

Consenting to Gender and Sexuality in Anthropology: ‘fetish queer bodies’ and the role of ‘fantasy’ and ‘desire’ in the curriculum.

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Abstract

This paper looks at two aspects of the teaching of gender and sexuality in anthropology. First, I debate the question of what we make of sexual difference when teaching gender and sexuality. Second, I look at some of the issues facing the teaching of gender vis-à-vis institutional and discipline contexts. Using examples from the creation of a module in anthropology of gender and sexuality and a research-based ‘fetish night project’ for students, the article discusses the kinds of questions we ask our students, the kinds of knowledge created through the teaching of gender, and the kinds of processes of gender representation that take place within academic institutions. For the first part, I will argue that a key challenge when teaching gender lies in how institutions and curricula processes perceive the teacher of gender as having their own agenda for teaching gender and sexuality. Often, lecturers of gender modules are perceived as having ‘their own reasons’, or what I will call a ‘desire for gender’ or ‘a desire for sexuality’ that conflates with their ‘desire for teaching gender and sexuality’. Teachers’ gender and sexual subjectivities are often represented as ‘bias’, thus disempowering not only them as individuals but also, I will argue, the viability of the subject area of ‘gender studies’. In doing so, both the teachers and the subject areas become what I see as ‘fetishised’ others. They are represented as being different kinds of academic beings and sometimes even lesser academics. For the second part I will argue that in order to ameliorate these issues, at least in anthropology, the teaching of gender can not be reduced to the teaching of matters of sexual difference. It also needs to extend beyond the usual dichotomies on nature/culture, men/women, gender/sex. In doing so, although teaching gender and sexuality appears to be predicated on emphasising gender and sexual identity, I will come to discuss the importance of placing less emphasis on sexual identity (both of the themes taught and of the teachers teaching them) and more, echoing Moore (2007), on the processes by which we come to participate in relationships of representation of ‘gendered and sexed subjectivities’ and their tensions within existing institutional and cultural contexts.

Introduction: Sexed beings in Anthropology

Henrietta’s Moore in her recent book, *The Subject of Anthropology*, poses three questions that are pertinent both to the themes of this volume and to this paper on the nature of teaching of gender and sexuality in anthropology. She asks, ‘what do people make of sexual difference? How do we become sexed beings? And how do changes in ‘the structures of desiring subjects’ bring about changes in history and politics?’ (Moore 2007: 2-9) I take these questions, here, to do two things. First they illustrate the kind of intellectual direction anthropologists have mapped out in the last three decades of anthropology of gender, questions that, I feel, underpin in one way or another the teaching curriculum on gender that exist in many anthropology departments. Second, I take these questions as ideas that can help us in questioning the desire of ‘teaching gender’ in contemporary times. What do we make of sexual difference when teaching? Do the subjectivities of teachers impact on the way they become sexed beings to their students, as gay, feminist, trans [or other] lecturers? Do lecturers’ and students’ subjectivities and their ‘desire for gender’ have any impact on the way gender courses are understood from within curricular, institutional and market forces that surround academic degrees?

As an anthropologist, in my seventh year of being a lecturer of a module in gender and sexuality in a department of anthropology, I am drawn to Moore’s questions because they synthesise, with neat precision, the relevance of contemporary

interdisciplinary discussion on the importance of teaching gender. These are the kinds of questions we ask our anthropology students to address, and in doing so, these also impinge on our teaching experience, and even on the reasons why we adopt certain curriculum options and learning strategies for classrooms.

As central and pertinent as these questions are, and as much as we acknowledge the contribution of contemporary feminist anthropology, one would expect gender to be fully incorporated into the teaching of anthropology. However, like the enterprise of gender and sexuality itself, as Moore anticipated in her earlier work (Moore 1999:169), these are still fraught with challenges. Three of the main challenges that this paper will discuss are the centrality of gender in anthropology being often unrecognised from within curricular process; the problematisation of reflexivity and personal experience (and sexual identity) brought by the teachers into the learning and teaching experience; and the development of innovations in practice hand in hand with theory.

In this paper I choose to look at one example that comes from my research and from one lecture topic within a course on 'kinship, gender and sexuality' that looks at representations of desire and 'post-modern sexed beings'. I will be looking at 'fetishism'ⁱ (see Apter 1993) a exponential example of what people do with their love choices, desires, fantasies, body experiences, their 'mappings of masculinity and femininity, their sexed subjectivities'ⁱⁱ (Moore 2007). I will also be looking at what it is that they say about contemporary queer/trans sexed subjectivities, and to consider how to deal with them as teaching topics. In turn, I will investigate how the learning and teaching exercises that target representation of imaginary desires have an impact on how lecturers, researchers and students acknowledge certain relationships of gender.

As Moore (2007) argues, gender and sexuality in anthropology is about understanding how practices to do with masculinity and femininity vary hugely across cultures, and how these understandings help us theorise the nature of social change from within each cultural context as opposed to doing so from a dominant (western, ethnocentric, normative, heterocentric) point of view (ibid 20). One of the reasons for introducing the fetish theme into the curriculum has to do with how this case helps us gain a better understanding of the cultural models regarding genders and their precarious stability as 'single coherent systems' (ibid 22). I will use the case of 'fetish' practices to ask about the meaning of sexed subjectivities when teaching gender and sexuality, and to illustrate how the teaching of gender and the experience of gender in society often mirror each other, and that inclusion and exclusion of any ethnographic and theoretical areas owes to the extent to which reflexive and personal approaches to teaching [what I call teachers' 'desire for gender' and passion for this study area] are central to the constitution of the teaching curriculum. They make good examples for use in understanding the meaning of gendered and sexed individuals, their social existence and agency.

The Era of Uncertainty: teaching gender? And who should be teaching gender?

This section looks at how we teach anthropology and the kinds of themes and intellectual directions that define the teaching of genderⁱⁱⁱ. The course I teach on gender was originally created through curricular discussions between members of the anthropology department at UWL that was set up in the mid 90s. Our curriculum

shares with other departments a specific blend of questions on the relations between men and women, inequality and power, gender and reproduction, and kinship and politics. It aims to address both themes pertinent to 'gender' and pertinent to anthropology as a discipline. As such, the gender module was given centrality in the curriculum because it was not just about 'gender' or 'feminism' or 'sexuality' or 'kinship' but about how this thing we call 'gender' relates to other modules within the discipline(s) and because it addressed key anthropological issues^{iv}. The course has been modified and updated over the years to include changes in theoretical and ethnographic directions, staff research interests, and changes of staff. On the whole, however, it is a commonly recognisable module assessed both through standard internal and external academic procedures.

As in most gender curriculum in anthropology, ours anchors the teaching themes within the context of the kinds of anthropological discussions that have been prevalent since the late 1980's with the works of Moore, Rosaldo, Strathern, Josephides, Ortner, Whitehead, Errington, Caplan, and Foucault among others. This period, heavily dependant on Moore's essays on anthropology and gender, examines the periods prior and leading to the discussions on inequality between men and women, allowing for an appraisal and critique of earlier feminist anthropology and the nature/culture debates, and it discusses the birth problems with the notion of 'gender'. The second stage in our curricular itinerary is to contextualise 1980's discussions on gender, kinship, reproduction, and the nature/culture debate against discussions on sexuality and relatedness that appear in the early 1990s, also considering debates on the assumed fluidity and instability of 'sex and gender' (Butler 1990, Moore 1988, 1994). The second stage deals with locating anthropological debates on culture and theory and it examines 'the end of certainty' about sex and gender (Moore 1999: 152). As the teaching itineraries unfold, in a chronological sense, those of us who teach gender tend to use Moore's approach and embrace further discussions on gender whilst contending with Butler's understandings of performativity.

At the edge of uncertainty about 'gender' and 'sex', sexuality or rather sexualit(ies) become a point of contention in our teaching. We present our students with an array of mid and late 90's ethnographies on third genders, Trans and Queer theories. At this point we challenge discussions on the construction of sexual difference (see for example Kirtsoglou 2004, 20-38). Whilst the first and second part of the itinerary follows the discussion on gender from within anthropology, discussion of sexualities opens to interdisciplinary theories and connects with areas that are a part of contemporary anthropological discussion.

The third part of the teaching itinerary is to bring the earlier themes towards a key issue in the literature of gender and anthropology: the body. The 'body' becomes the consuming object of most taught gender programmes, re-kindling the passion anthropology has always had with theories of the body and embodiment (Csordas 1999), as the place where we examine further representations on sexuality and culture. As studies on the body come to be placed at the last stages of teaching programmes so do other considerations on economics, politics, nationalism, development, globalisation and identity. In this teaching landscape the debates on gender and sexuality conclude with lecturers contextualising the issue of 'gender' with the larger debates within anthropology about the nature of relationships, representations, power and so on.

A defining feature of this curriculum is that all the teachers who at one point taught it felt passionate about the subject. They also desired it. Their engagement with their students was always one where the personal staff subjectivities and staff research would establish a two-way dialogue between staff and student. The courses were never thought as a space for people 'coming out' [in the sense of dealing with sexual identity], on the contrary, lecturers' gender, sexual and political identities were not the determining factor for having lectures on gender, kinship, or sexual identity. The different types of queerness^v in our staff challenged all of us. There was not a single point of unity in our understanding of 'sexual and sexed identity'. This gave us the possibility, for example, of being 'out' as 'queer' whilst not having to assign a sexed identity to our teaching. Perhaps, reflecting on that period, this meant we could be more open about discussing desire and perhaps less concerned with discussing 'actual' sexual identity. In teaching such courses one had the feeling of 'growing with it' as anthropologist, and that one's personal subjectivities were valued in challenging ethnocentric, heteronormative or other assumptions.

The existence of this module was for many years fairly unquestioned^{vi} in its validity for producing the kinds of anthropological engagement that is expected from any module within undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Our answer to the question about 'how we teach gender' was that we taught it like we teach everything else in anthropology: we aimed towards the 'making' of anthropological sensibilities and subjectivities for both staff and students. Teaching gender, however, had its particularities and specificities, some of which were predicated on the ways in which students and staff sexed identities (as opposed to just sexual identities), gender, and political affiliations were part and parcel of the learning process (also Howie and Tauchers 2002). Our desire for teaching gender and sexuality were informed by our desires, they were informed by gender and sexed subjectivities, and by our subjectivities as anthropologists and archaeologists. However, as most of the members of staff who had first committed to and taught this module left for other posts, the module itself and its specific centrality within anthropology started to be questioned. As I remained passionate for the module on gender but no longer 'in company' of those who had worked on it with me it forced me to re-think the particularities and challenges regarding the teaching of gender, some of which I examine next.

Against the passion: curriculum needs and market demands

One of the key challenges regarding teaching gender, for me, is its place within the teaching curriculum. How central should the teaching of gender be, and how should it be taught? My first challenge as a teacher was that I, perhaps naively, assumed that given the historical centrality that gender had achieved in anthropology its centrality was one that would be maintained by the sheer force of the contribution that gender studies had made to anthropology and interdisciplinary studies (see Moore 1988). Moore acknowledges feminist anthropology and anthropology of gender have produced a unique challenge within anthropology, and describes this challenge as being on three fronts: 'establishing research procedures, setting new relations between academy and theory and breaking down interdisciplinary barriers', opening, in her words' the door to 'multidisciplinary scholarship''(ibid 196).

A well-known challenge to the above process is that opening doors to an interdisciplinary exchange meant that there was no longer a single defining feature of

an anthropological core (also Moore 1996). Few would argue against the idea that the anthropology of gender is one of our most useful vehicles for critical interdisciplinary discussions, providing anthropology with one of the strongest theoretical directions, while simultaneously not defining itself as an anthropological core within the curriculum - unless it is associated with previously defined 'cores' in anthropology such as kinship or economic anthropology [and sometimes not even then]. As such, we felt teaching gender was placed 'meaningfully'^{vii} in our intellectual 'centre(s)' within the shadow of interdisciplinary curriculum even though it did not have [and did not want to have] a claim to centrality as such.

The importance of gender in anthropology is patent in our landscape. A short overview on the degree strategies and 'module offer' from departments of anthropology in the UK suggest that gender is taught in nearly all departments of anthropology. Most anthropology departments teach combinations of theory [gender, feminist, and post-modern theories] within both introductory and specialised modules. Where gender is taught it is often as a result of staff specialisation and internal curriculum structures. A senior lecturer within a London department beautifully illustrated this when she argued that:

'traditionally (since the 1980's), teaching gender was part of our agenda -because of the driving concerns of our Chair. She was very passionate about these modules being compulsory. By the time she left gender had become incorporated in other modules too. Now it is taught in modules based on specific staff research. For example, we recently had a visiting staff who produced a very popular module based on his research, on transgender identities. Our offer for gender courses changes depending on staff research and departmental interests'

In addition to specific curriculum arrangements for teaching gender, four departments in the UK teach modules where a blend of gender, kinship and economic anthropology are taught as compulsory options. Some departments such as the LSE have also developed specific research areas with the creation of 'Gender Institutes'. Most other larger institutions also have centres of research that have developed as part of anthropology departments into specialised research areas from within, either focussing on gender and development, gender and law, and gender from a cross-cultural perspective.

The description above defines a two-fold feature of the teaching of gender in most undergraduate degrees in anthropology departments. One, gender is given a specific role in teaching, with modules being produced and taught and where research and teaching are informed by each other either in compulsory module form or as recommended modules. Two, gender is taught as an 'element' that is part of other modules. The modularisation of teaching has had a great impact on the types of modules offered in different departments, hand in hand with complex and sometimes debilitating auditing processes (Strathern 2005, Shore and Wright 2000) and institutional demands on marketing and re-fashioning degrees (Squires 1992: 202-205). At this juncture, some institutions have remained strong in their wishes to keep gender as a central element of their teaching, mostly through research centres and compulsory modular options within undergraduate degrees. Other options have been to remove some of the centrality of gender studies towards optional courses and in some cases, to devolve gender to every other module. This is clearly less pronounced

in research centres as their specialisation on gender has balanced out some of the 'devolution' processes that are more pronounced in undergraduate degrees.

The 'undergraduate' devolution of gender has fulfilled two academic purposes. At one level, the inclusion of gender as a theme -the ubiquitous 'lecture three on gender' in an introductory module, or 'lecture four on gender' in a module on globalisation- has had the effect of placating institutional needs for representation and equality. Institutions like mine feel comfortable that gender is being taught, and that it is somehow everywhere, as if by virtue of devolution there has been an intensification of the quality of academic discussion on 'gender'. At this point, lecturers who teach 'a bit of gender here and there' but also do research on 'gender' feel uncertain about how 'gender' is taught. A colleague who was keen on teaching gender but only given 'a lecture here and there' used to comment how she hoped for modules on gender, something that allowed for its complexity to be fully appreciated. Indeed, she felt anxious that the students could not engage into a more comprehensive teaching of gender and sexuality, where the teaching of gender was a matter of indexicity rather than complexity.

From a perspective of confidence one could argue that compared with other disciplines anthropology is in a 'good shape' in that gender studies are pervasive enough and that the disposition to critically look at ethnocentric values enable students to make sense of gender lectures. However, the existence of many gender courses and research gender centres has not been followed by a sense of certainty by its practitioners, especially those young in their academic careers. Most of the lecturers I have worked with and talked about in the process of writing this paper feel that the place of gender modules -and their experiences of teaching are unsettling for them. Part of their-and my- anxieties arise from changes in the political direction of universities and university teaching/research itself, which mirrors that of other modules and disciplines.

The paradox lies in the fact that despite its recognised force, its capacity for articulating contemporary discussion from within a disciplinary and cohesive theoretical ethos, the teaching of gender and sexuality, as a 'core' module [one that is engaged with interdisciplinarity] is still far from happening. Here I will argue that there is an issue with emotional and political engagement with certain types of modules and certain kinds of teaching that underpins these discussions. I do not wish gender to be a compulsory module as a kind of 'representative core of anthropology' in the guise of an exercise that protects the boundaries of the discipline instead of promoting, as I feel, interdisciplinary approaches. But I do not wish gender to be taught only in snippets, a section here and there, one lecture on gender in methods, one lecture on gender in economic anthropology, and so on, creating this diffuse and apolitical sense of gender 'being everywhere' but actually not having any political centrality or specificity in connecting with student's sexed subjectivities and their learning process.

Perhaps a module on gender, kinship and sexuality, like the one I am teaching at present is, as I have been told, 'overspecialised' amidst institutional process that aim at recruitment. We are witnessing the transformation of knowledge as 'pots of material' aptly put by our Vice-Chancellor, where the university could gather different modules and themes (and sanction those that are not financially popular out of it) and pick them up for the marketing of 'transferable skills' and 'popular'

degrees. Here, from a marketing process, it makes sense that gender must be one lecture here and there^{viii}. In a sense, I am reclaiming gender as a 'specialised' module because it is not to do with 'cores' of anthropology but with the centrality of a critical interdisciplinary curriculum [as opposed to institutional interdisciplinarity (Weingard 2000)] as a whole. I believe 'gender/sexuality modules' within anthropology stand as a distinctive anthropological endeavour in making sense of social relations from a distinctive anthropological view whilst being able to accommodate the interdisciplinary nature of social sciences and perhaps offers some solace of critical embrace in an era of auditing processes (see also Abramson 2006: 21-23).

There is also another possible reason why this has happened, one that underpins some of the challenges and accusation of bias I discuss below. Namely, a superficial over-emphasis on discussing 'sexual identity' and 'gender' as if they were 'single coherent systems' (Moore 2007). This is perhaps the result of our intellectual tendencies that as Moore aptly argues have meant that anthropologists have given too much pre-eminence to sexual difference and symbolic orders and forgotten to look at 'the power of the imaginary and the relationships through which we become sexed beings' (Moore 2007:5^{ix}). One of these relationships I will argue happens, for teachers, through engaged processes of learning and teaching itself.

Teaching and subjective desires

A seeming paradox about desire tends to dominate our institutional landscapes. My first example comes from my first week of teaching my first module on gender. I had been appointed to teach gender as a compulsory module for an anthropology degree in a private college. A colleague of mine, who had just published a book on gender, was also teaching gender in an institute of education. She was hoping to introduce a module on gender within an anthropology curriculum in her department. After several unsuccessful events we met for one day to talk about teaching about gender. She looked at her course notes exasperatedly and said

“Oh...look, our chair won't introduce gender as a module in our degree. Look, these courses are good, they cover key aspects of anthropology...they are most up-to-date with the literature on gender. He (the head of school) is still struggling to put gender in the curriculum. He says it would take too long and something about gender is already being taught in kinship, his kinship module. What is worst, you know, he thinks that because I am a woman...he thinks I am biased in insisting on teaching gender'.

Those who teach gender feel often compelled to examine gender from a personal, subjective, emotive, reflective position, in tune with other developments in anthropology (Davies 1995). In fact, it would be rather odd, and it is so, that whilst anthropologists in the field question the nature of positivism and objective appropriation of 'social realities', and are freed from the confinement of naturalism, made to reflect, to bring emotions to the centre-stage of learning in the field; the teacher of anthropology is supposed to treat the classroom as a different medium than it's treatment of social encounters and one's positioning in the field. I am perplexed by the voices that suggest that one should divorce oneself from one's own reflective positioning vis-à-vis theories of gender in order to create an un-involved, non-emotional, non-sexed subject, leaving personal, gender issues 'at home'.

I have to admit that some of my challenges as a lecturer come from my position as being emotionally involved whilst positioned in a kind of experience where theory and ethnographic practice make sense through a personal, reflexive, ethically responsible, position in class. I was thus surprised when recently, nearly seven years after my first colleague was struggling to introduce a gender module in the curriculum, I became the target of a similar comment. This time, the context of the accusation was different. We had a gender module in the curriculum for six years; we did not have to struggle [or we so naively believed] with an academic context that was threatened by sexed identities. As institutional demands and a budget crisis had hit staffing levels, questions about why to continue teaching these modules and why to give them ‘centrality’ came into play. My insistence, like that of my previous colleague, in defending the viability of our curricular options, was met with similar comments. A colleague of mine related a conversation where another colleague had argued against my passion for teaching gender in that gender should not have so much ‘centrality’ in our teaching. In order to argue this point this person said about me: ‘She is gay. She should not be teaching gender and sexuality as compulsory modules, she is biased’. As I discussed this accusation with some members of staff, it became clear that what I was being accused of was of ‘thinking through my sexuality’. And that my sexuality, apparently, made me believe [as a kind of blindfold] that certain themes like gender and sexuality were more important than others and thus this must be [according to them] a reason why I defend the theme in the curriculum with passion. The alleged perversity of my actions was, as it was put to me, that I aimed to keep the ‘centrality’ of gender in our curriculum; that, from their point of view, I must have desired some academic ‘dominance’^x of some kind or other; and that I resisted to being defined by ‘sexual identity’ while trying to make sense of being in a contradictory position as a sexed being and as academic.

As biased and homophobic these comments are in themselves, they illustrate an underlying tension for teachers in many departments. I would argue in this paper that historical perceptions of one’s gender [or sexual orientation] as instrumental in the production of knowledge can be played against the teacher/researcher in many subtle ways: ‘if you do not come out (as a male, female, feminist, gay, trans...), you are not reflexive enough, but if you do, you are assumed to be too involved with your own subjectivity or too political’. Or, ‘I am biased because my sexuality makes me believe that teaching on gender and sexuality is more important than other things’^{xi}. For many lecturers to be put in this contradiction, where the complexity of being a sexed subject is reduced to a mere index of ‘sexual identity’ or ‘a woman’ (see Herdt 1993: 55) is a nearly tragic event. My earlier colleague seven years before me did not wish to maintain herself in that contradiction, for her, in her departmental context, the contradiction was quite unbearable. As a result she never taught the gender course she had written as a result of her research. Eventually she left her position. There was never a gender module included in that curriculum –although there was a devolution of gender lectures^{xii}.

The challenge here resides in the fact that that the subtle [and sometimes not so subtle] types of ‘discrimination’ [or rather placing people in contradictory places that may be too hard to compromise with] that affects teachers of gender are not always a product of people being unaware of gender issues, but precisely the opposite. These comments do not stem from a lack of awareness on discrimination. They are fuelled by a much rooted bias.

I will argue that the actual bias of the accusation is the result of a superficial [or rather circular] way of thinking about gender: of thinking that gender relations are just reduced to matters of sexual identity (men.v.women, heterosexual.v.gay) and attempts to counter-balance dominance, {that gay people can be as biased as heterosexual people, that heteronormativity can be met by homocentricity, that women can dominate men and so on}. As I perceive it, this circularity in thought is due to a confused view on gender and sexuality: a lack of understanding on what constitutes, historically speaking, and following Moore, the ideological dominance of sexuality over gender, and the role of desire in this tug of war.

The allegation that I must think through my sexuality suggests that I am [it represents me as], somehow, trapped in my sexual desires (they –I am being told- are the ones that prevent me from ‘seeing’; they produce a ‘bias’ in my vision). I will claim, in my defence, and that of others teachers in my situation, that I do not feel trapped in my sexual desires to such an extent that these desires will prevent me from assessing the reasons why I am passionate in defending the teaching of gender and sexuality. And yet, I will not disagree that desires of all kinds impinge on our thinking. We do think at some extent or other through our ‘sex(uality)^{xiii}’. What creates the bias, however, is a fissure in its very own discourse. We do not think through our sexuality but through ‘historically entangled’ sexualities (Weeks 2003:115). We do not think through a single gender (man/woman) but also through representations of ‘gender’. We think through more than just a ‘single’ gender or sexuality. There are, as I follow Moore’s argument multiple ‘gender positions’ (Moore 2007:18) in our thinking process. When people accuse others of ‘thinking through’ their sexuality they are, in fact, falling into the trap of the idea that gender and sexuality are what Moore beautifully defines as ‘coherent single systems’ (ibid 22). In representing relationships of gender and sexuality in a ‘coherent single system’ -and moralising it as discourse through bias-desire, the pleasure of teaching, and the subject of such passion becomes entangled – in the accusatory discourse- and fetishised as self-indulgent and ‘perverse’.

One could argue that the kinds of bias described above are also constitutive of gender relations at work and forcibly they sanction certain representations of sexualities as complex experiences of desire(s) [desire for gender]. My point is that while I acknowledge the certainty of the effect of desire on one’s teaching choices, and the importance of it, and how it effects the teaching process, the extent to which these constitute and become a bias underlies an insidious discourse on the morality of the control of sexualities and desires (Foucault 1990).

Here, I would like to recall the arguments of Lutz (1998: 221) and Milton (2004:27 and 2002:21-23) on the role of emotions as being represented as ‘inferior’ strategies for thinking in opposition to ‘rational thinking’. I would take their argument -on the western bias that gives pre-eminence and opposes emotions to reason- for the case I discuss here to say that to place desire for teaching [and teacher’s sexed subjectivities] as an overwhelming category of bias [uncritical thinking] is to fall foul of the western bias where desire (or emotions) is located in a realm that it is cognitively inferior [and undesirable] to agency and consciousness (see also Foucault’s pertinent discussion on the relational nature of the pre-eminence of ‘logos’ as a form of ‘moderation’ versus ‘the practice of pleasures’ represented as non-ethical subjects 1984:86)

As I illustrate above, many people teach gender as a taught module in anthropology, and they do so from different backgrounds and in different types of curriculum arrangements from optional to specialised modules, and combined with other subjects from kinship to entire specialised research areas. A reason for defending the teaching of gender, with passion, as a desire, is in fact, I would argue, because it is one of the areas in anthropology where we are making incisive contributions whilst being decisively interdisciplinary. The pervasive institutional discourse on ‘cores’, ‘optional modules’ –and somehow interdisciplinarity itself- [that arises out of the modularisation of degrees] can be very misleading. Toma (1995:679) describes well how the arrival of ‘alternative enquiry paradigms’ has resulted in fierce departmental differences and the creation of ‘wars’ between ‘distinct academic cultures’. Fractures in our academic landscapes do not just come from modularisation, but interlock with the tension of co-existing ‘distinct academic cultures’ from within.

There is, of course, a certain institutional desire for having gender in the curriculum. This may match that of their teachers, but often as I have discussed, at undergraduate level, they tend to be limited to the now compulsory lecture on gender in every other module. I suspect the fact that institutional passions and teachers’ passions often mismatch is the source of anxiety and challenge. Any critical views on how one hopes to transcend the contemporary predicament on ‘one lecture of gender here and there’ and to make it into a more consistent and research-based module, where personal subjectivities of both students and lecturer are valid in themselves, may find themselves in a tangle of discourses regarding gender being ‘overspecialised’ and ‘not fitting’ or ‘too subjective’ and colliding with needs for recruitment and the marketing of degrees. Trapped in Weingar’s ‘paradox’ of a constant (rhetoric) institutional demand on interdisciplinarity and critique to specialisations (Weingar 2000:26). They may find themselves accused of ‘bias’, or ‘being political’, ‘dominant’, ‘perverse’ and their identities and subjectivities as anthropologists being questioned whilst a deeper bias on the pre-eminence of ‘rational’ over ‘emotional’ and its place in the production of academic knowledge remains. They may find hard to bear these contradictions, or contextually prevented from finding a compromise. They may find it hard to deal with their sexed subjectivities being fetishised into sexual identity of a cohesive kind. These tensions will remain unless we provide room for further challenges on how to think about ‘gender and sexuality’; and how to validate [and give value to] the kind of ‘academic culture’ that has emerged as a result of the impact of anthropology of gender in anthropology. The predicament of lecturers I have worked or co-taught with over the years is the fact that their desire [a sexed desire] for teaching gender is often shortcut by both academic and institutional demands and intellectual fashions, creating in turn an anxious process of unfulfilled realisation of one’s personal subjectivity.

Fieldwork, Gender, and Identity: The example of the ‘Fetish Night’.

As a researcher I am interested in looking at processes of inequality, exchange and the nature of relatedness in relation to gender. In the past years, and as a result of the experience of co-teaching gender, we decided to emphasise a further inclusion of lectures that had a critical look at the (de)construction of sexuality theories. My new research interests^{xiv}, however, were still too much in their early stages to be able to be adopted for teaching. It was in fact my students who prompted the events that lead to the ‘fetish night’ project. During class, students commented on their participation in a student ‘fetish night’ (which invites burlesque, fetish and SM performances). I felt

students' experiences could be included, as mine were, through an assessed fieldwork exercise. With both the modules and the project, I hoped, it would help us address the issue of sexual difference and much more centrally the complex issue of desire and representations of power and gender.

One of the challenges when teaching subjects of this nature is of having to deal with student's perceptions of the 'lecturer's sexuality' when, as it happens with staff, they focus people's attention to a 'blind spot': sexed subjectivities and desires for gender, mystified as sexual identity. I will argue that while our sexed subjectivities and desires constitute us [including our teaching], our emphasis on sexual identity, the fact we use the term 'sexual identity' as a pre-determined category of understanding somehow betrays our purpose. Lectures (and lecturers) on gay and trans sexualities can be met with certain initial apprehension (or even abhorrence), let alone coming out in class^{xv} but, luckily, anthropology students assume it to be part of an 'inclusive' practice and a non-ethnocentric approach to thinking.

In teaching about the nature of desire, as a lecturer, I am unsure how far I can go in relating these to subjective experiences of students and lecturer without alienating one or the other. Sometimes during a lecture I feel like I used to feel the first years of coming out: a tension between acquiring visibility, invisibility, hiding, confessing, normalising and so on. It feels very similar to contexts where teachers can not come out in fear of the repercussions and discrimination that may follow. I often feel like I have to make an extra effort to remind myself that it is never a matter of coming out 'of fetish' to the people in class but of considering how the role of fantasies -unbound emotions, passions, representations of power in sex, transformation of the boundaries between genders, the alleged perversity of desires- are imagined worlds. As such our social and sexual worlds need to be imagined for us to become them, and for us to resist the ways political orders construct these as homogeneous types of 'cultures' and 'identities'. Fetish desires, one could argue, are like any other desires: they are ways of imagining the world, and also ways to represent sexed subjectivities, and ways to subvert and sometimes challenge such representations.

The difficulties about teaching on desire, fantasy, and how they relate to representing gender are more felt here^{xvi}. I am talking of a matter similar to 'coming out' in class (coming out as women, feminist, trans, man, gay, fetishist, bi, Christian, Muslim whatever type of coming out experience we could name) -and including 'gender and sexuality' coming out into the curriculum. It is coming out with 'desires' in class rather than with sexualities, gender or subject areas per se, that emphasises the feeling of vulnerability of the teacher. However, we should not reduce 'desires' and 'fantasies' to being matters of sexual identity, but processes of imagining -and achieving- possible relations between the different qualities and needs of becoming a particular type of social being.

Another of the reasons for which selecting a controversial teaching issue such as fetish desires relates to the practice of anthropology, is that it illustrates the relation between gender, sex and the body as it becomes a venue for consenting to desires, 'performed desires of masculinity and femininity' (Moore 2007:19). An example of this, that students bring out in class, is that of a realisation of their own choices in dress and gender performance {the most common dress for the fetish night is of a 'playboy' bunny for young women, for example}. Students easily point at the fact that the fetish night makes more visible certain representations of maleness and

femaleness, through dress and performance. Postgraduate students find it even more useful as the discussions illustrate how certain sexual practices become 'normative', 'sanitised' or 'problematized' depending on historical and social context (Foucault 1970, Wills 1997) and more importantly depending on what is 'done to the body' in relation to representing femininity and masculinity.

Perhaps the fact that models of gender give certainty to those observing them, and that they can appear stable if they are mystified as 'single coherent system' (as in the earlier bias-accusation example) topics like these above present a further challenge. Fetish models of gender heavily play with giving consistency to gender as a cohesive system that needs to be challenged, and this means keeping a kind of circularity of desire that threatens their own very representation of consistency (Hart 1988:10, Fernbach: 12,176). But it is not so much students, but other members of staff that appear to struggle with thinking beyond 'comfortable' types of coherence. Four years ago, commenting on the fetish ball, a colleague of mine frowned upon the mere idea of it (without having ever been there, and s/he pointed out at a crucial issue in my discussion, the body. S/He said, pointing at my recollection of a BDSM performance during the ball...'the ball (and what I described), that's disgusting, it really goes against the sanctity of the body...there is no respect for the body anymore'. And so I felt, the beliefs of those people around me functioned as a kind of sanction. I felt shy and troubled to say at least, that not only I was attending the fetish ball, but I was considering integrating the student's experiences in their learning practice through a consideration of the theme of fetish and desire in sexualities in their gender course.

At a basic level, the teaching of gender and sexuality in anthropology, with its struggles and conflicts, is very much about creating a context (a growing awareness, personal, reflexive, theoretical) for students and teachers to examine different cultural contexts in which other/and own subjects and cultures deal with and struggle with Moore's 'fact': masculinity and femininity do not map easily into male and female bodies^{xvii}. By locating examples that appear to co-exist and differ with their experience as sexed beings, students are asked to revert back to their own experiences, to confront both the impact of 'normative' positions and their effect on making alterity 'deviant' and problematic. The outcome of this experience, mirrored in the reflective journals that the students compiled, made me realise that gender practice, gender performativity and the learning of both fieldwork and gender positioning was crucial in the creation of the anthropologist researcher as a positioned self and as a reflexive one, albeit forced to deal with the circularity and instability of fetish representations.

Student entry on their assessment journal (and field diary)

- 'In the spirit of the night (and of course) in order to get the full effect on participant observation I decided to dress in my best fetish clothing –a tight PVC corset dress that I never imagined wearing in public [borrowed from a trans sibling]; I was embarrassed with the way my body looked in it and was convinced that people were constantly watching (and judging) me because of the dress. However, reflecting on the situation, I think it was an important aspect of my experience, as a large part of fetish night is putting oneself on display in vulnerable and sexual ways'
- 'Approaching both strangers and friends, I became hyper-aware of how they might respond to my outfit –would they think I looked sexy and slim or fat

and inappropriate? Would they be more willing to talk to me about fetishes because I was dressed for the part?’

The outcome of this student’s reflection on the event had profound meaning for me as a teacher. Underlying these questions, as we discussed later, laid open the issue of participation and subjective experience. Students’ experiences, however, from my point of view, were much more fluid; some were able to approach some of the participants and ask them questions, others flirted and flaunted their sexuality in ways they had not done before, including people coming out as gay to their lecturers having a chance not only to discuss about what it meant to be gay, but also a chance to perform the ‘dressing’ of sexuality(ies). The context in which the world of sexual fantasies had become represented, making it more elliptic and unattainable, staged a performative utterance for students; they felt some of the ordinary pressures from performing their queerness, bi-sexuality, heterosexuality, or Wican sexualities were removed. It was no longer a world of sexual identity, or against Butler, it was felt different to utterances of performativity. In class debates, it became clear that the event gave students the possibility to be ‘removed’ from every day gender performances whilst allowing for an exploration of the multiple possibilities for being a gendered person. It allowed students to reflect on their lives not just as identities (sexual and gendered), but as lived moments that had both subjective and academic meaning even in its uncompleted, uncertain, and fractured ways.

Students’ coursework and feedback made me feel it had been a good inclusion in the curriculum. The event [in addition to lectures and tutorials] had produced a context where the students had created good anthropological knowledge, not about looking at sexual minorities from within minorities, but about understanding that western models of dealing with the body, emotion and desire, specially in the context such as fetish desires, are part and parcel of larger anthropological discussions. Ultimately, these discussions were on how different cultures ‘make’ men and women, and ‘make’ the body, showing that somehow ‘marginal’ groups are central to cultural understandings on how the ‘body’ and thus ‘gender’ has to be ‘made’ and that the relation between ‘the subject and the social’ (Moore 2007:21) is never complete.

Conclusion: consenting to fantasies of ‘gender’

I believe that any teaching experiences that provide students with the potential for looking at possibilities for being a gendered person (the possibility of being male, female, gay, trans, queer, intersexed, and so on) whatever the venue may be, opens the door to these modules to fulfil their political potential to be critical to over- dominant, normative and over-cohesive understandings [and representations] of gender and sexuality.

This paper concludes by retaking my preoccupation with the kinds of ‘intellectual/disciplinary’ compromises that gender and sexuality modules stand for vis-à-vis the institutions where they are located. One of the realisations about teaching gender and sexuality, in anthropology [and across interdisciplinary areas] is that it requires the teacher to articulate a particular kind of engagement {emotional, passionate, and intellectual} with both the curriculum and the students.

The academic validity and strength of these courses do not depend just on how ‘well’ these are constructed, and how well the teacher engages with reflexive understandings

of gender through personal or students' experiences. I will argue, these courses [and their capacity to teach students how to analyse society and culture] also depend on the teacher's ability to be capable of questioning what we may take for granted both within gender studies and within anthropology; and how far the teaching of gender has an impact on the actual institutions where we work.

Creating and teaching gender courses heavily depends on 'how far' can institutions go in adapting to the critical nature and political incisiveness of gender and sexuality studies [here including any types of political incisiveness like feminism or queer theory]. In other words, how can institutional learning and teaching contexts [Universities, colleges and other learning venues] consent, that is give a place in a tacit agreement, or positively sanction, the kinds of sometimes transgressive, politically challenging, uncomfortable [to normative values] objects of knowledge that gender and sexuality courses like ours aim to create? How far can our learning and teaching institutions consent to courses that by their nature tend to place a critique on our academic bias and tend to challenge normative bias within society?

This paper argues that there are benefits in placing less emphasis on sexual identity in our teaching, and puts more emphasis on the relationships in which sexed subjectivities come to negotiate, consent, agree or disagree on gender models, the extent they exert agency, the extent of their participation in social life. For the students in this project, the experience of participating in the fetish ball raises issues about what kinds of bodies are being discussed, agreed upon, shifted in transition, and consented to by others. Through our student's engagement with the discipline the inclusion of gender modules are established in the ambiguous 'core' areas of the teaching curriculum. For myself as a lecturer, my teaching experiences are also, in paraphrasing, tied to practical possibilities of being a gendered individual within my institutional context. They are partly dependent on my capacity for balancing the precarious act of compromising desires, the desire for sexuality against sexual identity, the desire for teaching gender and sexuality within anthropology against poorly fetishised academic identities.

My last comment, however, is that no matter how good gender modules and teaching experiences may be, and no matter how careful a teacher is in balancing their desires 'for gender' with their desires 'for teaching gender in anthropology', it is left to the institutions and their needs for normative inscription within their own social contexts to appreciate their political usefulness. This of course, opens another discussion for future debates, as to the kinds of dialogues [besides marketing, auditing and benchmarking] that institutions have with their teaching staff and their students about their learning and teaching identities at the level of their desired and embodied experiences.

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ⁱ The term fetish here it is use to define 1) the types of desires and fantasies that are often located in the context of experiencing 'fetish/BDSM/and so called 'alternative sexualities' as transgressive and transformative pleasures that develop contemporary cultural fantasies (Fernbach 2002: 6-7,176) fetishism as a concept that examines how desire and fantasies in their elliptic and contradictory nature are culturally located into what McClintock calls 'impassioned objects' (McClintock 1995:184) and as forms of substitution (subject for object, sex for fantasy) that merges in economies of desire (i.e. colonial desire, sexual desire, epistemological desire).

ⁱⁱ In her book, Moore considers the relation that sexed subjectivities have with representation. In other words, she argues that sexed beings (gay, lesbian, trans) struggle with 'the fact' that 'masculinity and femininity do not map easily onto male and female bodies' (Moore 2007:13)ⁱⁱ. It is not only that ethnographically speaking, in different cultures, the male and female do not coincide with masculinity and femininity; sexed subjects (trans, gay, lesbian –in normative 'western' terminology) may not coincide with binary models of sexual difference (ibid 210) either. Basically, she argues, 'subjects identify with multiple gender positions' (ibid 18-19). In this sense, in order for subjects to have gender they must resist accommodating to a single model of masculinity and femininity (Moore: 2007:18). And in resisting to do so, femininity and masculinity appear as 'compromise positions', a place of 'non-coincidence'. All sexed subjectivities are located in a middle ground that struggles to make sense, to reach a compromise (an individually and socially lived one) between the many contradictory positions that each individuals identifies at different times (ibid).

ⁱⁱⁱ Here by the teaching of gender I mean the teaching of modules that look at 'gender', sexuality, kinship and so on. The term gender meaning 'gender modules' is used academically as shorthand for modules that often encompass more than just 'gender'. Some modules are titled, for example, 'gender, kinship and social reproduction'. Across the UK 'gender modules' (see in text) are fairly similar in their theorisations of gender and the bibliography they use. The shorthand does not define some essential core (i.e. gender being more important than sexuality or kinship). It is a 'folk' term. I define it as departments do; as administrative shorthand. What we mean by gender is an epistemological issue and a much-debated term in anthropology. For this paper I follow Moore's definition on gender (in page 2 of my earlier section). When referring to gender as an epistemological issue I use the term 'gender' in semi-colons to differentiate it from the academic administrative shorthand we use in our departments.

^{iv} The module, like all others in the curriculum, also aimed to help students in considering ethnocentricity. It aimed at improving tolerance towards gender and sexual diversity. It was a place for the examination of theory and critical discussion. Most importantly, it was a place for students to be made to think about the kinds of relations that commonly define anthropology as a discipline.

^v Here I acknowledge that the term Queer, like gender, is another problematic term in terms of epistemological discussion. This has been debated amply in anthropology (see Grosz footnotes for an example of the debate and its definition 1995). Here again I use it in 'emic' or 'folk' sense that is how members of the department saw it, meaning that not all were in same-sex relations, used it. For example, some staff defined themselves as 'straight but queer', 'bi and gay', 'bi and married', 'women-only', 'lesbian', 'kinky'. As the combinations suggest, over the years, discussion on the teaching of gender gathered a group of people fairly confident with discussions on gender and sexuality, with a strong awareness that the terms 'gay', 'lesbian', and 'bi' did not mean single systems of being sexed beings. Thus the often described 'this and the other' indicates that staff choices of partners, desires and sexual identity could not be just 'one single thing' and mean 'the same' to all. It did not define a feminist or queer curriculum per se (Rabinowitz 2002: 176)–the curriculum remained 'anthropological', but it informed our pedagogies.

^{vi} Another occasion in which the teaching of gender and sexuality was questioned was in departmental seminars on 'queer theory' for archaeologist and anthropologist. Staff from 'science' background felt puzzled that we cared for doing research on queer theories as they argued, 'gender does not matter when teaching'. As a group, the science-based staff declared that the issue of gender was irrelevant to teaching science. Candidly, a senior member of staff intercepted the discussion by asking us: 'does the university pay for this kind of research?' The joy of interdisciplinary with 'science-based' colleagues was short lived, but we felt the outcome brought them question about the reason for doing research and teaching and the fact that the gender and the sexuality of the lecturer does

matter. The risk in this context is that in order to emphasise the importance of gender in teaching science one has to over-emphasise gender and sexual identity as ‘coherent systems’ which they are not whilst avoiding circularity. It also jeopardises the possibility of understanding what Edwards call ‘cultures of practice’ within science (Edwards 2007:5)

^{vii} Its meaningful ‘centrality’, however, did not had to do with the its actual place of the module on the curriculum –it was never a matter of gender being an optional or compulsory module- but in what Toma (1997) describes for gender, as its capacity for being an ‘alternative enquiry paradigm’ (1997:679) and for ‘contesting’ anthropological theory. As Babcock (1993) argues by virtue of establishing new relations with theory(ies) against existing ‘dominant discourse of theory’ (ibid: 62-62). Ultimately, anthropology of gender claims legitimacy rather than a defined place in either ‘centrality/marginality’ -in similar ways to other disciplines dealing with gender (see Welch 2006).

^{viii} That gender, feminism and sexuality studies has fallen out of fashion in academic curriculum is [and it is no] a surprise: it has come hand in hand with its ‘distribution’ across modules, and a devolution of specialisation into many introductory modules. It is not a surprise when as I argue in the text teachers are made to loose their passion for teaching gender.

^{ix}“Anthropology is not longer a singular discipline, if it ever was’ writes Moore in her introduction to the future of anthropological knowledge, ‘but rather a multiplicity of practices engaged in a variety of contexts’. And so, I feel, it is also true of the practice of teaching (and producing) anthropological knowledge in classrooms (and other venues). One can teach anthropology, as it were, through modules that reflect such multiplicity of practices and contexts, the teacher being able to reflect upon and position herself through contextual understandings of gender.

^x At the centre of the misunderstanding, what was perceived as ‘imposition’ or an alleged attempt by me to ‘decide’ on the curriculum options was that, after considering all the options with internal and external assessors, it was not possible or desirable to compromise one type of academic dominance in favour of another, and the only option was to retain the module as it had been created because it was, as the external assessors argued, not a matter if gender was a ‘core’ or ‘compulsory’ module, but that through the gender module as it had been constituted, anthropology in itself, was the core of our curriculum.

^{xi} I on the other hand, due to a different departmental context, managed to resist for a while. The price I paid for my resistance is, of course, being sanctioned as perverse, and having my professionalism as an anthropologist being put into question –which, I feel, was another attempt to try to erode my resistance. I am conscious though that if the contradiction became too unbearable, if I was not allowed a place for compromise, like my colleague before me, I would have to renounce the teaching of gender, perhaps deal with the meanings of being a sexed being through other modules, or re-invent my desires for teaching anthropology in other ways.

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^{xiii} As in an earlier discussion of the use of the word gender, the term ‘sexuality’ is used here purposely as conflated sex and sexuality to reflect what happens in the bias discourse, where ‘sexual identity’ takes pre-eminence in the discourse as one single system of thought and practice. They are not. I borrow Moore’s term of sexed subjectivities, if I understand it correctly, to define their branching of desire into multiple gender positions.

^{xiv} Parallel to this discussion I was concerned, at the level of research, with looking at sexual identities (in particular ‘queer subjectivities’) that are represented as ‘fetish’, ‘illegal’ and transgressive in a current climate of the naturalisation of heteronormative values amongst LGBT groups with a specific interest in LGBT ideas of ‘fetish’, notions of ‘consent’ and ‘social contract’.

^{xv} Coming out [of any kind] in class involves several ‘issues’ that are about ‘how do we teach’, what kind of relationships and explorations can/should happen in class? One is the transformation of the learning process into a ‘political’ area that focuses on the identities of staff and students in the context of teaching. Another is the possibility of alienating individuals as it overemphasises the category of ‘sexual identity’. Another is the creation [as argued] of a false dichotomy and hierarchy of moral disposition between staff: teachers ‘emotionally’ and ‘politically’ (subjectively –for instance challenging homophobia) involved as opposed to non-involved (objective) teachers. Another dichotomy in that ‘lectures’ or modules becomes ‘agents’ –bias and prejudices are tackled through content rather than discussion, knowledge is ‘given’ out rather than created in class-. This impinges on how the ‘classroom’ is imagined as either a normative ‘place’ for the delivery of knowledge (non-involved staff), or as a place in which the learning context is gradually consented by those involved in it through reflexive and shared creation of knowledge between staff and students (also Howie 2000). In teaching gender I do not want students to assume that sexual and cultural identities reflect sexed desires and subjectivities in a non-problematic way. For this reason, in order to allow for a consented space in a teaching classroom, I resign myself to a compromise situation (always full of worries) by ‘being in between’ the coming out experience. I choose not to follow utterances of ‘sexual identity’. I avoid coming out as a form of a single ‘identity’, but to do it as a way to go away from it. The discussion on ‘coming out’ feels like depending only on a side mirror when driving, it distracts me from not being able to perceive ‘blind spots’ in our epistemological landscape. I perceive utterances of sexual identity {I am this, I am that} as, so to speak, a cry wolf (an academic wolf). In the context of teaching gender I don’t want my own sexed subjectivity(ies) to be reduced to mere ‘identity’ and for ‘sexual identity’ to be normalised ‘single coherent system’ in representation. I would represent ‘sexual identity’ –if it had to be done

through teacher/staff discussion of one's identities': not as 'identity' but as certain kinds of 'desires' (intermittent desires about sexed subjectivities). I would want to identify the subject, and the cultural complexity of desiring, not the identity per se as. I feel the theme of coming out in class/or research (see Roscoe 1996:201) did historically speaking, fulfil a good social, political and academic process within the history of constructing sexuality and that of normalising desires and promoting awareness against prejudices. These were part of the challenge to, what Dowset calls 'Big bang moments' such as the idea of sexuality as constructed rather than represented 'by bodies in sex' (Dowset, 2000:30). We should aim at surpassing its paradigm, though, before it becomes an over-encompassing interpretative bias. One way of doing so is to question (as did Moore (2007)) what we may leave 'unseen' or left concealed in the kind of 'blind spots' that interpretative biases acquire in themselves.

^{xvi} I also felt I had to justify the mere existence of the subject to the administrators of the university. Every internet page and click on our computers is always being watched, and themes like pornography and body modification are tabooed in the lists of the themes that are unacceptable to 'check online'. How could my students and I embark in considering the meanings of desire and gender and sexuality in areas where the university had specifically censured Internet access if not by embarking on types of participant observation and hope for achieving some interpretative 'thickness' in our ethnographic understandings.

^{xvii} See footnote i