

Smelling the sensual and the kinky as (a)sexualities emerge

Agata Pacho

Department of Sociology

Goldsmiths, University of London

In this short presentation I will talk about the sensual, the sexy and, of course, the fragrant. I will explore the sexual, which appears to be a powerful narrative in Katie's videos as well as in perfume industry which exploits the link between fragrances, romance and seduction.

While taking closer look at those associations, I will draw on Bruno Latour's notion of becoming which he draws from Giles Deleuze in order to enrich the way in which sexuality is discussed. Therefore, sexualities I will talk about are not fixed. I do not wish to search for the essence of the sexual. Quite the opposite, I treat sexualities as in an on-going process of emergence.

When listening to how Katie talks about various scents, I understood that perfumes do not only enable one to become a nose; they allow one to become a man, a woman, a sexual and desired self. Certain fragrances make us sensual, irresistible to others. Some may even do as much as indicate how willing we are to engage into sexual affair. Maybe they articulate what cannot be said in some spaces and in some circumstances?

Through smelling we become sensitive to sexuality of the other. Smelling is an intimate act, as Katie says. Indeed, it draws us into someone's personal space, so close that we can experience their body. We get attached to fragrances worn by our sexual partners or even to their bodily odours. One of Poland's greatest kings gained his place in the national memory not only through the grand victories on a battlefield but also through love letters in which he persistently asked his wife not to wash herself during his absence so he could smell her on his return.

Referring to Latour's theory, do we become a certain person through applying perfumes on our skin? Do we endure caught up in associations of the scent, our bodies, our desires and environment in which we dwell? As we learn from Latour, within associations of human and non-human, the more activity there is from one side, the more activity is from the other side. In fact, fragrances seem to be very busy and dynamic. Katie explains how various perfume components dance together, mix with each other and shake things up. Within their vibrant associations, we can observe how sexualities emerge.

Now, I would like to propose a new take on becoming sexual in the world of fragrances by discussing the process through the lens of asexuality. According to the Asexual Visibility and Education Network, which claims to be the largest association of asexual people in the world,

asexuality stands for the lack of sexual desire. It is a sexual orientation, in which there is no sexual attraction. It is important to mention that asexual people distinguished themselves from celibates who choose not to have sex, and, therefore, must control their sexual drive. Also, asexual people have the ability to form intimate relationships, as their orientation does not affect their emotional needs.

I talked about the associations of the body and the fragrance from which the sexual person emerge. But what would happen if the lack of sexual drive entered those associations? Does the lack of sexual drive change the scent? Does it alter how people sense the perfumes? Does the work of the fragrance become disrupted and dismantled?

Also, scents which evoke sexual connections may challenge an already complex process of establishing a definition of an asexual relationship. Among asexual people are those who experience sexual drive but are never willing to engage in sex with another person as well as those who find sexual behaviours pleasurable while the attraction they feel is purely emotional. Would experiencing partner's body through sensing their perfumes fall under the category of more innocent behaviours, such as cuddling? Or would it be an erotic pleasure?

References

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