



FANTASIZING

**AN INTRODUCTORY
BIBLIOGRAPHY ON
FEMALE SEXUALITY
THROUGH THE
P A T R I A R C H A L
U N C O N S C I O U S**

STILLP•INT

A MAGAZINE IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the development of my own sexual consciousness within a fairly bourgeois family, where sexuality was mostly repressed and not talked about, I found sexual imaginings mostly in early 2000s pop culture and mainstream porn. Now, having matured somewhat into a critical student completing my second degree in the department of Psychology after a few years in Cultural Studies and corresponding intellectual training in feminist theories, a few things have always remained unclear to me: Why are women not cumming? Why is it so hard for my female friends (myself included) to articulate our own desires? Why does it feel like there is so little help and information on this very central aspect of our lives? Is there really something wrong with us, or is there something wrong with the structures that make us into the beings that we are—structures that lie deeper than our political worldviews and general success at living autonomous lives?

Having access now to the realms of psychoanalytic discourse, I decided to attempt to look for pathways into the unconscious fantasies that generate desire. The question I would like to pursue is how these unconscious fantasies are inscribed with the patriarchal logic that seems to rule sexual differences and access to the power over who has access to autonomous pleasure. As to be expected, across psychoanalytic literature I encountered a number of variations of female desire and sexual function, which were portrayed as fascinating but largely enigmatic and mysterious tropes (Freud himself only specifically addresses male desire, while female desire remains a deviant form or codependent response to male desire). But since Foucault, those who follow psychoanalytically-influenced social critique know that the state of sex is always representative for the state of society and its power structures at large¹. So the mystification of female sexuality can be seen not so much as a description of the thing itself, but rather, as an intentional power tool utilized

¹ see Foucault, Michel (1990) [1984]. The History of Sexuality Volume 3: The Care of the Self. London: Penguin Books.

to legitimize masculine control in the sexual – and by extension in the social – sphere while eliminating responsibility for the lack of female sexual satisfaction (after all, the full physiological extent of the clitoris has only been “discovered” in 1998 by Helen O’Connell!)².

The prevalence of female sexual dysfunction as defined by the WHO’s classification of diseases ICD-10³ in the US is estimated at around 43%. However, the data to support these statistics varies greatly. Indeed, most studies concerning sexual function were conducted in the 1990s, often lacking methodological precision and therefore have questionable credibility (Simons, Carey 2001). Both the alarmingly high incidences of sexual dysfunction, as well as its insufficient statistical support indicate that there might be a bias in the way psychological research is dealing with the topic. Some of the studies, for example, only used three participants, which is obviously not a representative number for any statistical result, while others differed so greatly in their operationalization of sexuality that their results can barely be compared. Though this gap in the data might be caused by a decline in therapeutic attention to sexual problems and their connection to other mental health issues, there remains an open question as to why this is rarely the subject of contemporary psychological scientific research, while questions of gender and sexuality continue to rise in all other social disciplines.

Wondering about the connection between the structure of sexual desire and the fantasies underlying its production, and the way collective, societal imaginations and narratives of being have inscribed themselves into our unconscious, this bibliography can be seen as an entrypoint or a specific theoretical path into uncovering the discursive structures and the linguistic patterns that seem to endlessly repeat the impossibility of articulating female sexual subjectivity. This collection is currently a work-in-progress, and by no means complete, but my aim is to arrive at a place of depathologization of sexual dysfunction, identifying it not as a personal problem, but rather revealing how phallogocentric intrications are enmeshed in psychoanalytic theory itself. At the same time, I use psychoanalytic tools to delineate those very structures and possibly to find a way out of them. The chosen texts represent both popular psychoanalytic theories and their reception from other theorists, as well as lesser known texts by contemporary thinkers that are not part of any mainstream canon. It aims to find playful modes out of phallogocentric power issues and into new rhythms of pleasure.

²“Anatomy of the Clitoris” by Helen E. Connell, K a l a v a m p a r a V. Sanjeevan & John M. Hutson appeared in 2005 in Volume 174 Issue 4 of The Journal of Urology. You can find it by following this link: [10.1097/01.ju.0000173639.38898.cd](https://pubs.rsos.royalsocietypublishing.org/journal/rsos/10.1097/01.ju.0000173639.38898.cd)

³You can find entries for sexual dysfunction in the *International Classification of Diseases* Volume 10 by following this link: <https://icd.who.int/browse10/2016/en#/F52.0>

**FANTASME
ORIGINAIRE.
FANTASMES
DES ORIGINES,
ORIGINES DU
FANTASME
(FANTASY AND THE ORIGINS OF SEXUALITY)
JEAN LAPLANCHE & J. B. PONTALIS**

In this text, Laplanche deals with the dialectic field between fantasy, imagination, reality, and the psychic life. In it, he contemplates Freud's descriptions of the "primal scene" as an anthropological universal, something that every person experiences, regardless of the actual event. The primal scene, in Freudian theory, is understood as the child witnessing their parents having intercourse. This event might be real or imagined, but either way it generates an origin fantasy for the sexual development of the individual.

Fantasy, according to Laplanche and Pontalis, is the part of the pleasure principle that prevails throughout the principle of reality that forces the psyche to relate to an outside world, the ultimate expression of the unconscious wish. The primal fantasies then, understood as original unconscious, can be separated into two levels: fantasy (unconscious/repressed) and secondary (conscious/daydream). These primal fantasies provide the stage upon which questions of origin are negotiated, and they function as a translator for what seems real to the subject. This presumed reality is produced in the dramatization of primal fantasies and takes place in the auto-erotic dimensions of the psyche. They are an in between space of enigma and translation.

PAGE 36:

The concept of 'primal fantasy' [fantasme originaire] combines what could be called Freud's quest, the rock, to find the source of the event (and when it disappears in the history of the individual to be decomposed and simplified, one simply starts higher, rises higher...), as well as the claim to base one's own structure of fantasy on something other than the event.

(translation is the author's own)

**A B O U T
THIS TEXT:**

Originally published as a stand-alone text in French in 1985. It appeared a year later in English within the book *Formations of Fantasy*, edited by Victor Burgin, James Donald & Cora Kaplan.

THE QUEERNESS OF THE DRIVE

TERESA DE LAURETIS

Are there ways in which the drive theory, the Freudian idea of libido and sexual energy, can be conceptualized as inherently queer – thereby unhinging sexuality from heteronormative constraints of a presumed normality and its deviant others? De Lauretis follows Laplanche’s theory of a distinction between gender and sexuality, who argues that the sexual is the unconscious, “initially the primal unconscious and subsequently the repressed unconscious; finally it is the untranslatable” while gender is “an assignment within the social that is received or translated at the conscious–preconscious level”. This distinction allows for sexuality to be separated from gender-assignment, and thereby from the pseudo-biological entrapments by which it is often accompanied. According to Laplanche, gender identity is formed earlier than—but doesn’t organize—sexual identity.

De Lauretis describes the sexual drive as an “internal alien entity” since it lives in the unconscious and feeds off repressed memories. This inaccessible and uncontrollable position offers the opportunity to interpret sexuality as inherently deviant, which would open the question of the ways in which normative sexuality represents a pathology.

PAGE 1:

Laplanche’s rereading of Freud leads to a more complex understanding of sexuality as always deviant, in one way or another and to a greater or lesser degree, from the established social norms. So-called sexual deviance, therefore, is not a problem within the sexual but an issue within the social field.

**A B O U T
THIS TEXT:**

Published in the *Journal of Homosexuality*, Volume 62, Issue 14 (2017). 16 pages.

DISCUSSION OF GREEN'S "MELANIE KLEIN & THE BLACK MAMMY: AN EXPLORATION OF THE INFLUENCE OF THE MAMMY STEREOTYPE ON KLEIN'S MATERNAL AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE 'WHITENESS' OF PSYCHOANALYSIS"

ANDREW ASIBONG

One of the largest blind spots of psychoanalytic theory is its continuous obliviousness to its own assumed White universality. The complete denial of the inherent racialization of psychoanalytic ideas is only slowly getting excavated, in part, because the psychoanalytic community itself is in such a large part white. This essay by Andrew Asibong engages with Melanie Klein's conception of the Black Mammy stereotype and how it relates to her thinking about "infantile violence and the projective assaults of hatred and envy to which the maternal figure is subjected" (184). It highlights the fact that at the core of psychoanalytic thinking there are deeply rooted racialized fantasies, often traumatic and abject, which then are turned into universal stories about human behavior. Though this does not immediately relate to female sexual pleasure, it is crucial to remain conscious of these silenced traces in reading psychoanalytic theory, as well as mapping out the processes of structural racism and sexual and gendered violence that are inscribed into it. Accordingly, any psychoanalytic theory about female sexuality has to be examined towards its reference to white femininity as universal and the ways in which racialized structures are inscribed/positioned/eliminated from its narratives.

PAGE 184:

... Contemporary institutionalized psychoanalysis, Kleinian or otherwise, remains frightened and frightening in the policing of its own White borders: It does not want to be subjected to anything resembling a racialized or racializing gaze, and it certainly does not wish to be infiltrated by conscious or visible Blackness.

**A B O U T
THIS TEXT:**

Published in
*Studies in Gender
and Sexuality*,
Volume 19, Issue
3 (2018). 5 pages.

C O N F U S I O N O F T O N G U E S B E T W E E N A D U L T S & T H E C H I L D S Á N D O R F E R E N C Z I

Ferenczi is thought of as the first psychoanalytic thinker to conceptualize trauma. In this text, which was presented as a lecture for the International Psychoanalytic Congress in Wiesbaden in 1932, he highlights the traumatic moment in Freud's seduction theory, thereby locating the experience of trauma at the root of sexuality. In the tender play between caretaker and child, the adult may confuse affective intimacy with his own conscious or unconscious sexual fantasies and project adult eroticism onto the infant. The child, unable to decipher these messages would then identify with the parent and introject their feelings of guilt in order to maintain the tender loving relationship to the adult. An innocent dynamic of play can thus lead to a punishable event. This traumatic origin of sexuality is further developed in Laplanche's theory and can be related to de Lauretis's suggestion that sexuality is always deviant. Though this text does not refer to gender differences around this moment of seduction, it has implications for a reading with regard to patriarchal culture in which the sexualized desire of fathers for their daughters is a normalized trope that is continually displayed in various formations, thereby also normalizing a possible source of trauma.

PAGE 206:

Psychoanalysis willingly agrees with the Cartesian idea that passions are brought about by suffering, but perhaps will have to find an answer to the question of what it is that introduces the element of suffering, and with it sado-masochism, into the playful gratifications at the level of tenderness.

**A B O U T
THIS TEXT:**

Published in *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, Volume 24, Issue 2 (1988). 20 pages. It was originally written by Ferenczi in 1932.

THE RAP I E SEXUELLER STÖRUNGEN (THERAPY OF SEXUAL DYSFUNCTIONS) VOLKMAR H. SIGUSCH

In order to maintain a more direct connection to the clinical setting, I've added this edition by one of the major German researchers in sexual psychology. It is a clinical guide for the treatment of sexual dysfunctions, covering psychoanalytic as well as cognitive behavioral models of treatment and etiology. I include it in this collection to highlight the relevance of sexuality for clinical practice and to reference the available therapeutic models dealing with issues around sexuality. In the chapter about psychoanalytic approaches, N. Becker defines sexuality as posing four major risks to the ego:

1. risks arising from rivalry-generating differences, gender and gender roles
2. risks, which are caused by the fact that aggressive desires are always expressed in the sexual act
3. risks associated with orgasmic regression, with the loss of control in ecstasy and with the partial loss of self in orgasmic merging with the partner
4. risks associated with the female generative function of conception, pregnancy and birth

These risks produce conflicts that then can lead to the symptomatic behavior that we know as the various modes of sexual dysfunction as listed in the ICD-10. I would argue that women (as socialized subjects, not in their biological function) are much more vulnerable to at least three of those risks, which would lead to an increased probability of symptomatology that should be related to larger social structures.

PAGE 13:

The unique thing about sexual dysfunction is ... that the sexual function of the adult, which has undergone extensive development and ego transformation in childhood and adolescence, is disturbed when it is used by the ego in a certain way to ward off neurotic conflicts.

(translation is the author's own)

A B O U T
THIS TEXT:

Published in German in 1975 by Georg Thieme Verlag publishers. 287 pages.

LOVING SUBJECTS: NARRATIVES OF FEMALE DESIRE

DOREEN **D'CRUZ**

The psychoanalytic narratives of female desire as articulated in Freudian and Lacanian theory, though differing, unite in the central point according to which a subject position and female desire are mutually exclusive conditions. Femininity equals being an object (always in relation to others) while masculinity inhabits a subject position. For Freud this is the result of the Oedipal drama and Penis Envy and for Lacan it is the logical consequence of the symbolic order of the Phallus. As a way out of this fixed destiny, in which the female is the inevitable loser, other psychoanalytic theorists like Klein have argued that female sexuality may be located in the pre-Oedipal stage where the physical connection between mother and child is at the center of life. D'Cruz criticizes this latter approach since it "dislocates [female sexuality] from both temporality and language" (19) and instead, follows Luce Irigaray's suggestion that phallogocentric language is only one way to speak among many, and that in fact, there can be different languages and therefore different ways to understand desire and its relation to the unconscious.

Though the suggestion of a new language seems tempting, a simple dissociation from existing linguistic parameters seems idealist while it also remains unclear how to get to the space from where such a new language could be uttered.

PAGE XXIII:

The cultural fetishization of the penis may be one reason – though certainly not the only reason – that women have historically been especially prone to bad feelings such as depression and anxiety: it's harder to feel good when you can't hide behind a fantasy of omnipotence.

**A B O U T
THIS TEXT:**

Book published
by Peter Lang
Publishing Inc.
(2003). 295 pages.

PENIS ENVY & OTHER BAD FEELINGS: THE EMOTIONAL COSTS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

MARI **RUTI**

Ruti's work engages in a rather playful approach to psychoanalytic theory and Freud's famous concept of Penis Envy. Instead of a signifier for anatomical difference, she interprets the penis as the signifier of power which evidently evokes jealousy for women, and at the same time, provides a central moment of gender organization. Drawing on her own personal experiences as a child in Finland, and later within the North American academic world, she explores how the lack of the penis, and therefore access to natural power, can lead to a variety of bad feelings, including envy, anxiety and depression. Additionally, living in a neoliberal world of self-improvement, productivity and the marketing of everything (including gender norms), these bad feelings are simultaneously evoked and demonized (since they represent our collective repression of bad feelings). She tells us about carrying a pen to all of her lectures, which functions as a surrogate phallus, enabling her to access and inhabit a position of power. This scene relates directly to the Lacanian symbolic order in which gender and sexuality are organized around symbols that are based on Language and the fantasies produced by it. At the center of this order is the Phallus, or the 'Name-of-the-Father' while the female position, according to the Lacanian logic, is impossible and therefore nonexistent.

PAGE 4:

The relegation of female desire to the pre-Oedipal mode would exclude women from a desire that could find shape, form, and symbolic material both within the real-world temporal sequence and within the sequence of narrative. Further, postulating a desire that exists outside time and language confuses the very notion of desire.

**A B O U T
THIS TEXT:**

Book published
by Columbia
University Press
(2018). 288 pages.

A STUDY RESOURCE FOR *STILLPOINT* MAGAZINE BY AMELIE WITTENBERG

STILLPOINT MAGAZINE curates contemporary writers and artists to uncover what is behind the self.

STILLPOINT MAGAZINE inhabits digital spaces to build public knowledge that's rooted in community psychoanalysis and in collective, multiple, inclusive, radical, and hidden truths.

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