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## 7: On Not Thinking Straight.

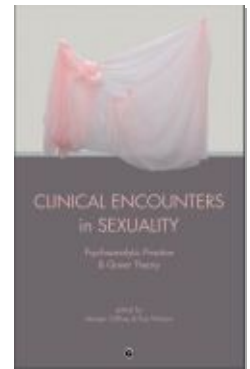
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SECTION 2

# PSYCHOANALYTIC RESPONSES



## On Not Thinking Straight: Comments on a Conceptual Marriage

*R.D. Hinshelwood<sup>1</sup>*

[T]he engagement of queer theory with psychoanalysis [...] is predominantly critical, psychoanalysis being seen as a theory and set of practices that rigidify rather than open up the sexual field.  
— Frosh 2006, 248

It is ironic. Psychoanalysis was born in the context of sexual transgression — the theory of seduction, and the Oedipal theory. The plethora of sexualities was suddenly open to be known, and in principle to be known in all of us. But, for normative reasons, powerful a hundred years ago, in no time at all, that opening door spawned the “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” (Freud 1905); it became a classic that could easily be read as experts in the clinic normalizing categories of sexuality, and defining the abnormal. No wonder queer theory has a thoroughly mixed reaction — but to be fair, the selection in this book is a respectful one. On being asked to add a comment on the chapters in section one, I looked forward to the challenge. They amass a “report” on the progress of the two innocent suit-

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<sup>1</sup> I need to acknowledge the help of Aaron Balick’s comments on a previous version of this chapter.

ors in finding a way forward together. What can one add to the promise of their new relationship?

### Changing Tack

The emphasis on sexuality and libido was solidified in the dispute with Carl Jung and Alfred Adler, so that sexuality and the Oedipus complex were promoted as the exclusive foundation of the human personality, transcending culture and history. However from 1911, Freud's trajectory was already changing. His analysis of the Schreber "case" had led him to pursue an increasing interest in identity, the ego, and the reality-principle. More recently, with the demise of ego-psychology and drive theory, and with the increasing importance of Kleinian psychoanalysis, self-psychology and the relational turn in general, the psychoanalysis of sexuality has become secondary, or at least contingent on the analysis of narcissism, personal identity, and the relatedness to others. This does not mean that orgasmic and non-orgasmic sexualities lack attention, but that sexuality is an ingredient, rather than the whole cake-mix. What is foremost now in a psychoanalysis is to outline the shape of a human personality, its coherence and its inner core of identity.

In this book which questions the nature of desire, it might be worth considering a move towards an object-relations approach and relinquishing the territory occupied by desire theories. Sexuality is nothing if not desire and ecstasy, but that is not at issue. It is the paraphernalia of identity that goes with it, both personal identity and social identity. For these purposes it is necessary to be clear about the postulate on which object-relations theory is grounded — the libido is primarily object-relating, rather than drive satisfying (Fairbairn 1944).

As a Kleinian, the consistent resort to Lacanian psychoanalysis and some post-Lacanian (notably Jean Laplanche and Luce Irigaray) in these texts seems a little one-track, all the eggs in one basket — almost equivalent to a straight phallic identity! A degree of flexibility might be warranted. Jacques Lacan and his audiences were molded in the climate created by Michel Fou-

cault and the post-war suspicion of social engineering in France. But across the Channel, welfarism in Britain implied a very different view of the individual within his society — perhaps a maternal view of a nurturing culture (Zaretsky 1999). A different psychoanalysis burgeoned.

### Fluid identities

In the object-relations approach, identity is a matter of relations, and to a degree follows Freud's (1921) view that psychology is more or less always social psychology; i.e., it is always about relations with the family, first, and then expanded into social relations growing out of those early ones. Freud quoted Gustave LeBon (1895) to the effect that a person is not quite the same in a group as he is when alone. The fact that social relations affect personal identity therefore has a long history in classical psychoanalysis. Freud (1921) put a lot of effort into understanding how this happened. He used his notion of introjection, which at the time he called "identification" (Freud 1917). Something of society, in the form of the people to whom the subject relates, gets inside the person, and significantly affects the way that person feels, thinks, and behaves. Not only is personal identity influenced by a group, but it is influenced in different ways according to the group of which one is presently a member. Thus personal identity has a potential to reshape itself as one moves from group to group during one's day. I can say that when I write my academic papers sitting in my sun-lounge, I am reaching for a particular identification, and that is somewhat modified from the "me" that goes and feeds the horses in the stables, or the "me" that reads a bed-time story to one of my grand-children. These are performances; the fluid movement between each is absolutely in line with the queer theory proposition about the fluidity of human sexuality. Thus identifications may be chosen, and chosen from a social context. However, identity itself is a little different.

## Identity and Identifications

The dominant notion of the individual is a discrete, stand-alone individual, with satisfactions to satisfy, and ambitions to achieve. No matter that the nature of this identity has varied from the rationalist “*Cogito ergo sum*” to the consumerist, “I am what I buy,” the individual is expected to experience himself as a relatively inflexible monument of human nature. In contrast, since 1917, when Freud used the term “identification,” a psychoanalytic version of a highly flexible inner world of identifications has become relatively commonplace. A kaleidoscopic representative world inside each person, suggests that psychoanalysis is counter-cultural, not positing a from-the-beginning unitary individual. Freud (1923) referred to the ego as “a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes” (29), a kind of psychic wardrobe of potential identities. Through the day I am selecting from the “identity-wardrobe” of my unconscious, what I will “be” for the moment. There is a sense in which the individual is a truly disaggregated person.<sup>2</sup> Psychoanalysis never developed this into a proper theorization that could have helped queer theory.<sup>3</sup>

Within and amongst this whirlwind of possible identifications where is “identity” found? A sense of personal identity is socially prescribed out there; and at the same time, psychoanalytically-speaking, there is a churning mass of possibilities inside here. And yet, for most of us, some “thing” holds all the possibilities together, and for that we might continue to use the term “identity,” as opposed to the separate potentialities of the identifications. Through all these variegated identifications, there is a thread which knows it is me all the time. There is a kind of “core” left, which keeps safe the knowledge of who it is that performs unconsciously in these identification roles (Hinshelwood 1989, 1997). One might think of Donald Winnicott’s

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2 The serial assumption of identifications might be better called multiple rather than fluid (Balick 2008)

3 Judith Butler (Salih 2002) has made significant headway in thinking through this notion of internalized identities.

(1960) phrase, a sense of “the continuity of being” (591), which if interrupted leads potentially towards psychosis. This is a very slimmed-down role for the notion of “identity,” the stability of which is an existential necessity. In this sense identity is to be distinguished from “identification.” Identity is thus a potentiality, a hitching post onto which different identifications may be hung, according to the unconscious influencing of social groups and relationships.

I offer this as a working model to render the war between essentialism and constructivism more manageable than it normally is between disciplines across the social/individual boundary. As Ian Craib (1995) remarked:

My professional life is divided between sociology and psychoanalysis (as a group psychotherapist) and I have become used to the idea that these two worlds know nothing about each other and that when sociologists comment on emotion, they do so with the same sensitivity and understanding that psychoanalysts display when commenting on society — which is (to put not too fine a point on it) none at all. (151)

This book is dedicated to straddling the disciplines and therefore the antagonism of the essentialist/constructivist battleground. In the formulation in this section, there exists some sort of essential experience of identity — though at the outset it is empty; whilst there is no doubt that what fills in the empty category of identity is a set of multiple identifications, precipitates of relational experiences as they have been performed and experienced, and moreover as they have been implicitly required by the prevailing discourse. The value of such a distinction between identity and identifications has not, to my knowledge, been as productively explored in queer theory as it might.

### Sexuality and Stability

However if the stability of personal identity is necessary to avoid consequences as bad as psychosis, then fluidity is likely to be



personally threatening. The nature of the ego and other aspects of personal identity have become the focus of psychoanalytic examination since Freud's (1911, 1914) consideration of narcissism, and have over the years become a more dominant tradition. The stability of the ego has taken precedence in the treatment situation over the conflicts within it.

In some cases, sexuality may be a support to an identity where it is felt by the subject to be weak or inconstant or fragmented. Certainly, sexual identity is a common enough notion, and something which many people feel a need to be sure of in themselves and others (Balick 2010). It can bolster the sense of self, and the relatedness in one's environment. Perhaps the sexual revolution of the twentieth century, which psychoanalysis helped to promote, may have in fact enhanced the need in many quarters for a clear sexual identity. To adopt a strategy of fluid sexual identity may therefore be problematic by undermining some more foundational sense of stability and inner security. One major support to stable identity is the physical entity of the body. This might be less well expressed by, "who am I?" than if we changed it to, "where am I?" I am where this organic, lumpish body of mine is. My sense of being is indissolubly glued to this physical mass. So, one of the massive resources for bolstering a sense of identity is one's body, its felt existence, and most intensely, the sexual feelings which are as glued to the body as the sense of identity.

The view of identity as a core element of psychological stability is essentialist, and so works against the basically Foucauldian notion of the social construction of identity. One problem is that social constructionism equates identifications (performances) with identity. On that score, its undermining of enduring identifications with specific sexual performances makes sense as a campaign against sexual prejudices of various kinds. At the same time it threatens the sense of identity. But if we unhook identity from identification, then a campaign against a stable identification does not destabilize a core sense of identity.

I would claim in fact that I am following Freud by describing identifications as fluid, whilst identity is a stable fulcrum. It

is important therefore in promoting a “fluidity of sexual identity,” that it is sexual *identifications* — i.e., performances — that should be fluid. Such a conceptual strategy entails acknowledging an essentialist basis for identity; it is an innate potential, a given; but in the formulation I propose, identity is content free. That is, the ego may freely explore a wide variety of identifications (including sexual performances) without loss of its needed stability.

### Freedom and Ethics

Identifications are mostly constituted by performance. And sexuality is a performance with another who is equally performing within an identification. So, sexual identifications are performative and relational. Because they are actions in the context of relationships with other sexual “actors,” they therefore have an integral ethical aspect. Thus an identification sought by one person, implies a complementary identification accepted by their partner. As a result good/bad evaluations creep back into sexual preferences and performances. What does one partner press his other to perform? It is unrealistic to plead for a non-judgmental attitude to all sexual acts since, clearly, some sexual relations can be violating, either bodily, financially or psychologically.

And license for even straight sex can only be seriously allowed between consenting adults. In addition, some relations, even when sexual satisfactions are freely agreed, e.g., extra-marital affairs, have to be carefully negotiated with an eye to the benefits and deficits for all concerned. In short, the identifications taken up require the consenting agreement of partners to reciprocate. In many cases of course — no problem. Very many straight couples are happy enough to divide up the binaries: active-passive, thrusting-receptive, etc., etc., in a relatively long-standing arrangement — though some couples will alternate in various imaginative inventions. However such performative compliance could be forced on the partner — and sado-masochism is a case in point. In the extreme, a rapist will automatically require his “other” to suffer the identification of a rape victim. As is well

known, the fantasy of being a rape victim is not uncommon at all, but the ethical situation makes the actual performance of such an identification very problematic.

So there are inevitably limiting conditions to performative identifications since they require compliance with a complementary identification. This ethical aspect to sexuality as relational may not sit well with the standard notion of self-actualization for everyone. But self-actualization carried to extremes can warrant exploitative violations of others.<sup>4</sup> Identifications which require the other's compliance with a complimentary identification should be limited by the usual informed consent. Finally, there is a question if sexual performers should be fluid, and whether that is already a directive on the way to a sort of rigid counter-prejudice. Such a requirement needs to be permissive, not obligatory — that is to say, society could permit fluid sexualities, rather than oblige people to be more fluid.

#### Inner Performance and Ethical Boundaries

Even with solitary masturbation, there is invariably an accompanying “masturbatory phantasy” about some sexual object however inanimate or fetishistic. The adoption of an identifica-

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4 The severe restriction of identification, including sexual identifications, is a violation of the personality. Such constriction of others into performances could be the basis of a psychoanalytical formulation of unethical action at an unconscious level. That is a principle of personal integration, and can be a basis for professional and general ethics (Hinshelwood 1997), as well as being applicable to an ethics of sexual roles and performances. A Kleinian version of this principle would involve the notion of splitting; the complementary identifications are separated (split) apart. The phenomenology of unconscious splitting in a Kleinian mold would allow more subtle understanding of the adoption of one or other complementary identifications. A splitting that is permanent and unhealing, leaving the partners wedded to a particular identification, would probably be unethical, whereas a splitting in which the identifications are fluid would be ethical (perhaps even identification with non-compliance). Whether such a principle of unconscious splitting could ever be part of a formal ethics is debatable; as is the question whether (given the human unconscious) such an unconscious principle could even be completely excluded from a workable ethics.

tion implies at the outset an inner performance with an other (internal object). Inward performances are potentially as arousing and as satisfying as proximity with an actual other. In fact, no sexual action takes place without it being action with the “other in the mind.” In the inner arena, the ethical constraints are relaxed. Murder in the mind is not murder. So too are exploitation and violation in the mind. Ethical issues arise when inner fantasy is transferred to an actual partner. Then freedom and ethics may clash.

However this “innocent” internal activity becomes an important consideration because some people may have a weak sense of that boundary between inner and actual. For them it is easy to overstep the mark. And it may be the case that for most of us, at high levels of intense arousal, the boundary is much more easily breached — people are tempted to “let go” if extremely excited. As a result, society has taken on itself a policing function as a means of protecting the vulnerable. And perhaps it should, but it seems to have stepped from policing a boundary to controlling the inner life of personal fantasy. Maybe that inward policing is exemplified in the actual policing of sexual material on the internet.

However the social policing job is strongly assisted by the subject himself. Even to imagine oneself a homosexual can become a self-loathing. This is understood by psychoanalysts as the function of the super-ego. However, on occasions — and non-straight sex is one of those occasions — the super-ego over-functions through being socially supported. Both internal factors and external social forces aim at “civilizing” individuals. Excessive policing over and above the real requirement is not uncommon, and was termed “surplus repression” by Herbert Marcuse (1955). This civilizing principle seems to derive from the economic requirements of society — and repression of sexuality is sublimated in labor activity. The apparatus of the super-ego appears to be the point of access by which the social exerts its intrusive influence over the individual, whether economic or ethical. The essential plasticity and polymorphous nature of hu-

man sexuality is the site upon which social forces most easily and frequently play.

Queer theory engages with the judgmentalism about sexual performances, and it can deploy a counter-judgement, a prejudice against prejudice! It requires a stronger theory of prejudice. Invalid evaluations of conduct, normalizing and pathologizing need some reference to the psychoanalytic theory of the super-ego. That is to say we need to understand exactly how social norms get inside the individual. A straightforward appeal to the pressurizing effects of power may not be sufficient. It would seem at least necessary to consider that there are internal mechanisms for receiving and accepting such socializing pressures. It would seem at least necessary to consider that such a two-sided knife sustains the wounds of prejudice. Given the resistance that prejudice always displays towards dissolving away, it would seem a little lacking in flexibility not to consider all the possibilities.

#### Prescription versus Description

Restricted to a social power theory of personality construction, there are therefore equally restricted possibilities for action. Power theories are one of the reasons for the temptation to counter-judge others, and to attempt to create a “powerful” restatement of sexual norms and mores, in order to change the dominant class and the dominant language traditions. Such a prescriptive approach is understandably tempting. But queer theory itself is culture-bound and socially located. Are there alternatives to a confrontation of power — a frequently sterile confrontation between the traditional and the progressive?

A kind of praxis that is not prescriptive — for instance, descriptive — must be a possibility. At its best psychoanalysis itself is a descriptive “science,” not a prescriptive brainwashing (though psychoanalysis can often seem so). In fact, what psychoanalysts do is to give a description as best they can of inter-

nal states, addressed to the very state of mind itself.<sup>5</sup> There is a power in simply revealing the state of affairs. To turn once again to the old-fashioned terminology of Western Marxism, pointing out the falseness of a false consciousness is empowering (Lukács 1920); and this prompted the development over the years of a strategy for “consciousness raising.” Queer theory might adopt such a program of its own; that is to gain the conscious awareness of at least a Western population, of the polymorphous nature of human sexuality. This is the message of Freud’s (1905) early ambiguous book, “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality.” There is passivity buried in the most active of sexual actors, there is sado-masochism in all-loving encounters, there are aspects of homosexuality that are foundational in heterosexual relationships.

## Conclusions

Queer theory applies where queer prejudice is. Psychoanalysis has not always been a solid ally. But there is a radical and critical leverage in the British object-relations tradition. It brings the pre-occupations with relationships into the inner reality of the individual, and at the same time, a much closer correspondence with the social relatedness of human beings to each other. The notion results in a picture of a changing, fluid world of unconscious connections to others, to groups. That this everyday journey around one’s inner population is relatively freer as far as non-sexual living is concerned should promise the possibility of a continual loosening up of the sexual identifications. This implies a stabilized identity (without specific characteristics) within a world of identifications.

As Stephen Frosh (2006) concluded in his not-unsympathetic critique of psychoanalysis, “That psychoanalysis has a long

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5 It is true that psychoanalysts do not address themselves to the social influences of power and privilege in the context in which their analysands live, but that is because psychoanalysis is not about that. It is about internal states. That is what psychoanalysis is good at, but analysts should not deny the impact of factors and forces outside their own ken.

road to travel before it comes to terms with homosexuality can hardly be in doubt, but perhaps the journey begins here” (250). He meant that sexuality should allow for differences and multiplicity. The fact that the broad potential for sexualities may be prematurely and unnecessarily cut off in many people, seems to be a matter of social prescription, and psychoanalytic description.

Though psychoanalysis has a reflective and descriptive intent, this has not prevented it being used in that normalizing way—given the powerful prejudicial tendencies in all members of (at least Western) society. Nor have psychoanalysts been particularly reticent about the use of psychoanalysis itself as gatekeeper to the profession and its Institutes. Instead of the knee-jerk reaction, homosexuality bad, heterosexuality good, it would be better to investigate if there are patterns of unhealth specific for homosexuality, and moreover the patterns of unhealth specific for heterosexuality, as well. Don't we need the courage to explore on either side?

Rightly queer theory has not always been respectful of psychoanalysis and it is laudable that a serious attempt to engage with psychoanalysis has been promoted. Psychoanalysis has become accustomed now, like queers, to the odium of being socially off-center. There appear to be grounds for an encounter between the two which might give both more substance, or will each continue to emphasize the other's oddity? Psychoanalysis when abroad from the treatment situation, needs the reminder that we are all social beings; whilst queer theory needs the help to understand the disavowed “essence” of people's identity. We can hope with the help of this book that the mutual sensitivity and understanding that Craib called for might be forthcoming.

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