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Is there a place for sensory aspects and alternative representations in non-normative sexual interest research? Reflections from a study into dacryphilia

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Abstract: Research into normative sexual interests (e.g., paraphilias, fetishes, and unusual sexual practices) mainly collect qualitative data because of the low occurrence of such behaviors. Moreover, the majority of studies using qualitative data have focused solely on sexual practices as they occur in ‘real-life’ and have neglected sensory aspects of sexual experiences, as well as alternative representations of sexual practices (e.g., screen media, literary texts, etc.). This is particularly relevant to non-normative sexual interests, as many of these may involve arousal from an ostensibly sensory activity. This paper first considers the subjects of four previously published studies examining feederism, eproctophilia, necrophilia, and zoophilia. It examines their methodological approaches in more detail, as a means of displaying how attention to sensory aspects and alternative representations may add further insight. We then examine some of our own data on dacryphilia (sexual arousal from crying) using data two previously published papers. These data are discussed in relation to the literature on sensory-based approaches to data analysis (e.g., visual methods) and other analytic techniques that may be suited to alternative representations of sexual practices as well as outlining four distinct types of crying data (visual crying, aural crying, written crying, screen crying). The data suggest that participants with dacryphilic interests orient towards sensory aspects and alternative representations. These sensory aspects of experience are worthy of further exploration and the paper highlights that there are contemporary data collection and analytic frameworks in which to do this (e.g., visual methods, interpretative phenomenological analysis).

Keywords: Non-normative sexual interests, Eproctophilia, Dacryphilia, Feederism, Necrophilia, Zoophilia, Paraphilia, Qualitative.

Introduction

Non-normative sexual interests have been described by different organizations and groups as paraphilias (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), unusual sex practices (e.g., Love, 1992) and/or fetishes (Griffiths, 2019). To some extent, these terms are interchangeable. In this paper, we use the term ‘non-normative sexual interests’, as we feel that it best describes the relation of such interests to societal attitudes (i.e., most individuals would not consider these interests normative) without being stigmatizing, and in a way that recognizes that not all sexual interests comprise sexual preferences. In particular, we choose not to use the term ‘paraphilia’, as this borrows from a discourse of pathology, which we do not intend to represent in this paper. Instead, we focus on non-normative sexual interests that are ostensibly ‘healthy’ for the individual(s) involved (i.e., they are consensual and do not require psychiatric or forensic treatment). It is, of course, the case that what constitutes a normative and healthy interest in one culture might not be reciprocated in another. Consequently, this opening section of the paper will focus on research carried out in North America and Western Europe.

A number of studies can be considered representative of research into non-normative sexual interests (e.g., Bruno, 1997; De Silva & Pernet, 1992; Pate & Gabbard, 2003; Weinberg, Williams & Calhan, 1995). Broadly speaking, these studies can be distinguished by their use of qualitative or quantitative data. We believe that, problematically, the majority of studies using qualitative data have focused solely on sexual practices as they occur in ‘real-life’ and have neglected sensory aspects of sexual experiences, as well as alternative representations of sexual practices (e.g., screen media, literary texts, etc.). This is particularly relevant to non-normative sexual interests, as many of these may involve arousal from an ostensibly sensory activity. Moreover, this shortcoming may be a result of limitations in the methodological approaches that are utilized in these studies.

We would now like to consider the subjects of some of these studies and their methodological approaches in more detail, as a means of displaying how attention to sensory aspects and alternative representations may have added further insight. Following this brief critique, we will examine some of our own data with regards to a specific non-normative sexual interest (i.e., dacryphilia). These data will then be discussed in relation to the literature on sensory-based approaches to data analysis (e.g., visual methods) and other analytic techniques that may be suited to alternative representations of sexual practices.

Limitations in current qualitative research into non-normative sexual interests

Terry and Vasey’s (2011) case study into feederism (i.e., sexual arousal from weight gain, either as a ‘feedee’ or ‘feeder’) uses an in-depth

semi-structured asynchronous online interview as its source data. These data are analyzed in an explanatory framework and the analysis is based on the questions asked by the interviewer, rather than using any overriding epistemological or theoretical assumptions (i.e., it is based on what Yin [1994] refers to as “*study propositions*” [p.21]). Lisa, the subject of the case, has a sexual interest in gaining weight herself (i.e., she is a ‘feedee’) and observing the weight gain of other women (which is commonly termed ‘fat admiration’). This would certainly seem to involve visual sensory aspects. As Lisa explains, in order to fully appreciate weight gain in other women, she prefers to see how the body physically changes shape over time. To some extent, this visual aspect of her interest is addressed by the researchers’ use of a Figure Rating Scale in relation to Lisa’s current weight, ideal feedee weight, and ideal non-feedee weight. Lisa’s ratings for this scale are reproduced in the paper for the reader to see. However, the body representations used on this psychometric scale are likely intended for a variety of respondents and therefore may be a generic representation of Lisa’s interest. Furthermore, they only deal with visual aspects related to Lisa’s self-image, rather than her interests in other women’s bodies. Elsewhere in the analysis, Lisa also refers to her use of online images for masturbation and arousal purposes. This highlights the fact that Lisa never describes any ‘real-life’ encounters that she has had with women – she prefers to use screen media for this part of her interest.

Case studies are often concerned with the idiographic examination of novel phenomena in their entirety (Willig, 2009), and this may have influenced Terry and Vasey’s choice not to focus solely on visual aspects of feederism and fat admiration, or Lisa’s use of screen media. As such, Terry and Vasey’s description of the sensory aspects and different media in Lisa’s interest is somewhat limited by its case study design. However, the use of visual representations of Lisa’s weight gain and that of others, either created by Lisa or downloaded from the internet, may have shed some further light on the nuances of feederism and fat admiration.

In a similar vein to Terry and Vasey (2011), Griffiths’ (2013) case study into eproctophilia (i.e., sexual arousal from anal flatulence) also uses an in-depth semi-structured asynchronous online interview as its source data, which are analyzed in an explanatory framework also based on study propositions (Yin, 1994). Brad, the subject of the case, has a sexual interest in anal flatulence, which seems to naturally be concerned with sensory functions such as smell and sound. Indeed, Griffiths’ (2013) choice of extracts describe in some detail the important role of smell and sound in Brad’s interest, and what constitutes an arousing smell and sound for him. Within the limitations of a case study design, Griffiths (2013) then gives a good description of sensory aspects of anal flatulence. However, it is conceivable that the presentation of, for example, audio clips of sounds that arouse Brad may have brought some deeper understanding to his experience of this sexual interest. While Griffiths attempts to bring the sensory aspects to the fore, it is important to note that the method and the reporting of it

simply cannot do it in a way that brings the sensory aspects of the case study to life as it would be if Brad was interviewed in the broadcast media (as this would at least bring the auditory aspects to the fore but the olfactory aspects would still be lost).

Moving away from case study designs, Aggrawal (2009, 2011) analyses secondary data from both medical and legal cases to describe different experiences within both necrophilia and zoophilia. These experiences are organized into ten different ‘classes’, which Aggrawal indicates increase in severity. Aggrawal analyses his sources in a descriptive framework that, although not specified, can be likened to a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the two studies previously discussed, feederism and eproctophilia ostensibly seem to be focused on various sensory aspects. This is not necessarily the case with necrophilia and zoophilia, as although there may undoubtedly be visual preferences, these interests would appear to be focused on the subject as dead or an animal. Instead, we feel that necrophilia and zoophilia may be more readily associated with alternative representations of sexual practices, as it may be difficult to access dead bodies and specific animals.

However, Aggrawal’s descriptions of these interests, and his classification system, rest on the assumption that those with a necrophilic and zoophilic interest primarily engage in ‘real-life’ scenarios. His Class I (i.e., “role-players”) and Class III (i.e., “fantasizers”) describe individuals who either act with (living) humans or fantasize without any ‘real-life’ encounters. Yet all of the other classes involve physical contact with dead bodies or animals. This may be a result of the secondary data that Aggrawal uses in his analysis, as it is unknown to us whether many medical or legal cases exist that involve alternative representations of necrophilic and zoophilic sexual practices.

However, it is certainly the case that zoophilic pornographic websites exist (e.g., Jenkins & Thomas, 2004; Maratea, 2011). Likewise, we imagine that it would be easier for individuals to find visual representations of dead bodies on the internet, or to read descriptions of dead bodies in fictional texts/crime reports, than to obtain access to an actual dead body. This is important because by not examining the potential existence of such alternative representations of these interests, we feel that something may have been missed from the experiences of those with necrophilic or zoophilic interests.

Dacryphilia: Data in action

In the previous section, we outlined how studies into four different non-normative sexual interests may have had shortcomings with regards to sensory aspects of the interests and alternative representations of sexual practices within these interests. We would now like to give some examples from our own research into dacryphilia, which give an idea of how

participants attended to specific sensory aspects and alternative representations in their responses.

The data are drawn from a set of semi-structured online asynchronous interviews with eight individuals with dacryphilic interests (i.e., they were sexually aroused by tears and/or crying). We have previously analysed these data using thematic analysis and discourse analysis to explore different interests within dacryphilia (see Greenhill & Griffiths [2015, 2016] for further information on the participants and design of the study). During that analysis, it became clear that a number of participants referred to the sight and sound of crying and tears. Similarly, many participants exclusively experienced their interest through screen media and literary texts. By the time this was realized, we were already drafting our papers and could not do significant justice to the sensory factors outlined above. However, by giving some examples in this section, we hope to inspire other researchers to consider sensory aspects and alternative representations of sexual practices when planning their data collection.

The following data can be broadly split into two different sensory aspects (i.e., visual and aural crying) and two alternative representations of sexual practices (i.e., written and screen crying). Although there is no hierarchical relationship between these different ways of experiencing crying, it is worth noting that the alternative representations of crying are experienced either visually and/or aurally.

Visual crying

In their descriptions of what they enjoyed about crying, it was clear that a number of participants focused on visual aspects of crying. In this extract, Angela M describes what arouses her about the movements of the face during crying:

“I like to see the image mostly, the face morphing under the strain, the turbulence of emotion” (Angela M).

Note here that Angela M specifically orients to the visual aspects by stating that she likes to “*see the image*” of the face. Likewise, the fact that she refers to “*the face morphing*” also suggests that she enjoys the way the face changes during the crying period, which would require visual attention in order to fully appreciate. Although she then refers to “*the turbulence of emotion*” (which appears to move beyond the visual), our contextual understanding is that Angela M feels that she can see this emotion through the face’s movements. Another participant (TorNorth) does not specifically mention sight in the next extract:

“I personally like the protruding, curling, contorting or bulging of the bottom lip when women cry” (TorNorth).

However, his use of four different verbs to describe what he enjoys about women's lips during crying suggests that he pays a lot of visual attention when he observes crying. To others, words such as "*protruding*" and "*bulging*" may appear to be almost identical in meaning, yet TorNorth is clearly able to distinguish between the two. We would suggest that this is because he is visually focused. Furthermore, the verbs that TorNorth uses are all related to sensory perception. It is not possible to hear, smell, or taste a "*curling*" lip. This is clearly an action that must be seen rather than heard, felt, and/or smelt.

Aural crying

Other participants' descriptions focused on aural aspects of crying. Chendru contrasts aural and visual aspects of crying in the following extract:

"One thing I discovered very recently is that watching a man crying is somewhat satisfying, but hearing a man cry is much more satisfying for me. The sound is more immediately stimulating" (Chendru).

Here, Chendru nods to the possibility of "*watching a man cry*", but goes on to specify that "*hearing a man cry is much more satisfying for me*". Her focus on aural aspects is further emphasized by her direct reference to "*the sound*" of crying. In response to a question about her feelings towards normative sexual practices, Meantangerine elaborates on what exactly is stimulating about the sound of crying:

"I still enjoy plain sex, but I can't orgasm from it without thinking about crying...there are things that turn me on, but somehow it all ties back in to crying: e.g., heavy breathing (I can imagine how it sounds when he cries)" (Meantangerine).

Meantangerine makes direct reference here to "*how it sounds when he cries*" and also gives the example of "*heavy breathing*" in relation to the type of sound that she enjoys. Although it may appear common sense that crying can involve the crier making specific sounds, we believe that this may not have occurred to researchers as being an essential aspect of arousal for some individuals. Indeed, Meantangerine states that she "*can't orgasm from [plain sex] without thinking about*" crying sounds. This suggests that the aural aspects of crying may be integral to her interest and therefore should be worthy of study.

Written crying

When probed further about the specifics of their interest in crying, a number of participants gave accounts of how they were aroused by written crying. On the surface, this is not necessarily surprising, as a number of erotic novels exist and these novels may eroticize crying. However, the examples that participants gave were not from erotic novels. Angela M draws on classic literary fiction to exemplify her enjoyment of crying:

“I like it when it happens all of the sudden and the character of my story is not willing to let go, to cry yet, he struggles, he represses, denies what he feels then...there’s this minutiae catharsis, when his eyes get flushed, well up with tears or the man is either shaken by sobs, has a breakdown or other such scenario. Such as Heathcliff in Wuthering Heights before the death of his beloved Catherine, such as Mr. Rochester in Jane Eyre” (Angela M).

Angela M specifically references the characters of Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* and Mr. Rochester in *Jane Eyre*. In doing so, she locates her interest within these literary texts, rather than in erotic novels and other erotic fiction. Similarly, her description of how *“the character of my story is not willing to let go, to cry yet, he struggles, he represses, denies what he feels then...there’s this minutiae catharsis”* suggests that she is focused on tragic literary devices (e.g., catharsis), which may play an important role in her arousal. Moreover, it is of interest that she is sexually engaged with written descriptions of crying, instead of real-life encounters. Meantangerine broadens the literary field when discussing the role of non-fiction texts in her arousal:

“It was actually a pretty dry list of statistics about how and how often men cry. It was based on William Frey’s study from the 80s. I can still orgasm just from looking at statistics about crying” (meantangerine).

The focus of Meantangerine’s arousal in this extract is an academic *“study from the 80s”* which comprises *“statistics about crying”*. This would appear to move the topics of written descriptions of crying even further away from erotic novels. By Meantangerine’s own admission, there is nothing erotic or even emotional (as Angela M suggests in relation to Heathcliff and Mr. Rochester) about these statistics – they are simply *“a pretty dry list of statistics”*. In spite of this, she *“can still orgasm just from looking at statistics”*, which indicates the integral role that such non-fiction texts may play in her arousal. As far as we are aware, the role of both literary and non-fiction texts is largely unexplored in the study of non-normative sexual interests. Although there has been some discussion of the role of non-

normative sexual interests in erotic novels, this has focused on the contrast between popular literary depictions and the realities for those with these sexual interests (e.g., BDSM in *Fifty Shades of Grey* [Barker, 2013]). As such, the discussion of how different literary texts may be used by those with non-normative sexual interests is somewhat non-researched and we feel that this may represent a novel area for exploration.

Screen crying

Another interesting occurrence was that all of the study participants gave accounts of screen crying in relation to their arousal. Once again, this may not initially appear surprising, owing to the large amount of (free) internet pornography available, some of which surely contains scenes involving crying. However, participants in the study tended not to focus on descriptions from pornographic films or photographs. In the following extract, Chendru describes a crying scene from a television series:

“However, on the same show [The Mentalist], Simon Baker had a crying scene that was very different. When he broke down, his face contorted, we could see his throat working as he tried to hold the emotion back, and finally he gave in and began to cry. Unfortunately, just at that moment the camera cut from a close-up to a long shot from outside the room he was in” (Chendru).

Here, Chendru specifically states that she is referring to a television “show”. She also describes how “the camera cut from a close-up to a long shot”, which further emphasizes not only that she is viewing the crying through a screen, but also that the scene itself is constructed using edited camera footage. The attention that Chendru has paid to the scene is also somewhat notable. Presuming that she is recalling the scene from memory, she manages to describe in detail how “when he broke down, his face contorted, we could see his throat working as he tried to hold the emotion back, and finally he gave in a began to cry”. This may suggest that she has watched the same scene a number of times. It may also indicate that screen depictions of crying are very vivid and memorable for Chendru. Either way, it appears clear that Chendru is completely engaged with this crying scene and that it is of importance to her. The scene that she references is also clearly non-pornographic in nature. In another extract, Punkchick provides an interesting take on pornographic scenes when describing her preferences in screen depictions of crying:

“I like watching comforting/crying scenes in normal movies/TV shows. In pornographic material I like videos that involve crying for emotional reasons (not BDSM). For example, people who are

unsure of themselves sexually or are scared, because it shows an emotional intimacy” (Punkchick).

Initially, Punkchick references that she likes “*watching comforting/crying scenes in normal movies/TV shows*”, perhaps in a similar way to Chendru. She then goes on to describe the role that “*pornographic material*” plays in her interest. However, rather than being interested in overtly sexual pornographic videos, Punkchick states that she likes videos with “*people who are unsure of themselves sexually or are scared*”. This implies that she may be more focused on aspects of the scenes that would not be considered erotic normatively. Punkchick further confirms this by clarifying that she likes videos that “*involve crying for emotional reasons (not BDSM)*” and that show “*an emotional intimacy*”. Consequently, although Punkchick does watch pornographic videos in relation to her interest, she seems to be more interested in social and emotional responses to sexual practices in these videos, rather than the sexual practices themselves. This provides some contrast to other accounts of pornographic image use by those with non-normative sexual interests, whereby it has been assumed that individuals are interested in sexually explicit images (e.g., an image of a dog’s penis juxtaposed next to a woman’s face covered in semen [Jenkins & Thomas, 2004]). We feel that the use of non-sexually explicit pornographic videos, television series and films described in participants’ responses may represent another area that is relatively non-researched in the literature to date and may also be worthy of further exploration.

Where next with sensory aspects and alternative representations?

In the previous section, we outlined a number of examples from our research into dacryphilia that may have benefitted from more analytic attention to visual and aural aspects, as well as alternative representations of crying. We would now like to discuss further how more attention could be paid to the above.

Visual data

Although anthropology, cultural studies, and sociology have a longer history with visual methods (Harper, 2002), in recent years psychology has begun to increasingly embrace visual data (see Reavy [2011a] for an overview). Reavy (2011b) suggests that visual data can bridge a gap left by the ‘turn to language’ in psychology in the 1970s and 1980s (see Burr, 2003), namely that much qualitative research has focused on language to the detriment of other areas. For example, it can be challenging to articulate specific experiences verbally (e.g., sensitive, emotional or particularly complex experiences). In such situations, the use of visual accounts may communicate more than verbal accounts could (Brunsden & Goatcher, 2007). In addition, the use of visual data often

constitutes participatory research, whereby the participant either directly chooses or creates the images to be used in the research (Brunsdon, Goatcher & Hill, 2009; Reavy, 2011b). Finally, visual methods may better recognize the embodied nature of individual's lived and felt experiences of the social world, which can be especially important in the study of sexuality (Bowes-Catton, Barker & Richards, 2011).

Cronin (1998) suggests that photographic images can exist to either provide information or provoke emotional reactions. Arguably, visual data can be collected that fulfils both of these functions (Brunsdon & Goatcher, 2007). However, in the context of the cited studies into non-normative sexual interests, where understanding was lacking with regards to the subject of the interest, we would argue that informational images would be a better starting point. This is important, as research using visual data often explores how participants visualize emotional responses to their experiences. Although this is undoubtedly also of interest in relation to non-normative sexual interests, the initial point for us would be to explore what is visually appealing to participants about their non-normative interest.

Broadly speaking, Reavy (2011b) identifies two ways of collecting visual data. Photo-elicitation refers to the use of pre-existing visual images as prompts for the research (e.g., family photos, images from an advertising campaign, etc.), while photo-production refers to the use of visual images that are created specifically for use in the research (e.g., photos, videos, drawings, etc.). Within the context of non-normative sexual interests, we feel that either data collection technique could be relevant. In a previous example, TorNorth talks about the “*protruding, curling, contorting or bulging of the bottom lip*”. We have previously suggested that these verbs may appear similar in meaning to somebody who does not have an interest in crying. This could be addressed by asking participants like TorNorth to choose some photos that represent each of these movements and discuss them with the researcher. Likewise, Punkchick describes how “*in pornographic material I like videos that involve crying for emotional reasons*”. What exactly such a scene would consist of may not be immediately apparent to the researcher. Therefore, by asking Punkchick (or someone like her) to choose an example scene of the above, the researcher would be able to talk this through with her and gain better understanding of what she is referring to. In the first section of this paper, we discussed the idea that Terry and Vasey's (2011) use of a Figure Rating Scale may have reduced Lisa's interest to a generic image. Visual methods could address this by asking Lisa to create her own images (photographic or otherwise) of the different weights in question. Moreover, the use of both photo-elicitation and photo-production techniques presents an opportunity to use the images in writing up the case study. This means that the reader can literally see what the participants are referring to. Although the reader may still interpret the images in a different way to the participant, this would place some emphasis on the centrality of visual aspects to the participants' interest.

Visual data in psychology has largely been analyzed using the same techniques that would be applied to verbal data. We would also suggest that there may be a place for the semiotic analysis of visual data (e.g., Barthes, 1977). However, as semiotic analysis is concerned with the identification and analysis of signs that essentially lay beneath the (visual) text, the role of the participant in such an analysis may be somewhat lost and consequently the focus may clash with the participatory aims of many visual methods. Brunsdon and Goatcher (2007) suggest that Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith & Osborn, 2003) may be more suited to the analysis of visual data than other techniques. IPA focuses on interpretation (i.e., from both participant and researcher) and sense-making as integral to individual experience (Willig, 2009). Within both photo-elicitation and photo-production techniques, the onus is on the participant to choose or create images that represent their interpretation of a specific experience, which ties in well with IPA. To continue the example of TorNorth, an IPA analysis of images of different movements of women's lips may assist in exploring how TorNorth makes sense of each of these movements, both as sexually arousing and as different from each other. Likewise, an IPA analysis of a visual scene relevant to Punkchick's interest may assist in discovering how she attaches emotional meaning to crying in her interpretation of the scene.

Aural data

Interview data (i.e., recorded audio interviews) can often be aural, as the data are actually heard by the researcher that is interviewing the participant. However, we are more concerned with aural data as sounds, rather than as verbal communications that are transcribed. Moreover, the fact that participants both in our study and other studies (e.g., Griffiths, 2013) have oriented specifically to sounds in their responses has necessitated our discussion of this area. As far as we are aware, psychology has largely avoided the analysis of this kind of aural data. As such, our discussion in this area is entirely tentative and somewhat limited. However, we would suggest that aural data could be collected and analyzed in a similar way to visual data, as outlined previously. For example, a participant could be asked to bring an audio recording of a sound that is particularly arousing for them, and their experience of this sound could be analyzed in, for example, an IPA framework. Likewise, by attaching audio clips of these sounds to an online publication of a report, the exact nature of this sound would be clear for the reader. One potential issue with the collection of aural data in relation to non-normative sexual interests is that many of these interests involve arousal from human functions (e.g., crying in dactyphilia). As such, there may be ethical issues in a participant consensually obtaining an audio recording of another person.

Written and screen representations

We have already outlined how screen representations of crying could be collected through photo-elicitation techniques and analyzed using, for example, IPA. However, both written and screen representations exist as artefacts independent from the participant. The question here then, is how written and screen representations could enrich data analysis, without being analyzed specifically themselves (i.e., as might be done in film or literary studies).

As we have previously outlined, studies into non-normative sexual interests have a tendency to assume that ‘real-life’ sexual experiences occur and may constitute the interest in its entirety. In the first instance, it may be of use for a researcher to bear in mind that their participant may not engage in ‘real-life’ sexual practices. Indeed, with the wealth of screen and written media in North America and Western Europe, it is easy imagine that alternative representations may be more accessible than ‘real-life’ sexual practices. This consideration could be implemented in the form of the research question (e.g., a question that directly looks at the use of non-fiction texts in relation to non-normative sexual interests) or in the interview schedule (i.e., accommodating for questions that address alternative representations of the subject of the interest). Although the participants in our study were forthcoming with regards to their use of alternative representations, this may not always be the case and may be worth anticipating in the study design.

The extent to which written and screen representations could subsequently enrich analysis may depend on how familiar the researcher is with the written or screen media in question. In our example from Angela M’s data (above), a researcher who is a familiar with either *Wuthering Heights* or *Jayne Eyre* may be able to draw on this knowledge in their analysis of the extract. However, this does not necessarily have to be the case. With regards to Angela M’s data, the first author was unfamiliar with the aforementioned novels, but was familiar with Aristotle’s analysis of tragedy. Furthermore, Angela M herself orients towards this by specifically mentioning “*catharsis*”. Either way, it would seem apparent that researchers should be able to enrich their analysis in some way. In the above data, this could constitute an interpretative act, whereby the researcher interprets Angela M’s enjoyment of crying in relation to romantic hero archetypes (e.g., Heathcliff and Mr. Rochester). Alternatively, it could involve a discussion of the discursive deployment of literary terms (e.g., catharsis) to construct Angela M’s interest as not just sexual, but also intellectual. The nature of the analysis and the resources that the researcher has drawn upon could quite easily form part of an introspective reflexivity (Finlay, 2002).

Conclusion

In this paper we have highlighted how previous studies into non-normative sexual interests have neglected specific analysis of sensory aspects (e.g., visual and aural), as well as alternative representations of sexual practices (e.g., screen and written). The examples from our own data suggest that participants with dactyphilic interests orient towards sensory aspects and alternative representations. As such, we feel that these aspects of experience are worthy of further exploration and that there are contemporary data collection and analytic frameworks in which to do this (e.g., visual methods, IPA, etc.). Although the aforementioned discussion is based around a small study of one specific non-normative sexual interest (i.e., dactyphilia) and may therefore be somewhat limited, we believe that the nature of other non-normative sexual interests may entail participant orientation to the aforementioned sensory aspects and alternative representations. We hope that this paper can encourage other researchers to bear these suggestions in mind in their future research.

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