

**Becoming Your Best Masturbating Self: How Masturbation Became the
Symbol of Female Liberation and Self-Development in the West**

By
Gabriela de la Vega

Submitted to Central European University - Private University
Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

*In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Sociology and Social
Anthropology*

Supervisors: Dr. Alexandra Kowalski
Dr. Eszter Timár

Vienna, Austria
2021

Abstract

This research studied the emancipatory potential attached to new mediatic developments in the field of female pleasure. Masturbation for women is has made its way into mainstream and digital media, attached to a discourse of self-emancipation, individual action, and liberation. What this thesis does is look into the emergence of this relatively new phenomena, the discourses attached to it, and the identity of the new emancipated woman. The methodology applied was discourse analysis of websites that talk openly about masturbation and are also commercial enterprises: educational websites and vibrator brands. In addition, two pleasure NGOs were also analysed, to assess if and how they position themselves differently from for profit organisations. By analysing these three different types of content, this paper manages to map out the emerging trends in the discourse about female masturbation, position it within a broader spectrum of postfeminist critique and evaluate the emancipatory potential of such developments. This research contributed to the field of critical postfeminist media theories by positioning masturbation as yet another technology of the self and area in which women are asked to self-improve.

Key words: *female masturbation; orgasm; clitoris; vibrator; postfeminism; neoliberalism*

Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis has been nothing short of a challenge. On the one hand, I feel incredibly privileged to be able to discuss such a sensitive topic so openly. I can write about masturbation without worrying not even for a minute about my freedom and my bodily integrity, something many others cannot. On the other hand, it feels wrong to keep going when one of our own has their freedom denied. I dedicate this work to Ahmed Samir Santawy, who undeniably would have been proud to see me graduate and complete this degree. He is a brilliant researcher that has been arbitrarily imprisoned simply for pursuing knowledge of a topic considered a taboo in his home country. I miss him dearly. Ahmed is a supportive friend, who was there for me throughout these two years whenever I considered giving up, and who kept reminding me that I was valued and loved. He should be here now with us completing his own degree and it is gut-wrenching that he is not. I hope that one day no one will be punished for pursuing knowledge, regardless of what this knowledge is about. Academic freedom and freedom of speech are two important pillars in the maintenance of a free and inclusive society, and I am determined to continue working to defend these values in my personal and professional life.

Of course, this thesis would not have been complete without the support and guidance of my supervisor, Alex Kowalski, and my second reader, Eszter Timár. Both of whom inspired and supported me throughout this difficult process, with impeccable feedback, empathy, and sense of humour. Thank you to my professors at CEU, whose inspiring classes helped create the theoretical basis for this thesis, and David Ridout, for all his help.

A huge amount of gratitude is also in place for all the other students in our cohort, who can understand better than anyone the challenges that we have been through. We stuck together throughout these difficult times, and kept each other going, with lots of love and empathy. I hope we can all be together again soon.

Finally, I need to thank my parents and my sister, who have always been by my side, supporting and cheering me on. Thank you does not even begin to cover how grateful I am. And, of course, my partner, who reminded as many times as I needed that I was capable and smart enough to do this.

Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	VI
Introduction.....	1
METHODOLOGY	3
Chapter 1 - Masturbation, Governmentality And Neoliberalism	5
HISTORY OF THE FEMALE ORGASM	5
RESEARCH ON THE FIELD.....	7
FOUCAULT AND POWER.....	10
POSTFEMINISM AND THE MEDIA	14
MEDIA POWER, PUBLIC SPHERE, AND POLITICAL ECONOMY	16
LIFESTYLE MEDIA AND POSTFEMINISM AS A MARKETING STRATEGY	18
Chapter 2 - “We Challenge The Status Quo”	21
TEACHING PLEASURE, SELLING PLEASURE, AND ADVOCATING FOR PLEASURE	21
IS PLEASURE FOR EVERYONE?.....	27
“THE TABOO ISN’T HELPING ANYBODY”.....	33
THE NEW EXPERTS	38
THE BUSINESS OF FEMINISM	41
Chapter 3 - “Go! Love Yourself!”	45
THE EMANCIPATED WOMAN.....	45
LILLY ALLEN, EMMA WATSON, JESSICA BIEL, AND CELEBRITY CULTURE	48
BECOMING YOUR BEST MASTURBATING SELF	50
THE ROLE OF SHAME	52
Conclusion	54

Bibliography	58
---------------------------	-----------

List of figures

Figure 1 – Screenshot OMGYes.com front page (OMGYes "“OMGyes.Com - an Entirely New Way to Explore Women’s Pleasure.”")	23
Figure 2 – Screenshot CLIMAX.how front page (CLIMAX 2021)	24
Figure 3 - Screenshot Lelo (LELO "LELO: The Leading Designer Brand for Intimate Lifestyle Products.")	29
Figure 4 - Screenshot Womanizer (Womanizer "Womanizer - The Original Discover the Revolutionary Sex Toy")	29
Figure 5 - Screenshot LeWandMassagers (Le Wand "Le Wand: Best Wand Vibrators and Sex Toys for Solo and Couples").....	30
Figure 6 - JeJoue, Instagram account (‘Je Joue on Instagram: “Do Something Today That Makes You Feel Fabulous! 2020).....	31
Figure 7 - UnboundBabes Instagram Account (‘Unbound on Instagram: “Keepin’ It Kinky 🍊 @mynamesireanna in Our Orion Cuffs!” 2021)	32
Figure 8 - We-Vibe Instagram post (‘We-Vibe on Instagram: “"Because Old People Do Have Sex. And If They Are Not Having Sex, They’re Probably Thinking about It, Wondering about It and Desiring Some..."” 2021)	32

Introduction

I am writing this thesis during the month of May, also known as International Masturbation Month. According to Wikipedia, this date was created by sex-shop Good Vibrations, in 1995, after Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders was fired by President Bill Clinton for suggesting to include masturbation in the sex education curriculum for students (Wikipedia, "'National Masturbation Day'" 2021). Masturbation in general, but specifically female masturbation and female orgasm, have been topics that have attracted a lot of public attention over the years. Be it negatively in the past, when it was considered a disorder, and subjected to misconceptions, to the most recent developments, which place pleasure and masturbation as an expression of self-love and care and even a way to improve oneself and achieve goals.

We are currently undergoing a change in the rhetoric about female masturbation, which can be observed by the emergence of websites, health reports, workshops, books, videos and articles encouraging women to engage in self-pleasure. On the one hand, these developments seem to sexually emancipate women and put their pleasure in their own hands, on the other, it is unclear whether they still reproduce current normative power relations in society, who has access to these emancipatory tools, and the implications attached to the commodification of female pleasure.

Arguing for female liberation are websites such as OMGYes, an educational platform with instructional videos on clitoridean and penetrative masturbation, that claims to have conducted the first-ever research on masturbatory techniques with over 20000 women and charges for access to its platform. Also, vibrator brands online pages, their marketing campaigns and content production. And finally, pleasure non-profit organisations.

This research will look into discourses about female masturbation present in educational websites and vibrator brands in order to assess their contradictory nature. One that on the one hand argues for liberation and emancipation, but on the other commercialises

knowledge and technology. To understand this contradiction, the research question is the following: ‘What kind of emancipatory potential can we see in this commercial enterprise, if any?’. With the sub-questions:

- How has discourse around female masturbation changed over the years?
- How are these websites framing emancipation?
- How is the discourse present in these websites different from the one present in non-profit organisations?
- How are these websites positioning themselves in the fight for ‘emancipation’?
- What (normative) discourses are they reproducing?
- How does commercialization come into play?
- How do they construct the ‘emancipated’ woman?
- How can a woman achieve such state of emancipation or, in other words, what does she need to do (or buy) to be truly emancipated?

The theoretical foundation that will guide this thesis is one based on Foucauldian theories of discourse and power, combined with a critical assessment of neoliberalism and postfeminism. By using this, I argue that masturbation has become a ‘technology of the self’ for women. The free emancipated woman portrayed by the media I will analyse is constructed as an ideal that women should strive for and a constant reminder of how much work women need to put in themselves and their bodies to become ‘liberated’. This, however, does not mean that there is no emancipatory potential in these enterprises.

The first chapter will look into the history of female orgasm, the research on the field, and lay the theoretical foundation upon which this thesis will be constructed. The second chapter will analyse emancipation from the perspective of the websites and the role they (claim to) play. This chapter will address issues concerning the production of discourse, the new expert role now played by the media, the commercialisation of media, and the universality of

the content produced. The third and last chapter will focus on the identity of the emancipated woman and the ways in which they can achieve such liberation. In the conclusion, I will address my main research question concerning the emancipatory potential of these websites. The word ‘potential’ being the key word here, since it is my aim to understand to which extent they carry such potential and not if they are realising it.

Methodology

This qualitative study will make use of online Critical Discourse Analysis of websites and social media attached to it. The first object of analysis are websites that promote or teach female masturbation, OMGYes and CLIMAX. I will also analyse the content of 9 vibrator brands, Lelo, Unbound babes, Maude, Womanizer, WeVibe, SmileMakers, Dame Products, Le Wand and Je Joue. And two non-profit organisations dedicated to female pleasure, The pleasure Project and Tryst Network.

The choice to research educational websites and vibrator brands is because they claim, on the one hand, to be part of a revolution to ‘end the taboo’, and, on the other, are companies that are seeking profit. These websites are also representative of a broader phenomenon going on in society and in particular the educational websites are relatively new, having only emerged in the past five years. The decision for these specific websites is because they are openly commercialising pleasure and portraying an idealised image of what women should strive to be. I will also analyse two pleasure non-profits mostly by means of comparison and contrast, and to assert whether their discourse differ significantly from the ones that openly present themselves as organisations for profit. I will conduct this analysis by carefully studying each website, identifying the main points of similarity/difference between them, and analysing the content in relation to the main theoretical points outlined in the following chapter.

Critical discourse analysis is the ideal method to study this case because it looks into the relationship between discourse and social and cultural developments (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002). Fairclough (2004) explains that discourse analysis sees language as one element of the social practices that is dialectically related to all other elements within such a practice. He also positions language as more than just written word, and it includes visual production, body language, pictures, and so on (Fairclough 2004). This theory also believes that language can be a medium for social change, meaning discourse is socially inclusive, which makes it even more appropriate for a research that aims at analysing social change from online discourses to offline and public opinion.

One last point to be mentioned is the issue of location. Because this is a research conducted online, location needs to be rethought. Instead of adopting a methodological territorialism (Scholte 2007), which understands relations through geographical lens, it is necessary to readjust the parameters of the research. I will loosely use the term ‘West’ and ‘Western’ as an indication of location since most of the content I will analyse is produced by Western countries. However, this content is directed at and produced for a global audience and far exceeds a defined geographical scope.

Chapter 1 - Masturbation, Governmentality and Neoliberalism

The first chapter is dedicated to delineating the theoretical foundation that supports this research and looking into the history of the female orgasm and the scholarship around it.

History of the female orgasm

The history of female pleasure is, unfortunately but not surprisingly, mainly written by men. Up until 1952, hysteria was still considered to be a medical disorder according to the American Psychiatric association. Maines (2001), in her historical account of the female orgasm, claims that the definitions of hysteria were not always the same, but what all of them had in common was that hysteria seemed to be a consequence of insufficient sexual intercourse or deficiency of sexual gratification. According to Maines, an androcentric model of sexuality was responsible for the medicalisation of the normal functioning of the female body (Maines 2001, p.4). There are accounts of treatments for hysteria, which were usually a stimulating massage of the clitoris by a medical professional, dating back to 2000 B.C. in Egypt (Maines 2001, p.23). The clitoral massages were not necessarily seen as sexual, but merely as a medical treatment.

What made the female orgasm so mysterious to many of the male medical professionals was the fact that women did not seem to reach climax by coitus alone, which then led to many theories as to why that was. As Maines (2001) explains, these professionals did not, at that point, question or even consider that perhaps coitus alone was not sufficient, as a result of looking at the question from a purely androcentric perspective. Sigmund Freud contributed to furthering this androcentric notion. According to him, women had clitoral orgasms in puberty, but upon reaching sexual maturity, they experienced vaginal orgasm. Which then led to the

diagnosis of frigidity. Masturbation, as a treatment for hysteria or of any sort, was discouraged by physicians in the early 20th century because it fundamentally contradicted the androcentric model (Maines 2001, p.56). Basically, up until this point in history, female pleasure and orgasm were viewed from an androcentric perspective only and the knowledge was concentrated on the hands of (male) medical professionals.

The scenario starts to change with the publication of the Kinsey (1953) and the Hite (1987) reports. Kinsey (1953), an American sexologist who conducted widespread research on human sexuality in the middle of the century, helped debunk Freud's theory, and showed the vagina's main function was reproductive and that it barely had any nerve endings, unlike the clitoris. Hite, who conducted a survey with 1844 American women, asserted that the true female orgasm was clitoridean. These two reports were crucial to aid the fight of feminists in the middle of the 20th century, who fought for the recognition of the clitoris as adult sexuality and emancipation from the androcentric point of view (Colson 2010, p.10).

A lot of the misconceptions over female masturbation and orgasm have been spread by different types of sex advice. Sex advice has often been mediated throughout the years. Barker, Gill, and Harvey (2018) make a historical reconstruction of the advice. The first mass produced form of sexual advice came in books in the nineteenth century, and these mostly regarded masturbation as damaging for individuals. Recent books from the 20th century, however, regard it as a way to learn about one's body and work on techniques for sex. Another relevant form of mediated sexual advice comes in the shape of magazines, particularly 'agony aunts'. There is plenty of research that also shows a shift in how these talk about female sexuality, moving away from a depiction of a passive, innocent woman to one that is desiring, active and autonomous sexual subject.

Over the past decades, although women have surpassed many of the previous challenges imposed by the androcentric perspective on female pleasure, it seems like some

myths are not completely debunked. Vaginal orgasm is still an indication of a healthy sex life and embracing one's sexuality, by using sex toys for instance, is now considered "trendy" and a symbol of emancipation (Colson 2010, p. 12).

Research on the field

Two things become clear from the historical account above. Firstly, that the androcentric perspective, one centred on men, has been present in almost all accounts of the female orgasm up until recently. And secondly, that despite the efforts of feminists, the female orgasm remains shrouded in an aura of mystery. The research on the field of female masturbation very much reflects these two points. Its focus has mostly been on masturbatory practices, frequency, and habits.

Research from the 70's, for instance, by Arafat and Cotton (1974) claimed that the number of men and women that masturbated was approximately the same, however, women felt stronger orgasm from masturbation than from coitus, and more women than men reported feeling depressed after masturbation, 24% compared to 11%, to which the authors associated with the undesirability of masturbation in women. Kontula and Haavio-Mannila (2003) looked into the masturbatory practices of men and women from 1971 to 2000. According to them, there has been an increase in masturbation for both genders. Their most relevant finding was that masturbation was directly linked to the perceptions within a given culture and what people learn during their teenage years. Their data showed that Western countries, which usually have a more open dialogue about sexuality, had higher levels of masturbation than post-Soviet countries. They also mentioned strong feelings of shame and guilty, particularly in women, in all cultures they investigated.

These results point to two relevant aspects: one, that learning about sexuality can influence the course of one's sex life; and two, that female masturbation was stigmatised and associated with feelings of guilt and shame.

Sexual education for women has been the topic of a number of research papers. Fine (1988) looked into sex education in schools in New York city. She argues that the sexual education girls were receiving at that time majorly overlooked desire as a part of sexuality and put these girls into positions of victimisation and passivity, educating them away from positions of sexual self-interest (Fine 1988, p.56). In 2006, Fine (Fine and McClelland 2006) updated her previous research, 20 years later. Although the discourse of desire has been incorporated into the curriculum, the author claims that, because of neoliberalism, these new policies have an uneven impact on young people and disproportionately place the burden on girls, youth of colour, teens with disabilities, and lesbian/gay/bi- sexual/transgender youth. More recent research (Kaestle and Allen 2011; Lee et al. 2013; Lamb, Lustig, and Graling 2013) shows that, although there has been changes in the way sexuality is taught to young women, the way sexuality is framed for women is still problematic in many aspects, particularly the ones highlighted by Fine (1988), objectification, victimization, and passivity.

Cultural repression of female sexuality is discussed by several authors. Its origins, motives, patterns and means differ significantly (Baumeister and Twenge 2002). Some theories are based on control, either from the male or the female side, others cite the costs of sex (for women) and power differences. Either way, female sexuality is still heavily associated with shame. Clayton and Humphreys' (2019) article investigated the depiction of female masturbation in American independent cinema and showed how it is often framed as something negative and transgressive. In young adult literature in Western society, Stein (2012) showed that, while male masturbation was often associated with a healthy libido, female masturbation still inspired anxiety and even fear.

Another important aspect of female masturbation is the internalisation of stereotypically masculine scripts about sexuality, as described by Fahs and Frank (2014). Androcentrism and phallocentrism are still present in women's masturbatory experiences. Frank (2014) even argues that masturbation can be a site for regulating female sexuality through internalised mechanisms of self-surveillance. Her findings showed that there are several consequences for girls who internalise negative discourses about masturbation and a silence around self-pleasure. According to the author, this results "in emotional and physical struggles, as well as the re-inscription of hegemonic cultural discourses on female masturbation, bodies, desire, and pleasure" (Frank, 2014, p.i)

When it comes to technical details of female masturbatory practices, two research papers stand out. Herbenick et al. (2018) assessed the practices among 1055 US women via an online form. This paper was the origin for the aforementioned website OMGYes. The research investigated pressure, frequency, pattern, style and location of touch. However, more than 90% of the women sampled were heterosexual, which indicates a lack of representativity which will later be discussed when OMGYes is analysed. Rowland et al. (2020) conducted an in-depth analysis of masturbation in women and concluded that there were three different typologies of women who masturbate: very sexually active women, who masturbate and have partnered sex frequently; women who masturbate infrequently and have partnered sex frequently; and women who masturbate frequently, but have partnered sex less often. This typology leaves aside women who do not engage in masturbate or do it less than once a month (16% of their sample) and they do not specify the sexual orientation of the women, although they claim it was part of the questionnaire.

Lastly, one final aspect that is relevant to this research is the role of commodification in this scenario. In 2005, Attwood describes the emergence of a heavily sexualised culture which targets women as sexual consumers. Sex toy websites, lingerie, and other sexual

products, according to Attwood, are recontextualising sexual pleasure in relation to the pleasures of fashion, design, pampering and self-help (Attwood 2005, p.404). Huff (2018) reached a similar conclusion, she investigated sex toy advertisements and explains that they suggest that masturbation is revolutionary and frees women from oppressive patriarchal forces. The author also points to a relevant change in the rhetoric of liberation, from one that intended to free all women, to a more individual approach. She points to the political discourse present in sex toy shops as being an excluding type of activism and how expertise is being used to achieve business goals (Huff 2018, p.444).

This literature review points out some gaps. There has not been, to my knowledge, a study that considered the most recent developments on the field of female masturbation, in particular the online content that has been development to instruct and ‘empower’ women in their masturbatory practices. What do these new websites entail, what discourses do they reproduce and how important are these tools in the learning process? The internet can be viewed as both culture and a cultural artefact (Hughes 2012), a new type of public sphere (Gerhards and Schäfer 2010; Papacharissi 2002), a powerful learning tool and a means for social change (Miladi 2016). Therefore, understanding the reproduction of knowledge, the content of the discourse and the consequences of commodification will be crucial in understanding how female sexual liberation, masturbation and orgasm are framed within broader Western society.

Foucault and power

The framework in which this thesis is constructed is one that approaches the topic from a Foucauldian perspective that takes into consideration the intertwining of biopower in the neoliberal discourse of (post)feminism. I will start by explaining key terms that are necessary for the comprehension of the framework upon which this thesis is built. Firstly, I will explain

Foucault's theorization of power and the repercussions in discourse and the technologies that enable this power to be maintained. A part of this explanation will also include a close look into the prevalent economic system in Western societies, namely neoliberalism. I will then move on to explaining how feminism is affected by such theorisations. Both the maintenance of power and the effects on feminism are heavily influenced by media, which will be my last point of theorisation, although it will be touched upon frequently.

Foucault, in his theorization of power, conceptualises biopower and biopolitics, which are terms used to describe a new form of power that replaces sovereign power. Whereas sovereign power used violence as an instrument, biopower exerts a positive influence on life and has its regulatory and corrective mechanisms based on knowledge and normativity. In this situation, a new type of power emerges, which is the power-knowledge. The aim of this new type of power is the effective administration of bodies and the calculated management of life through means that are scientific and continuous (Oksala 2013). Continuous in the sense that they are not only always present, but that they create a dependency and a need for constant surveillance.

In this new regime of power-knowledge, the confession becomes a fundamental part of the maintenance of the regime, particularly when it comes to sex. These modern disciplinary regimes encourage us to find the 'truth' about ourselves, and this 'truth' is only achieved by means of confession (Foucault 1978). In today's society, this confession is often becoming mediatized. According to Attwood (2009), sexual exposure is getting more and more public and becomes the subject of new experts, which are often media professionals. These, she claims, are "increasingly the source of our sexual knowledge, advisors on our sexual dilemmas and the architects of our sexual lifestyles" (Attwood 2009, p. xv). Later on, I will also discuss the implications of having such knowledge being mediated and mediatized.

To continue with Foucault's reasoning, this biopower is determined by the economic rationality in place. Neoliberalism has become the dominant thought and practice in most of the Western world (Harvey 2005). It can be described as both an approach to government and a defining political movement, and it influences virtually all economic, politic, social and cultural aspects of life (Bockman 2013). Neoliberalism is characterised by the reduction of the welfare state on a political and economic level, but also by the emergence of the 'enterprising self'. This 'enterprising self' is characterised by autonomy, fulfilment, responsibility and choice (Rose 1990). In this sense, biopower works through subjectivity and "subjectivity has become an essential object and target for certain strategies, tactics and procedures of regulation" (Rose 1990, p.3).

The ways in which the ideals of the self and power are connected takes shape in what Foucault terms as 'governmentality'. This neoliberal governmentality has as its main purpose that of producing subjectivity: its product is an economic subject that is self-interested and rational, and whose aim is to compete with others for maximal economic return (Oksala 2013). Governmentality is described by Foucault as the "contact between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self" (Foucault et al. 1988, p. 18). The technologies of the self permit individuals to perform changes in their bodies, souls or thoughts as a way to achieve a state of happiness and fulfilment (Foucault et al. 1988).

To put it in simpler terms, what this means is that power is exerted upon individuals by presupposing the existence of the entrepreneurial self (Rose 1990). Life, and the self, become a project, something to be constantly worked on, bettered, mainly by economic means, therefore contributing to the maintenance of the capitalist system. The 'experts' are crucial for the maintenance of this system of governmentality, as was mentioned earlier, since it is built upon scientific means. In searching for one's best version of oneself, expert advice and expert knowledge play a crucial role in shaping what this looks like and how it can be achieved.

Wendy Brown (2015) describes the process of turning the self and the body as part of means and modes of production as ‘economization’. “Rather, the point is that neoliberal rationality disseminates the model of the market to all domains and activities – even where money is not at issue – and configures human beings exhaustively as market actors, always, only, and everywhere as *homo economicus*” (Brown 2015, p.31). The workplace, consumption and the family are key areas in which this system influences the lives of individuals. Relevant to this research is the area of consumption. Here, “expertise has forged alignments between broad socio-political objectives, the goals of producers and the self-regulating propensities of individuals” (Rose 1990, p.16). In doing so, consumption becomes more than the mere acquisition of goods, but a fundamental instrument in bettering oneself and becoming the happy fulfilled self one seeks to be. Health, for example, is one area which has been incorporate by consumption. Individuals want to be healthy, and, with the guidance of experts, they can achieve so by consuming certain goods. “Health will be ensured through a combination of the market, expertise and a regulated autonomy” (Rose 1990, p.17).

Foucault (1978) positions sexuality and the talk about sex as crucial in the exercise of power. He explains that in modern society, it is assumed that sex is repressed. Within this assumption, talking about sex is a way of liberating oneself, of transgressing. However, he claims, we have never talked about sex this much. The existence of the discourse of repression is favourable for the exercise of biopower because it maintains people in a position of constantly having to talk about it, believing it is the only way to find the truth about oneself.

This is where masturbation comes in. Masturbation can be seen as the first sight of intertwining of biopower and sex (Garlick 2014) and it has always been strongly associated with the discourse of health. From advice magazines and books in the 19th and 20th centuries which claimed it to be unhealthy, the hypothesis is that what we experience now is a change in

the rhetoric. From being medicalised and demonised to being considered a healthy expression of sexuality, at least for women.

Beginning already in avant-garde circles in the 1920s, masturbation since the 1960s has become variously and in combination, an act of individual liberation, a proclamation of autonomy, an affirmation of pleasure for its own sake, a way to make money from sex toys, a practice in the cultivation of the self, a gambit and counter gambit in the sexual and more general cultural politics of the era, a subject of painting and performance art, a deeply interesting part of the human erotic experience as a sign of abjection or of triumph. (Laqueur 2003)

Masturbation is also a site of emancipation for women, particularly for Second Wave feminists, as mentioned above. But what exactly is meant by ‘emancipation’ can also be contradictory. Foucault, when explaining governmentality, also addresses the issue of emancipation. It has a twofold meaning, on the one hand, it can be related to virtue, to free choice, and on the other, collective liberation. “Emancipation is an act of creation of the free individual as well as an act of liberation from situations of constraint” (Rebughini 2015, p.271). And it is this twofold meaning that connects emancipation to individualization, liberalism and capitalism.

This section laid the first theoretical point of this research. I will approach the topic of this research by taking into consideration the Foucauldian notions of biopower, governmentality and technologies of the self. For the next section, I will further the theoretical foundation by adding issues concerning (post)feminism and media.

Postfeminism and the media

As was previously discussed, the discourses about masturbation, if we accept Foucault’s theories, are loaded with a specific form of biopower that is determined by neoliberal ideologies. In addition, masturbation for male-identifying people and female-identifying are significantly different. For this research, I will only look into the discourses around female masturbation. Hence the need to address postfeminist media theories.

Rosalind Gill (2007) theorises postfeminism as a sensibility made up of several interrelated themes. These themes are directly connected to the neoliberal self-enterprising self. The themes include “the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; an emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and self-discipline; a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm” (Gill 2007, p.147). Gill (2007) also suggests that, within this context, postfeminist media culture should be the critical object of scholars of culture, which is the position I am taking in this research.

Postfeminism is a set of ideologies, strategies, and practices that utilise feminist discourses such as freedom, choice, and independence, and “incorporate them into a wide array of media, merchandising, and consumer participation” (Banet-Weiser 2018, p.153). Roughly put, this means that postfeminist discourses assume that the only thing between a woman and equality is her own agency, because equality has already been achieved. If women fail to see it, it is an individual issue. It disregards structural systems of patriarchal domination still existing in society and employs a discourse of individual agency and personal freedom.

This postfeminist sensibility that is imbued in western media culture carries is part of the neoliberal subjectivity. There is an obsessive preoccupation with the body of women and an internalised self-surveillance, in which power is constructing women’s own subjectivity (Gill 2007). In this way, women are presented by contemporary media culture as active, free to choose, and deciding to make themselves into desiring sexual subjects in opposition to previous culture, which presented women as objects. Postfeminist media culture suggests that it is a woman’s decision to present herself as a sexual subject and perform changes on her body and her psyche. Another aspect of this culture is the evacuation of a political discourse and reflection, it assumes equality between genders has already been achieved. Not to mention the consistent exclusion of certain types of women, for example, non-binary, homosexuals,

asexuals, or older women. Finally, there is the ever-present assumption that women's lives are somehow lacking and need to be worked on, with the aid of expert advice.

That translates into an ideal female neoliberal subject that must achieve her own liberation, become her best and most successful self, and continuously engage in self-improvement and self-surveillance practices. Simply put, it is not about becoming a better feminist subject, but a better economic subject (Banet-Weiser 2018). There is hardly any room for the articulation of a collective consciousness, the focus lies on the individual. When it comes to the sexual realm, this means gaining knowledge about techniques and sex toys, but also “about her sexual self, her desires, potential hang-ups or inhibitions in need of work and her body's ability to be sexually desirable and to have the appropriate quality and quantity of pleasure” (Wood 2017, p.318).

Media power, public sphere, and political economy

But then the question that follows is, how relevant is media and why must we pay so much attention to it? Media power reflects structural disparities of power in wider society (Freedman 2015, p.274). As was mentioned earlier, Foucault pays particular attention to the way in which mechanisms of confession constitute the ‘truth’. In this sense, he explains that “relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse” (Foucault 1980, p.93). Foucault establishes discourse as a site of struggle and the tool to reproduce hegemonic ideologies. Hegemony, as described by Gramsci, refers to a dynamic system of domination based on political, cultural and institutional influence (Ahearn 2012, p.262). Discourse determines what can and cannot be said, how it will be said, and it produces what we perceive as the ‘truth’.

However, media power cannot be viewed as a deterministic top-down mechanism of control or a liberal market in which all opinions have the same weight. I suggest analysing this issue from the contradiction paradigm suggested by Freedman (2015), it accepts that the media reproduce current structures of power, but it accounts for the possibility of change and acknowledges the role of agency. Agency, in this case, refers to the socioculturally mediated capacity to act (Ahearn 2012, p. 278). This happens due to the fact that media has its own inner contradictions. While it does reflect the current power relations, it also opens up space for agency and questioning these same relations. Commercial media must cater to the interests of the audience. Hence, if the audience is actively challenging the power structures, media will also reflect that.

Approaching the object of study from this perspective means taking into consideration the fact that media texts are discursive tools in the production and maintenance of biopower. However, the audience is not passive, and the production of meaning on the side of audience may be significantly different from what is intended. This will not be the object of this research, the focus lies entirely on the production of content about masturbation, and not the reception.

Another relevant point to take into consideration is the fact that a lot of this content is being produced online. With the advent of the internet, theorists started to argue whether Habermas' (1974) concept of the public sphere could apply to the online sphere. They also question how the internet and the digital infrastructures influence democracy nowadays. If the internet can, indeed, be seen as the new public sphere, it is not unreasonable to assume it can directly influence the offline, however, there are many arguments that question this assumption.

When new media and new technologies arose, theorists started questioning whether this could mean a revival of the public sphere. However, the issue is rather more complicated. With the new technologies, also comes new challenges. First of all, there is the question if the internet can be seen as a domain of social life, such as Habermas described, if the access to it is not

universal and equal to all (Papacharissi 2002, p.15). From that perspective, the internet can be seen as a way to further inequalities. The digital divide (Dijk 2020), broadly defined as the division between people with access and those without access to digital media, still very much persists. Dijk (2020) explains that this concept, contrary to what was initially believed, does not indicate a binary division between those with and without access, but refers metaphorically to many other variations, such as social, cultural or economic ones, and proposes looking at the digital divide as relational and a network of inequalities. We are currently experiencing a digital divide which mostly relates to skill and usage (Dijk 2020). This is, therefore, something that must be taken into consideration given the fact that the material analysed in this research is not equally available and accessible to all.

A final point to be addressed concerns the political economy of the online media. This is a neo-marxist approach to media studies that takes into consideration the infrastructure of the media and the relations of power between the audience and the companies which dominate the media landscape. It is undeniable so many aspects of our lives are now being controlled by digital media, from socio-cultural to economic aspects. Broadly defined, the political economy of the media is the study of the social and power relations that constitute the production of communication resources (Hardy 2014). Relevant for this research is the notion that the content being produced is not only part of a certain political economy, but also not ‘free’ of charge, since users are often paying with their data or information.

Lifestyle Media and postfeminism as a marketing strategy

It has been argued that consumer culture now shapes basically every aspect of our lives, including our sexuality and sexual practices. There is no longer an option to place oneself outside of consumer culture and even our intimacy is now being shaped by brands. “We are under pressure to perform the ‘right’ kinds of sex and intimate relating, and this is more and

more entangled with ‘appropriate’ forms of (sexual) consumption: the right underwear, the right kinds of dating profile, the right sex toys” (Barker, Gill, and Harvey 2018, p.12). In this context, brands and media perform what can be referred to as ‘lifestyle media’. These are areas of life which used to be subjects of policies and state interventions. Now, the media acts as the socialising agent for neoliberal society (Barker, Gill, and Harvey 2018). It helps understand and navigate the seemingly endless possibilities that the world has to offer. “Advertising images and television programmes interpenetrate in the promulgation of images and of lifestyle, narratives of identity choice and the highlighting of the ethical aspects of adopting one or other way of conducting one’s life” (Rose 1999, p.178).

One of the ways in which they do this is by employing (post)feminist ideologies as a marketing strategy. The first concept that can help us grasp this use is the concept of economies of visibility. Usually described in opposition to politics of visibility, economies of visibility tend to be merely performative and the visibility of the identity is the end goal, instead of a route to politics and societal change (Banet-Weiser 2015; Clark-Parsons 2019). Politics of visibility, however, are aimed at exposing and transforming power. The economies of visibility have been increasingly absorbed into media practices and everyday life, they exist for the purpose of exchange and profit, and focus on the individual (Banet-Weiser, 2015). One relevant aspect of the economies of visibility is that it is gendered: its product is the feminine body, and it is actively contributing to the construction of the identity of women. That is not to say men are left out of this economy, but its focus still lies on the female body. “The dual dynamic of regulating and producing the visible self work to not only serve up bodies as commodities but also create the body and the self as a brand” (Banet-Weiser, 2015, p.57). The connection with the neoliberal female subject here is evident. Women are seen both as the target audience and the product of this economy, their bodies are brought to the spotlight and treated as a project to be worked on and a commodity to be exposed.

These economies of visibility make way to a specific type of advertising described by Gill (2007): midriff advertising. She describes the midriff as the major contemporary shift in the sexual representation of women. It is “the construction of a young, heterosexual woman who knowingly and deliberately plays with her sexual power and is forever 'up for it'” (Gill, 2007, p.5). The main characteristic of this type of advertising is, as mentioned before, a focus on the female body. However, the novelty is that the body is not presented as passive, but rather as an active, empowered, free female body, that exists in a world of equality. The midriff is not a sexual object, she is the subject herself. It is conveyed that it is her choice to present herself in that way, that her sexuality is empowering, and it is in her interest to present herself as such. “Contemporary advertising targeted at the midriffs suggests, above all, that buying the product will empower you” (Gill, 2007, p.8).

This first chapter outlined the theoretical foundations of this thesis and provided an overall view of the academic research that has been conducted in the area of female masturbation. For the next two chapters, I will apply these theoretical concepts into the analysis of the websites. These will provide substantial material to discuss the many aspects of the discourse present in the websites and draw some valuable conclusions based on that.

Chapter 2 - “We challenge the status quo”

This chapter starts with a brief description of the three types of object of analysis and goes on to a discussion about the role they claim to have in the fight for female emancipation. Relevant to this chapter is understanding what these websites mean when they refer to emancipation (or other similar terms, such as empowerment, liberation, freedom), how they position themselves in this fight, and what (normative) discourses are attached to their claims. Commercialisation and the understanding that no information is for free will also come into play.

Teaching pleasure, selling pleasure, and advocating for pleasure

The objects of this research are three different types of websites. The first type I will be referring to as ‘educational websites’, for it is their main purpose to educate women about their pleasure and how to achieve climax. The second type are vibrator brands and their marketing strategies. The last type are pleasure non-profit advocacy organisations, which are not necessarily related to only masturbation, but sex in general, however the focus here will be on the discourses about masturbation. I arrived at these three websites from the starting point of ‘what are popular and accessible ways to learn about female masturbation online?’. There are, naturally, many other websites that might be included in this list, such as Betty Dodson’s platform, which was excluded from the analysis due to its mostly offline emphasis. Therefore, the final list is focused on online platforms that provide information and knowledge about female masturbation.

Although I divide them in three different categories, the rhetoric present in these websites does not differ significantly. Hence, my objective here is not to make a clear-cut

comparison between the three, but to show that such ‘emancipatory’ discourses are present in all of them, to a different extent and degree, of course.

There are two websites which fit into the educational category, OMGYes.com and CLIMAX.how. OMGYes is an educational platform for female masturbation founded in 2016. They claim to have conducted the first scientific research on masturbation techniques for women. They offer women access to instructional videos of the techniques for a cost, which is they justify as a donation to allow for more research. It is hard to measure the reach OMGYes has, since there is no information available concerning how many subscribers they have. They are also not very active on social media, although their accounts have more than 350k subscribers and their YouTube videos have 600k views. CLIMAX is very similar to OMGYes, it describes itself as “an online sex-ed course grounded in science” (CLIMAX 2021). They also offer online courses about techniques with explicit videos and claim they base these on experiences of real women and scientific research.

The way OMGYes works is the following: by paying a 55 euro one-time fee, the user get access to the full content of season 1, which is dedicated entirely to clitoral pleasure, and consists of 60 short videos with explicit images of women explaining their own masturbation methods. To access season 2, the users must pay 55 euro, and they get access to 60 more videos, focused on inner stimulation and penetration. In each of the techniques, there are one or more videos with explanation and, after watching, the user can practice the technique on a virtual vulva. By touching it the correct way (as explained in the video) the woman reacts positively and gives direction to the user until she reaches climax. The videos portray different women each time. In the following page, there is screenshot of the front page of OMGYes.com for illustrative purposes.



Figure 1 – Screenshot OMGYes.com front page (OMGYes "OMGYes.Com - an Entirely New Way to Explore Women's Pleasure.")

CLIMAX is different, it consists of one woman explaining her techniques, in 32 episodes, and 17 techniques. They have three different types of subscription, the 'education' package, which costs 34 euro and includes 19 episodes. The 'classic', with all the techniques from the previous package plus tantric breathing sessions, it costs 49 euro. And the 'premium',

which includes 7 bonus episodes dedicated to partners. The following picture is also for illustrative purposes of the front page of CLIMAX.how.

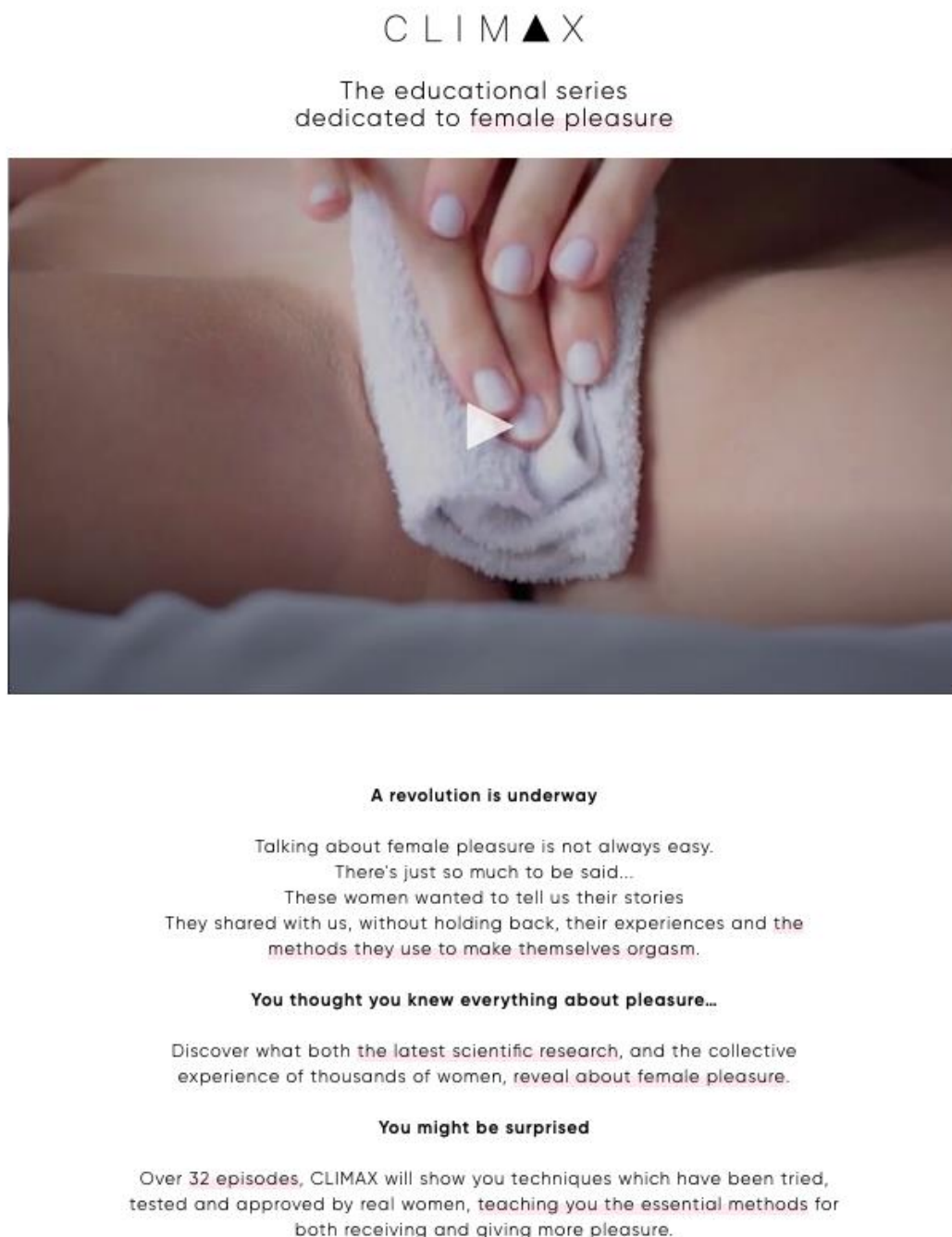


Figure 2 – Screenshot CLIMAX.how front page (CLIMAX 2021)

As for the vibrator brands, the priority was given to brand themselves, and not online sex shops. The reason for this is that vibrator brands are catered directly at women, whereas

online sex shops sell a variety of other products. I mapped nine relevant brands for this research, Lelo, Unbound Babes, Womanizer, WeVibe, SmileMakers, Dame Products, Le Wand, JeJoue and JimmyJane. These sell almost exclusively vibrators to be used with vaginas and vulvas. Out of these nine brands, only six had information available concerning their revenue and net worth, Lelo, Maude, WeVibe, Dame Products, JeJoue and JimmyJane. The two most successful ones, Lelo and WeVibe have an estimate annual revenue of 50 million dollars (Owler "LELO Company Overview"). The others have a revenue somewhere between 100k and 25 million.

These nine brands can be divided into three categories according to how they describe themselves, their company and their mission. The first category are brands that emphasise empowerment, JimmyJane, JeJoue, SmileMakers and Dame products. The second category are brands that focus on self-love and sexual wellness, Womanizer, Unbound Babes and Maude. The last are the brands that emphasise quality and innovation, WeVibe, Le Wand and Lelo. This is not to say that all of these aspects are not present in all of the companies, it is merely a categorisation based on what they choose to emphasise when describing themselves.

To exemplify, JimmyJane and JeJoue state on their 'about' page that their products are designed to empower people or their well-being (JIMMYJANE "About Us"; JeJoue "About Us"). Dame Products claims that their mission is to "close the pleasure gap" (Dame Products "'Who We Are'") and SmileMakers' mission is to "normalise the perception of female sexuality" (SmileMakers "Our Mission"). WeVibe and LeWand, however, speak of "award-winning design" (Le Wand "About Us") and "state of the art technique and tools" (We-Vibe "All about the Company behind We-Vibe"). And Lelo claims to have established a heritage based on quality and unexpected innovation (LELO "About LELO"). Finally, Womanizer puts emphasis on solo sex as a form of self-love (Womanizer "About Us"), Maude describes itself as a sexual wellness company on a mission to make intimacy better (Maude "About Us") and

Unbound Babes wants to improve how people experience and enjoy pleasure (UnboundBabes "About Unbound").

The last two websites that will be analysed are The Pleasure Project and Tryst Network. The Pleasure Project is “an international education and advocacy organization working to eroticize safer sex” (The Pleasure Project "About Us"), which is consistent with research showed pleasure is often overlooked in education (Fine 1998). They provide training and consultancy for sexual health educators, offer free resources for trainers on their website, and academic publications. They also offer consulting services and workshops for a fee. Their team is composed of four people, three women, and is led by Annie, a public health professional. They are not aimed specifically at men or women, but merely claim to bring pleasure into the sexual education.

Tryst Network, on the other hand, is a sex positive resource by global non-profit with a mission to “improve the sexual health IQ of women and their partners through fun, reliable and empowering online content.” (The Tryst Network "About Us"). The organisation has a collaboration with actress Jessica Biel is part of the WCG organisation. They rely heavily on the discourse of empowerment and ending taboos, “No more misinformation—or missed orgasms. [...] Tryst is dedicated to empowering you to make healthy, informed choices. [...] no topic will be TMI or too taboo.” (The Tryst Network "About Us"). Their platform is mostly dedicated to sharing content from other websites, which relate to sex, relationships, orgasm, masturbation and so on. They also display a list of resources on their website, including OMGYes. Neither of these are specifically aimed at female masturbation or female pleasure, although these are also present in their website and mission.

The following section will take a closer look at how universally accessible the content is and the issues regarding access and representation. Then, I will discuss how the vibrator brands and educational websites place themselves as fundamental in ending the stigma and

taboo around female masturbation. After that, I will discuss how they can be considered the “new experts” on sexuality. Finally, the chapter will end with a discussion how pleasure (and education about it) has become commercialised.

Is pleasure for everyone?

This section will be dedicated to the investigation of how access to these websites and technologies is not universal and how identities are represented. A lot of the analysis here will be a comparison between textual discourse and visual discourse, since their textual discourse often contradicts the visual.

The content provided by OMGYes and CLIMAX costs money. OMGYes charges 55 euro for access to their platform, which they justify as a contribution to the continuity of their project. This raises relevant questions with relation to access to the content and the initiative itself. If their goal is to provide necessary sexual education, then charging for it excludes those who are not able to afford it. Besides, by commercializing knowledge about the female body and pleasure, OMGYes subscribes to the neoliberal governmental agenda. The same way Ouellette and Hay (2008) argue that reality television does, this website could be a source of amplification of the governmentality of everyday life and a guide to everyday behaviour. This falls in line with what Gill (2009) describes as the neoliberal postfeminist agenda.

On the other hand, by charging for content, OMGYes and CLIMAX can dissociate themselves from the political economy of the media. Nothing is for free on the internet, everything comes at a price, and that is often people’s data. Indeed, the content that they provide is substantially different the “free” education provided by vibrator brands. Particularly OMGYes has a very well-developed and built website, with different classes, techniques, practices. Whereas the websites usually offer some articles which are not as elaborate as OMGYes and CLIMAX are, and just tend to address topics from the surface. So, charging can

be a way, or as OMGYes claims, the only way, to make sure they can deliver quality content to their user, even if that comes at the expense of those who cannot afford it. OMGYes also claims that this type of research is still underfunded, hence the need for users to pay for it.

There is also the matter of the digital divide. As explained in the previous chapter, it is no longer only the issue of having access or not, but a lot more than that, it is about social, cultural or economic variations. In that sense, it excludes people that might not have the skill to access and utilise such educational platforms. Or, in the case of the vibrators, that might not be comfortable shopping online.

When it comes to representation, OMGYes, on their FAQ, claim the website is for anyone who cares about female pleasure, and they acknowledge the lack of non-binary and transgender representation. They plan to integrate more varied experiences in the future and claim to have given much thought to the language they use. What can be assessed visually is that although the models vary in age, race and body shape, queer identities are not visually represented. CLIMAX is very similar, they state that inclusion is a serious topic, however, they do not have any trans or non-binary people represented visually in their material.

When it comes to the vibrator brands, the exclusion is even starker. Several of them claim to be inclusive, aimed at all bodies and people, SmileMakers even has it on their main page on the website a plea to racial inclusion and equality, in which they make their allegiance to the Black Lives Movement public. However, the bodies visually displayed follow a very clear pattern. The extent to which they incorporate clear images of bodies on their website is varied, some prefer to have only hands and arms on display, while others have sexualised men and women on their front page. Most of the bodies on display, the ones that are considered sexual, are young and fit, and the female body occupies a central position. Some vibrator brands do include older couples and women, people with disabilities, and queer people, however, they mostly do so on their social media, and not on their main website.

MAYSTURBATION SALE: SAVE UP TO 80% — 2d 18h 47m 18s left

SHOP NOW

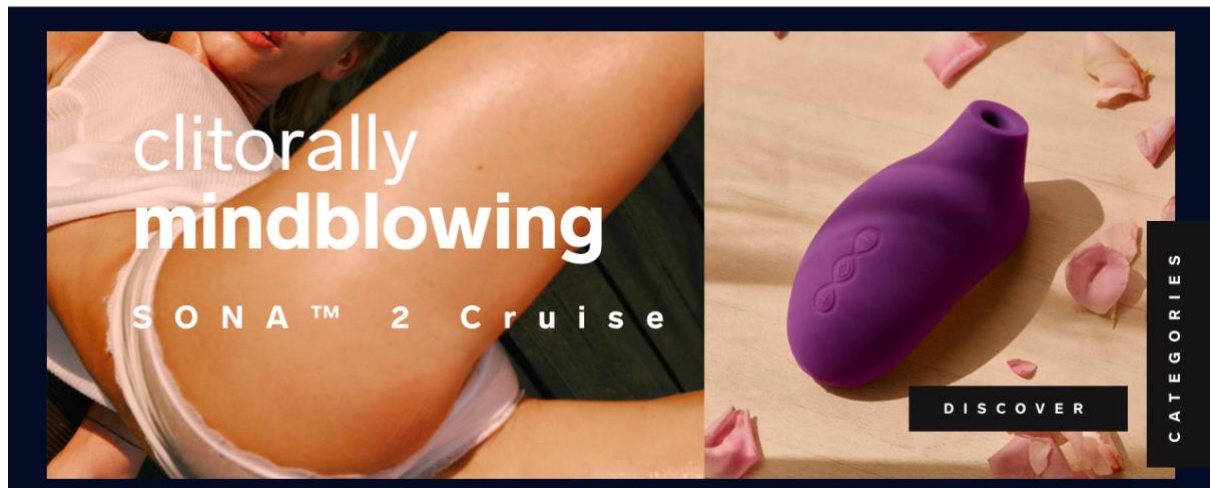


Figure 3 - Screenshot Lelo (LELO "LELO: The Leading Designer Brand for Intimate Lifestyle Products.")

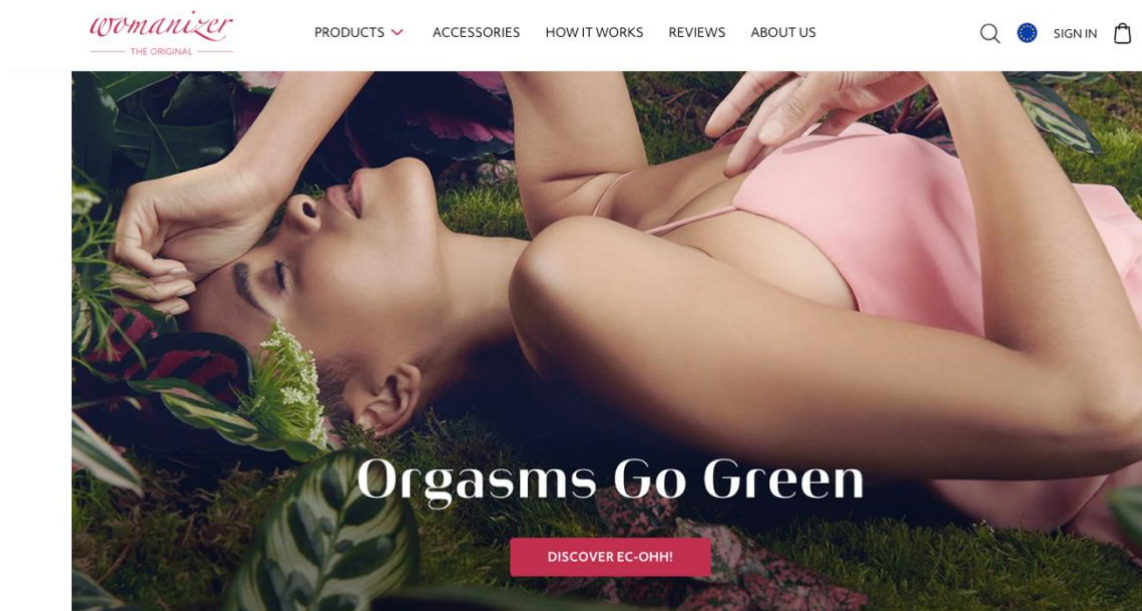


Figure 4 - Screenshot Womanizer (Womanizer "Womanizer - The Original | Discover the Revolutionary Sex Toy")

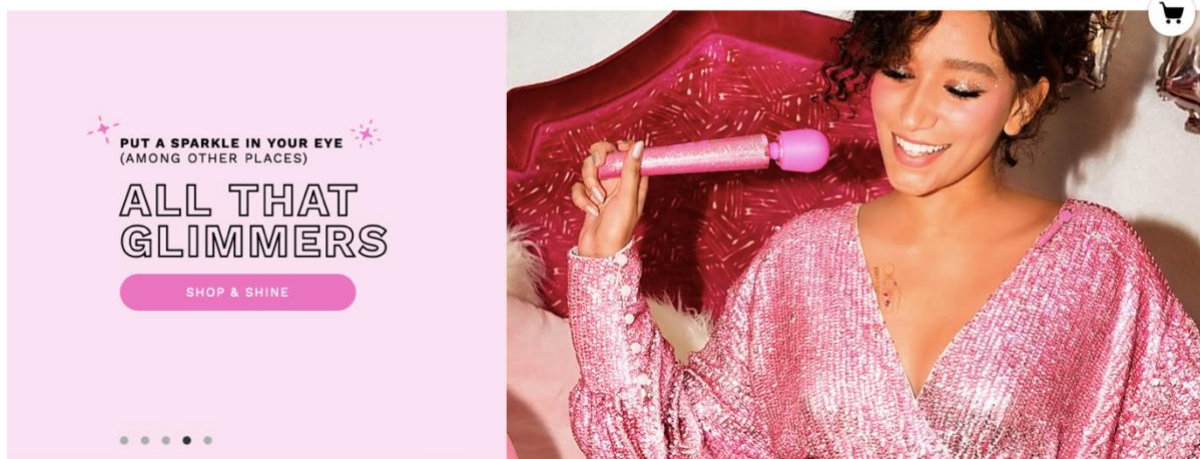


Figure 5 - Screenshot LeWandMassagers (Le Wand "Le Wand: Best Wand Vibrators and Sex Toys for Solo and Couples")

Both these analyses are consistent with what literature says concerning the lack of representation of women in postfeminist media. "Only some women are constructed as active, desiring sexual subjects: women who desire sex with men and only young, slim and beautiful women" (Gill 2007, p.153). From these websites, although there is an effort to include other representations of women, the majority of the bodies represented still follow what Gill (2007) explained. Particularly the part about women who desire sex with men. A lot of the content on the vibrator websites includes some sort of partner sex, and most of the couples represented are heterosexual couples. The lack of queerness and transgender representation is clear. Although some of the websites claim the toys are for anyone with a vulva, the images attached to it make it clear that they are mostly marketed for cisgender women and their (often) heterosexual male partners.

Their social media, as mentioned earlier, gives more room for different representations. They often feature on their Instagram accounts a lot of diverse content, including queer identities, fat and older women, and different ethnicities. Not all of them are shown from a sexualised point of view, however. Some identities, such as queer, people of colour, or fat people seem to have been granted the position of a sexual subject. Older women, on the other

hand, although they are given some validation as to their sexuality, are still represented in a very demure manner. In the pictures below, taken from the brands' Instagram accounts, we can see a strong man wearing red lingerie, in what is a clear inversion of stereotypical gender appearances. This picture is followed by a picture of a woman of colour, whose body is not in line with the current beauty standards in society, posing in a sexual way. And the last picture shows an older woman, accompanied by her male partner, posing in a non-sensual way, thus showing that not every woman is granted sexual status.



Figure 6 - JeJoue, Instagram account ('Je Joue on Instagram: "Do Something Today That Makes You Feel Fabulous! 2020)

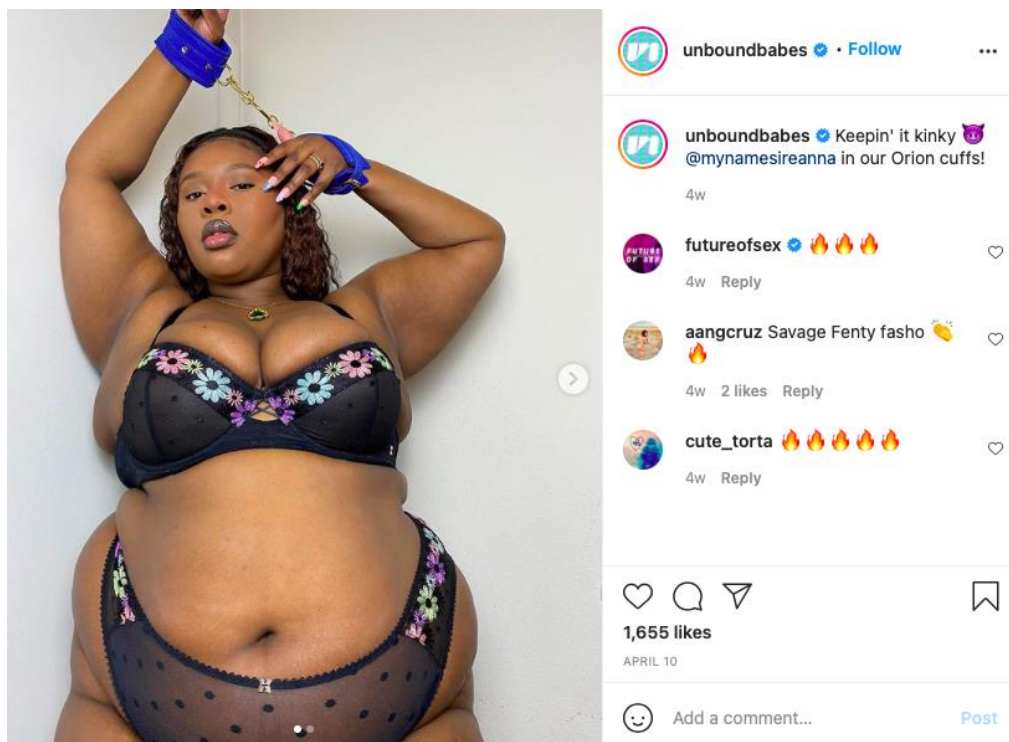


Figure 7 - UnboundBabes Instagram Account ('Unbound on Instagram: "Keepin' It Kinky 🐱 @mynamesireanna in Our Orion Cuffs!" 2021)



Figure 8 - We-Vibe Instagram post ('We-Vibe on Instagram: "'Because Old People Do Have Sex. And If They Are Not Having Sex, They're Probably Thinking about It, Wondering about It and Desiring Some..." 2021)

For the organisations it is slightly different. The Pleasure Project does not have images of bodies on their website, which is consistent with what they offer. Tryst, on the other hand, since its main page consists mostly of articles about pleasure, also falls under the same narrative of mostly visually picturing young, slim, and heteronormative bodies.

What can be assessed from this analysis is that there is a consistent exclusion of bodies that do not fit into the beauty standards, together with stereotypical masculine scripts about sexuality, such as the emphasis on male partners, and the lack of queer representation.

“The taboo isn’t helping anybody”

Having established the types of websites that will be analysed, how they present themselves, and how they can be exclusionary, I will now move on to how they frame masturbation and female pleasure in terms of it being a taboo and how they see themselves within this framework.

Both OMGYes and CLIMAX position themselves as actors in the mission of ending the taboo around female pleasure. OMGYes uses a rhetoric of liberation by knowledge. As their content is based on scientific research, they claim to finally have the research to “look at the many nuances of women’s sexual pleasure” (OMGYes "OMGyes.Com - an Entirely New Way to Explore Women’s Pleasure."). According to them, what makes female pleasure so ‘mysterious’ are three factors: the fact that it has not been researched before, the complex female anatomy and Hollywoodian myths. The reason for this lack of research comes precisely from the taboo. In this way, OMGYes positions themselves not only as experts in the field, but also as the ones paving the way for the end of the taboo. A claim that evokes Foucault’s critique of the assertion of the taboo as a way to maintain it. CLIMAX takes a similar approach, they also claim to use scientific rigorous methods and claim that they are part of a movement. “A

movement that is shaking off old taboos and pushing new boundaries.” (CLIMAX 2021). The wording is vague and there is no explanation as to what exactly this movement is.

For the vibrator websites, the rhetoric is slightly more varied. When it comes to the ones that heavily emphasise design and technological innovation, breaking the taboo is less relevant. They tend to consider their ‘mission’ a lot more closely related to revolutionising the industry and improving sexual wellness than to the breaking of taboos. However, some of the websites do incorporate the liberation from taboo rhetoric. JeJoue, for example, has an entire page dedicated to their social mission of encouraging open conversation and extinguishing judgemental attitudes. The way to achieve this mission is, as mentioned before, by knowledge and by sharing. JeJoue has a page dedicated to sex education and they ask people to “Get Talking!” (JeJoue). SmileMakers employs a similar rhetoric. They claim to be determined to break down the taboos surrounding female sexuality. To achieve that, they offer knowledge and say they want to foster a light hearted conversation about sex smile (SmileMakers "Our Mission"). Lelo also has a similar call for conversations, they ask their visitors to go on social media and “share your dirty thoughts” (LELO "LELO: The Leading Designer Brand for Intimate Lifestyle Products.").

Clear from these analyses is the employment of the Foucauldian discourse of power-knowledge and confession, which will be further discussed in the next section, where I will focus on the educational role these websites are playing. However, it is relevant to point out how these websites are claiming the position of change-makers in society and putting themselves in the forefront of the movement for the normalisation of female pleasure. Having sex toys as the forefront of the movement for female pleasure is not new. Following the developments in female sexual health in the United States in the 60’s, sex toy women and women-run business were booming. Sex shops such as Good Vibrations and Toys in Babeland doubled as educational and activist environments for women (Comella 2017). Still according

to Comella (2017), even though these sex shops were naturally aimed at consumption, women were drawn to it also because of a desire for camaraderie and community. Something that these online vibrator brands seem to be echoing by calling for conversations, but not achieving, since they only call for it without actually providing the space and way for users to do so.

Since both the educational websites and the vibrator brands claim to want to change and end social stigma, they can even be considered activist, if we understand activism as “engaging in direct, vigorous action to support or oppose one side of a controversial issue” (Frey and Blinne 2018, p.2). Their communication, reach, and clear statement of purpose can qualify as activist action. However, it is a type of activism and social action that is inscribed in a neoliberal context, as described by the ‘economies of visibility’, which only perform the identity in order to achieve economic gain and not social change. As Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser (2012) suggest, social action itself is turning into a marketable commodity and there is no escape from a commodified logic. When in usual activism identities would be constructed in opposition to the consumer culture (Banet-Weiser 2012), in commodity feminism and commodity activism, identities are formulated within the logics of consumerism (Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser 2012).

This is not to say that shops could not be a place for social change, however, their online aspect needs to be taken into consideration. In his book about retail gentrification in the United Kingdom, Hubbard (2017) mentions the growing concern posed by the increase of online shopping and out of town shopping for the continuity of a sense of community in the UK. According to his research, ungentrified shopping streets were a fundamental part of community building which will be undeniably lost due to both the move to online and gentrification. The reason why vibrator shops were so successful in the 70s and 80s is precisely due to their mission to work not only as a sex shop, but mainly as a welcoming place for women, free of patriarchy (Comella 2017). These shops were crucial in creating a sex-positive community around the

toys, and they even rejected competitive approaches to business. For them, having other business in the same field would further the cause and not hinder their progress (Comella 2017). This was not, however, without its problems. The political ideology of cultural feminism of the 70s often promoted separatism and lacked intersectionality. With the shift to online shopping, this fundamental element of community is no longer as straight-forward as it once was. For queer spaces, shops and shopping streets were also crucial in creating a qualitative change inspired by the quantity of queer shops in certain streets (Warner 2000). Gay bars, porn shops, and boutiques offered a critical resistance and formed a political base to pressure politicians into making legal changes, and that was due partly to their presence and visibility on those streets. Something the internet cannot mimic, particularly with its ever more polarised space.

Even in their social media, which could potentially be the ideal place for it, the content is mostly promotional or entertaining, composed mostly of memes, images of the female body, and pictures of vibrators. It has been argued that social networking sites can constitute virtual communities. Parks (2011) traces the elements that define a community and concludes that a group can qualify as a virtual community based on the following elements: engagement in collective action, sharing in rituals, having a variety of relational linkages, and being emotionally bonded to others in a way that provides a sense of belonging and group identification. His conclusion is that social network sites provide all the necessary functionalities and social affordances to satisfy these requirements (Parks 2011). The potential is there, however, his study showed that the actual building of a community does not occur often. Considering their content and the apparent lack of engagement from users, it is unlikely that these websites manage to build an online community.

What has been proven by some case studies is that online movements have been able to translate into offline changes. An article by Miladi, which reviewed literature about social change and online communities and conducted empirical research on it, argued that the new

media technologies do have a real impact not only in the communication flow, but also in social change and social activism (Miladi 2016). For both the vibrator websites and the educational websites then, the way they use their social media and the way their website is built does not open space for a significant interaction that could lead to the building of a community or to a collective social transformation. The websites prioritise an individual interaction and the social media does not fulfil its capability of creating a meaningful conversation.

Finally, the pleasure organisations also adopt a similar rhetoric. Tryst Network, for instance, claims that our culture treats sex as something bad or shameful and that “we don’t talk enough about the stuff we actually need to know about our bodies, our pleasure and our partners.” (The Tryst Network "About Us"). For the Pleasure Project, it is mostly about the taboo surrounding pleasure in sex education, and how their organisation, through education and open conversations, can end the stigma.

All in all, the rhetoric employed by the websites tends to be quite similar. The educational platforms, the vibrator websites and the organisations all claim to be somehow related to the mission of ending taboos or stigmas around female pleasure. They offer sexual education and somewhat of a safe space to talk about sex. Apart from the Pleasure Project, which offers in-person workshops and trainings, it is unclear where people should be having these conversations about sex and pleasure. Besides, the Pleasure Project also does not have an online space in which these conversations can be had. Overall, it is an empty call for conversations and honest talks, with no actual action attached to it, nor any space to do so. And such spaces would need to be, instead of places to ‘find one’s truth’, an actual community that would create innovative ways of engaging with the political and offer a significative site for resistance.

In addition, their constant stating that there is a taboo serves as a way to reinforce its existence. If the taboo really ended, their business model would fall apart. Therefore, by

claiming that there is a taboo and that they want to end it, they indirectly contribute to its maintenance. Previously cited research has indeed showed that there is a taboo, and that female masturbation is heavily associated with shame. However, if this taboo were to end, or lessen, their marketing strategy would be in danger. By maintaining that the taboo exists, they prove themselves as valuable and necessary, similarly to what Foucault (1978) claimed.

The new experts

For this section, I will look into how these websites present themselves as ‘experts’ in the masturbation topic, following Attwood's (2009) claim that the mainstream media is increasingly positioning themselves as the new experts in sexuality and intimacy. And Rose's (1990) assertion that expert advice plays a crucial role in shaping the self-surveillant neoliberal subject. This ‘expertise’ is part of a broader phenomenon that encompasses all parts of the self, as described in chapter 1, from intimacy and health, to relationships and family.

With OMGYes and CLIMAX, their positioning is very clear. OMGYes has conducted what they describe as the first-ever, large-scale peer-reviewed and published research about masturbation techniques. According to them, up until they came into play, there had only been biological or behavioural research done on female masturbation. It was, as they describe, an “uncharted frontier”. CLIMAX makes a different claim, they say they provide content that is based on the most recent research on the field, but do not claim to be the ones who conducted the research. On their FAQ page, they even say they are not experts in the topic, but that their content is based on the experiences of thousands of women and scientific research. They are not necessarily different claims, as the result is the same. It is true that the OMGYes team has conducted research, their website is based on a paper from 2018 by Herbenick et al., published on the Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy. It is safe to assume CLIMAX is also based on this research, although they have not conducted it.

When it comes to the vibrator brands, several of them have a blog attached to their website. Unbound Babes has an online magazine, with topics ranging from the best vibrator for your star sign to how orgasms can help a woman cope with endometriosis. SmileMakers' blog is called Vulva Talks and they claim to provide pleasure positive sex education. They work together with a sexologist and answer the questions sent by users. They also claim that the type of education they are providing is proven to reduce rates of unwanted pregnancy, STIs transmission and create a healthier, more inclusive society.

Dame Products has an attached blog called Swell, which publishes articles in four categories: relationships, culture, health and 'do it better'. Some of the articles highlighted on the website concerned, for example, masturbation shame, how to get more intense orgasms, and the difference between squirting and peeing. They also offer online workshops on, among others, mindful sex, pelvic floor exercises, and couples communication. LeWand's blog, Rumble and Buzz, also offers similar content. Their categories are anatomy, G-spot, self-care, clitoris, product knowledge, and more. Finally, JeJoue's blog, which they call Sex Education, is also similar in content to the others.

The overarching content of these blogs and articles is to provide information in order to sell their products, hence positioning themselves as experts and the ones best suited to tell women what to buy in order to achieve their goals. They also claim to want to debunk myths about masturbation, and to teach women how to improve their sexual life and their orgasms, cultivating the idea that there is always something to improve, again reinforcing the image of the self-enterprising woman, the one that is in constant look for improvement. In a way, we can consider these as model for self-developments that are sold as expertise.

Another relevant point here is that a consumer product uses their digital platforms to produce and distribute content that positions themselves as experts in the masturbation field. To have vibrator brands and shops do this is not, however, new. Research has shown that sex

shops' educational goals are central to their activist mission and they use their different forms of expertise to further both their political and business goals (Huff 2018).

The organisations are slightly different, since they are not (or not openly) profit-driven. Tryst is entirely an information website, and their platform is dedicated to the distribution of information about female pleasure. However, the content of their blogs are quite similar to the content in the vibrator brands' and educational websites' blogs. How to improve one's sex life and orgasms, information about the female organs, and relationship advice. The Pleasure Project also has a similar blog attached to their website, where, among other things, they give tips for a 'sexy self-isolation' and highlight the health benefits of masturbation. They differ because they also offer workshops and trainings for a cost. The aim of the trainings and the workshops is to change the rhetoric around sex, and their target audience are educators, media producers, NGOs and journalists. Therefore, for the general public, it is mostly the blogs that are available.

Overall, it becomes clear that these websites all position themselves as experts in female pleasure. Confirming what Attwood (2009) and Barker, Gill, and Harvey (2018) had previously researched. More and more all aspects of our lives are becoming mediated and surveilled. This is typical of lifestyle media, in which these experts are "urging us to look inside, overcome barriers and resistances, makeover our psychic lives" (Barker, Gill, and Harvey 2018, p.18). Information about sex and female pleasure is crucial in breaking stigma and still is a powerful tool used by activist movements. Feminist and LGBT movements, through the production and distribution of knowledge, have managed to shift dominant discourse about sexuality and how it is framed (Barker, Gill, and Harvey 2018). With online media, however, what happens is a proliferation of information that comes from all directions, that varies in quality and content, and can often be self-produced. Still according to Barker, Gill, and Harvey (2018), what the internet does is change the relationship between audience and the experts, as the spaces become

increasingly participatory, again evoking that feeling of community mentioned in the section above. Unfortunately, what it seems is that apart from producing and publishing the content there is not much else to what these websites do. There are hardly any comments or interactions on the articles and user are not allowed to produce content themselves.

The sex advice the websites give needs to, however, be understood in the context of power relations in society, particularly considering that the regulation of sex has been a way to control women's bodies and that now overt control has been replaced by internalised mechanisms of self-surveillance, as described in chapter 1. Scientific knowledge about sex has been used to characterise desires, feelings and what counts as "normal". Even though many of the articles did address queer people, the ever-present notion that one's sex life is always up for improvement can be considered the new "normal" of the neoliberal governmentality.

The business of feminism

This section will build on the depiction of women seen in the images on the last section. First, I will analyse how the female body is used for marketing purposes and then move on to the language they employ.

As can be observed from the pictures above, the (sexualised) female body is central to the marketing strategy they use. One important distinction, however, is that the body is depicted as a subject body, one that has agency. These women, in sexualising themselves, are also liberating themselves from the stigmas and taboos of the past. In consuming these products, they become the sexual women they aim to be. The vibrators sell a lot more than just a product, they sell an image women aspire to have. This is characteristic of midriff advertising. This type of advertising has four main characteristics: "an emphasis on the body, a shift from objectification to sexual subjectification, a pronounced discourse of choice and autonomy, and

an emphasis upon empowerment” (Attwood 2009, p.99). All of which can be seen to different degrees on the analysed websites.

It is very complicated to critique midriff advertising due to its perceived inclusivity and progress compared to previous types of advertisements, which objectified women. However, Gill (2007) claims that it is not about the identity that it is creating, but about the ones that it is excluding. While intersectional feminism argues for the recognition of different individualities and experiences within the feminism movement, this kind of advertising brings visibility only to the identities that sell. These usually tend to be of cisgender, heterosexual, white, able-bodied, fit women, as seen in the previous section. But more concerning than that, it also operates under the assumption that women are not constrained by structural inequalities or power imbalances, and that any women could just purchase a sex toy and achieve her own liberation. When, in fact, the shame and guilt related to masturbation are still very much present in women’s lives.

Research has shown that female masturbation is still a problematic taboo for many women (Kraus 2017). And depictions of masturbation in the media also confirm this taboo, female masturbation is still shrouded with stigma, shame, discomfort and fear. (Bowman 2014; Clayton and Humphreys 2019; Stein 2012). Therefore, by only recognising that women do not masturbate as much as men and claiming they should, the campaign ignores the underlying reason for such a taboo and places the responsibility on the individual to change their own situation. The campaign indirectly claims that the taboo only still exists because not enough women have bought this vibrator and started masturbating. Leaving aside centuries of repression and patriarchal domination.

The presence of a language of empowerment is also very clear on these websites. “Love Yourself”, “Feel yourself”, “Empower yourself”, “Treat Yourself as You Deserve” are some

of the catch phrases that are used, together with claims of promoting female empowerment and female liberation. This discourse is mostly present on the vibrator's websites.

Using a language of empowerment and liberation is characteristic of postfeminist discourses in the media (Banet-Weiser, 2018a; Gill, 2007). Such discourses emphasise individual action, and continuous self-improvement. This often means that feminism is emptied from its political valence and meanings and employed with the purpose of selling a product, a process described as commodity feminism (Banet-Weiser 2012). "Feminism sells, or at least those strands of feminism uncomplicatedly promoting the neoliberal principles of agency, choice, and empowerment do" (Rivers, 2017, p.57).

With all that being said, however, it is important to also mention the positive impacts such a campaign might have in the lives of women. Having a campaign directed at bringing visibility to female masturbation and aiming at de-stigmatising it can positively contribute to women's sexual experiences. A recent paper from Stroozas (2020) looked into viewers' reactions to a comedy show that depicted female masturbation without stigma. She concluded that such depiction created a safe space in which female-identifying viewers could openly discuss and reclaim their sexuality.

This chapter drew on theories concerning Foucault's power-knowledge paradigm and how the regulation of women's bodies is now being repositioned as something that intends to have a positive effect on women's lives and improve them. In that sense, experts play a relevant role in shaping what the ideal version of oneself is, and the way to achieve this is immediately connected to some form of consumption. The media, acting as the socialising agents for neoliberal society (Barker, Gill, and Harvey 2008), positions masturbation as a desirable and necessary activity for women to not only achieve their liberation but also be their best selves. They do so by using a discourse of expertise and by incorporating a postfeminist rhetoric into

their communication, which overlooks major social-economic issues related to the feminist movement, and assumes emancipation is an individual undertaking.

Chapter 3 - “Go! Love Yourself!”

This chapter is dedicated to the identity of the emancipated women that is constructed by these websites and the work that is necessary to be put into oneself in order to achieve this desired identity. I will start by analysing who this free emancipated masturbating woman is, based on the depictions found on the websites, then I will move on to discuss the use of celebrities and their own identities. Then, I will address the intimate entrepreneurship that is expected of these women and I will end the chapter with a discussion about shame. In doing so, I will answer the two final sub questions, how do the websites construct the ‘emancipated’ woman? And how can a woman achieve such state of emancipation?

The emancipated woman

In this section, I will analyse how the websites construct the identity of the liberated woman, by looking into the discourse they employ and the depictions of women on their website.

For OMGYes and CLIMAX, the identity women should strive for is clear, it is a woman who is knowledgeable about her own pleasure and her own orgasm. It is a woman who seeks new techniques and new ways to achieve climax, because “the more we know, the better it gets” (OMGYes "OMGyes.Com - an Entirely New Way to Explore Women’s Pleasure."). This woman is not satisfied with knowing the basics, she needs to know more and achieve more. Even if she thinks she knows what she is doing, there are new things to try, new perspectives on things they do already and more tools for their toolbox (OMGYes "OMGyes.Com - an Entirely New Way to Explore Women’s Pleasure."). This woman is also refusing the shame and stigma around female masturbation and actively engaging in an open conversation about

it. In a promotional video, where one of the participants explains why she decided to show her masturbation technique, she claims that “[...] everyone does it, so why is it weird to talk about? This is why I wanted to do this” (OMGYes "OMGyes.Com - an Entirely New Way to Explore Women’s Pleasure."). To put it simply, it is a woman who embraces her own pleasure and actively looks for way to improve it.

For the vibrator websites, considering both the images and the discourse, they portray women as active sexual beings, who choose to put themselves and their sexuality on display. It is no longer a rhetoric of passivity, as mentioned earlier, but women are now actively choosing to sexualise themselves. It is also a woman who loves herself and her own body, and the way to do so is to achieve sexual fulfilment in the form of an orgasm. “Together we’ll broadcast the message to the world: love your body and take time to find your sexual fulfillment! #IMASTURBATE” (Womanizer "About Us"). Their emphasis on providing sexual education also points out to the depiction of women as constantly looking to improve their own orgasms and themselves.

Gill (2009) claims that, through media, women are instructed to construct their desirable subjectivity, which includes pleasing men and putting sex and sexual labour at the heart of their new subjectivity (Gill 2009, p.365). The constant search for new information, new techniques, new sex toys, and stronger orgasms is a clear example of sexual labour. The responsibility is put upon women themselves to make their orgasms better, to have more knowledge, to be a sexual woman who loves herself, which, in this case, means masturbating and achieving climax. The subtext that is present sometimes explicitly in all of these texts is that by improving yourself, you make yourself better for your partner.

What are the benefits for guys / women’s partners?

Lots! One user wrote in and said that he learned all the things that worked best in bed from a really open partner who turned the lights on, showed him in detail what worked for her, and let him practice until it was really clear. (OMGYes "OMGyes.Com - an Entirely New Way to Explore Women’s Pleasure.")

Some of the highlighted vibrator reviews also provide more evidence. “I’ve had it for a week and every time me and my husband have had sex, I’ve been able to orgasm” (Dame Products). In both these passages, women are called upon to improve themselves not only for themselves, but to make themselves more desirable to their partners. The fact that they did not orgasm previously is also framed as a ‘inability’ in her discourse, as if something was amiss, and now it is fixed. In addition to the work they are expected to put on their own bodies and sexualities, they are also responsible for ensuring their own pleasure when in a partnered situation, taking all the responsibility away from their (often) heterosexual male partners. Which is, as mentioned in chapter 1, characteristic of neoliberal postfeminist discourses. “Women are presented not as seeking men’s approval but as pleasing themselves; in doing so, they just happen to win men’s admiration” (Attwood 2009). The use of testimonials as evidence of emancipation and liberation is characteristic of neoliberal discourses.

Women’s depiction as voluntarily and actively putting their sexuality on display is seen by some scholars as problematic. “The depiction of heterosexual relations as playful, and women as having as much – if not more – power as men in negotiating them is at odds with statistics which give an extraordinarily sobering picture of the levels of violence by men against women” (Attwood 2009). Another issue they point out is that this kind of depiction incentivises individuality and erases a sense of community by positioning liberation as an individual undertaking. Again, eliminating any kind of social and political tension, and working under the assumption that equality between genders has already been achieved.

Presenting one’s own sexualisation as a ‘choice’ is typical of neoliberal postfeminist discourses. Attwood (2009) claims this is a shift from the external male gaze to an internal self-policing one, which puts women in the position of doing the necessary work to ensure they are desirable subjects. “Through sexual subjectification they must also now understand their own objectification as pleasurable and self- chosen” (Attwood 2009, p.107).

To sum up, the new emancipated woman is a woman who perceives herself as equal and as powerful to men, and operates under this assumption. She is also a woman who is required to constantly worked on herself to make herself better for herself (and her partners). She is required to educate men about her own pleasure and she ‘chooses’ to put herself in a sexualised position, because she believes this is good for her.

Lilly Allen, Emma Watson, Jessica Biel, and celebrity culture

Another aspect worth mentioning, since it is crucial to the construction of the postfeminism woman, is the use of a celebrity. All three types of websites have used or use celebrities in order to promote themselves.

Actress and UN Women Goodwill Ambassador Emma Watson, during a conversation with Gloria Steinem in 2016, has publicly talked about how cool she thought OMGYes was, and immediately made headlines: "I Tried All the Different Ways to Touch a Vagina From the Website Emma Watson Loves" (Glamour 2016), "OMGYes: The Sex Education Website That Emma Watson Loves" (Marie Claire 2019), "Emma Watson Reveals Her Love For This Sex Ed Website" (Teen Vogue 2016). In the video, Emma recommends that everyone checks out the website, which, in spite of the expensive subscription, is worth it.

Womanizer launched in 2020 a campaign together with singer and songwriter Lilly Allen. In the Liberty Womanizer campaign, Lily Allen claims that this vibrator changed her life and her “orgasmic experience altogether” (Womanizer "Womanizer - The Original"). Here, we can see the subtle nod to self-improvement. A ‘regular’ orgasm is not enough, the ‘ideal’ orgasm, the ‘change-your-life’ orgasm is still to be achieved. The campaign also puts the user in the position of responsibility for such self-improvement. “We are all responsible for making ourselves happy and enjoying our sexuality” (Womanizer "Buy Lily Allen Liberty Online"). Finally, despite a claim for collective action “Together, we can wipe out social stigma about

sexuality and celebrate pleasure”, the way to achieve this is individually: “Empower yourself. Free yourself. Feel yourself.” ” (Womanizer "Womanizer - The Original").

Tryst Network is co-founded by Jessica Biel and one of its first articles was an interview with her. Again, we see in their discourse the idea that masturbation is both an important education to have and crucial in pleasing oneself. “If you skip the masturbation part, not only are you missing out on a lot of pleasure—which is a total bummer—you’re missing out on a crucial educational step.” (The Tryst Network "Meet Our Founders"). Another idea it reinforces is that sexuality is to be found within, shifting the gaze to the inside. “I don’t need anybody from the outside to tell me that I’m sexy. I know that shit because I know what my body did and what it can do, if I so choose. It’s just a really free feeling” (The Tryst Network "Tryst’s Founders on Sex Positivity and Owning Your Pleasure").

Overall, the identity that these celebrities are selling, together with the educational websites and the vibrator brands serves to reinforce the identity that was discussed in the previous section. The one of the woman that must constantly work on herself to improve her own sexuality individually.

As mentioned before, currently, (popular) feminism is a successful marketing strategy for middle-class women, and it is often the case that these celebrities present unnuanced views of feminism, under the guise of empowerment and aimed at consumption, yet again ignoring structural inequalities (Rivers 2017). Rivers also questions whether the presence of women in media could actually bring about cultural change or if it will only further the postfeminist agenda.

However, celebrity feminism may also be useful in advancing the feminist agenda. Keller & Ringrose (2015) discussed celebrity feminism with a group of teenage girls and assessed that having such conversations about feminism on the media was helpful for them, since they did not receive appropriate education on the matter. They also concluded that these

girls did not just passively accepted what was being said, but instead critically addressed it. Hobson (2016) also sees it as a positive development and a gateway to the feminist movement. Since these celebrity discourses coexist with other feminist discourses, such as academic and activist ones. Hence, having celebrities speak on these matters can be helpful in putting women and girls in touch with feminist ideals and bringing them closer to emancipation, here understood as collective liberation.

Becoming your best masturbating self

This section will address the ‘intimate entrepreneurship’ that women are required to undergo in order to achieve their desirable identity, the identity that is portrayed in the media. I will argue that this is closely linked to the neoliberal subjectivity.

Surprising as it may be, even if you consider yourself a ‘sex jedi’, there is still much more you could learn. Or at least that is what OMGYes claims. After using their platform, 95% of the users reported experiencing new kinds of pleasure. “Most of the techniques and ways to intensify pleasure that we’re presenting had literally never been researched before” (OMGYes "About"). For CLIMAX, everything they do is ‘in the name of greater pleasure’, they want to teach you new methods and techniques to give and receive more pleasure.

The vibrator websites are not different. “Womanizer guides you to the most intense climax imaginable.” (Womanizer "Womanizer - The Original | Discover the Revolutionary Sex Toy"). With WeVibe, you will achieve ‘new heights of pleasure’. SmileMakers designs vibrators to unlock your pleasure potential. LeWand promises to deliver the most ‘intense and luxurious pleasure’. These all send a clear message. A ‘regular’ orgasm is not enough, the ‘ideal’ orgasm, the ‘change-your-life’ orgasm is still to be achieved.

The vibrator blogs and the articles on Tryst Network also adopt a similar rhetoric. If you reach climax by clitoral stimulation, why not try the G-spot? If you get there with the G-

spot, why not join the two of them? And why not try some new techniques that can make it even better? And how about trying these techniques with your partner? And with a sex toy? It is the constant rhetoric of self-improvement and self-development, the work is never done, there is always a better orgasm to achieve. It is the need for continuous self-improvement, for the appropriate quantity and quality of pleasure, as described by Wood (2017).

These two types of ‘masturbatory work’, the educational technical one provided by OMGYes and CLIMAX, and the technological one provided by the vibrators are complementary and both are consumer driven, especially considering the vibrator also provides educational content. The rhetoric employed by these websites puts women in a constant position of missing out on something. Their pleasure is never complete. Not even the most knowledgeable woman, who owns several vibrators is done with the work she is required to do. There is always more. There is always a new vibrator or a new technique or a new piece of information that she has not had access to. The desirable woman, the woman who knows herself, has good sex, and loves herself is the woman who never stops looking for a way to improve. Her gaze is permanently turned inwards, self-policing, and constantly going after ways to make herself more desirable and feel more pleasure. Not even the most intimate activities are free from the self-policing narcissist gaze of the postfeminist neoliberal subject.

The ideal female neoliberal subject must continually work upon the self, becoming the best and most successful version of herself through a range of techniques including consumption. In the realm of sexual practice, this labour is primarily about gaining knowledge—not only technical knowledge regarding the best skills, positions and sex toys but about her sexual self, her desires, potential hang-ups or inhibitions in need of work and her body’s ability to be sexually desirable and to have the appropriate quality and quantity of pleasure. (Wood 2017, p.318)

Wood (2007) goes further in suggesting that what is required of women is not only a physical entrepreneurship, but a ‘mental makeover’. The term refers to the work women are supposed to put in to embody feelings of bodily confidence and get rid of anxieties and inhibitions, thus achieving the necessary emancipation to enjoy sex. This suggested

emancipation woman achieve, as mentioned in chapter 1, is not an emancipation from the consumer logic, quite the opposite.

Not to mention that all the work women are required to do is fundamentally an individual undertaking. It overlooks the systematic shame, stigma and fear surrounding female masturbation and assumes that emancipation is – literally – at the tips of your fingers.

The role of shame

This section is dedicated to the discussion of how shame comes into play. On the one hand, the websites reinforce the idea of shame with their rhetoric. On the other, shame can be a powerful tool in building a community and a shared identity. As discussed in chapter 1, shame and guilt are feelings that women often describe having after masturbation (Kontula and Haavio-Mannila 2003), and the depiction of female masturbation in popular culture (Baumeister and Twenge 2002; Clayton and Humphreys 2019; Stein 2012) also reinforces that ideal. Therefore, it is relevant to analyse how these websites address and relate to shame.

“It’s a completely new approach, refreshingly honest and direct, no blushing, no shame” (OMGYes "OMGyes.Com - an Entirely New Way to Explore Women’s Pleasure."). This is a quote from the opening video at the OMGYes website, which shows several different women against a neutral-coloured background, laughing and rejoicing in the fact that they can finally openly discuss their masturbatory techniques. What OMGYes does is, once again, place the burden of the lack of shame on the woman. As liberated women, one should be shameless when discussing something so natural and that is a part of everyone’s lives. Yet again, ignoring the social-economic factor that are responsible for the creation of such shame and guilt.

When it comes to the vibrator websites, almost all of them allude to ‘discreet shipping’ or ‘discreet packaging’ on their website. “Just because you’re a sexually liberated babe doesn’t mean the whole world needs to know about it” (UnboundBabes "Discretion"). From the

shipping box to the credit card statement, the websites make sure to keep the purchase on the down low, and not explicitly write it down. Given the current perception of female masturbation in society, such a strategy is very understandable. Its mere existence also confirms and reinforces the shame around it. By needing to be discreet, buying a vibrator associates it with something that should not be seen by others. Which is rather contradictory, considering the rhetoric of liberation and shamelessness these websites often employ. This is similar to what was previously discussed in the last chapter about taboo. Here, the strategies to fight the shame attached to it also indirectly make sure it stays in place.

However, shame can also be a powerful tool in community and identity building (Sedgwick 2003). The strategies employed by the educational and vibrator websites, which is merely stating it exists and offering an individual solution in the shape of a commodity, might not be effective in combating shame. What Sedgwick (2003) suggests is that shame is a formative experience in identity shaping, and that a community that has been brought together through a shared feeling of shame can be healing. The Pleasure Project, in their in-person workshops, offers some activities centred around discussing fears, shame and stigma, which might prove a lot more efficient in building a community that challenges the shame than simply buying a vibrator or a subscription to a website. On the other hand, apart from the in-person workshops, The Pleasure Project does not provide user with a way in which they can come together online.

This chapter addressed the ideal model women should emulate that is constructed by these websites and the inner work women are supposed to put in in order to achieve this ideal subjectivity. This is consistent with what was described in chapters 1 and 2, this self-enterprising neoliberal subjectivity places the burden on women and girls to be in constant search for their best selves, trapping them in a state of constant self-surveillance, and making them repeatedly aware that the work of becoming the ideal woman is never done.

Conclusion

Considering all of the analysis, the question still stands: what is the emancipatory potential of these websites? And the answer, naturally, is not straight forward. There has clearly been a significant change in the way masturbation is being framed in Western society. Although there are still feelings of shame and guilt attached to it, the positive representations of female pleasure and the educational content are relevant in demystifying and bringing bodily awareness to women. Something they did not have access to years ago. The clitoridean orgasm is also on the path to becoming more accepted and not considered as an ‘anomaly’ or an underdeveloped sexuality anymore, but just as a healthy expression of female sexuality.

However, these websites frame masturbation as the path to female emancipation and liberation, leaving aside social-economic issues that women all over the world still face. Simply claiming that masturbation can liberate you does not make that true. Shame, guilt, societal pressure, family, partners, are only some of the factors that might be preventing women from being able to explore their sexuality to the extent that they would like to do so. So, this framing of masturbation as a condition for emancipation puts unnecessary pressure unto women that might be constrained by several other environmental factors. Besides, it puts the responsibility for liberation on the individual, leaving aside collective action, a sine-qua-nom condition for emancipation understood as collective liberation and liberation from situations of constraints.

The fact that the websites position themselves as the path to emancipation and the experts in the topic is also problematic. They have a clear motive to do so, which is to sell their products, therefore this knowledge and expertise comes at a cost. For the education websites, the cost is straightforward, but for the vibrator brands, that offer content for ‘free’, it is not self-evident where the cost is, but it is safe to assume it is somewhere. Be it in the collection of data or the pressure put on women to purchase the products they sell.

What this analysis also shows is the way in which discourses about female masturbation in Western culture are a way to exercise biopower, in Foucauldian terms. As mentioned before, sex is at the crux of the development of biopower, and it was also crucial in the development and establishment of capitalism. In this sense, the discourses about female masturbation reproduce the regulatory power mentioned by Foucault. It creates a matrix of suggested behaviour which women should adhere to. It is a disciplinary power disguised under claims of ‘liberation’ and ‘emancipation’. By trying to free sex, we become even more subjected to it. There is no questioning of the basic assumption that sex is central to our lives. And with the digital tools, this becomes more evident, and more easily accessible. Talking about sexuality is no longer something that can just be done within circles of family or friends, but women are reminded daily, through online ads and social media, that they must cater to their sexuality, day in and day out, in order to become their best selves.

The discourse present in all of these websites is also very much in line with the normative neoliberal discourses currently present in Western societies. It is the rhetoric of the self-enterprising individual that is constantly working on oneself in order to be better. It is a never-ending ordeal that maintains women in the position of consumers. One’s orgasm is never good enough. If it was, it would eliminate the necessity of these websites. In making the argument that there is always something more to be achieved, women are perpetually positioned as consumers that need to buy the newest vibrator and acquire the newest knowledge. In this sense, I argue that masturbation is a clear form of technology of the self, women must constantly self-surveil to make sure they are their best (consumer) selves.

What is also significant here are the voices they erase. The mere idea that a woman might not want to have the best orgasm ever, or even any orgasm, is constructed as an impossibility. The orgasm is viewed as something one must work to achieve and rejoice when it comes, and not getting it is often seen as an issue, a work in progress, something to be fixed.

There is no such thing as a bad orgasm, an orgasm is always desired. Not to mention the exclusion of asexuality, for instance.

The ideal of the emancipated woman constructed by their rhetoric is a woman that takes pleasure into her own hands and purposedly puts herself in the position of a sexual object. She is sexual because she wants to be, not because a man put her in that position. She is constantly looking for ways to improve her orgasm because she wants to have the best possible orgasm. It is the typical discourse of ‘choice’, so characteristic of postfeminism. It is the woman’s choice to do so all these things, or at least that is what they will have us believe. When in fact, there are, as mentioned before, numerous factors that come into play that undermine this rhetoric of choice.

Not to mention that the way in which women can achieve liberation is basically through purchasing a consumer good, which is fundamentally contradictory to the notion of emancipation. Women are supposedly emancipating themselves from restraints society put on them in the past, but in doing so, they are subscribing to neoliberal notions of the self and the market. They are emancipated consumers, hostages of the free market. This also brings up the question of what if a woman does not invest time and effort and money in getting the best orgasm? What does that make her? What is the stigma attached to it? And is there room for resistance in this movement and where can that be found? These are all questions that should be addressed by further research. Where can we find the resistance to this movement of commodification and neoliberalisation of masturbation? What does that look like? Who is resisting this “liberation”?

The way to achieve true emancipation, that is, a liberation from all situations of constraints, is through collective action and community building, as mentioned in chapter 2. The websites, which might sometimes acknowledge the importance of a community, do not succeed in bringing this community to fruition, be it on their websites or their social media. It

is a missed opportunity since the technology and the tools for that already exist. However, the reasons for this might not be entirely responsibility of the website. The online environment often fails to create an actual community which brings about societal change. But the potential is there. Further research on this topic should revolve around how the users engage with the websites online, how they perceive themselves as consumers, how their sense of emancipation has increased or decreased, and how to make use of the online tools in a way that can fulfil their potential.

This research contributed to the field of critical postfeminist media theories by positioning masturbation as yet another technology of the self and area in which women are asked to self-improve. What this empirical analysis shows is that vibrator websites, educational websites and pleasure NGOs reproduce a discourse of biopower, neoliberalism, and postfeminism. Previous research (Gill 2009; Gill 2007; L. Harvey and Gill 2012; Barker, Gill, and Harvey 2018) had positioned sex, intimacy, and the makeover paradigm as forms to exert biopower over women and reproduce neoliberal ideals. My analysis goes further in demonstrating that female masturbation follows the same line and the same rhetorical strategies. It is also a commodified technology of the self.

Bibliography

‘About LELO: The Design Brand Who Revolutionized Sex Toys’. Accessed 10 May 2021.

<https://www.lelo.com/brand>.

‘About Unbound’. Accessed 10 May 2021. <https://unboundbabes.com/pages/about-us>.

‘About Us’. *The Pleasure Project* (blog). Accessed 10 May 2021.

<https://thepleasureproject.org/about-us/>.

‘About Us | Maude’. Accessed 10 May 2021. <https://getmaude.com/pages/about>.

‘About Us | Womanizer’. Accessed 10 May 2021. <https://www.womanizer.com/eu/about-us>.

‘About Us – JIMMYJANE’. Accessed 10 May 2021. <https://jimmyjane.com/pages/about-us>.

‘About Us - The Tryst Network - A Sex Positive Resource’. Accessed 10 May 2021.

<https://trystnetwork.org/about/>.

Ahearn, Laura M. 2012. *Living Language: An Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology*.

Blackwell Primers in Anthropology. Chichester, West Sussex, UK ; Malden, MA:

Wiley-Blackwell.

‘All about the Company behind We-Vibe | We-Vibe.Com’. Accessed 10 May 2021.

<https://www.we-vibe.com/eu/company>.

Arafat, Ibtihaj S., and Wayne L. Cotton. 1974. ‘Masturbation Practices of Males and

Females’. *The Journal of Sex Research* 10 (4): 293–307.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00224497409550863>.

Attwood, Feona. 2005. ‘Fashion and Passion: Marketing Sex to Women’. *Sexualities* 8 (4):

392–406. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460705056617>.

———, ed. 2009. *Mainstreaming Sex: The Sexualization of Western Culture*. London:

Tauris.

- Banet-Weiser, Sarah. 2012. 'Free Self-Esteem Tools?' In *Commodity Activism - Cultural Resistance in Neoliberal Times*. NYU Press.
- . 2015. 'Keynote Address: Media, Markets, Gender: Economies of Visibility in a Neoliberal Moment'. *The Communication Review* 18 (1): 53–70.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10714421.2015.996398>.
- . 2018. *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Barker, Meg-John, Rosalind Gill, and Laura Harvey. 2018. *Mediated Intimacy*. Wiley Online Library.
- Baumeister, Roy F., and Jean M. Twenge. 2002. 'Cultural Suppression of Female Sexuality'. *Review of General Psychology* 6 (2): 166–203. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.6.2.166>.
- Bockman, Johanna. 2013. 'Neoliberalism'. *Contexts* 12 (3): 14–15.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1536504213499873>.
- Bowman, Christin P. 2014. 'Women's Masturbation'. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 16.
- Brown, Wendy. 2015. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. First Edition. New York: Zone Books.
- 'Buy Lily Allen Liberty Online | Womanizer'. Accessed 27 January 2021.
<https://www.womanizer.com/us/womanizer-liberty-lilyallen>.
- Clark-Parsons, Rosemary. 2019. "'I SEE YOU, I BELIEVE YOU, I STAND WITH YOU": #MeToo and the Performance of Networked Feminist Visibility'. *Feminist Media Studies*, June, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2019.1628797>.
- Clayton, Wickham, and Georgia Humphreys. 2019. "'Keep It to Yourself': Shame and Female Masturbation in American Independent Cinema'. *Sexualities* 22 (1–2): 244–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460717731930>.

- CLIMAX. 2021. 'Who We Are, Mission & Manifesto'. 2021. <https://climax.how/manifesto>.
- Colson, M.-H. 2010. 'Female Orgasm: Myths, Facts and Controversies'. *Sexologies* 19 (1): 8–14.
- Comella, Lynn. 2017. *Vibrator Nation: How Feminist Sex-Toy Stores Changed the Business of Pleasure*. <https://library.biblioboard.com/content/42202c5f-0c63-4382-91a4-e5b3dd9f9bfd>.
- 'Dame Products • Practice Your Pleasure'. Accessed 18 May 2021. <https://www.dameproducts.com/>.
- Dijk, Jan van. 2020. *The Digital Divide*. Cambridge, UK ; Medford, MA: Polity.
- 'Discretion – Unbound'. Accessed 24 May 2021. <https://unboundbabes.com/pages/discretion>.
- Fahs, Breanne, and Elena Frank. 2014. 'Notes from the Back Room: Gender, Power, and (In)Visibility in Women's Experiences of Masturbation'. *The Journal of Sex Research* 51 (3): 241–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2012.745474>.
- Fairclough, Norman. 2004. 'Critical Discourse Analysis'. In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*, edited by Michael Lewis-Beck, Alan Bryman, and Tim Futing Liao. 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks California 91320 United States of America: Sage Publications, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412950589>.
- Fine, Michelle. 1988. 'Sexuality, Schooling, and Adolescent Females: The Missing Discourse of Desire'.
- Fine, Michelle, and Sarah McClelland. 2006. 'Sexuality Education and Desire: Still Missing after All These Years'.
- Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The History of Sexuality Vol.1 Vol.1*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, Michel, and Colin Gordon. 1980. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972 - 1977*. New York: Vintage Books.

- Foucault, Michel, Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton, eds. 1988. *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Freedman, Des. 2015. 'Paradigms of Media Power'. *Communication, Culture & Critique* 8 (2): 273–89. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cccr.12081>.
- Frey, Lawrence R., and Kristen C. Blinne. 2018. 'Activism and Social Justice'. In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483381411>.
- Garlick, Steve. 2014. 'The Biopolitics of Masturbation: Masculinity, Complexity, and Security'. *Body & Society* 20 (2): 44–67. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X13506945>.
- Gerhards, Jürgen, and Mike S. Schäfer. 2010. 'Is the Internet a Better Public Sphere? Comparing Old and New Media in the USA and Germany'. *New Media & Society* 12 (1): 143–60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809341444>.
- Gill, Rosalind. 2007. 'Postfeminist Media Culture'. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10(2): 147–66.
- . 2009. 'Mediated Intimacy and Postfeminism: A Discourse Analytic Examination of Sex and Relationships Advice in a Women's Magazine'. *Discourse & Communication* 3 (4): 345–69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481309343870>.
- Gill, Rosalind. 2007. 'Supersexualize Me! Advertising and "the Midriffs"'. In *Mainstreaming Sex: The Sexualization of Culture*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Glamour. 2016. 'I Tried All the Different Ways to Touch a Vagina From the Website Emma Watson Loves'. Glamour. 2016. <https://www.glamour.com/story/omgyes-emma-watson-ways-to-touch-a-vagina>.
- 'Good Vibrators and Lubricants for Women | Our Mission'. Smile Makers. Accessed 10 May 2021a. <https://smilemakerscollection.com/in-the-open/>.

- Habermas, Jurgen, Sara Lennox, and Frank Lennox. 1974. 'The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)'. *New German Critique*, no. 3: 49.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/487737>.
- Hardy, Jonathan. 2014. *Critical Political Economy of the Media: An Introduction*. Communication and Society. London New York: Routledge.
- Harvey, David. 2005. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Harvey, Laura, and Rosalind Gill. 2012. 'The Sex Inspectors: Self-Help, Makeover, and Mediated Sex'. In *The Handbook of Gender, Sex, and Media*, edited by Karen Ross, 487–501. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118114254.ch29>.
- Herbenick, Debby, Tsung-Chieh (Jane) Fu, Jennifer Arter, Stephanie A. Sanders, and Brian Dodge. 2018. 'Women's Experiences With Genital Touching, Sexual Pleasure, and Orgasm: Results From a U.S. Probability Sample of Women Ages 18 to 94'. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 44 (2): 201–12.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623X.2017.1346530>.
- Hite, Shere. 1987. 'The Hite Report_ A Nationwide Study of Female Sexuality'.
- Hobson, Janell. 2016. 'Celebrity Feminism: More Than a Gateway'. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* (blog). 2016. <http://signsjournal.org/currents-celebrity-feminism/hobson/>.
- Hubbard, Phil. 2017. *The Battle for the High Street: Retail Gentrification, Class and Disgust*. London, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Huff, April. 2018. 'Liberation and Pleasure: Feminist Sex Shops and the Politics of Consumption'. *Women's Studies* 47 (4): 427–46.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2018.1454923>.

- Hughes, Jason. 2012. 'The World of Web 2.0: Blogs, Wikis and Websites'. In *SAGE Internet Research Methods*, v4-1-v4-12. 1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road, London EC1Y 1SP United Kingdom: SAGE Publications Ltd.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446263327>.
- 'Je Joue on Instagram: "Do Something Today That Makes You Feel Fabulous! 2020 Photo: The Wonderful @jakedupree Wearing @PlayfulPromises Regalia Skylar..."'. Instagram. Accessed 14 May 2021. https://www.instagram.com/p/B_vgmCVFQfI/.
- JeJoue. 'Our Story'. Je Joue. Accessed 10 May 2021. <https://www.jejoue.com/pages/our-story>.
- Jørgensen, Marianne, and Louise Phillips. 2002. 'Critical Discourse Analysis'. In *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. 6 Bonhill Street, London England EC2A 4PU United Kingdom: SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849208871>.
- Kaestle, Christine E., and Katherine R. Allen. 2011. 'The Role of Masturbation in Healthy Sexual Development: Perceptions of Young Adults'. *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 40 (5): 983–94. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-010-9722-0>.
- Keller, Jessalynn, and Jessica Ringrose. 2015. "'But Then Feminism Goes out the Window!": Exploring Teenage Girls' Critical Response to Celebrity Feminism'. *Celebrity Studies* 6 (1): 132–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2015.1005402>.
- Kinsey, Alfred C. 1953. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*. Philadelphia and London: Institute for Sex Research, Indiana University.
- Kontula, Osmo, and Elina Haavio-Mannila. 2003. 'Masturbation in a Generational Perspective'. *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality* 14 (2–3): 49–83.
https://doi.org/10.1300/J056v14n02_05.
- Kraus, F. 2017. 'The Practice of Masturbation for Women: The End of a Taboo?', 7.

- Lamb, Sharon, Kara Lustig, and Kelly Graling. 2013. 'The Use and Misuse of Pleasure in Sex Education Curricula'. *Sex Education* 13 (3): 305–18.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2012.738604>.
- Laqueur, Thomas Walter. 2003. *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation*. New York: Zone Books.
- 'Le Wand About Us: Meet the Team Behind Our Award-Winning Sex Toys'. Accessed 10 May 2021. <https://www.lewandmassager.com/about>.
- 'Le Wand: Best Wand Vibrators and Sex Toys for Solo & Couples'. Le-Wand. Accessed 14 May 2021. <https://www.lewandmassager.com/>.
- Lee, Zoey, Megan Keels, David Knox, and Ken Wilson. 2013. 'LECTURE VERSUS DVD AND ATTITUDE CHANGE TOWARD FEMALE MASTURBATION'. *Education* 2 (Winter 2013): 212-217(6).
- 'LELO: The Leading Designer Brand for Intimate Lifestyle Products.' Accessed 13 May 2021. <https://www.lelo.com/>.
- 'LELO's Competitors, Revenue, Number of Employees, Funding, Acquisitions & News - Owler Company Profile'. Owler. Accessed 10 May 2021.
<https://www.owler.com/company/lelo>.
- Maines, Rachel P. 2001. *The Technology of Orgasm: "Hysteria," the Vibrator, and Women's Sexual Satisfaction*. Johns Hopkins Studies in the History of Technology.
- Marie Claire. 2019. 'OMGYes: The Sex Education Website That Emma Watson Loves'. Marie Claire. 6 September 2019. <https://www.marieclaire.co.uk/news/omgyes-the-sex-education-website-that-emma-watson-loves-15912>.
- 'Meet Our Founders | Jessica Biel and Sandra Pelletier | Tryst Network'. Accessed 18 May 2021. <http://trystnetwork.org/meet-tryst/>.

- Miladi, Nouredine. 2016. 'Social Media and Social Change: Social Media and Social Change'. *Digest of Middle East Studies* 25 (1): 36–51.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/dome.12082>.
- Mukherjee, Roopali, and Sarah Banet-Weiser. 2012. *Commodity Activism - Cultural Resistance in Neoliberal Times*. NYU Press.
- 'National Masturbation Day'. 2021. In *Wikipedia*.
https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=National_Masturbation_Day&oldid=1022193569.
- Oksala, Johanna. 2013. 'From Biopower to Governmentality'. In *A Companion to Foucault*, edited by Christopher Falzon, Timothy O'Leary, and Jana Sawicki, 320–36.
Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118324905.ch15>.
- 'OMGyes.Com - About'. OMGyes. Accessed 28 September 2020.
<https://www.omgyes.com/>.
- 'OMGyes.Com - an Entirely New Way to Explore Women's Pleasure.' OMGyes. Accessed 2 November 2020. <https://www.omgyes.com/>.
- Ouellette, Laurie, and James Hay. 2008. 'Makeover Television, Governmentality and the Good Citizen'. *Continuum* 22 (4): 471–84.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10304310801982930>.
- Papacharissi, Zizi. 2002. 'The Virtual Sphere'. *New Media*, 19.
- Parks, Malcom R. 2011. 'Social Network Sites as Virtual Communities'. In *A Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites*, edited by Zizi Papacharissi. New York and London: Routledge.
- Rebughini, Paola. 2015. 'Framing Emancipations'. *Journal of Classical Sociology* 15 (3): 270–85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468795X14558768>.

- Rivers, Nicola. 2017. *Postfeminism(s) and the Arrival of the Fourth Wave*. Cham: Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-59812-3>.
- Rose, Nikolas. 1990. 'GOVERNING THE ENTERPRISING SELF', 27.
- Rose, Nikolas S. 1999. *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*. Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Rowland, David L., Tiffany N. Kolba, Sean M. McNabney, Dudbeth Uribe, and Krisztina Hevesi. 2020. 'Why and How Women Masturbate, and the Relationship to Orgasmic Response'. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 46 (4): 361–76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623X.2020.1717700>.
- Scholte, Jan Aart. 2007. 'Defining Globalisation'. *The World Economy* 0 (0): 070916231942004-??? <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9701.2007.01019.x>.
- 'Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*'. 2003. In *Touching Feeling*, by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 35–65. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822384786-002>.
- Stein, Katy. 2012. "'My Slippery Place": Female Masturbation in Young Adult Literature'. *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 37 (4): 415–28. <https://doi.org/10.1353/chq.2012.0043>.
- Stroozas, Samantha V. 2020. "'We Are Like Feminist Heroes Right Now": A Study of Female Sexual Empowerment Communication for Female-Identifying Viewers of *Broad City*', 19.
- Teen Vogue. 2016. 'Emma Watson Reveals Her Love For This Sex Ed Website'. Teen Vogue. 2016. <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/emma-watson-sex-ed-omgyes>.
- 'Tryst's Founders on Sex Positivity and Owning Your Pleasure'. Accessed 18 May 2021. <http://trystnetwork.org/trysts-founders-owning-pleasure/>.

‘Unbound on Instagram: “Keepin’ It Kinky  @mynamesireanna in Our Orion Cuffs!”’

2021. Instagram. Accessed 14 May 2021.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CNdt7Tdl6rg/>.

Warner, Michael. 2000. *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*.

1. Harvard Univ. Press paperback ed. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press.

‘We-Vibe on Instagram: ““Because Old People Do Have Sex. And If They Are Not Having Sex, They’re Probably Thinking about It, Wondering about It and Desiring Some...””.

2021. Instagram. Accessed 14 May 2021.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CMfSmghMadH/>.

‘Who We Are’. Dame Products. Accessed 10 May 2021.

<https://www.dameproducts.com/pages/about-us>.

‘Womanizer - The Original | Discover the Revolutionary Sex Toy’. Accessed 14 May 2021.

<https://www.womanizer.com/eu/>.

‘Womanizer - The Original | Lily Allen Loves Womanizer #IMASTURBATE | Womanizer Discover the Revolutionary Sextoy’. Accessed 27 January 2021.

<https://www.womanizer.com/gl/lilyallen>.

Wood, Rachel, ed. 2017. ‘Look Good, Feel Good: Sexiness and Sexual Pleasure in Neoliberalism’. In *Aesthetic Labour*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

<https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-47765-1>.