### 6.2.2b) 'Reality' and 'Fantasy': the Activation of Future-Oriented Imagination

In this regard, the subject's desires connect with the repetitive performance of his/her sexual scripts using material objects through activation of the imagination, which should be distinguished from the psychoanalytic Imaginary<sup>1114</sup>.

The subject's projective intentionality does not necessarily take place in a goal-directed or conscious way, but through connecting imagination (rather than the Imaginary) with embodied experience through Jungian transcendent processes of individuation, understood phenomenologically<sup>1115</sup>.

Colman argues that real imagination depends on the ability to recognise the absence of the object of imagination from the material world<sup>1116</sup>.



<sup>1113</sup> Re sense and agency, see Tsakiris, M., Schütz-Bosbach, S. and Gallagher, S. On agency and body-ownership: Phenomenological and neurocognitive reflections, In *Consciousness and Cognition*, Volume 16, Issue 3, September 2007, Pages 645-660. They look at methodological problems in the empirical study of agency and body-ownership, presenting experiments relating to the interplay between motor and sensory information. They focus on how multisensory signals interact with body representations to develop the sense of body-ownership, as it inter-relates to the sense of agency. Looking at efferent and afferent signals experience of subjects' own body and actions, pertaining to self-recognition and the recognition of others' actions, they suggest that the coherent experience of the body depends on the integration of efferent ('carrying away') and afferent ('carrying towards') information in action. Overall, whereas afferent signals provide the distinctive content of one's own body experience, efferent signals structure the experience of one's own body in an integrative and coherent way.

<sup>1114</sup> See chapter 4 re psychoanalysis.

Re the intersections between body image and body schema based on the distinction between reflective and non-reflective intentionality, see also van Bunder, D & van de Vijver, G (2005) *Phenomenology and Psychoanalysis on the Mirror Stage- Different Metaphysical Backgrounds on Body Image and Body Schema*. In de Preester, H, Knockaert, V (2005) *Body image and body schema: interdisciplinary perspectives on the body*, Volume 62 of *Advances in consciousness research*, John Benjamins Publishing Company. Inter alia they discuss the differences between phenomenological and psychoanalytic viewpoints.

See further Modell, A.H. (2003) *Imagination and the meaningful brain*. Philosophical Psychopathology, Bradford Books, MIT Press. Modell claims that intrapsychic complexities of human psychology enables people to use metaphor to interpret, displace, and transform feelings.

<sup>1115</sup> See Jung, CG (1916) *The Transcendent Function*. CW, 8 Princeton, NJ: Bollingen [reprinted 1960]; Brooke, R (2000) *Pathways into the Jungian world: phenomenology and analytical psychology*. Routledge. See also Küle M (2004) Self-individualization as the Main Principle in the Phenomenology of Life. In Tymieniecka, A-T *Imaginatio Creatrix, Analecta Husserliana, The Pivotal Force of the Genesis/Ontopoiesis of Human Life and Reality* Volume 83, Section I, Springer Netherlands pp 47-56

<sup>1116</sup> Colman, W. (2006) Imagination and the Imaginary. In *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 2006, 51, 21-41

This recognition is implicit in some participants' acknowledgement that there needs be no sexual contact for the 'fetishistic' fantasy to be effective:

“Qu: so is (fetish) related to them, as people?

“often, no, just the idea. Just the... if someone had a lot of piercings, that idea would turn me on, by just looking. It doesn't have to lead up to sexual contact. ... I'm a highly sexual person, so I could look at anyone... even a female... with great tattoos, and great body piercing and go... I would never have sex with her, but it's still a sexual turn-on. The fact that her mind has evolved. She's in a different state of mind than what a normal person is, and I associate with that.” ('Jacques')

This approach leads to envisioning symbol formation as having a transcendent function between presence and absence as opposites<sup>1117</sup>.

Colman notes that Lacan's model of the three psychic realms of the real, the imaginary and the symbolic are similar to his differentiation of the Imaginary from Imagination in, for example, the importance given to the experience of absence and lack in the creation of the symbolic. However, Colman arrives at his argument through Jung<sup>1118</sup>, Winnicott<sup>1119</sup>, Steiner<sup>1120</sup> and the Post-Kleinians. The ability to imagine depends on a sufficiently differentiated ego to be able to relate to the unconscious as an equal partner<sup>1121</sup>. In this regard, sexuality incorporating material objects, rather than being *a priori* dysfunctional and psychopathological, requires an advanced sense of self-awareness<sup>1122</sup>, which some participants have and others do not<sup>1123</sup>.

With this focus, Colman distinguishes the 'imaginary' (as a deceptive illusion at play in the

<sup>1117</sup> Colman, W. (2006) *ibid*, abstract. The psychoanalytic Imaginary assumes an implicit negativity, and is a defensive misuse of imagination in an attempt to refute 'negation' where "negation is defined as all those aspects of the world that constitute a check to the omnipotence of fantasy—e.g., absence, loss, difference, otherness etc." See chapter 4 in regards psychoanalytic negation.

<sup>1118</sup> Colman, W. (2006), pp21. See Jung, CG (1916) *The Transcendent Function*. CW, 8 Princeton, NJ: Bollingen [reprinted 1960]. Jung described imagination as the transcendent function: symbolic imagination emerging from the conflict between conscious and unconscious

<sup>1119</sup> 'fantasying', as opposed to dreaming and living. See Winnicott, D. W. (1945) Primitive emotional development. In (1958) *Collected Papers: Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis*. London: Tavistock  
— (1953) Transitional objects and transitional phenomena. In (1974) *Playing and Reality*. London: Penguin Books

— (1958) Psychoses and child care. In (1958) *Collected Papers: Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis*. London: Tavistock

— (1967) The location of cultural experience. In (1974) *Playing and Reality*. London: Penguin Books

— (1971) Dreaming, fantasying, living. In (1974) *Playing and Reality*. London: Penguin Books

<sup>1120</sup> 'psychic retreats'. See Steiner, J. (1993) *Psychic Retreats. Pathological Organisations in Psychotic, Neurotic and Borderline Patients*. London: Routledge

<sup>1121</sup> a relation which may be attenuated in narcissistic positions

<sup>1122</sup> Although these ideas are often related to pathological organisations of personality, Colman focuses more on absence and negation in how people negotiate their relatedness to the world, which is a more interactive view of human development. See chapter 4 in regard to the implicit negativity of lacanian lack

<sup>1123</sup> See the Interjection re the repetition of heteronormative discourses

pathological) from a more positive sense of 'imagination' as a 'creative illusion' in order to express symbolic reality<sup>1124</sup>. In so doing, he counteracts Lacanian view of the 'real' as the original state of being, where the individual is not aware of a lack or absence. He argues that this should not be seen as 'real', since 'reality' needs to include a sense of both absence and presence in a symbolic whole object, without which the result is psychotic delusion.

This implies that the psychological comparator is the subject's (phenomenological) experience, rather than a universal lack<sup>1125</sup>.

In the present instance, imagination is for the participants at times about escapism from experiences of dominant normative prescriptions:

“Fantasy is for escapism, a realm where circumstances and realities are as we would like them to be. For me this is very clear and so to escape to these fantasies is also good for the soul.” (Simon')

Yet it is not merely an escape from an unpleasant past, but is a forward-looking aspiration:

“...Fetish sex makes many fantasies more accessible and able to be lived out. Definitely in terms of what I like (role-play), fantasy plays a huge role” (Simon')

In non-normative environments fantasy is more than an aspiration. It can often readily be actualised, and therefore becomes a precursor to action:

“In the circles I sometimes operate in (sic), especially in as far a fetish sex is concerned, there is little difference between fantasy and reality. If you fantasize about a particular act, you will find people who will comply” (Donald')

Imagination is therefore not simply passive, but calls on active, body-based experiential processes to help the subject effect Jungian individuation<sup>1126</sup>. Imagination thereby realises the possible in Husserlian/Merleau-Ponty-esque vein where embodied intentionality is a forward-thinking mode of psychological-processing and self-orientation.

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<sup>1124</sup>Colman, W. (2006) Imagination and the Imaginary. In *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 2006, 51, 21–41

<sup>1125</sup> See chapter 4. See Colman, *ibid* pp24. Colman notes that the major differences between his conception and Lacan's model are that the Lacanian imaginary is a universal and necessary process whereby the ego's internal image is created. Colman, however, sees 'the imaginary' as a way of getting over absence and lack which comes about only after absence and loss become unbearable through the individual's inability to sufficiently contain painful experiences

<sup>1126</sup> See Jung, CG (1916) *The Transcendent Function*. CW, 8 Princeton, NJ: Bollingen [reprinted 1960]. Jung described symbolic imagination emerging from the conflict between conscious and unconscious as the transcendent function. Important here is his notion of individuation. Yet I suggest that he did not incorporate notions of embodiment fully to express ideas of human relationships with both the material and discourse



Moreover, imagination enables self-aware subjects to breach gaps between desire and reality:

“Fantasy will never be matched by reality. Your mind may know exactly how something will feel and where your body will take you and how you will react, but in reality it will always be different. One will never find that one sexual partner who will live up to one’s pre-conceived set of criteria... this is where porn (to me at least) becomes even more important; it helps fill a lot of gaps...” (Jason)

This reflects that the *a priori* assumption of irretrievable lack leading to psychopathology does not apply, but rather that the subject should, metatheoretically, be presumed to merely be present in a value-neutral way, rather than either 'mentally ill' or 'well', whereby imagination is the unconscious partner to the ego as a central tool in sexual play incorporating material objects<sup>1127</sup>.

In most cases, the relationship between ego and unconscious is managed appropriately, available to the individual as a functional relational tool for processing and managing internal psychical conflict on a number of different levels, and to assist in positive psycho-social re-orientation in ways which I suggest are comparable to other forms of creative expression like art and literature.

#### 6.2.2c) *Imagination and Virtuality*

Conceived in this way, I suggest, imagination functions similarly, albeit not through the same mechanisms, as virtuality, and thereby virtual reality. What they both create is 'real', even if not materially manifested<sup>1128</sup>. Virtual reality uses the embodied subject's ability to create a link between

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<sup>1127</sup> See chapter 4

Calling on Plaut's 1966 paper, Colman argues that imagination depends on the ability to trust, linked to ego-strength. Plaut, A (1966) Reflections on not being able to imagine. In *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 11, 2, 113–33. Reprinted in *Analytical Psychology: A Modern Science*. Plaut differentiates between fantasy and imagination which Colman links to his own differentiation between imagination and the imaginary, where the latter is about defending against imagination. As Colman notes (Colman, *ibid*, pp28):

Plaut’s definition of fantasy is the same as Freud’s—i.e., frustrated wishfulfilments, but such fantasies are not necessarily defensive even if they are escapist. It is quite possible to engage in typical wish-fulfilling activities such as day dreaming and masturbatory fantasy in full awareness of their unreality—i.e., the essential difference between fantasy and material actuality is preserved. It is only when this difference is obliterated that fantasy becomes destructive, undermining the capacity for imagination as well as the relation to material actuality.

<sup>1128</sup> However, see the conflict between Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty. In this regard, see Lawlor, L (1998) The end of phenomenology: Expressionism in Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty. In *Continental Philosophy Review*, Volume 31, Number 1 / January, 1998, Springer Netherlands, pp 15-34. Looking at Deleuze's *The Logic of Sense* (1969) and Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Lawlor argues that, even though Deleuze's challenge is double through immanence and difference (the paradox of expression), there are similarities between the two in the idea of a past that has never been present. What is needed, however, is an interpretation of expression in Merleau-Ponty's unfinished *The Visible and the Invisible*.

See also Steeves J.B. (2001) The virtual body: Merleau-Ponty's early philosophy of imagination. In *Philosophy today*, 2001, vol. 45, no4, pp.370-380, DePaul University, Chicago. Steeves argues that, contrary to traditional interpretations of the thinking of the young Merleau-Ponty, perception and imagination are not related hierarchically, but dialectically through how the virtual body relates to bodily performance, and through reference to the Sartrean theory of the Imaginary.

On the relationship between the body and memory, whereby memory is reproductive in operation, see Casey, E.S.

the body and an object to simulate the environment and effect of that link<sup>1129</sup>.

Similarly, when the material 'fetish' object in question is part of the human body, it is

“... a representation [as opposed to the real thing]. But if you have certain physical fetishes, ... it's something that's there, something you can hold onto. Even on myself, I like body hair. I've got a hairy chest, I've got a hairy stomach. So I carry that with me. I have a piercing with a... a large piercing, which I enjoy. I have tattoos on my body which I see every day, I admire every day and I enjoy.” (Jacques')

At the same time as it 'isn't' real (i.e. is a symbol) this representation is also very real:

“So often it's not just a representation, but it's a physical development.” (Jacques')

In this regard, Deleuze distinguishes the virtual and the real whereby:

“The virtual is fully real insofar as it is virtual. Exactly what Proust said of states of resonance must be said of the virtual: ‘Real without being actual, ideal without being abstract,’ and symbolic without being fictional”<sup>1130</sup>.

The virtual is actually a part of the real object, whereby the object is partly in the virtual “as though into an objective dimension” while it also partly exists in reality<sup>1131</sup>. Virtual reality should not be dualistically conceived, since the virtual is actualised. This is not merely a logical process where the possible, qua 'not real', becomes real (realisation)<sup>1132</sup>. Both the virtual and imagination are connected to reality through multi-layered causal connections which are not determined in advance but allow for creativity and innovation<sup>1133</sup>. Using this analogy, active individuation is not vague and undifferentiated, but determinate and open.

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(1984) Habitual body and memory in Merleau-Ponty. In *Man and World*, Volume 17, Numbers 3-4 / September, 1984, pp 279-297

<sup>1129</sup> Hayles, N.K. (1993) The Materiality of Informatics. In *Configurations* 1.1 (1993) 147-170; Murray, C.D & Sixsmith, J (1999) The Corporeal Body in Virtual Reality. In *Ethos*, Vol. 27, No. 3, Body, Self, and Technology (Sep., 1999), pp. 315-343. They call on phenomenology to explore user embodiment in virtual reality applications. They call on views of embodiment as sensorial immersion, and use accounts of "disrupted" bodies such as phantom limb and dissociation of the self from the body, paralysis, and objectified bodies as contexts and claim that virtual reality is an embodied experience, which can help in the radical transfiguration of the body and its sense construction. Murray, C.D. & Gordon, M.S. (2001) Changes in Bodily Awareness Induced by Immersive Virtual Reality. In *CyberPsychology & Behavior*. June 2001, 4(3): 365-371. They explore influences of immersive virtual experiences on the perceptual awareness of the body, finding that various subjects experience higher levels of skin, muscular, and cardiovascular awareness, higher levels of body boundary ambiguity and aural awareness.

<sup>1130</sup> Deleuze, G (1994) *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press, pp208-9

<sup>1131</sup> Deleuze, G (1994) *ibid*

<sup>1132</sup> Deleuze, G (1994) *ibid*. This implies that the possible becomes real not merely because thinking of events or life excludes the new. In this regard, the only difference between the possible and the real is that the real exists, which is immaterial

<sup>1133</sup> Burlein, A (2005) The Productive Power of Ambiguity: Rethinking Homosexuality through the Virtual and Developmental Systems Theory. In *Hypatia* vol. 20, no. 1 (Winter 2005), pp30

This matches with Deleuzian rhizomatic thinking in that

“it conceptualizes an event not as the orderly progression (or realization) of an essence that begins as a root whose plan determines what unfolds next, but as a multiplicity whose development is not tied to some root but proliferates like bulbs or tubers, any point of which can be connected to any other”<sup>1134</sup>

Virtuality involves a similar kind of bodily experience as 'imagination-activated-through-material-objects' does for subjects, where material objects allow the subject to connect with his/her imagination which reflect a sexualised reality other than, or over and above ordinary experiences.

This does not presume that fantasy and reality in all cases equate, mean the same thing to everyone, or are satisfying, since the meaning of experiences is specific to the individual's expectations and embodied perception.

However, whereas virtual reality 'de-actualises' experiences, 'fetish' sexuality 'hyper-actualises' it, depending on the experience, partner/s and object/s being used. 'Puppy training', for example uses paraphernalia such as a muzzle, leash, prosthetic puppy dog tail, and paw-mitts to allow the subject to experience 'being' a canine. This takes place in a 'real-time', three-dimensional space which is different to the 'real-world', yet does not simply create the experience in a 'virtual' space. The virtuality of the experience is not computer-generated, as in virtual reality, but takes place in the fictive space of the imagination of the subject as played out with objects in the space between sexual partners.

In this regard, and contrary to the assumptions of the ICD diagnostic criteria which see relationships with material objects as normatively dysfunctional and obsessive<sup>1135</sup>, fantasy and concomitant sexual activity incorporating material objects can serve to create and maintain personal connections:

“I think sometimes [fantasy is] very necessary. I think it's an integral part of a relationship.... um, I don't want to say it'll keep the person there, but it'll certainly keep interest of both people, um, life and sex and relationships wouldn't be boring, it'd be permanently different, every time different. That's what I find interesting.” ('Henry')

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<sup>1134</sup> Burlein, A (2005) *ibid*, referring to Deleuze, G and Guattari, F (1988) *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*, vol. 2. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press pp3–25

<sup>1135</sup> See chapter 4

More than that, fantasy and concomitant material exploration with a partner is often a means to explore more than the sexual partner's performances of identity:

“Again, for me, it’s more about the experience with a certain person and what you ... suspect lies under the “real world” façade.” (Joseph)

In other words, it is to engage with what underlies people's public personae

### **6.2.3 Re-Orientations Conclusions: Relations between Learning and Materiality**

Clearly, learning is both cultural (and therefore discursive) and 'natural' (i.e. 'physiological')<sup>1136</sup>. As an example, people learn to maintain physical balance through nature pulling on the body in various directions<sup>1137</sup>. This requires a response, and the subject is required to actively do something to obtain a desired outcome (e.g. to balance on something)<sup>1138</sup>. At the same time as the subject becomes more 'natural' by balancing, he/she becomes more 'cultural' through both the fact that he/she balances/walks, and through the style in which he/she does so<sup>1139</sup>. In other words, the subject becomes more 'cultural' through his/her entry into culture<sup>1140</sup>. The idea and 'reality' of balance becomes cultural through the relationships with other people who are also to a greater or lesser extent physically and emotionally in balance, and by the things which physical balance enables, such as social interaction, mobility, the ability to use hands while balanced on legs etc. Obtaining body balance represents the coming together of parallel processes: becoming more 'natural', and more 'cultural'<sup>1141</sup>.

Similarly, the sexual use of material objects further habituates the subject to the experience of such sexuality, and therefore to an alternative way of being human, and at the same time concretises the subject in the (sub)cultural norms of 'fetish sexuality' practices. As such, the subject does not merely learn to work with a new mechanical tool, but, through proprioceptive perception, imagination and habituation through repetition, locates himself in a cultural milieu. This milieu (the sexual 'fetish' environment such as a leather 'scene') encourages learning and 'echo-locating' the self in relation not only to the practical elements of using a material object (such as, for example a dildo), but also to the exploration of an internal and fantasy world which is experiential, aspirational, forward-looking. And not defined by pathologising or demonising (hetero)normative discourses.

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<sup>1136</sup> Adamson, T (2005) Measure for Measure: The Reliance of Human Knowledge on Things of the World. In *Ethics & the Environment*, 10(2) 2005 175-194

<sup>1137</sup> Adamson, T (2005), *ibid*

<sup>1138</sup> Adamson, T (2005), *ibid*

<sup>1139</sup> Adamson, T (2005), *ibid*

<sup>1140</sup> Adamson, T (2005), *ibid*

<sup>1141</sup> Adamson, T (2005), *ibid*

## 6.3 Conclusion

The chapter has argued firstly that agency is neither the reactionary response to essentialist or determinist notions of pre-existing drives proposed by the ICD's diagnostic criteria, nor to discursive constructs proposed by much poststructuralist thinking. Rather, it is grounded in phenomenological experience and personal meaning derived from the orientation of the self in relation to the world which surrounds the subject, which means that it is mediated by normative constraints. Desires and choices are not borne of causal backwards-looking reaction to pre-existing frameworks or experiences. Rather, they are dialectically oriented in relation to both normative discursive constructions and embodied experience with absent, impossible, future, past and ideal objects. In this respect, agency is constructive, yet not deterministic, and the agent exercises (bounded) choice. Since 'fetishists' are not entities separate to any other person, or to the material world, the agency of 'gay male fetishists', like their constitution discussed in Chapter 5, is therefore not something different that of anybody else, and is not merely an inevitable reaction to essentialist, foundationalist or determinist structures. This begs the question as to what functions (sexual) interaction with material objects perform, and more narrowly, how same-sex exploration incorporating material objects ('gay male fetish sex') adds value to subjects' lives.

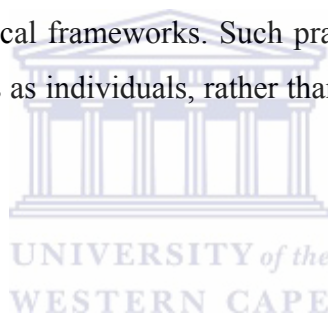
Secondly, this chapter has argued that complex orientation and agency enables 'gay' male subjects who incorporate material objects into their sexual scripts to call on the social collectives and the material world around them to re-align themselves both socially and emotionally. In turn, this re-phrased and re-oriented sense of self allows them the freedom to rephrase their own subjective sense of self-value away from perceptions of their sexuality as being a failed space, and towards more of a subjective and therefore contextualised sense of empowerment, in the face of judgement.

As I have argued in Chapter 4, psychopathologies, and in particular the ICD diagnostic criteria, normatively construct 'fetishism' as backward-looking and object-focused, and it therefore prescribes heteronormative practices. Instead, as I have argued in this chapter, the subject orients him/herself phenomenologically to the present and the future as a valuable being. This creates a powerful framework on which to base views of conceptual spaces in which subjects can develop their awareness of where/who they are (in other words their current positive subjective meaning), and where/who they are aspiring to be (in other words the future-oriented value of the self). These spaces can take the place of 'therapeutic cure', and can assist subjects to develop awareness of their needs and desires and engage complex notions of agency, thereby 'echo-locating' themselves in relation to other people through learning, imagining inherent possibilities, and realising them

phenomenologically. This adds up to recognising a subjectively defined sense of personal value, both socially and personally, through a phenomenological re-orientation towards a more empowered and less heteronormative alternative to the world in which they ordinarily live.

This description of processes intentionally does not prescribe that subjects are inherently emotionally 'functional'/'dysfunctional' (however one might describe this), since to do so would be to construct determinist metatheory to replace the inappropriate essentialising and foundationalising ICD diagnostic criteria. Nor does it describe subjects as inherently supportive or transgressive of heteronorms. I suggest that these kinds of value judgements can only be made by the subject him/herself on an individual basis.

Framing 'gay male fetish sexuality' in this way forces scholars, activists and psycho-medical practitioners to become more explicit about their own heteronormative predispositions, as well as those of the subjects which whom they are dealing. Such people must therefore become more accountable for their own biases, and to distinguish between the practices of individuals in a 'health-care' context and their own ontological frameworks. Such practitioners would thereby be enjoined to deal with psycho-medical subjects as individuals, rather than as representatives of approved or maligned groups.



## CLOSING PARENTHESIS

### REPHRASING SAME-SEX SEXUALITY INCORPORATING MATERIAL OBJECTS

If we were more artifactually literate, we would routinely take into account more than we normally do of the formidable complexity of even the humblest thing. Things have forced me to situate sexuality in a material context. This context includes objects that open up sexuality, gender, and sex to things that can trouble their meaning. When considering the meaning of the terms sexuality, sex, and gender, context is all. Without it, abstract and reductive statements abound: witness the oedipal conceits of psychoanalysis<sup>1142</sup>.

The Museum of Modern Art in New York recently hosted an exhibition of performance art by Serbian artist Marina Abramović, entitled 'The Artist is Present'<sup>1143</sup>. The piece entailed Abramović, beautifully dressed in a flowing outfit, sitting for eight hours a day or more in a chair in front of a table, on the other side of which museum-goers would take a seat and simply look at her for as long as they could or wanted to. Some lasted a few minutes, others sat for extended periods. Some never returned, while others returned multiple times.

Their facial responses were photographed, revealing some fascinating insight into the notion of the spectacle<sup>1144</sup>. Some were sceptical, some surprised, others caught in a brief moment of some intense personal emotional conflict which at times reflected in the tears coursing down their cheeks.

On the face of it the work is about patrons watching a live artwork, consisting of a woman, who may otherwise appear unremarkable, voluntarily offering herself up as a spectacle. Yet the photographs of the patrons revealed to me something more poignant: the spectators were really the spectacle, depending on who was watching, and from which vantage-point. There were so many different faces and bodies, all engaged in their own individual and inexplicable explorations of a moment in life. Caught in the moment of trying to see what this exhibition was all about, these people had become less self-aware, and in that moment became more honestly present, since, as far as they were concerned, this exhibition was about the artist, not about them. In the moment of taking on the role of spectator, they more honestly reflected (rather than consciously trying to represent) a sense of their own confusion in attempting to come to terms with the art piece.

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<sup>1142</sup> Graham, M (2004) Thinking Sex, Thinking Gender. In *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 2004 10(2):299-303 pp298

<sup>1143</sup> <http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2010/marinaabramovic>

<sup>1144</sup> <http://www.flickr.com/photos/themuseumofmodernart/>

More importantly, since the exhibition was not mediated by the lens of a camera or a sculptor's tools, they could explore their inner conflicts and what the interaction meant to them, without the mediating force of an artist explicitly trying to tell them something via an artistic medium. This was only possible because, as far as they were aware, they were not themselves being inspected by anyone other than the artist. Indeed, not even by the artist, since she remained impassive, neither touching nor communicating with them. The participants could merely be present and experience the exhibition<sup>1145</sup>.

To me, the exhibition itself was 'present', in three-dimensions, and constituted by the patrons' interactions with the phenomenal world in which they had placed themselves by attending the MoMA. Indeed, the experience of the piece did not, as the exhibition title might suggest, reflect that 'The Artist is Present', so much as enable 'The Audience' to be 'Present'. Or at the least question whether the artist was Abramović or each person sitting in front of her.

My thesis in some ways explores this notion of presence, which is very often negatively impacted on by the authoritative gaze. In the present instance, 'fetishists' have historically been defined, ethnologically demonised and psychiatrically pathologised by the dominant discourses of various contemporary eras, thereby attracting undue attention. Yet their subjectivities have largely been ignored, and they remain subjectively, albeit not discursively invisible. The various dominant discourses on 'fetishism' since its genesis in the sixteenth century have assumed that 'fetishists' are in some essentialist, foundationalist or determinist way evil or ill. In postmodernist times, they have been assumed to be ineffably subject to dominant discourses, and the epistemological focus has been on how their practices have either perpetuated or subverted normativities. All these discourses make a range of assumptions about the value and meaning of their lives, and effectively assume that they have no agency to make much of a choice themselves. As a result, people who incorporate material objects into their sexual scripts become some kind of façade or spectre, and their subjectivities are attenuated. More importantly, they are not acknowledged a space in which to explore their lives.

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<sup>1145</sup> Of course the mediated version which I saw on the internet is also subject to various readings, and I do not profess to have anything but a subjective response to what I saw. As I imply in my argument, this sense of subjective impression is part of the concern addressed by this thesis. As Casey Schwartz, who has a master's degree in psychodynamic neuroscience from University College London, notes of the exhibition in her blog article 'The Art of Silence' (<http://www.thedailybeast.com/blogs-and-stories/2010-05-06/the-art-of-silence>): "Abramovic's photos tap into the basic fascination we have with other human beings—the desire to stare, compare, assess, decode, and assume. In a sense, the Flickr stream is an extension of the Rorschach nature of the exhibit. Abramovic says nothing. She puts no boundaries on how long each visit will last. She offers little movement and very few expressions, though sometimes, her eyes well with tears. Across from her, people's reactions have been unpredictable, and many walk away from the encounter with their own understanding of what went on."



### *The Subject is Present*

So many discourses to which people are subjected pretend to be authoritative accounts of what constitutes (appropriate) human experience. Some, such as the positivist constructions of the '*feitiço*' and 'fetishism', make the individual who explicitly explores the material world around him/her into some kind of spectacle, subject to the disapproving gaze of either a deific force, a pre-existing foundationalist internal drive or some other controlling entity outside of him/her. The ICD classifications of 'fetishism' merely perpetuate this notion through labelling people as *a priori* mentally ill, thereby adding a Gestapo-like disapproving gaze of the psychiatric community into the mix.

This kind of discursive prescription militates against individuals being present in the moment of their explorations of their emotions, and of the materiality in which their emotions play out, since they most often are at least partially aware of the prescriptions and proscriptions to their explorations of the world. Similarly, discursive accounts of human experience construct the individual as being irretrievably subject to dominant social forces to which they must conform, or which they must fight in order to maintain a little quiet space of contemplation in which to just 'be'.

Neither of these options is conducive to allowing the 'spectacle' (the psycho-medical subject) to become the spectator of his or her own life, and thereby to create his or her own meaning and comprehension of the rather strange phenomenon of material existence. Rather, both options force people into seeing themselves as one side of a binary, in opposition to other people (whether some kind of authority or the faceless scowl of a judging public) and subject to their scrutiny<sup>1146</sup>. Even if individuals have loosened themselves from the shackles of monotheistic religion (which many have not), they remain bound by (hetero)normative prescriptions based on binaries of sexuality and sexual orientation which lock them into claiming either/or identities as 'gay'/'straight', 'mind/body', 'me/object' and/or 'me/other-purportedly-unitary-human'. More importantly, in the face of these perceived prescriptions, people most often marshal their own life performances, in the Butlerian sense, trying desperately to conform to 'God's will', 'sanity', or 'normal sexuality'. In so doing, they remain inscrutable to themselves, and thereby remain absent from their phenomenal experiences, and thereby, ultimately, from their own short lives.

This thesis is an attempt to counter such thinking, and in some small way to re-set the clock so that (psycho-medical) subjects need not inexorably be prescriptively bound by either history or fictions

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<sup>1146</sup> Perpich, D (2005) Corpus Meum: Disintegrating Bodies and the Ideal of Integrity. In *Hypatia* vol. 20, no. 3 (Summer 2005) 75-91. See later for argument pertaining to discourse and the connectedness of people and the material world.

of indomitable (heteronormative) control, while still recognising the inevitable influence of both. In so doing, I argue against simple cause-effect thinking, and advocate for conceiving of sexuality in terms of complex relations in the Butlerian mould, whereby thinking of sexuality as an effect rather than a cause is a way of recognising that effect is often not separable from the things out of which it comes and is expressed<sup>1147</sup>. Such things are material objects, which is particularly visible in the context of (same-sex) sexual practices which incorporate material objects, or what epistemologically remains labelled 'fetishism' or 'fetish sex'.

The thesis is not about the power dynamics between people, which, in the context of 'gay male fetish sexuality' often takes place through performances of bondage, discipline and sado-masochism<sup>1148</sup>. Rather, it is about the quiet sexual spaces in which individuals experiment with physical objects, and thereby explore what it might mean to them to be a sentient being in a world constituted by their own and other people's and objects' materiality, which it is impossible to escape, since "[w]e are so reliant on things that we are often inseparable from them"<sup>1149</sup>. By acknowledging that sexuality unfolds in conversation with the things which constitute material culture, we can see how embodied beings 're-orient' themselves through practices, which incorporate things that materialise what we call sexuality. But at the same time we should be careful not to make sexuality into a 'thing' itself, made up of some kind of collection of bodily practices, tastes, pleasures, desires, moral judgements and so on<sup>1150</sup>. Rather, I suggest, we need to de-reify 'things', by which I mean both bundles of ideas and material objects, thereby opening them up, and making of sexuality an opened-outward and connected function, and putting together what is separated into sexes, sexualities and sexual orientations<sup>1151</sup>.

This is clearly not what psychopathologising discourses do. Instead they perpetuate fictions that people are objectively identifiable, and concomitantly are necessarily 'bad', 'mad' or 'sad', or running screaming from these states. These fictions serve to prevent subjects from learning about and experiencing themselves, and finding alternative ways of being on their own terms. They keep people locked into closed circuits of self-definition which perpetuate a misery most often classified in heteronormative terms. They thereby inhibit people from recognising their own subjectively-phrased worth, and reconsidering and re-inventing themselves incrementally on an ongoing basis.

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<sup>1147</sup> Butler, J (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge

<sup>1148</sup> See introduction

<sup>1149</sup> Graham, M (2004) Thinking Sex, Thinking Gender. In *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 2004 10(2):299-303

<sup>1150</sup> Graham, M (2004) *ibid*

<sup>1151</sup> Graham, M (2004) *ibid*

This latter option is what this thesis attempts to open up, whether or not individuals can or want to do so in given instances.

Clearly the 'fetish' games and the social spaces in which they take place serve a function for 'fetishists'. Sometimes these games cover up deep emotional pain, sometimes they hide deep desires for 'normality', and sometimes for a while they switch off, or at least turn down the volume of, heteronormative assumptions around materiality, and the roles these subjects are expected to play. This is not to deny the power of discourse in the construction of sexual subjects, nor of the cultural power-plays which predominate. Yet it begs the question as to which metatheoretical frameworks should be adopted for same-sex activity incorporating material objects, if not the psychopathologising and heteropatriarchy-prescribing mechanisms laid down in such psycho-medical categorisations as the ICD classifications and diagnostic criteria for 'fetishism'.

Given the identity-politics-based social and political system which predominates, and the dominance of heteronormative discourses both inside academia and popular culture, there should clearly be something to replace these classifications and diagnostic criteria. Failing which, scholars and psycho-medical practitioners, many of whom outside poststructuralist studies are arguably rather reactionary, cannot/refuse to see past dualisms, and will replace the current explicitly heteronormative diatribes with implicit ones of the same flavour.

Clarification should therefore be obtained on what is to replace the ICD's categorical definition of 'fetishism' (and therefore 'fetishist') beyond the object-focused and/or foundationalist diatribes of psychoanalysis. Clarification should also, therefore, be obtained as to what is to replace the ICD's purported 'description' of 'fetish practices' incorporated into the diagnostic criteria.

These parameters govern the question asked by this thesis: what led up to the dualist metatheory of the ICD classifications and diagnostic criteria on 'fetishism', and with what should they be replaced?

The answer, as I have argued, is simply that a metatheoretical structure for psycho-medical practice should acknowledge the (non-essentialist) distinctions between people *inter se*. It should also acknowledge the distinctions between people and material objects in complex ways. It should distinguish between people (currently attempted through the ICD's classification of 'fetishism') and practices (currently established through the ICD's diagnostic criteria). More crucially, however, as I have argued, it should acknowledge the connecting points between people, and between people and objects.

In so doing, I have attempted to clarify two things:

- the ways in which people (heretofore known as 'fetishists') cannot be pinned down into essentialist, foundationalist or determinist categories, and cannot be defined or categorised either by comparing them to material objects, whether heteronormatively prescribed or proscribed, or by assuming some kind of essentialist, foundationalist or determinist subjective constitution; and
- since subjects cannot be defined in advance through certain specific criteria, subjects' practices do not reflect simplistic, identifiable pathologies, and are neither purely discursively created nor purely driven through unfettered choice borne of their material circumstances.

As such, the argument of this thesis serves to clear the metatheoretical playing field in relation to what is psycho-medically viewed as 'fetishism', by running two arguments side by side and yet overlapping each other.

The primary argument is an exploration of metatheory underpinning psycho-medical discourses on 'fetishism', and arguing in favour of a queer phenomenological perspective to replace the existing divisive one. This argument is based on clarifying a scholarly position on ontologies of the personal.

The second argument, which is implicit in and intertwines with the first, underlies the framework I propose that 'fetishists' cannot, contrary to historical epistemologies, be defined in any essentialist, foundationalist or determinist way, and therefore cannot be 'defined'. Rather, sexuality which incorporates material objects (which is arguably *all* sexuality), is not a 'diagnosable illness', but is rather a potential personal transformatory practice which re-aligns and re-orientes subjective worth.

This framework specifically does not comment on the extent to which subjects become aware of the political implications to their practices, nor does it deal with how heteronormativity is discursively perpetuated. It therefore does not explore how subjects either do or do not perpetuate heteronormativity, nor are inherently subversive in these practices. Such an approach therefore neither describes nor prescribes overt political action on the part of subjects, but is, I argue, a compelling value-neutral metatheoretical foundation from which scholars and psycho-medical professionals can work, and behind which they cannot hide their own pre-existing normative assumptions and thereby explicitly or implicitly perpetuate heteronormativities.

On this basis, such scholars and practitioners can, I suggest, be held more accountable for their actions, without the dubious luxury of relying on inherently normative constructions of 'fetish

sexuality' to justify their own political conservatism.

On the basis of this metatheory, and in response to conservative agendas, queer-aligned scholars, activists and psycho-medical professionals can therefore actively counter normativities and challenge the status-quo in more direct ways.

## **The Explicit Argument: 'The Subject is Present'**

Chapters 1 and 2 locate the research methodologically and politically. Chapters 3 and 4 largely follow a Foucaultian genealogical analysis of the development of the epistemologies of 'fetishism', which, I argue, have at all points along the way been divisive and 'fetish object'-focused. Chapters 5 and 6 then suggest a break with this history by approaching 'fetish sexuality' from a more inclusive, subject-oriented, queer phenomenological paradigm, which does not merely re-establish people who incorporate material objects into their sexual scripts as clearly identifiable and therefore essentialist notions of human beings.

### ***Chapter Summary***

*Chapter 1* establishes the methodological underpinnings for the research, noting that the thesis is neither a positivist hypothetico-deductivist work, nor is it an empiricist unfolding of 'knowledge', pre-existing truths or incontrovertible 'reality', borne of experientially or experimentally derived 'facts'. Instead, it suggests that the thesis both argues and reflects a need for change in the underlying epistemologies for viewing humans, not in terms of simplistic oppositionalist diatribes, but through explorations of process, relationality and an awareness of materiality. This has entailed discourse analytic qualitative research which reflects a feminist/queer epistemology and participatory methodologies, which themselves reflect the substantive argument in a recursive way.

*Chapter 2* addresses social and political locations of 'gay male fetish sexuality', arguing that simplistically conceived gay rights discourses are inappropriate for both political and social claims for validation. These paradigms, often premised on essentialist views of identity as unitary and coherent, are perhaps (partially) useful (or at least pragmatically utilitarian, given that they are theoretically flawed) when applied to political claims for access to rights denied to sexual minorities, yet are inappropriate for the revision of psychopathological metatheory (so-called 'cultural' claims), based on demands for the recognition of value and for exclusion from policing.

More appropriate frameworks for approaching social change lie, I suggest, in queer theories, which conceive of identity as multiple and complex. However, queer theories must be mobilised pragmatically in concert with gay rights discourses, which should be re-assessed in light of their highly problematic flaws. In this regard, I have called on queer processual locations for rephrasing 'gay male fetish sexuality'. In particular, I argue that same-sex sexuality incorporating material objects should be located as a resource for recognising subjective value. This, as argued in chapter 5, does not assume a liberal humanist essentialised unitary self but rather relies on a subject which is a kind of relationship, dialectically constituted between embodied materiality and (heteronormative) discourse. As argued in Chapter 6, it thereby assumes a subject which is mutable potential and capable of self-re-orientation.

*Chapter 3* argues the contemporary psychiatric definitions and discourses of 'sexual fetish' have come through an historical trajectory of colonialist discourses and Freudian psychoanalytic epistemologies, both of which have focused primarily on the fetish-object as the nexus of definition both for 'fetish practices' and therefore 'fetishists'. This focus has resulted in multiple and contradictory beliefs in both a recognition and the disavowal of difference which has obscured subjectivities and agency through classifying the sexual 'fetishist' as essentially identifiable.

I argue that the early psychoanalytic premises for 'fetishism' presume patriarchal heteronormativity and assume that 'fetishists' are merely reliving childish psychological attachments. They problematically assume that the 'fetishist' inherently adopts the subjectivity of a fictively generic heterosexual male. Notwithstanding attempts to remedy these failings by re-working Freud's premises, and/or by calling on a linguistic/discursive power-focus, psychoanalytic constructions of 'fetishism' do not address the fundamental premise of 'lack', which is inherently 'fetish-object' focused since it describes the human psyche as irretrievably and oppositionally defined in terms of the absence of physically or linguistically/discursively described 'objects'.

This results, I suggest, in the tendency to obscure subjectivities through the inappropriate prioritising of rationality over valid agency, thereby hiding the personal under the political and under discipline-specific practices, and failing to acknowledge the fluidity between consciousness and environment, and the complexity of human processes driven by a various internal and external, personal and political, rational and emotional influences.

*Chapter 4* argues that the ICD (& DSM)<sup>1152</sup> classifications and diagnostic criteria which codify the psychopathology of 'fetishism' are inadequate on two main fronts, since they essentialise human experience and perpetuate heteronormative discourses through reproduction of structuralist categorical and therefore diagnostic impulses.

Firstly, I argue that the classifications merely inappropriately repeat the discredited historical classifications of 'perversion', through incorrectly assuming an uncomplicated, non-contextualised sexual interest in material objects by an abstracted psychological subject. They thereby ontologically assume an essential value to (hetero)normativity, and fail to *describe* 'fetish' as played out in the lives of people who enjoy the sexual company of material objects. Rather, I suggest, they *prescribe* sexual behaviour through essentialist and foundationalist (hetero)normative expectations lodged in the categories themselves. 'Fetishism' therefore becomes a psychopathological terminological construct rather than a functional description of practices. In contradistinction, however, the participants' perceptions and practices of 'fetish' (which these participants have reclaimed from 'fetishism') indicate dialectical configurations between material objects of sexual interest, sexual partners, subjective perceptions, emotional associations and heteronormative social constructions<sup>1153</sup>.

Secondly, I argue that the diagnostic guidelines for 'fetishism' provide little clarity on the circumstances which do or do not constitute pathology, and inappropriately import both moral and statistical heteronormative comparables into the diagnostic process through the diagnostic requirement that subjects be psychically attached to 'unusual objects'. Further, the requirement of 'distress and impairment' is, I suggest, based on inappropriate (normative) circular arguments relating to prior assumptions of pathology and psychological addiction/compulsion, which undermine the notion of subjects' psychological agency. Since it is inappropriate both to conflate and to psychopathologise issues such as addiction, compulsion and 'fetishism', this indicates that the diagnostic criteria fail to describe the complexity of subjective psychological states and the multiple and complex ways in which people process their emotions or understand their practices. Instead, as with the psychopathological definitions, the diagnostic criteria normatively prescribe sexual activity, thereby inappropriately perpetuating dominant (heteropatriarchal) normative social constructions by rationalising the construction of 'fetishism' as a pathology while valuing other compulsive,

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<sup>1152</sup> World Health Organization. (2004). *International Classification of Diseases 10* (2nd ed). Geneva: WHO. ICD-10, and American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders 4-TR*. Washington DC: APA.

<sup>1153</sup> As will be discussed in Chapter 5, more functional bases for understanding the phenomenon of people-interacting-sexually-with-material-objects therefore lie in an epistemological focus on the subject as he/she interacts phenomenologically with discourse and his/her environment.

repetitive practices like heterosexuality.

As I argue, these issues should be dealt with by focusing on the subjective concerns and circumstances of psychical subjects, thereby obviating *all* categories and diagnostic criteria, and finding alternative ways to describe sexuality which incorporate both normative and non-normative sexual variety. One compelling approach is to rephrase the historical variations of 'perversity' as 'transgressive sexualities', approaching them as variations of sexual diversity and calling on distinctions between coercive and non-coercive sexual activity, subject to closer definition of coercion, danger, damage and consent, which are themselves socially constructed notions. Such solutions, however, merely describe sexualities and sexual activities from an external perspective, and do not successfully explain in detail the ways in which subjectivities (which incorporate what is often referred to as 'internal' psychical processes) interact with the cultural and phenomenal environment, and therefore the kinds of agency a subject expresses in sexual contexts.

The *Interjection* sets the scene for the remainder of the thesis, by contextualising the most appropriate scholarly role for laying bare ontological metatheories suitable to replace the inappropriate heteronormative ICD classifications and diagnostic guidelines, while avoiding essentialising discourses for both subjects and practices.

It argues, through referring to the arguments in Chapters 1 and 2, that a discourse analytic method unpacking participants' repetitions of heteronormative discourses is appropriate for laying bare the present circumstances of subjects, and for 'political' claims for inclusion in rights-based structures. Men such as the present participants who incorporate material objects into their same-sex sexual practices clearly *do* reproduce heteropatriarchy through their practices, reifying heteronormative scripts by repeating them, albeit in unusual spaces and with unusual sexual partners. Yet at the same time, they make these practices explicit, albeit not necessarily consciously or in public. This indicates that they undermine the (hetero)normative assumptions around the immateriality of human existence and the priority of the material over the immaterial. In so doing, they refuse to accept that objects are merely objects to be (hetero)normatively owned, and that people are inherently separate to objects and thereby cannot be (hetero)normatively owned. They play sexual games which mimic the putative 'ownership' of material objects through games where they are at times 'owners' of people, or themselves the 'owned'. Although these games can validly be discursively unpacked as reproductions of heteropatriarchal power-plays, they are at the same time subtle challenges to the specific forms of power which dominate, and which imply that only men may dominate and only women may be dominated.



They further play sexual games which fudge the distinctions between people and objects, by calling on those objects as extensions of people. For example, through replacing a human penis with a dildo, they question whether the human penis is indeed human or an object itself. In corollary, they challenge the (heteronormative) primacy of human-human procreative sex by playing with said dildo in a same-sex environment, thereby subverting assumptions that male-female penetration is the only acceptable sexual option.

However, in a political and social environment which prioritises dualist thinking and identity-politics, such an approach can tend to be inappropriately co-opted as indicating some kind of essentialist, foundationalist or determinist constitution of the sexual subject through mistaking discursive analysis as substantive description. It is therefore, I suggest, inappropriate as a basis for 'cultural' claims seeking the recognition of personal value, and demanding that subjects be excluded from either explicit policing or discursively constructed (hetero)normative comparisons. Such is the present argument which seeks to (re)conceive metatheory in a forward-looking way for use by psycho-medical practitioners dealing with subjects who incorporate material objects into their sexual scripts.

I argue that it is further inappropriate since a queer scholarship should not only reveal heteronormativities where they occur, but should refrain from perpetuating heteronormativity by prioritising such normative dualities by means of the research being done. Rather, I suggest, an exploration of how discourse intersects with the material is a more appropriate starting-point for re-theorising sexuality incorporating material objects. This sets the scene for the remaining two chapters which clarify metatheory on the constitution of the (sexual) subject (Chapter 5) and the practices of incorporating material objects into sexual scripts (Chapter 6)

*Chapter 5* argues that acknowledging the subject in sexual practices by way of a replacement for the heteronormative prescriptions in the ICD's classifications of 'fetishism' does not simply entail re-directing object-focused discourses to matching ones focusing on a simplistically-conceived putatively independent subject. The latter would simply be to inappropriately repeat essentialist, foundationalist and determinist (liberal humanist) discourses on the purportedly unitary nature of individuals. Rather, notions of 'subject' should acknowledge the dialectical roles in subject-creation of subject-as-material-being, object-as-material-thing, discourse and embodied experience.

As I argue, 'fetish sexuality' is emergent, multiple, and mobile, and necessitates a complex understanding of 'nature', 'culture' and discourse. In this way, 'fetish subjects' are not merely

pathological minds, nor in any finite way 'stand-alone' entities separable from fetish objects, other people or the environment more broadly. Rather, they are entities dialectically-described in relation to discourse and materiality. They are created and maintained in the transactional intersections and relations between the embodied being, discourse and environment, the material and discursive limits between which are fluid. These transactional intersections lodge people into a shared spatio-temporal environment which is the context for lived experience which is organised in its own structure in relation to intentionality, embodiment, intersubjectivity and temporality. This implies that there is really no such thing as either 'fetishism', or 'the fetishist', as determined in the ICD classifications, and that people who explicitly incorporate material objects into their sexual scripts should not be approached as if they are in some way separate to other people or objects.

*Chapter 6* argues that people such as the participants nevertheless identify their sexual practices as 'fetish', which may imply that perhaps they are merely repeating heteronormative discourses in some kind of ineffable and determinist way. Yet, I suggest, if the subject is constituted through a dialectical relationship between discourse and materiality as I argue in Chapter 5, that subject cannot merely be subject to dominant discourses, and must have some agency.

This chapter explores the constitution of (sexual) agency and the functions which sexual practices incorporating material objects fulfil. It argues that sexual activity involving material objects is neither the pathologisable practice prescribed in ICD diagnostic criteria or in early psychoanalytic theory which similarly postulates the subject as irretrievably the victim of foundationalist drives and therefore has no substantive agency. Nor, I argue, does the subject live in exclusive perpetual reaction to discursive constructs as proposed by much poststructuralist thinking.

Rather, I suggest that agency is grounded in phenomenological experience and personal meaning derived from the orientation of the self in relation to the material world which surrounds the subject, yet mediated by normative constraints. Desires and choices, rather than being causally defined and backwards-looking in response to pre-existing frameworks or experiences, are, I suggest, dialectically oriented towards both normative discursive constructions, and embodied experience with absent, impossible, future, past and ideal objects. Agency is therefore constructive, yet not deterministic, and the agent exercises choice, albeit largely discursively bounded. This implies that some subjects will be more influenced by discourses, while others will be less so. Concomitantly, some will be more influenced by their material circumstances than others.

I argue that this complex orientation and agency enables subjects sexually to call on the social collectives and the material world around them to re-align themselves both socially and emotionally. In turn, this re-phrased and re-oriented sense of (non-unitary) 'self' allows them the freedom to rephrase their perceptions of their sexuality as being a discursively-described failed space, and towards an empowered and functional sense of their own subjective value. This takes place through subjects re-orienting themselves phenomenologically to the present and the future as valuable beings. This creates a conceptual space in which subjects engage in awareness development of where/who they feel themselves to be (i.e. their current positive subjective meaning), and where/who they aspire to be (i.e. the future-oriented subjective value). They thereby develop awareness of their needs and desires, and engage complex notions of agency, thereby 'echo-locating' themselves in relation to other people (and things) through learning, imagining inherent possibilities, and realising them phenomenologically. This adds up, I suggest, to accessing personal and social value.

I argue that seeing non-normative human sexual relations incorporating material objects (i.e. 'gay male fetish sexuality') as a means of recognising personal value, both in terms of human-human relations, and in terms of a validated relationship to materiality, means that, through phenomenological 'projective intentionality', transactional flourishing for 'fetishists' is about a sense of location in the present and future. This paradigm acknowledges the role of the body/embodiment in 'fetish sexuality' practices in order to develop complex cartographies of human subjectivities. At the same time it validates consensual, 'gay male fetish sexual practices' as potentially self-transformative and socially-transformative (albeit not necessarily practices which politically destabilise normativities), and as resources for realising subjective value in a larger normative social environment which marginalises alterity.

Accordingly, instead of the relationships between 'fetishist' and 'fetish object' indicating a 'cause' of presumed pathological activities, I suggest that such relationships dialectically are both created by and create new forms of subjective meaning for people who incorporate material objects into their sexual scripts and the environment around them. This takes place through such individuals-in-community perpetuating or undermining stereotypes, juggling cultural norms of sexuality and gender, and appropriating or rejecting socially approved sexual roles (or various combinations of these, dependent on their subjective circumstances and the forms and power of dominant discourses in their localised environments<sup>1154</sup>).

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<sup>1154</sup> as with the present participants, who cannot really be 'classed' as 'fetishists' in any singular way, since they have various interests, desires and world-views, some of which perpetuate heteropatriarchy and some of which subvert it

### ***Personal 'Transformation'***

This sexual 'subject-orientation' (rather than 'object-focus'), which acknowledges that people are multiple and that the subjective meanings of their practices cannot be tied down in advance, recognises that people are constituted in the interstices between material and discursive constraints, through phenomenological conceptions of embodied experience.

This paradigm does not, however, prescribe the extent and duration of the personal transformation enabled by fetish. Nor does it intend to, since this would disengage the notion of individual agency. Rather, as I argue, in exploring their sexuality, subjects who incorporate material objects into their sexual scripts, *qua* 'actively becoming' beings, choose to enter the social and psychical environment of 'fetish' in which they have the opportunity to explore and value themselves, and thereby potentially to transform themselves emotionally if they don't like what they see. Neither the need for, nor the activation of transformation are pre-determined, nor is the extent or duration of this transformation, which depends on the individual in question, the specifics of the (discursive) environment in which he/she lives, and his/her own experiential journey. Therefore, I suggest, whether and to what extent individuals are psycho-socially benefited or caused detriment cannot be determined in advance by grand psychological, sociological or indeed poststructuralist narratives.

Ontologically, therefore, people can to a greater or lesser extent choose what to make of their lives, and should not be prescribed some specific formulation of 'mental health' (as opposed to 'pathology') or 'well-being' (as opposed to 'illness'). Of course, as I imply in chapters 5 and 6, those people who occupy the discursively marginalised groups have much less (if any) of a choice than those who are more advantaged, but, as Foucault would arguably have pointed out, these dialectics are not set in stone, and power dynamics can shift and flow, depending on what people individually and collectively do with them. Further, as implied in Chapters 5 and 6, the desires and choices of those who are discursively prioritised are thereby neither inherently more nor less valuable than those of the most marginalised. Even though people are discursively bounded, they call on the contemporary power-plays, together with the materiality at their disposal to make sense of their lives.

Psycho-medical frameworks aimed at encouraging human benefit should therefore not assume that subjective meaning is defined from somewhere outside of the subject, such as through a deific force, (hetero)normative (or 'anti-heteronormative') discursive priorities or any other essentialist, foundationalist or determinist conceptions. This kind of philosophical basis, which imports

recognition of the inherent value of all things is implicit in such approaches as buddhism and 'ubuntu'<sup>1155</sup>, and seeks to manage human processes and social structures through recognising the presence and complexity of individuality-in-community, rather than denying it by imposing supervening foundationalist assumptions or determinist projections onto human endeavour<sup>1156</sup>.

### *Tension, Equilibrium & 'Emotional Transformation'*

The complex subjectivities, agency and 're-orientation' away from (hetero)normativities which I have argued in Chapters 5 and 6 imply that the discursive and the material co-exists in a kind of tension. In more concrete terms, some 'fetishists' are more comfortable moving out of their very restrictive heteropatriarchal circumstances by merely going to a few parties and dressing up in leathers. Others challenge heteronorms by enjoying proscribed experiences such as 'golden showers'. Others relish the chance to challenge what some might see as the very foundations of heteropatriarchy: the fictive distinctions between male and female, by engaging in cross-dressing or even transcending gender (for example 'gender benders' or transgendered people). This implies that there are a diversity of interests, and perhaps that there is some kind of discursive barrier of propriety beyond which certain individuals are not prepared to go, while others are. Yet clearly there is no objective line to cross, failing which transgressive practices would all be the same, which is patently not the case, given the diversity of desires and practices.

This in turn implies that there is some kind of tension between competing discourses and how they manifest. For example pertaining to the current participants, the discourses which prioritise heteronormativity have a certain pull on them, while those which prioritise what they might see as 'transgression' (for example pornography showing macho men in sexual situations which arguably repeats heteronormativity) pull them in another direction. The participants' present circumstances

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<sup>1155</sup> Ubuntu is the Southern African indigenous belief-system that 'people are people through other people'. As Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu has said, "Africans have this thing called UBUNTU. It is about the essence of being human, it is part of the gift that Africa will give the world. It embraces hospitality, caring about others, being able to go the extra mile for the sake of others. We believe that a person is a person through another person, that my humanity is caught up, bound up, inextricably, with yours."

See Ngoenha, S.E. (2006) Ubuntu: New model of global justice? In *Indilinga: African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, Vol. 5 (2) 2006: pp125-134. Ngoenha argues that injustice and inequalities cannot necessarily be dealt with by liberalism. Ubuntu, as restorative rather than punitive justice, could enable a weaving, or re-weaving of relations at the planetary level rather than deepening wounds.

See also LJ Nyaumwe, L.J. & Mkabela, Q (2007) Revisiting The Traditional African Cultural Framework Of Ubuntuism: A Theoretical Perspective. In *Indilinga: African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, Vol. 6 (2) 2007 pp152-163; Nkondo, G.M. (2007) Ubuntu as public policy in South Africa: A conceptual framework. In *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies - Multi-, Inter- and Transdisciplinarity*, Volume 2, Issue 1 June 2007, pp88-100

<sup>1156</sup> This is not to say that the frameworks of both buddhism and indigenous Southern African belief-systems themselves avoid religious over- and under-tones, or are implemented in the same ways.

reflect that tension. Although they may have 'normal' lives as sales representatives or businessmen, their sense of self is equally constructed by their sexual exploits and what they see as their 'transgressions'.

Similarly, it implies a tension between dominant discourses and embodied desire. For example, even though the dominant discourses compel the participants to lead 'ordinary' middle class lives, they still feel compelled to 'transgress' these norms through their sexual exploits (which, as discussed in the Interjection, are often merely heteronormative repetitions).

Further therefore, as I have argued in Chapter 5, if individuals are neither entirely materially nor discursively constructed, there must for each individual be a point at which 'transgression' becomes such, and is not merely discursively defined as transgressive in some abstract way. In other words, that some 'fetishists' take pleasure in having a dildo inserted in their anuses while others do not, or prefer inserting it, means that there is an ontological fluidity between the material and the discursive, which is clearly visible in the diversity of practices between individuals. It also implies that, even though individuals such as the participants seem often to define their own rigid limits in relation to (or perhaps in fear of) discursive norms, such limits are discursively described, not exclusively (hetero)normatively defined nor proscribed in response to contemporary norms. In this regard, an individual's relationship with both the material and the discursive is potentially fluid, and shifts over time as discourses shift and flow.

This in turn indicates that each individual must experience some kind of tension between what is discursively proscribed, what is discursively prescribed, and the material things which represent such discursive instructions.

This further implies that, in order for individuals to be comfortable with their sexual desires (such as sexuality incorporating material objects), the subjective reasons for their enjoyment (for example that it makes them feel 'masculine' or 'loved' or 'transgressive' or a million other things), and the material expression of that enjoyment (for example, having a large penis-shaped object inserted into their anus), there is some kind of personal/subjective (rather than objective) aspirational equilibrium which a subject is seeking to achieve. In other words, subjects cannot, as I have argued, be compared to some foundationalist psychodynamic comparison point such as an inevitable lack, which is backward-looking. Rather, by implication, their 'personal transformation' is explained in terms of some kind of emotional equilibrium which they individually are trying to achieve given the discursive injunctions to which they are subject, and taking place within the material environment

in which they live (but of course which material environment is itself (heteropatriarchally) discursively described/constructed as being either 'good' or 'bad'). As implied by the fluid nature of relationships between the material and the discursive, this 'transformation' is neither inherently connected to nor disconnected from 'fetish' interests or 'fetish objects'.

Further, as is implicit in both the notions of a non-unitary subject and 'transformation', 'fetish interests' change and mutate over time. This in turn indicates that 'personal re-orientation/transformation' does not involve the 'cure' of pathology, which notion often underlies contemporary psycho-medical discourses.

### *'Transformation' of Personal Futures*

In an attempt to obviate moralising language, many contemporary popular psycho-medical discourses which do not speak of 'curing pathology' speak of assisting 'functionality' and encouraging 'well-being'. Such are the ministrations of the million dollar 'self-help', 'healing' and 'happiness' industries which offer Oprah-fied notions of mental health through instant gratification.

These conceptions imply a value-neutral state whereby subjectivity is not influenced by normativity, which is patently false<sup>1157</sup>, as is the further implication that 'healing' comes from somewhere outside of the subject<sup>1158</sup>, which is merely more of the same kind of thinking as in psychopathological constructs dealt with in chapters 3 and 4.

Such constructs are subject to discourse-based critiques in terms of class, race and sexual orientation, whereby dominant power relations prioritise bourgeois ('white', heteropatriarchal) conceptions of 'happiness' enabled only through access to resources. Yet at the same time, clearly material wealth is not a guarantor of either emotional stability or 'well-being', failing which the above mentioned industries would not have any future, and the only happy people populating the world would be wealthy. 'Personal transformation' can therefore not be predominantly a social phenomenon compared to any objective (normative) standards. Rather, in line with the arguments set out in chapters 5 and 6, I suggest that 'personal transformation' is equatable to 'emotional presence', as contextualised by the subject's relationships and the intersections between dominant discourses and phenomenal circumstances.

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<sup>1157</sup> I suggest that the same arguments apply here as in those applicable to the pathologising discourses described in Chapter 4

<sup>1158</sup> Whether that be through a new and improved version of religion, or a self-help book by an 'expert' offering solutions in 10 easy steps

This does not equate to some kind of liberal humanist 'transformation' which implies that the subject is meant to transform from some unsubstantiated normative sub-par state to an equally normative 'optimal', utopian state, both of which states are premised on fictions of a stable and static 'self'. As described in Chapter 5, the subject is not ontologically unitary, but rather is a bundle of fluid possibility and is therefore transforming, shifting and changing all the time. 'Personal transformation' therefore equates to 'coming into ones self', whatever the subject sees that 'self' to be in light of the dominance of discursive instructions and the subjective perceptions of materiality. Indeed, since that 'self' is an entity of flow and fluidity, 'transformation' describes merely a movement from one subjectively oriented state to another. For some, like the less 'transgressive' participants who largely recreate heteronorms through their practices, this partially means shifting social paradigms (re-orienting themselves) so that they see themselves as valuable *in terms of* social norms. For other more 'transgressive' subjects who subvert such norms in more express ways, this equates to transcending the subjective need to rely on heteronorms to a greater extent for their self-worth. Either way, I suggest that there can be no objective determination as to the function or end-goal of 'personal transformation', or indeed, as I have argued in Chapter 6, what counts as 'healing'.

In the case of some subjects this might mean overcoming the internalisation of marginalisation by seeing themselves as more 'normal'. In other cases, this might mean destabilising the very nature of what is (normatively) socially defined as valuable, and therefore the need to be recognised by society at all. This latter of course does not describe or prescribe how society sees that particular subject, and therefore whether or how he/she is accepted, but merely delineates the aim of the subject to become less attached to what discursive prescriptions mean to him/her, and therefore to how such prescriptions will influence his/her life going forward.

More particularly, as I have implied throughout this thesis, this conception of 'emotional presence' cannot be based on essentialist, foundationalist or determinist conceptions of the subject, approval by some deific or foundationalist force, the order of 'nature', normative heteropatriarchal notions of social status or 'scientific cures'. Rather, following anti-(hetero)normative arguments of queer theory, it must entail notions of what is *subjectively* valuable. In other words, subjects 'personal transformation' entails recognising the subjective value of what gives meaning and order to (his/her) human life<sup>1159</sup>. 'Emotional presence' can therefore not be a moralistic or deterministic position which

<sup>1159</sup> See Ahmed, S. (2007–8). The Happiness Turn. In *New Formations* 63, no. Winter: 7–14. In this regard, as Ahmed appropriately notes, it is more fruitful to look at what 'happiness' *does* than trying to clearly define what it *is*.

For different philosophical traditions of happiness see also McGill, V.J. (1967) *The Idea of Happiness*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger; Sumner, L.W. (1996) *Welfare, Happiness and Ethics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.



prioritises any specific social and cultural pre-requisites in order to enable feelings of self-worth. It cannot come about through comparisons with objective standards of 'ought' (in other words by saying that subjects should be 'happy' or 'well' if they achieve certain specific goals, or if they 'are' certain things). Yet it is not entirely internal either, in that what counts as 'happiness' is often discursively defined in (hetero)normative terms (for example the prioritising of procreation as a part of the equation for happiness). This kind of 'emotional presence' is therefore not a closed list of what counts as aspirational.

Rather, temporality is important, whereby 'emotional presence' is an acknowledgement of present circumstances matched with what the subject hopes for, thereby creating a political and personal horizon for aspirations which do not (completely) rely on external circumstances for their justification or delivery<sup>1160</sup>.

Further, this conception of 'emotional presence', however, is not one which only

“relies on a very specific model of subjectivity, where one knows how one feels, and where the distinction between good and bad feeling is secure, forming the basis of subjective as well as social well-being”<sup>1161</sup>.

Rather, it incorporates conceptions of emotion based on a subject who is not necessarily fully *consciously* 'present' to him/herself (in other words not necessarily intelligible, but, as argued in Chapter 5, accessible). In this regard, 'emotional presence' cannot be about a perpetual sense of calm and placidity, but rather about the subjective ability to recognise and largely be at peace with him/herself both because of and despite feelings of ambivalence, confusion, depression and trauma within a broader discursive/social environment. In other words, it is about the subject being content to be undertaking a physico-emotional experience which sometimes has ups and sometimes downs, but where he/she believes he can deal with them, albeit with discomfort.

This notion of 'emotional presence' aligns with 'positive psychology' which both measures and attempts to maximise the extent to which positive feelings impact on the individual<sup>1162</sup>. As noted elsewhere, it is allied to 'presence' in a Buddhist sense which revolves around striving for a subjective sense of peace about one's being-in-the-world matched with an

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<sup>1160</sup> See Ahmed, S. (2007–8). The Happiness Turn. In *New Formations* 63, no. Winter: 7–14

See also chapter 6 re arguments on temporality

<sup>1161</sup> Ahmed, S. (2007–8). *ibid*

<sup>1162</sup> See 'positive psychology', which started by critiquing how psychology takes anxiety, depression and negativity as object lesson. In this regard, see Argyle, M (1987) *The Psychology of Happiness*. London: Methuen, pp1; Snyder, C.R. & Lopez, S.J. (eds) (2002) *The Handbook of Positive Psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Csikszentmihály, M (2002) *Flow: the Classic Work on How to Achieve Happiness*. London: Rider & Co..

acknowledgement of the ability and responsibility to make choices and decisions in a society which can never be utopian<sup>1163</sup>.

I suggest that this 'personal transformation/healing' encompasses a kind of pragmatic and inward-looking or contemplative, (rather than foundationalist or determinist, personal psychical 'functionality'), within a broader social sphere conceived of dialogically and dialectically, whereby individuals engage in balanced ways with their community while at the same time mobilising their subjective (rather than commercial) resources to create meaning in their lives and behaving in ways which reflect an interdependence between themselves and the world around them, rather than either an independence or co-dependence.

Yet more than that, 'emotional presence' can be seen as some queer prospect of possibility, where identities and experiences are not bounded, but are fluid: "not that anyone might be queer, but that something queer might happen to anyone"<sup>1164</sup>. This possibility can be conceived by the individual as possibly attainable beyond him/herself and in his/her future, yet where the individual is empowered to look both within and beyond normativity to secure a comfortable position in the present from where to experience the 'hap' of 'happiness', the 'chance' of learning, and the appreciation of something new while acknowledging the circumstances of the present.<sup>1165</sup> Such conceptions of 'emotional presence' feed into voices advocating gay affirmative therapy<sup>1166</sup> and health psychology<sup>1167</sup> in that it seeks not to essentialise experience, but rather to affirm the value of the individual in his/her circumstances and a broader social environment.

### ***The Role of Psycho-Medical Practitioners***

This implies that the role of psycho-medical practitioners is not to 'cure' a 'gay male fetishist' subject by making his desire for sex involving material objects go away<sup>1168</sup>. Rather, I suggest, the subject will be enabled to come to terms with his desires by being encouraged not to (heteronormatively) judge those desires as being either inherently 'good' or 'bad',

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<sup>1163</sup> See Langdrige, D (2006) Ideology and Utopia: Social Psychology and the Social Imaginary of Paul Ricoeur. In *Theory & Psychology*, Vol. 16, No. 5, 641-659 (2006).

<sup>1164</sup> Haver, W (1997) Queer Research. In Golding, S. (ed) (1997) *The Eight Technologies of Otherness*. Routledge: New York, London, p288-291.

<sup>1165</sup> See chapter 2 re the role of queerness

<sup>1166</sup> See Lebolt, J (1999) Gay Affirmative Psychotherapy: A Phenomenological Study. In *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 27(40), 355-370, Langdrige, D, in conversation with Kathleen Ritter (2006) Gay affirmative therapy: Perspectives from an ally. In *Lesbian & Gay Psychology Review*, Vol. 7, No. 2 253; Langdrige, D (2007) Gay Affirmative Therapy: A Theoretical Framework and Defence. In *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy*, Volume 11, Issue 1 & 2 June 2007, pages 27 – 43

<sup>1167</sup> See Yardley, L (1997) *Material Discourses of Health and Illness*. Routledge

<sup>1168</sup> which such practitioner cannot do anyway, since, as discussed in Chapter 6, that will in principle conflict with the subject's agency: the subject enjoys his practices, albeit in a conflicted way, failing which he wouldn't do them

but to embrace them within his own emotional capacities which are mediated by the extent and nature of those desires, and the social prescriptions to which he is subject. He can thereby achieve a better understanding of what those desires represent, albeit not in terms of some abstract metaphorical representation relating to the subject's past and his desire to achieve some kind of missing 'wholeness' (i.e. lack), but rather in terms of what that subject seeks to achieve in a future-oriented way. This does not, in turn, mean that the subject is only metaphorically seeking to achieve some kind of purely psychological sense of 'transformation', but rather that his psychological reality is necessarily and inherently interconnected with his sense of embodied self. This translates into feeling grounded both now, in the moment of sexual experience, and in the future, as though he belongs somewhere, both physically and emotionally and in an ongoing social way. This implies that the subject may not really be conflicted with his use of material objects, or with his sexuality, but with how his sexual choices will intersect with the normative prescriptions against them and the subjective associations he has with the material world and 'fetish objects'.

I suggest therefore that, if the subject is conflicted concerning his sexuality or desires (which would be his reason for going to a psycho-medical practitioner in the first place), on the basis of the arguments in Chapters 5 and 6, the practitioner should not try to 'cure' his past or present, but to encourage the intersection between his present and his sense of an ongoing future. Therefore, in order to assist the subject to attain 'personal transformation', psycho-medical practitioners cannot adopt some kind of (heteronormative) moralistic position such as those inherent in the ICD classifications and diagnostic criteria, but should rather assist the subject to come to terms with his life (and his sexuality) as it is, while encouraging his ability to marshal his agency to choose to narrow the gap between what he desires as an embodied experience and the normative pre/proscriptions which stand in the way, thereby enabling him to choose an appropriate (middle) path. I suggest that the desired outcome is for the subject to neither reject nor embrace the practices wholesale, but to make an empowered emotional (rather than entirely rational) choice about how to move forward.

In other words, and simply put: I suggest that if a ('gay male fetishist') subject is uncomfortable with his sexual proclivities and desires to dress up as a dog and submit to the control of a Master, he should not be discouraged. Rather, I suggest, he should be encouraged to make an informed and empowered decision to choose on a deep emotional level to incorporate his desires more usefully into his present through looking to what he aspires to. His choice is his responsibility. However, this is not to suggest that this choice is merely pragmatically made. I suggest rather that he be encouraged to find a subjective sense of balance between his desires and his lifestyle, based on a

clearer understanding of how his desires may (but do not necessarily) represent a subjective sense of inadequacy or empowerment, or a complex combination of both which co-exist in the present<sup>1169</sup>. I suggest that it is important for the subject not to be compared to normative standards, but to be empowered to recognise how normative standards impact on his subjective sense of self. Clearly, given how materiality intersects with discourse, there is nothing inherently wrong with enjoying material objects as part of one's sexual script. The question is whether and how one is prepared to take responsibility for the emotional connections between desires and practices, and the potential social consequences of following through with those practices. I argue that this requires the subject to strive for a sense of balance, rather than merely buying into social opprobrium.

## **Implicit Arguments: A Personal Present vs A Political Future**

Historical scholarly epistemologies on 'fetishism' in both anthropological and psychiatric discourses created and perpetuated an ontological distinction between humans and material objects, and thereby perpetuated fictions that people are somehow separate to the world around them, and further are somehow 'better than' or 'more important' than everything else in the universe (and perhaps beyond).

Through this thesis, and in particular through looking at practices which by definition explicitly incorporate notions of materiality, immateriality and discursive constructions of appropriateness (human (sexual) interactions with material objects, i.e 'fetishism'), I implicitly suggest that this assumption should be unpacked not only by querying how these historical discourses perpetuate or challenge (hetero)normativities, but by incorporating substantive arguments on the role of discourse in the creation of materiality (or vice-versa), and therefore in the construction of human beings, thereby in turn interrogating how important human beings are, ontologically-speaking.

### ***Interrogating Materiality and Discourse***

By clarifying these relationships, I implicitly question some of the notions on which scholarly notions of 'fetishising' and 'reifying' rely. By calling on a kind of radical constructivism, I question the purported distinctions between people and objects, thereby implying that people are not essentially created by some deific force to be superior to other creatures, nor to the world itself, as

<sup>1169</sup> For example, the desire to be subjected to abuse may reflect abuse in his past, or may simply be an expression of empowerment. This cannot be determined objectively, or as having some relation to a psychoanalytic 'lack'. Rather, it is, I suggest more important to look at the feelings as they relate to his life now, rather than simply, as in the case of psychoanalysis, to unpack the past, which is always filtered through present eyes

suggested by historical nature-nurture debates. I further suggest that people are perhaps not anthropocentrically the most important beings on the planet, contrary to simplified notions of discursive constructions which often imply that language ontologically creates 'being', which by implication is impossible without human intervention. This argument is implied in the context of the recognition that animals, and even perhaps plants have 'cultures' of their own, and that they are therefore no less important than people<sup>1170</sup>.

### ***Locating Scholarship and Responsibility***

In the last three decades, discourse analyses have become the first port of call for scholarly reflection in much of the humanities and the social sciences, in particular in the realm of gender and sexualities, based on Foucaultian assumptions that culture is discursively created. Through this thesis I implicitly suggest that purely discursive reasoning has, however, been a reactionary stance to earlier essentialist and dualist thinking, and, as the thesis explicitly argues, tends to undermine the role of agency in subjectivities, assuming that people are irreparably discursively constructed.

Yet, as mentioned above, I suggest that to see human experience in this way is to imply that discourse is purely immaterial, which is seen as inherently more important and more powerful than material influences, and indeed as constructive of materiality. It is, I argue, to focus on the past, and to assume that discourses are their own creature and not subject to collective choices which people make, which in turn come out of individual (albeit often normatively prescribed) choices impacted on by materially-experienced circumstances.

I suggest therefore that the role of a queer scholarship is not merely, as may be implied by discursive analyses of participant contributions, passively to report how discursive constructs and normativities are reproduced, but also to reconceive metatheoretical constructs in ways which enable political action by avoiding inappropriate normative assumptions underlying professional practices (such as those of psycho-medical practitioners). This is not to assume that discursive analyses are inappropriate, and therefore that discourse is not immensely powerful in constructing reality, but rather that discourses are impacted on by material circumstances and by choices which individuals (which include both the participants and scholars) make in the face of dominant discourses. Discourse analyses are therefore powerful tools to reveal the ways of the cultural world as they stand now, yet not necessarily to construct frameworks for moving forward.

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<sup>1170</sup> Which in turn feeds into debates on the role of humans in areas like ecology and global warming. I suggest that people are not 'placed' on earth (either by some deific force or through evolutionary change) as either the 'rulers' or the stewards of the planet, but rather are an integral part of it and should conceive of all parts of the planet, organic and inorganic, with a sense of partnership.

## *From Scholarly Location to Political Action*

On the face of it, this thesis may look like a mere description of how (sexual) things work and may appear to minimise or ignore the profound effects of (hetero)normativities. Yet this is only a surface reading. The re-oriented theory for which I argue can and should indeed be mobilised to shift heteronormative essentialism and foundationalism which still runs amok, perpetuated, for example, by the World Health Organisation, which has not called on queer or phenomenological epistemologies. This indeed indicates that these imperatives have not penetrated beyond the borders of the few gender studies scholars.

On the surface this might imply that an appropriate response would be merely to call attention to how these discourses inappropriately reproduce heteronormativities. But, I suggest, to do so merely itself reproduces dualist ontologies. As I have argued in Chapter 2 and the Interjection, re-phrasing metatheory to be explicitly anti-normative itself merely re-sets the same old confrontational battlefield, rather than creating a value-neutral platform from which to make political shifts through mobilising political activity aimed at changing daily practice.

The key to the thesis argument is not the queer and phenomenological epistemological foundations on which it is based, which are, after all, no longer really new thinking. I argue, though, that simply recognising that human consciousness entails a focus on both discourse and materiality will enable us to stop simply regurgitating undesirable positivist claptrap<sup>1171</sup>. This will not necessarily take place by constructing new frameworks for thinking sexualities, but by working with the sound premises at our disposal, such as a 'queer phenomenology', which foregrounds lived experience<sup>1172</sup>.

Without pretending that the tedious, restrictive and uninspired heteronormative and patriarchal assumptions about the world don't exist, scholars and those who have the power to influence policy

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<sup>1171</sup> See Ahmed, S. (2006) Orientations: toward a Queer Phenomenology. In *GLQ: a Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* (12:4) 543-574

<sup>1172</sup> See chapter 2

See Ahmed, S (2006) Orientations: toward a Queer Phenomenology. In *GLQ: a Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* (12:4) 543-574. Calling on Merleau-Ponty's conception of the re-orientation of bodies to become 'vertical', she explains how certain feminist philosophers of the body have engaged with phenomenology to see how social differences come from the ways in which bodies inhabit spaces and are intercorporeal.

"Becoming vertical" pertains to Merleau-Ponty's points in *The Phenomenology of Perception*. See also the work of feminists such as Bartky, S (1990) *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*. New York: Routledge; Butler, J (1997) *Performative Acts and Gender Constitutions: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*. In Conboy, K, Medina, N. & Stanbury, S. (eds) *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press; Diprose, R (2003) *Corporeal Generosity: On Giving with Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas*. Albany: State University of New York Press; Grosz, E (1995) *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*. New York: Routledge; Young, I.M. (2005) *On Female Body Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Weiss, G. (1999) *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality*. New York: Routledge.

can, I suggest fight normativities on two fronts: through explicit (queer) political action, and through a refusal to keep heteropatriarchy alive by diverting focus away from it through adopting 'presence' based arguments such as those advocated in this thesis. Such arguments, I suggest, combats normativity both explicitly, in the face of problematic discursive constructs, and by enabling a kind of 're-orientation' similar to that I argue applied to 'fetishists' in Chapter 6, whereby they support subjects' acknowledge what is 'present' in their lives, together with what subjects want to become, as mediated by both (heteronormative) discourses and the material. In so doing, personal and embodied responses to the unusual, which includes non-normative sexual proclivities, can inspire, energise and enable the creation of new, healthy personal habits, while still, in more appropriate political environments, countering dominant (heteropatriarchal) discourses. This, I suggest will contribute to what Sullivan calls significant, rather than monotonous change<sup>1173</sup>.

This thesis addresses how individuals interact with their socio-political and material environments. It therefore suggests approaches on how individuals should be dealt with in the 'safe spaces' of psycho-medical assistance. It does not focus on how normativities are perpetuated, and therefore how political activity should be mobilised. Yet the implication of the argument is that those in the caring professions can, and indeed should, contribute to the empowerment of individuals to undertake daily excursions into destabilising heteronormativities, which daily practices are an important element of political change, since such practices disrupt what is often seen as the impenetrable homogeneity of such discourses. By engaging in individual re-orientation, and implementing the appropriate epistemological shifts, *everyone* can shift paradigms away from heteronormativity. Political change can thereby not be tied to activists and politicians alone, but can be acknowledged to happen in the interstices of everyday life by everyone, which includes scholars, psycho-medical practitioners and sexual subjects.

At the same time, I suggest that the overt politically pragmatic activism advocated in Chapter 2 should be mobilised, in order to deal with popular politics, which still relies on majoritarianism, which in turn often tends to exclude and marginalise what are mainly conceived of as 'minorities' through media representation of unusual sexualities, popular discourses and political rhetoric.

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<sup>1173</sup> Weiss, G (2002) The Anonymous Intentions of Transactional Bodies. In *Hypatia* vol. 17, no. 4 (Fall 2002) pp187-200, reviewing Sullivan, S. (2001) *Living across and through skins: Transactional bodies, pragmatism, and feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

## Closing Thoughts

Clearly the world is not in any essentialist, foundationalist or determinist way made up of 'majorities' and 'minorities', 'heterosexuals' or 'homosexuals', or 'fetishists' or 'non-fetishists'. Rather, it contains six billion or so individuals-in-community, each of whom interacts with the material world to navigate his/her way and to make sense of his/her life in the face of powerful discourses.

For the privileged, this might equate to buying property, going to fancy restaurants and jet-setting, socially problematic though that may be. For the middle-classes this often equates to buying into the discourses which prioritise the (unattainable) accumulation of wealth which contemporary popular culture romanticises, whereby big-screen televisions and a 4x4 sports utility vehicles are the height of achievement. For the underprivileged this equates to subjecting themselves to deprecating performances to obtain and maintain basic survival. Yet to assume that all privileged people are not subject to discursive scrutiny and control, and are inherently 'present' in their lives is much the same as concomitantly to assume that the underprivileged endure lives of abject meaninglessness and misery. All substantive assumptions render human experience deterministic and deny people the wonderful singularity of their subjectivities which produce amazing cultural, political, social and personal contributions both despite and because of their circumstances.

Overt political activity must, in all good conscience, fight for the redress of inequality in order to afford all people similar opportunities. Yet psycho-medical activity (particularly, in the context of this thesis, the work of psychiatrists and psychologists) must not presume either that the bourgeois sensibilities with which most psychiatric and medical professionals come equipped are the point of reference/standard for 'healing', nor that underprivileged people do not take their own circumstances and the discourses to which they are subject and work with them in order to fashion some sense of meaning and self-worth.

Similarly, in the context of non-normative sexual play, medical professionals cannot assume that heteropatriarchal norms are appropriate gauges for life. Whereas some subjects (otherwise constructed as 'fetishists') explore their lives in a sexual context through the explicit and conscious non-normative use of material objects, others do so implicitly, for example by offering a flower to a loved one. Whether such individuals are privileged or underprivileged, (hetero)sexually central or (homo)sexually peripheral, the only foundation on which to base any psycho-medical assistance is surely through enabling those subjects to be 'present' as embodied beings in the face of discourses which continuously tell all people that they are not valuable, and calling attention to their lives as



they are, not as they can/should/might be. Such lives are not merely fantasies, psychically-based feelings or ideas, but are subjective experientially and phenomenologically based 'presence'.

As is apparent through performance art exhibitions like that of Marina Abramović, these individuals are better phrased and better assisted in being present in their lives and therefore in appreciating the experience through destabilising notions of the spectacular and the specular: by creating spaces for them in which to be both the viewer and the viewed, in dialogic conversation with the phenomenal world, rather than under either the (hetero)normative microscope of psychopathology or the discursive erasure of their uniqueness and complexity.



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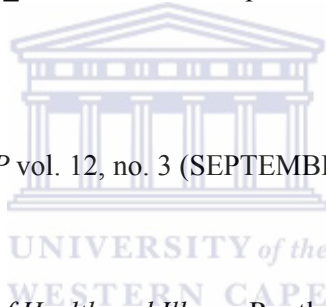
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# ADDENDUM 1

## FREUDIAN FETISHISM

Freud discussed Fetishism in various commentaries<sup>1174</sup>. His views were seen through the processes of ego splitting and disavowal, as well as defence and repression.

### Ego-Splitting, Disavowal and Fetishism: a Brief Explanation

Freud's construction of Ego-Splitting and Disavowal defines fetishism in relation to what is seen as an inappropriate adult response to castration anxiety. This translates into a fear of the absence/removal of the penis, *qua* object, which, through psychical mechanisms, remains both lost and found.

Freud saw non-pathological ego-splitting as a general principle of all psychopathology, which principle is exemplified by 'Fetishism'<sup>1175</sup>. As a result of their inability to conceive of someone similar to them without a penis, boys consistently try to see themselves, or a mirror image of themselves, in others in the face of their mother's penile lack, through a refusal to recognize that women have no penis, and a belief that they see one<sup>1176</sup>. This process is not uncommon and not dangerous in children, but in adults indicates psychosis<sup>1177</sup>.

The adult 'fetishist' continues with this immature reaction to perceived differences between male

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<sup>1174</sup> See [http://www.ncf.edu/hassold/FinDeSiecle/freud\\_fetishism.htm](http://www.ncf.edu/hassold/FinDeSiecle/freud_fetishism.htm), compiled by Cris Hassold Professor of Art History, New College of Florida, from Freud, Sigmund. (1928) "Fetishism." vol. 21 in Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud.: 152-157. He notes that "this is a seminal psychoanalytic discussion of fetishism which claims that a fetish both acknowledges and denies the maternal phallus. The fetish acts as a substitute for what was not there when the male child first encountered his, mother's body, the maternal penis. Freud goes on to say that the fetish is a substitute for the Mother's penis and wards off the castration that the child "saw" and feared for himself when he did not find a penis on the body of his mother who must have been castrated."

See 'Fetischismus.' First published Int. Z. Psychoanal., 13 (1927), 373; reprinted Ges. Schr., 11, 395; and Ges. W., 14, 311. Translation, reprinted from Int. J. Psychoanal., 9 (1928), 161; by Joan Riviere.; Freud's paper on "Repression" (1915b). General Psychological Theory. Collier Books edition AS 582V.; "Neurosis and Psychosis" (1924a) and The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis (1924c).; Freud reverted to the subject of fetishism later, in 1938. See An Outline of Psychoanalysis (London, 1949), 73 ff.

<sup>1175</sup> Bass, Alan. (2000) *Difference and Disavowal: The Trauma of Eros*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press

<sup>1176</sup> Note that girls, on the other hand, "disavow" their lack of penis. See Freud, S in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, 24 vols. London: The Hogarth Press, 1953–1974. Vol XIX, 143–44; see Rottenberg, E (2000) A Testament to Disaster. In *MLN* 115 (2000): 941–973 Johns Hopkins University Press, pp951 & 952

<sup>1177</sup> Freud, *ibid*, vol XIX, 252; see Rottenberg, *ibid*, pp950

and female anatomies, thereby retaining two incompatible positions. The fetish therefore substitutes “for a particular and quite special penis that had been extremely important . . . but had later been lost”, i.e. the mother’s (woman’s) missing penis, in such way that the penis remains both lost and found<sup>1178</sup>.

As a psychological defence, Kaplan understands disavowal as ‘having it both ways’ and as “the sine non qua (*sic*) of sexual fetishism’, which allows the fetishist to disregard reality and continue believing in an imagined construct<sup>1179</sup>. In disavowal, the fetishist does not “scotomise”, but creates a blind spot where the perception continues<sup>1180</sup>.

The fetishist therefore sees and does not see at the same time, holding onto the belief that women have a penis and he has given it up<sup>1181</sup>. The child ‘fetishist’ is caught between the id and reality, and is compelled either to acknowledge a real danger, give in to it and deny an instinct satisfaction, or to ‘disavow’ reality and choose to believe there is no reason for fear, in order to hold onto satisfaction. Here the ego does not choose between the id and reality, but holds both together<sup>1182</sup>.

Freud sees Fetish as an ‘oscillation’ between two contradictory reactions, both of which remain valid and effective. However, he maintains that this oscillation is “only possible under the dominance of the unconscious laws of thought—the *primary process*”<sup>1183</sup>. As the child grows, life

<sup>1178</sup> Freud, *ibid*, vol XXI, 152; see Rottenberg, *ibid*, pp 968

<sup>1179</sup> Kaplan, L.J. (1991) *Cultures of Fetishism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp27-28

<sup>1180</sup> scotomising is a neurotic and pathological process equated with repression, where the incompatible reality is “entirely wiped out, so that the result is the same as when a visual impression falls on the blind spot in the retina [*auf den blinden Fleck der Netzhaut*]. Freud, *ibid*, vol X, 153–54; see Rottenberg, *ibid*, pp952.

<sup>1181</sup> Note that throughout this section I refer to the fetishist as ‘he/him’, both because of Freud’s construction of the fetish in patriarchal terms whereby the female fetishist is not conceived of, and because the current research deals specifically with gay men.

<sup>1182</sup> Freud, S. In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, 24 vols. London: The Hogarth Press, 1953–1974. Vol XXIII, 275; see Rottenberg, E (2000) A Testament to Disaster. In *MLN* 115 (2000): 941–973 Johns Hopkins University Press, pp952

<sup>1183</sup> Freud, S. *ibid* vol XXI, 154; see Rottenberg, *ibid*, pp952, (Rottenberg’s emphasis) His description of the psyche in terms of primary and secondary processes date from early in his work. In the 1895 Project for a Scientific Psychology, Freud notes the distinction between “primary psychic processes,” where “wishful cathexis tends toward hallucination, which in turn entails the full development of unpleasure and defense,” from “secondary processes,” which involve “a moderation of the foregoing . . . through the correct evaluation of reality-signs”. He noted that, in primary processes, wish-fulfillment and defense work together: [t]he wishful state results in a positive attraction towards the object wished for, or, more precisely, towards its mnemonic image; the experience of pain leads to repulsion, a disinclination to keeping the hostile image cathected. Here we have primary wishful attraction and primary defense.

The pleasure principle regulates the idea of the primary process in this context. In Chapter VII of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) he uses the example of a hungry baby hallucinating the breast. Here the baby’s wishing replaces hunger with images of satisfaction; and at the same time prevents an ‘investment or cathexis’ in the painful experience. Wishing makes what Freud refers to as “a perceptual identity” (*Wahrnehmungsidentität*) by destroying the difference between memory and perception. The child repeats the perception connected to its prior sense of satisfaction, getting back the psychical rest state (*psychische Ruhezustand*).

experiences force the psyche to create a secondary way of doing things (the *secondary process*).<sup>1184</sup> In fetish the *primary process* defense does away with the ‘disagreeable’ reality of genital difference, and the fetish makes reality ‘agreeable’ again. Disavowal therefore uses primary process wish fulfilment or fantasy, in a delusional way, to correct the unpleasant reality<sup>1185</sup>.

Freud acknowledges that the fetish is not a neurosis, since disavowal successfully wards off the ‘reality’ of genital difference, i.e. the mother’s missing penis, which must be there, failing which the castration possibility is real<sup>1186</sup>. The fetish is therefore created in order “to destroy *the evidence for the possibility of castration*”<sup>1187</sup>.

## Defense and Repression

‘Defence’ and ‘Repression’ are principles underlying Freudian ‘Fetishism’<sup>1188</sup>.

Freud saw fetish as a defence, which describes how the ego struggles against incompatibility which takes place as experiences, representations, or sensations. This incompatibility distresses the ego so much that its only recourse is to protect itself by denying what has happened. Although Freud replaced ‘defence’ with “repression,” the former resurfaced in his later work (Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety) as a way to restrict “repression”, where this latter form of “defense” referred to all defensive processes, including “repression” as a separate idea.

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<sup>1184</sup> Freud, S, *ibid*, vol. XII, 219; see Rottenberg, *ibid*, pp955 The child moves from a closed and self-contained and self-regulated system, through being forced to recognize and confront reality which stands in the way of its pleasure (the reality principle).

“[T]he non-appearance [*das Ausbleiben*]” of the expected satisfaction, the failure of the psyche to defend against an increase of tension by way of hallucinatory wish-fulfillment (primary process) forces the psychological apparatus to change its defensive strategy. “A new principle of mental functioning was thus introduced; what was presented in the mind was no longer what was agreeable but what was real, even if it happened to be disagreeable”

<sup>1185</sup> Freud, S, *ibid*, vol. XII, 219; see Rottenberg, *ibid*, pp955 Freud maintained that the primary processes don’t disappear as we grow, but rather they remain in our dreams and “our waking tendency to tear ourselves away from distressing impressions”, as well as in disavowal. In this respect the term ‘primary’ does not indicate that it is replaced by the secondary process, but rather is something that must remain in balance with the secondary process by means of a knowledge of the ‘fiction’ of an unbridgeable gap between an experience of satisfaction (i.e. a perception) and the ‘hallucination’ of the memory of satisfaction. This implies that reality has been registered and rejected. This further implies that almost but not quite realizing a self-sufficient psychological system is recognizing the dependence of the primary process on something that is equally, if not more primary (i.e. the secondary process).

<sup>1186</sup> Freud, S, *ibid*, vol XXI, 152 Rottenberg, *ibid*, pp957

<sup>1187</sup> Freud, S, *ibid*, vol XXIII, 203; see Rottenberg, *ibid*, pp957

<sup>1188</sup> For a fuller explanation, see Rottenberg, E (2000) *A Testament to Disaster*. In *MLN* 115 (2000): 941–973 Johns Hopkins University Press

Freud's idea of a defense against the incompatible reflects a reaction so extreme that the ego is in an impossible situation. The ego must forget the distress in order to survive, which Freud considered impossible, leading to various conditions defined as pathological, such as hysteria, obsession or hallucinatory psychosis. Yet in these instances, the ego remembers the distress, does not force away the incompatibility and survives through ego-splitting, which functions to separate the representation from its effect, and turn a strong representation into a weak one. Obsessional neuroses dislodge or transpose the affect from its original representation.

A third way to deal with incompatible representation by banishing it from consciousness, along with its affect, resulting treating the representation as if it hadn't happened. This however results in psychosis, and hallucinatory confusion.

In the case of neurosis, the superego, influenced by the external world, commands the ego, which in turn represses the id, denying a strong instinctual impulse, thereby refusing to help the impulse find a motor outlet, or denying the impulse an object. The ego sides with the superego against the id, based on the idea that the demands of the superego are stronger than the impulses of the id. The superego acts as a mediator between the inside and the outside the psyche, but prioritises 'reality' over the drives of the id.

In psychosis, however, the disturbance is more extreme. Here, repression is ineffective and the external world remains out of consciousness and perception. With amnesia, the ego refuses to accept new perceptions and of its own accord it creates a new world as per the impulses of the id. In psychosis, the powers of the superego are overwhelmed, and delusion occurs

Since the present research is conducted in relation to consensual, conscious and willing participants in sexual fetish, at this point it is not necessary to explore 'psychical illnesses' such as obsessional neurosis.

## ADDENDUM 2

# THE ICD-10 CLASSIFICATIONS OF MENTAL AND BEHAVIOURAL DISORDERS

From the World Health Organisation Website

<http://apps.who.int/classifications/apps/icd/icd10online/?gf60.htm+f681>

## Chapter V

### Mental and behavioural disorders (F00-F99)

#### Disorders of adult personality and behaviour

#### (F60-F69)

This block includes a variety of conditions and behaviour patterns of clinical significance which tend to be persistent and appear to be the expression of the individual's characteristic lifestyle and mode of relating to himself or herself and others. Some of these conditions and patterns of behaviour emerge early in the course of individual development, as a result of both constitutional factors and social experience, while others are acquired later in life. Specific personality disorders (F60.-), mixed and other personality disorders (F61.-), and enduring personality changes (F62.-) are deeply ingrained and enduring behaviour patterns, manifesting as inflexible responses to a broad range of personal and social situations. They represent extreme or significant deviations from the way in which the average individual in a given culture perceives, thinks, feels and, particularly, relates to others. Such behaviour patterns tend to be stable and to encompass multiple domains of behaviour and psychological functioning. They are frequently, but not always, associated with various degrees of subjective distress and problems of social performance.

Disorders of sexual preference:

Includes:

paraphilias

#### **F65.0 Fetishism**

Reliance on some non-living object as a stimulus for sexual arousal and sexual gratification. Many fetishes are extensions of the human body, such as articles of clothing or footwear. Other common examples are characterized by some particular texture such as rubber, plastic or leather. Fetish objects vary in their importance to the individual. In some cases they simply serve to enhance sexual excitement achieved in ordinary ways (e.g. having the partner wear a particular garment).

#### **F65.1 Fetishistic transvestism**

The wearing of clothes of the opposite sex principally to obtain sexual excitement and to create the appearance of a person of the opposite sex. Fetishistic transvestism is distinguished from transsexual



transvestism by its clear association with sexual arousal and the strong desire to remove the clothing once orgasm occurs and sexual arousal declines. It can occur as an earlier phase in the development of transsexualism.

Transvestic fetishism

### **F65.2 Exhibitionism**

A recurrent or persistent tendency to expose the genitalia to strangers (usually of the opposite sex) or to people in public places, without inviting or intending closer contact. There is usually, but not invariably, sexual excitement at the time of the exposure and the act is commonly followed by masturbation.

### **F65.3 Voyeurism**

A recurrent or persistent tendency to look at people engaging in sexual or intimate behaviour such as undressing. This is carried out without the observed people being aware, and usually leads to sexual excitement and masturbation.

### **F65.4 Paedophilia**

A sexual preference for children, boys or girls or both, usually of prepubertal or early pubertal age.

### **F65.5 Sadomasochism**

A preference for sexual activity which involves the infliction of pain or humiliation, or bondage. If the subject prefers to be the recipient of such stimulation this is called masochism; if the provider, sadism. Often an individual obtains sexual excitement from both sadistic and masochistic activities.

Masochism

Sadism

### **F65.6 Multiple disorders of sexual preference**

Sometimes more than one abnormal sexual preference occurs in one person and there is none of first rank. The most common combination is fetishism, transvestism and sadomasochism.

### **F65.8 Other disorders of sexual preference**

A variety of other patterns of sexual preference and activity, including making obscene telephone calls, rubbing up against people for sexual stimulation in crowded public places, sexual activity with animals, and use of strangulation or anoxia for intensifying sexual excitement.

Frotteurism

Necrophilia

### **F65.9 Disorder of sexual preference, unspecified**

Sexual deviation not otherwise specified

## ADDENDUM 3

### PARTICIPANT RECORDS OF HOMOPHOBIA AMONGST MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS

Certain participants report judgmental medical responses to their sexuality, albeit in subtle ways.

“it's hard to describe...when you say medical professional, it's a general practitioner which is my only contact with medical practitioners. You go there because you're sick with flu, but your partner takes you. And of course he can see that you're a couple, and you get that feeling that he's not as ... he has to like touch you, and it's like you pick up that this guy is uncomfortable with you purely because he assumes that you're homosexual. ... Where I know... fortunately I haven't been in a position where I have to go to a doctor and say “listen, check this out”, or “do this” or whatever, because I've picked up something. If I have to do something like that I would definitely make sure that I go to a gay doctor, for sure. Because I would feel that if I were to go to any other guy, that won't accept me or my lifestyle or how I got what I did... ja, I would feel intimidated by it...” (Brian)

Even in the absence of overt psychopathologising of sexuality/sexual orientation on the part of mental health/medical professionals, participants have often felt guilt/shame pertaining to their fetish sexuality, and/or being gay, or at least feel the need to be discrete about their sexuality due to the risk of public censure:

Qu: Have you ever felt bad, guilty, shameful, about your sexuality/sexual orientation ?

“yes. When I was a lot younger, definitely, and I would ascribe that to a lot of religious guilt, because you know, you've been told that it's wrong to be gay, sinful, God hates you, God will punish you, etc etc. And you ... once you've just come down from that euphoric high from an orgasm, the guilt starts setting in, you start feeling “I'm so bad, I'm so bad, I shouldn't have done that, will God forgive me?” Once you can get over that, then... but ja, I have felt guilty...” (Brian)

“Yes. I grew up in an ultra-conservative Afrikaner Church-going home. ... Acceptance of being gay ... took a while. I never discussed my fetishes with the therapist, but not being ashamed came with the general acceptance of being gay.” (Donald)

“well, with my religion, a good catholic boy, I would automatically feel bad about my sexual orientation, but I've come to grips, not... come to an understanding with that. Um, I accept myself as I am.

Qu: and how did you change... how did that acceptance happen?

“I think it was a case of I realised I would never ever be different to what I am. Right? As a good Catholic boy I would say you're gonna have to go to confession every week. But every week you're going to confession, you're saying the same things. You've done the same things. And you're gonna be doing that til the end of your life. Um, when you come down to it, Christ came to die for sinners, not for saints.” (Henry')

“I wouldn't say I've ever felt bad or guilty for being gay and having certain fetishes, but what I will agree to is having been very discreet about it in the past – mainly to due public opinion and persecution. I used to feel embarrassed by the names I was called. It really hurt since I never really had the strength, of character and body, to withstand the attacks .... I never felt accepted anywhere and knew that I didn't fit in anywhere. Today it's a different story as I'm older now, a little bit wiser to the world and a lot more confident in myself. I have built up my body and have gained respect for that, even from strangers. My confidence levels have improved (though it can be stronger, or longer as in the case of my dick) and I think this is mainly due to the fact that I have accepted myself for who I am: I have been my own worst sexual enemy and there was a period from the age of about 27 to 32 where I thought my sexual prime was over and that I have lost that desire. Today, at 35, I have never had such a prolific sex life (mainly with established partners – being very careful) and I am very proud to say that I am an extreme gay fetishist, beginning to live the dream at last.” (Jason')

“in the beginning there was (a sense of shame), ... Before I came out and I realised I was gay, there was a huge sense of shame when I got chatted up by gay people. And the same was with the fetish. It was a very much hidden away, .... You know, ... my parents were fairly elderly, they were 40 when I was born, so in terms of generations, there was a generation missing, so we never got sexual education... and I think that was it: it was always restricted, it was always hidden, and even now, I mean, even up until a few years ago, when I came it was instantly clean up and hide everything away and run away. And it's only now that I've got into exploring myself more, and realising, and seeing porn videos and seeing how it's not a disgusting thing to have cum all over your chest.” (Jared')

“I think in the beginning you do. Ja, when you realise you're gay you always think somewhere something is wrong. And especially coming out of an Afrikaans home, and ja, very conservative... so in a way you do, especially the first few times I played I felt very very guilty. But after that, no. Especially once the family knew about it, they accept me for who I am. So ja. I don't have a problem there now.” (Karl')

“When I was coming to terms with who I was in my teens, I struggled to accept that I was gay, mainly because of what society's point of view on it was as well as religious upbringing. In realising I couldn't live my life to make others happy I accepted who I was and realised I'm just as entitled to be happy as everyone else.” (Simon')

## ADDENDUM 4

### NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS

4a:

Mthethwa, B (2008) “It's still not OK to be gay in SA: Survey shows 80% of population is prejudiced against same-sex relationships”. In *The Sunday Times*, 23 November 2008, Page 24

4b:

Qwelane, J (2008) Call me names, but gay is NOT OK. In *The Sunday Sun*, Sunday 20 July 2008

4c:

Evans, S (2010) Minister Slams 'Porn' Exhibition. In *The Times*, Monday 1 March 2010



# It's still not ok to be gay in SA

## Survey shows 80% of population is prejudiced against same-sex relationships

**BONGANI MTHETHWA**

SOUTH Africans may legally embrace same-sex marriages, but deep down an overwhelming majority are homophobic.

The annual South African Social Attitudes Survey, which was conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council, to be released tomorrow, shows that a staggering 80% of South Africans are still largely prejudiced against rather than accepting of gay and lesbian relationships.

The study, conducted by Ben Roberts and Kevin Reddy, found that between 2003 and 2007 more than 80% of the population consistently felt that sex between two men or two women was always wrong. It also found that gays and lesbians were characterised as "un-African" and that intolerance towards homosexuality was prevalent.

South Africa was ranked alongside countries such as

Chile and the Philippines, where intolerance towards gays and lesbians was more than five times higher than in the Netherlands.

The study, conducted annually since 2003, with sample sizes ranging from 3 164 to 5 843, used a national representative sample of respondents

**'The view that homosexuality is un-African implies that African culture is somehow unique to all other cultures'**

aged 16 and older.

The researchers found that, in the four years between 2003 and 2006, 16 to 24 year olds were significantly less likely to voice their disapproval of same-sex relations than middle-aged and older groups. There were some indications that attitudes began softening after 2005, especially

among those older than 24.

"However, it's important not to overstate the scope of the age differences, especially since in most instances more than 80% of the various age groups over all five years held negative views," said Roberts.

Views on same-sex relations appear to be closely related to

education, with highly educated people being more tolerant.

Black South Africans reported slightly higher levels of disapproval than whites and coloureds in most of the survey rounds. The most negative attitudes were found in rural areas, among those living on commercial farms and in communal

areas, while less negative attitudes were observed in formal urban areas.

Yet, given the still high level of intolerance in urban areas, combined with relative proximity to gay and lesbian communities, the potential for hate crimes in such areas was likely to be high.

Reddy said labelling homosexuality as "un-African" was part of a culture of denial and a "hostile" response to its existence. "It's an attempt to tell African gays and lesbians to 'go back into the closet' because you're a 'disgrace' to African culture," he said.

Reddy said this attitude was also linked to the stereotyped view of homosexuality as a European and Western form of perversion, "something that colonisers brought with them to contaminate African culture".

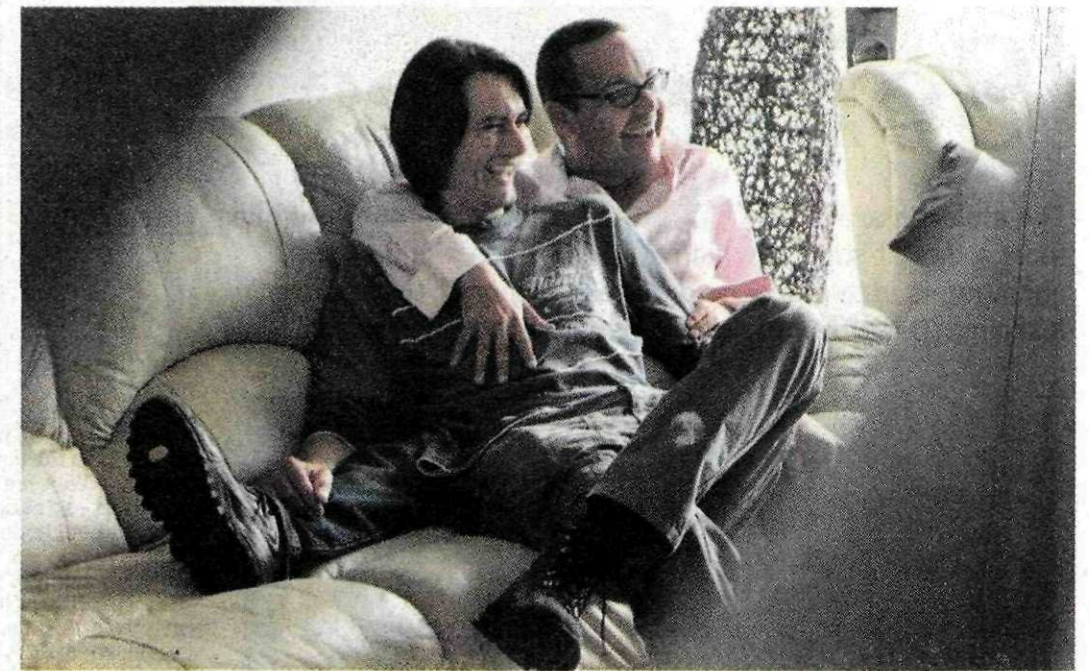
"This attitude still exists despite openly gay and lesbian Africans speaking out about

their sexuality. The view that homosexuality is un-African implies that African culture is somehow unique to all other cultures," said Reddy.

Johannesburg clinical psychologist Kevin Joubert said although it was easy to change the law, it was very difficult to change people's attitudes.

In one narrative in the *I* stories, published by Gender Links, Marco Ndlovu, a 39-year-old black lesbian from Pietermaritzburg, said: "As a lesbian, hate, violence and misogyny follow me wherever I go. I became pregnant as a result of being raped by a man I believed to be a friend. I've been beaten almost to pulp because of my sexual orientation, at the instigation of none other than my mother."

In July last year, Sizakele Sigasa and her friend Salome Masooa were tortured, raped and brutally murdered in Soweto. Sigasa was an outreach co-



WEDDING PLANS: André-B van Wyk and Wayne Scott plan to get married next year despite South Africans' prejudice against gay couples  
Picture: JACKIE CLAUSEN

ordinator for the Positive Women's Network, a lesbian rights organisation. The network said their murders appeared to be hate crime.

Pretty Makhanya, an organiser at the Lesbian and Gay

Equality Project, said: "It's a fact that lesbians and gays are getting killed out there and nothing has been done about 30 cases of gender violence. Homophobia is still alive and kicking." — mthethwab@sundaytimes.co.za



**TELL US:** Why are South Africans so intolerant of same-sex relationships? Write to [tellus@sundaytimes.co.za](mailto:tellus@sundaytimes.co.za)

**O**h dear, here we go yet again. The Anglican Church is heading for a split in its ranks, and homosexuals are the reason.

The church faces the first real schism since the day Henry VIII walked angrily out of the Catholic community to lead his own faction, because Rome would not sanction his marriage to Anne Boleyn, his brother's widow.

This time some leftists among the Anglican Communion want not only more homosexuals ordained as bishops, but women as well.

The real problem, as I see it, is the rapid degradation of values and traditions by the so-called liberal influences of nowadays; you regularly see men kissing other men in public, walking holding hands and shamelessly flaunting what are misleadingly termed their "lifestyle" and "sexual preferences".

There could be a few things I could take issue with Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, but his unflinching and unapologetic stance over homosexuals is definitely not among these.

Why, only this very month – you'd better believe this – a man, in a homosexual relationship with another man, gave birth to a child!

At least the so-called husband in that relationship hit the jackpot, making me wonder what it is these people have against the natural order of things.

And by the way, please tell the Human Rights Commission that I totally refuse to withdraw or apologise for my views.

I will write no letters to the commission either, explaining my thoughts.

**T**rouble in the Anglican Communion began when the Episcopalian fraternity in America (where else?) decided to ordain a homosexual as bishop of the flock.

Here in South Africa we had a senior officer of the church in Cape Town parading his "gay lifestyle" openly.

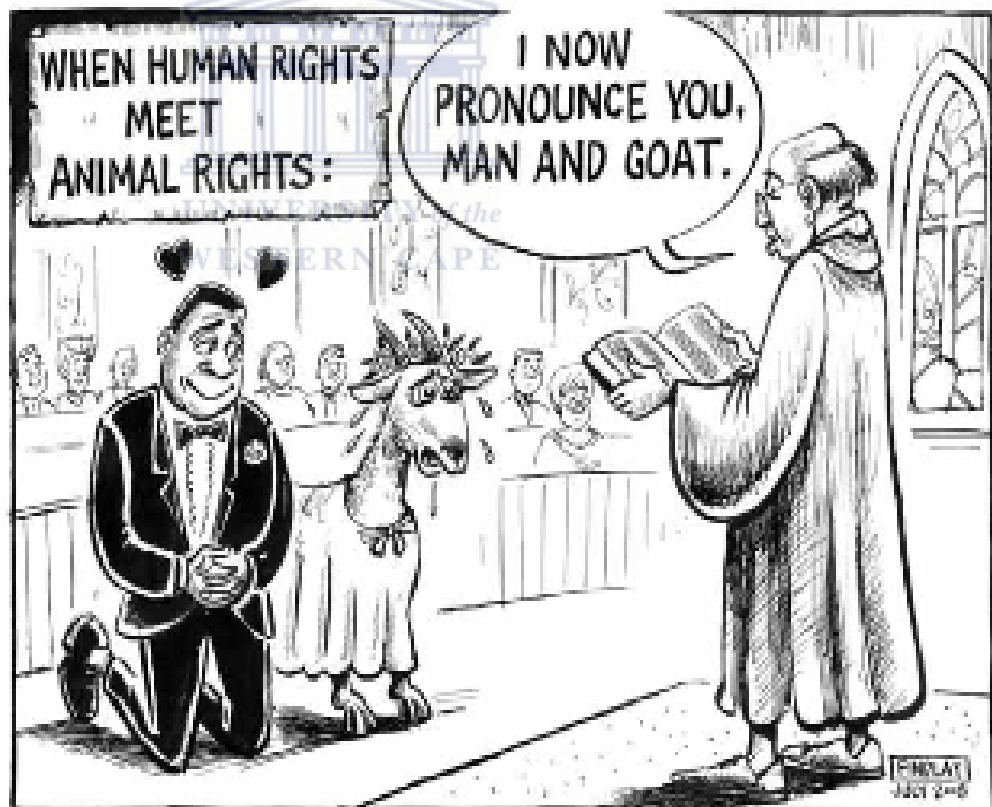
The 10-yearly Lambeth Conference in England – the gathering is the world "synod" of the church – will deliberate the delicate matter of women and homosexual bishops, among other things.

Homosexuals and their backers will call me names,

# Qwelane

WHAT'S JON GOT TO SAY THIS WEEK?

## Call me names, but gay is NOT okay...



printable and not, for stating as I have always done my serious reservations about their "lifestyle and sexual preferences", but quite frankly I don't give a damn: wrong is wrong!

I do pray that some day a bunch of politicians with their heads affixed firmly to their necks will muster the balls to rewrite the constitution of this country, to excise those sections which give li-

cence to men "marrying" other men, and ditto women.

Otherwise, at this rate, how soon before some idiot demands to "marry" an animal, and argues that this constitution "allows" it?



**Some day a bunch of politicians will muster the balls to rewrite the constitution...**

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DECEPTIVE BEAUTY: On the other side of these sluice gates at Hartbeespoort Dam is an inland sea of raw sewage and algae which has made the water undrinkable ● See the story and picture on Page 6  
Picture: DANIEL BORN

# 'This is not art!'

## Minister refuses to open exhibition after she is given preview of photographs

### EXCLUSIVE

SALLY EVANS

THE opening of an exhibition by young, black women artists at Constitution Hill turned sour when Arts and Culture Minister Lulu Xingwana stormed out of the exhibition, calling the work "immoral".

Xingwana, whose department gave R300 000 to the *Innovative Women* exhibition, which was launched in Johannesburg to coincide with Women's Day last August, left before she was due to speak at the opening.

*The Times* understands that after she saw a series of photographs by prominent artist and lesbian activist Zanele Muholi, of naked, black women embracing each other, Xingwana slammed the work as

"pornographic", spoke to her aides, and left in a huff. Her personal assistant read out her speech.

Yesterday, Xingwana confirmed that she had "indeed" left the event without addressing the gathering.

In a statement read by her spokeswoman Lisa Combrinck, Xingwana said: "Our mandate is to promote social cohesion and nation building. I left the exhibition because it expressed the very opposite of this.



ZANELE MUHOLI



LULU XINGWANA

"It was immoral, offensive and going against nation-building."

Combrinck said: "Minister Xingwana was also concerned that there were children present at the event and that children should not be exposed to some of the images on exhibit."

*The Times* understands that the day after the opening, Xingwana complained to staff at Constitution Hill about the "pornographic" content of the art on display.

Insiders, who spoke to *The Times* on condition of anonymity, said Xingwana did not

like the images of women posing as couples.

However, Xingwana denied that any such complaints were relayed to Constitution Hill.

The *Innovative Women* exhibition featured work by 10 artists including Muholi, photographer Nandipha Mntambo, and painter Bongi Bengu, who also curated the exhibition.

The exhibition was also shown in Durban and Cape Town.

While viewing the artwork, Xingwana appeared most upset by the work of Muholi and Mntambo, which deals with intimacy between women.

Speaking to *The Times* from the US where she is exhibiting and lecturing, Muholi said she was "very disturbed" by Xingwana's views.

● Continued on Page 4



# 'Immoral, offensive and against nation-building



ALL-EMBRACING: Three of Zanele Muholi's photographs, as they appeared in the catalogue for the exhibition 'Innovative Women'

Pictures: ZANELE MUHOLI

## ● From Page 1

"There is nothing pornographic. We live in a space where rape is a common thing, so there is nothing we can hide from our children.

"Those pictures are based on experience and issues. Where else can we express ourselves if not in our democratic country?"

"Children need to know about these things. A lot of people who have no understanding of sexual orientation, people are suffering in silence," Muholi said.

"We need to educate people about homosexuality. We need to

have very good treatment and respect from the minister."

*The Times* has learned that after the exhibition opening, Xingwana demanded to know why it was not censored and why her department had contributed R300 000 to it.

Although Xingwana denies this, three insiders told *The Times* that after the department's lawyers found nothing pornographic about the art, she then called in lawyers from a Pretoria law firm to "inspect" the work. Insiders said they were flown to Cape Town for the opening of the exhibition there to

decide whether the art was "suitable as art or not".

The exhibiting artists told *The Times* many artists feel there is no place for them in South Africa.

### 'It is worrisome to artists that what we do will be censored'

One said: "It is worrisome to artists that everything we do is going to be censored.

"There is no room for us in South Africa, so we are having

to relocate overseas, where our work is recognised and appreciated because sadly it is not in South Africa."

Mntambo, who did not attend the exhibition opening, said she found Xingwana's views "irritating and sad".

"I was quite surprised by what happened. I actually found out just after I had done a presentation on censorship," she said.

Mntambo said she received funding from international sponsors or from private individuals.

"I don't even apply for funding from the department. I like being

able to do what I want to do, it's really important," she said.

In the exhibition's catalogue, Muholi's artwork has been described as being "without precedent in South Africa, where there are very few instances of black women openly portraying female same-sex practices."



## HAVE YOUR SAY

Do you think the pictures are pornographic?

tellus@thetimes.co.za  
or SMS 33971

Each SMS costs R1.50