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**TESTOSTERONIC GADGETS: THE 'NEW' TECHNOLOGY OF ORGASM APPLIED TO SEX
TOYS**

ARTEFACTOS TESTOSTERÓNICOS: LA 'NUEVA' TECNOLOGÍA DEL ORGASMO EN GADGETS
ERÓTICOS

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Abstract: Sex toys, and the vibrator as its greatest exponent in the passion party world, have become a totemic sex trend in Western sexual culture, going beyond their functional role for both men and women. In the neoliberal postcapitalist societies – based on compulsive, virtual and hedonist consumption – erotophilia is developed and expanded according to the existing sexual imaginary. An overview of the erotic gadgets and their heterosexual practice provide an interesting element to be analyzed to establish the validity of the sex androcentric model, which has been found poor in terms of female sexual satisfaction.

Key Words: testosteronic gadgets, female sexual satisfaction, dildo, masturbation, phallus, sexuality.

Resumen: Los juguetes sexuales y el vibrador como su máximo representante en el mundo del tupper sex ha adquirido una cualidad totémica en la cultura sexual occidental, más allá de su rol funcional para mujeres y hombres. En los sistemas postcapitalistas neoliberales basados en el consumo compulsivo, virtual y hedonista, la erotofilia es cultivada y expandida en consonancia con el imaginario sexual existente. Un recorrido al estudio de los aparatos eróticos y su práctica heterosexista constituye un elemento interesante de análisis para determinar la vigencia del modelo androcéntrico de sexualidad, poco productivo en términos de disfrute femenino.

Palabras clave: artefactos testosterónicos, disfrute femenino, dildo, masturbacion, phallus, sexualidad.

... the most fundamental risk for any social order whatever are integrated and recuperated as a 'myth of emancipation'. Women are given Woman to consume...
 (Jean Baudrillard, 1974, *The Consumer Society*)

1. More than a sexual toy: on the artifact phallus

The intense changes that are being produced in Western societies have reinforced the hedonistic, selfish and possessive individualism, based on the consumption and notion of an identity which results from an insecurity crisis (Bauman, 2001). The globalization and its effects on our lives' instability have rationalized a new global social structure creating a world of "winners and losers" (Castells, 1998) which authenticates the existence of social and gender inequalities and shapes the current patriarchal reaction (Cobo, 2011). The logic of neoliberal capitalism, focused on the individual will as maximum expression of modernity, has turned sex into the main production means, together with drugs and information (Preciado, 2010). Sexuality and the exercise of corporeality as ways of being-in-the-world have found on the Internet a virtual communication, interaction and sociability symbolic space (Guimarães, 2004). Thus, sex gadgets enclosing pleasure – small mechanized utensils for private satisfaction, at freight paid or through passion party talks – have become top consumption products which have enabled the creation of new companies and entrepreneurs.

In this porn culture inspired by the Playboy Era (Preciado, 2010), are sex toys instruments that try to improve our relations with the body and the exercise of sexuality or, on the contrary, are a sign of the existing sexual misfortune? Are they a sign of sexual liberalization or a backlash of sexist slant? (Faludi, 1991). The vibrator is the greatest exponent of these toys and its historical evolution, it was firstly associated in practice to the medical treatment of women and later transformed into an erotic product in pornography (and thus its mass standardization). The vibrator has become a substantial part in the construction of the current sexual imaginary of the androcentric model prevailing in and for women.

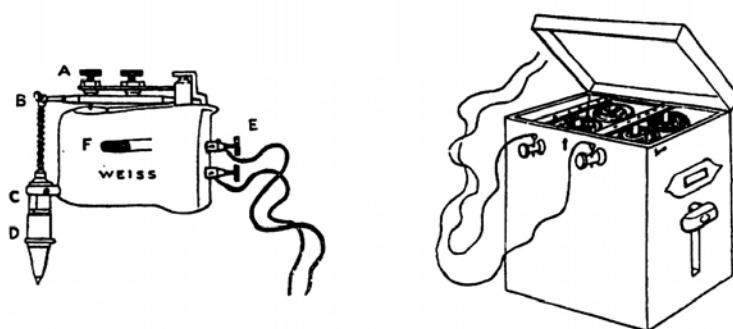


Fig. 1. Illustration from Joseph Mortimer Granville: *Nerve-vibration and excitation as agents in the treatment of functional disorder and organic disease*. London 1883.

For this purpose, a previous contextual and essential study on the brief analysis of human sexuality has been done taking into account the use of the body, its signs (power-knowledge-pleasure) and regulations, the construction of masculinity and the study of female sexual (dis)satisfaction, which justifies the creation of the vibrator as a therapeutic instrument and that is modified according to its new uses and practices.

The human sexual dimension completely influences us: we do not have sexuality, we are sexed (Spencer et al., 2005). As corporal beings with certain sexed gonads, hormones, genetic program, sexual physiological map of private pleasure –personal and fortunately transferrable–, with mental representations that place us under a specific sexual identity – which conditions our behavior towards ourselves and the others – with fantasies and highly personal emotions (affections). We are and we belong to a structure and social group characterized by multiple factors. They define our roles and behaviors, in which we constantly reprogram ourselves, some people more than others. Sex and gender categories show how a society has built its values. The change to which they are subject are different types of social constructions in non-chosen contexts. Thus, the situations or the reality in which they are found are defined through the interaction of people (Berger & Luckman, 1966). In this interaction lights and shadows start to appear and in this distinction the realities are cleared and created (there is not one, but several). In the analysis of power and body, Michel Foucault (1976) is a contemporary referent according to whom modernity is built on control systems based on normalization (and not on law), on control (and not on punishment), leading to a sex technology in which body and sexuality become the locus of

the social control through a series of power speeches (scientific-medical, legal, social and religious) taking the body of women as the space par excellence to exercise this power.

Both in modern and post-modern times, we cannot escape from the original tension between two opposite political-ideological principles in the analysis of the construction of identities. The distinctive feature of the modern Western cosmology is precisely the coexistence of the ideal of free will with strict limitations innate and/or imposed by the society. The task of separating or identifying what is natural (biological) and what is learnt (cultural) becomes useless, as even geneticists talk about living beings as open systems (Lewontin, 1995). At the same time, regarding the consideration of the existence of different hormone types (male and female: androgens and estrogens) we should say it is not truth, as both sexes generate the same components but vary their proportion, although given their chemical interrelation they can be transformed into one another through enzymes existing in the body, regardless of their sex. The one that used to be considered as the hormone per se in women (progesterone), responsible for the development of the womb, vagina, breasts and menstrual cycle, also affects men, even at similar levels, and seems to be the chemical precursor of testosterone (Lewontin, 1995; Lowe, 1983; Beall et al., 1992). In any case, the action of hormones is so changeable and is so mediated with the interaction of other substances and factors (metabolism, proteins, etc.) that it is difficult to attribute them durable behaviors. Therefore, the environment plays an important role, once again, in these so naturally argued issues.

In the modern era, sexuality has become one of the most useful instruments in the sex-gender power relations and in those in which a rationality justified by common welfare and by the good operation of the social system is applied (Foucault, 1976). Human sex is cultural and is regulated as such. With the development of capitalism, a series of moral and social rules are created to manage sexuality and dissent (deviations or abnormalities). According to Anthony Giddens (1992), sexuality is a social elaboration working within the power frameworks that regulate the relationship between body, self-identity and social rules. Thus, sexual liberation is an instrument to emotionally reorganize the life of people. The so-called political technology of the body, according to Michel Foucault (1976), reminds us that the body is immersed in the political field and that is where the struggle for power takes place.

For the World Health Organization (WHO) the concept of sexual health includes three basic elements:

"(i) a capacity to enjoy and control sexual and reproductive behavior in accordance with a social and personal ethic, (ii) freedom from fear, shame, guilt, false beliefs, and other psychological factors inhibiting sexual response and impairing sexual relationship, (iii) freedom from organic disorders, diseases, and deficiencies that interfere with sexual and reproductive functions" (WHO, 1975: 6 – according to Mace, Bannerman and Burton, 1974).

Sexology is used to make the necessary pedagogy to inform about enjoyment and discovery (the positive appraisal of masturbation is key and significant). The Western sexual rules of the last centuries have been established according to the following elements (Guash, 1993): the defense of marriage or stable relationships and of a coitus-centered and genitalized sex, the definition of sexuality in masculine terms (also the feminine one) and the condemnation of dissident sexualities. It is not about prohibiting or repressing, but about providing rules to reach pleasure.

2. Masculinity and female sexual dis(satisfaction)

Female sexuality has been an unknown knowledge area almost until the 20th century and has been historically considered as a reversal of what is masculine. The representation of the vagina as an inverted phallus is due to the creation of a mutual position and opposition that has placed the man and the woman in two completely different levels: a higher and a lower level (Bourdieu, 1990). In patriarchal societies, the phallus has been considered as the main element in sexual relations and the women's orgasm the way of quantifying male power and virility. In fact, Catharine MacKinnon (1979) sees the simulation of orgasm by women as an exemplary proof of men's power, making up the interaction between sexes according to the view of men, which is also extrapolated to the work world, where women are not only segregated to bad paid jobs, but where women's sexuality is also part of the job.

In order to analyze the fact of being a man or what is socially considered as masculinity, we cannot forget its inherently relational condition; in other words, it only exists as opposed to femininity (Connell, 1995). In fact, the culture not treating men and women as polarized types of personality does not have a concept of masculinity understood from the modern notion of culture (European and American). The studies on Social Sciences of the last ten years conclude that masculinity is, above all: multiple (there is not a common model), hierarchical (with a hegemony), collective, active as social practice, stratified (they are not

finished and homogeneous products) and dynamic (changeable). Thus, we must take into account that in different cultures and in different historical moments, masculinity is interpreted in different ways. The organization into a hierarchy of the valorization of masculinity is also a cultural feature of the society and the position held in the gender order through the privileges of men among them and on women, another defining element.

In the field of sexuality, the proliferation of the commercialization of Viagra meant providing men with

"an erection on demand, reinforcing the idea that erection is the be-all and end-all of male sexuality – the only way a man can be sexual – and reinforcing the belief that erection is mechanical, more related to bodily functions than to a relationship or emotions" (Hite, 2006: 135).

Sexes are attributed a different sexual desire and the exercise of sexuality by men and women is justified by the usual alibi of what is naturally assigned, but the truth is that relations between genders and their intergeneric symmetry have in sex a substantial element of power registration where the higher the social control on women's bodies, the exercise of their eroticism or their procreating potential will be directly proportional to the position they hold in the hierarchical structure of the group. That is why Marcela Lagarde (1990) talks about the body of women as a defined political field, body-subject, foundation of its submission and of its power nucleus. Thus, in the same way, according to Rosa Cobo (2011) capitalism is prone to the natural impulse towards the privatization of resources and the natural impulse of the patriarchies goes towards the commercial exploitation of women: sweatshops, the industry of prostitution, the objectualization of women's bodies as natural part of the alliance established by the two domain system. Female genital mutilation in the world is also an example of the subjection of women's bodies (denying enjoyment) and the fact that this method of gender violence was not officially condemned by the WHO until 1993 for the first time is another example of male power (Herrera, 2010). The social reality also shows this subjection revealed through biplane sexuality: male sexuality, "tireless eater of imaginary sexual preys that can be accumulated with fetishistic ostentation; and female sexuality, offered as physical form and visual figure exhibited to our sights" (Gil Calvo, 1991: 107, in Spanish in the original text, own translation).

Which will be the Spanish barometer of this inter-gender situation? Ramón Serrano Vicéns, who has been called the Spanish Kinsey, was one of the first Spanish sexologists

that carried out the first empirical studies on female sexuality in Spain. His work was unpublished and censored by the pro-Franco moral, although his research was published in 1971 through the Magazine *Dr.* Between 1933 and 1961, he interviewed 1,417 women from different classes analyzing female masturbation, heterosexual premarital caresses, marital coitus, extramarital coitus and lesbian practices. This showed that solitary masturbation represented for the Spanish single woman the main source of sexual enjoyment (as for married women, it ranked second taking into account the total number of orgasms), being followed, by frequency order, by heterosexual caresses, premarital coitus and homosexual practices. These practices were much more frequent than expected and did not make reference to a specific group of women in determined environments, classes or areas. Far from it, homosexual practices were recognized by 35.8% of all women from different social classes, populations (rural and urban) and orientation (heterosexual and bisexual) (Monferrer, 2012).

The last nationwide study executed regarding sexuality in Spain was the one carried out by the Spanish Sociologic Research Center in cooperation with the Spanish Ministry of Health (CIS, 2009), it was novel because it included a gender approach and the redefinition of sexual relations in a wider conceptualization than the coitus-centered one (vaginal or anal penetration), locating them within a whole group of practices carried out by two or more people, of the same or different sex, with the aim of obtaining sexual pleasure. This does not need to include coitus, nor conclude with orgasms, although these practices were specifically and differently defined in the survey. Of the almost 10,000 interviews done and regarding sexual satisfaction, men declare that they would like to have intercourse more frequently (in 45% of the cases; almost doubling women, with 23.6%) and regarding the levels of sexual life satisfaction throughout life, the global assessment is more negative in the case of women than in the case of men (54% of men and 52.2% of women state that they are satisfied, but percentages rise in the case of indifference (8.5% for men and 10.4% for women). It almost doubles with the option quite satisfied (1.4% and 2.7% respectively) as well as in the option very satisfied (0.9% and 1.9%). The only percentage in which values are reversed is the assessment of sporadic or occasional sexual partners, where 13.1% of women state that they are in some way satisfied against 8.9% in the case of men.

These results can be compared and updated with an European report on sexual habits (Pfizer, 2011) in which 2,500 women from Germany, Austria, Portugal, Sweden and Spain were interviewed. Under the title *What do women want?*, sexual satisfaction, the frequency

of sexual relations, the sexual desire inhibition factors and, of course, the treatment of erectile dysfunction were analyzed. The main conclusions indicate that Spanish women are slightly under the European average regarding sexual satisfaction (75% declared that they are very or quite satisfied: 22% and 53% respectively, against an average of 74%, followed by indifferent: 18%, quite satisfied: 5% and very satisfied: 1%). When specifying the frequency of sexual relations, Portuguese women are the ones that have intercourse more frequently, 81% of them at least once a week (4% daily, 48% several times a week and 29% at least once a week). In Spain percentages are lower: a total of 68% distributed as follows: 4% daily, 30% several times a week and 34% at least once a week. These data contrast with the fact that most of the 80% of Spanish women would like to increase the frequency of their sexual relations (42% would like to have intercourse several times a week and 14% every day). The increasingly active, demanding and autonomous role of women has eroded the relations between sexes and, by extension, of the patriarchal family. Individual homes increased in Spain up to 20% of the total (INE, 2011), in many occasions women being the suppliers of the family. Thus, Manuel Castells and Marina Subirats (2007) talk about the deep diversification of the family, which is also found in: late marriages, high rates of divorce, women representing two thirds of the homes with just one member, etc. The hegemonic social image of the current woman is the professional one (and in sexuality, the phallic one), although the hard core that still resists to women is power: the power at work, at home, in the political arena and by extension... in the sexual field.

3. The vibrator and its totemic nature in the Western sexual imaginary

The clitoris, as sexual organ whose only function is to make feel pleasure and the multiple orgasm existing in women, widens the potential of female pleasure, not focusing it on the genitals. It has no end and it is renewed. Gender asymmetry also appears in the maximum expression of pleasure (although it reverses here). Male orgasms are defined by Gil Calvo (1991) as short, limited, finite and intermittent and quite the opposite in the case of women. In addition, the feeling of male discharge is neither shared and the female pleasure is continuously reconstituted, as it is an absolutely intransitive emotion (Bruckner & Finkieldraut, 1977). Maybe for this reason, female sexuality is self-perceived ad relational and social (it links, binds and creates communities): female orgasm is like a merger and male orgasm like a fission, a split (Gil Calvo, 1991).



Fig. 2. Different vibrators at the Funfactory flagship store in Berlin, Germany (2009).

Author: twicepix from Bern, Switzerland – Creative Commons

What could be represented by the Playboy logo in the modern expression of femininity is the vibrator-phallus in its current hegemonic male example. In spite of being in the first row of the screens in sex-shops in a wide range of colors and shapes, as well as in on-line shops and in the sexual imaginary of men and women, it is not the top sales product among sex toys, although it is the most visible and representative one. The boom in the market of the so-called erotic cosmetics focused on the creation of devices to enhance sexual pleasure has also a marked gender bias. There is a clearly differentiated spatial division: the specialized sex-shops with porn movies and masturbation cabins are spaces essentially for men and the souvenirs and gift shops with erotic products are for female consumption. The great spread of passion parties has been essentially of and for women: they are held among women who know each other, in private (normally in the house of one of them) and have become an original and convenient method of leisure/consumption (as used to be kitchen utensils and encyclopedias, vacuum cleaners, make up...) in which many women are taking refuge as a freelance job in the modern instability of the paid jobs in times of crisis. The main sale among women in these cases are cheap products with a wide use, not exclusively sexual, such as lubricants, oils, erotic lingerie, the menstrual cup and cosmetics (vibrators are mainly sold at hen parties). Emma, among other things 5 years working as freelancer giving erotic talks, comments:

"I start talking about the preliminaries, how an erotic massage is given –which does not need to be precisely on the genital areas–. When we talk about eroticism and sex

they quickly come here (pointing to the pelvic area), they just think about genitals. Everybody knows how to penetrate, but caressing is more difficult. Then we also talk a little bit about chemistry, which is important for erotic cosmetics. That's why I don't like hen parties, because... How are you going to talk about chemistry at a hen party? 'Come oooooon... take the weinerooooouut...!' What do you want me for? If you're going to be drunk, I just drop the things there, you see them and that's all." (Emma).

At the same time, fetishism and the standardization of the sale of erotic products have expanded passion parties to public places: restaurants, wine bars, book shops, sociocultural centers... as another method of entertainment while having a drink, having dinner, having a look to an exhibition, buying... and at hen parties. Men normalize in this situation the visit to institutionalized prostitution spaces or where they can pay to have sex (Gómez & Pérez, 2009) while women consume male striptease and exhibit phallus-vibrators. In this excessive publicity of the phallus in female parties (in food and, specially, in desserts, in the iconography exposed in t-shirts and ornaments: hair-bands, bobby pins, badges) is the social practice of the Phallic Woman, who is identified with the symbol of lack or, in other words, who is identified with the desire provoked (Pommier, 2008). Once again, the exhibition and respect for the desire object-and-not-subject woman. Even the exaltation of the questionable G-spot, qualified by some as the modern gynecological-myth (Hines, 2001) can be a sign of the need of the phallus for its function in female pleasure and enjoyment. In any case, the aim is to make the evening/night more enjoyable for those searching new feelings and/or learning experiences in those passion party talks with pedagogic purposes, at the best.

"Young girls are even worse, which is what really shocks me. Everybody has access to information and well girls keep getting pregnant, they don't use condoms. They tell me, – the ones above forty – 'Look! I was going to buy a vibrator to be trendy', cause they watch Sex in the City and that stuff, and they say 'I'm doing it too, but I wasn't going to buy it cause I thought it wouldn't help me. Now I know it will given what you told me, but I swear I was going to buy it to play cool with my friends'" (Emma).

In patriarchal societies, the phallus has been considered as the main element in sexual relations. Although most women, as most men, can masturbate until reaching an orgasm in a bit more than four minutes, the truth is that fewer/much fewer times orgasm is reached

during intercourse, in the case of women, of course. The work made by Rachel Maines (1999) analyzes in depth the massage instruments used by doctors in these women's ailments, which show how technology and its uses reveal the male failure in female enjoyment of that time or, in other words, it leads us once again to the social construction of the androcentric sexuality prevailing in history. Dildoes and/or penis substitutes are not even usually used in female masturbation, as the clitoral stimulation with hands is effective and usual (Maines, 1999). The pathologization of female sexuality has been present throughout history through the different diseases attributable to women and to their wrongly appreciated and supposedly limited capacity of sexual pleasure: frigidity and/or anorgasmia or the so-called hysteria (which literally means uterus disease) have been remedied and treated – at the establishments for women affected by these ailments grouped in the so-called hystero-neurasthenic disorders already in the 18th Century – with genital massage (of the vulva or clitoris) up to orgasm by a doctor or midwife. Women have been systematically fetishized and especially in eroticism, where, through the process called objectification-signification-restructuring by Gil Calvo (1991), the female body is perceived by men as a figure in relief, this is, reduced to her parts without connection with the carrier (breasts, hips, butt, legs).

"People have got many complexes. They tell you many things... I can give them a hand, but when they have physical problems: 'Girl, go to the gynecologist, you know? I can't help you, I sell toys'. They tell you many things and women have many complexes" (Emma).

The vibrator (which did not have a phallic shape) appears as an electromechanical medical instrument by the end of the 19th Century and entails an evolution with regard to previous massage technologies (pelvic shower, for example) meeting the doctors' demand of quicker, more efficient and comfortable physical therapies, thus increasing the number of patients per day. The female orgasms experienced with these techniques were called hysterical paroxysm and their objective was to alleviate the symptoms of women out of the prevailing sexual paradigm: the recognition of sexuality failure androcentrically (coitus-centered) defined. In addition, they were women/patients who did not get better nor died because of this disease, so they needed a regular treatment, becoming a very lucrative market for physicians.

The development of new technologies was mainly focused on avoiding direct/manual contact with female organs and the bucolic spaces of spas were in fashion even among

those who were not ill, with hydrotherapies and the so-called water cures (showers with the shape of a waterfall) where many of the therapies for women took place. The documentary compilation carried out by the historian Rachel Maines (1999) represents a hardly advertised material deriving from the stigmatization in which these practices derived (their photographic sources have come from middle to high-class European and American white patients). When the vibrator used in the medical offices since 1880 became popular in erotic movies in 1920 (which had nothing to do with their predecessors) it massively became an intimate product and was no longer used as a therapeutic resource, becoming a personal care machine with phallic shape and current symbolic reference – totem – of the hegemonic masculinity (Maines, 1999). On the second half of the 20th century, the vibrator is established as a sexual object, adapting to the prevailing sexual imaginary and suggesting that this tool is just a substitute for the penis and becoming the modern expression of a universal orgasmic mutuality in the intercourse shared by men and women. This reveals the validity of the androcentric sexual model. Western cultural industries (tv series, popular songs, tales, novels, magazines, fiction series, films, etc.) maintain models of idealized relations that build and maintain the traditional myths of marriage or cohabitation, monogamy and heterosexuality, pairing and exclusivity, placing the individual in a permanent search, in eternal dissatisfaction (Bauman, 2003).



Fig. 3: Erotic Shop Punto G. Narón (Galicia). Photo by the author

Sex, in historical moments pushed into the shadows of privacy, intimacy and indecorousness, emerges in the modernity as a public, social and essential entity. Explicitly or not, its presence has been magnified, everywhere – it is kitsch and cool at the same time – it is not only in fashion, but it also has become self-referential (there is no need of

justifying it, it is just there and that is enough). This publicity and exhibition is just that: a change in the scenario, it has not had an impact on the improvement of the sexual practice (higher levels of sexual satisfaction) nor in a change of model (the vibrator as the greatest exponent among sexual toys perpetuates the value of the phallus as exhibition and masculine pleasure). Technology and the plastic, fluid and post-modern corporeality is an avatar, a virtual image of the globalized dissatisfaction in which the western society (consumer, compulsive and hedonist) is immersed, and the phalluscentric artifact is its most fetishist expression.

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