

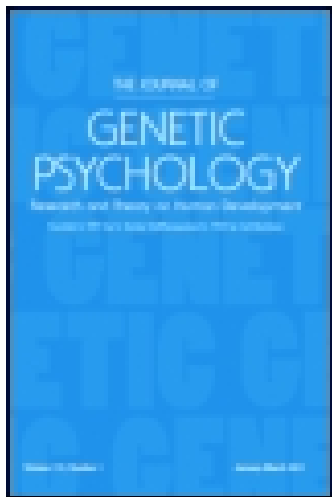
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Publisher: Routledge

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The Pedagogical Seminary

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/vzps20>

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Published online: 28 Aug 2012.

To cite this article: George M. Gould M. D. (1898) Child Fetiches, The Pedagogical Seminary, 5:3, 421-425, DOI: [10.1080/08919402.1898.10534026](https://doi.org/10.1080/08919402.1898.10534026)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08919402.1898.10534026>

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CHILD FETICHES.

By GEORGE M. GOULD, M. D., of Philadelphia.

It is now an almost trite and over-emphasized truism that "the ontogeny repeats the phylogeny," and we have heard much concerning this fact as regards child study. But, so far as I have been able to learn, the subject of the persistence or inheritance of fetichistic habits in children has but little or not at all attracted the attention of students or observers. And yet it is a fact that most every intelligent parent or child-lover must have seen or negligently passed over. The data adduced in the excellent study of Dolls, by A. Caswell Ellis and G. Stanley Hall (*THE PEDAGOGICAL SEMINARY*, Vol. IV, No. 2), although allied, are by no means psychologically identical with those of the phenomena I shall illustrate, and in some respects are quite dissimilar. Some phases of doll psychology doubtless tend to fetichism, but so long as the doll is, properly speaking, a veritable doll, it is an object of affection, and its existence flows directly or indirectly from the reproductive instinct. The savage's fetich, however, is not born of this instinct, and many children exhibit characteristics which can only legitimately be connected with the fetich worship of primitive peoples. The following instances are either personally known to me or are vouched for by friends whose report I can trust.

Case I. A. M. was three years of age, when one day his father, who is a wealthy gentleman, told him that among some of his poor tenants there was a little boy whose name was Joe Dean, who was a bad little boy and did all those things that children do who are not rightly brought up, and such as he was sure his child would never do. At once this Joe Dean became associated in the child's life with all that was evil. Little A. was not a bad boy, but would indulge in fits of perverseness, such as any child might have who preferred his own way rather than that of the parent. When these naughty times came on him he would then say he was Joe Dean, and retiring to an adjacent room, he would close the door, and his mother would hear him stamping and shouting and bidding Joe Dean go way. Soon he would return with the tears all dried up and a bright, smiling face, assuring his mother that Joe Dean had gone, and that her good boy A. was with her once more. This habit was continued until he was 6 years old. One day, after his father and uncle had returned from the city, he quietly said, "I want all of you after dinner to come out on the lawn to a funeral;" they said "whose funeral?" "Never mind," he said, "I'll show you." With anxiety they waited the time set by the little boy, when on going to the lawn, they found he had dug a little grave, and beside it was a small piece of round wood about the length of the grave. This he told them was Joe Dean, and he was going to bury him, and that would be the end of the bad boy. He had taken one of his aunts into his confidence, and had her write on a piece of paper the following epitaph, which, after the grave was filled up and supplied with a small white pine head stone and a foot stone, was spread out on the grave; it was found to contain these words: "Here lies the body of Joe Dean, never to come to life again." (It is the family belief that the words were of his own prompting.) From

that moment the fits of anger and freaks of disobedience disappeared. His whole nature changed, and up to the present time, when 13 years of age, he has never been in such a state of mind that the character of Joe Dean could be associated with his daily life.

Somewhat similar to the foregoing is the following :

Case II. When about two years of age, D. assumed a second self, who was ever present with her in angry moods, and on retiring to the corner of the room, or to an adjacent room, D. would actively shake her skirts and bid "Sarah Jane" begone. "Get out, Sarah Jane!" she would say, and in a few seconds all the cloud of anger, crying, and fretfulness would disappear. One day she returned from Sunday School and told her grandmother that she had met a lovely girl there whose name was Hossie Grafell. Upon further questioning her at that time, it was found, according to her report, that Hossie Grafell's mother was living, and that her father was dead, and that she was an only child, and that she didn't say what D. said. When asked to explain, she replied: "I say I won't go to bed," but Hossie Grafell says, "I would rather not go to bed." A former nurse girl, without our knowledge, had taught her to say, "You nasty thing." She said Hossie Grafell would not say that. Hossie Grafell was a dear child, and only said the things which pleased her mother. So D. assumed that when she was good, she was "Hossie Grafell," and when she was bad, she was "Sarah Jane." This was continued for several years. It is needless to add that Hossie Grafell was a pure myth.

Case III. N. O. is a boy at present eight years of age. From earliest infancy he has constantly kept by him "Bowsy," a little Canton flannel stuffed dog, about six inches high, with bead eyes, straight tail, and four stiff legs. Up to two or three years ago he would never be without this companion for an instant, but carried it in all of his plays, from the time that he would wake up until he went to sleep. Some two or three years ago he quit carrying it constantly in the day time, but never would go to bed without it. It has been forgotten several times in travelling, and the child's grief was so great, and the danger of producing illness so apparent, that it had to be shipped to him at once. No similarly made doll or effigy would do, and the mother has had to be very careful to have a duplicate on hand all the time in case of loss of the original, but the duplicate is made with scrupulous care, so accurately like the old as to deceive the child; at least he always pretends to think it the same one. Sometimes when it has been impossible to get the original or duplicate, the child has only gone to sleep, at nights, after long crying and sobbing. About two years ago he became somewhat sensitive about the habit, fearing that others would ridicule him, but at the present time he shows no sensitiveness whatever upon the subject, although the parents and servants are careful not to ridicule him. Neither the parents or his little sister by action or word, either of encouragement or discouragement, have seemed to have any influence upon his addiction to "Bowsy." A year or two ago his mother made a dog exactly similar to the old one, but with a curled tail instead of a straight one. He accepted this addition to the family, but frankly stated that he did not care anything for this dog, that it should not be called "Bowsy," but might be called "Browney," and might, if it pleased, go to bed with him, following after "Bowsy."

I think the two following instances, when carefully scrutinized, will also be recognized as having a different psychologic origin from that of doll-loving.

Case IV. "A. P., when an infant, was weak, and was always wrapped up in blankets. She selected one certain blanket and would never go to sleep without it. She personified it by the name of "Esther," and

always regarded this blanket with a kind of affection and had a sort of companionship with it. As she grew older the blanket shrunk until it was so small that she could only lay it up to her face, and, as it were, breathe through it. She took it to boarding school, and her companions could not shame her out of going to sleep with it. At the age of eighteen she went to Europe, making a trip up the Rhine and to Switzerland, etc., with a party of school companions; the blanket was always with her at night. At a fashionable boarding school it was likewise her companion. The last time I saw this blanket it was about the size of a large pocket handkerchief, yellow and much darned. Miss P. has always been able to find it in the dark by the feel of it, and to distinguish it from other flannel by its own peculiar odor. It is as well beloved as ever, although Miss P. is now twenty-seven years old."

Case V. A cousin of A. P., when a little boy, was accustomed to put himself to sleep by rubbing the back of his hand on the starched and tucked end of the pillow slip with which his crib was provided. He was pleased with its smooth feeling and coolness, and would not go to sleep in any position in which he could not move his hand gently to and fro over the starched and ironed surface. This sort of pillow slip was carried when travelling, and his mother was careful to have such slips taken to the country home. His devotion to these peculiar pillow cases was such that when going to school he insisted on taking them from home, and declared that it was impossible for him to sleep soundly without them. He invariably went to sleep by rubbing the back of his hand gently to and fro over the hard, smooth surface of the tucks and hem. The last heard of him was when he was about fourteen or fifteen years old.

Case VI. F. J. was an intelligent and perhaps neurotic girl of seventeen or eighteen. As long as she could remember she had been accustomed before retiring to give some object in her sleeping room three caresses or pats. When she got into bed without doing this she felt compelled to rise and do it before she could go to sleep. The object was always some pleasing thing, such as a vase, a picture, a box, or bit of furniture. When she occupied the same room for a long time the object to be patted was changed occasionally, according to her whim, but was not changed each night. She would often choose one thing for months together. When away from home or travelling, on entering the room which was to be her sleeping room for the first time, she always unconsciously made a mental selection of the thing that was to receive the three pats.

Case VII. F. B., from early childhood, has been in the habit of using a peacock feather or whip-lash dangled over a shut book to aid her in a method of self-amusement. The feather was first employed, but when this was broken by usage a small whip with a limp lash took its place. Several such whips were used up during the years of her childhood. The end of the lash was held fluttering over the Kate Greenaway figures of a closed picture-book, and with the eyes directed to the figures or the whip-lash, the child would talk to herself by the hour. One might suppose this to have been a kind of self-hypnosis and perhaps implying a morbid habit of mind, but the child was perfectly normal-minded in all other respects, healthy, and happy, and when carrying on this soliloquy was not hypnotized or "entranced" and apparently was as natural as a child when playing alone and chattering to itself or to a doll. She preferred to carry on this procedure when alone or at least when unobserved, and would not do it at all when strangers were present. The soliloquies when overheard by the parents or her sister were very interesting and peculiar. They were

in early childhood almost invariably metrical and rhymed, and if a rhyme did not come pat, one was made whether it was a real word or not and also regardless of the sense. Usually there was a thread of narrative or of logical sequence more or less clearly running through the jingle. After a few years the child stopped versifying and rhyming and told fairy stories and all sorts of tales to herself, the whip-dangling never failing. The parents describe these stories as partaking of the *style* but never of the *matter* of the fairy tale or story book last read. All the incidents, names, etc., etc., were original and never an echo or memory of the story read by herself or to her. There was never any tendency to indulge in this amusement to excess, and as her (very intelligent) parents were alert to watch for any evidence of morbid mental action and yet failed to detect such, she was allowed to continue the habit almost daily until the child was about fourteen years of age. A physician then advised that it be gradually discouraged, and this was successfully done, though even at the present time when she is over twenty years of age, a bright and intelligent woman, she likes occasionally to soliloquize by the aid of something held quivering over her book.

Case VIII. Dr. H.'s two daughters (now grown up young ladies), from the age of five or six to about ten or twelve, had a smooth, oblong stone about six inches in diameter, with which they always played and would never let it be thrown away. They called it "Tom Stone" and carried it about in a baby carriage, but did not think of it at all as a doll, and their remembrance of it to-day is clear that they did not have such feelings toward it as children have towards dolls; they never dressed it up as a doll. One of the interesting things about their feeling toward "Tom Stone" was that they constantly put it into the sunshine to get warm. They are now unable to determine whether or not this was done to make the stone happier by the warmth or whether the warmth felt more comfortable to the hands.

Case IX. Two ladies tell me that when children they formed among themselves what they called a "missionary society" for mice. Miss H. had kept about her body for a year a little white mouse. It would nestle in her sleeve, in the waist of her dress, etc., all the time. After the death of this white mouse the girls formed the "missionary society" so-called, in which, without the knowledge of the mother, they fed mice secretly, until finally Mrs. H. found her house infested with mice, and had to set traps, in which over 30 were caught.

Miscellaneous Cases. Miss H. had a stump some distance from the house, of which she was very fond. For a year or two she would constantly visit this stump and sit by it whenever possible. She was greatly grieved when this stump was pulled up.

Mr. R., now 40 years of age, has a piece of flannel blanket which he has kept since childhood, and always demands it when he is ill or when he gets hurt, calling it "his baby." He is really miserable when ill, if he does not have it, and when he was hurt and taken to a hospital, he actually sent home and got it.

Mr. H., when a boy, always twirled and curled the corner of the blanket on going to sleep.

I know of a lady who preserved two old spools, with a string in them, with which she used to play when a baby, and although now a married woman, keeps them in the upper drawer where she can look at them occasionally.

Miss H. has always been attached to a little down pillow with a long cover. She is, to-day, a girl of 20 years of age, and yet protests that "it feels better than any other pillow she ever had." She now always carries it away to school with her when she goes.

A little child of 4, in a hospital, who had never been able to play with a hoop, secured the wooden hoop of an old keg and kept this about its neck all the time.

It appears evident to me that the foregoing histories are not instances of inheritance or atavism, but, like many things thus classified, they are simply instances of *de novo* productions and habits which have arisen from precisely the same causes and conditions as similar ones in the adults of savage peoples. One might philosophize at much length upon their *raison d'être* without exhausting the suggestions aroused, and perhaps not exactly hitting upon the true explanations. I take it that very often the fundamental reason of origin may be the need of the mental mechanism of these jelly-like developing beings to objectify psychic things or habits in order to intensify and realize them. Materialization, real or vigorously assumed, is necessary to give a sense of validity and reality, and, as it were, to etch deeper into the mobile protoplasmic substratum of thought and feeling.

Perhaps, also, the loneliness and alienation which grieves all of us, the isolation which is a necessity of individuation, is dumbly and dimly felt by these young exotics, and the hunger for companionship becomes manifest in fetichistic habits.

Often, too, many mixed motives compete or complete. We smile when a simple mind thinks his watch superior to that of others, and in the child the beginnings of the egotism of possession are naively shown in fancied superiority of any chance object selected. It has been contended that much religion or theology has its origin in the pride of belief in the superiority of the tribal or national god over that of the despised neighbor.

Once established, of course, the habit intensifies itself by mere repetition.

Almost every writer defines fetichism according to the teleologic bias of his mind. The toplofty definition of Comte was framed to prove his theory of the triple stages of human development. Lubbock's ideas of it as a method of constraining the deities to comply with desire seems also to do violence to the facts, and even the conception of Tylor appears to give the savage too much intention and self-consciousness. In many types mere habit, or satisfaction with the familiar, is quite sufficient to account for the beginnings, and for much of the continuance, of the love or use of an object or of persistence in a method of action on the part of primitive minds. We should not import into these mobile unformed psychic mechanisms our own habits of self-consciousness and purposiveness. Every negro servant at his or her work objectifies some person there in the air, converses with the imagined one, and even "gets mad" at him. Charms and talismans indicate quite as often mere satisfaction in familiarity, repetition of touch, etc., as they do any desire for things obtainable through the object. The child is also most loyal and doubtless feels some compunction of conscience in failure of faith even to a toy, to an imagined other, or in neglect of an oft-repeated manner or method of action. Even agreeableness to the touch of an object may undoubtedly influence the adult judgment and determine weighty affairs of life. We need only a more subtle and discriminating observation of the unnoticed reasons for our own prejudices, likes and dislikes, to be able to comprehend the most obstinate fetichisms and superstitions of the plastic mind of the child.