

**An Orientation to Love Objects:  
An Analysis of the Objectum Sexual Community's  
Campaign for Recognition as Sexual Subjects**

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## Abstract

In this thesis, I analyze the narrative strategies deployed by objectum sexuals in their campaign to seek recognition as proper sexual subjects within Western, neoliberal societies. I situate the narrative of objectum sexuality within both the framework of neoliberal citizenship and queer critiques of the way in which cultural differences are conceptualized within neoliberal society. This juxtaposition allows me to illuminate the tensions and inconsistencies that arise when marginalized groups seek societal acceptance of their difference by utilizing strategies that emphasize assimilation and sameness. This project considers both the negative portrayal of objectum sexuality perpetuated by mainstream media and the more affirmative readings offered by queer theorists, and I offer my own analysis of objectum sexuality using D.W. Winnicott's psychoanalytic theory of transitional objects and transitional phenomena combined with Judith Butler's reading of Freudian psychoanalytic theory in order to postulate that traumatic loss and a subsequent object attachment are fundamental aspects in the formation of both the normative and the deviant sexual subject. Using insights from new materialist and post-humanist theorists, I conclude this project by analyzing to what extent the narrative of object love put forth by objectum sexuals both subverts and reifies the conventionally held understanding of the subject as that which is endowed with agency and the object as that which is without agency and always passive.

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## Introduction

Perhaps it is a mundane statement for queer and social theorists, but it is still worth saying: sexuality is so much more than how and with whom someone has sex. Queer theorists and historians have demonstrated that sexuality is a historical concept that has become so deeply embedded within the Western cultural psyche that it is now inextricably entangled with notions of subjectivity and citizenship. It is from this perspective that I ground my analysis of objectum sexuals, people who claim they are innately oriented to love objects, and the narrative strategies that they utilize to gain recognition and acceptance as proper neoliberal subjects.

The entire population of objectum sexuals comes from neoliberal nations in the Western world, and their demands for inclusion and tolerance echo those made by mainstream LGBTQ activists who have grounded their campaigns for acceptance in neoliberal notions of rights-based claims of recognition, inclusion, and normalization. Objectum sexuals explain their orientation to love objects by drawing on and citing Western society's biologically determinist and heterosexist understanding of sexuality as an innate and ahistorical trait that exists within all subjects. In other words, everyone is born with a sexual orientation.

In chapter one, I explore how rights based claims to equality and tolerance that are grounded in strategies of gaining inclusion through assimilation are criticized within social and queer theory for deploying an understanding of sexuality that operates on an exclusionary logic in which members of a socially marginalized sexuality must portray another marginalized sexual community as perverse and deviant in order to frame their sexuality one that is natural and acceptable. I situate the narrative of objectum sexuality within both the framework of neoliberal citizenship and queer critiques of the way in which cultural differences are conceptualized within neoliberal society. This juxtaposition allows me to illuminate the tension and inconsistencies that arise when marginalized groups seek societal acceptance of their difference by utilizing strategies

that emphasize sameness and minimize the difference in which they ground their identity. Using a combination of self-published essays written by objectum sexuals and documentaries and television shows in which they have been interviewed, I focus specifically on how objectum sexuals face pressure from the mainstream public to disavow or downplay accusations that their sexuality is not a legitimate sexuality, but rather, it is the result of an underlying pathology such as post-traumatic stress disorder or a diagnosis of a condition on the autism spectrum. Though there does appear to be a strong correlation between PTSD, autism, and Asperger's syndrome and objectum sexuality, the objectum sexual community's adherence to strategies of neoliberal identity politics requires that objectum sexuals reject accusations that their sexuality is merely the result of an inability to correctly recover from childhood trauma or is caused by an underlying condition which inhibits their ability to conform to normative standards of social behavior.

In the second chapter, I approach the phenomenon of objectum sexuality looking for the insights that this newly emergent identity can provide regarding the way in which human-object attachment resulting from traumatic loss play a foundational role in the formation of both normative and deviant human subjects. I then explain how these human-object relationships are policed and disavowed within neoliberal, capitalist societies. This analysis is grounded in D.W. Winnicott's theory of transitional objects and transitional phenomena and Judith Butler's poststructuralist reading of Freud's writings on the psyche and subject formation. I foreground my reading against Jennifer Terry (2010) and Amber Jamilla Musser's (2013) analyses of objectum sexuality, in which they endeavor to provide rich and nuanced accounts that take seriously the claims made by objectum sexuals, and I detail the way in which queer theory often proposes readings of marginalized sexual identities that contradict and are in tension with narratives that are propagated by marginalized sexual groups in order to gain recognition as proper neoliberal subjects. I argue that proposing a reading of objectum sexuality that contradicts the self-concept of objectum sexuals does not necessarily undermine or delegitimize their identity.

In the concluding third chapter, I look to theories grounded in the frameworks of new materialism, post-humanism and object oriented ontology to determine to what extent the narrative of objectum sexuality both subverts and reifies the culturally dominant understanding of the subject as that which has agency and the object as that which is passive and without its own agency. I consider Terry's analysis again since she gestures to both new materialism and post-humanism to construct an explanation of objectum sexual relationships in which both the human and the non-human object are agential actors. Using Levi Bryant's concept of onticology, I argue that while objectum sexuals certainly have some views regarding objects that deviate from mainstream society's anthropocentric view of the world and the objects that inhabit it, objectum sexuals do not necessarily succeed in redefining agency outside of anthropocentric terms.

## Chapter 1: Objectum Sexual Identity and Neoliberal Sexual Subjectivity

This is my husband. His name is the Berlin Wall and he was born on August 13, 1961. I expect you've heard of him; he is quite a celebrity. He lives in Berlin. I used to work in a pharmacy. Now I own a museum. My husband's job was to divide East and West Berlin. He is retired now.

-Eija Riita Berliner-Mauer, quoted by Jennifer Terry<sup>1</sup>

### A Brief history of Objectum Sexuality

The narrative of objectum sexuality's origins closely follows the trope, identified by Kath Weston (1995) in "Get Thee to a Big City: Sexuality and the Great Gay Migration," used by gay individuals describing how they came to the realization that they are not heterosexual. Both objectum sexuals and the people interviewed by Weston maintain that their sexuality is an innate part of their identity, and they have always known about it even if they did not have the proper term to describe it. Weston details how many adults who identify as gay or lesbian recall knowing from early childhood that their desires were different from the mainstream. Though they were aware that there was something different about them, they had no word for it until they found the word "gay" in the dictionary or heard about it on television. Eija Riita Eklof-Berliner-Mauer's story varies a slightly from this trope, since the word for her orientation did not yet exist. Eija Riita claims that she has always been inclined to love objects, but was unable to properly explain this part of her identity to the rest of the world due to the limitations of language. Driven by a desire to share her true self with the world Eija Riita coined the term "objectum sexuality" (OS) in the early 1970s (The Red Fence, ND). In an unofficial ceremony in 1979, Eija-Riita married the Berlin Wall and attached Berliner-Mauer (the German term for the Berlin Wall) to her surname to symbolize her love of and commitment to her partner. Later, while the internet was

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<sup>1</sup> Terry, 2010, p. 36



still in its infancy, Eklof-Berliner-Mauer created the first of what would be multiple websites which would not only bring the phenomenon of objectum-sexuality to the attention of the general public, but would also serve as a resource providing both community and information to those who felt that they too were oriented to love objects. Unofficial counts report that there are approximately forty individuals in the world, mostly women and mostly concentrated in the United States and Western Europe (Terry, 2010), who self-identify as objectum sexuals (Piotrowska, 2008). Erika Eiffel, who is married to the Eiffel Tower and maintains relationships with multiple bridges and the Berlin Wall, is also a major figure in the OS community. She helped Eklof-Berliner-Mauer create the Objectum-Sexuality Internationale (OSI) website, which is now a major source of information on objectum sexuality and objectum sexuals for both OS and non-OS individuals. Though objectum sexuals claim that the coining of the term for objectum sexuality is the point in time that marks the official emergence of OS as a sexual orientation, the Objectum-Sexuality Internationale website is largely responsible for both the public recognition of OS and the growth of a supportive international community of objectum sexuals.

For a community with such a small population, OS has generated a significant amount of media, medical, and academic attention. In “Loving Objects,” Terry (2010) views the sensationalizing tone and general attitude of incredulity typically displayed in media representations of OS as symptomatic of a moral panic induced by objectum sexuals and their claims to have an innate orientation to love and be loved by objects, and that this orientation is innate in the same way that many assume heterosexuality and homosexuality to be. My aim is to find what exactly is at the root of this so-called moral panic produced by objectum sexuals’ demand for acceptance. What value or norm does the idea of consensual love between a human and an object destabilize? I’ll first situate objectum sexuality within the broader context of sexual citizenship in Western, neoliberal nations; this will serve as the theoretical background for my analysis of both objectum sexuals’ strategies of self-representation and media portrayals of OS.

In my descriptive analysis of objectum sexuality, I give special attention to how strategies deployed by objectum sexuals in order to gain recognition and acceptance both conform to and deviate from those used by other societally marginalized groups, such as the neurodiversity community and the mainstream LGBTQ social movement. I will then move on to sensationalist media representations of OS in order support my assertion that objectum sexuality transgresses societal boundaries regarding appropriate attachment to objects. This discussion will lay the groundwork for the following chapter in which I propose using D.W. Winnicott's theory of transitional objects and transitional phenomena in order to explain how objectum sexuals develop an orientation to love objects.

## Defining Subjectivity in Neoliberal and Queer Contexts

Before analyzing objectum sexuality both as it is explained by OS individuals themselves and depicted in the media, it is first helpful to provide the social and historical context that produces the tropes and vocabulary used by objectum sexuals to both understand themselves and to explain themselves to the general public. This preliminary analysis will focus on the tension and contradictions that exist between neoliberal and queer notions of subjectivity. Since the objectum sexual population is concentrated in Western, neoliberal nations, their concept of themselves as objectum sexuals is heavily rooted in a neoliberal framework of citizenship and identity politics in which assimilation and acceptance are seen as the ultimate goals. Though the examples I use are drawn largely from writings by queer theorists focusing on the mainstream LGBTQ movement in the United States, their insights are relevant to my analysis of objectum sexuality, since objectum sexuals have appropriated the strategies used in this movement and use them as a template in their own quest for acceptance and recognition.

Queer theorists, such Michael Warner have been critical of the way in diversity is understood within the Western, neoliberal framework. Warner writes, “In the United States, the default model for all minority movements is racial or ethnic. Thus the language of multiculturalism almost always presupposes an ethnic organization of identity rooted in family, language and

cultural tradition” (1993, pg. Xvii). Familial, linguistic, and, culturally based identities are grounded in a necessarily exclusionary logic. In order to have a group defined by their linguistic, cultural, or familial ties, there must also be an understanding of who is excluded from this group due to differences that are determined to be crucial. Warner continues to explain that a queer logic of identity rejects the “member/nonmember” logic which is at the heart of identities grounded in the ethnic model of identity. Warner asserts that a queer understanding of identity entails a refusal to adhere to the exclusionary logic that dictates which sexualities are seen as normative and which are seen as deviant. Marginalized social groups who deploy strategies of identity politics to seek acceptance within normative, mainstream society must prove that their identities are authentic and harmless. This goal is usually achieved by designating another group as deviant. This strategy can be seen (and will be discussed at length later) in the way in which objectum sexuals distance themselves from fetishists. Before that discussion, I will go into more detail about the logic of exclusion and how it plays upon notions of in/authenticity. To do this, I gesture to Judith Butler’s notion of the original and the copy.

The trope of the original and the copy are frequently deployed by Judith Butler in her writings on subjectivity and identity. In “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” Butler (2004) uses these concepts in order to challenge prevailing ideas pertaining to queer sexual identity politics and the political project of coming out and being out. Butler’s reticence towards an unquestioning embrace of labels as a political practice is grounded in what she sees as the necessarily exclusionary nature of identity categories to which I alluded in the preceding discussion of Warner. Butler eschews a narrative of coming out that assumes an essential gay or lesbian identity which must necessarily exclude “improper” gays or lesbians in order to constitute itself as a seemingly stable identity category. She uses the original/copy concept to undermine the expressive understanding of sexuality, which assumes that heterosexuality is an original, natural, essential identity that resides within a subject that radiates out of them. Under this model, all other sexualities are seen as imperfect imitations of the original heterosexuality. Butler destabilizes the relationship of the

original to the copy by illustrating that there can be no understanding of that which is posited as original without the positing of that which is a copy. Butler is careful not to just invert the relationship of the original and the copy, because the relationship will constantly invert itself. She explains that the relationship between the original and the copy is unstable. This unstable relationship of the original to the copy grounds Butler's assertion that sexuality and gender are performative. By demonstrating that categories of gender and sexual identification are unstable and constantly mutating, Butler seeks to diminish some of the inherent and exclusionary violence of these "instruments of regulatory regimes" (2004, pg. 120). Though Butler's focus is on gay and lesbian identity based social movements, the logic she critiques underpins mainstream identity politics movements, and the strategies she depicts are used by objectum sexuals in their campaign for acknowledgement as proper citizens. Using Butler's original/copy concept, we can say that the heterosexual monogamous couple is both the original to which objectum sexuals are compared and to which objectum sexuals try to conform.

While a queer critique of identity politics is essential to my project, so is the notion of sexual citizenship within neoliberal nations. I foreground my Foucauldian understanding of the relationship of citizenship and sexuality against the normative neoliberal understanding of citizenship. Using Foucault not only enables the theorist to conceptualize the entanglement of subjectivity and sexuality, but also the way in which notions of citizenship also play a role in constituting the normative matrix that produces both normative and deviant subjects. Giovanna Procacci (2004) uses Foucault's concept of governmentality to shift traditional citizenship theory away from a juridical framework in which laws govern a subject that precedes them and toward a framework in which inclusive and exclusive policies of the state are seen as strategies that work to produce a specific citizen-subject. Mainstream society is still embedded in the juridical paradigm of citizenship in which the subject is understood to precede the law, and a person who demonstrates themselves to be a proper citizen can achieve citizenship status. As Ruth Lister (2003) notes, the concept of the ideal citizen is grounded in a notion of universalism that assumes that

anyone regardless of race, gender, ability, age, and sexual orientation can achieve the status of citizenship and its attendant responsibilities and privileges, but Lister argues that this is a 'false universalism' and hidden beneath it lies the figure of the able-bodied, white, and heterosexual male around whom the notion of citizenship has been built (pg. 68). Therefore, in the context of neoliberalism, gaining rights and recognitions is often predicated on a group's ability to demonstrate that they can be just as good citizens as the white heterosexual male which serves as the template of the ideal citizen.

The claims made by objectum sexuals are motivated by a desire for tolerance and recognition as proper, not deviant, neoliberal citizens. This means that objectum sexuals must demonstrate that they can be the same type of citizen as the able-bodied, white, and heterosexual male who functions as the implicit model citizen. In "Objects of Desire," Amber Jamilla Musser further explains the implications of striving for recognition as a neoliberal sexual citizen. Musser writes, "In this vision of citizenship, one strives for inclusion because it signifies social acceptance though the terms of this are structured according to the logic of privatization and self-discipline that characterizes neoliberalism ... objectum sexuals want recognition as normal members of society. This means portraying their behavior as natural, controllable, and without societal cost" (2013, pg.3). These strategies by which objectum sexuals both portray their differences as benign and focus on how their love is the same as other types of love which are accepted by society can be aptly described using Diane Richardson's notion of equality in sameness as opposed to strategies that demand acceptance of difference (2004, pg.392). The following analysis of objectum sexuals' self-representation will focus specifically on how the OS community campaigns for acceptance of their difference through a discourse based in sameness.

### **Framing Sexual Difference as Sameness**

"Our love, in itself, is no different than any love that exists between two beings." -Erika Eiffel<sup>2</sup>

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2 Piotrowska, "Married to the Eiffel Tower"

Though the official story of objectum sexuality traces its origins to the 1970s with Eija Riita Ekloff-Berliner-Mauer, it is the internet that has enabled objectum sexuals to form an international community and to band together to seek public recognition and acceptance of their sexuality. Since objectum sexuality is emerging in the age of the internet, objectum sexuals are able to make their voices heard on television and in academia. Whether or not their voices are taken seriously is an entirely different matter, which will be explored later on in this chapter in my analysis of media representations of objectum sexuals. I will draw from the official objectum sexuality website (OSI), Amy Marsh's sexological survey of twenty-one of the members of the OS community, and quotes from objectum sexuals themselves taken from various media appearances in order to construct my descriptive analysis of objectum sexuals and their narrative strategies of self-representation

Although a romantic and sexual love of objects would seem to belong to the realm of fetishism, objectum sexuals refuse explanations of their orientation which would simply dismiss it or cast it as a perverse fetish. With a logic that recalls Foucault's repressive hypothesis,<sup>3</sup> objectum sexuals see themselves as a community of individuals with an innate sexuality that has been marginalized by society's anthropocentric bias. According to the OSI website, objectum sexuality is more than a fetish, because OS individuals have a relationship with their objects of desire that is based on more than purely sexual desire and arousal. The anonymous OS author goes on to state that a belief in animism allows OS individuals to see their lovers as more than just a passive object and to develop a relationship based on reciprocal love, not purely sexual satisfaction (What is OS, ND). According to objectum sexuals, fetishists do not have multifaceted love for the objects they fetishize; Objectum sexuals view their object lovers as animate beings with souls with which they form an intimate loving relationship that is emotionally comparable to the loving relationship that human beings build with each other. The objectum

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3 See a further elaboration of Foucault's repressive hypothesis in the second chapter

sexuals' insistence on not being classified as fetishists appears to follow the original/copy logic described by Judith Butler. In order to define their orientation as one that is authentic and legitimate, OS narratives portray fetishism as the manifestation and practice of a perverse sexual desire and refuse to have themselves associated with it. By positing themselves against and apart from fetishists, objectum sexuals seek to ally themselves with others who are deemed to have socially appropriate sexual desires.

Objectum sexuals claim that they relate to objects differently than fetishists, because they are animists and believe that their object lovers possess souls, whereas fetishists do not see the objects they fetishize as animate. The "What is OS" article on Objectum Sexuality Internationale describes animism as "The innate belief that objects are not inanimate but possess a spirit, soul, or energy to which one can connect with" (What is OS, ND). In "Loving Objects," Terry equates the animist beliefs of objectum sexuals with a belief that reciprocal communication occurs between the human and their object lover. Terry writes, "Rudi another self-identified OS person, states that OS people are in love with specific objects and that this love is reciprocal, citing the presence of a soul or spirit in the objects through which the lovers telepathically communicate"(2010, pg. 35). This belief is held by many objectum sexuals, but not all. In "Love Among the Objectum Sexuals," (2010) a report made by data collected from surveys of twenty-one individuals from the OS community, sexologist Amy Marsh reports that she received varying responses when it came to the ways in which self-identified objectum sexuals experienced communication with their object lovers. Some respondents claimed that absolutely no communication took place between them and their object lovers (Marsh, 2010, NP). Unfortunately it is not completely clear whether or not it is physical access to the object or lack thereof which accounts for the reported lack of communication between human and object or a lack of a belief on the part of the human in the possibility of communication between humans and objects. There are those respondents who say that they are the only ones communicating in the relationship. It is easier to conclude that these responses are motivated by the belief that

human and objects are unable to comprehensibly communicate with each other. I provide these anonymous quotes collected by Amy Marsh as examples:

“I talk to him, he cannot talk back.”

“Only on [sic] my mind.”

“Never with words spoken aloud. Nothing there for the wrong ears...” (2010, NP)

And though Marsh does not state what percentage of her sample population purports to hold any of these beliefs about communication, judging from the amount of quotes provided as evidence, it seems that a large majority of objectum sexuals do believe that reciprocal communication occurs between them and their object lover. There seems to be a unanimous view that communication between object lovers and objectum sexuals is nonverbal, but there is some variation about the specific way that OS individuals and their object lovers communicate. Some respondents said it was through energy or vibes, some used the term telepathy, while others described the communication as an exchange that occurred on a spiritual level (Marsh, 2010,NP). I go into this detail in order to support my assertion that a belief in animism does not necessarily presuppose a belief that a human being is able to reciprocally communicate with objects. Understanding how exactly human-object communication functions is rather difficult for the non-objectum sexual, since communication is generally considered to be an ability possessed by animate creatures, and objects are generally assumed to be inanimate.

The animist beliefs held by objectum sexuals also contribute to their tendency to refer to their objects with gendered pronouns. In “Married to the Eiffel Tower,” (Piotrowska, 2008) Erika explains her usage of gendered pronouns, “You can’t lift up a leg on the Eiffel Tower to tell whether it’s male or female, but you cannot call the object an “it”, because the language that we speak... calling something an “it” instantly means its inanimate.” In “Objects of Desire,” (2013) Amber Jamilla Musser keenly reads this usage of pronouns as an indication of the extent to which the notion of gender is entangled in sexuality. In *Bisexual Spaces*, Clare Hemmings



illustrates how the relationship between gender and sexuality functions in an individual's identity stating that one is able to establish a stable and legible identity by aligning their gender with or in opposition to the subjects whom they desire (2002, pg. 25). Hemmings mentions this in her discussion of bisexuality to illustrate that gender identity for bisexuals is precarious due to the lack of consistency of their objects desire. The same is especially true for objectum sexuals who desire objects which are considered to be genderless, since gender is a social construct. In addition to belying the entanglement of gender and sexual identity, I argue that the usage of gendered pronouns by objectum sexual allows them to more closely associate themselves with the desire present in heterosexual and homosexual relationships.

The "What is OS" article on OSI, Amy Marsh's sexological survey, and numerous television documentaries and talk show segments mention the seeming overrepresentation of post-traumatic stress disorder, autism, and Asperger's syndrome in the small OS community. This correlation between OS and PTSD and conditions on the autism spectrum is portrayed differently by different sources. Within the OS community itself the connection is acknowledged but objectum sexuals make it clear that their attraction to objects cannot not be completely reduced to past trauma or perceived social deficiencies. The author of "What is OS" states that the OS community recognizes that a sizable number of OS individuals have been diagnosed or fit the diagnostic criteria for Asperger's Syndrome. The following explanation is offered, "It is possible that objectum-sexuals with Aspergers syndrome relate to certain objects of interest better than with people due to impaired social functioning from early childhood when mainstream social bonds are influenced and conditioned"(What is OS, ND). I mention this quote specifically in order to illuminate how exactly objectum sexuals wish to be viewed by the general public. The OSI author also addresses the PTSD connection by stating that many who experience childhood trauma had tendencies to love objects that predated the trauma. The OS community is open about the high rate of PTSD, Asperger's Syndrome, and autism within the community, but they refuse to have their OS seen as a mere symptom of deeper pathological

condition. In line with their usage of strategies that advocate for equality based in sameness, objectum sexuals refuse to have their sexuality understood as a mere symptom of the socially pathologized conditions of PTSD, Asperger's syndrome, and autism, but they do not deny that diagnoses of these conditions are prevalent within the OS community. If one steps outside the logic of movements which adhere to strategies that emphasize their sameness in order to gain acceptance, and look instead at the neurodiversity social movement which insists on acceptance of their differences from mainstream 'neurotypical' society, both parallels and contradictions with the OS community can be seen.

The beginning of the "What is OS" article on the OSI website is prefaced by a note that states that the objectum sexual community welcomes "professionals" who can help illuminate the nature of objectum sexuality, but they are also very clear that they are not seeking to be "cured of their desire for objects"(ND). This is more than a lack of interest in finding a cure; it is a resolute belief that no cure is necessary for OS. The OS community's assertion that they are not in need of a cure is reminiscent of neurodiversity discourses that are being put forward by activists with Asperger's and autism, which claim that society should accept their differences rather than try to erase them. Though objectum sexuals downplay any difference in regards to PTSD, Asperger's, or Autism, they insist that their different sexual orientation should be accepted by society. While there are important differences between the demands made by the OS community and those made by autistic neurodiversity activists, I think more theoretical exploration of the connection of Asperger's Syndrome and autism to OS from a neurodiversity perspective would yield important insights into the way in which ability and sexuality relate to each other.

In the neurodiversity framework, traditional ableist norms of society are challenged, and what are typically perceived to be social deficits or pathological deviations from social norms are reframed as social differences that should be embraced, not cured (Connor, 2011). When they

are not claiming that their love for objects is the same as that shared between two human beings, OS individuals acknowledge their difference and assert that the problem is not them, but society's problematic anthropocentric bias which stigmatizes the OS individual's perfectly natural and harmless orientation to love objects. Within the framework of neurodiversity, autism is framed as "a human specificity or difference that involves different ways of socialising, communicating, and sensing and that these differences must be respected" (Brunswick-Cole, 2014, pg. 1120). This belief in being genetically hardwired to experience and communicate with the world in a way that is different but not pathological can be seen in OS claims that declare they are were born with an orientation to love objects. Within the autism and Asperger's activist community, rejection of a cure also means that the community is not worried in finding the cause of the neurological differences, for why would one seek the origin or cause if they did not wish for a remedy? OS individuals welcome classification and an explanation of how and why they are oriented to love objects that would help them to be recognized as proper sexual subjects. I mention neurodiversity, to illustrate that even though the media uses the connection of PTSD , autism, and Asperger's Syndrome to delegitimize objectum sexuality, there are communities of neurodiversity advocates that do not try to separate themselves or their identity from the autism or Asperger's Syndrome, rather they demand society accept them as they are. Within the neurodiversity framework, objectum sexuality could be seen as just another unique trait arising from diverse neural wiring that should be accepted by society, but objectum sexuals forgo this strategy, and instead advocate for inclusion based in similarity and not difference, and therefore they exhibit ambivalence in the way they address PTSD, autism, and Asperger's in their community.

On both the Objectum Sexuality Internationale website and in the BBC channel 5 *Strangelove* series' "Married to the Eiffel Tower" episode, the "born this way" trope is invoked. Amy Wolf, a woman in love with the amusement park ride 1001 Nacht and the Empire State Building, states that she has always, throughout her life, kept an object close by for comfort

(Piotrowska, 2008). This statement is meant to imply that her love of objects is innate and evidence of it existed in her childhood behavior, which is in direct opposition to her mother's understanding of her sexuality. Her mother says, "She is convinced she was born this way; I think it is everything that has happened to her that made her this way" (Piotrowska, 2008). From this statement and the extended focus on Amy's unstable family life as a child, we can gather that Amy's mother believes that if Amy had had a better, more stable family life she would not have developed an attachment for objects. It is implied that if she had appropriately dealt with the trauma in the past, or if she would deal with the trauma appropriately now or in the future, she could stop loving objects and start forming appropriate romantic relationships with people. Amy is open to the idea that her objectum sexuality could be related to her Asperger's diagnosis, but she does not think that her love for objects needs to be "cured" by being redirected towards humans. Terry does note that, even though the Strangelove episode presents Amy's turbulent childhood and Asperger's Syndrome in order to pathologize her identity as an objectum sexual, Amy accepts the Asperger's diagnosis and isn't concerned if that is a contributing factor of her love of objects (2010, pg. 44). She believes neither of these facets of her personality need to be cured. "Born this way" means Amy couldn't imagine herself any other way, and she doesn't really want to, and it also works to establish her orientation as something that is natural, and therefore, more socially acceptable.

Amy's story helps illuminate the inconsistency and tension that occurs with the use of the born this way narrative in the objectum sexual community. They seek to naturalize their orientation in order to gain acceptance within society, but they also recognize that there could be certain external factors that could contribute to their love of objects. 'Born this way,' as it is used by mainstream LGBTQ activists is a strategy used to portray the sexual desires and practices of queer individuals as healthy, normal, and natural manifestations of human sexuality as opposed to the less and less dominant social understanding of homosexuality as a perverse lifestyle choice. The OSI website states that objectum sexuality is innate in just the same way that

heterosexuality and homosexuality are. Erika Eiffel is the founder of OSI, but she can be seen in the *Strangelove* documentary saying that it is not a problem for her if her traumatic life has played a role in the formation of her love of and attachment to objects (Piotrowska, 2008). I am highlighting this inconsistency, not to invalidate or cast dispersions upon the authenticity of the claims made by objectum sexuals, but rather to illuminate the fact that they are navigating between their own understandings of themselves as OS individuals with innate connections to and desires for objects and society's demand that they explain themselves within the narrowly defined parameters that delineate normal from abnormal sexual desires. I also mention Amy and Erika's acceptance of their respective Asperger's and post-traumatic stress disorder diagnoses in order to illustrate that societal norms regarding ability also factor into the policing experienced by objectum sexuals and enacted by the general public in their responses to the phenomenon. In the article "Born This Way": Queer Vernacular and the Politics of Origins," Jeffrey Bennett (2013) explains that use the term 'born this way' in the LGBTQ community is not as biologically deterministic as it would first seem. Using Butler's notion of citational practices, Bennett argues that through its frequent deployment in the LGBTQ community, the term 'born this way' becomes detached from its biologically determinist connotations, and becomes a way of explaining the intrinsic entanglement of one's queer identity and one's concept of self. With Bennett's insights in mind, I argue that objectum sexuals are using the phrase 'born this way' genuinely. It seems that the usage is motivated by a need to prove that objectum sexuality resides within the bounds of societally appropriate sexualities, and 'born this way' doesn't necessarily reflect a belief in biological predestination, but rather, reflects their experience of their sexuality as something deeply intrinsic to their concept of themselves.

### **Stigmatizing Trauma and Neurodiversity: Objectum Sexuality as Portrayed in the Media**

I conclude this chapter with a brief presentation and analysis of the way in which OS is presented in popular media. The previously mentioned "Married to the Eiffel Tower" episode of BBC Channel 5's *Strangelove* series is largely responsible for objectum sexuality's introduction to

the general public. The episode has been completely disavowed by the OS community, including those who were in the show, for its portrayal of the OS individuals who appear in the episode. In fact, anticipating that many of the visitors coming to the OSI site may have found it through the documentary, the homepage of OSI bares, in bold red font, a notice declaring, "The film is firmly denounced by the objectum-sexual community for its exploitative and sensationalized take on OS" (Objectum Sexuality Internationale, ND). With this said, it is still important to discuss "Married to the Eiffel Tower," since, for many people it is their first or only exposure to objectum sexuality.

The sensationalist tone of "Married to the Eiffel Tower" makes itself known early in the episode. Not three minutes into the episode, Erika Eiffel is shown explaining that she has never had sex with a human, and soon after this, the episode shifts the focus to if and how objectum sexuals have sex with their object lovers. Interrupting a scene in which Erika is talking about how she physically feels as if her blood flows into her bow (one of her former lovers) and she can feel his molecules flow back into her, someone off camera asks the question everyone wants to ask, but knows they shouldn't: "Is it mechanically similar to a man and woman having sex?" (Piotrowska, 2008) While it seems that Erika is trying to explain the way in which she relates or communicates with her bow in way that is perhaps intimate but not sexual, the filmmaker just wants the juicy details. Erika does not go into details, but she does explain that she experiences orgasm, and then immediately notes that the emotional experience is also probably quite similar to that felt between two human lovers.

The film does not only sensationalize the sexual aspect of OS, it also portrays PTSD, autism, and Asperger's as probable pathological causes underlying the behaviors and beliefs of objectum sexuals. In one scene, Amy is shown detailing her turbulent childhood in which her father left her mother who had cancer, and her family endured the loss of several jobs and houses. She candidly admits that she has twice seriously concerned suicide. This information from Amy is immediately followed with narrator's voiceover rhetorically asking, "Why would a

person choose to seek comfort and solace in objects rather than people? " (Piotrowska, 2008)

The viewer has been primed to draw the conclusion that objectum sexuality is a pathological response to childhood trauma or just another symptomatic social deficiency caused by the individual's Asperger's or autism. The Asperger's and autism aspect is highlighted soon after the narrator asks the question about the possible causes of OS desires by a scene evocative of Foucault's confessing animal in which, Amy reads a report from her childhood which documents her history of delayed social development and a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome. Amy smiles knowingly while reading, but the narrator somberly explains that "Asperger's disease is a condition on the autistic spectrum which makes it difficult for a person to make connections with other people"(Piotrowska, 2008). Again the conclusion the viewer is prompted to draw is clear: objectum sexuals are incapable of forming healthy social relations with people and therefore shift their attention to objects.

Lastly, I want to highlight a segment from the Tyra Banks Show's "After Dark" episode (2009) to demonstrate that when people aren't proposing pathology as the cause of objectum sexuality, they assume that those who claim to love objects are just plain lying. Tyra Banks interviews Erika Eiffel and expresses her initial doubt about the authenticity of the claims objectum sexuals make regarding their identity. Banks, after talking at length with Erika, and before introducing a sexologist into the conversation states, "When I first heard Erika's story, I thought she was joking. I thought she was doing this to get a lot of publicity. I almost didn't want her on the show." Take a second to consider the judgment that is being leveled when a daytime talk show hosts considers a phenomenon to be too fake to be featured on their show, and then consider what is revealed by bringing a sexologist into the conversation to verify the statements made by Erika about her own personal experience. In light of the suspicion aroused in the general public by objectum sexuals, queer theorists and sexologists have taken up the cause of validating and affirming objectum sexuals and their claims that they have a distinct subjectivity centered on an affinity for objects.

Jennifer Terry is one such theorist, and in "Loving Objects" she argues that "through mobilizing sentiments of horror, disgust, pity, and tepid toleration, the show [*Strangelove*] contributes to moral panics concerning who and what are the proper objects of desire "(2010, 39). I agree with Terry's analysis, but also believe that there is more underlying what she calls the moral panic generated as a response to the phenomenon of objectum sexuality. I will argue in the following chapter, using Winnicott's writings on transitional objects in conversation with Terry's argument that everyone falls somewhere on a "spectrum of object-love"(2010, pg. 46), that the love and intimacy that objectum sexuals experience for and with their object lover is very real to them. I argue that this experience of the human-object relationship as very real is deeply unsettling and at the heart of the so-called moral panic surrounding OS. Both the fact that OS individuals are completely convinced that their relationships with objects are just as meaningful and reciprocal as any between two (or more) human beings, and their demand for external recognition of this internal reality, creates the reality policing that occurs within media representations of OS.



## Chapter 2: Creating an Account of Sexual Subjects Who Desire Objects

### Queer Perspectives On Sexuality

The popularly held understanding of sexuality that is perpetuated within the framework of identity politics based social movements differs quite dramatically from those held by queer theorists and historians of sexuality. The most striking difference would be the rejection of sexuality as a trans-historical and essential quality of humans. Take, for instance, the phrase "born this way." The usage of this phrase in both the queer and objectum sexual communities, is loosely based on the logic that sexuality is an innate quality which one expresses through sexual practices and romantic relationships. The logic at work in the phrase "born this way" assumes that sexuality is a set of desires and practices that are natural and inseparable from the biologically determined nature of all human beings. In the following section, I will provide a brief summary of some of the guiding theoretical assumptions at work in queer theory, and I will illustrate the differences between the narrative of objectum sexuality that is created by the objectum sexual community's strategic framing of their orientation to love objects within the normative framework of sexuality and the multiple explanatory narratives that could be provided by various queer theory perspectives. I will begin by illuminating the differences that exist between the equality and acceptance based narratives of sexual difference propagated by the mainstream LGBTQ movement and the narrative of sexuality as a historically contingent phenomenon that is put forth by social and queer theorists. This difference is highlighted in order to illustrate that, even though objectum sexuals refuse to be categorized as fetishists, it does not necessarily undermine and pathologize objectum sexuality to use psychoanalytic theory to gain an understanding of the psycho-social processes that produce one's attachment to objects in the same way that it does not delegitimize LGBTQ identities by explaining sexuality in terms of social construction which directly contradict the popular usage of a biologically deterministic paradigm to gain LGBTQ acceptance.

The term "born this way" implies a belief in a biological basis to one's sexual orientation.

The search for the biological origins of sexuality has a long history, most notable is Dean Hamer's scientific search for the gay gene. Usage of the term "born this way" by the OS community is used to promote the belief that objectum sexuality is a natural difference with its origins in the genetic makeup of the human body. In "Is There a History of Sexuality" David Halperin claims, "Sexuality is not a somatic fact; it is a cultural effect (1993, pg. 416)." This statement is in direct contradiction to the beliefs held by those who advocate for and continue the search for the existence of the gay gene. To prove his bold claim, Halperin goes on to argue that the ancient Greeks did not have a concept of sexuality. Halperin asserts that the understanding of one's sexual desires and behaviors as an outward expression of an inner essential identity was completely absent in ancient Greek society. According to Halperin, in ancient Greece, sex was an act one performed with one's own body (and generally the body of another). How and with whom sex acts were performed was governed by one's social status: a citizen must penetrate and must not be penetrated (1993, 418). The male prostitute who sold his body and allowed penetration of that body, was thought to have compromised the integrity of his self, but the stigma placed on the prostitute was not due to the fact that he had sex with other males, since the fact that one desired to have sex with a person of the same sex was not seen to be a reflection of that person's identity. If Halperin's analysis of ancient Greek society can be taken as proof that the ancient Greeks did not have a concept of sexuality, how can we explain how sexuality came to be understood as an innate desire inextricably entangled with an individual's identity? In other words, what paradigm shift has occurred that enables objectum sexuals to believe that they are born with an innate orientation to love objects?

This paradigm shift can be understood conceptually through Michel Foucault's writings on sexuality and disciplinary power. In many of his writings, Foucault works to establish a genealogy that demonstrates the social and historical character of what are commonly held to be ahistorical, biological facts, and Foucault's theory of disciplinary power offers an explanation of how one's actions came to be seen as indicative of an inner and essential part of a person's spirit

or soul. In his work *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault puts forth the assertion that during the eighteenth century, a paradigmatic transformation occurred which effected a shift from a society governed by sovereign power to one ruled by disciplinary power. Foucault uses the concept of disciplinary power to illustrate how the body became “the seat of needs and appetites and... to what extent historical processes were involved in what might seem to be the purely biological base of existences” (2008, pg. 100). According to Foucault, the logic of disciplinary power rests upon the assumption that the behavior and desires of an individual are representative of their own inherent soul or spirit which is contained within their body. Within disciplinary power, the body becomes the sight where multiple strategies of power are negotiated and internalized, thus producing the individual, embodied subject. Foucault illustrates this point by detailing the policies that created regimens designed to discipline the most minute movements of the body within disciplinary institutions such as schools and prisons.<sup>4</sup> These policies were based on the belief that desires can be controlled and influenced through the regimented discipline of the body. Within the framework of disciplinary power, what were previously considered to be deviant behaviors came to be understood as natural tendencies belonging to an individual with a perverse spirit or soul, and it was believed that one’s spirit could be disciplined through the disciplining of the body. It is this same paradigm shift that inextricably entangled one’s sexual desires and practices with one’s sense of self and enables the usage of ‘born this way’ rhetoric.

The ‘born this way’ slogan used by both OS and queer individuals is grounded in an expressive understanding of sexuality, in which sexuality is seen to be a product of natural urges and desires which originate from one’s biological makeup. Objectum sexuals see their sexuality as something that is innate, but society’s anthropocentric norms regarding sexuality prevent them from fully revealing and practicing it. The scientific search for the ‘gay gene’, as it is colloquially called, demonstrates the persistence of the belief that sexuality is, to borrow Halperin’s phrase, a

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<sup>4</sup> See the following chapters by Foucault in Rabinow’s (1984) *The Foucault Reader*: “The Body of the Condemned,” “Docile Bodies,” “The Means of Correct Training,” “Panopticism,” and “Complete and Austere Institutions”

somatic fact. Though the work of queer theorists may be shifting the paradigm, my following analysis of objectum sexuality demonstrates that both LGBTQ and objectum sexual communities subscribe to the dominant understanding of sexuality as a trans-historical human trait. Halperin's study of sexual practices in ancient Greece was undertaken in part to demonstrate that sexuality is a historically contingent, socially constructed idea. It is the socially constructed nature of sexuality that Foucault had in mind when he asked the question, "Why do we say, with so much passion and so much resentment against our most recent past, against our present, and against ourselves, that we are repressed?" (1980, pg. 8) Foucault rejects the notion of repressed sexuality, for it is grounded in the assumption that sexuality is something that occurs naturally within an individual and is either sanctioned or suppressed by a power that can only act negatively. Foucault's rejection of the notion that sexuality is repressed does not mean he doesn't believe that it is not subjected to mechanisms that both discipline and constrain; it is rather a rejection of the concept of a framework that understands power only as a negative force that is solely capable of restricting and forbidding (1980, pg. 12). Foucault goes on to assert that power manifests itself through multiple techniques or strategies, which produce as much as they constrain. Sexuality constitutes just one of the many discursive categories through which power governs and produces the individual. Foucault's rejection of what he calls the "repressive hypothesis" (1980, pg. 10) is important to keep in mind, since many of the narratives told by or about objectum sexuals traffic in the language of a repressed sexuality. Foucault's notion of power as that which both produces and constrains will also guide my psychoanalysis based exploration of objectum sexuality. As demonstrated in previous chapters, objectum sexuals claim that their sexuality is completely normal and natural, but society's norms prevent them from fully expressing their love for their objects, especially the outdoor structures such as buildings, monuments, and bridges. The "born this way" narrative used by LGBTQ and objectum sexuals seeking acceptance in society contradicts the queer understanding of sexuality as the product of historically and culturally specific norms and practices.

Though queer theorists and members of mainstream queer acceptance movements have different understandings of the concept of sexuality, certain members of the queer community have read and appropriated the work of queer theorists, and the gender and sex binaries are starting to be seen as social constructions with boundaries that can be pushed and blurred. Objectum sexuality's emergence in the age of the internet has enabled the objectum sexuality community to have a say in how they are represented in all forms of media, from television talk shows and documentaries to sexological reports and articles written by queer theorists. The OS website bares a bold red note decrying the sensationalism of the *Strange Love* documentary, and the website also links to sexologist Amy Marsh's *Love Among the Objectum Sexuels* and several other articles and documentaries. Members of the community are participating in the discourse surrounding their orientation, and they are making their voice heard regarding what they feel to be proper and improper interpretations and representations of their sexuality.

All of this has been to say, that while it is good practice to listen seriously to and construct a richer understanding of the forces which produce, constrain, and govern not only objectum sexuality, but also sexuality in general as it produces and constrains subjects in a Western neoliberal framework, it is important to bear in mind that narratives of sexuality as understood and propagated by members of both normative and marginalized sexualities differ from the explanations and analyses offered by social and queer theorists. Though, I respect objectum sexuals' rejection of explanations that would reduce their love for objects to some sort of pathology, and I agree that framing OS desire solely within the Freudian paradigm of fetishism is reductionist and precludes further exploration that would produce insights into the norms that govern human relationality to both objects and humans, I argue that psychoanalysis offers insights into how humans form any romantic attachments, be these attachments to humans or objects.

### **Terry and Objectum Sexuality as Perverse Nationalism**

Before proposing my own analysis of objectum sexuality, I will provide a brief recapitulation of the Jennifer Terry's reading of objectum sexuality and the way in which she

situates objectum sexuality within post-9/11 neoliberal society. Terry's analysis of objectum sexuality is grounded in the assumption that “stigmatized sexualities tell us something about the social and historical world from which they emerge” (2010, pg. 34). Terry focuses specifically on OS through a lens of national security in a post-9/11 world. Her analysis, while nuanced and thoroughly considered, assumes a sort of homogeneous global reaction throughout the Western world, since the examples she works with are based in the United States, but objectum sexuals come from multiple countries in Western Europe, and not all objectum sexuals are in relationship with objects which serve as national symbols such as the Empire State Building, nor does she problematize Erika's desire for the national symbols of other countries (e.g. The Eiffel Tower and the Berlin Wall).

Terry uses the concept of the “spectrum of object love” (2010, pg. 46) to situate objectum sexuality within a broader social contexts. She asserts that objectum sexuality is policed and stigmatized because of a societally prevalent disavowal of “the multi-faceted pervasiveness of object love in postmodern society” (2010, pg. 34). Terry effectively illustrates the multiple socially acceptable ways in which people are allowed to form attachments to objects by juxtaposing the image of Erika sleeping next her object lovers, such as her bow or her sword, with United States Marine recruits who, as part of their training, are taught to love and respect and even sleep with their rifles. Terry also asks the reader to consider the relationships of heterosexual couples in which one's attraction for the other may be partially due to their nice apartment or the stylish clothes to illustrate the tacit ways in which objects figure into mainstream relationships in late capitalism (2010, pg. 48). With these examples, Terry demonstrates that certain emotional investments into objects are sanctioned and even encouraged within neoliberal capitalism. Following Musser (2013), I argue that even though objectum sexuality is emergent from, and to a certain extent emblematic of, capitalism, it is oversimplifying to read it as an extreme form of commodity fetishism, as it ignores an analysis of the ways in which the OS mentality deviates from dominant capitalist ideology. Musser specifically

notes that endowing objects with agency and viewing their relationships in terms of a reciprocal intimate exchange is indicative of a way of relating to an object without consuming it that differs from the predominant mode of relating to objects within late capitalism. (2013, pg. 5).

Terry goes further in her analysis of the ‘spectrum of object love’ by situating objectum sexuality within post 9/11 neoliberal society by coining the term “monument sexuality” (2010, pg. 52) to refer to a specific type of public sex which is practiced in the publicly sanctioned and tolerated acts of national reverence. In monument sexuality, acts of reverence for and loyalty to the nation the nation are inspired by national monuments, this love for and attachment to the nation is funneled into monogamous heterosexual marriage in which the state is reproduced by the production of new citizens. In the case of the objectum sexual, one’s love for the nation is not diverted through the heterosexual family but is affixed directly to the physical objects that symbolize the nation. Terry claims, “We are all encouraged to develop a libidinal reverence in the presence of these mighty architectural wonders: standing in awe of them is the normative condition. We are asked to attach ourselves to them, however to marry them or admit our attraction to them are affronts to the licit mode of having sex in public” (2010, pg. 53). She argues that both heterosexual reproduction and objectum sexuality are products of nationalist devotion. Terry uses the Freudian notion of the perverse, an occurrence that deviates from the norm but it is not necessarily morally deviant, to coin the term “perverse nationalism” (2010, pg. 53) to refer to acts such as marrying objects or maintaining physically and emotionally intimate connections to national symbols that deviate from socially accepted displays of nationalist devotion.

Terry’s analysis of monument sexuality and perverse nationalism is a rich and nuanced formulation which details the ways in which nationalist devotion can bypass its typical expression of heteronormative reproduction and attach itself directly to symbols of the nation. The applicability of this postulation of OS attachment fits only so long as the OS individual’s object of desire is a national symbol, which is not frequently the case. Since individuals who are in love

with major landmarks tend to get more attention from the media, it appears as though most objectum sexuals are prone to love culturally significant objects. By looking at the results of Amy Marsh's 2010 survey of objectum sexuals, one can see that this is not the case. Thirty-three percent of respondents indicated that their object lovers could be categorized as "structural/large: buildings, bridges, walls, rail track, constructions, or similar" (no pagination). This category in itself is not exclusive to objects which serves as national symbols. Terry's analysis is also limited in that it does not account for objectum sexuals such as Eija Riita Eklof-Berliner-Mauer and Erika Eiffel who love the Berlin and the Eiffel Tower which are national symbols for countries other than their own. Terry's analysis is able to provide an account of the state mechanism's which both produces and polices objectum sexuals' attachments to national monuments, but this analysis is limited in its applicability since only a small fraction of objectum sexuals love national monuments.

### **Refusing Fetish without Rejecting Psychoanalytic Insight into Objectum Sexuality**

Though Terry's formulation of the possible sources objectum sexual desire is thoroughly reasoned, it manages to postulate an explanation of only a small portion of the OS population's attachment to objects. I assert that recourse to psychoanalytic insights on object attachment, can help the theorist formulate a theory that not only explains how objectum sexuals, but also any human subject, become emotionally attached to and invested in objects. Both Terry and Musser note the OS community's rejection of Freudian fetishism, and it seems as though they misconstrue objectum sexuals' refusal to be defined as fetishists for a moral imperative prohibiting the queer theorist from using psychoanalysis to explore the phenomenon of objectum sexuality. I argue that even though objectum sexuals refuse to be classified as fetishists, because it is both an inaccurate classification, and it derails their campaign to be accepted as proper neoliberal subjects, does not mean that any attempt at a psychoanalytic analysis of objectum sexuality should be abandoned. I first want to show exactly why and how the OS community rejects the idea that they are fetishists. I hold that this rejection is grounded in only a



partial understanding of Freud and a popular misinterpretation of Freud's writing that assumed he was condemning marginalized sexual practices, rather than trying to find an explanation of the mechanisms that produce deviations from socially prescribed sexual norms. I will offer an analysis of objectum sexuality guided by D.W. Winnicott's "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena," and Judith Butler's work, especially *Psychic Life of Power*, to demonstrate the reparative usage of psychoanalysis in queer theory that demonstrates the connection between relationality, attachment, sexuality, trauma, and human subjectivity that all must navigate in order to achieve legible subject-hood, though individuals choose separate paths and strategies which yield different subjectivities and modes of relationality.

As I have mentioned in the preceding chapters, members of the objectum sexual community thoroughly reject any explanations invoking Freudian notions of fetishism that would reduce the source of objectum sexuality to a trauma induced misplacement of desire onto nonhuman objects. Musser offers the following explanation for the OS refusal of Freudian explanations of their orientation, "Freud's insistence on embedding fetishism within a narrative of trauma is rejected by the objectum sexual community largely because of their reluctance to be classed as suffering from posttraumatic [sic] stress disorder, which is one of the frequent diagnoses given to objectum sexuals" (2013, pg. 2). In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that objectum sexuals openly acknowledge the seeming correlation between OS and PTSD, but due to their adherence to strategies of recognition grounded in sameness, they refuse to have their sexuality reduced solely to a pathological response to childhood trauma. It should be noted that objectum sexuals themselves do not usually cite this specific reason offered by Musser as that which motivates their rejection of assertions that place their orientation solely within the realm of fetishism. Most often, objectum sexuals explain that they refuse to be seen as fetishists, because Freud believed that the fetishist's object of desire was a symbol for something else, namely, the penis.

Objectum sexuals repeatedly claim that they relate to their objects not because he or she

symbolizes a phallus, but because of their unique soul. This reasoning is clear in this quote from an objectum sexual (A.L.) used by Musser:

Their inner Freudian makes the claim that I must love a building because it's a large phallus! What? This implies I cannot have physical gratification without the presence of a penis and therefore I cannot love without human company.

Obsurd![sic] First, I am [an] objectum sexual and I have no physical attraction for the male, nor his bits. Second, my physical attraction for my lover is not defined by human sexuality and therefore I see zero relevance to an object appearing phallic. I love this building with all my heart foremost and there should be no need to justify our love in the confines of humans-sexuality [sic] (2013, pg. 2)

Though it is true that objectum sexuals do not want their orientation to be portrayed as a pathological response to trauma, that is not how objectum sexuals generally explain their dismissal of those who are eager to classify OS as a fetish. Objectum sexuals reject being classified as fetishists, because those making this classification assume that their desire for objects is actually a repressed desire for a penis, or as A.L. explains, "[a] physical attraction for the male [and] his bits." It also seems that OS individuals, on their quest for acceptance and recognition, want to distance themselves from the stigma of perversity associated with fetish. Though I agree that it is reductionist and precludes a more insightful analysis to classify objectum sexuality as fetishism, I argue that insights from psychoanalysis taken from Freud, Winnicott, and Butler's deconstruction of psychoanalysis provide the theorist with the tools to build a rich and sympathetic description of objectum sexuality. Before explaining how psychoanalytic insight can be used to understand objectum sexuality, I shall first explain in what ways certain understandings and popular misunderstandings Freud's concept of the fetsih fail to provide a robust and nuanced description of the forces which work to produce and constrain objectum sexuality.

Jennifer Terry is correct in asserting that objectum sexuality does not perfectly fit the

criteria for fetishism since Freud believed that fetishism was a phenomena that occurred mainly in men, and most objectum sexuals are women (2013, 49). Freud understood the psychic process that produces a fetish from the perspective of the son, and he asserted that a fetish is the result of a son's response to the realization that the mother has no penis, or in other words has been castrated. In the case of the fetishist, the son manages his fear of the possibility of his own castration by preserving the phallus of the mother, so the fetishist projects the phallus onto the object they fetishize. In Freud's words, "Yet in his mind the woman has got a penis, in spite of everything; but the penis is no longer in the same place as before" (1927/1997, pg. 353). The Freudian notion of fetish doesn't fit, because it is male centric, and therefore it cannot be said that these women are preserving the penis of their mother in order to manage the fear of their own possible castration. And, it is inaccurate in the popular misunderstanding of Freud that is demonstrated in A.L.'s above quote, to say that all objectum sexuals are dealing with their inability to form successful human relationships by projecting their desire for a penis onto their non-human object lovers, no matter how phallic they may be. Though some objectum sexuals may actually fit the criteria for being classified as fetishists, fetishism does not provide a coherent theory through which the phenomenon of objectum sexuality can be fully understood.

Though the Freudian notion of fetish does not work as an accurate classification of objectum sexuality, Freud's insights can still provide the theorist seeking to understand objectum sexuality with guidance, because his work can be used to demonstrate that psychoanalytic theories offer insight into the psychic processes that produce sexual orientations that deviate from the socially defined norms without pathologizing them or automatically assuming that different desires must be re-routed toward appropriate objects. Terry and Musser avoid classifying objectum sexuality as a fetish, and they ultimately eschew a rich and nuanced psychoanalytic exploration of objectum sexuality. Though Terry alludes to Freud and Winnicott in footnotes, and Musser briefly entertains the notion of objectum sexuality as narcissism, they do not go any further in deploying the insights that psychoanalysis provides regarding the

psychic processes through which people form attachments to both humans and objects and how these attachments play a role in the formation of one's sense of self and one's ability to negotiate internal and external realities. Terry notes that popular misunderstandings of Freud persist, particularly involving the notion of perversity. She writes, "Freud urged readers to reach beyond the moralistic judgments attached to the word [perverse], by noting that perversion is a kind of swerving away from the normative course of development, stressing that there is no pre-given natural or determined course, but that psychological development entailed negotiating the complexities of sexual subjectivity" (2013, pg. 53). This insistence on viewing perversity as a natural part of human sexual variation rather than a social ill, can be seen in "The Sexual Aberrations" where Freud asserts that the copious amounts of deviations from what seem to be an expression of naturally innate human desire could possibly indicate that perversion "must form a fact of what passes as the normal constitution" (1905/1991, pg. 86). The objectum sexuals' instinct to distance themselves from Freudianism stems from a correct understanding that the definition of fetishism involves a notion of the penis that does apply to them, but it also comes from a misunderstanding, that Freud's work was merely a classification and explanation of various sexual pathologies.

### **Trauma, Object Attachment, and Identity Formation**

By skirting around psychoanalytic and Freudian readings of objectum sexuality, the accounts produced by queer theorists miss the opportunity to draw attention to the foundational role that trauma plays in the formation of both the normative and deviant subject's identity. Instead they focus on how the media frame the possible trauma induced origin of objectum sexual identity to portray it as a perverse identity. Freud not only placed trauma at the root of fetishism; Freud asserted that realizing one's own mother has no penis is a traumatic experience for all men, but is negotiated in different ways. Some negotiations of this trauma result in a sexual desire that falls within societally acceptable parameters and others, such as the fetish, fall outside the boundaries of acceptability (1927/1991, pg. 354). According to Judith Butler (1999),

Freud considered the experience of loss and melancholia to be an integral factor in the formation of one's own identity and one's sexual desires (pg. 74). This helps the theorist address the objectum sexuals' refusal to have their sexual orientation defined in terms of trauma. The psychoanalytic framework views the formation of the individual and their sexual desires, be they perceived as normal or deviant, as products of continual negotiation of trauma. Judith Butler illustrates this point repeatedly in her writing. Butler's analysis also demonstrates how psychoanalysis can be appropriated into post-structuralist theory by deconstructing the notion of the psyche as a sort of a priori structure responsible for the formation of the subject. Butler reframes the psyche as the matrix of cultural norms and prohibitions that produce the subject and that which must be negotiated and appropriated by the subject if they are to be intelligible<sup>5</sup>. Butler's reading of psychoanalytic theory through Foucault's notion of polymorphous manifestations of power demonstrates how sexuality is inextricably caught up in the process of subjectivity.

In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler undertakes to explore and explain the possible psychic mechanisms that comprise the conditions for the possibility of the subject to be both produced by and subjected to power as Foucault asserts (1997pg. 2). She postulates that there is some fundamental dependency on power that produces an attachment to it; the subject allows itself to be subjugated to power, since it is the same power that produces and sustains that same subject. Butler explains the entwinement of dependency, survival, and subjectivity in the following passage:

A child's love is prior to judgment and decision; a child tended and nourished in a "good enough" (emphasis in original) way will love and only later stand a chance in discriminating among those he or she loves. This is to say not that the

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<sup>5</sup> Butler, Judith See *Bodies That Matter* Introduction pg. 12 and "Prohibition, Psychoanalysis, and the Heterosexual Matrix" in *Gender Trouble*, specifically pg. 53

child loves blindly... but only that if the child is to persist in a psychic and social sense, there must be a dependency and the formation of attachment; there is no possibility of not loving where love is bound up with the requirements for life.

(1997, pg. 8)

Humans are born dependent, and love is an act of self-preservation, but what happens when that which we first love and are dependent upon is lost? Both Butler and Winnicott provide answers to this question, and these explanations will serve to ground my assertion that, if we consider love an act of self-preservation, we can understand objectum sexuality as an act of preservation of the self through a melancholic identification with objects. Before offering an analysis of objectum sexuality through Winnicott's theory of object attachment, I will first situate it within Butler's framing of Freud's melancholia.

Melancholia is a foundational process for both Butler and Freud. Butler writes that Freud saw melancholia as the crucial process that enables the formation of the ego (1999, pg. 73). Butler goes on to explain Freud's understanding of the process of mourning and melancholia. When a person loses someone, they preserve the one whom they have lost by integrating them into their ego. This integration is also understood as an identification, the bereaved preserves the lost object by incorporating it into part of their own identity. Butler is adamant that this is not a process rooted in pathology. It is a self-preserving process, driven by the dependency that enables the survival of the subject. Butler writes, "Freud suggests that the internalizing strategy of melancholia does not oppose the work of mourning, but may be the only way in which the ego can survive the loss of its essential emotional ties to others" (1999, 74). Butler goes on to note that not only is the process of melancholia a necessary process to survive loss, it also determines the way in which one's choice of sexual object is formed. What is important here for our understanding of objectum sexuality is that, for psychoanalysis, it is not only sexual object choices which deviate from the norm, but also those that adhere to the norm which arise from

melancholia and both an attachment to and identification with a lost love. The Freudian account of sexuality and poststructuralist interpretations are in contradiction to the mainstream cultural understanding notions of sexuality as an expression of innate desires perpetuated by members of both mainstream and marginalized sexualities. In order to be recognized within the Western neoliberal framework of normal sexualities, objectum sexuals must cite the normative narrative of sexuality. Both Freudian and post-structural readings of psychoanalysis that view the formation of the subject and its desires as the product of trauma would not be a helpful explanations for those seeking acceptance of their desires within mainstream society. Instead of downplaying the role of trauma and loss in the narrative of objectum sexuality, I assert that the role of trauma and loss and role in the formation of sexual desire, object attachments, and identities be acknowledged as part of the process of formation of any sexual subject. In order to explain objectum sexuality, I assert that this reading of melancholia can be integrated into Winnicott's theories of transitional objects and transitional phenomena.

Within Winnicott's theory of infant object attachment, the original lost object here is not the mother's penis, as in the occurrence of fetishism, but rather, the object lost is the mother, specifically her breast. I use the term "loss of the mother" to refer specifically to the infant's realization that the mother's breast is not a part of them, and that they exist separately from the mother. D.W. Winnicott's essay "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena," illustrates the way in which an infant's attachment to objects can be viewed as a way of negotiating the loss of the mother, and how relationality to not just human objects, but also non-human objects plays a crucial role in one's development of self, their attachment to human and non-human objects, and their perception of reality. My analysis will be grounded in the poststructuralist assumption that the psychic process is both constraining and productive and also governed by cultural norms. Within this framework, what is referred to as "normal development" is merely the most frequently occurring and most socially acceptable outcome of the process, but it is not the only option, nor is it necessarily the right option while all others are wrong.

Winnicott proves to be particularly useful for addressing the doubt about authenticity of objectum sexuality displayed in the media representations of OS. The doubting of authenticity to which I refer is twofold, and it concerns both whether or not objectum sexuals are being truthful in their claims, and, if they are being truthful, how one can then understand the authenticity of their orientation as they experience it. I shall begin with Winnicott's identification of these elements which produce and constitute the human: "inner reality, external (or shared) reality and experience" (2005, pg. 3). Winnicott defines the relationship of these three elements as such, "...It [experience] shall exist as a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perceptual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated" (2005, pg. 3). Winnicott goes on to say that he is not concerned so much about object attachment itself, but instead, his goal is to gain a working understanding of "the intermediate area between the subjective and that which is objectively perceived" (2005, pg. 3). Applied to objectum sexuality, this means trying to reconcile the reality of the objectum sexual's attachment to objects with the commonly held belief that objects are passive and therefore unable to reciprocate human love and affection.

Even if post-human and new materialist claims about the agency of objects are taken seriously, as will be done in the following chapter, it seems that agency does not manifest itself within human constructs such as gender and consent to sex and marriage, therefore the agency of objects will not serve to place objectum sexuals' connection to objects within the more credible realm of external, or shared, reality. In lieu of the suspicious approach to objectum sexuality taken by television talk shows and documentaries that produces narratives of objectum sexuality which oscillate between skepticism over the authenticity over the claims made by objectum sexuals and confused, pathologizing explanations of how objectum sexuals could possibly be convinced that they really love objects and objects really love them back, I propose approaching OS using Winnicott's understanding of relationality to reality. It may seem paradoxical to suggest that taking objectum sexuality seriously would mean understanding it in



terms of illusion, but if we use Winnicott's understanding of illusion, this is possible.

Though objectum sexuals would surely bristle at the suggestion that their relationships to their object lovers are illusory, Winnicott passes no judgment on illusion. In fact, Winnicott recognizes that illusion plays a crucial role in human life and is the heart of many community based relationships. Winnicott writes,

"...studying the substance of illusion, that which is allowed to the infant, and in which adult life is inherent in art and religion, and yet becomes the hallmark of madness when an adult puts too powerful a claim on the credulity of others, forcing them to acknowledge a sharing of illusion that is not the their own. We can share a respect for *illusory experience*, and if we wish we may collect together and form a group on the basis of the similarity of our illusory experiences. This is a natural root of groupings among human beings (2005, pg. 4)

Though Winnicott does believe that some object attachments are unhealthy, he does allow for certain phantasmatic attachments to objects which persist into adulthood. For Winnicott, our attachment to illusion is natural and is subject to societal norms that govern appropriate and inappropriate attachments our illusions. We are allowed illusions in life, though they are disavowed as such. These illusions are allowed but are heavily policed, as evidenced by the media's generally incredulous response to objectum sexuality. Winnicott's theorization of transitional objects enables me to assert that objectum sexuals actually experience the reciprocal love they describe with their objects. Nesting Winnicott's theory's in a poststructuralist understanding of psychoanalysis, I assert that objectum sexuality, though perhaps illusory and considered be outside the bounds of illusion deemed socially acceptable, is a result of a melancholic attachment to a lost object without framing this as a pathological response. Before making that argument, it is first necessary to reference Winnicott's understanding of the role of object attachment in forming self-identity and a "proper" relationship with reality.

According to Winnicott, predating an attachment to an external "not me" (2005, pg. 2) object, the infant exists unaware of its distinctness from its mother. This lack of distinction for the infant is enabled by the 'good enough mother' (2005, pg. 13). The 'good enough mother' begins by providing complete and almost instantaneous attention to the infants need for comfort. As the infant becomes older and more capable to withstand small delays in the satisfaction of their needs, the mother accordingly accommodates this ability by responding less immediately and completely. This encourages the development the infant's ability to self-soothe (2005, pg. 14). This process of instantaneous and complete and then gradually less complete and immediate adaptation to the needs of the infant allows for what Winnicott refers to as a "proper" relationship to and understanding of illusion, internal reality, and external reality. Winnicott claims that this process works because the mother's almost instantaneous response to the infant's needs fosters the illusion that the breast is a part of the infant and is conjured by the infant whenever they are in need; this is the infants internal reality that does not correspond to the objective phenomenon, but it is still very real for the infant. As the infant develops and the mother begins to allow herself to delay the satisfaction of the infant's needs, the frustration caused by this delay is integral in helping the infant become cognizant of the existence of an external reality.

During the period in which the infant is negotiating the relationship ship between internal and external reality and dealing with the trauma inducing realization that they exist separately from the mother, they generally form an attachment to a comfort object such as a toy or blanket. This transitional period is referred to as reality testing, and the infant is allowed a certain amount of illusion. Winnicott notes illusory experiences, such as religion and art, persist into and throughout adulthood; (2005, pg. 18). Winnicott writes, " This intermediate area of experience, unchallenged in respect of its belonging to inner or external (shared) reality, constitutes the greater part of the infant's experience and throughout life is retained in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and to religion, and to imaginative living, and to

creative scientific work" (2005, pg. 19). According to Winnicott, while the child is in the transitional period of reality testing, one should not ask the following question in regard their transitional object, "Did you conceive of this or was it presented to you from without?" (2005, pg. 17) This question though is the main question that comes to mind and is subtly (or not so subtly) presented to the objectum sexual to answer. In order for their identity to be accepted as legitimate, they must adhere to strategies of sameness used in the neoliberal western context of identity politics, and claim that, just like everyone else's romantic and sexual relationships they are responding to affection and intimacy that is being offered to them by an external party.

### **Melancholic Disidentification as Self-preservation and Self-love**

In the following section, I focus on building a cohesive theory of objectum sexuality by weaving together both Musser and Terry's already wonderful and rich descriptions of objectum sexuality with my assertion that objectum sexuality is an illusory experience, like those many adults experience through religion or art, but it is one that falls outside of socio-cultural norms regarding sexuality and or assumptions regarding the nature of objects. I once again refer to Winnicott to illustrate what is at the source of the policing of objectum sexuality. Winnicott writes, "Should an adult make claims on us for our acceptance of the objectivity of his [sic] subjective phenomenon we discern a diagnosis of madness" (2005, pg. 18). Objectum sexuals are demanding that what has been deemed a subjective experience be recognized by the general public as a natural and fully acceptable objective experience generated by an interaction between an active, agential object and a human being. The response to this demand by the general public has been to understand objectum sexuality as either a hoax to get attention or a symptom of what is considered to be some deeper pathology, such as post-traumatic stress disorder or a condition on the autism spectrum.

To fulfill my promised offer of an explanation of the psycho-social mechanisms that produce attachments to objects and a relationship to both internal and external reality, I will resort to the technique of bricolage. Presuming that the psyche is the matrix of cultural norms

that one must navigate in order to achieve intelligibility as a subject, I will offer a hypothesis that claims that a complicated process of identification, disidentification, and melancholia, produce objectum sexual subjectivity. This hypothesis will draw on Musser's theorization of how reciprocity works within OS relationship. I will use claims from objectum sexuals themselves in which they explain the way in which they relate to and identify with their object lovers in order to assert, that objectum sexuals identify with the object as a part of themselves. They project traits of themselves onto the object, and by investing their object lovers with aspects of their own identity, objectum sexuals embrace and love their own traits which are seen as deviant by society's standards.

My analysis of objectum sexuality pulls together this analysis of Winnicott's transitional objects and phenomena with Butler's reading of Freud's concept of melancholia and Musser's interpretation of objectum sexuality as a disidentificatory practice with the goal of becoming the object. I draw on two statements made by Erika in the film "Married to the Eiffel Tower" to demonstrate the way in which the objectum sexual's identity becomes entangled with that of their object lover, in spite of their claims that they love the object as only an object and not as a symbol for or a projection of someone or something else. In a scene in "Married to the Eiffel Tower," Erika is shown talking to the Berlin Wall and can be overheard saying, "I tried to hate you, but I don't. Why is it such a big problem that you bring happiness and joy to me? Isn't that what they want, for people to have happiness and joy? I curse myself for being a human, I want to be an object just like you. (Piotrowska, 2008)" This statement is not enough in itself to use as evidence to support an assertion that objectum sexuals identify both with and as their object lovers, but combined with Erika's following statement, also from "Married to the Eiffel Tower" the argument becomes more tenable. Erika says, "The Berlin Wall was built, made, and then rejected by the people who made him, and I feel that way about my own life. How can you bring someone into the world and not love them? ... I am standing up and being me. I am the Berlin Wall. Hate me, try to break me apart, try to tear me down but I will still be here standing"

(Piotrowska, 2008). These statements read together recall José Esteban Muñoz's (1997) notions concerning disidentificatory practices. Muñoz defines disidentification as a strategic refusal in which one refuses to align one's self with the terms prescribed to them by normative society or to simply base their identity in opposition to the norms of the state and society. Disidentification is a third option and an alternative to the identification/counter-identification binary. Though Muñoz describes disidentification as "a reformatting of the self within the social (1997, 83)", I assert that even though objectum sexuals try to fit in within normative frameworks of sexuality, objectum sexuality can be seen as a practice of disidentification that entails a reformatting of the self within the object.

This reformatting of the self within the object also relates back to Butler's reading of Freud's melancholia. According to Butler (1993), to internalize an object is to also incorporate it into one's identity. The merging of the objectum sexual's identity with that of the object is a melancholic identification in which one identifies with and as the object. I argue that society confronts objectum sexuals with a demand to disavow the traumatized or socially non-conforming parts of their identities in order to be accepted, and when confronted with this possible loss of these aspects of their identity, objectum sexual invest their object lovers with these traits and internalize them. This identification produces an object-self which is internalized and loved. I argue that we see can the attachment that occurs in objectum sexual attraction as a way of preserving the traits of the objectum sexual that society would pathologize and insist on having cured and eliminated. In Erika's statement where she identifies herself as the Berlin Wall, she is talking about the trauma of rejection she has experienced and survived in her life. Though society would have her move on from her trauma by finding proper love in a monogamous heterosexual human relationship, Erika sees her trauma in the Berlin Wall and by identifying as the Berlin Wall maintains a relationship with her biographical history of trauma, but it is one in which she loves herself for the very traits which would cause society to reject her. Erika is not the only objectum sexual to voice her desire to be an object. Terry quotes Ekloff-

Berliner-Mauer's writings in which she laments the fact that she is a human. She writes, "I am ashamed to be born as a human in this life" (Terry, 2010, pg. 37). We could also read the scene in which Amy, who has been diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, is lying under 1001 Nacht, smearing her face with his grease and repeating the phrase, "I want your fluids (Piotrowska, 2008)" as an expression of her desire to not only be with, but to be the object. Objectum sexuality can be read as melancholic strategy of disidentification by which the objectum sexual refuses to give up preserve parts of their identity society would have them disavow as a pathology in need of a cure. This framework I have sketched out, envisions that all subjects are preserved by their ability to form identificatory attachments to other objects. Objectum sexuals differ in that the objects that they choose to attach to and identify with are non-human objects.

## Chapter 3: Understanding the Object of Objectum Sexual Desire

### Agential Objects

In this final chapter I will consider objectum sexuality through the theoretical lenses of post-humanism, new materialism, and object oriented ontology, in order to address why I have decided not to explain objectum sexuality as an effect of object agency, and why I argue that there are limitations to the potential that Jennifer Terry sees within objectum sexuality to destabilize conventional notions regarding subject-object relations. There is a considerable convergence between the theoretical perspectives of post-humanism, new materialism, and object oriented ontology. Post-humanist theorists like Donna Haraway seek to find ways to make sense of the world from a perspective that does not privilege the human and does not take for granted the notion that 'human' is a stable category with fixed boundaries. According to Haraway's post-humanist perspective, the subject and object do not pre-exist each other, but they arise from an entanglement of all beings which are constantly in a state of becoming. Haraway writes, "The partners do not precede the meeting; species of all kinds, living and not, are consequent on a subject- and object-shaping dance of encounters" (2008, pg. 4). The new materialists, following the post-human desire to move beyond anthropocentric social theory, focus their attention on redefining the way in which matter is seen. Samantha Frost explains, "These 'new materialists' consider matter...not only as they are formed by the forces of language, culture and politics, but also as they are formative. That is, they conceive of matter as having a peculiar and distinctive kind of agency, one that is neither a direct nor an incidental outgrowth of human intention but rather one with its own impetus and trajectory" (2011, pg. 70). Karen Barad's (2003) "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," is a prime of example of the way in which new materialists endeavor to explain the agency of matter in a way that is not grounded in human perception or activity. Barad takes issue with dominant cultural presupposition that objects exist statically and independently in the world. In Barad's post-humanist performativity, there is no a priori difference; there is only intra-

active matter (intra-active, since there is not yet differentiation). Perceived differences appear as products of the intra-action of matter. The produced differences are not stable, but rather the temporary products of a dynamic process (Barad, 2003, pg. 816). In *The Democracy of Objects*, Levi Bryant (2011) mentions Karen Barad and Donna Haraway in his long and diverse list of the “heroes of onticology” (pg. 27). Onticology is Bryant’s term for a theoretical framework of object oriented ontology that imagines a ‘finally subjectless object,’ (2011) in which, the agency of the object is not derived in any way from the human. This goal of onticology, to envision object agency that is not first grounded in human agency, is shared with new materialist theorists who reject representationalist frameworks that reduce objects to representations.

In *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Jane Bennett (2010) uses the concept of ‘thing-power’ in order to illustrate why she rejects social constructionist paradigms that reduce all objects in the world to human perception of them. Bennett writes, “There is a strong tendency... to refer such signs back to human agency conceived as its ultimate source. The impulse toward cultural, linguistic or historical constructivism, which interprets any expression of thing-power as an effect of culture, and the play of human powers... But the constructivist response to the world also tends to obscure whatever thing-power there may be.” My preceding analysis of objectum sexuality through the framework of illusory attachment and identification does not stem from the fact that I do not believe in thing power; it is grounded in my understanding of an object agency which derived from the object itself and not as that which is derived from human agency or is even necessarily intelligible to the human. I gesture to Levi Bryant in order to support my assertion that thing-power is not necessarily intelligible to humans.

Bryant's onticology is a rejection of the privileging of epistemology over ontology that has been so dominant in poststructuralist thought that works within a "correlationist" paradigm (2011, pg. 26). Bryant agrees with anti-realist theorists who take issue with theories that "treat objects as constructions or mere correlates of the mind, subject, culture or language" (2011, pg. 26). Within correlationist, paradigms objects are reduced to our knowledge of them. According



to these theories, human access to objects is inherently limited by the fact that the human mind can only access the representation of an object and never object itself. Bryant does not deny that there is a gulf between what exists and what can be perceived by the human; we could call this a gap between the epistemic and the ontological, but he refuses to privilege it by assuming that it is a unique rift that exists only in the relationship between humans and objects. Bryant explains, "The difference is that where anti-realists focus on a single gap between humans and object, object-oriented philosophy and ontology treat this gap as a ubiquitous feature of all being" (2011, pg. 27). By asserting that no object has direct access to any other objects, and by formulating the human as specific class of objects, Bryant does not transcend the representationalist framework, but he does manage to disrupt the inherent anthropocentrism of representationalist paradigms that reduce objects to a human's access to them.

For Bryant, to de-center the human means reconceptualizing humans as objects. Bryant notes that this de-centering of the human does not necessarily entail an exclusion of the human. Bryant's onticology is able to include humans since is grounded in this bold claim, "There is only one type of being: objects" (2011, pg. 20). Bryant supports this claim with insights from George Spencer-Brown's *Laws of Form* in which Spencer-Brown outlines the relationship between indication and distinction. Bryant explains that a distinction forms the conditions for the possibility of the indication. In other words, the ability to indicate any phenomenon is predicated upon its distinction from another phenomenon. Bryant uses the example of the distinction between dark and light that enables one to indicate that the sun is shining (2011, pg. 20). Bryant, still following Brown at this point, notes that inherent to the relationship of the distinction is the blind spot that creates both a marked and unmarked space. The marked space is that which is indicated, or the content of the indication, and the unmarked space contains that which is excluded from the marked space of distinction.

Bryant argues that philosophical frameworks which privilege epistemology place the subject (also known as culture or the human) within the marked space of distinction, and all that

is not human is placed beyond the blind spot into the unmarked space (2011, pg. 21). Within this model, the object is always passive and unknown or only able to be known through our access to them through representation. This epistemologically grounded framework reduces the object to the human's access to the object, and is inherently anthropocentric. Bryant inverts the indication/distinction relationship predominant in epistemologically grounded paradigms, but this inversion does not simply switch the positions of the marked and unmarked; it expands that which is marked. Bryant explains,

It will be noted that when objects are placed in the marked space of distinction, the sub-distinction does not contract what can be indicated, but rather expands what can be indicated. *Here subjects and culture are not excluded, but rather are treated as particular types of objects.* Additionally, it becomes possible to indicate objects without treating them as vehicles for human contents. (2011, pg. 22)

If we take seriously the idea that humans are a certain category of objects, it still remains that humans do have limited access to objects. This is what Bryant means when he claims that "all objects translate each other" (2010, pg. 18). Bryant insists that objects exceed their translations and cannot be reduced to them. So when I claim that objectum sexuals cannot truly claim to know the gender of objects or receive sexual consent from their object lover, it is not because I believe that objects do not have agency; it is because I believe that agency of objects does not work in such human terms. All of this has been to say, that I take the notion of thing-power very seriously, and my claim that thing-power is not fully intelligible to human beings is couched in an understanding that humans are a class of objects among other non-human objects, and all objects have limited access to other objects, since they cannot be reduced to their translations of each other.

When I claim that there is an ontological-epistemic gap preventing objectum sexuals from being able to know their object lover's gender or to receive consent for sex and marriage, I mean that the agency of objects does necessarily not manifest itself in ways that are intelligible

to human beings, and it seems unlikely that the agency of objects would be focused on making itself legible through cultural constructs such as the self-determination of gender identity, agreement to enter a marriage contract, and consent to sexual activities. An article in *The Guardian* reports that legislators in California passed a bill in August 2014 that defines sexual consent as, “an affirmative, conscious and voluntary agreement to engage in sexual activity,” thus shifting the paradigm of consent away from ‘no means no’ to ‘yes mean yes’. (Associated Press in Sacramento, 2014). Though this article goes on to note that the legislators say that consent can be given nonverbally through affirmative body language, this notion of consent is inherently bound up in human notions of communication that cannot be applied to communication with objects. Terry mentions consent in "Desiring Objects" but never quite explains how it works. Her mention of consent is in reference to a discussion thread regarding objectum sexuality that occurred on University of Warwick's LGBTUA online forum in which certain commenters voice concern over consent in OS relationships. Terry refers specifically to one commenter who claimed that consent is not needed when using inanimate objects for sexual pleasure. The commenter asserted that it is not rape to use a vibrator. In a parenthetical aside, Terry asserts that vibrators must be animate, since they would not be the source of so much sexual pleasure if they were turned off (2010, pg. 60). This point does nothing to resolve the debate over how objects, whom objectum sexuals claim are animate, can communicate their consent to sexual intimacy with humans, and it also fails to conceive of non-human agency. A human turning an object on and off does not indicate animacy or agency on the part of the object.

Perhaps by returning to objectum sexuals and their claims that their love for objects is reciprocated, can provide insight that can be used to understand how one can get consent from an object. Looking to Musser and her speculations on how exactly reciprocity may function in objectum sexual relationships, provides an insight that is in line with my previous assertions that objectum sexuality is a product of the objectum sexual perception of their relationship to their object lover which is very real to them, but not necessarily plausible according to the norms and

rules governing external reality, or to new materialists and object oriented ontologists who take seriously the notion of object agency that exists without and beyond human perception. Musser draws on a statement made by Erika Eiffel in an appearance on *Good Morning America* to make her assertion that reciprocity is perhaps an internal experience for the objectum sexual, and not the product of agency on the part of the object. Musser quotes Erika, "I will tell you that I know love is being reciprocated, because it's what this relationship grows inside of me, what these relationships have done for me, the person that these relationships have helped me become"(2013, pg.7). We can make sense of the empowerment that Erika gets from her relationships with objects by returning to the notion that by projecting oneself onto the object through a process of internalization and identification, the objectum sexual performs a radical act of self-love and preservation. But this explanation of reciprocal intimacy with objects does indicate that the intimacy felt by objectum sexuals with their object lovers is not an effect of the object's agency as understood by post-humanists and new materialists.

Most objectum sexuals claim to be animists and maintain that the love they feel for their object lovers is reciprocated; even though it seems as though these claims could possibly be substantiated by post-human and new materialist theorists who seek to de-center the human from theory and demonstrate that objects and not just humans possess agency, we must be careful not to construe objectum sexuals' belief that their object lovers have souls with the assertion that objects possess an agency that is not determined by the human . In "Loving Objects (2010)," Terry gestures towards new materialist and post-human thinkers in order to ground her assertion that the claims made by objectum sexuals allow us to interrogate our relationships with objects and our anthropocentric assumptions about human sexuality and agency. Though objectum sexuals do make claims that are anti-anthropocentric, the narratives of OS they circulate in order to gain acceptance and tolerance within the mainstream endow objects with human traits and subject them to socially constructed rituals revolving around the human notion of love. Though perhaps objectum sexuals rethink subjectivity by asserting that objects

can possess subjectivity as well as humans, the subjectivity they imagine is based on the conventional human definition of the subject merely applied to the object.

Certain claims made by objectum sexuals do resonate with the post-humanist theorists that seek to move outside of an anthropocentric worldview. Terry (2010) quotes Eija Riita Ekloff-Berliner- Mauer's thoughts on the matter of anthropocentrism, "We share this planet with other beings like animals, thing etc. We have all the same worth independent of what we are-- an object, an animal, or a human being or a plant, if it comes to that" (pg. 37). Terry goes on to quote Ekloff-Berliner-Mauer's assertions that the human race's belief in its superiority is similar in logic and effect to the notions of racial superiority that reigned in Nazi Germany (2010). This sentiment of Eija Riita recalls the post-humanist rejections of the humanist concept of the human as a construct in which the human signifies the able-bodied, white, and heterosexual male and has been used to literally dehumanize exploit other human beings (Braidotti, 2013). Erika Eiffel claims that she relates differently to objects than other humans, because she sees beyond their practical purposes and does not have the mindset that objects only matter as long as they are useful to humans (Banks, 2009). Erika and Eija Riita and many other objectum sexuals believe that most humans think of themselves as superior to objects because they fail to acknowledge that objects possess souls<sup>6</sup>. As mentioned earlier, I assert that there is a fundamental difference between claiming that objects have souls and claiming that objects have agency. And though the narrative of objectum sexual desire certainly breaks from conventional societal notions regarding objects by claiming to be in love with them, I maintain that objectum sexuals attribute the traits of the human subject to object rather than totally reimagining the position of the subject and the object in relation to each other. These statements from objectum sexuals do belie a rejection of a notion anthropocentrism, and objectum sexuals are unique in their belief that objects are not as passive as most people tend to believe. I argue that these

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<sup>6</sup> See also "The Thing with a Soul" by Rudi on [objectum-sexuality.org](http://objectum-sexuality.org). A link to this article can be found by clicking on the "expressions" tab on the OSI homepage.

beliefs alone do not constitute an understanding of relationality between the subject and object in which the human is de-centered and completely redefined. Objectum sexuals maintain a traditional definition of the human, since they focus on how human-like objects can be by describing them with gendered terms and marrying them.

Though the narrative of objectum sexuality perpetuated by OS individuals does not radically re-envision the subject-object relationship, Jennifer Terry uses a wide range of theories in an effort to postulate a framework in which the object's agency is conceived of as a property of the object itself, and is not seen as a derivative of human agency or perception. Terry begins her exploration of the possible ways in which objectum sexuality redefines both the subject and the object by asserting that humans are things (2010, pg. 62). She alludes to Bill Brown's explanation of 'Thing Theory' in order to explain what she means by this claim. According to Brown and Terry, Thing Theory differentiates between objects and things; the term "thing" denotes "a particular subject-object relation" (Terry, quoting Brown, 2010, pg. 62). She combines Brown's notion of Thing Theory with Arjun Appadurai's concept of "things-in-motion," in which Appadurai understands the agency of objects as that which "derives from [human] encodation of dynamic objects" (Terry, quoting Appadurai, 2010, pg. 62). These theories which from which Terry is drawing ground the agency of objects within human perception. Terry herself admits that these theories, which envision the life and agency of an object as that which is endowed by human perception, do not de-center the human, since they reduce objects to the human's ability to apprehend objects. I would word this more strongly, by asserting that these theories of things are deeply anthropocentric, since objects are defined solely in respect to the human's access to the object. I'd like to return to Terry's claim that humans are things. Whereas Bryant redefines the human as object, thus radically redefining the notion of subject and object, Terry seems to preserve the conventional subject-object relation by defining humans as things which she defines as a subject-object relation.

Terry goes even further in her effort to form an understanding of objectum sexuality

which radically decenters the human by using Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT) to postulate a possible explanation of what precisely enables objectum sexuals to form such attachments to these objects. She begins this investigation with these two questions: "what if we said that it's best to think of object enchantments that are not at the behest of humans? And could those object enchantments involve things formerly known as humans?" (2010, pg. 63). These are wonderful questions reminiscent of Bryant's 'finally subjectless object' to help us get at the heart of whether or not objectum sexuality could provide us with some sort of way of conceptualizing relationships in a non-anthropocentric way. Terry explains that Latour's theory, which focuses on scientific experiments, conceptualizes all the elements of an experiment as actors. From the researcher to the test tubes and everything in between, everything is an actor existing within a network (2010, pg. 63). She correctly notes that Latour's framework takes us out of the representational paradigm in which all objects are known only through representation. Using this notion, Terry ventures that objectum sexual love can be understood as "operating in a network of actions, one in which the human is not the only actor and one in which the agency of the object is conditioned upon the circumstances of the existence of the network" (Terry, 2010, pg. 65). This is an inspired reading of objectum-sexuality that succeeds in de-centering the human by granting the object an agency that is not predicated on the human. The narrative Terry outlines here succeeds according to her goal of thinking of "object enchantments that are not at the behest of the human" (2010, pg. 63). But the narrative she constructs earlier, that of monument sexuality and perverse nationalism in which the objectum sexual's desire is understood as a projection of their nationalist devotion directly onto objects that represent the state, does not seem to operate in this framework.

Throughout this chapter, I have been very insistent that theorists take great care when making explanatory gestures that would postulate objectum sexuality as a phenomenon that is, in part, produced as an effect of the object's agency. I have done this make sure that, in an effort to destabilize the dominant understanding of subject-object relations, object agency is not

portrayed as a product of human perception or will. I have done this in adherence with the political project of post-humanism that seeks to destabilize the boundaries that have been drawn to both define the human subject from and privilege it above other beings that exist in this world. The work of Bennett, Bryant, and Haraway is influenced by concept of environmental or ecological justice that is predicated on the notion that human exploitation and destruction of the environment is partially due to the predominant anthropocentric perspective that views the objects in the world as passive and ready for human consumption. A theoretical framework that only allows objects an agency that is derivative of human perception perpetuates the notion that the world exists solely for humans. Objectum sexuality is based around the notion that humans can love and have intimate relationship with objects that are very similar to romantic relationships that occur between humans, but adhering to insights gained from the frameworks of post-humanism, new materialism, and object oriented ontology I caution the theorist from postulating that there exists an agency of objects that can love humans and cater to our physical and emotional needs in the way that a romantic partner would, as this runs dangerously close to the anthropocentric view that world exists for humans.



## Conclusion

The three preceding chapters have covered a lot of theoretical ground in order to gain an understanding of the societal and historical forces which have produced the conditions for the possibility of the objectum sexual subject. The same socio-historical forces that have produced the figure of the objectum sexual are also the same forces that inform the demands made by the mainstream public that objectum sexuals portray themselves as proper, neoliberal sexual subjects. Meeting these demands proves to be difficult, since the notion of citizenship is predicated on the very specific figure of the heterosexual, able-bodied, and white man who reproduces the heterosexual, white, and able-bodied nation. In order to assimilate to this image, objectum sexuals downplay any relationship that may exist between their sexual orientation and any traumatic histories or diagnoses of conditions on the autism spectrum they may have.

I moved on to an investigation of objectum sexuality with the intent to understand what the figure of the objectum sexual may be able to reveal about the societal norms governing human attachments and relationality to non-human objects. I argue that situating objectum sexuality within psychoanalytic theory that conceptualizes the formation of the subject through a process of traumatic loss and attachment, reveals a societal disavowal of the possibility that human attachment is to some extent enabled by and a negotiation of trauma. By insisting that others recognize their psychic attachment to objects within the framework of normative human love, objectum sexuals challenge the notion that sexuality is an innate trait within all humans that drives their relationships and attachments.

And finally, I used the theoretical frameworks of new materialism, post-humanism, and object oriented ontology in order to explore to what extent objectum sexuality re-imagines the relationship of the subject to the object. I caution against positing an agency of objects that serves human emotional and romantic needs in the same way that a romantic partner would, because this conceptualization is reminiscent of the anthropocentric perspective that the world, and the objects within it, exist for humans. I ultimately assert that objectum sexuals do

experience a genuinely profound and complex love for their object lovers based on the human subject's psycho-social need for attachment in order to ensure its survival.

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