“Who cares what the DSM says?”: reorienting questions of power and docility concerning psychiatrists’ attitudes towards the DSM

A multi-method project investigated the presence of heteronormativity in the DSM IV’s construction of female sexual dysfunction. Textual analysis of the DSM IV was backed up with a qualitative interview study of psychiatrists' actual perceptions and use of the DSM IV in their clinical approach to women with sexual issues. This approach follows the urgings of Emily Martin and Anne Fausto-Sterling, among others, who highlight the need for researchers to look beyond analysis of clinical texts in order to understand actual clinical practices, politics and attitudes. In failing to think of discourse as practices and over-relying on linguistic interpretations of clinical texts, some researchers have incorrectly applied a concept of hegemonic power to psychiatric clinical practice; a concept that is both blind to the agency of those who wield power and contrary to Foucault's (1980) notion of power. In doing so, psychiatrists may be incorrectly positioned as “docile dupes” (Foucault 1978, 138). My findings demonstrate that some psychiatrists are highly reflexive of the instruments they use and the profession in which they work. In fact, they are not ‘docile dupes’ at all. Psychiatric practice is more nuanced, diverse and sophisticated than some writers suggest. This analysis thus reorientates questions of power and docility that are unwittingly reproduced in the very analyses which seek to deconstruct institutional assumptions.

Biography
Tara Bates is a PhD Candidate within the discipline of Gender, Work and Social Inquiry at the University of Adelaide, Australia. She has undergraduate degrees in Laws and Arts, majoring in Gender Studies. Her research interests include health, mental health, gender, sexuality and feminism, with a particular focus on the intersections of sexuality, medicine, culture and global capitalism.