Asexuality:
Towards a Freudian-Lacanian Understanding

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Gina, who has been a constant source of support and encouragement.
Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the two people whose guidance and supervision have allowed this work to reach completion: former Associate Professor Russell Grigg and current Associate Professor Matthew Sharpe. Firstly, I would like to thank A. Professor Grigg for his help, from the outset, in bringing what had begun as a relatively unformed idea to a workable thesis idea and for allowing me the latitude to take that idea wherever it was necessary to go. His opinions and ideas over the years have been invaluable. Secondly, I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of A. Professor Matthew Sharpe in taking over the last year and a half of this six year project with such enthusiasm and belief in the dissertation. His attention to detail has allowed for the shaping of my research into a unified whole while his ideas, suggestions and editing skills have been an enormous support. Finally, my thanks to Dr Talia Morag for her close reading of the early draft of the Freud chapters and whose comments allowed me to see those chapters in a new and illuminating way.

I would also like to thank my family for their perseverance over this time, in particular my wife, Gina, to whom this work is dedicated and whose support has been both unwavering and inspiring. My daughters, Alice, Georgie and Julie, were also a support through their encouraging words, their interest in the subject matter and their regular requests for updates on its progress. I would also like to thank my colleague Dr Dan Collins of Affiliated Psychoanalytic Workgroups (APW) who encouraged me to present my ideas on asexuality at five successive APW annual conferences. The fruits of that process are woven into the chapters on Lacanian theory. I would also like to thank my colleagues Dr Carol Owens and Nadezhda Almqvist for inviting me to contribute a paper on asexuality to their book “Studying Lacan’s Seminars IV and V”. The research from that paper is also included in this thesis. Many thanks also go to my clinical supervisor Dr Olga Cox-Cameron for her work on translating French texts and for her helpful comments and views. I would also like to thank Dr Eve Watson whose regular enquiries about progress and her encouragement for the work were invaluable. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the support of the Deakin University HDR administrative team who were prompt and patient in their replies to my various and numerous queries.
Kevin Murphy is a psychoanalytic psychotherapist practicing in Dublin, Ireland. He is a Registered Practitioner member of the Association for Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy in Ireland (APPI) and a member of the Irish Council for Psychotherapy (ICP). He is also a graduate member of the Irish Psychological Society (IPS) and an associate member of the Irish Psycho-Analytical Association (IP-AA). He is both a supervising psychoanalytic psychotherapist and a training psychoanalytic psychotherapist for students. His field is sexuality in both his private clinical practice and in his forensic psychotherapy work with sex offenders at a State prison. He has lectured on forensic psychotherapy to undergraduate and post-graduate students in Dublin. He has also presented papers on asexuality at numerous international conferences.
Asexuality is defined as the experience of having no sexual attraction for another person or thing. As an emerging self-defined sexual orientation, it has received little or no attention from psychoanalytic research. This dissertation is, therefore, the first sustained piece of exploratory and theoretical research from a Freudian-Lacanian perspective which seeks to contribute to an understanding of asexuality. It does so without presuming asexuality to be a form of pathology. The method employed in this research involves a close reading of the texts of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan to search for theoretical and categorical concepts that could offer an insight into asexuality’s aetiology. It also draws on the work of asexual writers and on the findings and clinical data from non-psychoanalytic asexual research. This dissertation proposes that asexuality, rather than being a desire for an unsatisfied desire, is a desire for no desire, a concept which has not been considered in psychoanalytic theory up to now. This desire, in turn, is supported by a fundamental asexual phantasy in which the objet petit a, as cause of desire, is the object “nothing”, as Lacan incorporated it in his theory. The aetiology of this desire for no desire is to be found in infantile sexuality, at the pre-Oedipal stage, when the child is obliged to take up the position of the Imaginary phallus in relation to the mother. This research proposes that the absolute nature of the absence of sexual desire in asexuality, and the absence of phallic signification in relation to sexual activity, is due to the foreclosure of the Imaginary phallus, another concept which has not been considered so far in psychoanalytic theory. This conclusion is arrived at based on Lacan’s early theorising in Seminar IV, Object Relations, in which he employs concepts such
as the reversal of the relation of dependence on the Other, and the annulment of the object as symbolic, to illustrate how this can occur. The foreclosure in question, however, is not one which is causative of psychosis, as psychoanalysis classically understands the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father. It is, instead, a foreclosure that has implications for the Symbolic phallus, as the signifier of sexualised meaning effects, and is foundational to the eventual annulment of sexual desire. Similar to the manner in which foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father can be supported by the *sinthome*, a concept from the later Lacan that describes a self-created act of artifice, this research proposes that asexuality, while not a *sinthome* in itself, nevertheless can avail of the *sinthome* as a support in making up for the foreclosure of the Imaginary, and by extension, the Symbolic phallus.
Popular opinion has quite definite ideas about the nature and characteristics of this sexual instinct. It is generally understood to be absent in childhood, to set in at the time of puberty in connection with the process of coming to maturity and to be revealed in the manifestations of an irresistible attraction exercised by one sex upon the other; while its aim is presumed to be sexual union, or at all events actions leading in that direction. We have every reason to believe, however, that these views give a very false picture of the true situation. If we look into them more closely we shall find that they contain a number of errors, inaccuracies and hasty conclusions.

- Sigmund Freud, 1905.¹

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.0. Objective:

The objective of this dissertation is to offer a Freudian-Lacanian understanding of asexuality, a sexual orientation that experiences no sexual attraction for another person or thing.² It is also an area which has received little or no attention from psychoanalytic theorists.³ I will, firstly, be using a close reading of the work of Sigmund Freud, highlighting the significance and value of his theories about human sexuality which can be applied to asexuality. His work will be the primary source for this dissertation because it is not only foundational for Lacanian theory but also for my hypothesis about asexuality. Freud’s theories are predicated on the idea that every human subject has a sexual drive which is directly or indirectly acknowledged and experienced by the subject in one form or another; either through its expression, alteration or prohibition. However, certain areas of his theory, as I will show, offer limited scope for a specific understanding of a sexual orientation in which a sexual drive is theoretically present but experientially absent. This is why I will, secondarily, go on

³ This amounts to three academic papers, offering diverse opinions. See Pardo (2010), Chassaing (2008) and Hansen de Almeida and Brajterman Lerner (1999) in Chapter 3. Many non-psychoanalytic researchers also refer to the paucity of asexuality research but their literature base is more extensive.
to a close reading of the theories of Jacques Lacan, since they advance Freud’s ideas in different ways. This approach also follows a long-established tradition of acknowledging Freud’s contribution to Lacanian theory, a tradition best exemplified in one of Lacan’s last statements: “It is up to you to be Lacanians if you wish; I am a Freudian.”

Asexuality, as I will be using the term, is taken to be a self-defined orientation in which the asexual can engage with sexual activities even though they do not experience sexual attraction for another person or thing. This experience of no sexual attraction for another person will usually have been, although not exclusively so, a lifelong experience. The other defining feature of asexuality is that it does not involve subjective distress. Research suggests that asexuals do not appear to fall ill as a result of their sexual orientation. In other words, they do not fall ill as a result of their libido not being directed externally onto another person or thing, as Freud suggests should be the case. It is also important to note that the definition of asexuality distinguishes it from celibacy or chastity, the latter being the result of conscious choices while asexuality is considered by its proponents to be innate.

I will be referring to asexuality as a sexual orientation because my proposal will be that, like

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heterosexuality and LGBT+ orientations, asexuality is a legitimate response to the persisting demand, or Drang, of the sexual drive.⁹

In working towards a Freudian-Lacanian understanding of asexuality, I will also be proposing a theory which resists the assumption of pathology, an approach that psychoanalysis has adopted towards non-normative sexualities in the past.¹⁰ An example of this would be the pathologising of same sex orientations, not by Freud¹¹ but by those who followed after him.¹² In contrast, I will be coming to asexuality from a perspective similar to that expressed by Dean (2000) in his theorising of sexuality, which is that psychoanalysis may hold the potential to assist with a reconceptualisation of it.¹³ In this context, it is notable that psychiatry has, relatively recently, de-pathologised asexuality. In the 2013 edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), the criteria for a diagnosis of Female Sexual Interest/Arousal Disorder now come with the direction to practitioners that if a lifelong lack of sexual desire is better explained by a woman’s self-identification as “asexual”, then a diagnosis of female sexual interest/arousal disorder should not be made.¹⁴

The same applies to Male Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder where practitioners are

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advised that if a man’s low desire is explained by self-identification as an asexual, then a
diagnosis of male hypoactive sexual desire disorder is not made.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{1.1.0. A Brief History of Asexuality:}

Any focus on self-defined asexuality must take into account its relatively recent emergence
into social discourse. According to Hinderliter (2009), its first appearance was in a 1997
article called \textit{My life as an Amoeba}.\textsuperscript{16} This article was posted online, allowing people to
respond and so it was the first online asexual community.\textsuperscript{17} An early Yahoo group called
“Haven for the Human Amoeba” (HHA) was formed in October 2000. In its first discussion,
the group founder defined asexual as being “not sexual”—with reference to people.\textsuperscript{18} At the
same time, during the 2000–2001 term, a college freshman at Wesleyan University,
Connecticut, David Jay, who considered himself asexual, realised there was no information
at the university about asexuality. He had read \textit{My life as an Amoeba} and it was this,
according to Hinderliter, which prompted him to create an internet page on his Wesleyan
account, calling it AVEN—the Asexual Visibility and Education Network. AVEN is now the
main asexual website on the internet today. Jay was also responsible for scripting the first
definition of asexuality. “The first instance of the present definition in HHA (Haven for the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Ibid, p.443.
\item \textsuperscript{16} This can be accessed at: 
\url{http://web.archive.org/web/20030210212218/http://dispatches.azstarnet.com/zoe/amoeba.htm}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Hinderliter, A. (2009), \textit{Asexuality: The History of a Definition}, Accessed at 
\url{http://asexystuff.blogspot.com/search/label/definition} online pagination, p.1.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid, online pagination, p.2.
\end{itemize}
Human Amoeba) was in a discussion on defining asexuality (asexualism and asexuality were used interchangeably back then) in a post by David (Jay) in late September 2001,” Hinderliter says.

While the first definition of asexuality was of a person who was attracted to neither gender, the definition used by the asexual community is now: An asexual is a person who does not experience sexual attraction. This is prominently displayed on the homepage of AVEN.\footnote{AVEN website, accessed at\url{https://www.asexuality.org/}}

However, Hinderliter says that Jay has on one occasion referred to this definition as the one used outside the asexual community.\footnote{There are different views of what the definition of asexuality should include. See Carrigan, M., Gupta, K. & Morrison, T.G. (2014), \textit{Op. Cit.}, pp.3-4, p.25.} Inside the asexual community, on the other hand, the preferred definition is: an asexual is a person who calls themselves asexual.\footnote{Hinderliter, A. (2009), \textit{Op. Cit.}, online pagination, p.5.}

The first academic enquiry into the statistical prevalence of asexuality was conducted in 2004 and it found that approximately 1\% of British residents defined themselves as asexual.\footnote{Bogaert, A.F. (2004), \textit{Asexuality: Prevalence and Associated Factors in a National Probability Sample}, Journal of Sex Research 41(3): pp. 279-287.} This 1\% figure is now the commonly quoted estimate for the prevalence of asexuality in any given population. However, other estimates put the prevalence from a low of 0.4\% \footnote{Aicken, C.R.H., Mercer, C.H., Cassell, J.A. (2013) \textit{Who reports absence of sexual attraction in Britain? Evidence from national probability surveys}, Psychology and Sexuality 4(2): online pagination, p.5.} up to 1.05\% in the UK,\footnote{Bogaert, A.F. (2004), \textit{Op. Cit.}, p.282.} and up to 4.8\% of females and 6.1\% of males in the US.\footnote{Poston, D.L. Jnr., and Baumle A.K. (2010), \textit{Patterns of Asexuality in the United States}, Demographic Research, 23:509-530. p.527.}

For comparison purposes, a US Gallop poll conducted in 2016, showed that 4.1\% of Americans identified as LGBT+, compared to 3.5\% in 2012.\footnote{Accessed at \url{https://news.gallup.com/poll/201731/lgbt-identification-rises.aspx}}
Asexuality continues to strive for recognition and, indeed, acceptance. Its representative group, AVEN, acknowledges this in the use of the word “visibility” in its title. As a publicly focussed movement, therefore, it can be considered as having something in common with the newly emerging movement of queer theory. Both asexual and queer proponents have a strong desire for their orientations to be recognised and they have both had the experience of being excluded from lesbian and gay political discourse.\(^\text{27}\) Indeed, while asexuality occupies a politically quieter space, it shares queer theory’s oppositional relationship to sexual normativity,\(^\text{28}\) engaged as it is with having the hegemony of sexual desire’s place as part of this norm re-evaluated.\(^\text{29}\) The asexual stands in contradistinction to Copjec’s (2015) sexually desiring subject who wants what social laws want it to want.\(^\text{30}\) As Miller (2017) puts it, asexuality invites a confrontation with the idea that sexual desire is foundational to human identity.\(^\text{31}\)


\(^{28}\) Ibid, p.30.


Although asexuality has emerged at this point in history as both a quasi-politicised movement and as a self-defined sexual orientation, it would be remiss to ignore its broader place in history. Engelman (2008) believes that while asexuality’s emergence now is due, in part, to its experience of increased isolation at a time of burgeoning sexuality, there have been asexual figures in history and in literature throughout the ages. She points to the Christian Virgin Mary, Joan of Arc and the Greek goddess Artemis, the huntress and, paradoxically, patron of childbirth and virginity, all of whom are deemed to be asexual.

There are other examples, such as the man on whom the movie Lawrence of Arabia was based, T.E. Lawrence. According to Wikipedia, his friends believed he was asexual and Lawrence himself specifically denied any personal experience of sex. Florence Nightingale, whose name is included on many online lists of asexual people, led an asexual life which she dedicated to doing God’s work. According to her biographer, she decided when she was relatively young to remain unattached and single.

A discussion forum on the AVEN website mentions English physicist and mathematician Isaac Newton as asexual, as well as Hungarian mathematician Paul Erdos. In the case of Erdos, his biographer says that he did not have time for “frivolities like sex”. The pop singer Morrissey has been associated with asexuality, having said that he is celibate and that he was not attracted to girls as a teenager. He uses the word humasexual to describe his

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34 This can be accessed at: https://www.asexuality.org/en/topic/19214-famous-asexual-people/
36 See https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/morrissey-unfortunately-i-am-not-homosexual-97985/
sexuality and he is mentioned in numerous articles as asexual.\textsuperscript{37} The American writer Gore Vidal, speaking about his 53 year relationship with Howard Austen in “The United States of Amnesia”, a 2013 documentary by Nicholas Wrathall, said:

Well you’re asking if it was a sexual relationship and of course it wasn’t; I don’t go in for that sort of thing. Friendship is one thing and sex is another. Sex is all over the place and friendship is not very common. Sex destroys relationships... either one or the other loses interest and either one or the other wants something else. We had not taken a vow of celibacy and we were not involved with each other, that’s all.\textsuperscript{38}

The same sentiment is central to what are known as “Boston Marriages”, a term used to describe long-term female relationships which do not include sex.\textsuperscript{39} In fact, the lacuna which exists in psychoanalytic research regarding asexuality is all the more conspicuous when it is recalled that the daughter of the founder of psychoanalysis was in a Boston Marriage for most of her adult life. Anna Freud, youngest daughter of Sigmund, was in a non-sexual relationship for fifty years with Dorothy Tiffany Burlingham, a mother of four and the granddaughter of the founder of Tiffany & Co.,\textsuperscript{40} sharing a cottage with her in Walberswick, Suffolk at weekends and during holidays.\textsuperscript{41} According to her biographer, she did not have a sexual relationship with Dorothy Burlingham or anyone else, despite rumours at the time.


\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, p.309.
that she might have been lesbian. Anna was reputedly annoyed at this gossip and did not want to be “labelled homosexual”. Nor did it escape her father’s attention that Anna had a very different libido. In a letter to a female colleague, Freud referred to his hope that he could find a way to “drive her libido from the hiding place into which it has crawled”. In the same letter, he referred to his concerns for her “suppressed genitality”. Despite his concerns, however, her “flight from sexuality” never resolved in the way he would have liked.

Asexuality also appears in works of fiction but not always in a way that is representative of asexuality as a lived experience. The character Spock from *Star Trek* and the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes are asexual figures who, according to Engelman (2008), unfortunately represent aloof versions who apparently cannot engage in loving relationships. According to Miller (2017), there is a growing representation of fictional asexual characters in comics. However, he too notes that depicting it as an absence or dysfunction, as some do, risks stigmatising it as a disorder or reducing it to a stereotype.

### 1.2. Questions To Be Addressed:

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44 Appignanesi, L. and Forrester, J. (1992), *Freud’s Women*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London. p.278. See also, Freud’s excerpted letter to Anna on this topic. ibid, p.276.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid, p.279.
The main questions, *inter alia*, that I will be setting out to address in this thesis are the following:

- Are experiences in earliest childhood responsible for the formation of asexuality? If so, are these experiences part of a common set of experiences for all subjects?
- If the asexual experiences nothing of sexual arousal or sexual attraction for another person, what pleasure or *jouissance*,\(^{49}\) if any, is being derived from this?
- Does asexuality derive a counter-intuitive pleasure from experiencing no sexual attraction? If so, is this different to the non-phallic *jouissance* which Lacanian theory posits as feminine only?
- If asexuality is not sexually attracted to another person does this indicate that no object-choice has been made or is asexuality aimed at an object which has not been considered so far?
- Because sexual desire is absent, could asexuality represent a departure from the Lacanian concept of human desire as the desire of the Other?\(^ {50}\) If so, can Lacanian theory offer an understanding of this departure?
- Asexuality represents an absence of sexual desire. Can this absence be accounted for using psychoanalytic theory which posits that libido, as sexual energy, is present for everyone?

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\(^{49}\) *Jouissance* is defined as libidinal pleasure that goes beyond the law of the Pleasure Principle, i.e., to enjoy only enough to satisfy need, and instead goes on to seek more pleasure. Lacan describes *jouissance* as a pleasure which brings suffering and is, therefore, a painful pleasure. See Evans, D. (1996), *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, Routledge: London, pp. 91-92. See also Lacan J. (1959-60), *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, Seminar VII*, Routledge: London, session of March 20, 1960, p.184.

\(^{50}\) The term "Other" is used in this dissertation in the Lacanian sense as defined by Evans D. (1996), *Op. Cit.*, p.133, to designate both another person, in their radical otherness, and also the symbolic order of language and the law which mediates the relationship between the subject and that other person.
• In approaching an understanding of asexuality from a psychoanalytic perspective, is it possible to do so without pathologising it?

• Does asexuality represent a new paradigm in which a subject can create their own support in terms of meaning around the absence of sexual desire and which, in turn, establishes a new relation to the object as other person?

1.3. An Outline of the Dissertation:

My approach will be to offer a hermeneutic interrogation of Freudian and Lacanian texts in order to answer the above questions, as well as a number of related questions which I outline below. I will begin by reviewing literature from non-psychoanalytic researchers who have been active in the field of asexuality. I will draw from this research a composite picture of the asexual subject as represented in the findings. Of particular interest will be any findings about the asexual subject’s apparent absence of sexual desire. Is it verified or is it refuted? Is it due to fear or disgust, or perhaps something else? Is it an absolute position or can the asexual subject engage in some forms of sexual behaviour? What does the research say in terms of the aetiology of this orientation? Do any of the findings corroborate whether it is biological or genetic? Also, I will be looking to the research to see if there are any childhood experiences of either a sexual or an asexual nature that asexuals can recall. Finally, what does the research say about the status of relationships for asexuals if there is no desire for sexual activity?
I will then review the very small psychoanalytic literature documenting research in this specific area (see Footnote 3, above), and combine it with the field’s more extensive literature on human sexuality which, I propose, will be valuable for understanding asexuality. Indeed, much of the thesis represents a critical and analytic search through Freud’s and Lacan’s theories in order to locate concepts of potential applicability to understanding the enigma of asexuality. Of particular interest will be the fact that asexuality represents a lack of sexual attraction to others. This is an absence of sexual attraction that is experienced by the asexual as both an internal reality and, externally, as the apparent absence of an object that causes desire. The question of absence, therefore, is one which will be an important focus of attention.

The domain of sex and sexuality is one which, for both Freud and Lacan, is not just a domain of pleasure but one which can give rise to unpleasure also; sex becomes something which creates an *impasse*. The question is whether sexual desire is predominantly experienced and characterised in asexuality not just by its absence but by an unconscious refusal because of this unpleasure. The latter would be something of which the asexual subject would, by definition, be unaware. In this sense, does asexuality have something of an anorexic quality? In researching what Lacan, in particular, has to say about anorexia, I will be attempting to treat asexuality as distinct from anorexia while, at the same time, extracting

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what his theory has to say about the psychical mechanisms of the latter in order to better understand the former.\textsuperscript{52}

Given that asexuality considers itself to be a sexual orientation,\textsuperscript{53} I will also be seeking to establish if the mechanisms that give rise to asexuality are similar to those that give rise to sexuality. In short, if object-choice is central to sexuality, is asexuality similarly structured but focussed on a hitherto unconsidered object which provides pleasure? This is not a theme that appears to have been explored in current non-psychoanalytic research or in psychoanalytic papers.

I will also be asking what the literature has to say about the unconscious phantasy\textsuperscript{54} that is potentially operating within asexuality. The concept of phantasy, in the psychoanalytic sense, refers to an unconscious template which structures the subject’s relation to others. It is, I will be proposing, a concept that offers considerable depth and value for understanding asexuality, but one which has also been little utilised by non-psychoanalytic researchers.

Finally, in the same way that it will be necessary to draw from Lacan’s views on anorexia in

\[\text{\textsuperscript{52} In a related manner, Rose (2005 [1986]) points out that Freud first identified the “hesitant and imperfect construction” of sexual difference through his work on the hysterical symptom before he recognised its “continuing and barely concealed presence across the range of adult sexual life.” See, Sexuality in the Field of Vision, Verso: London. p.226.}\]


\[\text{\textsuperscript{54} “Phantasy” is used in this dissertation to denote a fundamental “axiom” which unconsciously supports the structure of each subject in a consistent manner. Lacan says: “... the phantasy has no other role, you have to take it as literally as possible and what you have to do, is to find in each structure, a way to define the laws of transformation which guarantee for this phantasy, in the deduction of the statements of unconscious discourse, the place of an axiom.” (Lacan, J. (1966-67), The Logic of Phantasy, Unpublished. (Trans. Gallagher, C). Accessed at www.lacanireland.com, session of June 21, 1967, p.274.) Morel refers to the fundamental phantasy as “a fixed point or a centre of gravity that would support the whole of this structure, a constant determining the life of the subject, a particular law of desire holding the key to his or her destiny.” (Morel, G. (2017), Fundamental Phantasy and the Symptom as a Pathology of the Law, The Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research Web Journal. Accessed at https://cfar.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Morel.pdf, p.3.)}\]
order to understand asexuality, it will also be necessary to consider asexuality’s relation to
the psychoanalytic concept of hysteria, characterised as it is by a desire for an unsatisfied
desire. Does asexuality have something in common with hysteria, given that an aversion to
sexual engagement is common to both? By extension, the further question will be whether
asexuality is related to obsessional neurosis which can also represent a withdrawal of the
libido from objects. I will be examining these questions to establish if it is possible to
distinguish asexuality from a primarily neurotic condition, notwithstanding the place of
neurosis in all subjects. Failure to make such a distinction, similar to the distinction needed
with anorexia, leaves asexuality open to negative bias and to being classified as a sexual
dysfunction.

1.4.0. A Freudian View of Asexuality:

My approach to Freudian theory will be that, on the one hand, it can provide a framework
proffering a broad understanding of asexuality but, on the other, its concepts and
mechanisms may not offer a satisfactorily detailed understanding of it. For example, the
broad Freudian view that libido, or sexual energy, is present for everybody is a tenet which
this dissertation will take as one of its basic assumptions. The theory of infantile sexuality is

He says: “... you may quite well say that we are all ill – that is, neurotic – since the preconditions for the
formation of symptoms can also be observed in normal people.”

56 In Carnes, P. (1997), *Sexual Anorexia, Overcoming Sexual Self-Hatred*, Hazelden: Minnesota, the author
describes a distressing, life-long and pathological avoidance of sex. The disorder he calls sexual anorexia,
however, is not asexuality. See p.1, p.39, p.49 and p.52.
another central component of what I will propose in later chapters. Also, the disruptive nature of the sexual drive and its potentially traumatising effects as it develops through infantile stages will, again, be pivotal to understanding asexuality.

By contrast, concepts such as repression, while undoubtedly part of a person’s psychical formation, may not in itself offer a complete understanding of this striking, newly recognised phenomenon. I will also be proposing that while sublimation, regression and inhibition may also have a part to play, they might not offer a complete understanding either. It is, however, necessary to work through Freudian theory in order to extract its most useful elements, which will form the basis of my later exploration of asexuality from a Lacanian perspective. This latter theory, I propose, will offer more robust conceptual tools with which to better understand the various aspects of this sexual orientation. As a result of these considerations, the exploratory methodology that I will be applying in Chapters 3 and 4 will take the form of a systematic examination of the concepts which Freud’s theories can offer towards an explanation and understanding of the clinical data emerging on asexuality. As stated, this is an exploratory and hypothetical method which, in contrast to research which usually applies aspects of existing theory to explain new evidence, will examine existing theory in the light of this newly emergent sexual orientation.

In the context of Freudian theory, which says that the sexual drive is essential and constant, it will be necessary to consider a number of questions. Firstly, are there forces that can work against an instinct’s (drive) finding a path to satisfaction and, if so, what are

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these? Freud sees the alterations which instincts undergo as evidence that the human subject unconsciously defends itself against them, which is a radical idea in itself. The second question is, why does no sexual object-choice appear to be made in asexuality? Why is it that the asexual does not feel sexually attracted to another person and can Freudian theory explain this? In this regard, an obvious area of focus will be the latency period which is the final stage of psycho-sexual development before puberty and the question I will be asking is whether this phase has a role to play in the emergence of the asexual person. During latency a sexual drive can be present even though the subject does not consciously experience it. Yet, if the Freudian view is that the human sexual drive is constant in all subjects, then is asexual experience a form of extended latency period? Equally, a further question will be, if Freud is of the view that libido must inevitably be directed externally or the person risks falling ill, why is it that asexuals do not fall ill as a result?

1.4.1. Asexuality and Specific Freudian Mechanisms:

This will lead on to a more specific consideration of Freudian psychical mechanisms and their potential role in the formation of asexuality. For example, repression is the mechanism responsible for making the sex drive inoperative and so represents a resistance acting against the instinctual (drive) impulse. As well as repression, sublimation offers a potential understanding as to what is taking place in asexuality. Freud has always insisted that sexual

instinctual (drive) impulses are extraordinarily plastic,\textsuperscript{60} meaning that one component instinct can take over from another if reality frustrates their satisfaction. The question which asexuality poses is that its satisfaction is potentially derived from having no sexual drive and so it needs to be established if sublimation, which allows sexual trends to attach to non-sexual ones, can provide an insight into this? Does it allow for the possibility that a sexual satisfaction can being derived from \textit{not} experiencing the sexual drive? In this same context, the classical Freudian concepts that are often used to explain the absence of a desire for sexual engagement, i.e., female frigidity and male impotence, will also be considered.

Another question to be explored from a Freudian perspective is whether asexuality, given its absence of sexual attraction for another person, represents a narcissistic condition? After all, narcissism is the result of the libido which was once attached to external objects leaving those objects and setting up the person’s own ego in their place.\textsuperscript{61} In effect, a person treats their own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is ordinarily treated.\textsuperscript{62} But if it is narcissism, then what is to be understood of those interpersonal relationships where some asexuals engage in sexual activities to please their non-asexual partners, albeit without a feeling of sexual attraction for them? Equally, is narcissism applicable to the experience of self-directed masturbation as a non-sexual activity, i.e., where their own body is \textit{not} treated as a sexual object?\textsuperscript{63} Alongside the question of narcissism, the lack of sexual attraction for another person, combined with the capacity of some asexuals to engage in non-sexual but romantic relationships, leads to a consideration of idealisation. This latter

concept has everything to do with the object, i.e., the other person, which becomes elevated in the subject’s mind. If an asexual engages in an interpersonal relationship, it implies that to a greater or lesser extent there is some idealisation of the object but how does this occur without a sexual element?

Therefore, the conundrum which this dissertation is setting out to understand is how a theorised sexual drive operates in asexuality without including sexual attraction for any person or thing. I will be proposing that an avenue of approach to this will be Freud’s views on how an increase in internal excitation can be equated with unpleasure. In particular, I will focus on the importance Freud gives to the element of fright as a result of a breach in the child’s defensive shield against internal and external stimuli; the fright being caused by a lack of preparedness. Freud believes the most abundant source of internal excitation is the sexual instinct (drive) which is repressed because of its traumatic effect. He does not, however, extend his theory to consider a subject who might, as a result of this, have no consciously experienced sexual drive. While he is of the view that there is no such thing as “normal” sexuality, his theory does not provide the conceptual tools to explain a form of sexuality which might desire no sexual desire. This is one example of the limits at which Freudian theory arrives and is, I propose, a point where it is necessary to use Lacanian theory in order to consider the issue further.

65 Freud, S. (1905d), Op Cit., p.209. Also, Freud takes up this subject again at greater length in the first part of The Economic Problem of Masochism, (1924c), Standard Edition XIX, pp.159-161.
66 Freud, S. (1920g), Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Standard Edition XVIII, p.31.
67 Ibid, p.34.
1.5.0. A Lacanian View of Asexuality:

In the same way that Freud gave prominence to libido as the sexual energy behind human endeavour, the theories of Jacques Lacan give prominence to unconscious desire as the driving force behind action, thought and imagination. In Lacan’s theory, desire is perpetual and constant and is supported for every subject by a fundamental phantasy. This phantasy places the subject, divided as they are between their conscious and unconscious realities, in relation to an intangible, invisible “object” which causes their desire. Lacan calls the object which causes this the objet petit a, or the little object a in English. This is an ineffable, incorporeal object which takes no specular form⁶⁹ but which, nevertheless, has its roots in the earliest bodily objects which come to symbolise loss – the breast, the excrement, the phallus. The objet a, therefore, as this object-cause of human desire, is central to Lacanian theory as the essential support of desire in all subjects. In other words, the presence of an unconscious object to desire is essential to ensure we remain desiring subjects.

In the context of this dissertation, this is, perhaps, the first and most important advance Lacan makes on Freud’s idea that the object of the sexual drive is unimportant once there is some object of the drive. Both theorists, however, believe that while it can be any object, the object is very particularly chosen by each subject. I will be proposing that asexuality has a very particular objet a in its fundamental phantasy with which to support a theorised

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desire for no sexual desire. The question I will be asking, therefore, is: what is the fundamental asexual phantasy and what does the objet a represent in it? If it can be established that the phantasy in asexuality is to have a desire for no desire, then this prompts the further question as to whether the objet a within this phantasy is, in some way, divested of phallic content, or phallic jouissance. If this argument can be sustained then it would move asexuality away from the concept of a refusal, as found in anorexia, towards an experience of not only the subject, but also its object, as voided of sexuality.

Psychoanalytic theory emphasises that libido, as the energy of the drive, is always present, irrespective of the conscious experience of the subject. In other words, the drive is a permanence within the subject’s unconscious. The challenge which asexuality represents, therefore, is to offer an understanding of it which, on the one hand, acknowledges the absence of the experience of sexual desire but, on the other hand, includes the constant unconscious presence of libido. For now, it is enough to propose that the lack of evidence of libido in the asexual subject might not be evidence of it being absent. The question is whether Lacanian theory allows for libidinal desire to combine with an absence of a sexual aim or object in a way that offers the asexual a form of pleasure? Importantly, this will necessitate examining Lacan’s theory about infantile sexuality to establish if he believes there are conditions which might encourage a disaffection with sexuality.

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Within his theory, the first infantile sexual encounter of every subject has something unpleasurable about it which can represent a structural trauma, similar to Freud’s point, above, regarding a fright for which the infant subject is unprepared. I will be questioning the nature of this concept of trauma and asking how and in what way this can have effects for the infant which might bring about an asexual orientation. Since infantile sexuality is the theorised place where human sexuality begins, I will be questioning whether asexual subjects, similar to sexual subjects, begin by being exposed to something of a traumatic nature. If so, what is the nature of this primary encounter which is experienced as trauma?

1.5.1. The Question of the Phallus:

Any consideration of asexuality in the context of Lacanian theory will have to include the concept of the phallus, which is not an imaginary or real object, nor is it a bodily organ. It is, in Lacanian terms, the signifier of desire, in particular the desire of the Other, and is the signifier which can designate meaning effects as a whole. Because Lacan makes the phallus an essential element for understanding and negotiating the networks of sexualised desire in relation to the Other, it will be necessary to question its place in asexuality. The

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72 Ibid, p.70.
74 Ibid, p.579 (690).
perspective from which I intend to approach this question is that the phallus is the essential signifier with which the child navigates the desire of its parents and, in the first instance, the desire of the mother. As such, a very particular relation is established between child and mother with what Lacan terms the Imaginary phallus. I will be asking what this relation represents in asexuality and whether it evolves differently to the way it does for sexual subjects. In focussing on the place of the phallus in the aetiology of asexuality, I will endeavour to further distance the latter from any equivalence with anorexia, even though I will be drawing on aspects of theory related to it. I will also examine how the place of the phallus relates to the imposition of the law of the father which prohibits the mother as object of desire. Asexuality is defined as a lack of sexual attraction for another person. In this sense, the place of the sexualised Other would appear to be crucially different for asexual subjects. Therefore, I will be questioning whether this “difference” originates in the first relation to the mother, as first Other, during infantile sexuality.

The related question is how the object, as other person, can be voided of sexual attraction for the asexual. In other words, how can the object come to be annulled of anything which can cause sexual attraction? Can the asexual subject annul the sexual drive and, by extension, bring about an annulment of the object as sexually attractive? In his early work, Lacan spends some time focusing on the concept of annulment and I will be asking whether this has relevance for asexuality. Furthermore, does Lacan’s understanding of annulment allow for the possibility that the infant can deny itself the satisfaction of an

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p. 17. (online pagination). He says: “This phallic function henceforth names the relationship of each speaking being, each parlêtre, to enjoyment.”
instinctual demand? Can Lacan offer a theoretical construct with which to situate a prototypical de-eroticisation of the first part-object, i.e., the breast? If this is the case, the next question will be how this can transmit from the earliest oral stage through various psychosexual stages and emerge in adulthood in the form of asexuality.

1.6.0. A Pleasure that is Not Obvious:

The asexual experience is one in which there is no sexual attraction for another person or thing and no subjective distress on account of it. This would suggest that the experience is somehow pleasurable or, at the very least, not unpleasurable. This, then, raises the question as to exactly what pleasure, if any, is being derived? I will be proposing that the experience of no sexual attraction, without subjective distress, suggests a unique and hitherto unconsidered form of jouissance. But, again, what kind of jouissance is this? Are there concepts within Lacan’s theory which can allow for an understanding of a pleasure to be derived from no sexual attraction?

In this regard, a concept in Lacan’s later teaching which I will examine is the sinthome. The sinthome is a subject-specific act of artifice whereby the subject creates a “something” to allow it function despite the symptom, bearing in mind that, in psychoanalytic terms, all

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subjects have a symptom.\textsuperscript{77} Indeed, Soler’s (2003) interpretation of this goes so far as to encompass normative heterosexuality itself as a symptom.\textsuperscript{78} Through the personal invention of a \textit{sinthome}, however, the subject can create a solution which ties the three Lacanian registers of human existence together – the Real which is the experience of reality that is beyond words, the Symbolic which includes language, law and cultural influences, and the Imaginary which comprises the subject’s interior life.\textsuperscript{79} The question to be addressed is what the theory of the \textit{sinthome} can offer in understanding asexuality. Asexuals are functioning people and so this would strongly suggest that they \textit{have} found a way of “tying things together”, to use the colloquialism. Does this mean that, through the \textit{sinthome}, asexuality has unconsciously chosen a support for the annulment of sexual desire which still allows for a productive engagement with desire in the broadest sense?

Since this route of enquiry moves into the later theorising of Lacan which is, much like asexuality, comparatively under-researched, it will be necessary to rely, not only on the work of Lacan himself, but also on a small number of key interpreters of this phase of his work, in particular Roberto Harari. Here, as elsewhere, the aim of the thesis will be not simply to relay Lacan’s work, but to offer, firstly, an engaged interpretation which recognises the difficulty of the original texts and also the divisions between readers and interpreters of these texts. Secondly, it is to contribute, for the first time, a Lacanian understanding of the recently emerged phenomenon of self-defined asexuality.

1.6.1. Lacan’s Later Concept of the Sinthome:

The evolved nature of Lacan’s later work heralds in new perspectives which, in a synchronous fashion, refer back to asexuality’s lack of attraction for another person. This is because the later Lacan, through his concept of the sinthome, posits a form of jouissance which is no longer prescribed by the other person. For Lacan, man’s desire is the desire of the Other,\(^{80}\) and yet his later theorising proposes an innovative way in which a subject can, essentially, find their own way of dealing with their symptom. I will be asking whether this concept offers an understanding of how the asexual subject can derive a different and, as yet, unconsidered form of jouissance, one that possibly both establishes and supports a new relation between the subject and the Other.

Just like sexual subjects, asexual subjects desire careers, recognition, self-expression and, apart from those who define themselves as a-romantic,\(^{81}\) they desire close relationships with others. In short, they are desiring beings and the energy of this desire is libido.

Therefore, in order to theorise a libido which is not sexually directed at another person, it will be necessary to ask how is the Other-directed component of libido annulled?

Furthermore, when we listen to asexuals speaking about their asexuality,\(^{82}\) it becomes apparent that there is something absolute about the way sexual desire is elided. The latter is not part of their experience, nor is the sexual activity of others understandable for them.\(^{83}\)


\(^{82}\) See Appendix 1.

\(^{83}\) Ibid.
The absolute nature of this absence of sexual desire for another person, and the absence of any understanding of its attractiveness for others, would suggest that something of a foreclosure has taken place. If this is so, it will be necessary to ask if foreclosure rather than annulment is the appropriate term. A further challenge in this regard is that, within Lacanian psychoanalysis, the term foreclosure is usually associated with psychosis. Therefore, in order to adhere to the stated aim of this dissertation, which is to assist in an understanding of the asexual orientation without the assumption of pathology, it will be necessary to interrogate the foundations of this term “foreclosure” and ask whether its close association with psychosis is justified and sustainable.

1.7. A Summary of the Chapters:

The thesis which follows has seven further chapters, organised as follows:

In Chapter 2, the Literature Review will address the non-psychoanalytic research and the limited number of papers on asexuality within psychoanalytic theory. The non-psychoanalytic research on asexuality is a relatively new field of academic study and, for this reason, is comparatively small. However, the research that has been carried out is of a high quality and offers useful and insightful material.
**Chapter 3** will examine Freud’s theories of the instincts and of libido. As mentioned above, this begins a two chapter exploratory and hypothetical survey of the conceptual resources available in Freudian theory that can provide an understanding of asexuality. This chapter, in particular, will show how the instincts (drives) are plastic to the extent that they are capable of a variety of ways of finding satisfaction. In terms of libido, I will be showing how Freud posits an unpleasurable aspect to it. This chapter will also examine the role of sublimation, the influence of auto-eroticism and the presence of an asexual period in every person’s sexual development.

**Chapter 4** will focus on more particular Freudian concepts such as the trauma which can be experienced from internally generated libidinal demands. It will also examine the role of narcissism in withdrawing libido from external objects, on the ego ideal as an agency that can include a desire for no desire and on the mechanism of repression and its potential role in asexuality. The concept of inhibition will also be explored, along with its role in male psychical impotence and female frigidity.

**Chapter 5** begins a three-chapter theoretical exploration of Lacanian theory in order to assess the innovative framework it provides from which to view asexuality. In particular this chapter looks at how Lacan’s theory offers a perspective on the universal concept of lack as a psychical absence which creates desire. It examines the central place of this absence within the unconscious fundamental phantasy which is the necessary support for all human desire. It will also highlight his concept of the reversal of dependency on the other person
for the satisfaction of need. I will be proposing that the lack of sexual desire in asexuality is not an absence, *per se*, but an active orientation to desire no sexual desire.

Chapter 6 elaborates a central proposal of this dissertation, namely, that the fundamental mechanism central to the formation of asexuality is a “choice” made by the unconscious of the infant to *not* take up the theorised position of the Imaginary phallus. This is classically understood as a pivotal moment whereby the pre-Oedipal child seeks to become what it imagines the mother desires. I will propose how this is linked to the eventual annulment of sexual desire and how asexuality might derive pleasure (*jouissance*) from no sexual desire. This chapter will also show how Lacanian theory can accommodate the paradoxical asexual experience of an active libidinal desire aimed at “nothing”.

In Chapter 7, I will refine the concept of annulment, Lacan’s term from *Seminar IV*, which I have used so far to explain the unqualified lack of sexual desire. This refinement of terms is necessary because of the absolute nature of the unconscious elision of sexual desire in asexuality which suggests that something unconditional is taking place. On this basis, I will propose that it is necessary to consider the term “foreclosure” as more appropriate, provided it can be separated from its Lacanian association with psychosis. I will also show how the *sintrohome*, a later conceptual development in Lacan’s work, offers a fruitful and robust way of understanding the enigma of asexuality within a predominantly sexual discourse.
**Chapter 8** is the concluding chapter. It will draw together the various theoretical strands of the previous chapters in order to propose that asexuality is a valid sexual orientation, that it is libidinally driven and that its libido, although unrecognisable as such, is directed towards a very specific object which causes asexual desire. I will be concluding that asexuality is the result of the earliest pre-Oedipal experience of libidinal excitation, i.e. the drive, which is experienced as unpleasurable. I will be further concluding that this unpleasure egresses forward through infantile psychosexual stages until it emerges in adulthood as the foreclosure of sexual desire for another person or thing.

In the next chapter, accordingly, I will commence with the Literature Review.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.0. Objective:

This Literature Review will focus predominantly on current thinking on asexuality within the non-psychoanalytic field where most research has taken place. It will also include the small number of psychoanalytic papers which deal directly or indirectly with asexuality. Although the existing literature on asexuality comes, almost exclusively, from disciplines other than psychoanalysis, and therefore differs markedly from a psychoanalytic approach, its findings are important and useful because they elaborate on the general characteristics of the asexual experience. While, traditionally, a literature review would offer a critique of existing literature of the field in question, in this instance a psychoanalytic critique of non-psychoanalytic literature would, I believe, be a misplaced cross-disciplinary exercise which would offer no theoretical challenge and serve no theoretical purpose. The research and the findings included in this literature review relate to those studies which I believe best provide an understanding of the asexual experience, and on which a psychoanalytic understanding can then be applied. The remainder of the dissertation, therefore, treats these findings in a psychoanalytic context and so, in effect, provides a critique of this literature, if it can be called such.
2.1.0. Early Studies of Asexuality:

A 1980 study, entitled *Theories of Sexual Orientation*, by researcher Michael Storms is generally accepted to be the first study to include the term “asexuality” in its research. In it, a model of asexuality was developed which classified heterosexuals as individuals who are highly attracted to the other sex (i.e., high in heteroeroticism), homosexuals as individuals who are highly attracted to the same sex (i.e., high in homoeroticism), bisexuals as individuals who are highly attracted to both sexes (i.e., high in both heteroeroticism and homoeroticism), and asexuals as individuals who are not attracted to either sex (i.e., low in both heteroeroticism and homoeroticism). Storms set out to test existing theories of sexual orientation that emphasised one of two assumptions: (a) that sexual orientation related to a person’s sex role orientation or (b) that sexual orientation related to a person’s erotic orientation. Although these assumptions influenced theory, research and clinical practice, he says neither had been adequately tested.

Using a two-dimensional model of sexual orientation, Storms was the first to distinguish between individuals who are bisexual (those who score high on both heteroeroticism and

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homoeroticism) and individuals who are asexual (those who score low on both dimensions). “Failing to differentiate bisexuals from asexuals can obscure the results of research on sexual orientation,” Storms says. He adds that his two-dimensional model of erotic orientation concurs with a Freudian view of bisexuality whereby bisexuals would have high levels of both homosexual and heterosexual eroticism. More generally, his results demonstrate a strong connection between a person’s erotic fantasy content and his or her sexual orientation. Storms concludes that if erotic fantasy is an important determinant of sexual orientation, “we still have no idea what produces erotic fantasy”.

2.1.1. The Bogaert Survey:

In what is generally regarded as the first direct enquiry into asexuality, Bogaert (2004) found that approximately 1% of British residents defined themselves as asexual. He used data from a national probability sample to investigate the prevalence and predictors of asexuality, defined as the sexuality of persons having no sexual attraction to a partner of either sex. The survey was prompted by the need for sexual information about the general population in the wake of the AIDS epidemic and it was among the most representative sexuality surveys. Up to this time, Bogaert says that sexual aversion disorder and hypoactive

87 Ibid.
sexual desire disorder (HSDD) had been studied more frequently. He distinguishes asexuality from these conditions because in both sexual aversion disorder and HSDD there usually is or was a sexual orientation toward partners of either or both gender(s). However, this is inhibited or blocked by either an aversion for genital contact with, or a low sexual desire for, these partners. “Asexuality, in contrast, can be defined as the absence of a traditional sexual orientation, in which an individual would exhibit little or no sexual attraction to males or females,” he writes. 89 He notes in his definition that asexuality is a lifelong orientation and while it is one that concerns a lack of sexual attraction it does not necessarily include a lack of sexual behavior with either sex.90

Bogaert found that of the participants, 195 or 1.05% reported being asexual,91 very similar to the rate of same-sex attraction (both exclusive same-sex and bisexuality combined; 207 or 1.11%). However, there were more gay and bisexual men than asexual men and more asexual women than lesbian and bisexual women. Relative to sexual people, asexual people had fewer sexual partners, had a later onset of sexual activity (if it occurred), and had less frequent sexual activity with a partner currently. Overall, asexual people had less sexual experience with sexual partners, and Bogaert interpreted this fact as providing some validation of the concept of asexuality. He speculates about whether the rate of asexuality is actually higher than reported given that some of the participants who declined to participate in this survey (about 30%) could also be asexual.

89 ibid, p.279.
90 ibid.
91 ibid, p.282.
He found that a variety of factors, from demographic (gender, social class, education, and race-ethnicity), to physical development (height and menarche onset), health, and religiosity variables predicted asexuality. Even physical development and health variables—late menarche, health problems in women and shorter stature and health problems in men—individually predicted asexuality. The study also found that a sizable minority (33%) of asexuals were in long term relationships and another 11% had had at least one long-term relationship in the past. Such partnerships in asexual people may occur for a variety of practical reasons (e.g., economic, child rearing), along with the fact that some, perhaps many, asexual people may still have a romantic/affectionate attraction to others and thus desire to form a romantic bond with them.

A second important finding was that, although asexual people reported a relatively low level of sexual activity with a partner (e.g., 0.2 per week vs. 1.2 per week for sexual people), some clearly still engaged in some level of sexual activity with a partner, perhaps if only to please that partner. Thus, distinctions between sexual attraction and other aspects of relationships (e.g., romantic attraction and sexual behavior) may be important within the context of definitional/conceptual issues surrounding asexuality, just as they are for the typical categories of sexual orientation (i.e., heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality).
In a later paper, Bogaert (2006) describes asexuality as an “overlooked phenomenon”\textsuperscript{92} and is careful to point out that his comments in his 2004 paper, regarding physical health issues and possible markers of atypical prenatal development as predictive of asexuality,\textsuperscript{93} should not be used to pathologise asexuality. This earlier view, in pointing towards a weak biology alongside a possibly atypical physiology, could lend itself to a pathologising 

credos. He clarifies that physical health and markers of prenatal development only accounted for a small percentage of variation in the prediction of asexuality. Also, until recently, a lack of sexuality was not perceived negatively.\textsuperscript{94} Rather, sexual activity, particularly if excessive or occurring within a nonreproductive context (e.g., masturbation), was perceived as a health and societal problem. In addition, even today, lack of interest in sex is promoted within certain religious groups and cultures.\textsuperscript{95} “If... we avoid a general tendency to pathologise and recognise that some people may be quite content to live as asexual beings, it may in fact serve to remove the stigma and possible distress associated with such inclinations,” he says.\textsuperscript{96} In this paper, Bogaert’s main point is that while HSDD does require a clinical focus, asexuality should not necessarily be deemed a pathological state.\textsuperscript{97}

\textsuperscript{93} Bogaert, A.F. (2004), Op. Cit., p.280. Here he says: “Both stature and the timing of puberty are interesting in this regard because they are partially regulated by the hypothalamus (e.g., Grumbach & Styne, 1992). Indeed, the fact that homosexual men may differ from heterosexual men in height and pubertal timing has provided support for the notion that the development of sexual attraction processes is affected by biological factors (e.g., prenatal hormones) originating prior to birth…”
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid p.249.
2.2. Asexuality and Subjective Distress:

According to Prause & Graham (2007), asexuality raises questions concerning the role of “personal distress” in defining sexual desire problems. Their study attempts to better characterise the way that the label “asexual” is used and to investigate what distinguishes those who identify as asexual from those who do not. They say that implicit in the debate about what constitutes a “normal” level of sexual desire is an assumption that some level of sexual desire is normative. As such, they ask: is low or absent sexual desire necessarily to be associated with pathology? They define “pathologizing” as assigning a diagnosis on the basis of cognitions or behaviors in the absence of substantive evidence that the cognitions or behaviors are maladaptive (citing Rubin, 2000). They point out that the current evidence does not suggest that cognitions and behaviours associated with asexuality necessarily signal a problem. They say that some researchers have used the term “asexual” as a pejorative label to refer to low or absent sexual desire or attractions, low or absent sexual behaviors, exclusively romantic non-sexual partnerships, or a combination of these.

Prause & Graham (2007) say their research was designed to better characterise individuals who self-identify as asexual and to provide exploratory data for future hypothesis-driven research. They also sought to measure the level of subjective distress among asexuals on the basis, as other authors have noted, that subjective distress is a symptom required for many psychiatric diagnoses, including hypoactive sexual desire disorder. The study found

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that self-identified asexuals were not particularly sexually fearful, but that they had a lower excitatory drive. The study did not replicate the findings of Bogaert (2004) in that it did not find a gender or relationship status difference between sexuals and asexuals.

The data also indicated that a higher percentage of asexuals had completed at least a college degree as compared to non-asexuals, and this was not accounted for by the group age difference. The Bogaert study found the opposite. There was no significant difference in the lifetime number of sexual partners reported by asexuals and non-asexuals, whereas in Bogaert (2004) asexuals reported fewer sexual partners. Both groups of participants reported that asexuals would differ most from non-asexuals by their no/low sexual desire and their no/low sexual experience, but the quantitative data suggested that asexuals actually differed most in their sexual desire and sexual arousability levels, and not the amount of their sexual experience. Asexuals also frequently explained that “what was wrong” with asexuality was something outside of their control (e.g., genetically or hormonally). The authors say it remains to be determined to what extent asexuality is problematic in the absence of individual, personal distress.

2.3. Researching Asexual Identity:

101 See Appendix 1.
Picking up on a statement by Cole (1993) that one of the most pervasive social assumptions is that all humans possess sexual desire, Scherrer (2008) comments that there is little academic literature exploring those people who do not possess it. She says that asexuality challenges notions of the pervasiveness of sexuality and presents a unique opportunity to explore the negotiation of identity and desire. Of the eighty-nine participants who responded to her question, “what does this identity mean to you?” thirty-nine, or forty-four percent, of participants said that their asexual identity means that they do not experience sexual attraction or sexual desire. The remaining fifty (56%) participants put forth alternative understandings. Of these, twenty-seven participants said that a lack of interest in sexual behavior was a defining component of their asexual identity and that this was not necessarily associated with sexual attraction.

Scherrer points out that for some respondents an asexual identity is not about a lack of sexual attraction but rather is based on an intent to not participate in sexual behaviours. An additional thirteen participants offered definitions of their asexuality that contained relatively limited information about the meaning of their asexual identity such as “It is just who I am”. She found 13 participants who described themselves as not experiencing sexual desire or attraction but at the same time, when describing an “ideal relationship”, they declared interest in some sort of physical intimacy with another or others.

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105 Ibid, p.626.
106 See Appendix 1.
Regarding masturbation, Scherrer says that while she did not explicitly ask about masturbation, ten participants mentioned it,\textsuperscript{107} with some making the distinction between sex in relation to others and the sexual encounter with the self, or masturbation. Despite this distinction, they still considered masturbation to be an expression of sexual desire that they were \textit{not} interested in.\textsuperscript{108} For Scherrer this disconnect between masturbation and sexuality is an interesting divorce, given masturbation’s historical connection to sex. It reinforces findings by Prause & Graham (2007) who found that two of the four self-identified asexual people in their sample did engage in masturbation while defining it as non-sexual. For Scherrer these narratives illustrate how behaviors that do not fall under androcentric definitions of sex are particularly likely to fall into a gray area of sexuality.

She says that an exploration of asexual identities contributes to a larger social constructivist project as the discourses of sex, sexuality, and physical intimacy are challenged and re-written during the construction of asexual identities. Sexual essentialism is a widespread assumption of modern society, according to which sex is a natural force that exists prior to social life and which shapes institutions. The idea that the desire for sex (or lack of this desire) is a natural and essential characteristic is present in many of her participants’ descriptions of their asexuality, with many describing themselves as \textit{naturally} asexual.\textsuperscript{109} While the Internet facilitates the discovery of a language for asexuality, she finds it

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid, p.628.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
interesting that this identity mostly revolves around the lack of sexuality. Some respondents compare an asexual identity with a lack, rather than the presence of a characteristic, as many salient identities are. Because it is defined as a lack of behaviour or desire, she says asexuality has escaped attention, which is a clear departure from the experiences of other marginalised sexualities.

Asexual identities are also defined in opposition to celibacy and celibate identities, which are described as a choice. Scherrer cites the AVEN website which states that: “Unlike celibacy, which is a choice, asexuality is a sexual orientation”. ¹¹⁰ For many of her participants the naturalness of their asexuality is an important aspect of how they see their identity. Sherrer also says the role of the Internet in coming to an asexual identity is evidence of the influence of social context on identity. Many participants reported that it was only after encountering the language of asexuality and an asexual community that they took on the identity. For many asexual individuals, the Internet has facilitated the discovery not only of a language by which to describe themselves and a community that offers support and acceptance but also a way of thinking about their asexuality as an essential characteristic of themselves.¹¹¹

2.4. Asexuality and Sexual Activity:

¹¹⁰ See AVEN website, accessed at [https://www.asexuality.org/?q=overview.html]
In a dual study of asexuality, Brotto, Knudson, Inskip, Rhodes and Erskine (2010) examined relationship characteristics, frequency of sexual behaviors, sexual difficulties and distress, psychopathology, interpersonal functioning, and alexithymia\textsuperscript{112} in 187 asexuals recruited from the AVEN website.\textsuperscript{113} A summary of the findings from this survey of 54 men and 133 women showed that sexual response was lower than normative data but was not experienced as distressing. Masturbation frequency in males was similar to available data for sexual men. Social withdrawal was found to be the most elevated personality subscale; however, interpersonal functioning was in the normal range. Alexithymia was elevated in 12%. Social desirability was also in the normal range. A second study was designed to expand upon the quantitative findings with 15 asexuals from the first study through in-depth telephone interviews. The findings of this study suggest that asexuality is best conceptualised as a lack of sexual attraction; however, asexuals varied greatly in their experience of sexual response and behavior. Asexuals partnered with sexuals acknowledged having to “negotiate” sexual activity.\textsuperscript{114} There were not higher rates of psychopathology among asexuals; however, the authors says a subset might fit the criteria for Schizoid Personality Disorder. There was also strong opposition to viewing asexuality as an extreme case of sexual desire disorder (HSDD).

\textsuperscript{112} Defined as the inability to recognise emotions, or their subtleties and textures.


\textsuperscript{114} Ibid, p.599.
The authors point out that only 80% of the men and 73% of the women selected “asexual” when presented with a forced-choice question about their sexual orientation. “This is despite the fact that we recruited from AVEN, a web-community devoted to asexuals, and that participants had to personally endorse the asexual label before being routed to questionnaires,” they say. The nature of their relationships, for those asexual individuals who were currently in a relationship, helped to interpret why not all participants selected asexual as their orientation. The majority described their relationships with a focus on the romantic (e.g., heteroromantic) as opposed to the sexual (e.g., heterosexual). They say that the 11% who did not endorse asexual as their label may have been deterred by the focus on “sexual” in asexual, and preferred to conceptualise themselves and their relationships as a romantic orientation.

In terms of the age of sexual interest and intercourse debut, many individuals indicated that they could not recall the onset of sexual interests. The authors believe this lack of recollection of first sexual interests and experiences might be important if one considers that puberty for humans marks a significant developmental hallmark where the initiation of sexual feelings and behaviors is an important aspect. They further add that this suggests, perhaps, a developmental trajectory whereby the lack of sexual interests in early adulthood may set the stage for later lack of sexual desire or excitement. It is noteworthy, they say, that 73% of the sample had never engaged in sexual intercourse and that this replicates the findings of Bogaert (2004). The fact that one-third of a sample of individuals with a mean age of 30 has never been in a relationship is also noteworthy. They speculate that problems

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in child-parent attachment may lead to problems in how the person later develops intimate relationships as an adult. Although speculative, they propose that it is possible that asexuals may have been avoidant as children, leading to insecure attachment and to their viewing of relationships as awkward and uncomfortable as adults.

Some 27% of the sample engaged in sexual intercourse and provided a variety of reasons for this, some unrelated to sexual attraction (e.g., a favor, or sympathy, or manipulation).\textsuperscript{116} Masturbation frequencies were comparable to those reported in other studies of sexual individuals; between 73% of women and 80% of men.\textsuperscript{117} The average frequency was a few times per week for men, and once per month for women. Similar rates of asexual women in this study (approximately 30%) and women in a probability study of sexuals had never engaged in masturbation. The authors say that sexual intercourse and masturbation that are stripped of sexual attraction might, therefore, be motivated by non-sexual reasons, e.g., reducing tension or for relationship reasons.

The majority (90%) of the sample denied having sexual distress\textsuperscript{118} and, whereas it has been speculated that asexuality might overlap with sexual desire disorder (Prause & Graham, 2007), Brotto et al (2010) support the speculation by Bogaert (2006) that asexuality and desire disorder can be differentiated on the basis that the person with low desire experiences distress whereas the asexual does not.\textsuperscript{119} Of significance, however, is the finding

\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{116} Ibid, p.607.
  \item\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
  \item\textsuperscript{118} Ibid, p.606.
  \item\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
that for both women and men, sexual distress and sexual desire were positively correlated. In other words, the study found that distress increased with increasing desire scores. These paradoxical correlations, the authors say, suggest that the presence of a desire response is distressing for the asexual individual.\textsuperscript{120}

The authors say that although Prause and Graham (2007) conceptualised asexuals as having low sexual excitation, masturbation frequency was manifest among their sample, and did not differ markedly from recent normative data, suggesting that the “motivations for masturbation may not stem from an intrinsic desire or sexual excitement”.\textsuperscript{121} There was also a consistent theme to how asexuals defined asexuality. A “lack of sexual attraction” was evident in nearly all individuals, as respondents distinguished this lack of attraction from other aspects of sexual response which may still have been present, such as sexual desire. If sexual desire or arousal were present, asexuals argued that they were not “directed” at anyone. This persistent or lifelong lack of sexual attraction was differentiated from the normative decline in sexual attraction that takes place with relationship duration.\textsuperscript{122}

Asexuality did not appear to be a fear-mediated construct and the lack of sexual activity was not related to avoidance or disgust. There was also a great deal of variety in sexual behaviours with some participants having frequent sexual intercourse and some having never engaged in it. Some motivations for engaging in sexual activity were in an effort to

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid, p.609.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid.
“seem normal”. The Brotto et al (2010) findings supported other research which found that asexuals had low levels of sexual arousability or excitement. While suggesting that a more thorough examination of the construct of distress might be necessary for future research, the authors say that it might also be at the heart of differentiating a problematic lack of sexual desire (e.g., HSDD) from a non-distressing lack of attraction (asexuality). The fact that all asexuals interviewed believed that asexuality was biological and that there may be a genetic component to it also deserves further study, they say.

Citing current theorists, they also say that it may be that asexuals lack “cognitive causal attribution” and so their physiological arousal does not become directed towards any target. They point to other theorists who prefer a biological explanation for the development of sexual attraction and posit a strong link with disruptions in the process of adrenal maturation (adrenarche) between the ages of 6 and 10. Alternatively, they say, asexuality may develop from a central mechanism that “prevents the activation of neural receptors by these androgens thus preventing proliferation”. This is pointing towards a hormonal aetiology similar in scope to that proposed by Bogaert (2006) in terms of the possible role of the hypothalamus. Describing asexuality as a “poorly understood construct”, the authors say that the majority of their participants could not recall onset of any sexual attractions during childhood and, instead, reported feeling different from their peers, who in contrast

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124 Adrenarche is a process related to puberty, but distinct from hypothalamic-pituitary-gonadal (HPG axis) maturation and function. It can occur as early as 5 years of age. Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adrenarche](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adrenarche)
verbalised sexual attractions, and that this points to possible aberrations in the period of adrenarche.\textsuperscript{127}

2.5. Diversity Within Asexuality:

The focus of Carrigan (2011) is on “the identities and lived experience of self-identified asexuals”, because a diverse range of experiences fall under the popular AVEN\textsuperscript{128} definition of an asexual.\textsuperscript{129} While conceding that the AVEN definition has been highly influential, he contends that it also conceals a significant degree of heterogeneity as to the personal reasons that individuals self-define as asexual.\textsuperscript{130} In contrast to Bogaert (2004, 2006), Carrigan believes that there are a variety of reasons that lead individuals to identify as asexual, and that “before we can begin to understand them, it is important to gain some acquaintance with the terms that asexuals use to describe themselves”. Figure 1 (below) illustrates the identifications Carrigan found within the emerging asexual discourse. Many, he says, are conversational terms among asexuals but others, such as “sex-averse” and “a-fluid”, are more rarely encountered. In his compilation, a central distinction is made between romance and sex which, he says, may be counterintuitive from the perspective of a mainstream sexual culture that regards the latter as the culmination of the former. Many

\textsuperscript{128} Accessed at http://www.asexuality.org/home/
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid. p.467.
asexuals feel attraction but without any sexual component to it, instead regarding it as
romantic and/or emotional. Others feel attraction that is distinctly aesthetic.\textsuperscript{131}

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Figure I. Common identifications within asexual discourse.\textsuperscript{132}

Within the group of romantic asexuals, Carrigan says that the variations include
heteroromantics who only feel romantic attraction to the opposite sex, homoromantics to
the same sex, biromantics to both sexes and panromantics without reference to sex or
gender. He says that some romantic asexuals actively seek relationships because closeness,
companionship, intellectual and emotional connection are desirable to them.\textsuperscript{133} Others are
simply open to the possibility, given their experience of romantic attraction, without actively
seeking it or assigning it any priority in their lives. He says that aromantic asexuals, on the
other hand, experience no romantic attraction and have no desire to pursue romantic

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid, p. 468. Also, see Appendix 1.

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid. Also, Weeks (1991) offers a similar account of diversity within homosexual and lesbian identities. See,

relationships. He says that Scherrer (2008) found something similar in that “self-identified aromantic asexual individuals tend to describe their ideal relationships as primarily friendship-like”. In other cases, though, he notes that romance may be actively and viscerally rejected, as with the respondent who wrote of their disgust at ideas of romance and annoyance at the priority commonly ascribed to them within people’s lives.

Carrigan found that attitudes with regard to sex also varied among asexuals, in that those who are sex-positive endorse sex as positive and healthy, sometimes with a concomitant intellectual and/or cultural interest, without experiencing sexual desire or seeking to engage in it themselves. He found that those who are sex-neutral are simply uninterested in sex. However, some may be willing to have sex in certain contexts. As well as pleasing a partner, it may be a source of intimacy and confirmation without being enjoyed in a way that is, per se, sexual. He says this latter qualification is supported by the findings of Brotto et al (2010) that asexuals who have sex do not find it brings them closer to their partners, although for others it may simply be a chore which is a term that came up in numerous interviews and replies to questionnaires. However, for those who are sex-averse or anti-sex, the idea of sex, let alone the actual practice of it, is deeply problematic. Yet, here too, there is variety, as some are mildly uncomfortable about sex, some are slightly revolted by it and then there are those for whom it is both disgusting and deeply distressing.

134 Ibid.
135 Ibid.
136 Ibid.
137 Ibid, p.470. See also Appendix 1.
2.6. Asexuality and Science:

Przybylo (2012) examines the role of scientific research in shaping the “possibilities and impossibilities of what counts as asexuality”.\textsuperscript{138} She says asexuality, like all sexualities, is culturally and historically contingent and has not existed at any other time in Western history, not as “asexuality” per se.\textsuperscript{139} She also believes that asexuality, like most sexualities, is “in significant and intricate ways carved into existence by science”.\textsuperscript{140} Earlier studies of asexuality, for all their faults, accepted asexuality as another “hue of human sexuality”,\textsuperscript{141} unlike more contemporary studies which demonstrate a “tangible claiming of asexual territory” as a modern “discovery” by science.\textsuperscript{142} She says the first depictions of asexuality saw Michael Storms engage in a remodelling of Kinsey’s sexuality scale, producing as a by-product the sexual orientation of asexuality. Kinsey’s work hinged upon one sole axis of sexuality – the heterosexual-homosexual continuum. He did not investigate what he termed group X – those having “no socio-sexual contacts or reactions” (citing Kinsey et al 1948)\textsuperscript{143} and who did “not respond erotically to either heterosexual or homosexual stimuli and (did) not have overt physical contacts with individuals of either sex in which there is evidence of any

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid, p.225.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid, p.227.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid, p.226.
response” (citing Kinsey et al 1953). Nor did Kinsey use the term asexuality. Przybylo contends that Storms named asexuality, but “hardly acknowledged this act of naming”, being more interested in the area of bisexuality. In Masters and Johnson on Sex and Human Loving (1986), she says sexologists William Masters, Virginia Johnson and Robert Kolodny linked asexuality with negative and pathological traits. The disinterest in the asexual category in the late 70s and early 80s suggests that it was not “a site of meaning making, intellectual enquiry or identity formation”. She further postulates that this flags the very contingency and “constructed-ness” of sexuality in terms of sexual ideals and practices. She says:

... these studies’ negligence towards asexuality reminds us that asexuality, like all sexualities, in not immutable and ever present in the same form. Today’s flourishing of asexual interest and meaning-formation... puts into sharp relief the absence of such conversations in the past.

Przybylo says Bogaert’s work, because it was the first outright study of asexuality, is of great importance and a lot of what was to follow built on it to a greater or lesser extent. But, it presents itself as “value-free” and “neutral”, yet it is limited in its “reliance on biological explanations of asexuality” and what she calls “a psychosocial rehearsal of confining sexual

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146 Ibid, p.229.
147 Ibid.
gender roles”. “In other words, it seems that the price paid for the legitimisation and depathologisation of asexuality is high – the rehearsal of limiting and normative standards of gender, as well as a veritable binding of asexuality to the body,” she says.148 Like Bogaert, she doubts whether the 1% figure, as indicative of asexuals in a given population, is accurate or reliable, believing the true figure may be considerably higher.149

Przybylo questions the general trend of contemporary sexology in establishing the differences between men’s and women’s biological sexual response. In contrast, she observes that Masters and Johnson had as “one of their major ideological tenets: the similarity between women and men”(citing Irvine 1990).150 Przybylo also questions why it is that this difference is based on classifying women as less aware of their bodies, less capable of coordinating their bodies with their minds, and as being more sexually receptive and pliable? She says these current patterns within scientific sexological discourse reflect something of contemporary sexual politics.151 While the scientific research on asexuality is instrumental in legitimising asexuality, she says “it does so through the reproduction of normative, essentialist, and harmful notions about (a)sexuality and sexual difference”.152 The outcome is that women are rendered as more receptive, pliable, and less sexually coordinated than men and asexuality becomes mapped on and in the biological body. These

149 Ibid, pp.231-232. She says the 1.05% is “not particularly accurate or reliable”, as many authors (DeLuzio Chasin, 2011; Hinderliter, 2009; Prause and Graham, 2007) have suggested. Bogaert (2004) also speculates whether the true figure is actually higher since 30% declined to participate and could be asexual. See p.284.
151 Ibid.
152 Ibid, p.239.
naturalised views of sexual difference take precedence and are framed in what may appear to be a progressive and generous analysis of asexuality, she says.

Therefore, the composite picture of an asexual subject which emerges from current research is a person who: Does not feel sexual attraction for another person or thing; does not experience subjective distress due to this absence of sexual attraction; has experienced this lack of sexual attraction for most, if not all, of their lives; is not, generally speaking, characterised by fear or disgust at sex; can, in some manifestations, engage in romantic, non-sexual relationships; can, in some manifestations, engage in consensual sexual acts; considers asexuality to be a biological or genetically determined orientation; has no recollection of childhood sexual attractions and can engage in self-directed masturbation but considers it a non-sexual activity.
2.7. Psychoanalytic Literature:

Research in the area of asexuality as a self-defined, distress-free, lifelong orientation is almost completely lacking in psychoanalytic literature. There are, however, three papers which touch on this area either directly or indirectly. One paper which is occasionally cited negatively by writers on asexuality\textsuperscript{153} is by psychoanalysts Hansen de Almeida and Bratjerman Lerner (1999). In it, the authors are credited with the comment that there is no such thing as asexuality.\textsuperscript{154} While this sentiment is undoubtedly contained within their paper, this is not a paper on asexuality but on gender identity. The term asexuality is used in the concluding paragraphs but it is conflated with the term gender neutrality and the authors are making the point that to identify as non-sex, i.e., neither male nor female, is a “fantasy”.\textsuperscript{155} Their point is not that asexuality does not exist, but rather that to identify as a neutral gender is an omnipotent fantasy of denial that leads to the “annihilation” of sexual identification.\textsuperscript{156} It appears to offer a repudiation of self-defined asexuality but, in fact, this is not the case.

Chassaing (2008), in a paper that deals directly with asexuality, entitled “The Position of the Resigner”, notes that asexuals appear to be “happy” in their orientation\textsuperscript{157} and asks why this

\textsuperscript{153} See Engelman, J. (2008), \textit{Op. Cit.}, online pagination, p.3. This opinion is also occasionally repeated in online blog comments.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid
\textsuperscript{157} Chassaing, J-L. (2008), \textit{La Position du Demissionnaire}, ERES | \textit{La revue lacanienne}, n° 2, p.101
would not be the case, having rid sex from their lives.  

Speculating that asexuality is positioned somewhere between a denial and a disavowal, he offers the view that asexuality has by-passed the tensions inherent in sexual relations. As such, asexuality represents, in his opinion, an example of the perfect mastery of the sexual Real, by which he means that all the enigmatic challenges which sexuality poses are avoided. He asks the further question, but does not answer it, as to what happens to the object relation in asexuality, an important topic which I will examine more fully in later chapters.

Chassaing believes it remains to be seen if asexuality is a fashionable fad and, therefore, transient. He concludes by commenting that the phallus as signifier of desire, and a central component of Lacanian theory, needs to be defended because of its importance in the symbolisation of lack which drives desire. For him, the pacifying effects of the phallus through speech and language offer a path through the challenges of sexuality and he implies that this is preferable to the “perverse complexity” of escaping castration which asexuality represents. This latter point is an occasionally-encountered psychoanalytic viewpoint which theorises non-normative sexualities as an escape from, or a shelter from, castration, i.e., deriving from an inability to come to terms with the lack that is installed

158 Ibid, p.102.
159 Ibid, p.103.
160 Ibid.
161 Ibid, 106.
162 Ibid.
164 Ibid.
due to the unassimilable trauma of sexual difference. In later chapters, I will be proposing an alternative perspective to this traditional view.

Meanwhile, Pardo (2010), in a paper entitled “Asexuality, contemporary phenomenon?”, also refers to the place of the phallus and to the possibility of asexuality as a “temporary fad”.166 She agrees that asexuals can be considered as free from sex, but only in terms of sexual activity and sexual desire. What she believes unites them is the fact of having put in practice “a denial, thus bringing about a degradation of phallic signification”. She asks whether they, therefore, constitute a new form of contemporary subjectivity. Asexuals are sexed beings—there is no third possibility—but as spoken beings (parlêtre), they have the possibility to play with their sexed being, in other words to elude what she calls the real “fatality” of sex.167 She says this is possible as an “imaginary assemblage” because on the imaginary level anything is possible in matters of sex, sometimes to the extent of asserting one thing and at the same time its opposite. She asks if asexuals are not without sex, but rather alone in sex, in what appears to be a reference to being transfixed in an imaginary and narcissistic dimension which works against the sexual.168

In a culture of spectacle and consumption, Pardo says the subject falls under the illusion of being able to compensate for any lack by consuming the objects at hand. As this filling of the

168 Ibid.
lack with real objects operates at the level of the imaginary, it eludes castration. This resonates again with the theme within psychoanalysis, mentioned above, that non-normative sexuality is the result of the encounter with castration being missed in some manner. This, she argues, leads to a confrontation with forms of jouissance outside of the body that are impossible to interpret. But, in a departure from asexual experience, she says that this process “leaves the psyche wide open to the manifestations of anxiety”. As stated, subjective distress due to the absence of sexual desire is not part of the experience of asexuality. She goes on to say that the common justification of asexuality that “I have been born like this”, is a very modern trap, a catchall phrase, for being biologically programmed and having no choice, even though this involves a form of depersonalisation.

For her, asexuality can be seen as an effect of the human subject being unable to “temper his jouissance”, to the point where “sexual difference appears more or less secondary”. She says that in order to become a subject, the human being must encounter sexual difference, experienced as fundamentally traumatic and unassimilable. Yet, asexuality implies an encounter of a different kind, she believes. It is still traumatic, but comes from the outside, through social discourse and through an imagery dominated by sex, stripped of its symbolic dimension and in a Real that may lead to “terror”. As a phenomenon, she

169 Ibid, p.7. (internet copy)
170 Ibid.
171 Ibid, p.8 (internet copy)
172 This is a fundamental Lacanian concept, based on Freud’s views, best exemplified in the latter’s paper Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes (1925), Standard Edition XIX, Vintage/Hogarth: London. p.252 ff.
says asexuality shows that in silencing its eroticism, a body is left to claim, in the public arena, the identity which it cannot grasp symbolically. As such, for her, asexuality is a contemporary form of a new subjectivity, where the symbolic is missing and the imaginary takes over. This, she says, disrupts the position of the Other, as sexual partner, whereby a pleasure of the drives can be attained by the asexual which is different from any satisfaction of need.\textsuperscript{174} I will be concurring with some of what Pardo says but I will be proposing that asexuality does not arise due to an inability to “grasp symbolically” the sexual real. I will also be proposing that while self-defined asexuality is, in part, responding to the adverse effects of a social discourse which is dominated by sex, social discourse is not the primary cause of asexuality.

The fact that there is very little available literature on asexuality within psychoanalysis clearly shows the gap to which this dissertation seeks to address itself. Just two papers take asexuality for their subject matter and within these there is evidence of a reliance on either anecdotal evidence or unquestioning adherence to classical psychoanalytic theoretical principles. As a result, both struggle to explain the concept of a sexual drive which is absent without recourse to characterizing it as a dysfunctional lack. This dissertation will seek to offer an alternative view to this from a close reading of Freud and Lacan. First, in the following two chapters, I will focus on Freudian theory and its contribution to an understanding of asexuality.

\textsuperscript{174} ibid
Chapter 3

Towards a Freudian Understanding of Asexuality

3.0. Objective:

This chapter will examine Freud’s theories of the instincts (drives) and of human libido in order to provide a psychoanalytic basis from which to build an understanding of asexuality. It will also examine the recurrent theme in Freud’s writings which challenges the popular assumption of sexuality as an unambiguously pleasurable phenomenon. Instead, Freud posits the experience of libido as disruptive and potentially unpleasurable. As well as this, it will examine the role of sublimation, the influence of auto-eroticism, the apparent lack of sexualised object-choice, and the significance of the latency period as an asexual stage in every person’s sexual development. Since Lacanian theory is based on Freudian theory, this chapter, and the next, will lay the necessary foundations for my proposal that asexuality represents an, as yet, unconsidered way in which the satisfaction of libido is achieved.
The method in what follows, as indicated in the Introduction, is relatively unusual, so it is worth clarifying it once again before proceeding over the next two chapters. In many cases, theoretical research applies a body of theory, which is held relatively constant, to explain some set of data. However, the phenomena associated with asexuality are very unusual, relative to the types of phenomena that Freud, in particular, encountered. His theory was shaped by responses to, and clinical encounters with, hysteria, obsessional neuroses, the perversions, and psychoses. In all of these, recognisable sexual symptoms are evident. Asexuality, as stated, is characterised precisely by the perceived absence of such sexual manifestations. It becomes a question in this case, then, of holding constant the new phenomena which the research and the clinic of asexuality brings to our attention, and reversing the direction of inquiry, at least in one sense. What light does the emergence of the asexual orientation throw on Freud’s theories? Can Freudian theory provide any assistance in the theoretical comprehension of this orientation? Also, what limits to this body of theory might the asexual experience represent? With this in mind, we can begin.

3.1. Asexuality and Freudian Theory:

Freud conceptualises libido as essentially a constant within the human subject and a “plastic” form of energy,\(^{175}\) one that is capable of finding satisfaction in a variety of ways. This means that every subject has a sexual drive and I will be proposing that for the asexual person both the object and the aim of the sexual drive are so remote that it has been

difficult, if not impossible, to recognise this. Asexuals appear to be desiring subjects and, even if it is an asexual desire, I will also be proposing that it is a desire which has libidinal roots. The beginnings of human sexuality, according to Freud, lie in infantile sexuality and he defines infantile sexuality as comprising “all the feelings” that a child has for its parents and caregivers which drive the child’s sexual impulses. These sexual impulses are expressed in the child’s wish for signs of affection from the adults around it, such as the desire to kiss, touch and look at them. But, he says, infantile sexual impulses are also to be found in such things as the child’s curiosity about the adults’ genitals, or about their excretory functions. It finds expression, too, in the child’s wish to marry its mother or have a child with its father. For Freud, these sexual impulses display a combination of tender and jealous feelings along with sexual intentions. In a fundamental way, he says, the child makes the person it loves into the “object” of all its “still not properly centred sexual needs”. The general characteristics of infantile sexual instincts (drives) are that they are numerous, they derive from a great variety of organic sources, they act independently of one another and they only achieve a more or less complete synthesis relatively late at puberty. This is a condensed re-stating of Freud’s theory that the sexual instincts (drives) develop, for all subjects, through oral, anal and phallic stages up to the age of 6 years or so, and then enter a period of latency until puberty when the fragmented instincts fuse together into a genital sexuality.

178 Ibid.
180 Lacan will differ on this point. See, Footnote 812, below.
Among the challenges which asexuality faces in terms of a wider understanding and acceptance of its orientation is not only the widely-held belief that the human sex drive is an unquestioned source of pleasure, but also that to be without a sex drive is to be a non-person. The following quote is from a religious article. “Question: What do you call a person who is asexual? Answer: Not a person. Asexual people do not exist.” 181 In contrast to this, Freud has long argued that the sexual instincts (drives), rather than being the ingredient for a happy life, or the source of unequivocal pleasure, are more nuanced in that they can also be problematic182 and can have an unsettling quality.183 The sexual drives can just as easily be “breakers of the peace” which constantly produce “tensions whose release is felt as pleasure”.184 He says that this aspect of the sex drive has caused civilization to suppress it.185 Not only is the sexual drive so troublesome that it needs to be suppressed, but its troublesome quality is due to unacceptable sexual feelings which derive from within our families of origin. This latter aspect, “derived from eroticism”, is responsible for renunciations of the sexual drive186 which take the form of enforced sexual abstinence or neurotic illness.187

Freud also sees the sexual drive include a quota of aggression and even repugnance188 which makes its very presence challenging. This is why there is something ineffable,

184 Freud, S. (1921g), Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Standard Edition XVIII, p.63.
188 Ibid.
unsayable, about sexuality\textsuperscript{189} and this, in turn, has fundamental implications for subject formation. The word “sexual”, then, is a multi-layered concept. As Freud says, it is something which allows us to contrast male and female, to search for pleasure, to reproduce the species, but all the while having within it something that is unsettling, at times improper and, at other times, something which must be kept secret.\textsuperscript{190}

For Freud, the plasticity of human sexuality means that there are those who will prefer same sex partners, as well as those who will eschew partners\textsuperscript{191} and use fantasy to gain pleasure.\textsuperscript{192} This latter point is of importance to asexuality because I will be proposing in later chapters that, contrary to what appears to be the case, there is a libidinal fantasy operating within this sexual orientation. Indeed, rather than a sign of a disorder, Freud believes that sex used for purposes other than sexual reproduction has been a feature of human sexuality from time immemorial, in all periods of history and among all peoples.\textsuperscript{193}

Regarding homosexuality, as an example, he says that homosexual urges, far from being exceptions in terms of human sexuality, are in fact part of the sexuality in every single neurotic.\textsuperscript{194} He also says that those who self-identify as homosexual are only a fraction of

\textsuperscript{192} Today this is termed “kink”, defined as a slang word for “bizarre or unconventional sexual preferences or behaviour”. Accessed at \url{http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/kink}. It is also a discourse within the sexual- and gender-diversity movement.
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid, p.304.
those who are latent homosexuals.\textsuperscript{195} Current USA statistics, cited in the previous chapter, suggest that the population of self-defined asexuals is on a par with the LGTB+ population. It remains an open question as to whether the numbers of asexuals, as Freud suggests regarding homosexuality, is a fraction of those who self-define themselves as such. Homosexuality is an important example for Freud of both the plasticity of sexuality and its polymorphously perverse origins in the infantile stages.\textsuperscript{196} I am proposing that asexuality is equally important for the same reasons; it supports the theory of plasticity and that of the polymorphous perversity, i.e., the flexibility, of the sexual drives.\textsuperscript{197} I will also be proposing that asexuality, like Freud’s belief regarding homosexuality, is quite possibly part of every person’s sexuality.

Freud doesn’t use the word “asexual” often, and never in the sense of self-defined asexuality, but in one of the few instances where he does, he says that because society’s educative processes ensure that “almost all infantile sexual activities” are forbidden, people really believe the lives of children are asexual.\textsuperscript{198} However, in what amounts to a challenge for both an understanding of self-defined asexuality and a challenge in theorising its apparent absence of sexual desire, Freud believes there is no such thing as an asexual childhood. It only appears to be this way because the period up to the age of five or six years of age, which is the period of infantile sexuality, is “covered in most people by the veil

\textsuperscript{195} Ibid, pp.307-308.
\textsuperscript{197} Freud, S. (1916-1917), Op. Cit., p.308. The phrase “polymorphously perverse” emphasises that human sexuality begins in all subjects from a diffuse and diverse set of psycho-physical component sexual drives that are capable of manifesting in a variety of ways. In this Freudian view, even bodily organs, as well as the functions they perform, have a sexual significance.
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid, p.312. Also, Appignanesi and Forrester (1992) argue that, from the mid-1940s to the 1970s, the British object relations school of psychoanalysis desexualised not just the “psychoanalytic child” but also the “sexual mother”. See, Freud’s Women, p.454.
of amnesia”. 199 Freud believes the majority of experiences before the start of the latency period200 are forgotten due to this infantile amnesia.201 The reason for forgetting these experiences is that they relate not only to early sexual life but also to the Oedipal relation to parents, which needs to be repressed. This could offer a psychoanalytic understanding of the recurrent experience of asexuality, reported by asexual individuals, as something a person is born with.202 Infantile amnesia erases any memory of early sexuality and so asexuality would, as with heterosexuality and homosexuality, appear as if the subject is born with it.

Also, if these earliest sexual experiences encounter repression it corroborates the argument of this dissertation that it involves a degree of unpleasure. I propose to show in later chapters that while the Freudian concept of infantile sexuality remains a core element of this thesis, i.e., that there is no such thing as an asexual infantile period, the passage of the asexual subject through this universal phase of infantile sexuality is markedly different to that of the sexual subject.

3.2.0. Asexuality and the Sexual Drive:

199 Ibid.
200 The latency period begins around the age of five or six years of age and continues until puberty.
The universality of the human sexual drive, however, does not mean that it is unequivocally experienced or expressed in conventional ways. Freud’s most comprehensive contribution to this field is his *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1905d) in which he says that there is no natural link between the sex drive and its satisfying object, i.e., the sexual drive is independent of its object. Nor is the sex drive’s origin likely to be due to the object’s “attractions”. The object, in other words, is not important, other than the fact that some object is necessary. This is central to any consideration of asexuality because it is generally assumed that asexuality, as per its definition, does not have an object and this is an assumption I will be contesting in later chapters.

While the object is a contingent choice that varies depending on the individual, Freud believes that what is “essential and constant” is the drive itself. This underlines the ubiquity of the sexual drive for the human subject and also the necessity for an object of some kind towards which to direct this libido. If asexuality is the lack of sexual attraction for any person or thing, then quite obviously there is no verifiable object. Because Freudian theory excludes the possibility of no experienced sexual desire and no sexual object-choice, it is only with the conceptual tools of Jacques Lacan that this particular conundrum can be explicated more fully in later chapters. For now, Freud’s view is that the word “libido” is “properly reserved for the instinctual (drive) forces of sexual life” and that it is not, and cannot be, an “ASEXUAL LIBIDO” but can only be a sexual libido.

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204 I will be discussing in detail in later chapters the nature of the object to which I am proposing asexuality is directed.
205 Freud, S. (1905d), *Op. Cit.*, p.168. Here he describes the instinct (drive) as a “continuously flowing source of stimulation”. See also his comments, and footnote 1, on p.149.
But even for sexual subjects, Freud says the sexual drive has many idiosyncrasies. Full sexual release through orgasm with another person is not always necessary and sexual excitation does not have to move towards this goal, i.e., it can be sublimated into other activities and towards other goals. Having detached the fixed nature of the sexual object from the sexual drive, as mentioned above, he is now detaching the so-called “normal” sexual aim from the drive also.207 The object, as other person, is not a constant and neither is the aim of sexual satisfaction. Going further, he even says that a constant sexual drive is not always a positively experienced phenomenon. It can just as easily bring with it a feeling of disgust, one of the factors in restricting the sexual aim.208 As well as disgust, he also points to the element of cruelty that can be present in the sexual instinct (drive).209 He notes the capacity for some people to find pleasure in pain, either inflicted on themselves (masochism) or in inflicting it on others (sadism). The presence of a sadistic component in the sexual instinct (drive), he believes, can dominate an individual’s entire sexual activity, particularly in perversion.210 It emerges as predominant in the pregenital oral stage where gaining erotic mastery over the breast as object coincides with its destruction.211

The Freudian view is that the sadistic instinct (drive) separates off and, at the stage of genital primacy, takes on, for reproduction purposes, the “function of overpowering the

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207 Freud, S. (1905d), Op. Cit., p.170. Freud came to this idea through his focus on the perversions. He believes that even in “the most normal sexual process” it is possible to detect rudiments of perversion.
209 Ibid, p.159.
211 Freud S. (1920g), Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Standard Edition XVIII, p.54.
sexual object” in carrying out the sexual act.\textsuperscript{212} Notwithstanding the predominantly male perspective here, Freud is not only including an aggressive/sadistic component as an experiential contingency within relatively conventional reproductive sex. But he is also including the idea that sadism/aggression can begin at the earliest oral stage of psychosexual development. I will be proposing that this same stage of psychosexual development is formative in terms of asexuality but with uniquely different outcomes. For now, Freud’s point is that the child’s particular relation to the object at this earliest stage of infantile sexuality remains influential in determining all later relations to the object. The inclusion of a destructive presence within the sexual drives\textsuperscript{213} illustrates Freud’s view that the sexual instinct (drive) is capable of including opposing trends.\textsuperscript{214}

\textbf{3.2.1. The Outward Trajectory of Libido:}

Asexuality is characterised by the absence of sexual desire for an object. In Freud’s theory, the object of sexual satisfaction is contingent, which means it becomes the object only because it is best fitted to make satisfaction possible.\textsuperscript{215} While his theory also allows for the possibility of the object to be an object in fantasy, it does not allow for the option which is found in asexuality, namely, the possibility that sexual desire is directed at the very absence of an object of sexual desire. In other words, it does not allow for the possibility that the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{212} Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{213} Freud, S. (1921g), Op. Cit., p.54.
\item\textsuperscript{215} Freud, S. (1915c), Instincts and their Vicissitudes, Standard Edition XIV, p.122.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
object towards which asexual libido is directed is absence itself. As stated, this aspect of my research into asexual desire will be taken up in later chapters using Lacanian concepts which, I propose, will allow for a more robust theorisation. For now, what Freudian theory does offer is a particularly important understanding with regard to the *choice* of object.

While there must be *some* object, irrespective of what it is, this does not mean it can be just *any* object.\(^{216}\) It is, rather, an object that is highly specific in terms of what the individual desires and it is determined by the history of each individual, particularly by childhood history.\(^{217}\) In later chapters, this perspective on the very specific choice of object will be built upon and extended more fully.

Similarly, if sexual excitation not only arises from the sexual areas of the body but “from all bodily organs”,\(^ {218}\) this clearly conveys that the human subject is hard-wired to experience sexual excitation, so to speak. However, directing this libido onto another person is not similarly arranged. The libido, in Freud’s view, is originally connected or attached to the subject’s own ego in a narcissistic libidinal cathexis. He describes this as “the original state of things”\(^{219}\). The subject only later directs this libido outwards onto others, and even then essential parts of it remain behind in the ego. The point is that an inwardly directed libido is the original organisation and finding an object externally happens later. In the case of asexuality, the libido, for all intents and purposes, does not extend outwards. Some asexuals do report that they experience excitation arising from the “sexual areas” but that they do


\(^{217}\) Ibid.


\(^{219}\) Ibid, p218.
not connect it with sexual desire for another person.\textsuperscript{220} For Freud, however, libido must inevitably be directed externally or the person risks falling ill.\textsuperscript{221} The question I will take up later is how, and why, this does not appear to be the case in asexuality, i.e., asexuals do not fall ill as a result.

At a time when the first beginnings of sexual satisfaction are still linked with the taking of nourishment, the sexual instinct (drive) finds a sexual object outside the infant’s own body in the mother’s breast.\textsuperscript{222} Freud is of the view that a child’s interaction with the person responsible for their care amounts to an “unending source of sexual excitation and satisfaction from his [sic] erotogenic zones”. Since in most cases it is the mother, Freud says that she, in turn, regards what she does as an “asexual” pure love in “teaching the child to love” and to grow up with “vigorous sexual needs”.\textsuperscript{223} This is one of the clearest statements from Freud that illustrates how, for classical psychoanalysis, a subject beginning life without a strong sexual drive aimed at an external object, i.e., either person or thing, is an unthinkable entity. I will be continuing in this tradition but will be proposing that asexuality undergoes a very particular transformation in this regard.

\textbf{3.3.0. Asexuality and Libidinal Sublimation:}

\textsuperscript{222} Freud, S. (1905d), \textit{Op Cit.}, p.222.
\textsuperscript{223} Ibid, p223.
If asexuality is considered to be a sexual orientation which experiences no sexual desire, then it suggests that the libido must be capable of such a transformation. The question is whether such a possibility is included within classical psychoanalytic theory. Freud does insist that sexual instinctual (drive) impulses are what he calls “extraordinarily plastic”. One can take the place of another or one can take over another’s intensity. If the satisfaction of one is frustrated by reality, the satisfaction of another can bring “complete compensation”. This is because the sexual instincts (drives) have the capacity to change their object and take another which is more easily attainable. This ability to displace or find a substitute has practical benefits in avoiding or reducing frustration. Therefore, Freud argues, if this displaceable energy is desexualised libido it can also be described as sublimated energy or what he calls a “desexualised Eros”.

Freud says this sublimated energy would still retain the main purpose of Eros in establishing unity, or in a tendency towards unity, which is particularly characteristic of the ego and can be found in platonic or social relationships. This is close to what asexuality represents in terms of a libido which, under the control of the ego, tends towards establishing unity but which is desexualised in terms of its aim and object. Freud extends the concept of displaceable energy, or sublimation, to the activity of thought-processes. If they, in the wider sense, are included among these displacements, then thinking is also “supplied” from the sublimation of erotic motive forces. While Freud appears to be offering a suitable

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226 Ibid, p.44.  
227 Ibid, p.45  
228 Ibid.
theorisation of asexuality with this concept of desexualised libido, he is in reality offering an account of sublimation which transforms existing sexual trends into non-sexual trends. As stated, the asexual person does not appear to experience a sexual trend in the first instance. For this reason, I will be proposing in later chapters that asexuality, rather than representing a sublimation, is taking up a wholly different relation to the sexual drive, one which moves beyond the concept of sublimation towards a satisfaction, if it can be called such, of a radically different kind.

For Freud, sexual instincts (drives), from the beginning to the end of their development, work towards obtaining pleasure and they retain this original function unaltered. What is of interest in any consideration of the aetiology of asexuality, is how the “other instincts” (drives), i.e., the ego-instincts (drives), come into play. They may have the same aim to start with as the sexual instincts (drives) but Freud says that “under the influence of the instructress Necessity”, i.e., reality, they learn to replace the pleasure principle by a modification of it. The task of avoiding unpleasure now becomes almost as important as obtaining pleasure. The ego learns to renounce immediate satisfaction, postpone pleasure by putting up with a little unpleasure and to abandon certain sources of pleasure altogether. An ego like this becomes, Freud says, “reasonable” and is no longer governed by the pleasure principle. Instead, it obeys the reality principle which also seeks pleasure but this time a pleasure “assured” because it takes account of reality, even if pleasure has to be

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229 Instincts have four components for Freud: the pressure (Drang) or demand for work, which is constant; the aim (Ziel) which is always satisfaction; the object (Objekt) is the thing through which the instinct achieves its aim; and, the source (Quelle) which is the somatic process that begins in the body and whose stimulus is represented in mental life by an instinct. See Freud, S. (1915c), Op. Cit., pp. 122-123.

postponed or diminished in order to achieve it.\textsuperscript{231} This understanding moves closer to the domain of asexuality because now the seemingly all-powerful sexual instincts (drives) can be influenced or held in check by the ego instincts (drives). Also, the ego instincts (drives) are tasked with avoiding “unpleasure”, which in the case of asexuality can sometimes, but not always, equate to even the “idea” of sex. One asexual in a research study says: “I find the idea of sex utterly disgusting. I honestly think I would vomit if I ever had sex.”\textsuperscript{232}

3.3.1. The Reversal of Libido:

Freud’s theorising places the ego in the role of mediating agency for the activity of sublimation. He believes the ego deals with the first object-cathexes of the \textit{id} (and later ones) by taking the libido into itself and binding it to itself by means of identification.\textsuperscript{233} The subject identifies, in the sense of incorporating something into itself, with the person to whom it has libidinally attached. This transformation of erotic libido into ego-libido by definition involves a desexualisation, as far as Freud is concerned. As a process, sublimation places social aims higher than sexual ones, which are “self-interested”.\textsuperscript{234}

Sublimation is a special case of the way in which sexual trends are attached to non-sexual ones and, from an asexual perspective, means that sexual satisfactions can be transformed

\textsuperscript{231} Ibid.
into non-sexual satisfactions. Freud explains this process as the ego “getting hold” of the libido that has been invested in the object, setting itself up as the love-object, and desexualising or sublimating the libido of the id. This theory, that ego libido can draw object libido back to itself, represents an important amplification of the theory of narcissism, which I will be examining in more detail in the next chapter. It suggests, particularly in terms of asexuality, that the eventual outward movement of the libido to external objects can undergo reversal at an early stage of infantile sexual development. The process which brings this about will also be examined in the following chapters and, in particular, the concept of reversal will be further traced and highlighted in Lacan’s work.

For the purposes of understanding asexuality, however, Freudian sublimation has its limitations. Freud himself theorises that the active libidinal drive operating within the human subject, seeking objects from which to derive satisfaction, means that “there is a limit to the amount of unsatisfied libido that human beings on the average can put up with”. He is saying that the adaptability of human sexuality has limits because the plasticity or free mobility of the libido can vary from person to person and so this capacity in some people is less than it is in others. Not only is the mobility of libido a constraining factor, but Freud is also of the view that sublimation is only able to deal with satisfying more than a certain fraction of libido. As sexual energy, libido “makes a person’s satisfaction

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237 Ibid.
depend on the attainment of only a very small number of aims and objects.”  238 In other words, if a person desires sexual release then sublimated forms of release may not suffice.

As well as that, not everybody has the same capacity to sublimate and only a small number of people are, in Freud’s view, “gifted with the capacity” to do so.  239 In particular, he is referring here to a person’s ability to create, through sublimation, artistic or other works that contribute to civilization, something which is not within every person’s capability. Equally, for those who are able, it ignores the anecdotal evidence that great artists and leading public figures display high levels of libidinal activity irrespective of what they create.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud says that: “No substitute or reactive formations and no sublimations will suffice to remove the repressed instinct’s persisting tension...”  240 In the context of this thesis, and bearing in mind the testimony of asexuals, the place of sublimation in the aetiology of asexuality may well prove to be based on a false premise. The capacity to exchange an originally sexual aim, directed at an external, independent object,  241 for another non-sexual one assumes the existence of an original sexual aim that is diverted. The testimony of asexuals, puzzling as it may seem, is the opposite: for them it is a predominantly lifelong experience in which there never has been a sexual aim directed towards an external object.  242 If asexuals appear to be essentially satisfied with their non-sexual orientation, this suggests that while some degree of sublimation might be involved, it will be necessary to understand why no existing sexual

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238 Ibid.
239 Ibid.
trend is evident. This will require looking for something other than, or beyond, sublimation to understand what is providing satisfaction for their libido.

3.4.0. Asexuality and the Constant Demand of the Drive:

In terms of libido as sexual energy, Freud says there are two important aspects of human instincts (drives). One is that the instinct (drive) is a concept that appears on the frontier between the mental and somatic, i.e., mind and body, as a representative of stimuli originating from within the organism that are seeking to satisfy bodily needs. When this demand “reaches the mind”, as he puts it, it is as “a demand upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body”. 243 But this demand, as I will consider below, is not always experienced as pleasurable. The second important point he makes is that every instinct (drive) is a piece of activity. When he considers passive instincts (drives), and asexuality is characterised by a relatively passive position in relation to libido, he says “we can only mean instincts (drives) whose aim is passive”. 244 In other words, the libido remains active but its aim is passive. Freud gives examples of a sexual instinct whose aim is passive as the aim to be tortured in masochism or to be looked at in scopophilia (exhibitionism). Extending his thinking away from a focus on paraphilias, this allows for the possibility, to be considered more fully in later chapters, that asexuality has an active libido but with the aim of not experiencing sexual attraction for, or not seeking sexual satisfaction with, another person. Freudian theory allows for the important possibility that, if this proposition can be

sustained, asexuality could be considered a sexual orientation with an active libido that is aimed at not experiencing sexual desire.

In Freudian terms, the reason an active libido might be aimed at not experiencing sexual desire is contained in his first observation regarding the instincts (drives). While the aim of the adult sexual instinct (drive) is pleasure, the important point to be extrapolated from Freud’s theory is that there are “motive forces” which work against an instinct (drive) being carried through to satisfaction in an unmodified form. This, and the vicissitudes which the drives can undergo, are what he considers to be methods of defence against those same instincts (drives). In other words, the repeated demand on the mind to act, which is a fundamental characteristic of the sexual drive in its broadest sense, must be defended against. This is a radical idea, not only for its time but also within contemporary discourses on sex and sexuality. The concept that the human sex drive might need to be defended against is not usually found outside of psychoanalytic theory. I propose to return to it more fully in the next chapter and in later chapters also. For now, the theoretical position of the asexual could, on the face of it, be arrived at via an unconscious defence against the sexual drive. The possibility now emerges that in asexuality the sexual instinct (drive) undergoes a vicissitude whereby rather than being repressed, its aim, and its choice of object, is for no sexual pleasure or sexual satisfaction.

3.4.1. Active Libido and Desexualisation:

With regard to a non-sexual object or aim, Freud says that the sexual drives can be satisfied without recourse to an object outside of the person. At the beginning of mental life the ego is understood to be libidinally invested (cathected) with the instincts (drives) and is capable, to some extent, of satisfying them on its own. This way of finding satisfaction Freud terms auto-erotic. At this early stage of infantile sexuality, the outside world is not of interest to the child in terms of satisfaction. The ego is associated with what is pleasurable and the outside world with what is either indifferent or unpleasurable.248 Due to the instincts (drives) for self-preservation, however, the ego must eventually acquire objects from the external world and, paradoxically, cannot avoid feeling internal instinctual (drive) stimuli for a time as unpleasurable. In order to quell the latter unpleasurable experiences, pleasurable objects from the outside are introjected and internal unpleasurable sensations are projected outward.

The key outcome of this, according to Freud, is that the ego, whose first function was to distinguish between internal and external, or what he calls the “reality-ego”,249 now becomes a “pleasure-ego” which prioritises pleasure above all other considerations.250 What Freud’s observation implies is that, for the pleasure-ego, the external world is divided into a part that is pleasurable and this part it incorporates into itself. The other part of the external world remains the part into which it is has projected its own hostile or unpleasant aspects. This means the ego coincides with pleasure, and reality coincides with unpleasure. Put

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249 The distinction of an “inside” and an “outside” is first mentioned in Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning (1911b). See also Negation (1925h) and Chapter 1 of Civilization and its Discontents (1930a).
another way, reality becomes desexualised. One commentator (Brodsky, 2011), therefore, says: “Freud distinguishes... between ego and reality according to sexualisation and desexualisation. It is thus that he gives a complicated idea of the desexualisation of reality and the desexualisation of libido.”

For Freud, when the stage of objects in the external world begins, the subject’s relation to the object is placed along the dimension of pleasure and unpleasure. If the object becomes a source of pleasure, he says, an action is made to bring the object closer and to incorporate it into the ego. He calls this the “attraction” exercised by the pleasure-giving object. In the case of asexuality, it will be necessary to establish if the process also occurs in this way or if, perhaps, the opposite is the case. Do the earliest infantile experiences include the possibility that the first partial object, understood as the breast, is desexualised because it is not experienced as the pleasure object? In terms of this experience producing an asexual subject, Freudian theory does not allow for any further advance in this line of thinking and so I will be returning to this question using Lacanian theory in the following chapters.

3.5.0. Asexuality and Pre-Oedipal Influences:


What Freudian theory does advance, for the purposes of this dissertation, is a focus on the importance of infantile sexuality in shaping what will become adult sexuality. When Freud speaks of infantile sexuality he is referring to the infant’s first impulses that make their appearance “attached to other vital functions” such as sucking at the mother’s breast. As far as he is concerned, this early sexual experience has significance for everyone, without exception. He says the importance of the first object’s influence on the choice of every later object cannot be overstated and has profound effects and influence in even “the remotest regions of our sexual life”. The path of infantile sexuality moves from the breast and oral eroticism, to the faeces and anal eroticism, and then to the genitals and phallic eroticism, which includes infantile masturbation. After this there is the latency period in which there are, in the main, practically no expressions or experiences of sexuality. The final stage is the genital stage, or puberty, when the latency period ends and where sexuality re-emerges but in a form that will be closer to adult sexuality.

In psychoanalytic thinking, therefore, this is the diphasic, or two-part, nature of human sexuality which has its second emergence at puberty. In this context, adult sexuality is shaped by early infantile experiences and also by repressions which bring about the dissolution of the Oedipus complex and usher in the latency period. Freud is, therefore, consistently pointing to the earliest time in infantile development as the place where human sexuality is laid down. He believes that from the third year of life, a child’s

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254 ibid, p.314.
255 The Oedipus complex occurs during the phallic stage of psychosexual development between the ages of c.3–6 years.
256 Freud S. (1905d), Op. Cit., p.177, footnote 1, also p.200 and p.222. See also Freud (1924d) in The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex where he places final object choice at the dissolution of the Oedipus complex. He also says many variations are possible of the standard Oedipus complex which, in turn, will have a very important bearing on the development of the individual. See Standard Edition XIX, p.179.
sexual life is similar to an adult’s except for the primacy of the genitals. He is referring to the inevitable traits of perversion and, despite the lesser intensity, the whole trend towards satisfaction of the drive. Yet, in an obvious reference once again to the importance of the pre-Oedipal phase, he says that “the most interesting phases of sexual or libidinal development” take place earlier than the third year of life.\textsuperscript{257}

In this context, the first object of the oral component of the sexual instinct (drive) is the mother’s breast which satisfies the need for nourishment.\textsuperscript{258} The erotic component which is satisfied simultaneously through sucking, he says, “makes itself independent with the act of sensual sucking \textit{[lutschen]; it gives up the outside object and replaces it by an area of the subject’s own body”\textsuperscript{259}. Of particular interest here, from the perspective of asexuality, is the movement Freud is describing in which the object as external is given up and the emphasis instead is placed on the libidinal pleasure associated with a part of the subject’s own body, in this case the mouth. An auto-erotic “choice” is made, if it can be described as such, that favours the sexual pleasure of the object experienced as self as opposed to one predicated on the object as external to the self. The sexual component of the oral instinct (drive) becomes \textit{auto-erotic “from the first”}, as do the anal and other erotogenic instincts (drives).\textsuperscript{260}

After this, Freud says, the course of sexual development for sexually desiring subjects has two aims: libidinal satisfaction moves to an external object from the infant’s own body

\textsuperscript{260} Ibid.
through the “abandonment of auto-eroticism”. Secondly, what he terms the “unification of the various objects of the separate instincts (drives) and their replacement by a single object”, 261 that is, a whole body. 262 What Freud is pointing to here is how the subject from its earliest instinctual (drive) experience turns towards its own body for sensual pleasure despite the presence of an external object, i.e., the breast. Then the infant must turn to an outside object for erotic satisfaction and leave auto-eroticism behind. Freudian theory does not extend to considering the possibility that this turning to an external object for infantile sexual satisfaction may be potentially problematic for some subjects. I propose that this is a possibility that has to be considered in terms of asexuality and so I will examine this concept in later chapters from the perspective of Lacanian theory.

3.5.1. The Obstacle to Genital Primacy:

In Freud’s theory, the diffuse streams of the component instincts (drives) of infantile sexuality finally come together under the “primacy of the genitals” at puberty. But now the libido comes up against the resistance of the preconscious system. 263 In other words, he theorises that there are conditions under which genital primacy does not take place. He says this occurs because reality’s effect is to constrain libidinal urges, and by reality he means the child’s interaction with external objects, i.e., ordinary frustrations and prohibitions imposed by its primary caregivers. This resistance due to the effects of reality can lead to a regression

261 Ibid.
262 Ibid.
263 The preconscious belongs to Freud’s earlier topological explanation of the psychical system and will become part of the ego in his later topology.
to the stages before genital primacy, of which there are two types. 264 One type returns from a higher to a lower stage of development as a result of repression 265 and never fully occupies the genital stage. The second type involves repression of the genital organisation, often found in hysteria. This version remains at the final genital stage but a symptom, as a substitute satisfaction, is formed. 266

In either case, Freud says “people fall ill of a neurosis” because they are unable to satisfy their libido and their symptoms are a substitute for this frustrated satisfaction. 267 I will be proposing in later chapters that regression does not fully explain asexuality because with the first type there should be signs of regressed infantile sexuality at earlier fixation points and there does not appear to be, unless the presence of masturbation is considered as such. The second type would assume a return of the repressed in the form of neurotic symptoms which, again, there does not appear to be.

Freud himself argues that not every frustration of a libidinal satisfaction makes the person neurotic. 268 Further, he says that the nature of frustration is seldom universal and absolute. In order to create pathogenic effects, he says, frustration must affect the mode of satisfaction which “alone the subject desires, of which alone he is capable”. 269 In other

266 Symptom is used here in the restricted clinical sense of something that indicates a disorder. Freud (1926d), in Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety, p.91, defines it thus: “A symptom is a sign of, and a substitute for, an instinctual satisfaction which has remained in abeyance; it is a consequence of the process of repression. Repression proceeds from the ego when the latter – it may be at the behest of the superego – refuses to associate itself with an instinctual cathexis which has been aroused in the id.” Symptom formation is the moment of the genesis of neurosis and is the sign of a return of the repressed, according to Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), Op. Cit., p.446.
268 Ibid, p.344.
269 Ibid, p.345.
words, frustration only emerges when it blocks a path to satisfaction which is desired by the person in the first place. The experience of asexuality appears to be that, since there is no sexual satisfaction being desired in the first place, there is no path to sexual satisfaction being blocked. Freud believes that for sexually desiring subjects there are many ways of tolerating deprivation of satisfaction without falling ill as a result. My proposition with regard to asexual subjects will be that they are not deprived of sexual satisfaction because they are not seeking it in the first place.

3.6.0. Asexuality and Infantile Object-Choice:

The concept of not seeking sexual satisfaction in the first place is implicit within the definition of an asexual: someone who does not experience sexual attraction for another person. This prompts the question as to whether a pleasure, or perhaps satisfaction, can be derived without an object-choice being made. Does Freudian theory allow for such a possibility? One manifestation of infantile sexual activity, raised above, is thumb sucking which Freud defines as a rhythmic repetition of a sucking contact by the mouth or lips. In thumb sucking, the instinct (drive) is not directed at another person but obtains its satisfaction from the subject’s own body, or auto-erotically. Freud identifies three characteristics of auto-erotic satisfaction: it attaches to one of the vital somatic functions; it

\[270\] Ibid.
has (as yet) no sexual object (auto-erotic) and its sexual aim is dominated by an erotogenic zone.\textsuperscript{272}

The literature on asexuality suggests that there is diversity in terms of sexual activity whereby some engage auto-erotically, some engage sexually with a partner, albeit reluctantly, and some do neither. On balance, however, many appear to find masturbation acceptable\textsuperscript{273} but without any apparent eroticism either subjectively directed at another person or through fantasy.\textsuperscript{274} The prevalence of masturbation suggests the presence of an unconscious sexual instinct (drive) operating auto-erotically, i.e., without an object as other person.\textsuperscript{275} Freud says many people who are abstinent only remain so with the help of masturbation, which is a satisfaction linked with the auto-eroticism of early childhood.\textsuperscript{276} This emphasises the Freudian view that the aim of infantile sexuality is to gain satisfaction. This is done by stimulation of a particular erotogenic zone which has been “selected in one way or another”.\textsuperscript{277} To be satisfying, Freud says the stimulation of an erotogenic zone must have been previously experienced as such.\textsuperscript{278} In other words, there must have been an original satisfaction gained from the stimulation of the erotogenic zone which left behind a need for its repetition. He says the repetition of the satisfaction has two aspects: a feeling of tension which is unpleasurable, and the need for stimulation of an erotogenic zone to

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\textsuperscript{272} Ibid, p182.
\textsuperscript{274} See Cox, P. (2008), \textit{We’re married, we just don’t have sex}, The Guardian, September 8. Accessed at: [http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2008/sep/08/relationships.healthandwellbeing](http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2008/sep/08/relationships.healthandwellbeing). Online pagination, p.1. See also Appendix 1 for this and other quotations regarding masturbation.
\textsuperscript{276} Freud, S. (1908d), Op. Cit., p.199. Also, Freud does not link female frigidity – the failure to transition from clitoral excitation to vaginal excitation due to the effects of familial and cultural suppression (see p. 217, same volume) – to regression. Instead, Freud views it as a fixation on clitoral excitement due to penis envy.
\textsuperscript{277} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{278} Ibid.
remove this tension. In sexually desiring subjects, the aim is to remove the unpleasurable tension in the erotogenic zone by finding an external stimulus which produces satisfaction. Asexuality, in particular its adult version, stands in contrast to this since there is no external stimulus which provides sexual satisfaction of a sexual need. There is also no apparent sexual need that requires satisfaction. This gives rise to the hypothesis that the asexual subject has found a unique way of responding to the infantile experience of unpleasurable rising tension and, in the absence of any Freudian concepts to explain this, I will be proposing in later chapters how I believe this comes about.

3.6.1. An Apparent Lack of Object-Choice:

Asexuality’s apparent lack of sexualised object-choice, object understood here as “other people”, is a conundrum since, for Freud, object-choices are made during infantile sexuality at the end of the Oedipus complex. The Oedipus complex describes a period, the phallic stage, in which every person between the ages of about three and six years experiences an unconscious desire for the death of the parent of the same sex and a sexual desire for the parent of the opposite sex. The Oedipus complex is theorised to play “a fundamental part in the structuring of the personality, and in the orientation of human desire”. For psychoanalysis, it is also a major determinant of and contributor to pathological categories.

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279 Ibid.
The next stage of object-choice, for Freud, is at puberty when the infantile object-choice of either one or other care-giver, usually a parent, is dispensed with and a new object-choice is made. This new object-choice is based on the original choice, but this time for a person outside of the Oedipal configuration and now with a sensual current attached to the affectionate current. “Should these two currents fail to converge, the result is often that one of the ideals of sexual life, the focussing of all desires upon a single object (person), will be unattainable,” Freud says.\textsuperscript{282} In terms of asexuality this is an interesting concept because, while some asexuals eschew all sexual contact and even emotional relationships,\textsuperscript{283} many asexual relationships remain based on the affectionate current which, according to Freud, is libidinally underpinned.\textsuperscript{284} This suggests that not only has infantile sexuality been part of the asexual experience, but it also suggests that elements of infantile sexuality persist throughout latency and contribute to the final formation of the adult asexual. Freud is saying that the human subject is biologically constructed to experience sexuality. Therefore, if powerful psychophysical forces combine to produce heterosexual and LGBT+ forms of sexuality, then it is conceivable that equally substantive, but as yet unknown, forces combine to produce an asexual subject. This is why Freudian theory, I propose, has a vital role to play in understanding asexuality.

\textsuperscript{284} Freud, S. (1905\textsuperscript{d}), Op. Cit., p.200. He says: “Only psycho-analytic investigation can show that behind this affection, admiration and respect there lie concealed the old sexual longings of the infantile component instincts which have now become unserviceable.”
Freud believes that all intense emotional responses “including even terrifying ones, trench upon sexuality”. So even strong emotions are potentially connected to sexuality. This will be of particular importance in the next chapter, when I will develop the concept, mentioned above, of the sexual instinct (drive) as something which needs to be defended against. I will do this through a more detailed examination of the concept of an internally-generated infantile trauma. For the moment, and supporting the point about powerful formative forces within the subject, Freud says that the human body even at the infantile stage makes the “fullest provisions” for “setting in motion the process of sexual excitation”. The sensory surfaces are first and foremost the place where it begins through both the skin and the sense organs, in particular the erotogenic zones. In fact, his overall point in this regard is that there may well be “nothing of considerable importance that can occur in the organism without contributing some component to the excitation of the sexual instinct (drive)”. From a psychoanalytic perspective there appears to be no consideration given to the absence of the experience of libido as the ubiquitous energy of the sexual instinct (drive). As stated above, this is why it will be necessary to use Lacanian theory to hypothesise how this can occur and how a satisfaction of this apparently absent libido is achieved in asexuality.

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286 Infantile sexual trauma, as I will be using it, will refer not to sexual abuse from an external agent but to the internal “menacing” demands of the libido. See Freud, S. (1919d), An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works, p.209. See also Freud, S. (1916-1917), The Paths to the Formation of Symptoms, p.364.
289 This proposition is analogous to Jacques Lacan’s distinction between his view of anxiety and Freud’s. For Freud, anxiety is fear without an object but for Lacan anxiety is not without an object. Lacan says of this object that the subject, “… is not without having it, but elsewhere, right where he is, it’s not to be seen.” See Lacan, J. (1962-63). Anxiety, Seminar X. (Ed. Miller, J-A). (Trans. Price, A R). Polity Press: Cambridge. pp.88-89. Similarly, I will be proposing that asexuality has an object that is not seen.
3.7.0. Asexuality and the Latency Period:

The experience of an apparently absent libido is to be found in the latency period which is present for all subjects to a greater or lesser extent. This gives rise to the question as to whether asexuality could be a form of extended, or even permanent, latency period. Freudian theory states that the first “configuration” of the child’s love takes place in the Oedipus complex but the repression which brings it to an end means that the sexual aspect of the object-choice is “unutilizable” during latency which follows. Instead, the sexual current becomes an “affectionate current” in sexual life. But concealed behind this affection are the “sexual longings of the infantile component instincts (drives)”. This allows for the possibility within Freudian theory for a sexual drive to operate in the background, as it does in the latency period, while overt sexual interest or activity is absent. Asexuality shares a number of common features with latency – the lack of interest in sexuality, the apparent absence of sexual object-choice, the possibility of sexuality operating behind affection – and so asexuality as a regression to or fixation at this period would offer a reasonable hypothesis. But, as stated above, regression does not seem to offer a complete understanding of the psychical processes operating within asexuality and I will be offering a broader explication as to why I believe this is the case in later chapters.

During latency, Freud says that whatever of the first period of love during the Oedipus complex that is left over shows itself as a “purely affectionate emotional tie”, relating to the same people in the subject’s life, i.e., the parents or primary caregivers. The difference now

292 Ibid.
is that during latency, this tie can no longer be described as “sexual”. The adult relationships of some asexuals are characterised similarly to the latency period in that they can comprise strong affectionate bonds that do not include a sexual tie to other people. It is during latency that forces which impede the sexual instinct (drive) are built up through the diversion of the sexual instinct (drive) from sexual aims, to new, non-sexual aims. This comes about by a process of sublimation as the child’s ego turns away from the object-cathexes with the parents and replaces them with non-sexual identifications with other objects in his or her world. Now the libidinal trends of the Oedipus complex are in part “desexualised and sublimated... and in part inhibited in their aim and changed into impulses of affection”. But, in Freud’s view, the sexual impulses do not stop, they are used for other purposes such as contributing to social feelings and (through repression and reaction-formation) in building up barriers against sexuality. In short, the latency period is a time when the sex drive is active.

Freud emphasises that the experience of latency will differ depending on the individual. A fragment of sexuality may break through or some sexual activity may persist until puberty when the sexual instinct (drive) emerges again with greater intensity. In later chapters, I will show that not only does the passage through infantile sexuality differ for asexuals but I will also show how the re-emergence of “sexuality” post-latency takes on its characteristic absence of sexual desire. For now, the point of interest is that Freud includes a phase of sexual development in every subject which, to a greater or lesser extent, is the conscious

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293 Ibid.
297 Ibid, p.179.
experience of no sexual desire. At the same time, a sexual instinct (drive) is operating which is sublimated into other areas of the subject’s life. The latency period offers an example of how a libidinal force can be operating and yet unnoticed while the subject is involved in a variety of non-sexual activities and experiences.

However, in order to ensure that asexuality does not become associated with the concept of an extended, or permanent, stage of latency and, therefore, a developmental anomaly, it is necessary to offer a distinction between the two. The main point of difference between asexuality and an extended, or permanent, latency period is that, for sexually desiring subjects, latency is inaugurated by a repression which brings the Oedipus complex to an end. I will be proposing in later chapters that this is not the case for asexuality, on the basis that repression is not the mechanism which ensures the desexualisation of the libidinal trends within asexuality. I will be proposing, in contrast, that the libidinal trends within asexuality are desexualised, not at the Oedipal stage, but during the earlier pre-Oedipal phase. This, in turn, will mean that the passage of the asexual subject through the latency period will be qualitatively different to that of the sexually desiring subject. On this basis, I am proposing that asexuality is not a case of an extended, or permanent, latency period.

3.7.1 Asexuality and the Incest Taboo:

As stated, the postponement of sexual development which latency represents allows for the erection of barriers and restraints on sexuality. The most important of these barriers, Freud says, is the barrier against incest; that is, against any possibility of continuing to choose the
mother or father figure as the sexual object post-puberty. He goes on to say, however, that it is “in the world of ideas” that the choice of object is first made and that, equally, the sexual instinct (drive) of post-pubertal subjects is “almost entirely restricted to indulging in phantasies”. He defines phantasies as ideas which are not destined to be carried out, which have their roots in infantile sexuality, which can persist through latency in the unconscious and which have a crucial role to play in symptom and dream formation. He sums up by saying that the Oedipus complex, as the infantile psychical engagement with one’s care givers (usually mother and father), represents the peak of infantile sexuality and, through its after-effects, exercises a decisive influence on the sexuality of adults.

The point of interest is how, for Freud, sexuality is determined not in a fixed biological sense but through a fluid inter-dynamic between the child and its adult care givers that combines physical, erotically-charged experiences with perceptual encounters in terms of what is seen and heard. These are combined with fantasised or imaginary components as the child seeks to put sense and meaning onto their experiences. The theory posits that every subject undergoes the Oedipus complex and must do so in his or her own unique way. It also posits that repression has taken place which has effectively removed all possibility of sexual excitation being experienced or converted into desire for the child’s parents. Nevertheless, Freud says that sexual love and what “appears to be” non-sexual love for parents come from the same sources. The non-sexual love “merely corresponds” to an infantile fixation of

299 Ibid
301 Ibid.
302 Ibid, Footnote 1.
303 Ibid.
the libido.\textsuperscript{305} This emphasises the sexual underpinning of non-sexual love, which, in turn, supports the proposition of a libidinal underpinning of asexuality. The presence of an affectionate trend which does not include a sexual trend places the aetiology of a “sexually anaesthetic”\textsuperscript{306} orientation firmly within infantile sexuality.

In Freud’s view, there is no doubt that “every object-choice” in adulthood is based, albeit less closely, on the prototypes of mother and father.\textsuperscript{307} In view of the importance of this in determining the later choice of sexual object, any “disturbance” in the child’s relations to his parents will, in his view, “produce the gravest effects” on adult sexual life.\textsuperscript{308} If, therefore, every object-choice in adulthood is based on the prototypes of mother and father, what does this imply about the nature of the relationship with these prototypes at the infantile stage? While I will be returning to this question in later chapters, for now, Freud says the child’s affection for its parents is the “most important infantile trace” which directs object-choice; but it is not the only one.\textsuperscript{309} He allows for the “innumerable peculiarities” of erotic life to have an effect, as well as the “compulsive character” of falling in love. But, he adds, these factors are “unintelligible” unless seen as the “residual effects of childhood”.\textsuperscript{310} The Freudian view carries the implicit understanding that libido is seeking to avoid unpleasure and achieve pleasure through discharge \textit{via} sexual activity with another person or thing. However, the theory also states that any factor that impairs sexual development brings about a regression, which Freud describes as a return of the libido or a movement back to

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{305} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{306} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{307} Ibid, p.228.
  \item \textsuperscript{308} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{309} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{310} Ibid, p.229.
\end{itemize}
an earlier phase of development which was pleasurable. In contrast, however, I will be proposing that, rather than a regression, the reverse takes place for asexuality, in that early infantile sexuality begins as unpleasurable and that this proceeds forward through the various psychosexual stages into adulthood.

In the next chapter I will examine more specific Freudian concepts in order evaluate their significance for asexuality. In particular I will be focusing on repression, narcissism, hysteria, inhibition and the ego ideal.
Chapter 4

Key Freudian Concepts and Their Relation to Asexuality

4.0. Objective:

This chapter will continue a hypothetical and exploratory analysis of Freudian theory but will focus on key concepts to evaluate their particular contribution to an understanding of asexuality. The previous chapter offered a contextual understanding of asexuality in terms of Freudian theory’s basic tenets of human sexuality, such as infantile sexuality, the ubiquitous presence of libido, the plasticity of the drives and so on, whereas this chapter will examine the usefulness of particular concepts such as repression, narcissism, hysteria, inhibition and the ego ideal, to name a few examples. In terms of repression, which is the main Freudian defence system for dealing with anything unpleasurable within the psyche, I will be examining whether it offers an understanding of how an asexual orientation comes about, particularly in dealing with increasing amounts of internal libidinal stimulation.
Since Freud believes that infantile sexual experiences are “momentous” and can have “traumatic effects”, \(^{311}\) I will be examining the concept of trauma to establish if Freud allows for an asexual subject to emerge as a result of this experience. I will encompass Freud’s view of libido as an internally experienced danger and will examine the implications of this for asexuality. A related concept is Freud’s theory of the excitation of the erotogenous zones in infancy and whether it applies to asexuality. If so, how does it relate to the absence of such excitation in adult asexuals?

It is also necessary to examine, *inter alia*, Freud’s concept of narcissism to establish the extent to which object-libido is being directed outwardly towards another person. In other words, is asexuality a narcissistic condition in the Freudian sense? Equally, Freud’s view of hysteria needs to be examined, particularly because of its aversion to sexuality. Similarly, I will explore the concept of inhibition because of its potential lack of symptomatic characteristics. I will also explore the ego ideal as the agency that can include a desire for no sexual desire, as well as assessing the relevance, or otherwise, of the Freudian concepts of impotence and frigidity. The methodology behind this approach is that if these Freudian concepts, like some of those considered in the previous chapter, are not in themselves adequate in offering an understanding of asexuality, then it becomes necessary to look beyond Freud to the theories of Jacques Lacan where Freudian theory is broadened and developed.

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4.1.0. Asexuality and Non-Sexual Emotional Ties:

Freud points to a non-sexual or asexual emotional tie with other people in which the ego is capable of setting up an object inside itself that it has lost or perceives itself to have lost through having to give up that object.\textsuperscript{312} This “introjection” is a form of regression to the oral phase, whereby the external object is introjected so that it becomes easier for the ego to give it up. The example in the Dora case study is how she withdraws her libido from the forbidden object of her father in a regression to an identification with him, or at least to an identification with a trait of his personality, i.e., his cough.\textsuperscript{313} Identification is, therefore, the earliest and original form of emotional tie with the object, even earlier than object cathexis.\textsuperscript{314} Freud speculates that an identification of this kind might be the only way the id, from which erotic impulses derive, can give up its objects. He believes this process is a “very frequent one” especially at early stages of development.\textsuperscript{315} The capacity to transform itself into the loved object,\textsuperscript{316} through taking the libido back into itself, makes the ego a “precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes” and one which contains the “history of those object-choices”.\textsuperscript{317}

Freud is describing the id’s loss of the sexual object and the manner in which this loss is mitigated by the ego in assuming the features of the lost object. He says that, from one point of view, this is a method by which the ego can obtain control over the id by forcing

\textsuperscript{312} Freud, S. (1923b), \textit{The Ego and the Id}, Standard Edition XIX, p.28
\textsuperscript{314} Ibid, p.107.
\textsuperscript{315} Freud, S., (1923b), \textit{Op. Cit.}, p.29.
\textsuperscript{316} Ibid, p.30
\textsuperscript{317} Ibid.
itself on the id as the love-object. In terms of asexuality, it allows for the possibility that even at early stages of development, object-libido can be withdrawn from the subject’s libidinal object-choices and this is a concept which will take on greater relevance in the following chapters. For now, this transformation of libido, in Freud’s view, implies an “abandonment of sexual aims, a desexualisation – a kind of sublimation, therefore”. This is a desexualisation of the child’s relation to part of its external reality, i.e., the sexual object, which can be recognised as a feature of asexuality. But this is not to say that desexualisation means there is no sexual drive in operation.

Freud believes that all sexual tendencies, whether towards love partners, parents, siblings or, even, the self, are an expression of a sexual drive with sexual satisfaction as its aim. In the case of siblings, parents and others who are deemed by the ego to be inappropriate objects of the drive, the sexual drives are diverted from this aim. Nevertheless, they preserve enough of their “original nature” to allow their true identity to be recognised; by which he means that the sexual drives can be detected in, say, the longing for closeness with, or altruistic tendencies towards, others. There is always something sexual taking place, even when it appears not to be. As mentioned in the previous chapter, affectionate feelings are the successor of a “completely sensual object-tie” with the person in question, or with that person’s prototype or imago. The concept of affection being the repressed derivative of earlier sexual trends means that asexuality can, theoretically, be considered a

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318 Ibid.
320 Ibid.
321 Ibid, p.91.
322 Ibid.
sexual orientation. Affectionate emotional ties have sexual aims, for Freud, but they have been diverted from those sexual aims.\textsuperscript{323} Another support for this concept can be found in Freud’s view of the ego instincts (drives). By taking the person’s own ego as its object, the ego instincts are to be counted among the sexual instincts (drives).\textsuperscript{324} This allows asexuality to be considered as a sexual orientation despite its perceived, and experienced, absence of sexual desire. As well as that, Freud also finds an active libido in a non-sexual context in his study of groups.\textsuperscript{325} This time, however, he reasons that if narcissistic self-love is tempered, i.e., lessened or reduced, within groups, then this is proof that group formation represents a “new” kind of libidinal tie among group members,\textsuperscript{326} wherein narcissism or ego libido is reduced.\textsuperscript{327} He says that in groups there is “no question” of sexual aims because the love instincts have been diverted from this aim. It is identification which represents a new kind of tie among people but, he says, this is, nonetheless, a \textit{libidinal} tie.\textsuperscript{328}

4.1.1. Sexual Independence from Other People:

Identification is, therefore, a way of creating a bond with another person or persons but without a sexual aim. In the Oedipus complex, Freud’s example is of the boy identifying with

\textsuperscript{324} Freud S., (1920g), \textit{Op. Cit.}, Footnote 1, p.61.
\textsuperscript{325} Freud (1921c) gives two examples of groups which have non-sexual aims and they are the Church and the Army. See pp.93-99.
\textsuperscript{326} Ibid, p.103.
\textsuperscript{327} Ibid, p.102.
\textsuperscript{328} Ibid, p.103.
the father as his ideal and then, either at the same time or a little later, going on to form a sexual object-cathexis towards the mother. In the Freudian understanding, identification not only comes before object-cathexis, but it is also ambivalent from the start and it can turn from being tender to just as easily being hostile.\(^{329}\) It can take place with any new perception of “a common quality shared with some other person who is not an object of the sexual instinct (drive)”.\(^{330}\) He gives an example in which he says that “all the ties” which a group depends on are of the character of instincts (drives) that are inhibited in their aims.\(^{331}\)

In his view, therefore, the tie that binds the members of a group is in the nature of this kind of identification, based on an “important emotional common quality”, as he calls it. This common quality, he suspects, lies in the emotional tie to the leader of the group. This, again, takes place through the process of introjection but in this context the leader comes to stand in or substitute for the original lost object, usually understood as the mother figure.\(^{332}\)

However, despite the asexual nature of these ties, something of the sexual persists in the individual within groups.\(^{333}\) It is libido which ties people together and it does not matter whether the libido is of a homosexual, heterosexual or, presumably, asexual nature. This is because Freud argues that “it is not differentiated according to the sexes, and particularly shows a complete disregard for the aims of the genital organization of the libido”.\(^{334}\)

Asexuality, like group formation, can involve many of these elements, in particular the existence of a love-tie that does not involve a sexual element. However, the obvious

\(^{329}\) Ibid, p.105.
\(^{330}\) Ibid, p.108.
\(^{331}\) Ibid, p.140.
\(^{332}\) Ibid, pp.108-109. Freud also sees this process of introjection occur in melancholia which again involves the loss of a primary loved object.
\(^{333}\) Ibid, p.141.
\(^{334}\) Ibid, p.141
distinction which needs to be made is that groups, according to Freud, are comprised of sexual individuals who come together in asexual formations. In contrast, the group that is asexuality is comprised of subjects who are asexual before the group is formed but who, according to Freudian theory, are nevertheless forming ties which are libidinal ties.

The desexualisation which sublimation brings about takes place through the mediation of the ego whereby sexual object-libido is changed into narcissistic libido and given a new aim, other than sexual satisfaction. In this theorisation, Freud is essentially describing the ego’s ability to withdraw the dependence for satisfaction of the sexual drive, either partially or totally, from the “influence of other people”. This aspect of Freudian theory offers a plausible understanding of how a libidinal investment in objects is absent in asexuality but it still does not throw any light on why, for asexuality, there is no conscious experience of the sexual drive. I will be returning to this in the following chapters to show how the subject can bring about the reversal of the dependency for satisfaction on other people which Freud is highlighting here. I will be proposing, however, that this process might not be brought about solely through sublimation, i.e., by changing sexual aims into non-sexual aims.

4.2.0. Asexuality and the Ego Ideal:

In terms of sexual aims, if the transition to a libidinal investment in an object involves a reduction of narcissistic libido, then giving up narcissism is never easy. In Freudian theory, in

order to facilitate the giving up of infantile narcissism, the subject forms an ideal which is a “substitute” for the lost narcissism of early childhood when the child was their own ideal.\textsuperscript{337}

The ego ideal ensures self-directed narcissism can re-direct to object cathexes. It is the result of the earliest identifications with its caregivers in the child’s “pre-history”,\textsuperscript{338} again emphasising the importance of pre-Oedipal factors. Since it is the hoped-for perfection onto which the subject’s lost narcissism of childhood is displaced,\textsuperscript{339} the ego ideal contains within it something intrinsically of the subject. It also heightens the demands of the ego to achieve the standard it sets. Therefore, directing the libido towards an object-cathexis, i.e., binding the libido to the object, is a question of whether it is concurrent with one’s ego ideal or, conversely, counter to one’s ego ideal.\textsuperscript{340}

Freud says that depending on the nature of the ego ideal, it can impose “severe conditions upon the satisfaction of the libido”\textsuperscript{341} through its choice of objects and can reject some objects because, judged against the ego ideal, they are incompatible. In asexuality, this allows for the possibility that the ego ideal may impose conditions on the satisfaction of libido if, not just the object, but also the aim as sexual satisfaction, is counter to the ego ideal. In this regard, Freud’s comment that people strive to attain happiness through becoming the ideal of perfection they once were in childhood,\textsuperscript{342} takes on a different meaning, particularly if that ideal has always been a non-sexually desiring one. In effect, the possibility now arises that asexuality chooses objects that are compatible with its ego ideal

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\textsuperscript{337} Freud, S. (1914c), \textit{Op. Cit.}, p.94.
\textsuperscript{339} Freud, S. (1914c), \textit{Op. Cit.}, p.94.
\textsuperscript{341} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{342} Ibid.
which includes the ideal of no sexual desire. The asexual experience, in general, suggests that a sexual drive has rarely, if ever, been experienced in their lives. This further suggests that the ego ideal of asexuality has not included the concept of sexual attraction for another person from an early age, if at all.

Freud says that behind the formation of the ego ideal which, through repression, brings the Oedipus complex to an end, the first and most important identifications of the child with the parents. In both sexes, Freud believes, the outcome of the Oedipus complex can be an identification with the father, with the mother, or both. Identification with one, i.e., modelling itself on one parent, will strengthen the object-cathexis with the other, i.e., libidinally attaching itself to the other parent. In Freud’s schema of a simple, positive Oedipus complex, for example, the identification with, or the becoming like, the parent of the same sex, preserves the object-relation (libidinal attachment) to the parent of the opposite sex. As mentioned above, the broad outcome of the Oedipus complex is to form a “precipitate” in the ego, consisting of abandoned object-cathexes which, for Freud, unite to form an ego ideal or super-ego. This ego ideal or super-ego then confronts the ego when it is not reaching the standards set by the incorporated ideal, as will be elaborated below.

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343 Freud, S., (1923b), Op. Cit., p.34.
344 Ibid, p.31. In footnote 1, Freud says that before a child has arrived at definite knowledge of the difference between the sexes, via the lack of a penis in women, it does not distinguish in value between its father and its mother.
345 Ibid, p.33. Freud says here that the bisexuality he believes is originally present in all children means that the earliest object-choices and identifications are not clear cut but are more likely ambivalent.
346 Ibid, p.34.
347 In The Ego and the Id (1923b) Freud’s use of the two terms “ego ideal” and “super-ego” is indistinguishable. In other writings, he treats them as separate. See, for example, New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis (1933a), Standard Edition XXII, p.66.
348 Freud, S., (1923b), Op. Cit., p. 34.
4.2.1. A Non-Sexual Ego Ideal:

The point of interest is that the ego ideal can be formed, not simply as a residue of earlier object-choices of the id, but as an energetic reaction-formation against those choices.\(^{349}\) In asexuality, a non-sexually desiring subject appears to come into being despite identifications and object-choices that relate to sexually desiring objects. However, Freud’s theory includes the proposition that the ego is not just influenced to “be like” the parental role model, i.e., sexually desiring. It can equally be influenced to not “be like” the parental role model, i.e., not sexually desiring.\(^{350}\) This is through the action of the super-ego seeking to maintain the sought-after standard which the ego ideal represents. If this is the case, it opens the possibility that the ego ideal in asexuality can take up the position of withholding permission to be like the parental model, thus representing a divergence from a traditional sex-normative position. It can also allow for the possibility that, through the influence of the ego ideal, a choice is made to take up no sexual desire. Thus, while recognising a role for the ego in the formation of the asexual subject, particularly at the level of asexual identification, the broad thrust of this dissertation is that any involvement of the ego is secondary to the aetiology of this sexual orientation and that the primary causation is to be found in unconscious processes, as will be outlined in later chapters.

\(^{349}\) Ibid.
For now, in the Freudian model, the child entering the Oedipus complex is already imbued with an infantile sexuality which seeks satisfaction in and through the object as other person. I will be proposing in the following chapters how the asexual, as a result of pre-Oedipal experiences of infantile sexuality, enters the Oedipus complex differently. In turn, the ego ideal which has the task of repressing the Oedipus complex is also different for the asexual, i.e., one that is not orientated towards seeking sexual satisfaction via the object as other person. In Freud’s view, the ego ideal is the heir to the Oedipus complex351 by which he means that it is formed from the identifications with the parents into a model to which the child attempts to conform, a model which combines both prohibitions and ideals. The ego ideal facilitates the child in moving beyond its state of narcissism and is responsible for the repression which brings the Oedipus complex to a close. For Freud, therefore, the ego ideal is the expression of the “most powerful impulses” and the “most important libidinal vicissitudes of the id”.352 I will be proposing that the asexual ego ideal is also the expression of powerful impulses and important libidinal vicissitudes of the id but in a way that does not include sexual desire.

4.3. Libido as the Internal Enemy:

What, then, are these powerful impulses of the id that Freud is referring to? To begin with, he believes the setting up of the ego in the place of the object cannot be considered as

either exceptional or trivial since it was probably “the universal and original state of things”. 353 Indeed, many sexual instincts (drives) begin by finding satisfaction auto-erotically in the subject’s own body. 354 Object-love only later develops out of narcissism and even then without narcissism disappearing completely. Narcissistic libido is understood to be “an amount of sexual energy attached to the ego itself and finding satisfaction in the ego just as satisfaction is usually found only in objects”. 355 Its discovery is, for Freud, a legitimate development of the concept of sexuality. 356

But it is through the existence of narcissistic libido that an important discovery of the trauma inherent in the sexual drive was made; hence the powerful forces of the id, mentioned above. Freud found that the same sexual aetiology applying to the transference neuroses could be applied more broadly to the narcissistic neuroses. In other words, traumatic neuroses could be included in the orbit of psychoanalytic investigation because of Freud’s intuition of the connection between fright, anxiety and narcissistic libido. 357 His reasoning is that while traumatic neuroses and war neuroses brought a strong focus on the real trauma which soldiers and people in danger experienced from external threats, they appeared to have nothing in common with the internal psychical threats experienced in the transference neuroses. 358 Then he found a link between war neuroses, traumatic peacetime neuroses and narcissistic neuroses on the one hand, and transference neuroses on the

353 Freud, S. (1916-1917), The Libido Theory and Narcissism, Standard Edition XVI, p.416. Also on this page, Freud uses the metaphor of the amoeba to explain the extension of libido on to objects while a mass of libido remains in the ego. As mentioned in Chapter 1, My Life As An Amoeba was the title of the first online article about asexuality and Haven for the Human Amoeba (HHA) was the name of the first online asexual community.
357 Ibid, p.210
358 Ibid
other. Freud proposes that the link is the existence of narcissistic libido, which makes the ego a “loved” object. In both categories of neuroses, the ego as the loved object is being threatened and/or overwhelmed. In traumatic and war neuroses, the ego is defending itself from an external danger. In the transference neuroses, the enemy is internal; it is the libido whose demands are experienced as “menacing”.359

In terms of asexuality, then, Freud’s work on narcissism brings with it the concept of libido as having the potential to be not only disruptive, but also the internal enemy. As such, it can threaten to overwhelm the ego and so must be defended against. Again, the limiting idea that libido can only be experienced as pleasurable is radically opposed. Freud says the main defence system available for dealing with this internal threat is repression which “lies at the basis of every neurosis, as a reaction to a trauma—as an elementary traumatic neurosis”.360 Since Freudian theory does not extend to a consideration of this concept’s potentially formative role in producing an asexual orientation, this point, about trauma as internally generated and intrinsically linked to the sexual drive, will be taken up in the following chapters. Aligned with this, I will also be proposing, in contrast to Freud’s view, that repression may not be the only possibility for dealing with early infantile trauma associated with an increased libidinal stimulation which threatens to overwhelm the ego.

In a comment that I will be applying more fully to contemporary asexuality in later chapters, Freud says infantile sexual experiences are “momentous” because they take place “in times of incomplete development and are for that very reason liable to have traumatic effects”.361

359 ibid
360 ibid
I will be proposing that a potentially structural traumatic effect is contained within the very experience of the sexual drive, one that occurs for both sexual and asexual subjects, but which can produce different outcomes both in terms of sexual orientation and the person’s experience of their sexual drive. For now, in terms of asexuality, Freud is describing a template for what can be experienced as internally generated trauma due to an increase in libidinal excitation, for which the infant is unprepared. Since being prepared constitutes the last line of the child’s defences against internally generated stimuli, he believes the difference between being unprepared and being prepared is possibly a decisive factor in determining the outcome in terms of trauma. As stated, however, his theorising does not extend to a consideration that this experience might lead to a radically different relation to the sexual drive, whereby having no sexual desire possibly becomes the ideal.

4.4.0. The Reduction of Libidinal Excitement:

Freud’s concept of the pleasure principle is a theorised mechanism for reducing libidinal excitation in order to keep the quantity of excitation as low as possible or at least constant. According to Freud, pleasure is in some way [emphasis in original] connected with the diminution, reduction or extinction of the amounts of stimulus while unpleasure is connected with their increase. He further argues that, if this principle holds, then anything that might increase excitation is bound to be felt as unpleasurable. The asexual

362 Freud S. (1920g), Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Standard Edition XVIII, pp.31-32.
365 Ibid.
experience seems to be consistent with this principle because “unpleasure” corresponds to rising sexual excitation.\textsuperscript{366} While registering no sexual attraction for other people, asexual subjects appear to have developed a way of unconsciously maintaining sexual excitation at its lowest possible level. Sexual subjects, on the other hand, deal with the unpleasure of rising sexual excitation by seeking discharge of this libido through sexual activity, either through masturbation or in relation to another person or thing.

In \textit{Beyond the Pleasure Principle} (1920g), Freud nuances his idea that the pleasure principle dominates mental processes. If it did, he reasons, then many of our mental processes would be accompanied by pleasure, which in fact they are not. He now says that the most that can be said is that there exists in the mind a \textit{tendency} towards the pleasure principle. This tendency, in turn, meets with opposition from the reality principle, which seeks to postpone satisfaction of instinctual (drive) and sexual impulses, abandon some impulses altogether, or tolerate unpleasure until satisfaction can be achieved.\textsuperscript{367} As the ego develops, the other mechanism which inhibits the pleasure principle is repression. It holds back sexual drives that are not compatible with the aims of the ego, or with the reality principle, and cuts them off from the possibility of satisfaction.\textsuperscript{368}

Freud argues that if these drives succeed in getting around repression to find a direct or substitutive satisfaction then this is also felt by the ego as “unpleasure”. His hypothesis is that these sexual impulses were repressed by the ego in the first place on account of being

\textsuperscript{367} Freud S. (1920g), \textit{Op. Cit.}, p.10.
\textsuperscript{368} Ibid, p.11.
unpleasurable. Their return to find another form of satisfaction is no less so.\textsuperscript{369} His theorising again suggests how internal libidinal excitations can be experienced as unpleasurable and need to be defended against. He says the human mental apparatus is shielded against the amounts of excitation impinging on it from the outside. But there is no such shield against excitations coming from within. He reasons that the absence of such a shield is because excitations coming from within are not considered atypical or alien compared to stimuli from the external world.\textsuperscript{370} For Freud, this produces two things: first, internal feelings of pleasure and unpleasure predominate over external stimuli. Secondly, a particular way is adopted to deal with “any internal excitations” which produce too great an increase of unpleasure. This “way” of dealing with them, Freud says, is to treat them as if they are coming from the outside so that a defensive shield can be erected against them. He believes this is the origin of “projection” which, in itself, is an important cause of pathological processes.\textsuperscript{371}

4.4.1. Internally Generated Trauma of the Sex Drive:

What is of interest here is that once again an increase in internal excitation is equated with unpleasure.\textsuperscript{372} Freud’s objective is to understand the effects produced by any “breach in the shield against stimuli” and the problems that follow in its train, with particular

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\textsuperscript{369} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{370} Ibid, p.29.
\textsuperscript{371} Ibid.
importance given to the element of fright caused by the lack of preparedness.\textsuperscript{373} Viewed in terms of asexuality, then, he is describing a template for the experience of internally generated trauma due to an unexpected increase in, or uncomfortably high levels of, libidinal excitation.\textsuperscript{374} The most abundant sources of internal excitation are the instincts (drives), and in particular the sexual instinct (drive) which is met with repression for the very reason that it has a traumatic effect.\textsuperscript{375} In addition, Freud theorises that a repressed instinct (drive) never stops looking for complete satisfaction, and no substitute, or reactive formation or sublimation can remove its persisting tension.\textsuperscript{376} The asexual subject, however, appears to register no persisting tension as a result of any repressed sexual drive, especially if asexuality’s absence of subjective distress is taken into account. The question to be addressed in the context of Lacanian theory in the following chapters is how this can occur.

The conundrum of the sexual drive which Freud highlights is how the tension of sexual excitement is an unpleasurable feeling and yet it is also felt as pleasurable. He asks how the unpleasurable tension and the feeling of pleasure are to be reconciled.\textsuperscript{377} In the research on asexuality outlined in the Literature Review, anxiety was shown to increase among asexual subjects as sexual excitation increased.\textsuperscript{378} Freud, in seeking an answer to his conundrum, says the kind of pleasure derived from the excitation of “erotogenous zones” is “fore-pleasure” and he links this to the same pleasure on a smaller scale experienced by the child during infantile sexuality. In contrast, the satisfaction derived from the sexual act he calls

\textsuperscript{372} Freud S., (1920g), \textit{Op. Cit.}, p.31.
\textsuperscript{374} Ibid, p.30. Here Freud describes amounts of stimulus that can cause the infant anxiety as “inflowing masses of excitation”.
\textsuperscript{375} Ibid, p.34.
\textsuperscript{376} Ibid, p.42.
“end pleasure”. The two are connected, he says, in that the excitation of the erotogenous zones in infantile sexuality makes possible the greater satisfaction in the sex act after puberty. He is saying that the sexually active adult transforms the unpleasure of rising sexual excitation into pleasure due to its association with the satisfaction of sexual orgasm. The pleasure of the erotogenous zones of childhood creates an association with, and expectation of, pleasure in the sexual act of adulthood.

The point of interest is that, in this view, the experiences of infantile sexuality determine the response to the tension of sexual excitement which takes place in adult sexuality. Therefore, if asexual people register no desire to achieve satisfaction in the sex act with another human being, or with any other thing, this would imply that either the excitation of the erotogenous zones never took place in childhood. Or, that it did take place but the unpleasure associated with the rise in tension caused the infantile or pre-Oedipal subject to transform it in some way. The weight of psychoanalytic theory would favour the latter outcome as being more probable. Once again, however, Freudian theory reaches a limit in this regard. It does not offer any concepts to explain a transformation of sexual excitation into its opposite, i.e., no sexual excitation, other than the withdrawal of object libido to ego libido.

4.5. Asexuality Considered as Narcissism:

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381 Ibid. p.184.
As a theoretical construct to understand asexuality, the withdrawal of object libido to ego libido has obvious parallels but it has its limitations also. In On Narcissism – An Introduction, Freud (1914c) says that narcissism is a necessary intermediate stage between the auto-eroticism of infancy and the object-love of early childhood.\(^{382}\) It is here that he draws a distinction for the first time\(^ {383}\) between ego-libido and object-libido and states that the more one form of libido is employed, the more the other is depleted. An example of this is when a person is in love; object-love is then at its height while ego-libido or narcissism is at its lowest.\(^ {384}\) Listening to what is written and said in asexual discourse, the desire to be in a loving relationship is very much in evidence.\(^ {385}\) This suggests that object libido is functioning and is being directed outwardly at another person. It equally suggests that, in all but the most trenchant a-romantic and anti-sex asexuals,\(^ {386}\) there should, therefore, be a concomitant depletion of ego libido or narcissism. Using this criterion, narcissism would appear not to offer a complete understanding of asexuality.

Equally, if narcissism is the attitude of a person who treats their own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is ordinarily treated,\(^ {387}\) then it also proves inadequate. Asexual testimony suggests that masturbation is commonplace, but it is carried out without the subject’s body being treated as a sexual object.\(^ {388}\) In this context, asexuality may not be

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\(^{383}\) Ibid, p.76.
\(^{384}\) Ibid


a narcissistic condition characterised by substantially greater quantities of ego libido compared to object libido. Freud’s thinking supports this inference when applied to the question of why some asexuals who do not want sexual relationships nevertheless want relationships. In his view, if the narcissistic trend, i.e., the investment of libido in the ego, exceeds a certain amount then it must be directed outwardly towards an object. The reason for this is that while a strong ego, i.e., one invested with ego libido, protects the individual from falling ill, he also believes that “in the last resort” people will fall ill if they are not able to love, i.e., direct libido outwardly.\textsuperscript{389} This, for Freud, answers the question of why it is necessary to pass beyond narcissism and attach the libido to objects as other people. It potentially, and indeed speculatively, answers the question as to why asexuals, who may well experience troubling repetitions in their lives, do not appear to fall ill from the direct experience of having no sexual attraction for other people. It also allows for an understanding of the motive force behind many asexuals’ choice to direct their libido outwards to other people without a sexual aim.

The experience of sexual attraction for another person, for Freud, can also include the element of sexual overvaluation. This means that the object of desire, as either sexually attractive or as the love-object or both, is free from criticism to a large extent; it is idealised. While the term suggests that the overvaluation is “sexual”, Freud says that if sensual impulses are repressed or “set aside”, the object can also be “sensually loved” for its spiritual qualities.\textsuperscript{390} Nevertheless, any spiritual qualities the object may exude are only

\textsuperscript{390} Freud S., (1921c), \textit{Op. Cit.}, p.112.
there by virtue of its sensual attraction.\textsuperscript{391} This implies that, firstly, sexual overvaluation is possible even if sexual attraction is set aside and that non-sexual qualities can become the focus of object-love. Secondly, it indicates that spiritual love is still based on the sensual qualities of the object, i.e., eroticised libido is operating in the background and influencing object-choice. Freud’s theory would, therefore, appear to support the possibility that in asexuality the object can be idealised as a desexualised object. The question which then arises is, to what extent repression, as it is classically understood, has a role in this desexualisation?

4.6. Asexuality and Repression:

Repression is one of the classical Freudian concepts that produces a form of desexualisation, whereby an instinctual (drive) impulse meets resistances that can make it inoperative.\textsuperscript{392} When this occurs, the instinct (drive) is then said to pass into a state of repression. Freud is aware that repression has a negative tone since it is a preliminary stage of condemnation; in other words, something the ego does not like or want is being kept at bay.\textsuperscript{393} If, therefore, the sexual drive is subject to repression, this can only suggest that it is experienced negatively or that, as Freud puts it, somehow the drive’s aim of seeking satisfaction might, paradoxically, produce unpleasure instead of pleasure. Yet, he is equally adamant that there are no such drives because satisfaction of a drive “is always pleasurable”.\textsuperscript{394} If this was not

\begin{flushleft}\textsuperscript{391} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{392} Freud, S. (1915d), Repression, Standard Edition XIV, p.146. \\
\textsuperscript{393} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{394} Ibid.\end{flushleft}
the case, he says, it would be necessary to assume that “peculiar circumstances” would lead to the pleasure of satisfaction being changed into unpleasure.\footnote{Ibid.} I am proposing that, for the asexual person, the experience of libidinal excitation originates in earliest childhood as unpleasurable and that the contrary experience of no sexual desire is, by contrast, deemed more pleasurable. This process will be taken up again in more detail in later chapters but, for now, the question is whether repression is responsible for this.

For Freud, the ego as the reality-facing agency is the most powerful factor in repression. This raises the question as to whether asexuality represents a repression which, as stated, the ego ideal requires. Freud believes that the process which detaches the libido from objects and cuts off its return to them, particularly objects such as parents and siblings, is “closely related to the process of repression”.\footnote{Freud, S. (1916-1917), \textit{Op. Cit.}, p.421.} However, repression, as it is classically understood, assumes that, in the first instance, a sexual drive is being directed towards a sexualised object with the aim of achieving a sexual satisfaction. Repression, in this scenario, acting on behalf of the ego ideal, would serve to withdraw the libido from the unsuitable or inappropriate sexualised object. But this understanding of repression does not take into account a further possibility, one that I will propose in later chapters, whereby the sexual drive and its libidinal excitations are potentially experienced as unpleasurable at the infantile stage. Out of this theorised experience, an ego ideal is formed which represents a qualitatively different relation to the sexual drive, i.e., that desexualisation becomes the ideal. There is no inclusion of this possibility in Freudian theory i.e., of an ego ideal that, for either conscious or unconscious reasons, is associated with the absence of sexual desire for
another person or thing. As I will show in a consideration of the role of inhibition, using the paradigmatic examples of frigidity and impotence (below), Freud offers theoretical constructs that come close to this terrain but which are, nevertheless, qualitatively different from it.

In Freudian terms, therefore, if repression is assumed to be the mechanism responsible for making the sexual drive inoperative in asexuality, then a factor that might be expected to manifest is the “return of the repressed”\(^{397}\) in the form of a symptom that could cause subjective distress. Freud’s view is that repression of the sexual drive, and the ideas associated with it, should return to the subject in the form of “substitute formations and symptoms”.\(^{398}\) Since asexuals do not consider themselves to be symptomatic as a result of being asexual, asexuality might not necessarily entail repression in its fullest sense. This is not to suggest that asexuality is a particular category which can avoid encountering repression as an ever-present human defence mechanism. Rather, repression might not fully account for the absolute nature of the absence which asexuals speak about in terms of sexual desire.\(^{399}\) In later chapters I will be proposing an alternative mechanism to account for this.

For now, as it is classically understood, repression is a turning away of something unpleasant and keeping it at a distance from the conscious mind.\(^ {400}\) There are two stages to

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\(^{399}\) See Appendix 1.

it and the first of these is a primal repression whereby the initial idea that represents the drive is kept from the conscious mind and so a fixation point is established.\textsuperscript{401} The second stage involves the repression of all subsequent associative ideas connected with the initial idea that is repressed, which is called “repression proper”.\textsuperscript{402} Of particular note here, is Freud’s elaboration of repression’s distinguishing features. While repression obviously triggers a psychical action from the conscious mind to keep an idea repressed, he says there is at the same time a less easily observable attraction emanating from the idea onto “everything with which it can establish a connection”.\textsuperscript{403} In other words, not only does the repressed idea continue to make its presence felt but it can also build a “power of strength” that it gets from both being dammed up and from the influence of phantasy.\textsuperscript{404} This suggests that the repressed idea represents a potentially unpleasurable rising tension in itself. Nor does repression merely happen once and bring about a permanent result;\textsuperscript{405} it demands a persistent expenditure of energy.

Repression partly explains something of asexuality to the extent that its motive force is the avoidance of unpleasure. If the subject experiences infantile sexuality or post-pubertal sexual relations as unpleasurable, then repression would ensure that any idea associated with it remains away from the conscious mind. Asexuals do have an absence of sexual ideation.\textsuperscript{406} They also appear to benefit from a split-off quota of affect, what Freud calls the emotional aspect which is split off from the idea. This is the energy of the drives\textsuperscript{407} which

\textsuperscript{401} Freud S. (1937c), Analysis Terminable and Interminable, Standard Edition XXIII.p.227.
\textsuperscript{403} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{404} Ibid, p.149.
\textsuperscript{405} Ibid, p.151.
\textsuperscript{406} See Appendix 1.
\textsuperscript{407} Freud, S. (1915d), Op Cit., p.152.
becomes the driving force in pursuing non-sexual aims. However, on the other hand, asexual subjects do not describe the persistent experience of keeping sexual impulses at bay, or of having to keep sexual ideation out of mind. Nor do they describe the presence of sexual fantasies or, indeed, of any internal rising tension from a sexual drive being dammed up. As Soler (2003) suggests regarding heterosexuality, asexuality may represent a symptom without clinical or pathological implications.

4.7.0. Asexuality and Hysteria:

The idea of asexuality as a symptom without clinical or pathological symptoms prompts the further question as to whether asexuality has something in common with conversion hysteria, in particular the well documented indifference of the hysteretic to their symptom (“the belle indifférence of a hysteretic”). Both the asexual and the hysteric share a disinterest, in the former, and an aversion, in the latter, to sexual engagement with another person. It is also important to bear in mind that hysteria is a foundational, structural position affecting both men and women, and that it is the sine qua non of obsessional neurosis. Of relevance to asexuality, Freud says that hysterics show a number of sex-averse characteristics. These include a degree of sexual repression in excess of what he calls the “normal quantity”, an intensification of the resistance against the sexual instinct (drive) and “an instinctive aversion on their part to any intellectual consideration of sexual

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408 See Appendix 1.
410 Freud S. (1895d), Studies on Hysteria, Standard Edition II, p.135. See also footnote 1 on same page.
problems”.\textsuperscript{412} This is an obvious set of characteristics that asexuality shares with hysteria, including its aversion to having the nature of the asexual orientation explored or examined psychoanalytically.\textsuperscript{413} The point at which asexuality differs from Freudian hysteria is in the latter’s other qualities. For Freud, hysteria includes a further characteristic, and a paradoxical one at that, of the \textit{predominance} of the sexual instinct (drive). In other words, hysteria is indicated by, at one and the same time, an aversion to sexuality and, in equal measure, a strong expression of it. To use Freud’s words, it includes the simultaneous existence of an “exaggerated sexual craving and excessive aversion to sexuality”.\textsuperscript{414}

While asexuality might fit one of these criteria, it quite obviously does not fit the other and so does not appear to represent a hysterical neurosis. It is, instead, consistently defined as a lifelong absence of sexual attraction for another person which has no subjective distress attaching to it.\textsuperscript{415} In conversion hysteria, the process of repression is understood to be completed when the repressed returns with the formation of the hysterical symptom.\textsuperscript{416} There does not appear to be a conversion of repressed libido into symptomatic form in asexuality. At least, there is none that is manifest. As a result, there is no conversion symptom to be indifferent to, unless it is considered in terms of male sexual impotence or female frigidity (see Section 4.8.1.). Psychoanalytic theory posits that the conditions exist in every subject to be neurotic, i.e., have a symptom,\textsuperscript{417} and that, therefore, a symptom is part of every subject’s experience. In this context, I will be proposing that asexuality is not in

\textsuperscript{412} Freud, S. (1905d), \textit{Op Cit.}, p.164.
\textsuperscript{413} An example can be found in \textit{Asexuality & Demisexuality: Queer or Anti-Queer}, accessed at \url{http://loneberry.tumblr.com/post/6413675137/asexuality-demisexuality-queer-or-anti-queer}
\textsuperscript{414} Freud, S. (1905d), \textit{Op Cit.}, p.165.
itself a pathological symptom, i.e., it does not represent a disorder. However, it cannot be ruled out that the asexual has a relation to hysteria in the sense that while they may not display psychiatric symptoms, there may be psychoanalytic symptoms in the form of troubling repetitions, mentioned earlier. In order to further consider asexuality in terms of hysteria, I will revisit this question from the perspective of Lacanian theory in Chapter 6.

4.7.1. Asexuality and Obsessional Neurosis:

It also needs to be asked if self-defined asexuality is a form of obsessional neurosis, in which repression brings about a withdrawal of the libido but in a way that makes use, not of the symptom, but of a reaction formation. This is a mechanism of repression which intensifies its opposite whereby the obsessional subject takes a contrary position with regard to the sexual instinct (drive). In other words, an aggressive trend is substituted for an affectionate one and it is the aggressive trend that is repressed. In the process, the forbidden sexual idea is repressed but through this uniquely different mechanism.418

The presence of affection or positive libido first, and the substitution of aggression or hostility second, gives obsessional neurosis its ambivalent character. For Freud, this ambivalence not only underpins reaction-formation but is also the point at which the repressed succeeds in returning. He says the “vanished affect” returns in a transformed way, such as anxiety or self-reproaches. The rejected idea is replaced by a substitute idea

through the process called “displacement”. But once again a differentiating point emerges between these criteria and asexuality. It could be argued that, like obsessional neurosis, self-defined asexuality includes elements of reaction-formation, where the asexual subject takes a contrary position with regard to the sexual instinct (drive). Asexuality differs from obsessional neurosis, however, in that there do not appear to be the clinical symptoms associated with obsessional neurosis such as anxiety, excessive conscientiousness or unlimited self-reproaches.

If, as Freud says, there is no sharply-defined normal sexuality, then the same conceptualisation can be applied to include asexuality as a valid sexual orientation. As evidenced with the latency period, an asexual experience is an intrinsic part of human sexuality. This opens the possibility for considering asexuality as a unique example of a broken-out, albeit damped-down, component of the sex drive. As such, I am proposing that there may be no sharp divisions between desiring and non-desiring forms of sexuality since asexuality is quite clearly a stage in every individual’s passage to adult sexuality. For this reason, Freud’s comment on the facility with which the sexual instinct (drive) diverges from the so-called heterosexual norm is pertinent. Asexuality may be “no great rarity” and may form part of what passes for the “normal constitution”.

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419 Ibid.
421 Freud, S. (1916-1917), Op. Cit., p.326. “From about the sixth to the eighth year of life onwards, we can observe a halt and retrogression in sexual development, which, in cases where it is most propitious culturally, deserves to be called a period of latency.”
423 That is, asexuality as a drive to be unaffected by the sex drive. This can be seen symptomatically represented in frigidity and male impotence (see sections 4.8.0. and 4.8.1.).
4.8.0. Asexuality as Inhibition:

Inhibition offers a closer explanation, from a Freudian perspective, as to what might be taking place in asexuality. This is because of its special relation to function, as Freud puts it.\[^{425}\] By this he means that inhibition does not necessarily have a pathological implication and that an inhibition of a function can easily be called a “normal restriction”. Here he is distinguishing inhibition from a symptom which, by comparison, denotes the presence of some pathological process.\[^{426}\] Although an inhibition may be a symptom as well, his point is that an inhibition simply involves a lowering of function. The examples he gives in his paper *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926) are inhibitions of the sexual function, as well as eating, movement (locomotion) and in professional work.

Taking his comments on the sexual function, he says that disturbances of it may appear at any point. Referring to the case of men only, he says that the chief stages are a turning away of the libido “at the very beginning of the process” of sexual engagement due to an experience of psychical unpleasure; an absence of erection; a shortening of the experience through premature ejaculation (which could be called a symptom), and a halting of the experience due to the absence of ejaculation.\[^{427}\] He believes that there is link between inhibition and anxiety and that the sexual function is avoided because it gives rise to anxiety.

\[^{426}\] Ibid.
\[^{427}\] Ibid, p.88.
which he classes, like the symptom of disgust, under hysteria.\textsuperscript{428} I will be returning to the issue of the disjunction between asexuality and hysteria in the next chapter but for now the issue of anxiety is one which, in some instances, asexuality shares. In a questionnaire survey, Brotto et al (2010), found that rising sexual excitation in adult asexuals correlates positively with rising anxiety.\textsuperscript{429} So, to an extent, it could be said that anxiety has a role to play in the experience of some asexuals regarding the sexual drive. However, this suggests that anxiety associated with sexual excitation leads to inhibition of the sexual drive, positing it as an ego function. I will be proposing in later chapters that the aetiology of the asexual experience is different to this in that it begins as an unconscious orientation during pre-Oedipal experiences which effectively annul sexual desire.

There is a further factor which he includes in inhibition and that is the precautionary measures inherent in obsessional acts, which are of a phobic quality. But, Freud says, his enumerative approach to inhibition is not very illuminating and it is easier to say that inhibitions of the sexual function can be brought about by a “great variety” of means.\textsuperscript{430} In general, he believes that an inhibition is the expression of an ego-function which occurs when the physical organs associated with it have become “too strongly eroticized”.\textsuperscript{431} This, he believes, is what happens in the case of an inhibition of writing (hands) or walking (legs). Because of this eroticisation, the ego renounces these functions so as not to have to undertake fresh repressions, thus avoiding a conflict with the \textit{id}. He concludes that inhibitions are the “restrictions of the functions of the ego” imposed either as a precaution

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{428} Ibid.
\footnotetext{430} Ibid.
\footnotetext{431} Ibid, p.89.
\end{footnotes}
(to avoid unpleasure) or to prevent an overuse of energy (such as dealing with a “continual flood” of sexual phantasies).\textsuperscript{432} In short, inhibition is a process that takes place within, or acts upon, the ego.

The concept of inhibition has an obvious affinity with asexuality in its characteristic of not necessarily having a pathological implication. In this way, the sexual function can be inhibited without any symptomatic elements and so asexuality with its lack of subjective distress could be explained in this way. It is also similar to the asexual experience in that, when looked at from a relatively narrow perspective, there is a turning away of the libido “at the very beginning of the process” of sexual engagement due to an experience of psychical unpleasure.\textsuperscript{433} As stated, in Freud’s understanding of it, these occurrences take place in the context of the ego in an attempt to avoid conflict with the \textit{id}. In contrast, however, I will be proposing that the aetiology of asexuality is not an ego-driven process, even though it is obviously sustained by an ego position which chooses non-sexual engagement with others. In later chapters I will outline this position and show how asexuality has its origins within the unconscious and that, as a result, it is not a defence against a conflict with the \textit{id}.

Freud’s understanding of inhibition has two main characteristics: it has a no pathological implications (except in the case of disgust at sexual activity) which aligns it closely with an asexual position. Secondly, though, inhibitions are experienced by the subject as an

\textsuperscript{432} ibid, p.90.
\textsuperscript{433} Ibid, p.88.
absence. In short, the person who is unable to play the piano, walk, write or engage sexually is consciously aware of being unable to carry out these functions. In the case of asexuality, while there is an experience of not wanting to engage sexually with others, there is no awareness of this as an absence. The absence of sexual desire is not experienced as an absence or as a conflict within the ego but as a natural or ego-syntonic occurrence. The asexual does not identify as a subject with a lack of sexual desire but as a subject for whom no desire for sexual activity is a natural state of things. It also has to be borne in mind that the key criterion of an inhibition, for Freud, is that it represents a “restriction of a function”. This implies that, in the case of the sexual function, a sexual drive exists which must then be restricted in order to qualify as an inhibition. In other words, some sexual function pre-exists in order for it to then become inhibited. In the case of asexuality, it is my proposition that there is no pre-existing sexual function or sexual drive in the traditional sense and that, therefore, there is nothing on which inhibition can act. I will outline in the following chapters how I propose this comes about but, for now, and for the above reasons, inhibition does not fully explain the characteristics or causation of asexuality. In order to consider this further, however, I will next examine the category into which Freud says most inhibitions of the sexual function are classed together, i.e., psychical impotence.

4.8.1. Asexuality and Impotence / Frigidity:

435 Ibid.
In *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* Freud (1926d [1925]) says: “The sexual function is liable to a great number of disturbances, most of which exhibit the characteristics of simple inhibitions. These are classed together as psychical impotence.” As such, the place of inhibition in the aetiology of asexuality can be best viewed from the perspective of sexual impotence in both men and women. In fact, the closest Freudian theory comes to a direct consideration of an asexual disposition is with the concepts of male psychical impotence and female frigidity. Taking male impotence first, Freud says it is a disturbance which affects men who, paradoxically, have “strongly libidinous natures”. This supports the suggestion that a manifest sexual drive is a precondition for inhibition to apply. In the case of male psychical impotence, its characteristics include a “refusal” of the genitals to carry out the sex act even though they are capable of doing so. For Freud, the origin of this potentially obdurate impotence derives from an incestuous fixation on the male subject’s mother or sister, along with any “accidental” or “distressing” experiences during infantile sexual activity. Implicit in this theory is the view that the conditions necessary for psychical impotence to occur are present during the Oedipus complex and that accidental and distressing experiences derive from external events which impinge on the child. Unlike the psychically impotent men in Freud’s theory, however, asexuals do not have strongly libidinous natures but, rather, have no sexual attraction for another person.

A further characteristic of psychical impotence is that a man can enjoy sex with a woman provided she is not in any way unconsciously associated with the mother or maternal figure.

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438 Ibid.
This means, however, that sexual activity can occur only if the woman can be “debased” in order for the sensual current to find expression.\textsuperscript{439} Freud’s thinking in this regard is that for men to engage sexually with women who unconsciously represent something of their mothers, both a sensual and affectionate current must combine to allow a “completely normal attitude in love” to take place.\textsuperscript{440} The affectionate current is the older of the two and is present throughout childhood until, at puberty, it is joined by the more powerful “sensual” current. But the sensual current, Freud says, connects to objects (other people) which are chosen on the basis of primary infantile object-choices, only now with far stronger amounts of libido.\textsuperscript{441} In essence, the libido of the sensual current is choosing its objects based on the pattern of its infantile experiences, i.e., usually a parent, and this is the unconscious underpinning of the inhibition.

Psychical impotence occurs, in Freud’s understanding of it, when affection and sensuality remain split. This split occurs as a result of the strong childhood fixations as well as the barrier against incest.\textsuperscript{442} Sensuality becomes tied to incestuous objects in the unconscious, or fixates on unconscious incestuous phantasies, which prevents the man from performing sexually. Psychical debasement of the sexual object protects against the overvaluation\textsuperscript{443} which idealises the sexual object in the same way as the incestuous object.\textsuperscript{444} In other

\textsuperscript{439} Ibid, p.183. Men can also achieve this through sexually engaging with non-maternal figures such as sex workers or through extra-marital or extra-relational affairs.
\textsuperscript{440} Ibid, p.180.
\textsuperscript{441} Ibid, p.181.
\textsuperscript{442} Ibid, p.184.
\textsuperscript{443} Ibid, p. 181. Here Freud also writes: “The greatest intensity of sensual passion will bring with it the highest psychical valuation of the object – this being the normal overvaluation of the sexual object on the part of a man.”
\textsuperscript{444} Ibid, p.182.
words, idealisation can mean the object-choice becomes unusable as a sexual object and
the only way of reversing this is to put the sexual object at a far remove from any
affectionate or incestuous associations. Debasement is the condition which allows
sensuality to be freely expressed and sexual interaction and sexual pleasure to develop.

Given that the factors which create psychical impotence are present for practically all men,
Freud believes it is more widespread than is supposed.\textsuperscript{445} He says the widespread behaviour
of men “bears the stamp” of this impotence.\textsuperscript{446} It manifests as an inability to engage
sexually with their love-object unless it is debased, or with a substitute who is far removed
from the incestuous love-object. He theorises that there are “gradations in its
symptomatology”\textsuperscript{447} and part of this gradation includes “psychanaesthetic men” who
engage in sex but do not experience pleasure. While this latter concept appears to have
something in common with asexuality, in Freudian terms it is the denial or minimisation of
pleasure in the sexual act because of an unconscious guilt associated with the incest taboo.
This seems to be qualitatively different to the asexual experience where, again, there is no
desire to engage in the sex act with the other person because no sexual desire is
experienced by the asexual subject. Freud’s answer to psychical impotence is that in order
to be “free” of it, the man must overcome his respect for women and at the same time
accommodate the idea of incest with his mother or sister.\textsuperscript{448} Noting that the conditions for
psychical impotence to occur are universal, he gives a clear indication that difficulty with sex
is more common than it appears and that men who cannot redirect their libido towards an

\textsuperscript{445} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{446} Ibid, p.185.

\textsuperscript{447} Ibid. Also, it should be noted that “gradations” are evident in the forms which asexuality takes.

\textsuperscript{448} Ibid, p.186.
object they can debase will remain in this state. However, when Freud refers to male
impotence as a refusal, he is pointing to the existence of a primary sexual drive that is
secondarily being refused. In other words, the concept of psychical impotence assumes a
sexual drive that seeks pleasure in the first instance and this does not appear to be the case
with asexuality.

4.8.2. Asexuality and Female Frigidity:

Freud believed that the cultural requirement of his time, for greater abstinence in women
rather than in men, was a factor in women becoming frigid. This strict requirement was
not, he believed, the best preparation for a full sexual life and was responsible for a
suppression of sexuality that could, at its extreme, leave the woman frigid. For Freud,
“civilized education” and its antagonism with instinctual life was responsible for this.
However, he points out that, unlike men, women showed little sign of the need to debase
their sexual object. Instead, he says, the long period of prohibition which they were
subjected to, and its influence on their sensuality, had an important consequence for them.
It meant they were subsequently often unable to undo the connection between sensual
activity and the prohibition on it, and they proved to be frigid when such activity was at last

452 A theme he advocated from the start of his theorising; see a memorandum to Fleiss dated May 31, 1897,
Draft N, Standard Edition I, p. 257, and, inter alia, at the end of Three Essays on Sexuality (1905d), which
appeared three years before his paper Civilized Sexual Morality.
allowed them. In other words, the “forbiddeness” in the erotic life of women is what he believed was comparable to men’s need to debase their sexual object. Both are the consequences of the long delay, in his era, between sexual maturity and sexual activity and both resulted from the inability of affectionate and sensual impulses to unite.

While Freud’s theory in this area has some obviously dated aspects to it with regard to women, there are still today strong sex-negative messages aimed at women more than at men. An example would be the invocation from some sections of the feminist movement that equates women having sex with men as a form of violation. Another example would be religiously motivated messages which depict women’s sexuality as shameful, or that encourage women to abstain from sexual activity. Abbott, Harris and Mollen (2016) found that as a result of religious influences, women experienced guilt related to their sexual behaviours and were less likely to perceive their sexual behaviours as congruent with their moral standards. Most of their sample identified as Christian and, the authors say, the findings seem convincing given the sex-negative messages often communicated by Christian organisations and authorities. In terms of neurosis, these messages and others of its type within, say, conservative family contexts, can provide a similar impetus for symptoms of

453 Freud, S. (1912d), Op. Cit., p.186. Also, in Dreams and Telepathy (1922a) he cites the case of a woman patient who is manifesting sexual frigidity and he attributes it to her sexual desires towards her father and death-wishes against her mother as factors alongside those just mentioned. See Standard Edition XVIII, p.214.
455 “Violation is a synonym for intercourse. At the same time, the [sic] penetration is taken to be a use, not an abuse; a normal use; it is appropriate to enter her, to push into (“violate”) the boundaries of her body.” Dworkin, A. (1987), Intercourse, Basic Books: New York. p. 154.
female frigidity to develop. The point is that while Freud’s historical explanations seem
dated, such prohibitions for women are discernible today but in a different form.

As Freud moves through his exposition of female frigidity, though, he aligns its aetiology
closer to the male experience of impotence by linking it to the Oedipus complex. He says
that, because the earliest allocations of libido are both universal and powerful, the earliest
infantile wishes in women usually comprise a fixation of the libido on the father or a
brother. These wishes were often originally directed towards things other than intercourse,
or included it only “as a dimly perceived goal”.457 But something of this fixation remains
when the woman chooses the man she loves. The husband, in this view, is almost always a
substitute for the father.458 The more powerfully the unconscious paternal figure is in a
woman’s sexual life the greater the resistance to sexual activity. For Freud, frigidity may
then become established as a neurotic inhibition or lead to other neuroses.

In terms of asexuality, psychical impotence and female frigidity assume either a sexual drive
that is being impeded459 or an aversion to satisfying that drive. Their aetiology is theorised
to be the result of libidinal fixations during the Oedipus complex. The former point, as has
been mentioned, is in contrast to the experience of asexuality where there is no
consciously-experienced sexual drive which is being impeded. The latter point contrasts
with what I will be proposing for asexuality in the following chapters, in terms of pre-

458 Ibid.
Oedipal factors. While the incest taboo has a universal application, and undoubtedly has some part to play in asexuality’s foreclosure of sexual desire, neither male psychical impotence nor female frigidity appear to provide a full understanding of why no sexual desire is evident in self-defined asexuality.

4.9. Summary:

Repression, as I have shown, does not appear to fully account for the absolute nature of the absence which asexuals speak about in terms of sexual desire.\textsuperscript{460} Even though repression is the main defence system available for dealing with the internal threat of the libido,\textsuperscript{461} Freud’s theory does not extend to a consideration of its potentially formative role in producing a subject who experiences no sexual desire. Of even greater theoretical relevance, is the question of whether the dynamics of repression could be sufficient to explain the apparent lack of subjective distress in asexuality,\textsuperscript{462} which is generally associated with the return of the repressed. The same can be said for Freud’s theory with regard to the traumatic effects of infantile sexual experiences. It accounts very well for the variations that manifest in adult sexuality but, again, it does not extend to a consideration that one further outcome might be the experienced absence of sexual desire. This is particularly so in the case of the asexual subject whose ego ideal may be constituted around the very desire for such an absence, a concept that is also not included in Freud’s theory even though his

\textsuperscript{460} See Appendix 1.  
conception of the ego ideal is one which can direct the child to not be like its parental role models, as outlined above.

As also stated, sexual excitation of the erotogenous zones of childhood takes place for all subjects.463 However, Freudian theory does not consider the possibility that this can be transformed into its opposite, i.e., into experiencing no sexual excitation. Freudian theory does offer the concept of the withdrawal of object libido to ego libido but this would suggest that asexuality is a form of narcissism. Yet, the desire of some asexuals to be in romantic relationships would equally suggest that object libido is functioning and directed at other people. Narcissism would not appear, therefore, to offer a complete understanding of asexuality. In a similar vein, the concept of hysteria, while it can be indicated by an aversion to sexuality, does not offer a complete understanding of asexuality either.

For these reasons, I am proposing that it is necessary to look to Lacanian theory, in the following chapters, in order to access the necessary conceptual tools with which to offer a fuller understanding of asexuality’s more challenging aspects. In particular, Lacanian theory places an emphasis on “lack” as a paradigmatic psychical absence which drives desire and is, by extension, of theoretical relevance to asexuality. It also emphasises the role of unconscious phantasy in structuring and supporting human desire, in particular the inclusion of an intangible object within the phantasy, the objet petit a. More significantly, it offers a conceptual framework for a reversal of the dependence for satisfaction on other people, a concept that is central to asexuality.

463 Ibid. p.184.
In the next chapter I will begin examining Lacanian theory to establish what it can offer in terms of building on Freudian theory to provide an understanding of asexuality.
Chapter 5

Towards a Lacanian Understanding of Asexuality

5.0. Objective:

This chapter will show how Lacanian theory offers an innovative framework from which to view asexuality, particularly the centrality of the concept of lack as a psychical absence which creates desire. It will also examine the concept of unconscious phantasy as a support for desire as well as the reversal of dependency on the other person for the satisfaction of need. I will be proposing that the lack of sexual desire in asexuality is not an absence, *per se*, but an active desire no sexual desire. In this sense, it is to be distinguished from Lacan’s concept of lack of lack.⁴⁶⁴ I will argue that in asexuality the lack of sexual attraction is the desire. Lack of lack, on the other hand, leaves the subject without a lack to mobilise desire and instead produces anxiety. As stated, asexuality is not characterised by the presence of anxiety.

5.1. The Centrality of Lack:

One of the central concepts within Lacanian psychoanalysis is the *objet petit a*, or the little o-object. This is the object that causes desire and drives the subject to fill the lack by re-finding the original object it believes it once possessed but lost. Indeed, the promise offered by the *objet a* not only includes the satisfaction of desire itself but also wholeness and, indeed, happiness. It is important to bear in mind its materially insubstantial nature, something which Lacan went to great lengths to emphasise. It derives from the physical objects which symbolise loss – the breast, the excrement, the phallus, and so on – and can associate itself with real objects but, in and of itself, it takes no specular form.\[^{465}\] In his invention of this concept, particularly in his *Seminar on Identification*,\[^{466}\] Lacan looks to Kant’s four nothings in order to settle on the *nihil negativum*\[^{467}\] as the object to represent nothing, becoming now the “empty object without a concept” which he describes as “the very example of the inexistent object and what is more the unthinkable one.”\[^{468}\] In this pursuit, he had been seeking to situate a “partial” object that is free of a specular unity to the object,

\[^{465}\] Lacan, J. (1961-62). *Identification*, Seminar IX, Unpublished. (Trans. Gallagher, C). Accessed at [www.lacaninireland.com](http://www.lacaninireland.com), session of June 27, 1962. p.308. Also, the *objet a* is translated in English in some of his work as the “small o”, such as this Seminar where he says: “Small o is being in so far as it is essentially missing in the text of the world. And that is why around little o there can slide everything that is called the return of the repressed, namely that here there is betrayed the true truth which interests us and which is always the object of desire, in so far as the whole of humanity, the whole of humanism is constructed to make us miss it.”


one that can become a space holder, empty of content and yet capable of fundamentally transformative effects, particularly in relation to mobilising the desire of the subject.

On the one hand, this introduces the idea of a desire that can be linked to “nothing” which, in essence, is a desire aimed at the object as both lacking and ineffable. This allows for a consideration of how asexuality can find jouissance in having no sexual attraction for another person or thing.\(^\text{469}\) This seemingly paradoxical linking of desire to nothing must, on the other hand, be sustained by something which is capable of providing a consistency between two seemingly contradictory positions. For Lacan, it is the Imaginary which puts meaning on the holes or gaps in the Symbolic order. The latter is the register of culture, language and symbolic meaning through which the Real, as the random and traumatic register that is unassimilable to language, insists on breaking through. A further aspect of his thinking in this regard is that the law of imaginary consistency means that what is “negative” can become “positive” because for Lacan a truth denied has just as much imaginary weight as an acknowledged truth, Verneinung as Bejahung.\(^\text{470}\) Applying Lacan’s law of imaginary consistency to asexuality implies that a desire to experience no sexual desire carries as much imaginary weight as the desire to experience the desire of the Other, the latter concept being the theorised Lacanian position of all desiring subjects.

If the asexual experience consistently records a lack of other-directed sexual desire,\(^\text{471}\) then the work of psychoanalysis, in theory and practice, involves giving equal weight to the

\(^{469}\) See footnote 50 for an explanation of the term jouissance.


\(^{471}\) See Appendix 1.
signifier “nothing” which is associated with this. Since phantasy is the support of desire,\(^472\) a key element in the phantasy is the objet\(a\), hence Lacan’s writing of it as \(\mathcal{O} \, a\), which is read as the barred Subject in relation to the objet\(a\) as cause of desire. One of the objets\(a\) that Lacan lists is precisely the “nothing”.\(^473\) This parallels the place of the very subject of psychoanalysis as structured around a lack of being or “want-to-be". As Lacan puts it, desire is the metonymy of the want-to-be.\(^474\) Lack is central to how desire is mobilised; and correlatively, desire is the very metonymy of the lack of being, the place from which passion emerges.

In Seminar VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, Lacan focusses on the Freudian concept of das Ding, translated in English as the Thing, which is conceptually the antecedent of his invention of the objet\(a\). In his discussion of the transformational effects of das Ding, he refers to it as an ineffable and intangible object which mobilises the subject’s desire in an unending but ultimately doomed attempt to re-find the lost maternal object. “It is the lost object which must be continually re-found, it is the prehistoric, unforgettable Other.”\(^475\) He elaborates on this by saying the Thing is impossible for us to imagine,\(^476\) making of it an “unknowable x, beyond symbolisation”, thus situating it in the Real. This is the precursor of the objet\(a\), which emerges from 1963, in his Seminar on Anxiety. Here he ties together the objet\(a\) and das Ding in his discussion of anxiety as that which does not deceive and, while it

may have no cause, is not without an object.⁴⁷⁷ He says that anxiety’s being not without an object “very likely designates” the most profound and ultimate object which is the Thing.⁴⁷⁸

The “nothing”, viewed in this light, is not just a conception of absence as is found in the non-psychoanalytic literature on asexuality. Nor, indeed is it merely another item on Lacan’s list of objets a.⁴⁷⁹ Boucher (2005) points out that the way Lacan includes it in that “unthinkable” list, which reads “the phoneme, the gaze, the voice… the nothing”, suggests that it could somehow fundamentally underpin all the other objets a.⁴⁸⁰ In common with the other objets a, the “nothing” has a place as cause of desire for the subject from its position within the fundamental phantasy. In Seminar IV, Object Relations, Lacan speaks about the anorexic subject who is not “not eating” but is instead “eating nothing” and, for him, nothing “is precisely something which exists on the symbolic plane”.⁴⁸¹ There are undoubted resonances here in terms of not sexually desiring in asexuality. Gherovici (2014) says the anorexic refuses to eat food from the Other to preserve his “appetite for nothing and desire nothing”.⁴⁸² In this instance, it is a refusal of the oral object as a defence against desire as the desire of the Other.

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⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Lacan, J. (1960 [2006]), The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire, Écrits, Op Cit., p.693 (817). Here he lists his other objets a: the breast, the faeces, the phallus (as imaginary object) and the urinary flow.


According to Fink (2004), “…rather than have us say *that she [sic] does not eat anything* [emphasis in original], Lacan would have us say that she eats nothing, the nothing as object that causes her desire, keeping her desire alive.” 483 Because food reduces desire to pure and simple needs, Fink says the anorexic refuses food precisely in order to maintain some space for desire, “some room for desire to subsist in.”484 For Lacan, “eating nothing” is something other than negation; it is not the object of satisfaction which the subject denies to itself.485 For the child, the breast as symbolic object of the subject-Other dialectic appears under the sign of nothing486 and, as Lacan says, it is the child who puts his dependency on the mother in check by nourishing himself on this “nothing”, on this object annulled as symbolic.487 “It is here that he reverses his relation of dependence, making himself by this means master of the avid omnipotence to make him, who depends upon it, live. From there on her omnipotence depends upon his desire …,” he says.488 Yet, for asexuality, this position in which desire is theorised to be directed at the “nothing” has to be sustained and supported by a fundamental unconscious phantasy and so the question that arises is, what is the nature of this phantasy?

5.2.0. The Emergence of Phantasy:

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484 Ibid.
The use of conscious fantasy to direct sexual desire towards the Other is absent in asexuality. Nevertheless, the presence of masturbation indicates that an active libido is present even though, again, the Other is not its object. Instead, the repeated experience cited by asexuals is that they do not “feel” sexual desire for the Other and do not imagine the Other as a sexual object. A respondent from one study says of masturbation: “I can’t attach pleasure together with it somehow. Was it physically pleasurable? I don’t know. I just can’t find the words.” A question, therefore, is what does the unconscious fundamental phantasy represent for the asexual in the Lacanian sense?

Without the fundamental phantasy ($\diamondsuit a$), which places the divided subject in relation to the objet a as cause of desire, Lacanian theory could lead us to postulate a subject who cannot experience desire. This is because it is desire and its correlative lack, which drives the subject to seek metonymic objects of satisfaction. Yet the asexual subject would appear to have effectively desexualised its relation to the Other. However, on the basis that asexual subjects are desiring subjects in the broadest sense, as stated in Chapter 1, this suggests that there must be an unconscious phantasy operating which sustains this position. In particular, there must be a unique relation between the barred subject, as asexual, and the objet a, as cause of desire. In current non-psychoanalytic academic research the desexualised position of the asexual is, in keeping with more general social discourses, viewed as an exceptional position, one that gives asexuality its unique status. While this is

490 See Appendix 1.
intuitively the case, the concept of desexualisation is one which Freudian-Lacanian theory has traditionally included in its metapsychology of the sexually desiring subject’s relation to the external world.

In *Formulations On the Two Principles of Mental Functioning*, Freud (1911b) talks about a momentary pleasure deferred in order to gain an assured pleasure at a later time.\(^{493}\) This is a point where Freud positions the child at the moment when it moves beyond the hallucinatory satisfaction of internal need, such as is found in dreams. When hallucinatory satisfaction does not occur or is not enough, Freud says, it becomes necessary for the “psychical apparatus”, as he calls it, to form “a conception of the real circumstances in the external world and to endeavour to make a real alteration in them”.\(^{494}\) In this way, the second of his two principles of mental functioning is set up: the reality principle. If motor discharge is employed in this “alteration of reality” by being converted into *action*, then it is the process of *thinking* that imposes constraints on carrying out an *action*. “Thinking was endowed with characteristics which made it possible for the mental apparatus to tolerate an increased tension of stimulus while the process of discharge was postponed,” Freud says.\(^{495}\) In other words, thinking can defer pleasure and thus bring about an alteration of reality, i.e., a desexualisation.

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\(^{494}\) Ibid, p.219.

\(^{495}\) Ibid, p.221.
For Lacan, if Freud contrasts the reality principle with the pleasure principle it is because reality is “defined as desexualised”. In contrast to asexuality, however, it is important to bear in mind that in Freud’s description, the pleasure principle is in no way deposed, but rather safeguarded. The drive towards pleasure and away from unpleasure is constant even if pleasure is deferred. In later chapters I will be proposing that, in contrast to a pleasure deferred, asexuality derives pleasure from not experiencing sexual excitation. For the moment, the most salient concept within psychoanalytic theory in which the desexualisation of reality can be found is the Oedipus complex. The child, from an early age, loves his or her first sexual objects, the primary caregivers or parents, with what Freud (1905d) describes in *Three Essays on Sexuality* as a “damped down libido”. In essence, he is describing the subject’s earliest experience of a cultural demand to render external reality desexualised in service of the incest taboo. He says:

> Society must defend itself against the danger that the interests which it needs for the establishment of higher social units may be swallowed up by the family; and for this reason, in the case of every individual, but in particular adolescent boys, it seeks by all means to loosen their connection with their family – a connection which, in their childhood, is the only important one.

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498 Ibid.
As stated, Lacan believes that if there is a contrast between the Freudian concepts of the reality principle and the pleasure principle it is because reality is desexualised.\(^{499}\) The possible mechanism for this will be considered below but, broadly speaking, the point of interest here is that reality is capable of being “altered” in this way. For sexually desiring subjects there is the ubiquity of sexuality within the unconscious and, yet, there is the capacity to desexualise reality in order to manage drive tension and defer satisfaction. As Lacan puts it, “... the notion that the approach of reality involves a desexualisation lies at the very principle of Freud’s definition of Zwei Prinzipien des psychischen Geschehens, of the two principles into which psychical “eventiality” [sic] is divided.”\(^{500}\) For the purposes of considering asexuality, therefore, psychoanalytic theory holds that the subject has the capacity to desexualise his or her reality. But how does this occur in the context of what Lacanian theory equally posits as the metonymically-desiring subject?

5.2.1. Asexual Phantasy and Desire:

Desire, whether sexual or asexual, is not to be satisfied, because its purpose is to keep the subject desiring. This is desire’s “eccentricity”, as Lacan says in Seminar V, and it is an eccentricity in relation to “all forms of satisfaction”.\(^{501}\) Not only does desire structure the drives\(^{502}\) but it also “adjusts to fantasy” in the same way as “the ego adjusts to the body


\(^{500}\) Ibid.


image”. For Lacan, the subject is nothing but such objets a, incorporated as real into the phantasy which supports desire and defends against it at the same time. “It is to this object that cannot be grasped in the mirror that the specular image lends its clothes,” he says. The lining of the subject, the “stuff” of the subject, is this object, this “substance caught in the net of shadow” which holds out the “tired lure of the shadow as if it were substance”. I am proposing that the objet a that completes the asexual fundamental phantasy is the “nothing”, in which the phantasy empties itself of that which makes the subject dependent through demand on the Other. This, paradoxical as it might seem, is the way the objet a is interpreted by some post-Lacanian theorists. According to Žižek (2016), the objet a is not an inaccessible ideal object to which no real object is ever adequate. Rather, he says, the objet a is “inadequacy itself”, a presupposed void in demand which comes to exist as a “pure gap”. In my proposal, asexual desire “adjusts to this fantasy” in a way that keeps the asexual subject desiring for “absence savoured as such” through a jouissance that is non-phallic. What this suggests is that, while the encounter with the first Other marks the sexually desiring subject as a subject of lack, for the asexual, bodily engagement with the Other becomes overshadowed with unpleasure and Hilflosigkeit (helplessness). The result, as mentioned above, is that desire goes on to be desexualised and satisfaction is derived from a jouissance annulled of its sexual element. As Lacan says in On Freud’s “Trieb” and the Psychoanalyst’s Desire, the sexual colouring of libido is “the colour of emptiness”.

504 Ibid, p.693 (818)
505 Ibid, p.693 (818)
For the asexual, I am proposing that the encounter with the first Other occurs in a particular way. As stated, the engagement becomes overshadowed with unpleasure due to the structurally traumatic experience of the component sexual drives in infantile sexuality.

Lacan in *Seminar IV* pinpoints the inaugural moment when the increase in drive tension in relation to the Other is experienced as unpleasurable.\(^{510}\) If desire structures the drives,\(^{511}\) and if an increase in drive tension is unpleasurable, then desire will adjust to a phantasy aimed at avoiding this. In the repetition of the sexual act, the sexually desiring subject reproduces the initial relation to the Other, which was potentially traumatic\(^{512}\) and is, Lacan says, the very relation which maintains the *objet a*.\(^{513}\) I am proposing that, for the asexual subject, the original rise in drive tension as a result of infantile sexual excitations was unpleasurable and caused anxiety\(^{514}\) and so psychological elaboration was achieved through a Nirvana principle response to reduce that tension to zero.\(^{515}\) According to Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), “…the Nirvana principle must be understood as something more than a law of constancy or of homeostasis: it is, rather, the radical tendency to reduce excitation to zero-point, as postulated much earlier by Freud under the name of the “principle of inertia”.\(^{516}\) At the same time, the word “Nirvana” evokes a profound link between pleasure

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and annihilation: this is a link that always remained problematic for Freud, they say. The term Nirvana in Buddhism also means the “extinction” of human desire.\footnote{Ibid, p.272.}

5.2.2. The Presence of Absence:

In asexuality, there is no signifier of sexual desire, or at least none that is in any way obvious either to asexuals or to researchers of asexuality. There is no struggle to keep unwanted sexual feelings at bay, no repudiation, no recognition of “this is what I want but I am not having it”. There is, instead, an absence of both wanting and not wanting, and in its place there is “no sexual attraction”, to use asexuality’s own terms. There appears to be no object that is elevated to the status of the Thing, no sexualised yet unsignifiable objet a that resides in the Other, no promise of a sexualised lost object being re-found, not even as semblant, within the fundamental phantasy propping up desire. Equally, there is no desire being consciously acknowledged but suspended, deferred or postponed in the first place.

This, I will argue, is what makes asexual desire distinct. There is no sense of loss, of privation. In fact, in the more obvious sense, there are no symptoms and no subjective distress. If this is hysteria, then it is hysteria without symptoms. If that sounds enigmatic, then it should be recalled that hysteria itself is, and historically always has been, enigmatic; no answer in and of itself will satisfy the question it represents.\footnote{Wajcman, G. (2003), The Hysteric’s Discourse, In, The Symptom, Spring, Issue 4. Accessed at \url{http://www.lacan.com/hystericdiscf.htm} p.8.} I will return to the
relation of asexuality to hysteria in the next chapter but, for now, a desiring subject without any consciously experienced sexual desire suggests something potentially new or different has taken place. If the asexual’s desire is based on the desire of the Other but without sexuality included, then the sexual element of the phallus, and indeed of the objet a, has somehow been annulled or neutralised. Interestingly, Lacan says that desire itself is founded on annulment, in this case the annulment constituted by the satisfactions which demand brings about, in relation to what is sought through need. He says:

... demand annuls (aufhebt) the particularity of everything that can be granted, by transmuting it into a proof of love, and the very satisfactions demand obtains for need are debased (sich erniedrigt) to the point of being no more than the crushing brought on by demand for love...  

Something is lost or annulled when need gets articulated in demand and this is what becomes desire. Yet, the theory posits that man and woman can only enter the field of their own desire, including sexual desire, through the signifier of the phallus. Lacan is obviously referring to sexually desiring beings who take up their sexual desire and so, in order to incorporate asexual subjects, it will be necessary to consider how the phallus operates in this regard. Can its sexual effects be annulled while the phallus itself still operates as a space

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520 Ibid.
holder in the signifying chain, much like the zero in mathematics?\textsuperscript{522} I will be returning to this question in greater detail in the next chapter. For now, if asexuality’s definition of not being sexually attracted to another person is the signifier of a desire for no desire, then asexuality’s desire remains as paradoxical as desire itself.\textsuperscript{523} The object that keeps the asexual desiring is one which is emptied of sexual desire and this paradox lies at the heart of asexuality as an orientation within the field of human sexuality. Fink (1995) suggests that psychoanalysis is obliged to avoid covering over paradoxes in order to prove that its theory is not lacking. He says it should rather “take such contradictions and paradoxes as far as they can go”.\textsuperscript{524} This is the challenge that I believe needs to be accepted when psychoanalysis is faced with the enigmas of asexuality. One such enigma is its apparent reversal of the relation of dependence on the Other.

\section*{5.3. The Theory of Infantile Reversal of Dependence:}

When Lacan is dealing with the oral drive of the infant, as he does in \textit{Seminar IV}, it is hunger which is the bearer of libido. He is pointing out that even orality is a question of sexual libido in the strict sense.\textsuperscript{525} The breast has entered into the dialectic of substitution, within the dialectic of frustration, whereby the child encounters moments in which his or her

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{522} “This is the zero of the place-holder notation, having no value itself but giving value by its presence to other numerals.” Kaplan, R. (1999), \textit{The Nothing That Is: A Natural History of Zero}, Oxford University Press: Oxford. pp.59-60. See also Seife, C. (2000), \textit{Zero: The Biography of a Dangerous Idea}, The Souvenir Press: London. p.23: “There is a lot of power in this simple number. It was to become the most important tool in mathematics.”
\end{flushright}
dependence is clearly experienced. In other words, a sexual relation has become substituted for a feeding relation because something other than feeding is taking place. The child is seeking satisfaction in the demand for love, and so the seeking of the breast becomes an eroticised activity. For Lacan, it is not the object itself which plays the essential role in this dialectic of frustration. It is rather the activity which has taken on an eroticised function on the plane of desire – in this case the oral function. Nor does the object as breast have to be present for eroticisation to take place; a bottle can substitute for it. He goes even further when he says “... it is possible for the same role to be played where there is no real object at all.” Therefore, for Lacan, eroticisation can take place in relation to absence, a notion that has not been available to non-psychoanalytic researchers in the field of asexuality. When he goes on to say, as stated, that, in the case of anorexia, the subject is not “not eating” but is instead “eating nothing”, this is a distinct but subtle shift of position from passive to active. The point of particular interest for asexuality is the reference Lacan makes to the mechanism whereby the breast as object is “annulled as symbolic” and that this is done in order to “reverse his relation of dependence”. This offers an understanding as to how a particular relation to the first Other can arise in which the subject as infant can experience dependence as a negative and seek to alter its position in relation to it. It also nuances the theoretical argument, as found in Freudian concepts such as repression, regression, sublimation and inhibition, which says the cause of lack of sexual desire must be found in an Oedipally-structured refusal or negation of sexual desire. Instead, it posits an originary pre-

528 Ibid, pp. 210-211.
529 Ibid, p.211.
Oedipal experience of a libidinally-based dependence as unpleasurable which the subject reverses in order to transform it.

Lacan elaborates in *Seminar IV* on how this psychical mechanism operates. He says the oral activity of feeding takes on an eroticised function on the plane of desire which is “organized” in the symbolic order.\(^{531}\) The activity of the infant sucking at the breast is an eroticised activity because libido has entered into the dialectic of substitution for satisfaction in the demand for love.\(^{532}\) He makes the point that this alone is what makes the symptom of anorexia understandable. It is an eating of “nothing” which, he says, is precisely a “something” that exists on the symbolic plane.\(^{533}\) In anorexia, the child uses this nothing, this “absence savoured as such”, to make the Mother depend on him rather than him depend on the Mother thereby reversing the relation of dependence. He says:

... what happens in specific is that the child eats nothing, which is something other than a negation of the activity. He uses this absence savoured as such vis-à-vis what he has facing him, namely the mother on whom he depends. Thanks to this nothing he makes her depend on him.\(^ {534}\)

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\(^{533}\) Ibid, p.211.
\(^{534}\) Ibid. His next line here is: “If you do not understand that, you can understand nothing not only of anorexia, but also of other symptoms, and you will make the greatest errors.”
Why does this take place? Lacan suggests that it is because the child has understood something of the omnipotence which the Mother wields in relation to it. He says the drive to reverse the relation of dependence is due to a realisation for the child that this real being as Mother is omnipotent and it is this real being on whom “absolutely and without recourse, the gift or non-gift depends”. He says: “I am telling you that the mother is primordially all-powerful, that we cannot eliminate her from this dialectic, that this is an essential condition for understanding anything at all of value.”

At this point he overlays a Kleinian interpretation and says that the depressive position of Melanie Klein is connected to the same maternal omnipotence he is examining. In order for a “real omnipotence” to bring about a depressive state, the child must have reached a stage of being able to reflect on the contrast of the mother with its own powerlessness. He situates this “point” at around the sixth month, the same time as his mirror stage takes place. He says:

“When he finds himself in the presence of this totality in the form of the maternal body, he must realize that it does not obey him. When the reflected structure of the

536 Ibid.
539 Ibid.
mirror stage comes into play, the omnipotence of the mother is then reflected only in a clearly depressive position, and in the child’s sense of powerlessness.\textsuperscript{540}

He points out that the “power” the child employs to defend against the omnipotence of the mother is not “negativism” but rather the “object annulled as symbolic”.\textsuperscript{541} In this way, he says, the child puts its dependency in check, precisely by “nourishing himself on nothing” and that it is here that it reverses its relation of dependence on the mother.\textsuperscript{542}

What I am proposing here, in relation to asexuality, is that if this operation is potentially available to the child, with regard to phallic sexuality as opposed to orality, then it can lay a theoretical foundation to comprehend how, post-Oedipally, the symbolic phallus as signifier will become annulled for the asexual. Rather than the anorexic symptom of the refusal of food, my proposition is that the asexual reverses the relation of dependence with regard to the libidinised or eroticised relation to the Other in a way that goes beyond the unadorned refusal that is found in anorexia. In the following chapters I will show how I propose that this can occur.

For the moment, Lacan’s theorising allows for the possibility that the subject, beginning in infancy, can unconsciously protect itself from the omnipotence of the first Other and, by extension, from the omnipotent desire of subsequent others. Therefore, rather than

\textsuperscript{540} Ibid, p.214.
\textsuperscript{541} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{542} Ibid.
assuming that asexuality is a refusal of sexual desire or a desire for an unsatisfied desire, it could instead be considered a desire for no desire, in which context the question of a satisfied or an unsatisfied desire becomes less relevant. As Lacan says in *Seminar IV*, the infant reverses his relation of dependence, making himself master of the omnipotence of the mother. From there on the mother’s omnipotence depends upon his desire and indeed, is at the mercy of his omnipotence. On this model, asexuality could, therefore, be potentially understood as similar to, but distinct from, anorexia, as the subject “nourishing himself on nothing” but without the same relation to death that the anorexic symptom can represent. The two conditions necessary for asexuality would, then, appear to be:

1) the signifier Phallus as annulled

2) the objet a as the nothing.

In this scenario, desire forms itself around a vacuole, a lack of sexual desire, just as the origin of desire itself and, indeed, of language is formed. But it occurs in a way that does not involve symptoms or subjective distress and precludes the demand of the Other as sexually desirable or desiring. If this represents an emptying of the drives, then as Moncayo (2017) puts it “…emptiness can also be revealed as a still and serene presence that constitutes the opposite of anxiety…”

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543 Ibid.

5.4.0. Asexuality and the Other:

The male asexual subject interviewed in a newspaper article entitled “We’re married, we just don’t have sex” (2008) describes his desire for the asexual woman he married. But his desire is not based on sexual need and therefore, in Lacanian terms, it is not available to be articulated in demand. If there is no seeking of satisfaction through demand, it would suggest that the asexual subject’s dependence on the Other is considerably different from a dependence that is. The supposition arising from this is that the asexual subject is unique in terms of its relation to sexual need and demand. In asexuality generally, a prominent characteristic is the manner in which the sexual demand of the Other is assiduously circumscribed. This latter point, together with the one similarly made about the omnipotence of the Other in anorexia, is reminiscent of Lacan in The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire (1960) when he offers the view that the neurotic, whether hysterical, obsessive or phobic, is the one who identifies, or even confuses, the Other’s lack with the Other’s demand. Demand then takes the place of lack, or as he puts it, takes on the function of the object in the neurotic’s phantasy and so the phantasy ($ \diamond a$) is reduced to the drive ($ \diamond D$). This focus on demand seemingly at the expense of desire in the fundamental phantasy of the neurotic hides, he says, the anxiety created by the Other’s desire.

548 Ibid.
As stated, Lacan makes a related point in *Seminar IV* when, drawing on Kleinian concepts, he says that the depressive position is a result of the “rapport of omnipotence” that takes place between child and mother.\(^549\) In order for the real omnipotence of the mother to take effect it must present the child with a contrast to his or her own “powerlessness” which is anxiety-inducing.\(^550\) In essence, the conditions exist for the need, demand and *jouissance* of the asexual in relation to the Other, deriving as they do from successive oral, anal and phallic stages, to be effectively voided of sexual content. If sexuality is determined through the interplay of castration, the phallic signifier, the phantasy and the Other, then asexuality appears to fit well within the broad range of human experience. However, emanating from a cultural milieu which over-determines sexualisation,\(^551\) I am proposing that asexuality has found a unique way of perpetuating desire through having no sexual desire, and through nourishing itself on an absence savoured as such. In this light, asexuality becomes an active, driven form of sexuality that, just like conventional forms, emanates from a dialectic of substitution, which takes place within a dialectic of frustration.\(^552\)

By its own definition, asexuality is the experience of no sexual attraction for another person. The argument is that the asexual does not have an active libido which, by extension, is not directed externally to objects.\(^553\) In keeping with Freudian-Lacanian theory and its postulation that there is no possibility of a subject without libido, I am proposing that


\(^{550}\) Ibid.


asexuals are similarly constituted to non-asexual subjects. Even if no conscious experience of sexuality exists, sexuality is present in the unconscious of every subject. If asexuality were simply a case of a libido that was passive, which it does not appear to be, Lacan reminds us that libido has active effects in every instance, even in the passive position, because activity is necessary in order to adopt the passive position. So, again, psychoanalytic theory emphasises that libido is always present, irrespective of the conscious experience of the subject and that the drive is a permanence within the subject’s unconscious. Extending the logic of this would imply that the lack of evidence of a libido in the asexual subject is not evidence of it being absent. In other words, whilst asexuality undoubtedly manifests itself as having no sexual attraction to another person, nevertheless it is, of itself, a form of latent sexuality that has a unique relation to sexual desire. But if, as Lacan proposes, the very reality of the unconscious is a sexual reality, how is asexuality’s experience of its absence to be understood?

5.4.1. The Place of Transference and Repetition in Trauma:

To answer this question it is necessary to consider what Lacan says in terms of the aetiology of the sexually desiring subject’s relation to the Other. This involves examining his exposition of the place of both transference and repetition in the unconscious of the subject

555 “The first thing Freud says about the drive is, if I may put it this way, that it has no day or night, no spring or autumn, no rise and fall. It is a constant force.” Lacan, J. (1964 [1977]). Op. Cit., session of May 6, 1964, p.165.
in relation to the desire of the Other. For Lacan, and indeed Freud, transference\textsuperscript{557} is a challenge for psychoanalysis in particular and for the human subject’s relation to the Other in general. It is so because transference is a “closing” of the unconscious that combines a structural trauma experienced by all subjects with both sexuality and the Real. Lacan says that this view is in contrast to other schools of psychoanalysis, which classically understand it as an “opening up” that renders the unconscious accessible. “Far from being the handing over of powers to the unconscious, the transference is, on the contrary, its closing up,” he says.\textsuperscript{558} In making this claim, he is following a path travelled by Freud who variously describes transference as the worst obstacle to treatment, the strongest weapon of the resistance, and the thing that can completely “annul” the analytic situation.\textsuperscript{559}

In the Dora case, Lacan talks about transference as a closure of the unconscious which he calls “the permanent modes according to which she constitutes her objects”.\textsuperscript{560} The word “permanent” here denotes fixity and, indeed, repetition.\textsuperscript{561} Four years on, Lacan is saying that transference as closure is in the imaginary in \textit{The Purloined Letter} and he outlines the dialectic of intersubjectivity, which is transference, in his Schema L (Figure 1).\textsuperscript{562}


\textsuperscript{559} This path is evident from as early as \textit{Studies on Hysteria} (1895d), p.301; see also the Dora case (1905e), p.116; see also \textit{The Dynamics of Transference} (1912b), p.104; see also \textit{Observations on Transference Love} (1915a), p.168; and see also \textit{Analysis Terminable and Interminable} (1937c), p.239.


\textsuperscript{561} Ibid.

The two middle terms, $a$ and $a'$ (prime) represent the couple involved in a reciprocal imaginary objectification that he has already brought out in his 1949 paper, “The Mirror Stage”\textsuperscript{563}. Transference here is due to the imaginary, but in Seminar XI, his idea of transference changes significantly. While it still represents closure, now it is not due to the Imaginary any longer. Now transference is the enactment of the sexual reality of the unconscious and it is Lacan’s return to this concept that requires any proposed aetiology of asexuality to be considered within an inherently sexual context. This is because it gives rise to the following question: if transference is the enactment of the sexual reality of the unconscious, why does its enactment bring about a closure of the unconscious?

Lacan argues that it is due to the very nature of what “sexual” represents and this is of central importance in considering asexuality. Transference, as the primordially-ordered relation to the Other, is dependent on repetition compulsion to ensure that the relation to the Other occurs again and again. It is necessary, therefore, in approaching his line of reasoning in this regard to go back and include what he says about repetition compulsion

and its relation to transference. In his 1955 *Seminar on The Purloined Letter*, the symbolic order is constitutive of the subject.\textsuperscript{564} This is the realm of the signifier, the pure signifier which, just like the titular purloined letter, drives repetition automatism.\textsuperscript{565} It is an insistence driven by a determinism which, in turn, “is unable to satisfy itself except by refinding an object that has been fundamentally lost” [emphasis in original].\textsuperscript{566}

In *Seminar XI*, this changes radically, when repetition, while still trying to re-find something that is fundamentally lost, is grounded not in the Symbolic, but in the first encounter with the Real and, what is more, with a Real that is originally unwelcome.\textsuperscript{567} The Real, not the Symbolic, is central now and the thing that is getting repeated is always something that occurs —and here he uses Aristotle’s word *tuchê* — as if by chance. He says that the function of *tuchê*, of the Real as chance encounter— in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter—first presented itself in psychoanalysis in the form of trauma.\textsuperscript{568}

Is it not remarkable that, at the origin of the analytic experience, the real should have presented itself in the form of that which is *unassimilable* in it—in the form of the trauma, determining all that follows, and imposing on it an apparently accidental origin?\textsuperscript{569}

\textsuperscript{565} Ibid, p.10 (16).
\textsuperscript{566} Ibid, p.34 (45).
\textsuperscript{568} Ibid, session of February 12, 1964, p.55.
\textsuperscript{569} Ibid.
At the very heart of the primary processes, he says there is the insistence of the trauma, an insistence that is now of the Real not the Symbolic. He points out that it is necessary to ground this repetition first of all in the very split that occurs in the subject in relation to this encounter. The split gives us a glimpse of the dialectical effects of this Real as something “originally unwelcome”, with the word “dialectical” signaling the necessity of the Other. Then he comes to the primal scene as the perceptual experience of the sexuality of the Other which is also traumatic. He wonders why this is so and asks why it always occurs too early or too late. Why does the subject take either too much pleasure in it, as in obsessional neurosis, or too little, as in hyste-ria? He also asks why does it not arouse the subject immediately, if we all are truly sexual beings. Instead, the encounter is dustuchia (a misfortune). He says in his reply to Francoise Dolto: “The central bad encounter is at the level of the sexual.” Here, Lacan is again positing a primary encounter with the Real which is experienced as trauma. This parallels his view in Seminar IV of a trauma in the Real that brings about a reversal of the child’s relation of dependence on the Other. In Seminar XI, however, he is referencing an Oedipal stage experience, which is sexual in the phallic sense, whereas in Seminar IV he is referencing an oral, but no less sexual, pre-Oedipal experience.

5.5. Sexual Reality and its Relation to Trauma:

570 Ibid.
572 Ibid, p.70.
573 Ibid, p.64.
Thus far, Lacan has theorised the occurrence of an original but accidental moment that grounds repetition automatism. It is one that is not only unwelcome, but is also both sexual and traumatising because it is unassimilable to the signifier. In Seminar XI, when considering the repetition of the Fort-Da game, the wooden reel is the objet a that is used to symbolise the mother’s departure as cause of traumatic Spaltung, or split, in the child.\textsuperscript{574} In this way a prototypical representative of the fantasy object is used by the child to put meaning on a part of the Real that resists the Symbolic. But this endless repetition is not necessarily about mastery. Rather, Lacan says it is a repeated attempt to accommodate an alienation that unsteadies the subject,\textsuperscript{575} with the objet a holding out the promise of that accommodation. His view is that repetition holds the key to unlocking the meaning of transference which, in turn, unlocks the apparent conundrum of why transference brings about a closure rather than an opening of the sexual reality of the unconscious.

The originally unwelcome and traumatising Real is sexual. Therefore, transference as the enactment of the “sexual” reality of the unconscious has to include traumatism, similar to the way repetition is considered. At some level, every encounter with the Other of desire must equally include traumatism. Repetition seeks to have an encounter that it repeatedly misses, driven by the unrealised hope of finally mastering the original trauma. But transference, Lacan says, has an unusual ambiguity. In The Dynamics of Transference Freud (1912b) says that transference phenomena are essential for making the patient’s hidden and forgotten erotic impulses immediate and manifest because it is impossible to destroy anything in absentia or in effigie.\textsuperscript{576} Even though these phenomena of transference are

\textsuperscript{574} Ibid, pp.63-64.
\textsuperscript{575} Ibid, session of June 10, 1964, p.239.
played out on the screen of the analyst’s person, they are originally based on something Real, i.e., beyond symbolisation through language. Lacan, for his part, says that this ambiguity of the Real being given in the transference is one that can be unraveled by understanding the Real in repetition.\(^{577}\) In repetition what gets repeated always occurs as if by chance, *tuché*. It is the accidental characteristic of the original trauma; the trauma that repeats, frequently unveiled.\(^{578}\) In transference, the trauma and its resistance to signification is the reason there are limits to memory. As Freud said, what cannot be remembered is repeated in behaviour.\(^{579}\)

This relates to how a post-Oedipal, desexualised reality becomes sexualised through the transferential relationship to the Other. In the transference, something of the trauma returns and this is why, for Lacan, the transference is the means by which the unconscious closes up again. Repetition, he says, continuously seeks to make the appointment with the *objet a* but misses it, while transference holds out the promise of providing an Other with whom the appointment can be made. Each in their way are determined by a traumatism which is brought about by an original encounter with a sexual Real. My proposition is that asexual subjects respond differently to this experience of structural trauma and I will outline how this occurs in the following chapters.

5.6. Asexuality and Unpleasure:

\(^{578}\) Ibid, p.55.
The question posed by Freud in 1896, therefore, relates to the very ambivalence which this sexual Real represents. “In my opinion,” he says, “there must be an independent source for the release of unpleasure in sexual life: once that source is present, it can activate sensations of disgust, lend force to morality, and so on.”\(^5\) This suggests that, before anything of external trauma is taken into account, the structural trauma of the drive itself involves an internal rise in excitation that threatens to overwhelm the ego.\(^6\) Verhaeghe (1998) proposes that “every” person experiences an infantile sexual trauma “because of the structural relationship between the drive and our psychological apparatus”.\(^7\) He makes the point that there is a strong analogy between drive and trauma in terms of their effects on the psyche. His view is that human sexuality contains potentially the same effect for the subject as an external trauma\(^8\) and this allows for an understanding of how sensations of disgust and the release of unpleasure in sexual life might derive. It might also allow for a clearer consideration as to why a subject might “choose” an asexual position, in the sense of a choice being made at the level of the unconscious. The term “choice” is used here similarly to Nobus’ (2017) description of it as the “transformative ability of the unconscious to steer a given potential through a multitude of different options”.\(^9\) It is also similar to what Morel (2019) describes as “a from among the array of figures proposed by the unconscious in response to whatever was imposed on the subject at the beginning (the maternal “imposed equivocations”).”\(^10\)

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that the “choice” of sex has to be situated at a level where an unconscious decision is made based on a contingent encounter with the real. Furthermore, she suggests that this “choice” occurs at a more fundamental level than that of the Name-of-the-Father and phallic signification, i.e., at the primary level of the maternal discourse.\textsuperscript{586}

From Lacan’s ideas in \textit{Seminar XI}, just mentioned, it is feasible to propose that the unpleasure of sexual life is based on an originally unwelcoming Real and is implicitly determined by the trauma caused by the first encounter with this Real, similar to what he has been pointing to in \textit{Seminar IV}. In turn, this posits asexuality as a distinct sexual orientation of the subject in response to the potentially traumatising libidinal effects of the drive in relation to the Other, just as occurs for sexually desiring subjects but with a very different outcome.\textsuperscript{587}

The subject of the sexual reality of the unconscious is, therefore, represented on the one hand by the pulsation of the drive and the sexualised seeking of satisfaction either in reality or phantasy. On the other hand, the subject is represented by repression and displacement, diverting or sublimating away from this sexual reality. Overshadowing all this, for Lacan, is the fundamental link between sexuality and death.\textsuperscript{588} The result is that what is essentially present in the unconscious as the sexual drive is transformed into a lack in the ego. Furthermore, this action is capable of taking place with the greatest of ease. Freud in \textit{The Interpretation of Dreams} talks about the phenomenon of un-pleasurable ideas being repressed and desexualised and says:

\begin{flushleft}
\hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{586} Ibid, p.206.
\hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{588} Lacan, J. (1964), \textit{Op. Cit.}, session of April 29, 1964, p.150.
\end{flushleft}
This effortless and regular avoidance by the psychical process of the memory of anything that had once been distressing affords us the prototype and first example of *psychical repression*. It is a familiar fact that much of this avoidance of what is distressing – this ostrich policy – is still to be seen in the normal mental life of adults.⁵⁸⁹

He refines this idea further in his 1919 paper on the war neuroses. There, he says that “we have a perfect right to describe repression, which lies at the basis of every neurosis, as a reaction to a trauma—as an elementary traumatic neurosis.”⁵⁹⁰ In *Seminar VI, Desire and its Interpretation*, Lacan says veiling of the very word “desire” appears in the whole of the analytic experience.⁵⁹¹ This “veiling” is what is indicated in the “damped-down libido” of Freud⁵⁹² and in Lacanian terms is the displaced signifier. The ever-present counter-wish to veil is there for the subject, psychically embedded, as a way of regulating the drive in an effortless movement away from pleasure of high intensity to one of lower intensity. Viewed in a Freudian context, the veil is erected by the child as a barrier against incest in relation to its parents. However, it remains nothing more than a veil because, as Freud points out, behind the “affection, admiration and respect” which a person may have for their parents “lie concealed the old sexual longings of the component sexual instincts which have now become unserviceable”.⁵⁹³ I will be proposing in later chapters that, rather than repression,

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the asexual subject deploys an unconscious mechanism related to Lacan’s concept of “reversal” of the relation of dependence.\textsuperscript{594}

When it comes to the asexual aversion to entering sexual relationships, it is difficult to avoid the antithetical stance which this represents in the context of the eroto-normative culture which prevails in many societies. Not just outwardly expressed sexuality, but functioning sexual relationships are considered to be the ultimate paradigmatic expressions of both inter- and intra-subjective fulfilment and personal human attainment. Yet, psychoanalysis has long considered sexual relations to have within them a void, which offers a counter-intuitive perspective. For Lacan, as I will show in the next section, there is no such thing as the sexual relationship. Essentially, for him, all notions of complementarity between the sexes are erroneous and the idea of unity is merely a suture provided by the Imaginary. In order to grasp the importance and relevance of this concept for asexuality it is necessary to examine his idea that there is no such thing as the sexual relationship.

5.7. Asexuality and the “No Sexual Relationship”:

The hegemonic acceptance of sexual harmony that Lacan is seeking to disrupt with his “no sexual relationship” can be traced back to Plato’s work in \textit{The Symposium}. In it, Aristophanes explains how Zeus, father of the Gods and men, originally cut men in two and

how, forever after, they have desired to be reunited with their “other half”.  
It puts a particular context on the historical belief in and attraction towards a theory of reciprocity or a natural and harmonious relationship between the sexes. In his consistent theorising, Lacan, in contrast to religious, classical, romantic and humanist discourses, embraces the contrary. For him, unity between the sexes is an impossibility, the sexual relationship does not exist and asymmetry better represents the relation between them. As early as Seminar II, he is saying that genital love, or the sexual act, is “absolutely unassimilable to a unity”, one that does not secure anything.  

Twelve years later, in Seminar XIV, The Logic of Phantasy, referring to what he terms the central concern of psychoanalysis, he says that everything turns around, not “being”, but the difficulty inherent in the sexual act. 

During the same period, and yet developing another idea that first occurs in Seminar II, he says that there is no sexual act weighty enough to affirm in the subject the certainty that it is of a particular sex. What is at stake, rather, is the “incommensurability” of the objet a to any unity of beings of opposite sexes. In other words, the object cause of desire, objet a, mobilises the desire of the subject differently to the desire of any other subject and, therefore, it does not bring two subjects closer to a manifest combinatory that clarifies their sexual identity.

595 “He spoke and cut men in two, like a sorb-apple which is halved for pickling... After the division the two parts of man, each desiring his other half, came together, and throwing their arms about one another, entwined in mutual embraces, longing to grow into one...” in Jowett, B. (1953), Collected Works of Plato, 4th Edition. Oxford University Press: Oxford. pp.520 (189c-189d) - 525 (193d-193e).
599 Ibid, p.5.
In *Seminar XVIII*, he says: “There is no sexual act” (relationship). After this, there is what he terms the “no sexual relationship” of *Seminar XX*, and in *Seminar XXII* the concept is repeated in different forms, one such example being “… there cannot be established a relationship between the sexed.” In this latter *Seminar* Lacan asks: what does “there is no sexual relationship” mean, particularly when the very concept of the sexual relationship is to be found spoken about on every street corner? He makes the comment that this is the Real of the knot, i.e., beyond symbolisation in language, and yet this is the thing that people have spoken about for all time. But, he says, still there is no elaboration of the sexual relation that is logical or mathematical, it is strictly impossible to write “x in relation (R) to y”.

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![Fig 3: The Borromean Knot.](image-url)

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The approach taken by Lacanian psychoanalysis, therefore, highlights the impossibility or *impasse* at the core of the very relationship model which society tends to aggrandize as an exemplar of sexual normativity. By contrast, Lacan posits the sexual relationship as unsatisfactory both in terms of providing the subject with certainty of its subjective sexual identity and by way of complementarity in relation to the Other. It is in this context that I propose to show in the next chapter how the asexual subject deals with the challenge of libido and brings about the annulment of sexual desire.
Chapter 6

The Challenge of Libido and the Annulment of Sexual Desire

6.0. Objective:

This chapter will show how Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis accommodates the paradoxical asexual experience of an active libidinal desire aimed at “nothing”. I will then show what is taking place in asexuality regarding the primordial signifier of desire: the phallus. In particular, I will outline how the desexualisation of the Symbolic phallus as signifier occurs in asexuality. I will also propose the mechanism by which annulment of sexual desire takes place and how asexuality derives jouissance from the paradoxical reality of no sexual desire.

6.1. A Desire for “Nothing”:

The theoretical challenge which asexuality poses is to conceptualise its absence of sexual desire as something distinct from an absence of wanting to desire. Asexuality’s definition of
no sexual attraction signifies an absence of “wanting”. An asexual version of Lacan’s view that “not wanting to desire is wanting not to desire” would be that the desire for no desire is the desire. If so, then, like all desire, asexual desire must be supported by a particular phantasy. The asexual phantasy operates on the basis of an objet a which is empty of phallic jouissance but which nevertheless underpins and sustains asexual desire. I will show that the mechanism by which this is brought about is through a pre-Oedipal annulment where the object is annulled as symbolic. If asexuality’s definition of no sexual attraction for another person is clearly pointing at absence rather than abeyance, signifying a void rather than avoidance, the first challenge is to ask how a desire for absence can sustain the asexual subject.

For sexually desiring subjects, Lacan says that, at the level of meaning which makes the unconscious fear that accompanies sexual reality manageable or understandable, language and thinking are radically inadequate to dealing with this. Yet it is around language, and its inadequacy to provide meaning as to what is involved in sexual reality, that the function of the objet a is defined. The objet a is an eroticised object and the sexually desiring subject will at certain vanishing points in relation to the Other’s desire use the objet a as support via phantasy. Lacan says that target inhibited sublimation shows that the so-called object of the genital drive can “without any inconvenience” for the sexually desiring subject be extracted from the sexual drive and that this can be done “without it losing

anything of its capacity” in terms of satisfaction.\textsuperscript{608} This supports the possibility that in asexuality the objet a is unconsciously situated in phantasy as the “nothing” representing an unconscious annulment of phallic jouissance. As considered in the previous chapter, anorexia is the conscious refusal of food as the pivotal object on which the reversal of dependence on the Other turns. With asexuality, in contrast, I am proposing that the process involves the unconscious annulment of the phallus as the pivotal signifier of sexual desire on which this reversal turns. While Lacan speaks about such a reversal with regard to the anorexic subject not “not eating” but “eating nothing”, it is important to use this analogy cautiously, without extending its association with anorexia too far in terms of asexuality. Asexuality is not a form of anorexia even though it has similarities. In both, something of the Other is annulled, food or sexual communion, so that desire can be protected. But, I am proposing, in asexuality the focus is the phallic signifier rather than the oral object. However, as I will show in this chapter, its roots are, nevertheless, in the oral stage.

For the asexual, the objet a operates in phantasy as cause of no sexual desire of the Other and in this way a paradoxical desire is supported. Pointing to an originary ambivalence inherent in an oral stage desire, Lacan makes reference to the duality of the concept “to be refused” as the possibility of refusing the breast or, alternatively, being refused the breast. Just like the dual dimension of the need to bite and the fear of being devoured, he says that looked at from one perspective, “...to be refused would be... to save oneself from being

\textsuperscript{608} Ibid, p.6.
engulfed by the maternal partner”. Asexuality is not simply a refusal, however, it is an experience of the subject and Other as voided of sexuality which, I am proposing, begins like anorexia in the first experiences of the child in the relation to the first Other. It differs from anorexia in that while the latter annuls the oral objet a, asexuality annuls the phallic signifier and the phallicisation of objet a. Put another way, anorexia refuses oral jouissance as symbolic of the subject’s dependence and hilflosigkeit (helplessness) in relation to the Other in order to maintain a space in which the subject’s desire can subsist. Asexuality, on the other hand, annuls phallic jouissance but with the same aim. An encounter that every subject experiences in the primordial relation with the first Other has, in asexuality, a unique and contingent effect which brings about a desexualisation of phantasy, desire, and jouissance in relation to the Other. This is, essentially, the sexual orientation of asexuality. In response to the fear of being engulfed, the objet a undergoes signifying substitution as the nothing, as the desired object of lack located in the gap between subject and Other which can, nonetheless, provide jouissance as compensatory pleasure. For the asexual subject, I am proposing that the manner in which the desire of the first Other is experienced uniquely shapes their desire.

Asexuality, at least in terms of sexual activity, is predominantly characterised by non-physical engagement with the Other in which desire as the desire of the Other is elided. Perhaps unsurprisingly, masturbatory activity which does not require the Other is frequently reported in studies of the asexual population. But even where there is self-directed

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masturbation, the conscious fantasy accompanying it takes the form of no sexual desire for the Other. This is articulated by one asexual as follows:

... I did masturbate. It wasn't a sexual urge for me, I didn't fantasise, it was just something my body decided to do. People say about asexuals: "But if they masturbate doesn't that make them sexual?" It's hard to explain, but if you're asexual you don't necessarily feel an explicit connection between masturbation and sexual orientation. It's just part of having a human body - a physical, biological process. 612

I will propose how this takes place in the sections below but, first, the question of libido in asexuality remains to be considered.

6.2. The Challenge of Libido:

Lacan's Seminar VI starts with the statement that psychoanalysis rests entirely on the notion of libido, on the energy of desire.613 In Seminar XI, he refers to libido as the effective presence and indicator of desire at the level of the primary process.614 Taking this as the


traditional position of psychoanalysis would appear to represent a paradoxical challenge for asexuality. If libido is an unavoidable bodily reality for all subjects then how can asexuality claim to experience nothing of this? Before answering this question it is important to restate the paradoxical nature of desire and, in turn, libido as the energy of desire. Subjects who experience sexual desire will defend themselves against it because, as stated, it represents the threat of engulfment from the desire of the Other.\textsuperscript{615} Lacan also points out that the very term sexual desire seems to offer openness and plenitude but it can be distinct from love in that it is possible to love one person and desire another.\textsuperscript{616} He also distinguishes between desire and need because, while the latter seeks satisfaction through demand, the former does not and has a “paradoxical, deviant, erratic, eccentric and even scandalous nature”.\textsuperscript{617} Even if desire does bring a certain amount of love the subject’s way, he points out that very often it is a love which is not avowed and even refuses to avow itself.\textsuperscript{618} He is establishing that even in the realm of recognised libidinal desire for another person, disavowal can occur.

In contrast, I am proposing that asexuals remain desiring subjects because a desire emptied of phallic \textit{jouissance} is tenable. As Lacan says in \textit{The Direction of the Treatment}, absence is just as much a presence on the symbolic plane.\textsuperscript{619} The point of interest for asexuality is in relation to Lacan’s view on the provenance of desire. Desire is not something that man or

\textsuperscript{615} Verhaeghe, P. (2001), \textit{Op. Cit.}, p.14. He says the fear of disappearing in the enjoyment of the Other, and the anxiety which accompanies it, is the original threat which emanates from the mother as “the first great Other”.


woman is simply possessed by or invested with. He says the subject has to find this desire. In this sense he is pointing towards the subjective particularity of desire, its absence of pre-determinism and its capacity to remain veiled from the subject until it is revealed. He says it is not something organised or put together in a preformed harmony with the “map of the world”. Rather, the history of desire is organised in a discourse which develops in “senselessness”, and this is what the unconscious is, he says.

Supporting this desire is the phantasy which, by definition, includes the ineffable objet a. As is the case for all subjects, the objet a as semblance ensures das Ding, as the original lost object, is never too close and never too much for the subject to bear. As semblance, objet a has greater appeal because of its quality as imitation which structurally posits a gap between it and the real thing. I am proposing that in asexuality such a gap allows the subject remain defended against not only the loss of the original object (through a compensatory jouissance) but also against being lost in the omnipotence of the original object. As Lacan points out in relation to the role of phantasy: “Let us say that, in its fundamental use, fantasy is the means by which the subject maintains himself at the level of his vanishing desire, vanishing inasmuch as the very satisfaction of demand deprives him of his object.”

I am proposing that in asexuality this operates similarly and the asexual phantasy, with objet a as the “nothing”, maintains the subject from vanishing in the face of the omnipotent Other’s originally traumatising desire. If the cause of desire in asexuality is voided of its

621 Ibid, session of May 13, 1959.p.3.
622 Ibid.
libidinal elements this, in turn, raises the question as to what is taking place regarding the signifier of desire, i.e., the phallus?

6.3. The Place of the Phallus in Asexual Desire:

In Lacanian theory the phallus is not an imaginary or real object, nor is it a bodily organ; it is the signifier which “designates meaning effects as a whole”. As such, it is the signifier of desire and, in particular, the signifier that can unlock meaning around the desire of the Other. While it is a signifier, it is a very particular signifier in that it is missing from the signifying chain and, for this very reason, is both involved in every relation to the Other and is the very metonymy of the being of the subject. Lacan makes the phallus as signifier an essential element for understanding and negotiating the networks of desire in relation to the Other and, again, the term desire is always understood as the desire of the Other. The paradox of desire, however, is that it is central as a life force, or élan, which drives the subject but, because it is located in the desire of the Other, it represents a signifying Spaltung or split for the subject. This is why Lacan says that, in the sense of Spinoza, desire really is the essence of man. But desire is not a simple élan because, as stated, it presents itself as more problematic, dispersed, polymorphous and contradictory, far from

628 Ibid.
an “oriented co-adaptation”, he says. As the signifier of the desire of the Other, the phallus also takes up a privileged place at the level of the object. As Lacan puts it, the “essential object” that is the objet a takes the place of that which the subject is symbolically deprived, i.e., the phallus.

When he theorises in terms of sexual subjects, he says that the logical sense of castration, as the place where something is lost, is based on the fact that any meanings around it, and any signifier that might make it manageable or understandable, are lacking. He terms this the “having or not having the phallic connotation”. There is a lack in terms of language at the heart of the emergence of sexuality, whereby the subject can neither symbolise the experience of their own sexuality nor the antagonistic enigma of sexual difference. The “something” which is lost at castration, for asexual and non-asexual subjects, becomes the phallus. For asexual subjects, however, I am proposing the phallus becomes the signifier of a desire for no sexual desire of the Other, thus annulling the sexual element. Lacan says: “It is from the phallus that the object takes on this function that it has in the phantasy, and that desire, with the phantasy as support constitutes itself.” In short, the objet a is the “effect of castration” while the phallus is the “object of castration”.

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631 Ibid, p.4.
In *Seminar VI*, Lacan associates the phallus, in terms of either being it (woman) or having it (man), with a power which the subject must preserve at all costs. But he equally places its importance in a realm that goes beyond sexuality and into the realm of being. He says that the human subject:

... cannot consider himself any more in the final analysis than as a being in whom there is something missing, a being – whether it is male or female – who is castrated. This is the reason why it is to the dialectic of being, within this experience of the one that the phallus is essentially referred.

For sexually desiring subjects, a phallically-underpinned relationship to “being” is an essential element in the dialectic that takes place in the unconscious development of different stages of identification, from the first relationship with the mother, through the Oedipus complex and the operation of the law. I propose that asexuality takes up a different and unique position to the signifier phallus as a result of its trajectory through this domain.

Taking the infant’s position with regard to the Imaginary phallus, Lacan cites Melanie Klein’s finding that the child comes to understand “from the outset” that the mother “contains” the

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641 Ibid.
642 Ibid, p.3.
phallus. But this phallus as a third term in the mother-child dyad is something enigmatic and veiled. It is a point beyond the child towards which the mother’s desire, and thus her lack, is aimed. For Lacan, the child must therefore become this Imaginary phallus in order to become the thing that the mother desires. This is how the first identification begins and he says: “If the mother’s desire is for the phallus, the child wants to be the phallus in order to satisfy her desire.” The generally understood implication of this statement is that this is so for all subjects, despite it being an “original passive traumatic” encounter with the “threatening enjoyment of the Other from which the subject flees”. In fact, much of what Lacan has written in Seminar IV, mentioned above, suggests that a subject position is equally possible in which becoming the Imaginary phallus for the mother is not inevitable and can even be rejected. In The Direction of the Treatment he is also questioning the universality of becoming the Imaginary phallus. He says: “Ultimately, by refusing the mother’s demand, isn’t the child requiring the mother to have a desire outside of him, because that is the pathway toward desire that he lacks?”

As outlined in chapter 5, with anorexia the omnipotence of the mother represents a traumatic encounter which causes the infant to reverse its relation of dependence on her.

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Indeed, in *Seminar VI*, Lacan identifies a “moment” when this reversal might conceivably take place and it is when the child reaches an awareness that the breast is the possession of the mother, not of the child.649 The child’s awareness now extends to the new possibility of being deprived of the desired object since its presence is at the apparent whim of the mother. Lacan equates this time with the onset of the Kleinian depressive position “when the mother as totality” is realised.650 I am proposing that in asexuality this has implications not for the oral object as in anorexia but for the child’s relation to the Imaginary phallus and, post-Oedipally, to the Symbolic phallus as signifier of the desire of the Other. This first awareness that the breast is the possession of the mother inaugurates the experience of the omnipotence of the mother. It is the awareness by the child of the omnipotence of the mother which has the potential to create traumatic effects. This, for asexual subjects, is what brings about the reversal in the relation of dependence that Lacan outlines in *Seminar IV*.

Therefore, Lacan’s “test of desire” (see next section) which takes place in the phallic phase, the last phase of infantile sexuality before the latency period and the one which brings about the dissolution of the Oedipus complex, also has a qualitatively different effect for asexuality. Lacan theorises that the absence of the penis in the mother has symptomatic consequences for the child who has taken up the position of being the Imaginary phallus for the mother.651 If the asexual position is one in which the child does not wish to become the Imaginary phallus for the mother, the discovery of the absence of the mother’s real phallus

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650 Ibid.
should have far less symptomatic consequences. I am proposing that this is the context, with its roots in the oral stage, from which the emerging asexual subject approaches the Oedipus complex. But, first, a closer examination of the trajectory of this approach is necessary.

6.4.0. From Imaginary Phallus to Symbolic Phallus:

The transition from Imaginary phallus to Symbolic phallus as signifier is a necessary one for every subject to make. Without it, the child risks remaining in the position as Imaginary phallus for the mother; that is, fixed in a position of attempting to be the thing that fulfils her desire. Hook (2006) says the child gradually comes to realise it cannot incarnate the Imaginary phallus for the mother and so the child must make the “momentous” step of giving up the Imaginary phallus.652 This is the point of the castration complex when the child is required to take up a relation to the Symbolic phallus and only when this has taken place can the Oedipus complex be dissolved. But before this, the important transition from Imaginary to Symbolic must take place. Lacan’s “test of desire”653 is essential since it effectively marks the threshold between Imaginary phallus and Symbolic phallus and is the moment when, as stated, every subject learns that the mother does not have a “real” phallus.654 For Lacan, this “test” is one without which symptomatic or structural

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654 Ibid.
consequences related to the castration complex cannot take effect. His “test of desire” is one that, should the subject accept the mother has no penis, ultimately dispels the Imaginary concept of the phallic mother and dissipates the desire of the child to identify with and try to become this Imaginary object.

The “test” is, for Lacan, the foundational experience that ties desire and castration together in a way that will allow for a relation with the Symbolic phallus. But this recognition that the mother does not have a “real phallus”, in turn, still has to undergo what Lacan calls “the law introduced by the father in this sequence”. I am proposing that the law of the father which prohibits the mother as object of desire is also experienced differently for the asexual. It is different because the projected separation of the child from the mother which is brought about by the symbolic father has, for all intents and purposes, already been put into effect by the child, and to the same end as the prohibition to be brought about by the Name of the Father. For sexually desiring subjects, once Lacan’s “test” has been passed, the child is able to transition from Imaginary phallus to Symbolic phallus via the paternal metaphor and so the Oedipus complex comes to an end. From this point on the child takes up a relation to the phallus as signifier – a position in relation to Symbolic authority and the law – and so the phallus becomes a symbolic function rather than “an instrument of Imaginary kinds of identification”.

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655 Ibid, p.582 (693-694).
656 Ibid, p.582 (694).
657 Ibid.
The Oedipus complex is dissolved at the point that the child realises it can no longer directly materialise the phallus for the mother; it must now give up the idea of the phallus as an Imaginary object and position itself in a relation to the phallus in its Symbolic dimension as the phallic signifier that will determine sexual identity.\(^{659}\)

I am proposing that the asexual subject undergoes the castration complex in a qualitatively different way to the sexual subject. Because the asexual subject has annulled the Imaginary phallus, he or she will unconsciously bring about an alteration in the relation to the Symbolic phallus, whereby the latter’s sexual element is annulled. In this latter form, therefore, instead of designating meaning effects as a whole within a phallic context, or becoming “the bar with which the demon’s hand strikes the signified”,\(^ {660}\) the desexualised signifier phallus allows the post-Oedipal child to continue to reverse its relation of dependence on the Other while remaining a desiring subject.\(^ {661}\)

\(^{659}\) Ibid.


6.4.1. The Post-Oedipal Asexual Subject:

For the post-Oedipal asexual subject the implications of either being or having the signifier phallus are also different. The Symbolic phallus as signifier does not operate in the same way in asexuality, i.e., it does not designate meaning effects in relation to the desire of the Other. As one female asexual puts it: “I don’t have sex and don’t understand why people would want to have sex.” Similarly, a male asexual says: “Well, I've always been this way. Even my friends knew I was different - they even avoided topics about how “cute” someone is with me because they were aware I couldn’t understand.” The phallus as signifier does not function to illuminate the Umwelt of the asexual speaking subject with a phallicised meaning that interprets the desire of the Other. It is in sharp contrast to the experience where, as Lacan puts it, “…the part of this being that is alive in the urverdrangt [primally repressed] finds its signifier by receiving the mark of the phallus's Verdrangung [repression] (owing to which the unconscious is language).” The fact that the phallus is a signifier requires that the subject can access it only if it is in “the place of the Other”. For sexually desiring subjects, it is in the place of the Other only in “veiled” form and as “ratio” or measure of the Other’s desire, because the Other’s desire is what “the subject is required to recognize”.

662 Ibid.
664 Ibid, p.628.
665 It means the everyday world around the subject; from the philosophy of Martin Heidegger.
667 Ibid.
668 Ibid, p.582 (693).
I am proposing that due to experiences which begin at the oral stage, and for the reasons I have outlined so far, the asexual subject does not recognise the sexual desire of the Other and yet remains a desiring subject. Lacan has argued that through a process of signifying substitution, from breast to faeces and so on, the phallus becomes a signifying element and that this substitution is, in his view, the mainspring of symbolic progress. I am proposing, in contrast, that this “signifying substitution” has undergone fundamental alterations in the case of asexual subjects, so that the phallus does not become the signifying element in the way he is theorising.

In the *Direction of the Treatment*, Lacan gives a rare example from one of his own analysands in which the signifier phallus remains situated in the latter’s female partner and so the sexually impotent analysand cannot bring the phallus into play. The analysand’s mistress has a dream in which she had a phallus and on hearing it the analysand’s sexual powers are restored. According to Lacan, this was a case of refusal of castration, which is first and foremost a refusal of the mother’s, and in turn the Other’s, castration. In other words, this is a result of a refusal or inability to give up the Imaginary phallus in return for the Symbolic phallus. The change that took place for Lacan’s analysand was due to the woman’s desire yielding to the patient’s desire “by showing him what she does not have”,

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670 Ibid., p.10.
672 Ibid, p.527 (631).
673 Ibid, p.528 (632).
i.e., that she is castrated.\textsuperscript{674} The dream of his wife having a phallus highlighted what she does not have in reality, that she is lacking, and that he, in turn, no longer needs to be the Imaginary phallus and could, instead, find a “use” for his real phallus.\textsuperscript{675} A similar encounter with the Imaginary phallus takes place in Lacan’s account of Ella Sharpe’s dream analysis in \textit{Seminar VI}. Her analysand dreams of a trip with his wife around the world.\textsuperscript{676} They are on a road in Czechoslovakia and he is having “sexual play” with a woman in front of his wife. Lacan points out that the man is far from being able to recognise that the other is castrated, let alone that he is castrated,\textsuperscript{677} which places him at the stage of the Imaginary phallus also. Because the Symbolic phallus is not something that can be demanded when it is most needed, the subject finds himself in a “state of breakdown”.\textsuperscript{678} As Lacan puts it, “… he must consent to perceive that the woman is castrated.”\textsuperscript{679}

In both of these examples, it is possible to see the power of an incompletely renounced Imaginary phallus to create symptomatic effects in sexually desiring subjects. In the latter example, the analysand has taken up a regressive infantile position where the female Other contains the phallus just as the mother once did. Lacan himself says that this analyand does not want to give up “his queen, like those bad chess players” who equate it with losing the game. “This is what the subject does not want to do under any circumstances because the signifier phallus is for him identical with everything that happened in the relationship with

\textsuperscript{674} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{675} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{678} Ibid, session of February 11, 1959. p.15.
\textsuperscript{679} Ibid.
his mother,” he says.680 This, in turn, situates the analysand in the position of an identifying regression as the infant who has not yet been brought to accept that the mother does not have the phallus. This explains Lacan’s comment that there is nothing more neurotogenic not than the fear of losing the phallus but in not wanting that the Other should be castrated.681 If the Other is castrated then the Other does not have the phallus and this is traced back to the fact that the original place of the phallus was the place of the I, the place of what Lacan calls primitive identification to the mother.682 What does it mean for asexuality, then, if the phallus as signifier of the desire of the Other, and which designates meaning effects as a whole, is annulled?

6.4.2. The Phallus Annulled:

Because there is no signifier that guarantees or authenticates the signifying chain, Lacan points clearly to the manner in which the sexual subject brings in something to “sustain his desire” in the “face of the desire of the other” for the purpose of “constituting himself as desiring”.683 Lacan says: “…the fact is that the only thing he does not know, is that in constituting himself as desiring his steps are profoundly marked by something which is there behind, namely the danger which is constituted by this slope of desire.”684 He is saying that,

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684 Ibid.
at the same time as constituting himself as desiring, the subject “does not perceive” he is protecting himself from something, in that “his very desire is defence, and cannot be anything else”. Lacan is pointing to the paradox at the heart of this dialectic of desire whereby the subject must constitute himself as desiring in relation to the Other’s desire and, at the same time, must defend himself from this desire of the Other. I am proposing that the asexual subject similarly constitutes him or herself.

Hook (2006) comments that it follows from Lacan’s maxim, that man’s desire is the desire of the Other, that taking on a relation to desire is always “a taking on of how one will be desired by an other”.\(^685\) I am proposing that the self-defined asexual’s relation to sexual desire is, first and foremost, a relation in which phallic dependence on the Other, and phallic demand of the Other, is annulled. Lacan says that the sexually desiring subject “summons as a help something which presents itself in a third position with respect to this desire of the other”.\(^686\) This “something” is the phallus and it is a support against the “sucking in, disappearing relationship” of the barred S and the objet a in the fundamental phantasy (\(\hat{a}\)) which exists to support desire.\(^687\) I am proposing that the asexual subject supports him or herself similarly. The phallus allows both the sexual and asexual subject the capability “to symbolise” which is, Lacan argues, “nothing else than (of) symbolizing his situation” so that he can “recognise himself as subject”, and even “satisfy himself as subject”, despite the “paradoxical” and “contorted” effects of the symptom.\(^688\) The differences between the sexual and the asexual positions are twofold in that, firstly, the phallus for the asexual is

\(^{687}\) Ibid.
\(^{688}\) Ibid, pp. 7-8.
annulled. Secondly, the direction in which the objet a, the object which takes the place of that which the subject is symbolically deprived, i.e., the phallus, \(^{689}\) drives the asexual is also different. In other words, the aim of the asexual phantasy is to support a desire that is non-phallic. \(^{690}\) Lacanian theory includes a form of jouissance which is non-phallic and I will examine this in Section 6.5 below.

Lacan states clearly that it is the relationship of the desire of the subject to the desire of the Other that constitutes an essential structure, not only of neurosis but every other structure. \(^{691}\) In short, the phantasy is used to sustain the desire of the subject in the presence and face of the desire of the Other. \(^{692}\) In every case the subject summons the help of the phallus in a “third position” with respect to the desire of the Other. \(^{693}\) But as the signifier linked in the unconscious to the law, \(^{694}\) Lacan believes the notion of distance from desire might be essential and impossible to eliminate. It might even be necessary, he says, for the maintenance, support and very safeguarding of desire. \(^{695}\) In essence, this is the psychical template on which asexuality is based; distance from sexual desire is foundational to the asexual experience. I am proposing that the difference between sexually and asexually desiring subjects is that in asexuality this concept of “distance” is instated from the pre-Oedipal stages, beginning at the oral, through the anal and into the phallic stage.

\(^{689}\) Ibid, session of April 15, 1959. p.7.
\(^{690}\) While Lacan’s original matheme for the fundamental phantasy accommodates this position, it could also be written as the matheme $\text{S} \& a^0$, the barred Subject in relation to the objet a as cause of desire for no sexual desire – the latter represented by the superscript zero on the right hand side of the formula.
\(^{691}\) Ibid, session of June 10, 1959. p.4.
\(^{692}\) Ibid, p.7.
\(^{693}\) Ibid.
\(^{694}\) Ibid, p.8.
\(^{695}\) Ibid, session of June 17, 1959. p.4.
As a result, the transition from Imaginary phallus to Symbolic phallus is marked by a desire to annul the Imaginary phallus, thereby leading inexorably to an annulled, desexualised Symbolic phallus as signifier of sexual desire. In Seminar XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts, Lacan discounts the possibility of a desexualised libido\textsuperscript{696} and I am proposing that this position still holds good. The concept of a desexualised phallus is not intended to give rise to the assumption that the libido as the energy of desire in asexuality is equally desexualised. As I have argued, the desire for no sexual desire in asexuality is the desire which keeps the asexual subject desiring. In this way, a desexualised phallus maintains the libidinally underpinned but non-phallic desire of asexuality. As stated, Lacanian theory incorporates the concept of a non-phallic jouissance which is essentially, for Fink (1995) at least, an “asexual jouissance”\textsuperscript{697} in the sense that it is non-sexual and so it is necessary to consider this concept’s relevance to self-defined asexuality.

6.5. Lacan’s Non-Phallic Jouissance:

\textsuperscript{697} Fink, B. (1995), The Lacanian Subject – Between Language and Jouissance, Princeton University Press: New Jersey. p.120.
In his *Formulae of Sexuation*, Jacques Lacan sets out to logically map sexual difference in such a way as to underpin his theorisation of the non-rapport between the sexes; the non-sexual relationship mentioned in the previous chapter. Of interest to asexuality is the fact that, within the *Formulae* (Figure 4), he includes a form of jouissance which is non-phallic and is to be found on the Women side. The women position, like the men position, is defined not by biology but rather by its relation to the phallus as sexualised signifier of

![Diagram of the Formulae of Sexuation](image)

**Fig 4: The Formulae of Sexuation**

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desire. The position of “all men” is fully subject to the phallic function, i.e., it pursues a phallic or sexual jouissance through the objet a located in his partner by way of compensation for castration. This male phallic position is to be found in the bottom left corner of the upper section, written as $\forall x \phi x$, and is read as “all men are subject to the phallic function”.

The women side, on the other hand, has access to a second or other jouissance and only has a partial relation to the phallus, which is what Lacan terms his Not-All of woman. In other words, women are able to participate in, but are not fully covered by, phallic jouissance because they are also able to participate in a jouissance which is non-phallic or non-sexual. For this reason, Lacan calls this non-phallic jouissance “Feminine or Other jouissance” and it is to be found in the bottom right hand corner of the upper section, written as $(\forall x \neg \phi x$ and read as “not all of woman is subject to the phallic function”. This Other jouissance is, in Lacan’s view, “the path of love”, the place he associates with divine love, religious love, ecstatic, mystical love and so on. It is not simply a question of withheld or denied orgasm because Feminine jouissance is on the path of ex-sistence, Lacan’s way of saying that something is in the Real, outside of language. He is pointing to something other that

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701 The concept that defines man’s position is not biology but rather his relation to the phallus and the objet a, in terms of being wholly under the phallic function and aimed at the objet a as it is represented in his partner.


accounts for it; an inexpressible Other jouissance is attained that is both sublimated\textsuperscript{706} and desexualised or asexual.\textsuperscript{707} Phallic jouissance, on the other hand, is the jouissance of the organ, accessible to both men and women, but it is a jouissance that fails,\textsuperscript{708} that is never enough and that keeps man, in particular, tied to his objet a rather than the real body of his partner.\textsuperscript{709}

The presence of a non-phallic jouissance within Lacanian theory is of particular relevance to asexuality because this clearly posits a pleasure that is other than phallic, or genital. It also offers a clear mapping of sexual difference in terms of sexually desiring subjects. However, in terms of its applicability to asexuality, there are a number of questions. The first of these is that, if the jouissance which all men derive is phallic, as Lacan’s Formulae show, then a biological male who wishes to experience something beyond the phallic can situate himself on the female side, as Lacan expressly states.\textsuperscript{710} Miller (2000) puts it succinctly when he says that “it is only on the basis of feminine sexuality” that a sexual jouissance beyond the phallic can be situtated.\textsuperscript{711} It is here that the male subject can access Feminine jouissance through the Not-All position. But, equally, the biological male is now positioned on the female side.\textsuperscript{712}

\textsuperscript{707} Žižek, S. (1996). \textit{Love beyond law}, Accessed at [https://www.lacan.com/zizlola.htm], p.1, (online pagination). He says: “…love is here no longer merely a narcissistic (mis)recognition to be opposed to desire as the subject’s “truth” but a unique case of direct asexual sublimation (integration into the order of the signifier) of drives, of their jouissance, in the guise of the asexual Thing (music, religion, etc.) experienced in the ecstatic surrender.”
\textsuperscript{712} Fink, B. (1995), \textit{Op. Cit.}, p.108. He says: “From a clinical vantage point, a great many biological females turn out to have masculine structure, and a great many biological males proves to have feminine structure.”
In the theory as it stands, if phallic *jouissance* has nothing to do with love but is rather about the pleasure of the organ, then this Other *jouissance* is the only place where a *jouissance* beyond the phallic can be accessed.713 Lacan’s concept of an Other *jouissance* offers a unique psychoanalytic perspective on a man or woman who is differently positioned in terms of both phallic pleasure and the Other, and who can sustain a subjectivity beyond sexual desire or the gratification of sexual need. However, the *jouissance* of asexuality is theorised solely in terms of Feminine *jouissance* which risks endorsing a reductionism that aligns asexuality with a psychical feminisation.714 At the very least, it posits a similar feminine structure for all asexuals by implying that only subjects who are positioned on the side of Women can be truly asexual. Undoubtedly, Feminine *jouissance* offers those subjects who are inscribed on the women side of the *Formulae* access to a non-phallic *jouissance*. But what of asexuals who are inscribed on the man side? It is outside the scope of this dissertation to theorise the possibility of a non-phallic *jouissance* on the men side, although I acknowledge this as a potential line of enquiry in the “Further Research” section of Chapter 8. Rather, the focus is to consider the non-phallic *jouissance* which is included within Lacanian theory and assess its applicability to asexuality.

The second question is that, for the subject who does position itself on the women side of the *Formulae*, the only access to this non-phallic *jouissance* is *via* sublimation. Fink (1995)

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713 Ibid, p.120.
believes that Feminine jouissance is achieved through a combination of Freudian sublimation of the drives in which the drives are satisfied, along with a Lacanian sublimation whereby an ordinary object is elevated to the status of the Thing. Sublimation, Lacan says in Seminar VI, is a sexual activity that is desexualised and can be defined as “the very form into which desire flows” because it can “empty itself of the sexual drive”. However, Laplanche and Pontalis (1973) are of the view that Freud left the theory of sublimation in such a primitive state that “the dividing-lines” between it and processes such as reaction-formation, aim-inhibition, idealisation and repression remain vague. In Freud’s own conception of sublimation, it is a limited solution, as outlined in Chapter 3. Similarly, Fink (1995) points out that Freud never suggests that ego or superego functions, which direct sublimation, can offer a full, substitute satisfaction. He says that it is one thing to consider sublimation as a turning from “pleasure” to “reality” but there is “obviously something different” in considering sublimation as capable of offering “full satisfaction of the drives”.

In terms of Feminine jouissance, then, the path of sublimation implies that through S(Ⱥ) women can find direct access to the big Other in the form of culture, society and language, thus characterising a subject which takes up a feminine structure. This, in turn, frees

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715 His concept of “satisfied” appears to be that a real non-phallic satisfaction is possible but he, nevertheless, makes the distinction that full satisfaction of a sublimated sexual drive might be an impossibility. See Fink, B. (1995), Op. Cit., p.195, note 38.
716 Ibid, p.115.
720 Ibid. He says: “Apart from the imaginary satisfaction we may associate with religious ecstasy or rapture, or with the artist’s or musician’s work, there is nevertheless a real satisfaction obtained, and that strikes me as Lacan’s “beyond of neurosis” for those with feminine structure.”
women (or men) from the hegemonic relation to the Name-of-the-Father721 and the phallic function.722 However, given the limitations which sublimation represents, it does not offer a robust explanation as to how asexuality apparently derives jouissance from a non-phallic orientation. This, I propose, implies that the non-phallic satisfaction that is to be found in self-defined asexuality is achieved through a different process, as I will propose in the next chapter.

The third difficulty with the concept of Feminine jouissance as a potential basis for the theorisation of the asexual position is that, because it is theorised in relation to sublimation, this assumes that an existing sexual trend is being sublimated, or diverted to a non-sexual aim. As stated in Chapter 3, asexuality does not appear to have an existing sexual aim which is directed at a sexual object to begin with. Furthermore, if asexuals appear to be essentially achieving real satisfaction, this suggests that while some element of sublimation might be involved, it still remains necessary to understand why no existing sexual trend is evident. In the next chapter, I propose to show how this comes about but, for now, and as stated in Chapter 4, I will examine the absence of subjective distress in asexuality and further consider whether it has a relation to hysteria.

721 The Name-of-the-Father is a fundamental signifier which represents the prohibitive function of the father for the child in relation to the mother. It allows the child to separate from the mother and find its objects of desire in the external world by installing a prohibition on the child’s desire for the mother, and vice versa. It is symbolisation, mediated through the Name-of-the-Father, that leads to the emergence of the Symbolic phallus. (See also Lacan, J. (1958 [2006]), *The Direction of the Treatment*, Écrits, p.581 (693)) The Symbolic phallus, in turn, becomes the measure (ratio) by which the subject can recognise the Other’s desire (ibid, pp.581-582 (693)).

6.6.0. Asexuality and Hysteria:

The question of whether asexuality is a form of hysteria was considered in Chapter 4 but it is important to revisit this question from a Lacanian perspective because, since Freud, ordinary hysteria is now considered to have no symptoms.\(^{723}\) It is not the hysteria of Lacan’s period up to the late 1950s where it was considered as imaginary inversion, the paradigmatic example of which was Dora’s masculine identifications in Freud’s famous case study.\(^{724}\) But, rather, it is the hysteria Lacan spoke about from 1960 onward, after the introduction of the \textit{objet a} and the phantasy.\(^{725}\) The hysteric’s position, whether man or woman, is to refuse phallic \textit{jouissance}, particularly the Other’s, and yet cause the desire of the Other. We can find this manifest in some sexual-with-asexual marriages whereby, in some instances, the asexual partner encourages the non-asexual partner to engage sexually with a substitute.\(^{726}\) What is involved in hysteria is “to be the lack of desire, to be the nothing of desire”\(^{727}\) and this is similar to the asexual position in relation to the Other. While hysteria’s identification with the lack of desire resonates with asexuality, the self-defined asexual does not transform this lack or void into the hysteric’s question of “Am I a man or a

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woman?” I am proposing that this is because the symbolic register has provided self-defined asexuality with an answer in the form of the signifier “asexual” thereby producing a qualitatively different relation to lack.

Hysteria refuses the Master or the Master signifier, written as S1, which can be read as anything the Master’s discourse designates as an answer to hysteria’s question. Self-defined asexuality, on the other hand, embraces its Master signifier of “non-sexually desiring” and its S1 is clearly denoting “no sexual desire”. As Guéguen (1992) points out, phantasy “shows up whenever the unfolding of the signifying chain comes to a dead end, comes to a kind of breach in its development”. The signifying chain has, historically, not provided asexuality with a signifier to cover the gap in cultural discourse until relatively recently. As Decker (2014) puts it: “If people are confused by asexuality, it’s unlikely that it’s because of the word.”

It could be argued that the signifier asexual has emerged at a moment in history when the signifying chain had reached a “dead-end” for asexual subjects. Vanheule (2016) says that hysteria, as the active formulation of complaints, involves the search for an Other who is presumed to have an answer. Asexuality is not characterised by the active formulation of

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complaints and if its antipathy to psychoanalysis indicates anything, it not only signals a mistrust and scepticism for a Master discourse but also suggests it is not in search of an Other who is presumed to have an answer. Therefore, if it is accepted that in the sphere of social relations “discourse unfolds when someone forges a position in relation to another”, then asexuality has created a discourse with society at large, by announcing its presence, by forming online and offline communities and by a direct engagement with the lack of sexual desire at the heart of its orientation. Is there a case to be made that this approaches similar territory to that which Lacan once designated for himself? He says: “When all is said and done, I am a perfect hysteric, namely, symptomless ...” If the notion of perfection is too parodic to be applicable in terms of asexuality then his view that the hysterics of old are gone and have instead been subsumed into the social framework may be more apt.

The symptoms of hysteria, if they are manifest, speak to the Other and demand answers in the form of knowledge but, at the same time, hysteria is a riddle and no answer will ever be sufficient. Self-defined asexuality, in contrast, by-passes the Other and provides an answer to the question of “who or what am I?” It subjectifies the lack rather than objectifies it and, once self-definition has taken place, states that “this (version of lack) is what I am”, as opposed to the hysteric’s metonymic question of “what (version of lack) am I”? Asexuality,

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like hysteria, does have questions about its lack which are “located at the level of the
Other”, particularly in the stage before self-definition takes place. However, I will
propose in the following chapter that asexuals do not find their place in a pre-existing and
“preformed symbolic apparatus that institutes the law in sexuality”, as Lacan suggests, but
instead “realize their sexuality” by creating something new “on the symbolic plane”. In a
sense, asexuality could be considered a veiled response to the enigmatic but ultimately
dependent position of hysteria down the centuries which, similarly, has a “radically
ambiguous relationship with the other”, in that hysteria supports the other “while
constantly interpellating it”. In this regard, it is often asked why asexuality has made its
appearance at this particular time in history. It would be convenient to view asexuality as a
newly evolved version of hysteria which forecloses on the sexual demand of the small other
while, at the same time, questioning the master position of a big Other whose
understanding of it is hampered by a predominantly eroto-normative social discourse. If
hysteria is a demand directed to the Other for answers that are metonymically inadequate,
axuality is only tangentially so because it directs this demand to itself and provides its own
answer. The answer is not sought in the Other or in psychoanalysis. This, I am proposing,
generates a very different position compared to hysteria in terms of both asexual desire and
the phantasy which supports it.

736 Carrigan, M. (2011). There’s more to life than sex? Difference and commonality within the asexual
3, pp.599-618.

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For Gherovici (2014), if the hysteric is defined as someone who cannot determine his or her objet a and who is always questioning whom she or he is loving, then hysteria “unveils the very structure of human sexuality”. I am proposing that asexuality should also be considered an element of the structure of human sexuality, but one whereby the objet a is established, desire is possible and a jouissance is derived from “absence savoured as such”. Gherovici points out that Lacan in Seminar V works with a definition of hysteria that takes on an extended social sense which exceeds the confines of neurosis, to include a dimension that is latent in all speaking beings as long as they question their desire. “That desire can be a source of perpetual questioning is the natural consequence of the alienation introduced by speech – the speech of hysterics and non-hysterics alike,” she says. This is particularly so in relation to the limits of speech in signifying the enigma and trauma of the Real of human sexuality. As Salecl (2000) puts it, sexual difference is the name of a deadlock, a trauma that resists every attempt at its symbolisation. Hysteria is “tempted by sacrifice” in order to keep desire unsatisfied and, in this way, the subject’s desire as the desire of the Other is sustained. Asexuality, on the other hand, subjectivises lack in order that there is a desire for no sexual desire of the Other.

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Rather than a form of hysteria, I am proposing that asexuality can be represented in the various structures of neurosis, psychosis, and perversion, just as heterosexuality or homosexuality which, for Lacan, carry “symptomatic sediments”. Non-asexual forms of sexuality only fall under the different diagnostic structures once their symptomatology in relation to castration and the Name-of-the-Father is examined. If structure does not define sexuality, then it does not define asexuality since, like heterosexual and LGBT+ orientations, asexuality, while it may well have symptomatic sediments, is a positioning of the subject in relation to jouissance and the Real of the drive.

6.6.1. Asexuality’s Distinct Desire:

Asexuality’s desire is distinct from hysteria’s desire for an unsatisfied desire, as seen in Freud’s case study of Dora, in his interpretation of the dream of the Witty Butcher’s Wife and in Lacan’s writing about medieval Courtly Love. In the case of the Witty Butcher’s Wife, she desires for an indefinitely-deferred thing. This, in turn, is based on a hysterical identification with her female friend who desires salmon but does not allow herself have it. Both the desire for salmon and the unfulfilled desire for caviar indicate the desire for

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746 Freud, S. (1900a), The Interpretation of Dreams, (First Part), Standard Edition IV, pp.147-148.  
an unsatisfied desire.\textsuperscript{748} Her own desire for caviar in real life is the thing that is absent in the
dream. As Lacan says, the signifier of her unsatisfied desire is her desire for caviar.\textsuperscript{749}

Dora was also, at some level, aware that a desire was being kept at bay. According to Voruz
(1999), her phantasy is one in which she can see herself as the object of desire, a desire she
sustains as unsatisfied.\textsuperscript{750} It is a position that is essentially beyond demand and sexual
satisfaction.\textsuperscript{751} According to Lacan: “... the problem of her condition is fundamentally that of
accepting herself as the object of desire for the man, and this is for Dora the mystery which
motivates her idolatry for Frau K.”\textsuperscript{752} But when Herr K in the scene by the lake punctures the
phantasy by alluding to Dora as a sexual object, then everything changes. She no longer sees
herself as identified with the object cause of desire but instead as the object of \textit{jouissance}
for Herr K, and as an object of exchange between him and her father. In contrast to
asexuality, the thing Dora is refusing is ever-present for her; she reads books about it, she
keeps out of the way of it when Frau K and her father are together; she is daily reminded of
it by the flowers and gifts Herr K sends her. In this sense Dora is libidinally orientated. She is
in a position of desiring, and of being desired, while remaining safely distant from the threat
of the desire ever being satisfied; a classic hysterical position. Dora’s symptoms, in Freud’s
terms, are a communication of the conflict between a repudiation of her sexuality,\textsuperscript{753} and its

\textsuperscript{748} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{749} Lacan, J. (1958 [1977]) \textit{The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power}, Écrits: a selection,
\textsuperscript{750} Voruz, V. (1999), \textit{The Scene by the Lake: When Desire Fails as Defense}, Psychoanalytical
\textsuperscript{751} Ibid.
New York. p.68.
attempt at recognition. Even if her desire was not for the person Freud thought, she has an active, if unsatisfied, sexuality.

Moving to Lacan’s fascinating reflections on “Courtly Love”, this was a practice in the Middle Ages across Europe which allowed ladies of the court, especially those in loveless, pre-arranged marriages, to engage in romantic relationships with honourable knights, provided that strict rules of fidelity and chastity were observed.\(^{754}\) It had an unusual aspect to it, in the sense that in Lacan’s reading of the poets of the time, the Lady was an intimidating object, often cold, terrifying and inhuman. From a psychoanalytic point of view, the Lady is both the object of desire and the obstacle to its fulfilment. Like Dora, but perhaps even more obviously, Courtly Love’s relation to desire is clearly visible through the techniques of “holding back, suspension, and amor interuptus” which belong, as Lacan says, to the sphere of foreplay.\(^{755}\) They signify a desiring intent behind the postponement. A heightened desire is operating around the Lady whose function as vacuole, or empty space, is the very object around which the detour of desire is organised. That is Lacan’s point when he says that in sublimation the object is raised to the level of the Thing.\(^{756}\) Once it becomes the Thing, it becomes unattainable and so the inaccessibility is not due to man-made obstacles but to the nature of the object itself. Desire is at once heightened, sustained and guaranteed, while at the same time prohibited from being satisfied.\(^{757}\)

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\(^{755}\) Ibid.

\(^{756}\) Ibid. p.112

The point is that each of these preceding examples which Lacan has highlighted in various parts of his theory illustrate the existence of a sexual desire which must be refused, a desire manifest in the signifiers that come to represent it, and which must remain unsatisfied. I will be proposing in the next chapter that asexuality is a distinct orientation which differs markedly from the phenomena just described. I will show that the asexual subject, like the non-sexual subject, is libidinally desiring but functions in a qualitatively different way.

Lacan in Seminar V refers to the “... hysteria latent in every kind of human being in the world...”[^758] He says this is because all speaking subjects are constituted by the desire of the Other’s desire. But while hysterics led Freud to develop psychoanalysis, they were at the same time proving the inadequacy of his knowledge. As such, they posed a limit to knowledge while demanding answers at the same time, in a dialectic in which absolute knowledge remained elusive. Again, it could be argued that asexuality occupies a similar but not identical position in that, like hysteria, it confounds existing knowledge. Fink (1995) references the Heisenberg uncertainty principle in quantum mechanics which states that there is a fundamental limit to the precision with which physical properties of a particle can be known.[^759] In 1927, this shocked the physics world because it posits something that cannot be known, and is impossible to know. In terms of Lacanian theory, impossibility is

[^759]: Fink, B. (1995), *Op. Cit.*, p.134. If a particle’s position is known, its momentum at the same time cannot be known and vice versa. Nor can this be subject to observable verification.
related to the Real and it is the objet a. In the hysteric’s discourse, the objet a in the position of truth is in the Real which means it is outside of language (Figures 5 and 6.)

In essence, it is a truth that is governed “by that which does not work, by that which does not fit”. The point for asexuality is that its desire is also supported by a phantasy whose objet a is in the Real and is beyond the linguistic signifying chain. It is so because it originates in a primal, erogenous experience of the first Other as omnipotent and traumatic. Trauma ensures that the field of erogenous experience becomes unconscious. This

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760 Ibid.
traumatic inflection associated with the infantile sexual Real as represented by the first Other transfigures the dyadic foundations of the dialectic of need, demand and desire. It becomes, as can be found in mathematics, a unary operation of annulment with only one operand or single input which, I am proposing, becomes the dominant tendency of annulment in the relation to the object starting in the oral phase. This tendency repeats through the anal phase until it becomes established in the phallic phase. If this proposition holds, then, for the asexual, desire is potentially delimited from its very beginning by the elision of the libidinal element of the part objects that come to represent the relation of subject to Other. This, then, leads to the question of what is the mechanism by which such elision can come about?

6.7. A Consideration of Annulment:

For Lacan the main purpose of anorexic refusal is about the object, the symbolic object of the subject-Other dialectic which appears, as he says clearly, under the sign of the nothing. As mentioned in the previous chapter, he identifies the mechanism which brings this refusal about when he says that it is with regard to the “object annulled as symbolic” that the child puts his dependency on the mother in check by nourishing himself on nothing. The mechanism of annulment, therefore, offers considerable scope in approaching asexuality’s relation to lack of sexual desire and, therefore, merits further

763 Ibid.
consideration. Using Freud’s term, *Versagung*, Lacan speaks of it as “annulation, in the sense that one speaks of annulling a treaty or of a retreat from an engagement.” Freud in *The Future of An Illusion* (1927), writes about *Versagung* thus: “For the sake of a uniform terminology we will describe the fact that an instinct cannot be satisfied as a ‘frustration’...”

Freud’s conception includes a refusal as much by the child as by the Mother, according to Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), who point out that *Versagung* as frustration not only designates an empirical fact but also designates a “relation implying refusal... on the part of the agent”. They point out that *Versagung* as frustration includes an active sense and they define the word as a “condition of the subject who is denied, or who denies himself, the satisfaction of an instinctual demand” [emphasis added]. While the translation as “frustration” implies the subject is “passively” frustrated, *Versagung* “in no way lays down who does the refusing” [emphasis in original].

Lacan makes the following observation:

... all satisfaction called up in frustration comes in against the background of the fundamentally disappointing character of the symbolic order. The satisfaction here is only a substitute, a compensation. The child crushes what is disappointing in the symbolic play in the oral seizure of the real object of satisfaction, the breast in this

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764 Ibid, p.216.
767 Ibid.
instance. What puts him to sleep in this satisfaction is precisely his disappointment, his frustration, the refusal that he has experienced.\textsuperscript{768}

At about the same time in his writing, Lacan (1958) in \textit{The Signification of the Phallus} also refers to a crushing, this time of the satisfactions of bodily need which are achieved through the child’s demand.\textsuperscript{769} He explains that this “crushing” takes place because the satisfactions which the infant’s demand obtains do not satisfy the “proof of love” into which the demand for satisfaction has been “transmuted”.\textsuperscript{770} This idea of the child crushing what is disappointing is coterminous with the conception of \textit{Versagung} under consideration. It can be seen, therefore, that refusal is thinkable on both sides of the Mother-child dyad but that the contingent refusal on the Mother’s side to offer the gift of the breast might be considered a primary refusal. The frustration that this gives rise to in the child then produces a secondary refusal whereby the gift of the breast is refused, in the sense of the child crushing what is disappointing in the experience, i.e., it did not satisfy the “proof of love”. It must also be borne in mind that frustration is not just the refusal of an object of satisfaction but is also the refusal of a gift. According to Lacan:

\begin{quote}
The gift arises from a beyond of the object relation, since it supposes behind it the whole order of exchange into which the child has entered, and it can only arise from that beyond with a character which constitutes it as properly symbolic.\textsuperscript{771}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{770} Ibid.
Here the oral object is the gift whereas in his subsequent work Lacan continues the Freudian tradition in which the gift is associated with the anal object.\textsuperscript{772} In \textit{Television} (1963), for example, Lacan describes the oral object as the breast which the “astonished” child realises belongs to the Mother.\textsuperscript{773} The anal object, by contrast, is the gift, “the present offered in anxiety”.\textsuperscript{774} In \textit{Seminar IV}, however, it is the breast that is the gift and Lacan says the refusal of the gift involves for the child the experience of a frustration that is only thinkable as the refusal by the Mother of the gift as symbol of love.\textsuperscript{775} At this point in Lacan’s account “the nothing” enters as “the gift that is not constituted by the act which has previously annulled or revoked it”.\textsuperscript{776} In other words, the child is presented with “the nothing” representing the absence of the Mother’s reply to its call for the gift, a call which only makes itself heard when the object of satisfaction is \textit{not} there.\textsuperscript{777} When it \textit{is} there the object appears “only as the sign of the gift” and, as the object of satisfaction, is “nothing”.\textsuperscript{778} He will go on to say that against this “background of revocation” the gift as sign of love is given or not given in reply to the call.\textsuperscript{779} This “symbolic game” has a fundamentally disappointing character but is, nevertheless, the manner in which satisfaction takes on its meaning.\textsuperscript{780} I am proposing that this pre-Oedipal mechanism of \textit{Versagung} as annulment is formative in designating the asexual subject position with regard to a de-sexualisation that then transmits through subsequent phases of libidinal engagement with the Other. Once this mechanism of

\textsuperscript{772} Freud, S. (1917c), \textit{On Transformations of Instinct as Exemplified in Anal Eroticism}, Standard Edition XVII, pp.130-133. See also Freud’s paper in the same volume entitled \textit{Anal Eroticism and the Castration Complex}, pp.81-82.


\textsuperscript{774} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{775} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{776} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{777} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{778} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{779} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{780} Ibid.
annulment is taken into account, it opens the question of what kind of jouissance is available to a subject who takes up this position. In the next chapter I will answer this question by showing how the asexual employs the Lacanian concept of the sinthome in order to derive a jouissance that is both non-phallic and asymptomatic.
Chapter 7

Asexual *jouissance* and the Lacanian *sinthome*

7.0. Objective:

In this chapter I will outline in further detail the psychical mechanism which, I propose, inaugurates the desire for no sexual desire and I will show how asexuality derives *jouissance* from this. I will also show how the *sinthome*, a later conceptual development in Lacan’s work, offers a more robust way of understanding the enigmas of asexuality by moving beyond inhibition, sublimation and other symptomatic considerations. But, because this concept belongs to Lacan’s most challenging theoretical period, part of this chapter will rely on a number of highly considered interpreters of this phase of his work, in particular Roberto Harari.
7.1.0. Asexuality and Foreclosure:

In the previous chapter, I proposed, *inter alia*, that asexuality’s inaugural moment is when it rejects the taking up of the position of Imaginary phallus and I considered the implications of this for sexual desire. It is proposed in this dissertation that the contingent and particular response to pre-Oedipal structural trauma orders the asexual relation so that sexual desire is annulled. The following is a quote from a woman who self-identifies as asexual:

I would say I’ve never in my life had a dream or a fantasy, a sexual fantasy, for example, about being with another woman. So I can pretty much say that I have no lesbian sort of tendencies whatsoever. You would think that by my age I would have had some fantasy or dream of something, wouldn’t you? ... But I’ve never had a dream or a sexual fantasy about having sex with a man, either. That I can ever, ever remember.\(^781\)

Up to now, I have used the term annulment to explain the aetiology of this unqualified lack of sexual desire, in keeping with Lacan’s term from *Seminar IV*. However, the absolute nature of the unconscious elision of sexual desire in asexuality, even among asexuals who engage sexually with a partner, suggests that something unconditional is taking place. On this basis, it is necessary to consider the possibility that the term “foreclosure” may be more

appropriate to describe the mechanism responsible for what happens when the position of Imaginary phallus is rejected. In considering the term foreclosure, which is the translation of Verwerfung that Lacan suggests, it might also be useful to bear in mind his earliest translation of Verwerfung as a “rejecting tendency”, given that the hypothesised foreclosure in question is taking place at a pre-Oedipal stage.

When the term “foreclosure” is introduced into a consideration of the aetiology of asexuality, it raises the question of psychosis. It has been a long-held precept of Lacanian theory that psychotic structure is determined by the foreclosure of the signifier of the Name-of-the-Father as agent of castration. As Grigg (2017 [1998]) points out, Lacan introduces the term “foreclosure” to explain the massive and global differences between neurosis and psychosis. This use of foreclosure in designating psychosis refers to the Name-of-the-Father which acts to symbolically castrate/negate the subject as Imaginary phallus of the mother and, in turn, castrates the Imaginary phallus that the child represents for the mother. Lacanian theory proposes that without this separation psychosis ensues.

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and Fink (1997) encapsulates this in his text book when he says: “... foreclosure is the cause of psychosis. It is not simply associated with psychosis; it is constitutive of psychosis.”

A consequence of foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father is that metaphoric processes that determine the subject remain fundamentally unstable. This symbiotic relation of foreclosure and psychosis stems from Lacan’s early position in *Seminar III, The Psychoses* and in his paper of the same period, *On a question prior to any possible treatment of psychosis*. In *Seminar III*, for example, his view is that everything that takes place in psychosis is a question of the subject’s access to this signifier, or rather “the impossibility of that access”. “It can thus happen that something primordial regarding the subject’s being does not enter into symbolization and is not repressed, but rejected,” he says. The Name-of-the-Father is the essential signifier on which he centres his theory of psychosis. This tradition continues into applying foreclosure to designate some manifestations of human sexual behaviour as psychotic.

Therefore, if the term “foreclosure” is applied to asexuality, does this require that asexuality should be assigned a psychotic structure? A distinction can be made when Lacan says that in foreclosure, *Verwerfung*, “whatever is refused in the symbolic order”, as the Name-of-the-

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Father is, then “reappears in the real”, in the form of paranoia or psychotic hallucination.\textsuperscript{793}

It is the void which foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father opens up in terms of the subject’s initial introduction to fundamental signifiers which has the most significant implications in terms of psychosis.\textsuperscript{794} I am proposing that asexuality forecloses, not the Name-of-the-Father, but an earlier imaginary object of desire, the Imaginary phallus. For this reason, it is a foreclosure that does not produce psychosis.

7.1.1. Foreclosure without Psychosis:

Can the term foreclosure be applied to a rejection which gives rise to something other than psychosis? Lacan says if there are things the subject “wants to know nothing about” then foreclosure is the mechanism because what is at issue in Verwerfung is the “rejection of a primordial signifier into the outer shadows”.\textsuperscript{795} Or, as Grigg (2017 [1998]) puts it, what is foreclosed is not the possibility of an event coming to pass, but the very signifier that makes expression of it possible in the first place.\textsuperscript{796} In short, foreclosure ensures the subject lacks the very linguistic means for making a statement at all. It is also worth pointing out that, in Evans’ (1996) definition, the Imaginary phallus (φ) represents “phallic signification”,\textsuperscript{797} which positions it as a primary signifier in terms of sexuality. As stated, I am proposing that

\textsuperscript{794} Ibid, sessions of May 30, 1956, p.252 and July 4, 1956, p.323.
\textsuperscript{795} Ibid, session of February 15, 1956, p.150.
in asexuality it is not a foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father because the subject has already brought about a foreclosure of the Imaginary phallus, thus effecting a separation from the mother in the form of a reversal in the relation of dependence. I am also proposing that this theorised foreclosure of the Imaginary phallus may not be so radical.

Even for the non-.asexual subject, the choice of taking up the position of the Imaginary phallus represents a challenge. Lacan says that the mother will “equip” herself with the phallus and, reciprocally, the child “generously grants it” to her, but this does not result in a perfectly harmonised symmetry.798 “Now, the couple finds itself on the contrary in a situation of conflict, even of respective internal alienation,” he says.799 The reason for this is that the phallus is with the father who is “supposed to be” its vehicle.800 In Seminar XVII, he says the mother’s desire in this regard “will always wreak havoc”.801 Indeed, there are also negative consequences when the Imaginary phallus is “ingested” too fully by the subject. In Seminar VII, he points out that the ingestion of the Imaginary phallus in a relationship that is “entirely governed by the imaginary” leads either to psychosis or perversion.802 I am proposing that the foreclosure of the Imaginary phallus in asexuality makes the movement to the father and away from the mother a more tranquil transition. In this sense, asexuality represents what Lacan terms a père-version,803 or a turning toward the father. However,

799 Ibid.
800 Ibid.
801 Ibid.
unlike perversion which does not give up the Imaginary phallus for the Symbolic phallus, the asexual forecloses the Imaginary phallus and with it the jouissance of being the “instrument of the Other’s jouissance”.804

Regarding foreclosure, Lacan himself suggests on more than one occasion in Seminar XXIII that the unequivocal link with psychosis may not necessarily be intractable. On one occasion, he says that the sinthome, as the created and additional support for what is foreclosed, stands out, not as psychotic, but as “something neurotic”.805 Moncayo (2017) offers the view that here Lacan seems to “collapse the distinction between psychotic structure and a psychotic symptom within a neurotic structure”.806 Later in the same Seminar, Lacan points to a foreclosure that takes place in terms of the Real foreclosing meaning (sens). This is not the foreclosure of the Name-of the Father but rather a consequence of the “orientation of the real” that does so.807 Foreclosure is now being associated with the Real, rather than solely with the Name-of-the-Father whose absence, for Lacan, has always been the cause of psychosis.808 He explains his enlargement of the term thus:

I’m saying this because yesterday I was asked whether there are other types of foreclosure besides the one that results from the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father. It’s quite certain that foreclosure has something radical about it. In the end, the Name-of-the-Father is something slight. ⁸⁰⁹

The “de facto Verwerfung” that Lacan describes in James Joyce ⁸¹⁰ does not, for instance, put Joyce in the position of a psychotic. The traditional argument would contend that this is consistent with the Lacanian concept of the *sinthome*, which I examine below, acting as the new signifier which protects the subject from psychosis. Harari, however, argues that the theorising of the final Lacan, with its emphasis on the *sinthome*’s stabilising role in knotting the three registers of the Symbolic, Real and Imaginary for *all* subjects, posits an effective “psychotic” kernel in every individual. Conceding that the accepted understanding of foreclosure is that it is “a properly psychotic mechanism”, ⁸¹¹ he, too, argues for a broader conception of the term. In his view, *Verwerfung* now becomes what he calls “the mechanism of an unavoidable dimension of the psyche, that of the constitution of the subject”, one which takes up “the role of a constitutive hole”. ⁸¹² Something is irreparably lacking which, he says, Lacan writes as SÅ, the signifier of the lacking Other. This, he believes,

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⁸¹² Ibid.
... indicates that what we find at the place of the signifier is what is absent by definition. We can thus say that the signifier is foreclosed. Here, we are dealing with a “normal” foreclosure, so to speak, a foreclosure that is constitutive, irreducible, bearing on the very condition of being a speaker.\textsuperscript{813}

The implication of this is that Lacan is introducing, particularly in the last sessions of the \textit{Seminar}, the possibility of other types of foreclosure other than that which produces psychosis.\textsuperscript{814}

\section*{7.1.2. Alternative Forms of Foreclosure:}

Harari considers alternative foreclosures to the Name-of-the-Father that are evident in Lacan’s work.\textsuperscript{815} These include the various Lacanian formulas containing \textit{il n’y a pas} or \textit{il n’existe pas}; Lacan’s famous aphorisms that there is no sexual relation or the Woman does not exist. Equally, the Symbolic is also based on a foreclosure that does not allow a signifier to represent itself; the $S_1$ must turn towards another signifier, the $S_2$.\textsuperscript{816} Furthermore, there is also the foreclosure of language itself whereby there will always remain “something final

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{813} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{814} Ibid, p.247.
\item \textsuperscript{815} Ibid, p.291.
\item \textsuperscript{816} Ibid, p.286.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
or primal that is unsayable”817 and that this “amounts to a primordial feature of foreclosure”.818 “In this sense, we find – for we have looked for them – foreclosures in neurotics …,” Harari says.819 Grigg (2017, [1998]) concurs with this view when he says that there appears to be nothing to rule out the possibility that foreclosure “is a normal psychic process”.820 He says that Lacan’s work in Seminar XXIII “effectively generalizes the concept of foreclosure” and that psychosis is only one response to it while “the symptom-metaphor of neurosis is another”.821

If the application of foreclosure to psychotic structures is no longer absolute, this opens up new possibilities. In particular, it allows for the possibility that asexuality represents an alternative foreclosure that has not, so far, been considered within Lacanian theory. In this sense, asexuality could represent the foreclosure, as I am proposing, of the Imaginary phallus. Again, it is important to highlight that this is a very different position to perversion which, Lacan says, sees the child’s relationship to the mother “constituted” by its “dependence on her love”.822 In either identifying with the Imaginary phallus (perversion) or becoming the Imaginary phallus (neurosis), for Lacan there is a “phallocentrism produced by this dialectic” between mother and child which is due to an “intrusion” of the phallic

817 Ibid, p.287.
818 Ibid.
signifier into the child’s psyche.\textsuperscript{823} Lacan views the imaginary function of the phallus as the “pivot point in the symbolic process” for both sexes.\textsuperscript{824}

On this basis, a foreclosed Imaginary phallus is, by extension, going to bring about, if not a foreclosure of, then, at the very least, a consequent diminution of the signifying status of the Symbolic phallus. This would permit sexual desire as the desire of the Other to be foreclosed of its sexual content. Lacan clearly refers to the role of the *sintrohome* in making up for what is missing in relation to James Joyce in *Seminar XXIII* when he says that Joyce’s “art is the guarantor of his phallus”.\textsuperscript{825} Morel (2019) interprets this as Lacan stating that the Joycean *sintrohome* stands in for, not just the foreclosed Name-of-the-Father, but also the “foreclosed phallus”.\textsuperscript{826} I am proposing that the foreclosure of the Imaginary phallus and, by extension, the Symbolic phallus in asexuality is the foreclosure of sexual desire. This foreclosure does not, however, disrupt the subject’s relation to language or its metaphoric processes as can be found in the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father.

As stated, for Lacan, foreclosure is the mechanism that brings about the rejection of a primordial signifier into the outer shadows. I am proposing that in asexuality the primordial signifier that is being rejected is not the Name-of-the-Father but rather the Imaginary phallus and, by extension, the Symbolic phallus. The Name-of-the-Father, as agent of castration and separation, is experienced and acknowledged, no matter how “slight” it...
happens to be.\footnote{827} If, therefore, the Imaginary phallus and, by extension, the Symbolic phallus is foreclosed, while the Name of the Father is not, this further requires that the phallus, as object of castration, is considered separately to the Name-of-the-Father, as agent of castration. In Lacan’s theorising twenty years before Seminar XXIII, the Name-of-the-Father and the Phallus are intrinsically linked within his formula of the former.\footnote{828} In his “I” Schema of this period,\footnote{829} he provides a distortion of his “R” Schema\footnote{830} in order to offer a didactic mapping of psychosis. In the “I” Schema, he clearly places the foreclosed Name-of-the-Father (P₀) in the Symbolic with a foreclosed Phallus (Φ₀) in the Imaginary. In this writing, it would appear impossible to conceive of one being foreclosed without the other being foreclosed also.

However, I am proposing that in asexuality the Name-of-the-Father is not foreclosed because the subject has already brought about a foreclosure of the Imaginary phallus, effectively a pre-Oedipal form of separation from the mother. Therefore, the motive force necessary to reject the Name-of-the-Father and cast this primordial signifier into the outer shadows, through foreclosure, is absent in asexuality. As such, my proposition sees a dividing of the Name-of-the-Father from the Phallus, so that, as stated, the latter is foreclosed while the former is not. In support of my proposition, Morel (2019) outlines a case study of “Hector”, a case of male perversion, that includes a configuration involving phallic foreclosure (Φ₀) without the Name-of-the-Father (P₀) being foreclosed.\footnote{831} She says

\footnote{827} Ibid, session of March 16, 1976, p.102.  
\footnote{829} Ibid, p.476 (571).  
\footnote{830} Ibid.  
this represented a “new case of castration anxiety”, but one which was no longer phobic. In contrast, it involved a confrontation with the law but without any acceptance of phallic castration. The Name-of-the-Father was certainly recognised, in that “Hector” feared his father, but phallic signification or castration were not recognised, and the latter are associated with the Name-of-the-Father in the paternal metaphor. “For Hector, the phallus remained maternal,” Morel says. She adds that while Lacan envisaged a disjunction between these two foreclosures, he did not believe one would exist without the other, hence she claims her case study is a counter-example. I am proposing that asexuality is also an example of an explicit disjunction that can potentially occur between the two.

The further question which arises from this proposition regarding foreclosure of the phallus is how the asexual subject makes up for this absence. As stated, the emergence of asexuality as a sexual identity has allowed many contemporary asexuals to find an indentification in this orientation and, by extension, to benefit from the stabilising effect which this can have. However, before asexuality became an emergent identity, asexuals existed and functioned well in their lives. It is also a reasonable assumption that not every contemporary non-sexually desiring subject identifies as asexual. The question arises, therefore, as to how an asexual subject can sustain their position in the absence of identificatory support. Later in this chapter, I will consider the Lacanian concept of the sinthome and its potential role in this regard.

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832 Ibid, p.286.
7.2. A *Jouissance* of Absence:

The asexual subject experiences no sexual attraction and does so without subjective distress.\(^33\) If, therefore, the asexual experience is not due to inhibition, this would suggest a unique and hitherto unconsidered form of *jouissance*. To quote Freud (1916-17), albeit from a different context, asexuality would appear to offer “a mode of satisfaction which alone the subject desires”.\(^34\) A more in-depth consideration of Lacan’s ideas will provide perspective on a *jouissance* that ultimately derives from the child’s crushing of what is disappointing in the Symbolic,\(^35\) as mentioned in the previous chapter. I am proposing that this approach is relevant in terms of understanding how asexual subjects, due to unconscious processes, are situated in relation to asexual *jouissance*.

In *Seminar IV*, as I have shown, Lacan is focussed on what are, essentially, oral-stage effects and he outlines what happens when the satisfaction of need is substituted for a symbolic satisfaction. The fact of substitution means there is a transformation of the real object (the breast) into, as he puts it, a sign in the demand for love or a symbolic request. As stated in Chapter 5, this is how, for Lacan, orality comes into being and, as an instinctual form of hunger, is the bearer of libido. It has entered the dialectic of substitution and in doing so has become an eroticised activity. He says: “It is libido in the strict sense, and sexual libido.”\(^36\)

This is the link, he says, between frustration on the one hand and the permanence of desire

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on the other. In other words, frustration has nothing to do with need that can be satisfied, it is not the refusal of an object of satisfaction.\textsuperscript{837}

Therefore, Lacan’s premise concerning Versagung, mentioned in Chapter 6, of the child crushing what is disappointing in the symbolic, holds out the theoretical possibility of an unconscious, prototypical refusal of the eroticisation of the first part-object. He says:

\begin{quote}
...Freud never speaks of frustration. He speaks of Versagung, which is inscribed much more precisely under the concept of annulation, in the sense that one speaks of \textit{annulling a treaty}, or of a retreat from an engagement. That is so true that one can even sometimes put the word Versagung on the opposite side, for the word can mean both \textit{promise} and \textit{rupture of promise}.\textsuperscript{838}
\end{quote}

In \textit{Seminar VI, Desire and Its Interpretation}, Lacan elaborates on how this Versagung might be transmitted through oral, anal and phallic phases. What he terms “the code of demand”,\textsuperscript{839} or an “unconscious vocabulary”,\textsuperscript{840} passes through a certain number of relationships via food, excrement and so on. These relationships involve the same process of substitution by way of an interchangeable object that he defines as food for the oral relationship and excrement for the anal relationship. If, therefore, the “code of demand” or “unconscious vocabulary” can encompass the Versagung as Lacan speaks about it, then the stamp of a renunciation, or annulling of the object as symbolic in the demand for love,

\textsuperscript{837} Ibid, p.206.
\textsuperscript{838} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{840} Ibid, p.7.
would appear to be distinctly possible, carrying through from the first relation to the breast as object in the dialect of substitution. When it comes to the phallic phase, Lacan says that it is by a “kind of imprint, or prolongation” of the relation to demand established in the oral and anal relationships that “symptomatic incidences” come to appear in a disguised fashion via the signifier phallus.841

This hypothesised movement of an annulling Versagung through subsequent psycho-sexual stages amounts to a divergent trajectory when set against one which, for example, Verhaeghe (2005) outlines in terms of sexually desiring subjects. In keeping with the traditional understanding, he theorises that the sexual drive “colonizes basic somatic needs”, which is synonymous with the transition from need to desire.842 In contrast, I propose that Lacan’s theorising allows for a consideration of Versagung as a refusal which is capable of bringing about an unconscious and prototypical renunciation of eroticisation at the oral stage which then egresses forward. As a result of this “prolongation” of the “code of demand” passing through the oral, anal and into the phallic phase, the Symbolic phallus can ultimately emerge as annulled or, as I have theorised above, foreclosed. I am also proposing that it is as a consequence of the foreclosure of the Imaginary phallus that the Symbolic phallus becomes variously stripped of some or all of its signifying effects. But, because the Name-of-the-Father has brought about castration,843 the phallus continues to

841 Ibid, pp.8-9.
operate as a place holder in the signifying chain, analogously to how zero operates in mathematics, as stated in Chapter 5. For sexually desiring subjects, the Name-of-the-Father, as structuring metaphor, allows the child to separate from the mother and find its objects of desire in the external world by installing a prohibition on the child’s desire for the mother, and vice versa. It is symbolisation, mediated through the Name-of-the-Father, that leads to the emergence of the Symbolic phallus, located in the place of the Other, as the measure (ratio) by which the sexually desiring subject can recognise the Other’s desire. But does the theorised renunciation of eroticisation which begins at the oral stage not bring asexuality closer to a shared classification with anorexia and, therefore, require that a further distinction be made between the two?

When Lacan distinguishes anorexia as something other than a negation of activity, it is an important distinction. It is not a drive that is negated or repressed but a drive that gains jouissance from “absence savoured as such”. In The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of its Power, his paper one year after Seminar IV, he examines, inter alia, Ernst Kris’ “fresh brains” case and here, again, he is considering the idea of a desire for nothing. This time, however, he moves it beyond an exclusive association with orality, even though the case study offers up its meanings through the analysand’s reference to physical hunger for a plate of fresh brains. For Lacan, Kris’ case study is about absence rather than about the presence of the idea of being a plagiarist. What he draws out from it is the very notion that this patient’s fear of plagiarism functions as a form of stealing nothing. It is not an oral

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845 Ibid, pp.581-582 (693).
drive but is instead an anorexia of the “mental realm” and, as Lacan puts it, “the desire on which the idea lives”.\textsuperscript{848} It now allows asexuality to move further away from an association with anorexia and closer to a phenomenon that concerns a desire on which the idea lives. The “idea” amounts to a desire for the nothing which, in the case of asexuality, represents a desire for no sexual desire, one in which the objet a as “nothing” is embraced and becomes the support of desire. Asexuality and anorexia are similar only to the extent that something of the Other is defended against so that desire can be protected, a similarity equally shared with both hysteria and obsessional neurosis. In the asexual phantasy, however, the objet a operates as the “nothing”, as cause of desire for no sexual desire, and in this paradoxical way desire is supported.

7.3. The Support of the Fundamental Phantasy:

I am proposing that for the asexual subject desire is supported through a fundamental phantasy of being independent of the omnipotence of the Other. Lacan is clear that the relation of the objet a to the Other is based on the fact that the subjective structure of the child depends on the imaginary of the Mother.\textsuperscript{849} He says thinking is radically inadequate for dealing with sexuality\textsuperscript{850} and nor can language deal with it, when language emerges.\textsuperscript{851} Therefore, this is the lack around which the function of the objet a is defined, for both

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{848} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{850} Ibid, session of January 18, 1967, p.4.
\item \textsuperscript{851} Ibid, p.12.
\end{itemize}
sexual and asexual subjects.\textsuperscript{852} This is the place where the central object as “nothing” of the asexual phantasy begins, as a paradoxical “eroticised”\textsuperscript{853} piece of the Real that cannot be assimilated into language, at the place where the Symbolic emerges but where this objet a as remainder escapes symbolisation. For Lacan, it is with regard to the object, under the sign of nothing, that “resistance against omnipotence in the relation of dependence is elaborated”.\textsuperscript{854}

At one and the same time as being the originary place of lack, this is also the place of inaugural helplessness (\textit{Hilflosigkeit}) for the subject. As Lacan says in the \textit{Seminar on Desire}, in the primitive presence of the opaque and obscure desire of the Other, the subject is without recourse. “He is hilfloss, \textit{Hilflosigkeit}” and this is the “foundation” of the “traumatic experience”.\textsuperscript{855} The cause of this trauma of helplessness, Lacan says, cannot be defined in any other way than simply “the desire of the other”.\textsuperscript{856} The structural trauma associated with the desire of the other, therefore, allows for an understanding of the aetiology of the asexual experience of no sexual desire for another person, as included in the AVEN definition. Lacan returns to the idea in \textit{Seminar XIV, The Logic of Phantasy}, when he considers refusal of the oral object as a way “…to save oneself from being engulfed by the maternal partner”.\textsuperscript{857} In \textit{Seminar IV}, the unavoidable reality or \textit{Wirklichkeit} for the child is that of the omnipotence of the mother as the “primordially all-powerful” figure.\textsuperscript{858}

\textsuperscript{852} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{853} Ibid, session of January 25, 1967.p.9. Here Lacan says that the objet a is an eroticised object.
\textsuperscript{856} Ibid, session of June 10, 1959. p.3.
However, asexuality is not a refusal in the same way that anorexia in Lacan’s *Seminar IV* is. Rather, asexuality is an experience of the subject as voided of sexual desire which, I am proposing, begins in the first experiences of the child in relation to the first other. In other words, an encounter that every subject experiences with regard to the primordial other produces a unique and contingent effect for the asexual subject.\textsuperscript{859} This, ultimately, results in a desexualisation of desire, phantasy and *jouissance* in relation to the other which, in essence, is the manifest sexual orientation of asexuality. When the primordial place of structural trauma is considered, it becomes possible to see where “sensations of disgust” and the “release of unpleasure” in sexual life might derive from, as posed by one of Freud’s earliest questions, mentioned in Chapter 5.\textsuperscript{860}

The lack of sexual desire is based on an originally unwelcoming Real experienced through an unpleasurable increase in drive tension, implicitly determined by the early encounter(s) with this Real. The psychological elaboration of this trauma for sexual subjects who reach so-called genital maturity\textsuperscript{861} is to seek discharge for the unpleasurable rise in tension through a repetitive engagement in the sexual act which, as stated, for Lacan has symptomatic sediments. In the repetition of the sexual act, the sexually desiring subject reproduces the initial relation to the other, which was potentially traumatic and is, as also stated, the very

\textsuperscript{859} It is not within the scope of this dissertation but this invites the question as to whether heterosexuality and LGBT+ orientations might emanate from this source also.

\textsuperscript{860} “In my opinion, there must be an independent source for the release of unpleasure in sexual life: once that source is present, it can activate sensations of disgust, lend force to morality, and so on.” See, Freud, S. (1896), *Extracts from the Fliess Papers, Draft K, Standard Edition* I, p.222.

\textsuperscript{861} Freud says that sexuality is composed of a number of partial drives, such as the oral drive and the anal drive, each with a different source (erotogenic zone) and which function independently until, at puberty, they become organised together under the genital zone. Lacan, in contrast, says the partial drives never come to a complete harmonisation in the genital phase. Instead, the drives remain partial, not in the sense that they are parts of a whole genital drive, but that they only represent sexuality partially.
relation which maintains the *objet a*. For the asexual subject, on the other hand, the rise in drive tension and its related dependence for discharge of this tension on an omnipotent other is unpleasurable. In this case, psychological elaboration is achieved through the support of a fundamental phantasy aimed at the *objet a* as the “nothing”. It is what might be called a Nirvana principle response to reduce drive tension to zero, to borrow the term Freud borrowed from British psychoanalyst Barbara Low. According to Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), “the Nirvana principle must be understood as something more than a law of constancy or of homeostasis: it is, rather, the radical tendency to reduce excitation to zero-point...” At the same time, they say, the word “Nirvana” evokes a profound link between pleasure and annihilation: a link that always remained problematic for Freud. They note that the term Nirvana in Buddhism connotes the “extinction” of human desire.

While this might lead to an assumption that the death drive (*Thanatos*) is dominant within asexuality, there are other considerations that need to be taken into account. Research and the testimony of asexuals show that many form loving relationships with both asexual and non-asesexual partners which indicates a counter-balancing presence of *Eros*. However, despite the hypothesised unconscious tendency to reduce excitation to zero which is supported by the asexual fundamental phantasy, the conscious lived experience of asexuality proves to be unsettling for most subjects until a further support is encountered in the form of identification, which I will consider next.

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7.4. The Support of Identification:

A recurring theme within the experiences of asexual subjects is the stabilising effect that occurs when the designation “asexual” is discovered at a particular moment in their lives. It appears to provide a subjective anchoring for what had often been, up to that point, a confusing and alienating sense of their sexuality. Research by Carrigan (2011) shows that before self-identifying as asexual, most asexual subjects assume a pathological cause for their sexual orientation. The following quote is representative of the asexual experience of encountering a sense of subjective relief which identification provides and its LGBT+ resonances can be noted.

... I finally identified myself as asexual, and coming out to myself and the world was one of the most liberating experiences I’ve ever encountered ... I’m comfortable with it. I’m relieved by it ... It makes all the sense that nothing made before and I’m glad to not spend countless hours worrying about why I am broken anymore.

Asexuals, in the period when they have not yet defined their sexuality in terms of an absence of sexual attraction for another person or thing, and who do not yet have access to

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this “signifying formulation”\(^{869}\) experience varying degrees of distress. Carrigan (2011) shows that while specific biographical details vary greatly among individuals, there is a typical pattern to the experience of asexual subjects before they transform their intrapsychic experience into a symbolically-assimilated identification as asexual.\(^{870}\)

The pattern which Carrigan identifies begins with a sense of being different from their peer group. This is then followed by a period of self-questioning which leads, in general, to an assumption of pathology, i.e., the idea that to experience no sexual desire must be a disordered condition. The assumption of pathology can endure until self-clarification is obtained through the acquisition of the identity “asexual” via a communal authentication.\(^{871}\) Similarly, research by Scherrer (2008) suggests that it was only after “encountering the language of asexuality” that asexuals respond to that identity. In this sense, then, it would appear that asexuals who do not have access to “asexuality” as an identity can experience challenges in their ability to function in a stable manner. As one asexual man in Scherrer’s (2014) research put it:

> Before I knew asexuality existed, I did consider asking a doctor why I am like I am. I never did because I knew I wouldn’t want to be “cured”. So a doctor wasn’t the


person to ask. I would have found it extremely difficult to talk about because at that time I felt it almost made me not a real person.872

7.5.0. Asexuality and the *Sinthome*:

However, in the era before asexuality was available as an identity category, asexual subjects who had undergone a foreclosure of the phallus could access an alternative supporting concept. As briefly mentioned above, Lacan called it the *sinthome* and it is, in fact, available to all subjects, whether sexual or asexual. This would also include contemporary asexual subjects who do not, or cannot, access “asexuality” as an identity. In his later teaching, Lacan introduces the *sinthome* as a subject-specific act of artifice whereby a unique and particular creation such as an artistic or personal construction constitutes a fourth ring which ties together the Borromean knot of Real, Symbolic and Imaginary, thus anchoring the subject.873 Morel (2019) says the *sinthome* is a “knowing way of dealing with repetition” because it constitutes a “response to the equivocal naming of the child’s *jouissance* by the mother” and, as a mode of separation, “entails the invention of a new relation to the Other.”874 In other words, it is a creation. This allows for the possibility that the asexual subject can, through the *sinthome*, unconsciously support a desire for no sexual desire which, unlike anorexia, allows for a productive engagement with desire. I am proposing that

non-identified asexuals can, through the creation of a *sinthome*,\(^875\) function adequately well without the phallic signifier, thus representing a reinvention of their sexuality. I am also proposing that asexual subjects, such as those mentioned in Chapter 1, are possible examples of people who created particular and unique *sinthomes* which allowed them function despite the foreclosure of the phallus.

T.E. Lawrence, an iconic figure of the 20\(^{th}\) century, was a British archaeologist turned soldier, who created a unique name for himself due to his actions in leading the Arab Revolt against the invasion by Turkey in World War 1. The invention of himself as Lawrence of Arabia could be considered his *sinthome*, a creative act that was both singular and unique. Florence Nightingale, the nurse and social reformer, became a crusader for the improvement of civilian and military healthcare, and whose ideas became foundational for modern nursing. Her *sinthome*, in the form of her singular and unique vocation, could be considered in the same way. English physicist and mathematician Isaac Newton created his *sinthome* through his pioneering and unique work on the effects of gravity. It could also be argued that Hungarian mathematician Paul Erdos created a *sinthome* out of his unique gift for mathematics. He essentially created a name for solving mathematical problems that had remained unsolved for generations and for applying himself to any new problems that came to his attention.\(^876\) Likewise, the pop singer Morrissey could be said to have created his *sinthome* through musical creativity. Assuming his quote from Chapter 1 indicates an asexual orientation, the American writer Gore Vidal’s *sinthome* can be seen in his political

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and creative writing (he was a co-writer on the 1959 movie *Ben Hur*). Equally, if she is considered to have been an asexual, Anna Freud’s *sinthome* is, arguably, to be seen in her perpetuation of her father’s name through her unique work and writings about psychoanalysis and her dedication to child analysis in particular.

### 7.5.1. Sinthome As Transformed Symptom:

While the *sinthome* is the archaic way of describing the symptom, and is essentially a reparative transformation of the symptom, Lacan uses the term to describe something very different from a symptom. He introduces it into his theory in *Seminar XXIII* where he explores the writing of James Joyce as the paradigmatic example of the concept. Essentially, the *sinthome* becomes the buckle that can repair the trefoil knot of Imaginary, Symbolic and Real which, in Joyce’s case, was his desire to be an artist “who would keep the whole world busy”.

Joyce’s *sinthome* has its origins in his desire to be an artist and is what “compensates exactly for the fact that Joyce’s father was never a father for him”.

According to Thurston (1996), Joyce faced a radical non-function or absence of the Name-of-the-Father from childhood. However, he managed to avoid psychosis by “deploying his art as suppleance, as a supplementary cord in the subjective knot”. Thurston says the Joycean canon from start to finish entails a “special relation to language”, a refashioning of

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878 Ibid.
it as *sinthome*. According to Lacan, “The name that is proper to him is what Joyce valorizes at the expense of the father.” Joyce’s own name, elevated through an art that is aimed at “the whole world” is what acts as addition or suppletion for the failure of the signifier Name-of-the-Father. The foreclosure of this signifier does not, in the case of Joyce, result in psychosis because his art, as *sinthome*, acts as the buckle that repairs the knot. In this final period of Lacan’s work, his theorising of the *sinthome* becomes an extension of his previous *Seminar, RSI*, in which he focussed on the Borromean knot. There, the three registers of Real, Symbolic and Imaginary that constitute the intertwined domains of the speaking subject are considered from a topological perspective and are conceived as linked together. In *Seminar XXIII*, however, Lacan concedes that they may not constitute a perfectly arranged knot and so a fourth ring is necessary to bind them and this ring is the *sinthome*.

One of the most thorough interpreters of this challenging and comparatively under-explored phase of Lacan’s later thinking is Roberto Harari. For this reason, I will be referencing and relying on his extensive work in this area in order to situate the place of asexuality within the conceptual terrain of the *sinthome*. Harari (1995) says the invention of the *sinthome*, as that fourth element without which it is impossible to articulate R.S.I., is “one of the most powerful, uncompromising, and subversive propositions in all of Lacan’s thought”. The fourth ring is considered by Lacan to be beyond meaning to the extent that

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880 Ibid.
882 Ibid, p.72.
883 Ibid, p.73.
Joyce never questioned his relation to writing, it was something he had to do. According to Thurston (1996), Joyce was able to invent a new way of using language to “organise enjoyment”. He says:

The sinthome thus designates a signifying formulation beyond analysis, a kernel of enjoyment immune to the efficacy of the symbolic. Far from calling for some analytic “dissolution”, the sinthome is what “allows one to live” by providing a unique organisation of jouissance. The task of analysis thus becomes, in one of Lacan’s last definitions of the end of analysis, to identify with the sinthome.

7.5.2. Extending the Concept of the Sinthome:

There are contemporary theorists, however, who are extending the application of Lacan’s concept of the sinthome away from a purely literary association and into the area of sexuality. In the area of sexual difference, Gherovici’s (2010) main contention is that Lacan’s theory of the sinthome permits a new approach to the paradoxes of gender, in particular citing Lacan’s idea a few years after his Seminar on the sinthome that there is a she-sinthome and a he-sinthome. In other words, the sinthome can become a supplement for grasping the impossible relation between

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886 Ibid, p.189.
the sexes or, as Gherovici puts it, “to tolerate the absence of the sexual relation”. In this theorising, she is taking the concept of the *sinthome* clearly into the domain of sexuality. In this regard, she gives the case study example of Victoria who remakes her male body and transforms it to female through what the author terms transvestite artificiality.

Taking into account the complex relationship that transgender subjects have to the body, Gherovici (2010) says that an art similar to that of actual artists can be found in transgender artificiality. This is not an art on the level of Joyce’s genius but it is, she argues, tantamount to a creative *sinthome*. She describes the *sinthome* as a ‘self created fiction’ that allows a person live their life. But, she points out, while James Joyce set out to make a name for himself, he also aspired to create a universal language. Her thesis is that transgender subjects also demand singular recognition while at the same time a universal agency can be observed in them, more precisely when they write. For her, sex change memoirs are often symptoms but they can also be *sinthomes*. Equally, they may not be great literature but they aspire to the most essential function of literature, a communication to the self or others that inscribes sexual difference. This leads to her proposition that, in some cases, transgender subjects writing about their transgender transformation is “of the order of the *sinthome*. She says the *sinthome* shapes the singularity of an “art”, a *techne* that reknots

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890 Ibid, p.216.
893 Ibid.
a “workable consistency” which moves the subject from contingency to absolute necessity.

Transvestite artificiality, for Gherovici, is an example of a creative sinthome and, in saying this, she is aware that her theorising is a departure from Lacan’s first formulations of the sinthome which insist on the Symbolic and on the father. She extends this line of thinking to the interesting idea that, in the case of male-to-female transgender subject Hera, the identification with the surgical process whereby she would become a woman was itself a sinthome. In another case, that of Linda, the subject’s bulimia is transformed through analysis into a career making highly successful artisanal chocolates. In this case, the sinthome was creative confectionery. Morel (2019) gives case history examples which include the case of Hector whose sinthome is his craft of being a counterfeiter, Claude whose sinthome is being a husband to his wife Ana and Bill whose sinthome is his writings as an Egyptologist. The point of interest here is that the particularity of the sinthome is now being considered in a variety of new and different ways.

7.5.3. The Sinthome as Sexual:

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894 Ibid.
896 Ibid, pp.185-186.
897 Ibid, p.191.
898 Ibid, pp.207-208
900 Ibid, p.274.
901 Ibid, 297.
Of importance for this dissertation is Gherovici’s (2010) theoretical gamble, as she calls it, whereby she links sexuation, i.e., gendered sexuality via Lacan’s *Formulae of Sexuation*, with the *sinthome*. This is how she comes to propose, as stated, that transgender transformation may be, in certain cases, of the order of the *sinthome*.\textsuperscript{902} In terms of this dissertation, I am proposing something similar but not the same. Asexuality, unlike the transgender experience, is a sexual orientation aimed at no sexual desire. It is, therefore, in many instances an identification with a non-sexually desiring position rather than a *sinthome*. However, my theoretical gamble, if it can be called such, is that the *sinthome* can support asexual subjects, particularly in the era before self-identification was available, and also contemporary asexuals who have not accessed identification as a support.

My proposition is similar to Gherovici’s to the extent that the *sinthome* is being associated with supplementing a sexual positioning of the subject. It differs to the extent that asexuality, in and of itself, is not a *sinthome*, even though it remains possible to reinvent one’s sexuality by identifying with one’s *sinthome*.\textsuperscript{903} My proposition, as stated, is that the absence to be tolerated in asexuality is not the absence of the Name-of-the-Father or the sexual relation, but the absence of the imaginary and, by extension, the symbolic phallus. For those asexuals for whom the stabilising function of identification as asexual is not available either culturally or subjectively, the *sinthome* can offer the possibility of “creative unbalance”\textsuperscript{904} which “disrupts the symmetry”\textsuperscript{905} of heteronormative expectations and which helps the subject accommodate this absence. The consideration of asexuality as a *sinthome* in itself is not being proposed, because it does not satisfy the two criteria of singularity and creativity, i.e., it is not, strictly speaking, a singular nor is it a creative production of each subject. Instead, as also stated, asexuality is a sexual orientation which offers a sexual

\textsuperscript{903} Ibid, p.247.
\textsuperscript{904} Ibid, p.154.
\textsuperscript{905} Ibid.
identification which many asexuals can share and find support in. I am proposing that the *sinthome* can effectively offer an alternative support and supplement for the foreclosure of the symbolic phallus for those asexuals who may need it. In this way, it allows a non-phallic orientation to function in a predominantly phallic discourse. The corollary of this proposition is highlighted in the Further Research section of this dissertation, i.e., that non-sexual subjects who are unable to either find support in identifying as asexual or through the creation of a particular *sinthome* are potentially exposed to psychological distress and/or symptomatic effects.

Morel (2010) reminds us that the *sinthome* is not only available to men of genius such as Joyce but that it is potentially available to everyone. The syllogistic logic she follows is that since every subject has a symptom, and since every *sinthome* is a unique transformation of, and solution to, the symptom, then every subject can potentially create a *sinthome*. The objective of Morel’s study in *The Law of the Mother* (2019) is to look at how the child separates from the Mother, a topic I have discussed in Chapter 5, and her focus is also on how this is done without the Name of the Father. In her work, she extends Lacanian theory to consider that it is the *sinthome* which is capable of separating the child from the mother, even without the father. As well as its possible role in separation, she also hypothesises that the *sinthome* will allow the subject achieve sexual identity but, in Morel’s reading of it, this may be a creation in response to the experience of sexual ambiguity. This is why she refers to the *sinthome* as the *sexual sinthome* in the title of her book. Morel (2019) says that the *sinthome* may result from successive symptomatic reductions obtained in analysis through the process of interpretation. But she also believes it may appear “out of the blue” without analysis. The writing of James Joyce as *sinthome* is an example of a *sinthome* which

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908 Ibid, p.3.
appears without analysis. Morel (2019) says that Lacan’s theory of the *sinthome* allows for an alternative to the Name-of-the-Father by generalising its power of separation. “The *sinthome* is what enables the child to disengage itself from the law of the mother, by using a contingent element as a means of support,” she says.\(^\text{910}\) This contingent element *could* be the father but, of relevance to asexuality, she says it could also be an element “borrowed in a broader sense from the subject’s social life”.\(^\text{911}\) In the traditional understanding, the *sinthome* is the intermediary signifier through which the absent signifier of the Name-of-the-Father is made operational.\(^\text{912}\) I am proposing that the *sinthome* for asexuality can be a “signifying formulation”\(^\text{913}\) that allows the subject to function, in the absence of identification as a support, despite the foreclosed and, therefore, absent signifier Phallus. Harari says that while the hysteric is “clearly torn asunder”, the “*sinthomatic*”, although not tranquil, is “often without the surging anxiety that afflicts the former”.\(^\text{914}\)

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7.6.0. The *Sinthome* and No Sexual Desire:

This allows for a consideration of asexuality as being capable of engaging in “an *intersinthomal relation*”\(^\text{915}\) in which the *sinthome* operates as the signifier of a desire for no sexual desire. If this appears at first sight to be a strange form of *sinthomatic jouissance* it is worth remembering that in *Joyce the Symptom II* Lacan (1979) says that the *jouissance*

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\(^{910}\) Ibid, p.307.

\(^{911}\) Ibid.


\(^{915}\) Ibid, pp.209-211.
proper to the *sinthome* is “opaque”, indicating something that is hard to understand, not clear or lucid, and can even be obscure. He further refines what he means by opaque *jouissance* when he says that it “excludes meaning”.\textsuperscript{916} This is in contrast to phallic *jouissance* which, as stated, is the *jouissance* that fails.\textsuperscript{917} As such, the *sinthome* as it might be created by the asexual is not a metaphor, not a substitution, nor indeed a sublimation, but rather a making-up-for as suppletion. It is an additional signifier that compensates, not for the Name-of-the-Father as is found in psychosis, but for the signifier Phallus whose foreclosure ensures that phallicised meaning effects remain voided for asexual subjects.

This addition that compensates with something new is an act of a symbolic nomination.\textsuperscript{918} But this act of nomination has to be distinguished from a complementary form of creationism which is to be found in Lacan’s early work. In the latter, according to Harari, it was enough to “name something” *via* the signifier in order to make “the Real emerge on the basis of the Symbolic”.\textsuperscript{919} By contrast, the *sinthome* represents the *invention* of a name as either a proper name or as a noun.\textsuperscript{920} He says:

\textsuperscript{919} Ibid, p.346.
\textsuperscript{920} Ibid, p.347.
Symbolic nomination is therefore alone capable of making a hole in the Real, determining it as not-all, as “fragmented”. It is thus the concept that makes up for the sheer absence [carence] of the Name-of-the-Father...  

I am proposing that the sinthome, for those asexuals who do not, or cannot, access identification as a stabilising mechanism, is also an act of symbolic nomination, the invention of a name, as a way of making up for the absence of the signifier Phallus. Lacan’s phrase “to do without the Name-of-the-Father on condition of making use of it” means, for Harari, to choose a “good” form of heresy as an “unconditioned” Name-of-the-Father. In the context of the contemporary discourse of hegemonic sexuality, asexuality is considered by some sections of society as a form of sexual heresy. The creation of a sinthome amounts to a working with the Real in a subjective identification with the thing created. The sinthome, and the agency of symbolic nomination which produces it, stops the objet a residing in the Other. In the case of asexuality, as I have proposed, the sinthome allows for the objet a to reside in the Other but as the “nothing” which does not cause sexual desire and ensures that jouissance is no longer prescribed by the Other. The subject of the symptom does and does not want his or her symptom whereas the subject of the sinthome cannot live without it. I am proposing that asexuality can access a similar act of symbolic nomination, the invention of a name, which makes a not-all of the Real of sexual desire. In this way, it makes up for the “sheer absence” of the phallic signifier. Asexuality, through

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923 See the 2013 Huffington Post article entitled, LGBT+, Asexual Communities Clash Over Ace Inclusion. Accessed at https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/21/LGBTQ+-asexual_n_3385530.html
925 Ibid, p.347.
the creation of a *sinthome*, can represent a new way of organising enjoyment, one that is immune to the efficacy of the symbolic and which derives from a desire for no sexual desire.

7.6.1. The *Sinthome* repairs, the Symptom Damages:

In this new way of looking at the symptom, Lacan conceptualises it as providing a *jouissance* that differs markedly from that of the traditional symptom. As Moncayo (2017) puts it:

“*Sinthome* repairs and symptom damages or injures either in the form of pain or in the form of pleasure turned into pain.”

While the symptom represents a compromise of pleasure combined with suffering, the *sinthome*, by contrast, offers an addition of something new that stabilises the subject. The *sinthome* is not a symptom in the Freudian sense of a compromise formation that involves suffering for the subject. It is rather a suppletion, something that adds support to the subjective position. Verhaeghe and Declercq (2002) say that the *jouissance* provided by the *sinthome* is “no longer prescribed by the Other” and is instead “a *jouissance* of the particular drives of the subject.” Similar to the definition of Thurston above, they say “Lacan coins the *sinthome* to designate the idiosyncratic *jouissance* of a particular subject.”

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928 Ibid.
Verhaeghe and Declercq (2002) offer a view from a differential consideration of symptom and sinthome in the context of an analysand in psychoanalysis. A subject can choose either an identification with or a belief in his symptom.\textsuperscript{929} A belief in situates all jouissance on the side of the Other and involves the subject taking a stand against this in the fundamental phantasy. An identification with, however, sees the subject situate jouissance in the Real of the body. Therefore, the movement from belief in to identification with implies a change in the subject’s position vis-à-vis jouissance. This change means that there is no longer a jouissance prescribed by the Other.\textsuperscript{930} Also, identification with is not Symbolic nor Imaginary, but a Real identification\textsuperscript{931} and it implies that the subject has verified during analysis that the failure of the sexual relationship is not a matter of individual impotence, but of a structural impossibility. They say:

\begin{quote}
The analysis has made clear that the essence of the subject – son être du suject – is situated at the place of lack of the Other, the place where the Other does not provide us with an answer. The analysand has experienced the fact that the subject is “an answer of the Real” and not “an answer of the Other”.\textsuperscript{932}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{929} Ibid, p.9. (online pagination).
\textsuperscript{930} Ibid, p.10. (online pagination).
\textsuperscript{931} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{932} Ibid.
The *sinthome* is, therefore, an answer of the Real and in *Seminar XXIII*, Lacan refers on more than one occasion to its emergence from and relation to the Real.\(^{933}\) In analysis, the subject is unaware that they are fashioning an “answer of the Real” and this is consonant with Lacan’s comment in *Seminar XXIII*, regarding James Joyce, where he says: “Joyce didn’t know that he was fashioning the *sinthome*, I mean, that he was simulating it. He was oblivious to it...”\(^{934}\) What Lacan is highlighting is the possibility that a *sinthome* can be created, as in the case of Joyce, without undergoing psychoanalysis, and without consciously realising that a *sinthome* is being created. In the case of Joyce, he says it is achieved using *savoir-faire*, a know-how put to use in his role as artificer, as an inventor, creator and artist. A consequence of this is the new relation which the *sinthome* establishes between the subject and the Other. I am proposing that in asexuality a *sinthome* can offer the necessary support in order to make up for both the absence of sexual desire as a subjective experience and as the erotic desire of the Other. In short, in the absence of identification as a subjective support, the *sinthome* can make up for the foreclosure of the phallus.

For Lacan, the *sinthome* is created by the subject’s ego, as exemplified in the case of Joyce in relation to his writing. In *Seminar XXIII*, he states that the ego rectifies “the wanting relationship” in Joyce which does not tie the Imaginary in a Borromean fashion to the link between the Real and the unconscious.\(^{935}\) In terms of the *jouissance* which asexuality provides, i.e., one that is no longer prescribed by the Other, Moncayo (2008) makes an

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interesting point when he says: “Where the jouissance of the Other and the symptom was, the Other jouissance of the sinthome shall be.” Through the “artifice of writing”, Joyce ensures that the Borromean knot is restored. Therefore, in terms of “artifice”, the theoretical wager of this dissertation is that the asexual subject can also engage in a synthomic creation which provides an Other jouissance and which ensures that the Borromean knot is restored.

7.7.0. The Sinthome and its Relation to the Other:

Verhaeghe and Declercq (2002) are of the view that, if there is anything original or authentically present in terms of a subject, it has to be looked for in the Real of the body and the drive. They emphasise that this contrasts sharply with the subject as constituted through the process of alienation whereby the subject is dependent on the Other. The testimony of asexuals consistently points to a desire that ensures they are not dependent on, or responsive to, the sexual desire of an other. As one asexual puts it:

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I am simply uninterested in having sex, not repulsed, and if my partner insisted on having sex I would oblige willingly. It’s just not the emotional connection for me that it seems to be for most other people.\textsuperscript{939}

The emphasis in early Lacan was on the metaphor of the Name-of-the-Father whose function was to set the subject free from the desire of the (m)Other; in other words, to bring about a separation in the Symbolic. In his later work, and in Seminar XXIII particularly, he moves away from metaphor to search for a new signifier that will provide the same function, i.e., knot the three rings together.\textsuperscript{940} While it is not possible to speak for every asexual person, I am proposing that the individual asexuals mentioned above are hypothetical examples of those who have invented a \textit{sinthome} and used it to support their desire for no sexual desire. In this way, asexuality and its foreclosure of the imaginary and symbolic phallus can access support through the \textit{sinthome}. In fact, Lacan in Seminar XXIV focusses the goal of the subject on inventing something new. In particular, on inventing a signifier that can knot the three registers of the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary into a \textit{sinthomatic} sexual rapport.\textsuperscript{941} “Why would we not invent a new signifier? Our signifiers are always received. A signifier for example which would not have, like the Real, any kind of sense,” he says.\textsuperscript{942}


\textsuperscript{941} Ibid, p.15.

This “self-created fiction” or *sinthome* is the new signifier that is built “upon the lack of the Other” and as such is a creation “ex nihilo.” Verhaeghe and Declercq (2002) also refer to Lacan’s invitation to all subjects to follow the example of Joyce and create their own *sinthome* at this place of the lack of the Other. The aim of this creative act, in the traditional understanding, is to be able to function without the signifier of the Name-of-the-Father, that is, the Other. They also point out that if this new signifier, like the Real, has no sense (*sens*), then it cannot be exchanged with other subjects. This is a reference to Lacan’s point that the *sinthome* is particular to each subject. Yet this aspect of the singularity of the *sinthome* has another dimension to it. Morel (2006), echoing Gherovici’s point (see Section 7.5.2.), says the significance of the *sinthome* is that it combines the singularity of the individual with “the universality of a structure that belongs to all”. Morel says the *sinthome* is a structure at the point of intersection between the universal and singular. On the one hand, it is universal in that every speaking being responds to the trauma of the encounter with language by producing a symptom. On the other hand, it is singular because it depends on the contingency of that trauma in the context of each individual’s personal history.

Harari (1995) says that singularity is one of the “most radical features” of the *sinthome*. He believes this should be given its proper emphasis, since it is also constitutive of psychoanalysis, as a treatment, in terms of the respect given to it and the demand for it.

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944 Ibid, p.16. (online pagination).
Not only does a subject’s *sinthome* not “fit” another subject, but Lacan’s last seminars repeatedly return to the idea that synthomatic creation is highly individual and particular to each subject.\(^{948}\) When Harari (1995) comes to expand on his view of the singularity of the *sinthome*, coincidentally, he takes the example of the rejection of sexual advances in which a woman says “no”. He says: “Here we see a mode of singularity emerging: the “but not that” is a way of putting down a mark – “I don’t do that sort of thing; I’m not that kind of woman (or: one of those women).”\(^{949}\) Endorsing a point made earlier regarding the asexual’s approach to the demand of the Other, Harari points out that in his example the sexual demand invoked is manifestly related to the demand of the Other, to the extent that the “but not that” is essentially a “confrontation with demand”. He says that in the face of this dominance of the demand of the Other, the “but not that” is a reaction which signals what he terms “the beginning of an escape from the subjection to the neurotic symptom”. It is in this regard that the *sinthome*, through its singularity, entails a “break from these subjective positions”.\(^{950}\) In this way, the *sinthome* becomes the means by which the asexual subject can effectively escape from the neurosis which responding to the sexual demand of the Other might impose.

Furthermore, Harari’s example is not linked to any typical symptom of obsessional neurosis, hysteria, or phobia, but bears ultimately on an “ethical dimension”.\(^{951}\) It is worth pointing out that Morel (2019) extends this concept when she says that the *sinthome* has the advantage, as far as theory is concerned, of considering neurosis, psychosis and perversion

\(^{950}\) Ibid, pp.32-33.
\(^{951}\) Ibid, p.33.
from one common perspective. Harari, underlining Lacan’s successful avoidance of a pronouncement of psychosis in the case of Joyce, believes it would be wrong to consider Joyce’s writing to be a symptom of any kind. “The only person to suffer from a symptom for us, as analysts, is the one who says that he or she does,” he says.

The sinthome, therefore, is the specifically human act of artifice and, in terms of Lacanian theory, is a new advance on what had been previously proposed. As such, savoir-faire becomes the means by which an anchored, subjective position can be achieved without undergoing analysis. In Borromean terms, this is the invention or creation of a fourth ring to tie the other three rings together. One of the characteristics of the sinthome is that, at one and the same time, it cannot be situated in the unconscious yet the subject remains unconscious of it. In a similar way, I am proposing that the asexual who finds support through the creation of a sinthome also remains unconscious of it. The corollary of this might equally be true, i.e., that a non-sexually desiring subject without the support of either identification or the sinthome might encounter symptomatic disturbances. I will briefly consider this question in the next section.

7.7.1. The Buckle that Repairs the Knot:

954 Ibid, p.88.
956 Ibid, p.222.
There undoubtedly have been asexuals at earlier points in history who did not have access to identification as an asexual and so the question arises as to how they functioned in a stable manner. Engelman (2008) points out that due, in part, to the sexual revolutions of the 60s and 70s, “the world seems obsessed with sex”. As a result, she believes, asexuals felt extremely isolated from the rest of humanity and only recently have been able to find others like them and form communities over the Internet. She adds that there are many older asexual individuals who married and/or had sex out of social obligation, assuming there was “something wrong with them” because they didn’t enjoy it. For these individuals, lack of access to identification as asexual, and also to the creation of a sinthome, appears to have negatively affected their ability to function, if not in a stable manner, then certainly in an authentic manner. Since it is outside the scope of this dissertation, it remains an open question as to how many non-sexually active subjects have suffered distress as a result of either not being able to access asexuality as a sexual identity or not being able to create a sinthome to support them.

However, there are asexuals who have managed to function well without identifying as asexual, as mentioned above, and who, theoretically at least, may have accessed the sinthome. Not only were most of these people living in a pre-Internet age when the “obsession with sex”, as Engelman refers to it, was considerably less shrill, but it was also a time when abstaining from sexual practices could be seen as spiritually enlightened or, at the very least, something that remained private to the individual. The examples mentioned also share the common quality of having self-created and successful careers which, as I have

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958 Ibid.
proposed, have a *sinthomatic* quality to them. In other words, they were functioning well as a result of self-created *sinthomes* even though the *sinthome* in these cases was not “*asexuality*”. By contrast, the contemporary asexual lives in a time when the gaze of a sexualised society is probably more intense than it has ever been, hence the possibility of a *sinthome* which directly addresses this. I refer to the possibility of writing as a *sinthome*, in keeping with Lacan’s original insight into James Joyce, but a writing that is more directly focussed on asexuality, in keeping with Gherovici’s (2010) theory regarding transgender subjects. This type of writing can be found in the more personal and *sinthomatic* work of C J DeLuzio Chasin,959 Julie Sondra Decker,960 Andrew Hinderliter961 and Ela Przybylo,962 to mention just four. There are also numerous asexual-spectrum bloggers to be found writing about their experiences on the internet.

In summary, in a similar way to James Joyce whose art is his self-created *sinthome* which acts as the buckle that repairs the knot of Real, Symbolic and Imaginary, I have proposed that the *sinthome* can do the same for the asexual subject. Like Joyce, whose work is unique and non-transferrable to any other writer, so too is the manner in which some asexuals create a *sinthome* which allows them occupy the domain of asexuality. In the same way that Joyce creates a special relation to language and refashions it as *sinthome*,963 I am proposing

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that a sexuals can, through a variety of synthomatic creations, refashion a special relation to their sexuality. In the conclusion which follows, I will consider the implications of this chapter, and previous chapters, in the overall context of self-defined sexuality.
Chapter 8

Conclusion

8.0. Objective:

The objective of this chapter is to draw together the concepts and themes of previous chapters into a coherent theory of the aetiology of asexuality. This thesis has proposed a Freudian-Lacanian understanding which posits asexuality as a legitimate sexual orientation that derives from similar origins as those of sexually desiring subjects, i.e., I have defended the notion that asexuality is grounded not in biology or genetics but in shared, structural encounters with the Real of human experience. However, for a combination of the reasons which have been outlined, I have contended that a “choice” is made at the level of the unconscious whereby the asexual subject chooses a desire for no sexual desire in a manner that does not include, or lead to, subjective distress.

8.1.0. Asexuality and Freudian Theory:
The challenge of seeking an aetiology of asexuality using Freudian theory is that the latter posits that there may well be “nothing of considerable importance that can occur in the organism without contributing some component to the excitation of the sexual instinct (drive)”\textsuperscript{964}. From this perspective there appears to be no place given to the absence of libido as the ubiquitous energy of the sexual instinct (drive). It, therefore, became necessary to theorise the presence of libido for the asexual subject and to hypothesise that satisfaction of this libido must be achieved in a hitherto unrecognised manner.

Freudian theory, as shown in Chapters 3 and 4, sees the sexual instinct (drive) as problematic\textsuperscript{965} and points to the unsettling quality of libido as a central aspect of human sexuality.\textsuperscript{966} So much so, human civilisation, in several of Freud’s formulations, is depicted as being built on the suppression of the sexual drive.\textsuperscript{967} The relevance of this thematic is that it emphasises the contrariety which the human sexual drive represents, i.e., it is disruptive and confusing for the subject, even before the effects of morality or societal constraints are felt.\textsuperscript{968} As Copjec (2016) puts it, for Freud, sex manifested itself in negative phenomena such as lapses, slips of the tongue and so on, and that this signalled a “discontinuity in the causal chain” and represented “unexpected dislocations in linearity”.\textsuperscript{969} This thematic of disruption challenges the implicit assumption of sexuality as being solely concerned with the

pleasurable expression of sexual impulses. For Freud, in contrast, the sexual drives might also need to be defended against and, to this end, there are “motive forces”\(^\text{970}\) within each subject that work against the drives being carried through to satisfaction in an unmodified form. He says that these “vicissitudes” of the drives can be considered methods of defence [emphasis in original].\(^\text{971}\) This, I have proposed, supports my contention that the asexual position is arrived at via an unconscious defence against the sexual drives.

Another important concept, within Freudian theory, with which to approach an understanding of asexuality, is that there is no natural link between the sexual drive and its satisfying object, i.e., the sexual drive is independent of its object. Nor is the sexual drive’s origin likely to be due to the object’s “attractions”, as Freud comments.\(^\text{972}\) The object of the drive, in other words, is not important, other than the fact that some object is necessary. In non-psychoanalytic theorising of asexuality, the absence of an object is considered as a concrete absence, one which is written in to asexuality’s definition of “no sexual attraction” for another person or thing. The Freudian view that there must be an object, however, is of distinct importance when considering asexuality. The object of asexuality, I have proposed, is not only a desexualised object but also a non-specular one. This, in turn, allows for a theory of asexuality that has two central tenets: that asexuality is not without an object and, secondly, that it is free from the edict of a manifestly sexual object against which the presence or absence of a sexual drive is assessed.

\(^{971}\) Ibid, p.127.
8.1.1. Asexuality and Infantile Sexuality:

Freudian theory offers a perspective that sees the child’s relation to the parents as the most important infantile experience.\textsuperscript{973} Freud explains that the “innumerable peculiarities of the erotic life of human beings” and even the “compulsive character” of falling in love are unintelligible unless seen as the “residual effects of childhood”.\textsuperscript{974} He is also consistently pointing to the overwhelming nature of the sexual drives for the infant. For Freud, the most abundant sources of internal excitation are the sexual drives which can have a traumatic effect due to the unpreparedness of the infant for these internal events.\textsuperscript{975} Preparedness for the anxiety which these drives evoke is, he believes, the last line of defence against the former. In early infantile traumas, however, the subject is, by definition, \textit{unprepared} and this may be a decisive factor in determining the outcome.\textsuperscript{976} Although Freud was theorising in the context of sexually desiring subjects, these aspects of his theory are, I propose, key to understanding asexuality.

In one of the few instances where Freud does use the word asexual he gives the example whereby “almost all infantile sexual activities” are forbidden so that an ideal is set up

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{973} Ibid, p. 228.
  \item \textsuperscript{974} Ibid, p.229.
  \item \textsuperscript{975} Freud, S. (1920g), \textit{Beyond the Pleasure Principle}, Standard Edition XVIII, p.34.
  \item \textsuperscript{976} Ibid, pp.31-32.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
making the life of the child asexual.\textsuperscript{977} He says that over time people really believed the life of children was asexual and, following this, science pronounced it as a doctrine.\textsuperscript{978} For Freud, as stated in Chapter 3, there is no such thing as an asexual childhood because the period up to the age of five or six is the first phase of infantile sexuality which is forgotten as a result of “the veil of amnesia”.\textsuperscript{979} This latter concept, for asexuality, allows for a greater understanding of the subjective experience of “being born with it”.\textsuperscript{980} For Freud, the reason for forgetting these infantile experiences is that they relate, in particular, to the Oedipal relationship of the child with its parents, which needs to be repressed. Infantile amnesia erases any memory of early sexuality and so, as with heterosexuality and homosexuality, it appears as if the subject is born with it. Nevertheless, as I have shown in previous chapters, the early infantile experience of asexuels is qualitatively different in some respects to that of sexual subjects.

Within Freud’s work, one apparent point of commonality between sexual and asexual subjects emerges when he includes an asexual phase in all human sexual development. This period, we know, is when the Oedipus complex comes to an end and there is a diversion of libido away from sexual aims to new non-sexual aims through a process of sublimation. Freud calls this the period of sexual latency of childhood\textsuperscript{981} where libidinal trends

\textsuperscript{978} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{979} Ibid.
associated with the Oedipus complex are in part “deseتخلیش and sublimated... and in part inhibited in their aim and changed into impulses of affection”. During latency, sexual impulses still exist even though they cannot be used because the reproductive functions of the sexual drive have been deferred. The latency period, therefore, is a time when the sex drive is still active and this, I have proposed, offers a Freudian template on which asexuality can be modelled: an apparent absence of sexual desire behind which lies concealed an active libido.

The main point of difference between asexuality and an extended, or permanent, latency period is that for sexually desiring subjects, latency is inaugurated by a repression which brings the Oedipus complex to an end. For asexuals, I have proposed that repression at the phallic stage is not the mechanism which ensures the desexualisation of the libidinal trends but that an earlier foreclosure of the Imaginary phallus is. I have also proposed that, in contrast, the libidinal trends directed towards the Other within asexuality are desexualised, not at the end of Oedipal stage when latency begins, but during the pre-Oedipal phase. This proposal implies that the passage of the asexual subject through not only the latency period but also the preceding stages of infantile sexuality is also qualitatively different to that of the sexually desiring subject. For the asexual, sexual desire for the desire of the Other is not sublimated away from achieving sexual aims but is, instead, foreclosed.

In sum, in Freudian theory, there are two aspects which are of particular relevance to asexuality: libido can find a way towards satisfaction which differs from normative

expectations\textsuperscript{983} and, secondly, it can be difficult to see that libidinal satisfaction is being derived by the subject because of this.\textsuperscript{984} I have proposed that this supports my theory that the asexual subject is deriving a satisfaction which has not been considered to date.

\textbf{8.2. The Limits of Freudian Theory:}

There are, however, points at which Freudian theory reaches a limit in terms of providing the fullest possible understanding of asexuality. I do not believe, for example, that the concept of repression adequately explains the phenomenon of asexuality. In repression, there is a psychical action from the conscious mind to keep ideas repressed but, equally, there is an attraction emanating from the repressed idea that extends to “everything with which it can establish a connection”.\textsuperscript{985} In other words, the repressed idea continues to make its presence felt. Also, repression does not merely happen once and therefore brings about a permanent result.\textsuperscript{986} Instead, it demands a persistent expenditure of energy. This is because a key feature of repression is that the repressed continues to return in the form of “substitute formations and symptoms”.\textsuperscript{987}

In asexuality, there is quite obviously a withdrawal of the cathexis of libido\textsuperscript{988} which is characteristic of repression, but the repressed does not return in the form of symptoms that

\textsuperscript{983} Freud, S. (1916-1917), \textit{Op. Cit.}, p.365. Freud is here talking about the “strange” libidinal satisfaction to be found in symptoms.
\textsuperscript{984} Ibid, pp.366-367.
\textsuperscript{986} Ibid, p.151.
\textsuperscript{987} Ibid, p.154.
\textsuperscript{988} Ibid, p.155.
might cause subjective distress. Freud also argues that frustration must affect the mode of satisfaction which “alone the subject desires, of which alone he [sic] is capable”. In other words, frustration only emerges when it blocks a path to satisfaction which is desired in the first place. The experience of asexuality is that, since there is no sexual satisfaction being desired in the first place, there is no path to sexual satisfaction being blocked. This has led me to conclude that repression is not a satisfactory explanation of the operative cause of asexuality.

In terms of regression, both of the types that Freud distinguishes also fail to adequately explain asexuality. The classical understanding is that if the libido is pushed back to an earlier stage or, secondly, if the genital organisation is repressed, neurosis ensues and its symptoms are a substitute for frustrated satisfaction. On this basis, regression does not apply to asexuality because with the first type there would be signs of regressed infantile sexuality and there are none. The second type would see a return of the repressed genital organisation in the form of symptoms of which, again, there are none. I have proposed that, rather than a regression, asexuality represents an egression whereby an early pre-Oedipal experience of unpleasure is carried forward by the subject rather than one which, post-Oedipally, regresses the subject back.

Sublimation, too, would appear to offer prima facie material for an explanation of asexuality. It is the ability to displace or find a substitute for the sexual drive in order to avoid or reduce frustration. In particular, Freud points to a placing of social aims higher than

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990 Ibid, p.342.
sexual ones “which are at bottom self-interested”. Sublimation is an example of how sexual trends are attached to non-sexual pursuits and offers an explanation as to how sexual drives can change their object and, most importantly from an asexual perspective, can be transformed into non-sexual satisfactions.

However, as outlined in Chapter 3, Freud says that with sublimation “there is a limit to the amount of unsatisfied libido that human beings on the average can put up with”. Also, libido itself “makes a person’s satisfaction depend on the attainment of only a very small number of aims and objects”. As well as that, any imperfect development of the libido leaves behind numerous fixations to early phases and to objects which are mostly incapable of real satisfaction. Asexuals appear to be unperturbed by their non-sexual orientation, suggesting that the motive force necessary for sublimation is missing. Sublimation also presumes the existence of a sexual trend which must attach to a non-sexual one and, as I have argued, asexuality does not appear to have a pre-existing sexual trend with either a manifest sexual object or a sexual aim. Nevertheless, as stated, the Freudian view is that behind non-sensual or affectionate trends lie originally sexual aims. An “affectionate feeling” is, for Freud, the “successor to a completely ‘sensual’ object-tie”. It is for this reason that I have proposed that asexual affection, as seen in romantic asexual relationships, is underpinned by an active libido aimed at a particular desexualised sexual object in a way that may not include repression or sublimation.

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991 ibid
993 Ibid.
994 Freud, S. (1920g), Op. Cit., p.34.
I have also contended that the answer to asexuality is not to be found in the Freudian understanding of hysteria. Hysterics show a number of sex-averse characteristics such as a degree of sexual repression in excess of what Freud calls the “normal quantity”, an intensification of the resistance against the sexual instinct (drive) and an instinctive aversion “to any intellectual consideration of sexual problems”.\textsuperscript{995} This is a set of characteristics that asexuality shares but the point at which asexuality differs from Freudian hysteria is the paradoxical one of the predominance of the sexual instinct (drive). Hysteria is characterised by a simultaneous “exaggerated sexual craving and excessive aversion to sexuality”.\textsuperscript{996} Asexuality does not match these simultaneous criteria and, on this basis, it represents something distinct from the symptomatology of hysteria.

8.3. Asexuality and Lacanian Theory:

This thesis has sought to employ Lacanian theory in order to advance beyond the limits of Freudian theory. In particular, it has pointed to an important concept, not found in Freudian theory, which is a mechanism whereby the breast as object is “annulled as symbolic”\textsuperscript{997} by the infant in order to reverse the relation of dependence.\textsuperscript{998} This is a theoretical account of how the infant can experience dependence on the Other as a negative and seek to reverse its position in relation to it. As outlined in Chapter 5, it offers a point of difference to concepts such as repression, regression and sublimation where the cause of lack of sexual

\textsuperscript{995} Freud, S. (1905d), \textit{Op Cit.}, p.164.
\textsuperscript{996} Ibid, p.165.
\textsuperscript{998} Ibid, p.214.
desire is found in an Oedipally-activated refusal of, or aversion to, sexual desire. Instead, Lacan’s concept of a reversal of dependence posits an originary pre-Oedipal experience of the omnipotent desire of the Other as unpleasurable, manifesting in the first oral activity of feeding. This activity takes on an eroticised function on the plane of desire which is “organised” in the symbolic order and where a sexual relation becomes substituted for a feeding relation. This is the primary infantile sexual experience from which I have proposed the asexual orientation originates.

The reversal of the relation of dependence on the mother, for Lacan, can be seen in anorexia. He describes this as an eating of “nothing” which is a “something” that exists on the symbolic plane. In anorexia, the child uses “absence savoured as such” to make the mother depend on him rather than him depend on the mother, thereby reversing the relation of dependence. He says the drive to reverse the relation of dependence is due to a realisation for the child that this real being as mother is omnipotent, i.e., the being on whom “absolutely and without recourse, the gift or non-gift depends”. I have proposed that this concept of a reversal of dependence is equally applicable to the formation of the asexual subject by showing, in Chapter 7, that Lacan broadens its applicability beyond anorexia. In applying this psychical mechanism to asexuality, I have shown that this reversal does not remain fixated on the oral drive as in anorexia but egresses or moves forward

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999 Ibid, p.211.
1002 Ibid.
1003 Ibid.
1004 Ibid, p.212.
through subsequent psychosexual stages. I have also proposed that this infantile experience at the oral stage lays the foundation upon which, post-Oedipally, the Symbolic phallus as the sexualised signifier *par excellence* is foreclosed by the asexual.

As examined in Chapter 6, psychoanalytic theory emphasises that libido is present irrespective of the conscious experience of the subject and that the sexual drive is a permanence within the subject’s unconscious. I have proposed that, due to this theorised reversal of dependence, asexuality is *libidinally* directed to experience a void in terms of sexual excitation because this is the very satisfaction which asexuality seeks and derives. As stated in the previous paragraph, Lacan himself moves the concept of reversal beyond anorexia when he speaks about a desire for nothing in the “fresh brains” case of the would-be plagiarist. It is not that the patient does not steal anything, it is that he steals *nothing*. For Lacan, the absence *is* the desire, the anorexia of the mental realm as he refers to it, the actual desire on which the idea lives. This has provided a foundation on which I have theorised an aetiology of asexuality which, fundamentally, includes a reversal of the relation of dependence on the first Other by the infant. A central proposal of this dissertation is that this reversal, in turn, brings about a pivotal reversal in the child’s taking up of its initial sexual position in its first relationship with the mother, i.e., in *not* taking up

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the position of the Imaginary phallus. Since this is a foundational concept for this thesis, I will elaborate on it more fully in the following sections.

8.4. Asexuality and the Imaginary Phallus:

For Lacan, as stated, the child must become the Imaginary phallus in order to become what it is the mother desires. This is how the first identification begins and so if the mother’s desire is for the phallus, then the child wants to be that for her.1008 The generally understood implication of this statement is that this is so for all subjects. Yet, as I have pointed out, Lacan’s teaching in Seminar IV suggests that becoming the Imaginary phallus for the mother is not inevitable and can even be rejected. Indeed, in Seminar VI he identifies a “moment” when this reversal might conceivably take place and it is when the child reaches an awareness that the breast is the possession of the mother, not of the child.1009 This is the moment of understanding the possibility of being deprived of the desired object. Lacan equates this time with the onset of the Kleinian depressive position, “when the mother as totality” is realised.1010

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1010 Ibid.
The traumatic inflection associated with the infantile sexual Real as represented by the first Other transfigures the dyadic foundations of the dialectic of need, demand and desire. I have proposed that for the asexual it represents an unconscious tendency, starting in the oral phase and repeating through subsequent psychosexual phases, which will ultimately orient the asexual position towards an annulment through the mechanism of foreclosure of the phallic signifier. If this proposition holds, then asexual libidinal desire is potentially delimited from its very beginning by the elision of the libidinal element of the symbolic part objects that come to represent the relation between the subject and the first Other. For Lacan, anorexia is the refusal of the breast as the symbolic object of the subject-Other dialectic which appears, as he says clearly, under the sign of the nothing.\textsuperscript{1011} He identifies the mechanism which brings this refusal about when he says that it is with regard to the “object annulled as symbolic” that the child puts his dependency on the mother in check by nourishing himself on nothing.\textsuperscript{1012} He speaks in \textit{Seminar IV} about the Freudian concept of \textit{Versagung} in terms of the child crushing what is disappointing in the Symbolic. By disappointing, I interpret him to mean not just that the demand for love,\textsuperscript{1013} implicit in the demand for the satisfaction of need, can never be completely satisfied, but that it also includes the child’s experience of helplessness in the face of mother’s omnipotence in this regard.

I have proposed that this is an unconscious, prototypical annulment of the eroticisation of the first part-object which can be applied to asexuality. It is \textit{Versagung}, as Lacan has

\textsuperscript{1012} Ibid.
referred to it, as “the concept of annulation, in the sense that one speaks of annulling a
 treaty or of a retreat from an engagement”. As stated, Laplanche and Pontalis (1973)
 point out that Versagung includes an active sense and they define the word as a “condition
 of the subject who is denied, or who denies himself, the satisfaction of an
 instinctual demand” [emphasis added]. Nor, they say, does Versagung categorically
 prescribe “who does the refusing” [emphasis in original]. I have proposed that it is
 annulment by the child which brings about the reversal of the relation of dependence on
 the Other, a concept central to asexuality. In anorexia, it is the libidinal relation to the breast
 as symbolic object which is the focus of this reversal. By contrast, in asexuality I have
 proposed that, although it begins with the breast as oral object, it does not fixate on the
 oral object and, instead, carries on through anal and phallic phases by a process which I will
describe in the next paragraph.

In Seminar VI, Lacan elaborates on how Versagung might transmit through oral, anal and
 phallic phases. What he terms a “code of demand”, or an “unconscious vocabulary”,
 passes through relationships to the symbolic part objects via food, excrement and so on. I
 have proposed that the stamp of renunciation or annulment of the object as symbolic
 carries through from the first relation to the breast as object in the dialectic of substitution.
 Rather than repression or regression, the aetiology of asexuality involves an egression or
 movement forward from oral to subsequent phases. When it comes to the phallic phase,

1016 Ibid.
Lacan says that it is by a “kind of imprint, or prolongation” of the relation to demand established in the oral and anal relationships that “symptomatic incidences” come to appear in a disguised fashion \textit{via} the signifier phallus.\textsuperscript{1019} Therefore, beginning with the oral stage, \textit{Versagung} as annulment is capable of bringing about an unconscious and prototypical nullification of other-directed eroticisation, in line with Lacan’s theorising. As a result of the “prolongation” of this “code of demand” passing through oral, anal and into the phallic phase, the Symbolic phallus can emerge annulled in order to protect the subject from the first Other’s desire which is experienced as omnipotence. This, as I have proposed, can also keep the subject protected from the desire of subsequent others. The phallus as an annulled signifier becomes variously stripped of some or all of its phallicised signifying effects but continues to operate as an essential space holder in the signifying chain analogously to how zero operates in mathematics.

8.5. Asexuality as Non-Psychotic Foreclosure:

In proposing that asexuality’s inaugural moment is the “choice” not to take up the position of Imaginary phallus, I have made use of the term “annulment”, taken from Lacan’s \textit{Seminar IV}, to explain the mechanism that brings this about. But, as I have also pointed out, the unconditional nature of the unconscious elision of sexual desire in asexuality, even among asexuals who engage sexually with a partner, suggests that something irrevocable is taking

\textsuperscript{1019} Ibid, pp. 8-9.
place. On this basis, I have proposed that it is necessary to consider that the term foreclosure rather than annulment may be more appropriate to describe the mechanism for this.

As noted in Chapter 7, when the term “foreclosure” is introduced into a Lacanian consideration of the aetiology of asexuality it raises the question of psychosis. I have argued that the term “foreclosure” as applied to asexuality does not require that the latter should be assigned a psychotic structure. In psychotic foreclosure, “whatever is refused in the symbolic order”, as the Name-of-the-Father is, then “reappears in the real”, in the form of paranoia or psychotic hallucination because of the Name-of-the-Father’s role in anchoring meaning for the subject.1020 In asexuality, there is no return in the Real of psychotic symptoms which, I have proposed, supports the concept of a non-psychotic foreclosure. Equally, asexuality is not associated with any forms of language disturbance which foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father opens up in terms of the subject’s initial introduction to fundamental signifiers.1021 This would have significant implications for the emergence of psychosis which, again, is not evident in asexuality.

I have proposed that the Name-of-the-Father, as agent of castration and separation, is experienced and acknowledged in the case of asexuality, no matter how “slight” it happens to be.1022 This theorising requires that while the Imaginary phallus and, by extension the Symbolic phallus, is foreclosed, the Name of the Father is not, so that a separation exists

between the two. In Lacan’s theorising, particularly in *On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis*, he clearly places the two foreclosures as linked and taking place at the same time. However, I have proposed that in asexuality the Name-of-the-Father is *not* foreclosed because the subject has already brought about a foreclosure of the Imaginary phallus, effectively a pre-Oedipal form of separation from the mother. Therefore, the motive force necessary to reject this “primordial signifier into the outer shadows”,\(^{1023}\) through foreclosure, is absent in asexuality. The Name-of-the-Father is *not* foreclosed while the Phallus *is* foreclosed and I included a case study from Morel (2019) in support of this proposition.

I have also proposed that the foreclosure of the Imaginary phallus is the psychical mechanism which inaugurates separation in the form of a reversal in the relation of dependence on the mother and which does not produce psychosis. If, as Lacan suggests, the Name-of-the-Father is something “slight”\(^ {1024}\) and if, as Harari (1995) suggests, it is a precarious signifier which is structurally deficient and “cannot account with sufficient rigor for the status of foreclosure,”\(^ {1025}\) then this allows for the possibility of other, non-psychotic forms of foreclosure.\(^ {1026}\) This permits asexuality to potentially represent an alternative foreclosure, i.e., a foreclosure of the Imaginary phallus, that has not, so far, been considered within Lacanian theory. It also permits the Name-of-the-Father, as structuring agent of the child’s desire, to function. This theorised foreclosure of the Imaginary phallus in asexuality is


\(^{1026}\) Ibid, p.344.
different to the position of perversion which, Lacan says, sees the child’s relationship to the mother “constituted” by its “dependence on her love”. In identifying with the Imaginary phallus in perversion, or indeed becoming the Imaginary phallus in neurosis, Lacan is saying that there is a “phallocentrism produced by this dialectic” between mother and child which is due to an “intrusion” of the phallic signifier into the child’s psyche. I have proposed that the asexual neither identifies with nor becomes the Imaginary phallus. Instead the latter is foreclosed as the child seeks to defend itself from the omnipotent desire of the first Other. It follows from this line of reasoning that, if the Imaginary phallus is foreclosed, there is little, if indeed any, intrusion of the phallic signifier into the child’s psyche. In Lacan’s view, the Imaginary phallus is the “pivotal point in the symbolic process” for both sexes. On this basis, I have proposed that a foreclosed Imaginary phallus is, by extension, going to bring about a foreclosure of the Symbolic phallus so that desire as the desire of the Other is voided of both sexual content and sexual meaning.

8.6.0. Asexuality and the Sinthome:

I then proposed that asexuals who do not avail of identification for support can have access to the sinthome. The sinthome is a conceptual device elaborated in Lacan’s later teaching whereby a subject-specific act of artifice creates a fourth ring that ties the Borromean knot.

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1028 Ibid, p.463 (554).
of Real, Symbolic and Imaginary together.\textsuperscript{1030} This, I have also proposed, allows asexuality, unlike anorexia, to participate in a productive and creative engagement with desire. The emphasis in early Lacan was on the metaphor of the Name-of-the-Father whose function, \textit{inter alia}, was to set the subject free from the desire of the mother, or bring about a separation from her in the Symbolic. In his later work, and in \textit{Seminar XXIII} particularly, he moves away from metaphor to search for a new signifier that will provide the same function, i.e., to knot the three rings together.\textsuperscript{1031} This “self-created fiction” or \textit{sinthome} is the new signifier that is built “upon the lack of the Other” and as such is “a \textit{creation ex nihilo}”.\textsuperscript{1032} I have proposed that the \textit{sinthome} in asexuality is also built upon the lack/omnipotent desire of the first Other. As stated in previous chapters, the desire of the mother is experienced as an omnipotence which engenders psychical helplessness and is, therefore, traumatic. In this sense, just as the desire of the first Other is experienced as overwhelming, it is correlative to the experience of the Other’s lack as unfillable and, indeed, unfathomable. As stated in the previous chapter, Lacan’s invitation is to all subjects to follow the example of James Joyce and create their own \textit{sinthome} at this place of the lack of the Other. In the traditional psychoanalytic understanding, the aim of this creative act is to be able to function without the signifier of the Name-of-the-Father, that is, the Other.\textsuperscript{1033}

However, the asexual subject is not making up for the absence of the Name-of-the-Father but for the absence of the phallic signifier. I have proposed that the \textit{sinthome} in asexuality

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{1032} Ibid, p.11, online pagination.
\textsuperscript{1033} Ibid, p.16, online pagination.
\end{flushleft}
allows the subject to function without the Phallus as signifier. Morel (2019) believes the Lacanian concept of the *sinthome* frees the subject from any obligation to "become inscribed in the phallic function in order to subsume a relation to sex and sexuation".  

1034 In asexuality, the effects of the phallic signifier are absent because the Imaginary phallus has been foreclosed by the child. The lack of the mother, manifest through her desire, has been experienced as overwhelming and the child has unconsciously chosen not to become the Imaginary phallus which might fill that lack. In this regard, Harari (1995) points out that the *sinthome* becomes the means by which the subject effectively escapes from the neurosis which responding to the sexual demand the Other might impose.  

1035 The *sinthome* is an act of artifice and, as such, *savoir-faire* becomes the means by which it can be achieved.

1036 Lacan is clear that in the case of James Joyce the latter is unconscious of the fact that he is creating the *sinthome*.  

1037 In a similar way, I have proposed that the asexual who might need the support of, or the self-identified asexual who might need the additional support of, the creation of a *sinthome*, can do so and can, equally, remain unconscious of it.

8.6.1. The Absence of Subjective Distress:

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I have also proposed that for asexuality, the objet a as nothing, as the cause of desire for no desire, is central to the phantasy which supports the foreclosed sexual desire in the subject. I have further proposed that the foreclosure of the Imaginary phallus and, by extension, the Symbolic phallus is the foreclosure of sexual desire. This foreclosure does not, however, disrupt the subject’s relation to language, or meaning, as can be found in the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father. The sinthome compensates for the foreclosed signifier Phallus and allows the subject to function. The absence of subjective distress in asexuality is, in turn, due to the comparatively “tranquil”\textsuperscript{1038} effect of the sinthome in its function of knotting the three registers of Real, Symbolic and Imaginary together. The sinthome is not a metaphor, not a substitution, nor indeed a sublimation, but rather a “making up for” as suppletion. It is an additional signifier that compensates in asexuality for the foreclosed signifier Phallus which does not now create phallicised or sexualised meaning effects.

The objet a as “nothing” in asexuality maintains a void whereby no substitute object, or semblant, takes up this position other than the object as void. In this sense, the asexual fundamental phantasy could be said to represent a similar position to the traversing of the fundamental phantasy which is the term used to describe the completion of psychoanalysis as treatment. As Neill (2014 [2011]) puts it, traversing the fundamental phantasy involves the subject assuming a position of responsibility for their phantasy. He says it is an acceptance of one’s desire for what that desire is, accepting it as being bound to the desire of the Other and “not attaching oneself to the illusory dream of attaining lost jouissance

\begin{footnote}
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‘elsewhere’” through the “perpetual sliding of objet petit a”. 1039 In keeping with the theory as it applies to sexually desiring subjects, he goes on to say that, insofar as objet a has no content and is a “no-thing” it must be marked by “some” content, even if whatever is chosen is never “it”.1040 I am proposing that the asexual puts “nothing” in the place of objet a, thus assuming responsibility for their desire for what it is and not attaching to the illusory dream of attaining jouissance through metonymically shifting objets a. This, paradoxically, achieves the objective of protecting the subject from ever attaining the object of phantasy and the trauma which would ensue from this.

In terms of an act of nomination, the creation of the sinthome is a way of working with the Real in a subjective identification with the thing created. The sinthome, and the agency of symbolic nomination which produces it, alters the manner in which the objet a resides in the Other. In the case of asexuality, as I have proposed, the sinthome allows for the objet a to reside in the Other as the “nothing” which does not cause sexual desire. As an act of symbolic nomination, or the invention of a name, it makes a not-all of the Real of sexual desire. In this way it makes up for the “sheer absence”1041 of the phallic signifier and so allows the asexual subject to desire in a manner that does not include sexual desire and without the experience of subjective distress.

1040 Ibid,
8.7. Asexuality and “Delusional Normalism”:

In this thesis, I have proposed a model of asexuality which adheres to Lacan’s view of human sexuality as something which does not “satisfy the delusional normalism of the genital relation”. The asexual subject, through a hypothesised reversal of the relation of dependence at the oral stage and a consequent foreclosure of the Imaginary phallus, has subjectified lack. This, I am proposing, is the mechanism which shapes the asexual orientation. The desire to become the Imaginary phallus for the mother is reversed and so the lack of the mother, communicated in her desire which is experienced as traumatic for the child, is in this way subjectified by the child. Gherovici (2017) says that the way subjects relate to lack determines the way they relate to their “sexual bodies”, which is what psychoanalysis calls castration. She says the relation to lack will provide the foundation for “diverse structures of desire” whether those structures are “neurotic, perverse, fetishistic or homosexual”. I have proposed that asexuality is one further possibility that can manifest within these diverse structures of desire.

Given that this dissertation also proposes that the Phallus does not have the same use-function for asexual subjects as it does for sexual subjects, it is interesting to note how Gherovici (2017) posits the sinthome as that which allows Lacanian theorising to move beyond the Phallus. She describes the latter, variously, as that which is an “obstacle” and

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1044 ibid
what she believes to be a “failed answer to the conundrum of sexual difference”\textsuperscript{1046} as well as a “defective tool to navigate the Real”.\textsuperscript{1047} Although her focus is on transsexuals, I propose that some of her comments are equally applicable to asexuality. Asexuals, like transsexuals, could be said to have a “complex relationship” to their bodies, evidenced in their very different relation to sexual desire and in the particular way they derive jouissance. Extending the concept of a creative sinthome, she says a “push-towards-writing” is evident in transsexual experience as a way in which “the body finds its anchor in the sea of language”.\textsuperscript{1048} While not in any way comparable to the singular writings of James Joyce, nevertheless I have proposed in the previous chapter that a similar “push-towards-writing” can be seen in the work of asexual writers such as C J DeLuzio Chasin,\textsuperscript{1049} Julie Sondra Decker,\textsuperscript{1050} Andrew Hinderliter\textsuperscript{1051} and Ela Przybylo,\textsuperscript{1052} as well as in numerous asexual-spectrum bloggers writing about their experiences on the internet.

The sinthome allows for a creation in the Symbolic, out of language, \textit{ex nihilo}, which in turn allows the subject to deal with the “unbalance” of the “impossible relation between the sexes”.\textsuperscript{1053} The asexual experience can be free of subjective distress because a contemporary identification is now available to support it but also because a sinthome can

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\textsuperscript{1046} Ibid, p.378.
\textsuperscript{1047} Ibid, p.374.
\textsuperscript{1048} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1051} Hinderliter, A. (2009), \textit{Asexuality: The History of a Definition}, Accessed at \url{http://asexystuff.blogspot.com/search/label/definition} Online pagination, online pagination, pp. 11-12.
be created which allows for a relation to sexual difference which does not rely on the
Phallus. If it does not rely on the Phallus, then it follows that it does not rely on a
phallicisation or sexualisation of the relation within and between the sexes. This sex-free
domain, or beyond of sexuality, is strikingly similar to the one on which some contemporary
writers on homosexuality have been focussing. Dean (2000) says that homosexuality should
try to situate itself in a place that is “outside – or apart from – genitality”. Arguing for the
addition of an aesthetic practice to situate alongside an erotic practice, he says that far from
a “poor substitute for sex, art may represent a more inventive mode of approaching
jouissance”. He says: “Beyond sexuality lie the myriad possibilities of aesthetics.”

Needless to say, the co-option of art as a support for the impossibility of sex and sexual
difference evokes Lacan’s concept of the sinthome. Bersani (2010) goes further in terms of
considering an alternative view of sex. In the opening lines of his essay on homosexuality, he
says: “There is a big secret about sex: most people don’t like it.” He goes on to reference
the “immense body of contemporary discourse” that argues for a radical revision of thinking
around “the body’s capacity for pleasure”. In an earlier work, The Culture of Redemption,
Bersani (1990), writing on Freud’s theories of narcissism and sublimation, refers to what he
calls “the peculiar idea of a sexuality independent of sex”, a topic which has been the
focus of this dissertation.

1056 He points to “a certain refusal” of phallocentric sex to be found in the writings of Michel Foucault and
Jeffrey Weeks, and the more direct “refusal of sex” to be found in the work of Andrea Dworkin and Catharine
8.8. Further Research:

The theoretical position being proposed in this dissertation will benefit from further research into many of the propositions I have put forward. This work is not intended to be a closed or final position with regard to this topic. Rather, I am hopeful that my hypotheses can encourage further avenues for research, particularly among psychoanalytic theorists. One area I would suggest for further research is asexuality’s position with regard to sexual difference, or “sexuation”, to use the Lacanian term. I have proposed that the asexual position begins in both men and women with a pre-Oedipal foreclosure of the Imaginary phallus which, in turn, has consequences for the Symbolic phallus. Lacanian theory posits that gendered sexual difference or sexuation is arrived at due to a particular mode of jouissance the subject chooses in relation to the Symbolic phallus and the objet a, as outlined in Lacan’s *Formulae of Sexuation*. However, I have proposed that as a result of foreclosure of the Imaginary phallus the asexual subject functions without the phallic signifier.

The aetiology of asexuality as I have proposed it, therefore, is based on a foreclosure for both male and female subjects. For sexually desiring subjects, Fink (1995) indicates that foreclosure is also to be found on both the woman and the man’s side of Lacan’s *Formulae*. On the man side, he says the primal father in the position of exception, written as $\exists \phi x$, does not exist but rather ex-sists, by which he means that the phallic function is not simply negated but is foreclosed. He makes a related argument regarding “ex-sistence” in

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of women. Lacan’s Feminine jouissance or Other jouissance is non-phallic and is to be found in the place of the Not-All, written as \( \forall x \not\in \phi x \), on the woman’s side of the Formulae, as outlined in Chapter 6. He says this latter position, similarly, does not “exist” but rather “exists” as a “radical alterity” in relation to the symbolic order and is “akin to that of a logical exception” similar to that found on the man’s side.\(^{1060}\) This gives rise to the question: can an asexual position be found on both sides of the Formulae, in the place of exception on the man side and in that of the Not-All on the woman’s side, which derives from the foreclosure of the phallus but not of the Name-of-the-Father?

This, in turn, opens onto the related issue regarding the phallus as signifier of sexual difference which has been mentioned above and which is being questioned by some psychoanalytic theorists. If, as I have proposed, the asexual can function without the signifier phallus, what does this imply for the latter’s hegemonic role as signifier of sexual difference? As stated, Morel (2019) says that Lacan’s invention of the sinthome, which is a concept that “crows” the Name-of-the-Father,\(^{1061}\) means that there is no longer any obligation for the subject to “become inscribed in the phallic function” in order to take up a position in relation to sex or sexuation.\(^{1062}\) She says: “Sexual difference, which since Freud’s time has been measured using the yardstick of the phallus, now also needs to be considered in quite another way.”\(^{1063}\) Similarly, Gherovici (2011) says the phallus only refers to phallic jouissance, i.e., sexual jouissance, and that “other forms” of non-phallic jouissance exist and can be experienced. She says: “Sexual positioning is predicated on an “error” that consists of

\(^{1060}\) Ibid, p.113. See also note 32, p.194.
\(^{1063}\) Ibid, p.309.
taking the real organ for a signifier of sexual difference. The error is to take the phallus as a signifier of sexual difference.”\textsuperscript{1064} Dean (2000), from a different perspective, argues that sexual difference is secondary in determining sexual desire because desire originates in the unconscious which knows nothing of sexual difference.\textsuperscript{1065} From his perspective, it is the objet a which “demotes or relativizes” the concept of the phallus because, while the latter implies a univocal model of desire, the former offers multiple possibilities.\textsuperscript{1066} Each of the above, in their way, are inviting a reconsideration of an accepted tenet of Lacanian theory, and are questioning the efficacy of the phallus in its role as the determinant of sexual difference and sexual desire. Such a reconsideration has not been a direct focus of this dissertation but has been raised by implication in relation to the theorised aetiology of asexuality.

An equally important area for further study is the clinical research of individual case studies with asexual analysands. This will involve asexual subjects presenting for psychoanalysis, in the same way that heterosexual and LGBT+ subjects do, not to analyse their sexual orientation or, indeed, their sinthome because the sinthome cannot be analysed,\textsuperscript{1067} but in order to alleviate the suffering produced by the neurotic, perverse or psychotic symptom as it applies to all subjects. This will allow psychoanalytic researchers an opportunity to test some of the proposals included in this dissertation. One proposal, in particular, which would benefit from research into individual case studies is the theory that the infantile libidinal

\textsuperscript{1066} Ibid, p.250.
trends which the emerging asexual subject directs towards the Other are desexualised, not at the end of Oedipal stage when latency begins, but during the earlier pre-Oedipal phase. This implies that the passage of the asexual subject through the stages of infantile sexuality, including the latency period, is qualitatively different to that of the sexually desiring subject. Psychoanalytic case studies will offer the opportunity to establish if there is any unconscious material emerging in the clinic which might support this theorised proposal.

Other areas of particular interest for further research through psychoanalytic case studies are:

- the proposed foreclosure of the Imaginary phallus
- the theorised concomitant foreclosure of the Symbolic phallus
- the apparent functioning of the Name-of-the-Father as agent of metaphoric substitution despite these foreclosures
- the operative unconscious presence of a fundamental phantasy which includes the objet a as the “nothing”
- the functionality of a jouissance that is non-phallic for both male and female asexuals on both sides of the Formulae of Sexuation
- the sinthome as it functions in the lived experience of asexual subjects who desire no sexual desire.

Within Lacanian theory there is a sense of conflicting importance given to the pre-Oedipal phases. On the one hand, Lacan places great emphasis on this area in his theorising both in
Seminar IV and in his regard for Melanie Klein’s work. It can also be found elsewhere in his writings on the oral stage. On the other hand, he is also capable of describing pre-Oedipal stages as “analytically unthinkable”. He suggests considering the term “pregenital stages” which are amenable to psychoanalysis via the retroactive effect of the Oedipus complex. Further theoretical research will allow for a synthesis between Lacan’s concept of the analytically unthinkable aspect of pre-Oedipal stages with what this dissertation has proposed in terms of the theoretically thinkable aspects of them. Further work is also necessary to accommodate my proposed egressive effects of the pre-Oedipal on the Oedipal, compared to Lacan’s, and indeed Freud’s, emphasis on the retroactive effects of the Oedipus complex on pregenital stages.

Another area which will benefit from further research is asexuality’s relation to the Freudian concepts of female frigidity and male impotence. Further research can throw light on whether some forms of frigidity and impotence are distressing because of the absence of the sinthome and the absence of identification as non-sexual as a support. Has there been a similar foreclosure of the Imaginary phallus in lifelong frigidity and impotence as I have proposed for asexuality? If so, what are the factors that allow for a sinthome to be created in some instances of asexuality, and identification in many instances, while none is apparent in frigidity or impotence, both of which can be distressing for the subject?

1069 See Lacan’s comments, in *The Direction of the Treatment*, on the child who is most lovingly fed being the one who refuses food and employs this refusal as if it were a desire. *Écrits* (2006), p.524 (628).
1071 Ibid.
Finally, further research will allow for a more comprehensive topological or Borromean interpretation of asexuality than this dissertation was able to provide. It will also allow for a fuller examination of areas of commonality and disparity between asexuality and the “redemptive reinvention” of sexuality proposed by Bersani (2010)\textsuperscript{1072} and the “eroticism beyond genitalia” proposed by Dean (2000).\textsuperscript{1073}

Asexuals Speaking About Their Asexuality

The following two quotes are taken from the first recorded internet post about asexuality, *My life as an amoeba*, by Zoe O’Reilly, posted on Friday, May 30, 1997.

On being asexual:

It is my nature.

On asexuality as an overlooked orientation:

I'm out and proud to be asexual. My people are a definite minority group who wish to be recognized like all the others. We want a colored ribbon, a national holiday, coupons for fast food. We want the world to know that we are out there.

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The following quotes are taken from a study by Prause N. and Graham C. (2007) entitled: 

*Asexuality: Classification and Characterization.*

On experiencing sexual behaviours, one woman says:

Well, I’ve never kissed someone. I mean, I’ve kissed people, I suppose... but not in any sort of sexual way. I guess on occasion now I’ll kiss a close friend, if I haven’t seen them for a while or whatever, it’s not a sexual thing.

The same woman reports a similar lack of experience of sexual dreams or fantasies:

I would say I’ve never in my life had a dream or a fantasy, a sexual fantasy, for example, about being with another woman. So I can pretty much say that I have no lesbian sort of tendencies whatsoever. You would think that by my age I would have had some fantasy or dream of something, wouldn’t you? ... But I’ve never had a dream or a sexual fantasy about having sex with a man, either. That I can ever, ever remember.

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1076 Ibid, p.344.  
1077 Ibid.
One woman, discussing her attempt at masturbating, states:

I can’t attach pleasure together with it somehow. Was it physically pleasurable? I don’t know. I just can’t find the words.

One respondent observed that a factor in her considering herself as asexual may have been not finding sexual activities enjoyable. She states:

I think those experiences contributed because I didn’t find the act something I enjoyed. I guess I thought “What’s the big whoop, what everybody talks about? Why are they so interested in this thing? I don’t get anything out of it, so what’s the big whoop?” I started feeling this way in my 20’s.

Another woman, describing her experience of sexual intercourse with a man, says:

To me, it was still rather a painful experience and I didn’t really enjoy having sex. He surely [sic] seemed to be enjoying it, so whenever he wanted it I didn’t really refuse.\(^{1078}\)

\(^{1078}\) Ibid
One woman commented that watching sexually explicit films had little effect on her. She states:

The thing is, I could be watching a flat out sexual scene, like intercourse, and it would have no effect on me whatsoever.... I’ve often been like, “Oh, you’re just covering this up or whatever,” but I don’t honestly feel anything. It’s just boring it’s not even remotely interesting to me. Or it doesn’t [effect] me in any way I’m aware of.\textsuperscript{1079}

On lack of sexual interest or desire, rather than a lack of sexual experience, one woman says:

Now I can see that I experienced sexual things, but that doesn’t make me sexual. I have no interest in it. So I think to me having an interest in sex is what makes you sexual, and you can be doing sexual things and not really be sexual, I think.

Regarding the issue of self-definition as asexual, the study quoted a woman as saying:

I sort of consider myself asexual because I have no desire. There’s just no desire. I just really have no desire to go and have sex with someone. It’s just the furthest thing from my mind. It seems to me to be boring.\textsuperscript{1080}

\textsuperscript{1079} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1080} Ibid, p. 345
A third participant believed that asexuals’ lack of interest might have a biological basis:

I think people are probably biologically programmed to be interested, to have interest in sex, and it just comes naturally.... I think for most people it’s no problem to find a partner to engage in the act, but for somebody who’s asexual, they don’t have interest. They don’t know how to get involved in the act, so they remain sexually inactive. Basically, I think it’s the lack of sexual interest. 1081

One woman says that she had engaged in sexual activity when she was younger because of curiosity:

Umm, I was very curious about the opposite sex and having sex and stuff, things like that, when I was a teenager, but when it actually - in my 20’s, I never really, I didn’t find the act, I didn’t get any pleasure from the act. 1082

A female participant on engaging in masturbation:

I might have gotten a book on women’s sexuality. I was like “let’s try” to do some masturbation here and see if this goes anywhere.” And it’s like,
“umm, no this is just boring.” So it was like that’s the extent of it. It was just boring.\textsuperscript{1083}

A woman says a possible reason for sexual activity was being in a relationship:

But I suppose if ever I got married to someone, I would sort of feel like, I want to sort of learn how to “do” sex because it may be beneficial for this person with me. I mean, like most people have an expectation of sex in a relationship and so if I was really going to have a serious relationship with someone... they’re going to expect it.\textsuperscript{1084}

Another says:

I think if the person is asexual, he or she might engage in the act, probably if he or she has a partner, they may feel obliged to engage in the act. They might pretend to be like everybody else. They might fear being different from others, I think. Even if the person is asexual, if necessary, they might engage in the act just for the sake, because the partner asked.\textsuperscript{1085}
On questioning her asexuality, a woman says:

I’ve actually wondered, like, is there something wrong with me? What is this business?

Another woman says:

I often wonder why I am the way I am now and I think about not having married or not having a boyfriend or not seeing anybody. I find myself not really interested but at the same time I kind of worry for not being like everybody else, I guess.

The same participant felt she should make an “effort” to change:

I feel that I should be normal, not that I do have a clear idea of what is normal ... As for myself, I think I should seek out the opposite sex and be more involved in social life.
Another says:

I guess I’m wondering what other people are thinking and other people are feeling and am I the only one who’s not doing this?\textsuperscript{1089}

A male participant was unconcerned at being asexual:

I’m not worried about it or I’m not concerned about it. ... My life is interesting enough and it’s not really, um, a necessity.\textsuperscript{1090}

The following quotes are taken from a 2008 study by Kristin Scherrer entitled, “Coming to an Asexual Identity: Negotiating Identity, Negotiating Desire”.

An 18 old woman, on lack of sexual attraction:

I just don’t feel sexual attraction to people. I love the human form and can regard individuals as works of art and find people aesthetically pleasing, but

\textsuperscript{1089} ibid
\textsuperscript{1090} Ibid, p.346.
I don’t ever want to come into sexual contact with even the most beautiful of people.\textsuperscript{1091}

A 32 year old woman says:

I am sexually attracted to men but have no desire or need to engage in sexual or even non-sexual activity (cuddling, hand-holding, etc.) with them.\textsuperscript{1092}

A 22 year old woman says:

I don’t have sex and don’t understand why people would want to have sex.\textsuperscript{1093}

A 29 year old male says:

It’s just who I am, romantically and sexually speaking.\textsuperscript{1094}


\textsuperscript{1092} Ibid, p.626.

\textsuperscript{1093} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{1094} Ibid.
A 36 year old male, who identifies as a romantic hetero-asexual says:

I’m romantically attracted to the opposite sex, but don’t desire sexual contact. I enjoy cuddling, and kissing and even pleasing my wife, but I don’t desire sexual intercourse.\textsuperscript{1095}

A 28 year old woman for whom physical affection is acceptable says:

... so long as the physical contact does not become sexual in nature.\textsuperscript{1096}

A 21 year old male, self-identified as hetero-romantic asexual, says:

Certain things that might be considered sexual behavior - hugging, cuddling, kissing--

I would be interested in, but nothing explicitly sexual.\textsuperscript{1097}

\textsuperscript{1095} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1096} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1097} Ibid.
A 25 year old woman describes herself as a bi-curious asexual and says:

I don’t need, want, or like sex, including any activities that seem to be leading to sex. For me this includes masturbation. [I experience] no desire for sex with another person or with myself. ¹⁰⁹⁸

A 21 old woman, on masturbation, says:

I do not have any desire to have sex with another person. I masturbate at times but I don’t connect it with anything sexual. I know it sounds like a contradiction but it’s just something I do every now and then and it seems to help me relax when I am stressed. ¹⁰⁹⁹

A 29 year old male, self-identified as an aromantic asexual, says he:

... occasionally gets the urge to masturbate (which I will occasionally do), but I still do not experience attraction and have no real desire to engage in sexual activity with anyone. ¹¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁹⁸ Ibid, p.627.
¹⁰⁹⁹ Ibid.
¹¹⁰⁰ Ibid.
A 24 year old woman says:

Well, I've always been this way. Even my friends knew I was different - they even avoided topics about how “cute” someone is with me because they were aware I couldn’t understand. Though, I've heard the term “asexual” used in this way, somewhere around a year ago [I heard it] and it fit well with me.\textsuperscript{1101}

Similarly, a woman in her 40s says:

I have always felt this way. I just did not know there was a name for it, until a few years ago. Also, I did not realize there were so many others like me.\textsuperscript{1102}

A 22 year old woman, who identifies as asexual and aromantic, says:

I've been able to call myself asexual since I first read the AVEN FAQs [at] age 20. I didn't call myself asexual for several months because I needed to have a good long think about the whole matter. I concluded that I'd always been asexual, even if I didn't have a handy label to stick on.\textsuperscript{1103}

\textsuperscript{1101} Ibid, p.628.
\textsuperscript{1102} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1103} Ibid. p.629.
Another woman says:

I realized there were others that called themselves asexual through the Internet. I've known that I don't date and don't consider others as anything more than “friends” for about 4 years. 1104

On the distinction between asexuality and celibacy, a 29 year old man says:

I was exploring the Internet looking for celibate people to relate to (as that’s the only word I had with which to describe my sexual status at the time) and stumbled across a link to www.asexuality.org. After a few hours of reading the website, I was pretty sure that “asexual” was a label that suited me.

Another woman says:

I don’t desire sex, so I am asexual. I am not celibate, as this implies a desire for sex that is repressed.” 1105

1104 Ibid.
1105 Ibid.
A 21 year old woman who self-identifies as a bi- or pan-romantic asexual says:

Outside of AVEN or conversations specifically about sexuality, I don’t really consciously think of myself as asexual. Like being an atheist or non-Hispanic or a non-driver (all apply), asexuality is something I’m not and never was, rather than something I am. The label is mostly a useful marker. So, my asexual identity is important in certain contexts, and I can’t imagine my life if I weren’t asexual, but it’s not specifically important to me.\textsuperscript{1106}

On “inventing” a language to describe asexuality, a woman says:

I came to realize it by myself or in communication with my family. Though none of us knew about this we strained some logical thinking to get us to the point that something like asexuality must exist. Then I made this term up to explain myself to my surroundings and future partners.\textsuperscript{1107}

\textsuperscript{1106} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1107} Ibid, p.630.

On the persistent lack of sexual attraction:

I have a sexual drive that comes up regularly through my hormonal cycle, before I menstruate, there are times when I feel aroused, but it is not directed towards any individual.\textsuperscript{1108}

Regarding the particular non-excitement attached to sex one respondent says:

I think sexuals have a lot of anticipation and pleasure leading up to the sexual experience. I don’t have any of that. I could do without it. Even though it is very pleasurable and exciting while I am doing it, I have absolutely no anticipation for it at all. I have no interest or desire that would lead me towards that in the way that I do towards other activities that I enjoy.\textsuperscript{1109}


\textsuperscript{1109} Ibid.
Another says on the same theme:

I could be attracted to someone. I can...you know, think they’re good looking and think they’re interesting and want to spend time with them and get to know them better. But to me it’s never, oh, yeah, I hope we end up in bed.\textsuperscript{1110}

On the theme of feeling different as an asexual, a respondent says:

I always knew that I was different and I always knew that I didn’t have that interest like my friends had...I always had this babysitting job and I thought it was great because they would always give me a huge tip, but then my friends would go, “Oh we went to this really cool party and everybody was making out and it was so much fun and you should come next year.” I would make a point of getting a babysitting job because there was no way I wanted to be in that kind of environment because I...I just didn’t want to.\textsuperscript{1111}

On the possibility of getting married, a participant says:

Basically, I just enjoy being close to someone and spending time with them and doing things that make them happy. Not sexually..... Well, like I like being touched and held but I just

\textsuperscript{1110} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1111} Ibid.
don’t really want to do anything sexual if that makes any sense. Like I desire to be held and like to cuddle and stuff but not to have sex.\footnote{Ibid.}

On the desire for a romantic relationship, the same participant says:

Everyone’s definition of sexual activity is somewhat different but I mean asexual people just aren’t interested in intercourse and there are all different levels of how far they’ll go...there are some asexuals who are aromantic and they don’t want anyone to touch them and they hate being touched at all...in asexuality there is the same types of romances there is with sexuality. There’s aromantic, heteroromantic, biromantic, and homoromantic and their sexualities could differ and what they desire could differ. It just depends on the person.\footnote{Ibid.}

On the subject of asexuality perceived as a disorder, one says:

I’ve never had the interest and so, even if today you could say, “Oh here...here’s a pill that will fix you...” no, that’s okay, thanks.\footnote{Ibid, p.611.}
On the same theme, another says:

I know there is a spectrum of asexuality, so there are people who do experience some sexual attraction, but for me, low sexual desire says that I think there is a problem with who I am, I want to desire sex, I know what that feels like some of the time to have some kind of desire, and now I am not experiencing any desire, so I see this as a disorder. Whereas for me, I have never felt any kind of sexual attraction, so I do not miss what I do not know.\textsuperscript{1115}

On the same theme, a third says:

Everyone in the asexual community wants to spread the message that it’s [asexuality] not a disorder and it’s not something that’s a problem and needs to be fixed and that’s the big thing, the reason that we’re trying to get the word out about it as an orientation because if it’s not considered an orientation then there must be a problem because you have to have an orientation.\textsuperscript{1116}

\textsuperscript{1115} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1116} Ibid.
Regarding masturbation and the motives for it, a participant says:

Even though they (an asexual) might want to clean out the plumbing once in a while, they don’t have any interest in doing it with someone else. ...so that would...you know, that would qualify (as an asexual).\textsuperscript{1117}

Regarding the experienced changes at puberty, a participant says:

Puberty, well uh, you know I had the hormones, uh stuff starting working there but I really didn’t have anything, nothing to focus it on. I did you know test the equipment so to say and everything works fine, pleasurable and all it’s just not actually attracted to anything.\textsuperscript{1118}

In terms of sexual arousal, another says:

Yeah, I’d say I was...well I would say I was lubricated I guess...but enough? It’s hard to know. Um...you know, I mean like the plumbing works, let’s say, if you want an

\textsuperscript{1117} Ibid.\textsuperscript{1118} Ibid, p.612.
expression...... Well, I don’t know if I’d call it aroused. I mean, just because I’m lubricated doesn’t necessarily mean I’m aroused.¹¹¹⁹

On negotiating boundaries in relationships, a participant says:

You know, the only reason I do it (intercourse) is to make the other person happy. And so, we were in a relationship and you know, he wanted to do it and we had been dating for a while and you know, I was in love or whatever and I thought we’ll be together forever. So um...yeah, so we kind of planned it and that’s...yeah...I mean it wasn’t...I mean the way he was talking about it, oh it’s so great and you’re going to love it, blah, blah, blah, and then okay...you know, I believed him...¹¹²⁰

On feeling closer to a partner after sexual intercourse:

(My boyfriend says to me) “Oh gosh, I would like to crawl into you,” and I says, “Wow, I would like to crawl into you too!” And then he says that maybe that’s what sexual feelings are, when I want to have sex with another person—that is the ultimate

¹¹¹⁹ Ibid.
¹¹²⁰ Ibid.
“crawling into”. And then I say, “Well, aren’t sexuals then disappointed when they find out that they have gone through all of this trouble to crawl into a person and then finally they have just had sex and are still not in the other person?”¹¹²¹

On being asexual with a non-asexual partner, one says:

Well, because he is sexual and I am asexual, we have tried to see what our body parts do to each other, trying to find out what body positions are most appropriate for us, or what kind of feelings it brings about when we touch that body part...while touching my genitals doesn’t do anything to me either, but I like very much them being very close to his, when the whole body is connected with the other body.¹¹²²

On the invisibility of asexuality generally, another participant says:

Well, I think that it’s [sexuality] really not perceived and that’s the problem and that’s why like we need the (AVEN) message board and all the news reports and stuff because nobody or very few people know that it exists or have heard of it.¹¹²³

¹¹²² Ibid.
¹¹²³ Ibid.
On finding a community through AVEN, another says:

I am very keen on getting the word out because had I known years ago my life could have been so different. I always knew that I was different and I always knew that I didn’t have that interest like my friends had. But I never heard of asexuality. I didn’t realize that I could say, hey, I’m asexual, you know…go away.\footnote{Ibid.}[1124]

The following quotes are taken from questionnaire replies contained in a 2011 study conducted by asexuality researcher Mark Carrigan.\footnote{Carrigan, M. (2011) There’s more to life than sex? Difference and commonality within the asexual community, in Sexualities, 14 (4), p. 467. Online version can be found at http://sex.sagepub.com/content/14/4/462}[1125]

A selection of comments on why people identify as asexual:

- I’m 25 years old and I’ve never had a crush on or any sexual attraction to anybody and I honestly get confused when people say they’re “horny” because I have no idea how that feels. I’m not denying there’s still a chance that I may be “a late bloomer” or just “haven’t found the right person for me yet”, but constantly defining this aspect of myself in terms of “maybe someday” just felt...
like I was kidding myself. As far as I’m concerned, an asexual is simply someone who doesn’t feel the desire to actually have sex and, for me, it fits.\textsuperscript{1126}

- I am simply uninterested in having sex, not repulsed, and if my partner insisted on having sex I would oblige willingly. It’s just not the emotional connection for me that it seems to be for most other people.\textsuperscript{1127}

- I define as asexual because it explains how I can find males attractive without wanting to have sex with them, as well as how that lack of sexual desire for males does not translate to wanting to have sex with females.\textsuperscript{1128}

- I am not at all interested in sex. It doesn’t disgust me or bother me… it just doesn’t register.\textsuperscript{1129}

- I identify as asexual because I do not get the urge to have sex. If I do have sex, I only like it for the first minute or so, and then I am satisfied and would like to stop. Basically, sex is not necessary in my life and I could live without it. There are other things I would rather do. Being an asexual doesn’t mean that one can’t be

\textsuperscript{1127} ibid
\textsuperscript{1128} ibid
\textsuperscript{1129} ibid
attracted to people. I’m attracted to both males and females but mostly in terms of emotional or intellectual attraction.\textsuperscript{1130}

- I find the idea of sex utterly disgusting. I honestly think I would vomit if I ever had sex.\textsuperscript{1131}

On attraction that is aesthetic:

I’ve never understood how beauty relates to sex. I can love and be intensely passionate about people, however. When I say somebody is beautiful, I mean it in the sense that a picture is beautiful, or an animal, or a child. It has nothing whatsoever to do with sex though, and doesn’t relate to sex in my mind.\textsuperscript{1132}

On the idea of romance:

I vastly prefer to maintain close friendships. I would rather have a romantic relationship than only have loose friendships, however.\textsuperscript{1133}

\textsuperscript{1130} ibid
\textsuperscript{1131} ibid. p.468
\textsuperscript{1132} ibid p.469
\textsuperscript{1133} Ibid.
On being sex-neutral:

I don’t find it disgusting, just not something I care to experience.\textsuperscript{1134}

On being sex-averse:

I don’t really like it, because it feels a bit weird and unnatural to me, and genitalia aren’t exactly beautiful.\textsuperscript{1135}

Also on being sex-averse:

I find the whole idea of sexual contact slightly repulsive.\textsuperscript{1136}

On being repulsed by sex:

I believe I differ from many other repulsed (as opposed to indifferent) asexuals in that it is purely the idea of myself having sex that I find disgusting. The idea of others doing it does not bother me in the slightest, apart from finding depictions of female sexuality a little uncomfortable as it reminds me of myself.\textsuperscript{1137}

\textsuperscript{1134} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1135} Ibid, p.470.
\textsuperscript{1136} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1137} Ibid.
On coming to identify as asexual:

The year I was sixteen (and for some time after) I spent a lot of time in the company of a few people who were very sexual and it was through their near-constant talk of sex that I was finally convinced that sexual attraction was real. I had heard that something would happen to make you want to have sex with another person, but I had never experienced it myself. In fact, I did not really believe that a person could have physical feelings “down there” that they identified as sexual feelings, despite having learned what erections etc. were in my health class. I thought everyone was like me, until my classmates and friends begin to talk about sex. Then I realized that I was not like them, and for a while I thought I must be immature ... except that in every other way they seemed so much less mature than I. I thought there might be something wrong with me, except that I am otherwise in perfect health. Then, one night while I was surfing the internet, I came across an embarrassingly girly website which included, as one of its pages, a “definitions” page. I suppose the point was that sheltered girls with internet access could look up all the words they were afraid to ask their parents about and get solid, medical definitions. The first word on the list was “asexual” and it caught my interest, because I had never heard it before. I clicked on the link which read the same thing AVEN does, “Asexual: a person who does not experience sexual attraction” and it was like coming home. I knew immediately that this was me and that I wasn’t alone.\footnote{Ibid, p.471.}
On pursuing a pathologising route to finding an asexual identity:

I came to identify as asexual this way: I have never understood the desire to engage in the acts that define sex, from kissing on down the list. ... This issue haunted me for years until finally, when I was engaged to be married, I knew that I couldn’t walk down the aisle until I solved what we called the sex issue. So I went into therapy. I explored every corner and crevice of my childhood. After psychological reasons were ruled out, I took hormone tests to see if my body was functioning properly. When the tests came back as “normal”, I still lobbied to be prescribed low-levels of testosterone. I got the prescription and took testosterone to jump-start my sex drive. The testosterone didn’t work, so I switched to progesterone after a few months. I lamented the feeling that I was somehow “broken”, that I was somehow “less of a person”. I continued to look for psychological reasons in therapy. I continued to engage in sexual activities even though I’d rather take the LSATs or swim the Pacific than be naked with another human. After over a year of hormone therapy, after exclusive sex therapy with my partner, after the kind of lament and struggle that so many of the kids I mentor experience when they’re struggling with their sexuality, my relationship ended. I continued in therapy, and I continued to wonder why I was broken. It was another six months before I finally identified myself as asexual, and coming out to myself and the world was one of the most liberating experiences I’ve ever encountered ... I’m comfortable with it. I’m relieved by it ... It makes all the sense that nothing made before and I’m glad to not spend countless
hours worrying about why I am broken anymore. I’m happy, and I’m proud of my asexuality.\textsuperscript{1139}

The following quotes are taken from an article in The London Guardian (2008) in which an asexual man speaks about his marriage to an asexual woman.\textsuperscript{1140} In it he says he and his wife have been “happily married for nine months now and we’re both still virgins”.

\textbf{On sharing the general public’s scepticism about asexuality, he says he was sceptical too:}

For years I just thought I was the only person in the world who felt like this.

\textbf{On reading a sex education book at 13 years of age, he says:}

I just couldn’t see why anyone would go to so much trouble just to have sex. I tried looking at pornography on the internet. I wasn’t disgusted or appalled - it was just boring, like looking at wallpaper.

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\textsuperscript{1139}Ibid, p.474.
\textsuperscript{1140}Cox, P. (2008), \textit{We’re married, we just don’t have sex}, The Guardian, Monday 8 September accessed at http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2008/sep/08/relationships.healthandwellbeing
\end{flushleft}
On masturbation without a sexual urge or sexual fantasy, he says:

It was just something my body decided to do. People say about asexuals: "But if they masturbate doesn't that make them sexual?" It's hard to explain, but if you're asexual you don't necessarily feel an explicit connection between masturbation and sexual orientation. It's just part of having a human body - a physical, biological process.

On the common perception of asexuality:

Since Freud and Kinsey, and even to an extent the sexual revolution of the 60s, we tend to believe anyone without a sexual orientation must be repressed or delusional. Asexuality is therefore an impossibility. Kinsey labelled us "X", a statistical throwaway category for anyone damaged to the point where they can't express any sexuality. Gradually, though, through visiting the (AVEN) site, I came to realise that these were just ordinary people; people who were writing things I'd thought myself, but had never heard anyone else express. It was such a relief. Finally I had a label - a way to explain myself that could settle all the awkwardness and questioning.

On holding his wife-to-be's hand for the first time:

I felt cautious about it but just wanted to. I wondered if I could. Then I found I couldn't let go.
On committing to get married:

In the asexual community we don’t form relationships lightly. If you don’t want to spend the rest of your life with a person, there's no reason to make such a special commitment.

On marriage as an asexual:

People always ask how our marriage is different from just being friends, but I think a lot of relationships are about that - being friends. We have built on our friendship, rather than scrapping it and moving on somewhere else. The obvious way we differ is that we don't have sex, though we do kiss and cuddle. We like to joke that the longer we're married the less unusual this is. By the time we've been married five years we'll be just like everyone else.

On the possibility of having sex with his wife at some time in the future:

We would both be willing to compromise because we’re in a relationship and that's what you do.
On the effect of having an asexual community:

It validates my non-interest and allows me to remember that it doesn’t make me broken.\textsuperscript{1141}

The following quotes are taken from Scherrer, K. & Atkins, A. (2008), Asexual Relationships: What Does Asexuality Have to Do with Polyamory?

On relationships without sex, a woman says:

Intimate relationships and romantic partnerships are the same thing to me, it means that you are willing to share in sexual activities to some degree, from kissing to intercourse. Friendships can be with either sex, with persons who share your interests in some way and will spend time with you.\textsuperscript{1142}

Another woman says:

I’d say intimate relationships would involve sexual activity and kissing. It’s harder for me to define the difference between friends and romantic partners though. For me, a romantic relationship would be more physical and have more trust involved on my

\textsuperscript{1141} Ibid, p.475
part than friendships . . . I see friendships with more joking and chatting, and romantic relationships with all of that plus discussions and connections on a deeper level.\textsuperscript{1143}

Another says:

I think the standard friendship vs. romance is a spectrum, not a binary, and it can be difficult to pin any given relationship down.\textsuperscript{1144}

On monogamy, a woman says:

I sometimes imagine an “ideal” relationship. However, I don't have to say much about it, except that it is heterosexual, monogamous, and I have a very sincere understanding partner.\textsuperscript{1145}

Another says:

I want to have a deep, monogamous relationship with a man, but don't wish to engage in sexual activities with him or anyone else.\textsuperscript{1146}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{1143} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{1144} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{1145} Ibid, p.156.  \\
\textsuperscript{1146} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
Another says:

(She is interested in a monogamous relationship) ...as long as it was nonsexual.\textsuperscript{1147}

A woman says:

I don't know how feasible monogamy would be for me, given that I'm asexual and most other people aren’t, but I've got a preference for it. I'm willing to try a polyamorous or otherwise consensually non-monogamous relationship, but monogamy seems like it would feel more secure to me.\textsuperscript{1148}

Another woman says:

I desire a socially monogamous, intimate relationship. I don't care about the sex, but if my partner wants me to have sex I would need him to be sexually monogamous. But if he wants to go elsewhere and forgo sex with me altogether that is fine, too. Better, actually. I would be open to a polyamorous-relationship but I have never tried it and am sceptical.\textsuperscript{1149}

\textsuperscript{1147} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1148} Ibid, p.157.
\textsuperscript{1149} Ibid, p.158.
The following quotes are taken from a newspaper article titled: Asexuality: “I realised I wasn’t into girls or boys.” Irish Independent, November 4, 2015.\(^{1150}\)

**On coming to an asexual identity:**

Coming to terms with yourself is a slow realisation that you are different. Many don't have a word to describe their experiences, and feel like they are simply bad at relationships or sex. I certainly didn't - various unpleasant experiences brought to me the full realisation that I was different, although at the time, I believed what I had been told: that I was broken and needed to be fixed. I hope I never hear someone utter those words again, with the intent of “fixing me”.

**He also says:**

Beginning to educate myself on these matters was incredibly liberating; the sheer pressure to be sexual and to fulfil people's romantic and sexual expectations of me was crushing, and so to find that there were so many people like me was elating.

\(^{1150}\) Accessed at [https://www.independent.ie/life/asesuality-i-realised-i-wasnt-into-girls-or-boys-34167467.html](https://www.independent.ie/life/asesuality-i-realised-i-wasnt-into-girls-or-boys-34167467.html)
On “knowing” that one is asexual:

Asexuality isn’t something diagnosed by a blood test or MRI scan. [...] Definition of asexuality is “lack of sexual attraction”, another one I’ve seen and like is “you’re asexual if you think the label fits and is useful for you”. Neither of those are in any way something science can confirm. Both of those are something that each person knows for themselves.1151

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